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Master thesis

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**EU INFLUENCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS
IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE:
A COMPARISON OF ARMENIA AND GEORGIA**

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Abstract

Although environmental governance has long been one of the EU's priorities in the Eastern Neighbourhood Programme, the amounts of EU funding that were invested in Armenia and Georgia seem to only weakly correlate with their environmental performances. This master thesis hence deals with the question, why EU mechanisms aiming at environmental politics in post-Soviet countries are in some cases more effective than in others. The focus lies on the processes of EU cooperation and communication on the theoretical basis of external governance, comparing the two cases Georgia and Armenia. The hypothesis states that it is more likely for the EU to have a sustainable impact on a country's environmental politics when it has a strong hierarchical governance. The research consists of the qualitative assessment of expert interviews with environmental actors in Georgia and Armenia. Major findings include that the EU's cooperation patterns differ towards different national actors, to the general detriment of environmental NGOs. This creates the request for more institutional and reliable support by the EU.

Eastern Partnership, External Governance, Environmental Politics, Georgia, Armenia, EU

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Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
AAP	Annual Action Programme
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CSF	Civil Society Forum
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIB	European Investment Bank
ENP	European Neighbourhood Programme
ENPARD	European Neighbourhood Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EPI	Environmental Performance Index
EU	European Union
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IR	International Relations
MEPA	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme
USA	United States of America

1. Environmental Cooperation in the Eastern Partnership

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and other communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the new political systems had to adapt and reform both institutionally and economically. One sector which was quickly influenced externally through international cooperation, was the environmental sector: International actors, such as the European Union (EU)¹, looked at post-communist countries as a “tabula rasa” (Andonova & VanDeveer, 2012, p. 287), since they lacked national legislation in this matter and were, at this point, largely excluded from international treaties.

The environmental sector has since gained global attention: Both the EU’s internal and external actions reflect its stance and the importance for environmental action and sustainable development, as most recently manifested in the *Green Deal*², one of the EU’s flagship strategies (European Commission, 2020a, p. 1). The EU’s democracy promotion instruments, such as the conditionality criteria, were not only used in its enlargement strategy, but also regarding the *European Neighbourhood Policy* (ENP), which was founded in 2004 and further differentiated in the *Eastern Partnership* (EaP) in 2008³. The decision to establish the EaP was strongly influenced by the Georgian-Russian war in 2008, which served as a “wake-up call” (Lippert, 2009, p. 237) for the EU to no longer neglect the post-Soviet states beyond EU-membership. However, environmentalism in third countries has been on the EU’s agenda much earlier, as the study ‘Convergence with EU environmental legislation in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia: A Guide’ from 2003 indicates: Already then, the EU’s objective was “to develop a ‘road-map’ for convergence” (European Communities, 2003, p. 4) on environmental policies, which led to the definition of “jointly agreed priorities for action ranging from environmental governance and issue-specific activities to international and regional cooperation on environment issues” (European Commission, 2020c) today.

¹ The term European Union or EU is also used for its predecessors like the European Communities until 1993.

² Italics will be used with regards to programmes, theoretical concepts as well as the variables of this research.

³ The EaP consists of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Although none of the EaP countries currently have a membership perspective, there are nonetheless differences between them with regards to their degree of EU integration: In contrast to Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus which cooperate with the EU while keeping their distance, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, have declared their intention to apply for membership as soon as they complete the implementations of the Association Agreements (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2019). The Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili even emphasises that Georgia “prepares itself to officially apply for EU membership by 2024” (Lavrelashvili & van Hecke, 2021). Following the review of the EaP in 2016, and further its incentive-based ‘more for more’ approach⁴, the EU aims at pursuing differentiated approaches and strategies towards each EaP-state (European Commission, 2015g, p. 5; Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 663).

After 1990, the post-Soviet countries evolved completely differently from one another, due to various internal and external factors such as political and economic crises or armed conflicts. Consequently, there exist substantial differences in environmental politics, innovation, and sustainability in post-Soviet countries today which is mirrored in the *Environmental Performance Index* (EPI) that assesses the environmental performance of 180 states and has been conducted by Yale and Columbia University since 2006. It will be explained and critically reflected in more detail in Chapter 3. As Figure 1 shows, the six EaP countries perform quite differently according to their EPI scores, in which Georgia clearly takes the last place. These differences alone are worth analysing.

However, it becomes even more puzzling when comparing the countries’ environmental performance with the funding they receive annually by the EU. After the foundation of the ENP, the EU in 2007 established a financial instrument called the *European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument* (ENPI), which was followed by the *European Neighbourhood Instrument* (ENI) in 2014. As Figure 2 shows, Georgia receives the second highest EU funding. The opposite is true for Azerbaijan, Belarus

⁴ The more-for-more scheme of the EU means that the more reforms a country is willing to take, the more support and funding it receives by the EU.

and Armenia, which perform environmentally well in EaP-comparison, but have been receiving much less funds within the EaP framework throughout the past decade.

Figure 1. Illustration of EPI scores in EaP countries, 2007-2016, own Illustration. (Hsu et al., 2016; Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy et al., 2016)

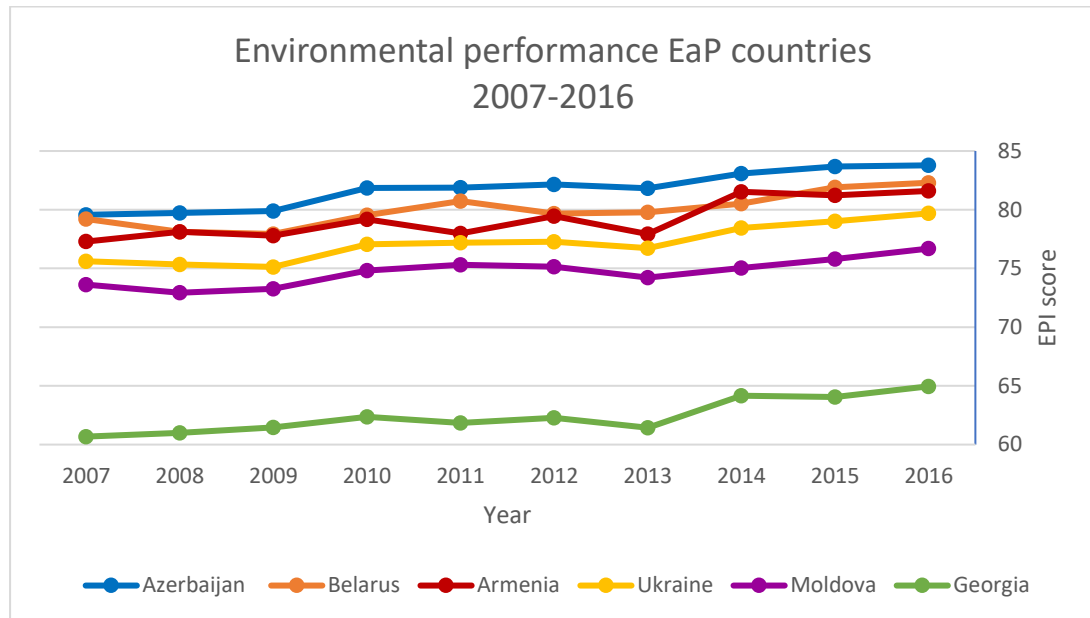
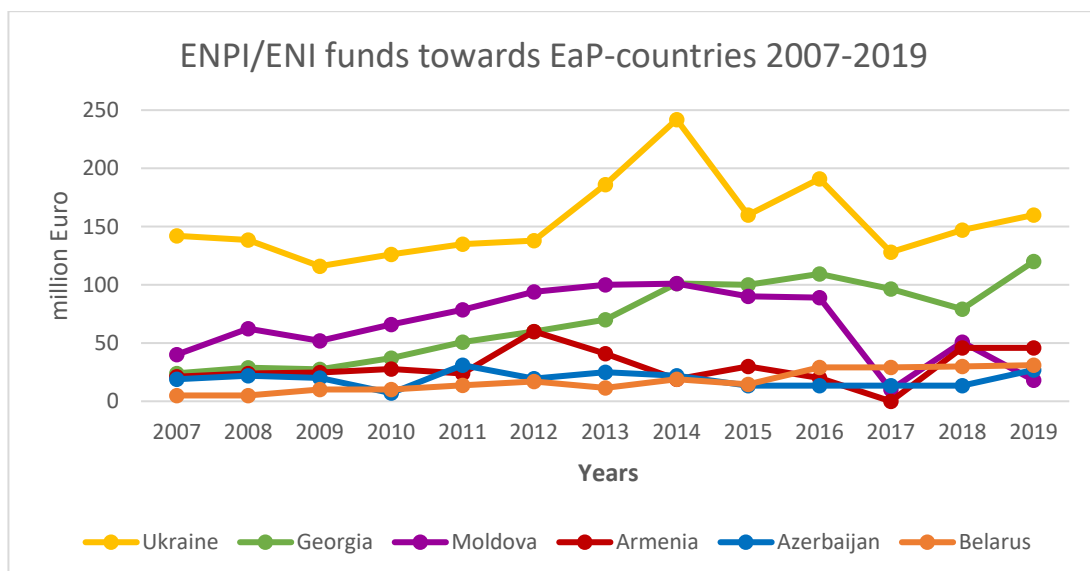


Figure 2. Illustration of ENPI/ENI funding for EaP countries, 2007-2019, own illustration. Data by European Commission, 2020e.⁵



⁵ The website contains the Annual Action Programmes for each EaP country since 2007 which display the annual funding. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed overview of all sources.

This research therefore aims at contrasting Environmental Politics (as a dependent variable) and the Degree of EU influence (as the independent variable) on this sector through a comparative case study of two EaP countries. The political proximity to the EU plays an important role for the selection of the cases: While Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine chose to seek deeper integration with the EU through the *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement* (DCFTA), Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan on the other hand are hesitant or unwilling to embark on the same way (Paul, 2015, p. 79). The case study aims to cover both positions and chooses Georgia and Armenia for the following reasons:⁶ Georgia as a DCFTA-country qualifies as a case that ideally strives for EU membership, and in the very least for deeper integration according to the ‘more for more’-scheme by the EU (Buzogány, 2018, pp. 235–236). Its neighbouring country Armenia has meanwhile taken a position in-between the EU and Russia when it joined the Eurasian Union in 2014 (European Commission, 2018i, p. 18), and hence qualifies as a second case. In terms of its best environmental performance among EaP members, Azerbaijan would represent an interesting second case, as well. However, the conduction of qualitative interviews is more difficult due to the repression of civil society actors (European Center for Not-for-Profit Law Sticking, 2020; Mahmudov, 2019). As an overview with the help of the *Most Similar Systems Design* (MSSD) in Chapter 3 will show, Armenia and Georgia are therefore well suited as cases for this research.

1.1. Research Question and Hypothesis

The actual amount of funding that has been reserved for environmental programmes within the ENPI/ENI framework is not publicly available. Due to this lack of transparency, no causal link between EU (monetary) influence and environmental performance can be assumed. However, the importance of sustainable development, and environmental protection have been increasingly stressed by EU organs (European Commission, 2019h, 2020c). Following the conditionality approach and the EU’s ‘more for more’ approach that was specifically designed for the EaP countries, funding should positively correlate with the countries’ environmental performance. It is puzzling that large amounts of EU funding only seem to correlate weakly with the EaP countries’

⁶ The case selection will be explained in more detail in Chapter 3.

environmental performance. This requires further investigation, which is why this thesis will aim at answering the following research question:

Why are EU mechanisms aiming at environmental politics in post-Soviet countries in some cases more effective than in others?

This research is going to focus on processes of EU interaction with third countries as one possible factor for varying EU influence. This approach is of relevance because the EU as a civilian power is looking back on decades of democracy promotion in other countries (Lavenex, 2004, p. 686). Particularly with regard to the countries of the EaP, the EU's strategies and behaviour towards them could be a decisive factor: Especially in the beginning of the ENP, the EU's instruments used in the two eastern enlargements were merely transferred to this form of external cooperation without much adaptation (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 887). The focus of this thesis will hence not be on outcomes of EU mechanisms, but on their processes through the conditional variable *EU Mode of Governance*.

In order to narrow down the research question, and hence specify the perspective of this research, the following sub-questions are added: **How does the EU engage with the respective national or regional actors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within the EaP framework? Which tools does the EU use in interactions with third state actors?** These questions clearly concentrate on the process of EU influence, rather than its outcome.

After a short overview of the central concepts and the literature used for this research, Chapter 2 will present the theoretical foundations of the external governance theory which categorises hierarchical, network and market governance as potential modes of cooperation. The theory allows for a process-oriented view on the different modes of influence which the EU exerts on another country. The chapter will then conclude with the following hypothesis: **The stronger the EU's hierarchical governance in a certain country, the more likely it is for the EU to have a sustainable impact on this country's environmental politics (while keeping other factors constant).**

Chapter 3 presents the methodology of this research that makes use of both quantitative and qualitative elements. In addition to the dependent and independent variables, data

resources, the conceptualisation of the qualitative interviews and the chosen interview partners will be outlined. After an empirical overview of EU environmental governance and the environmental status quo in Georgia and Armenia in Chapter 4.1., a thorough analysis of the main findings will be conducted. Chapter 4.3. will compare the research outcomes for Armenia and Georgia, elaborating on three specific findings: Firstly, the EU's cooperation patterns differ towards different national actors, to the general detriment of environmental NGOs. This secondly creates the request for more institutional and reliable support by the EU. Thirdly, the EU's role in the two countries is differently influenced by other international actors. Chapter 4 concludes the paper by offering two policy implications for the enhancement of future EU external environmental governance and possibilities for further research.

1.2. Central Concepts and Literature Overview

The paper mainly engages with three concepts that are theoretically explained in Chapter 2 and operationalised in Chapter 3. Firstly, the dependent variable *Environmental Politics* is defined through political and physical aspects and operationalised alongside indicators which were developed by the EPI. This is complemented with the EU's definition of environmental politics. In a second step, the independent variable *Degree of EU Influence* is defined with the help of the Europeanization approach by Ladrech (2010). As seen in the puzzle, the independent variable can be operationalised through monetary influence. Another indicator could be a country's political proximity to the EU, following the assumption that the EU's influence is higher, the more integrated a country is into the Union. The methodology chapter further discusses these aspects regarding the case selection. However, since the independent variable mainly served as a starting point for this research, the focus of both theoretical and methodological elaborations lies on the conditional variable *EU Mode of Governance*. This variable is measured qualitatively, in contrast to dependent and independent variable which are measured quantitatively.

The conditional variable aims to qualitatively explain the reason for the weak correlation for independent and dependent variables with the help of the theoretical concept of external governance. A multitude of publications concerning this theory have been published by a small range of scholars, with Lavenex and Schimmelfennig among

the most influential contributors. While the subsequent theoretical chapter combines these different publications, their essay ‘EU rules beyond EU borders: theorizing external governance in European politics’ (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009) is particularly worth mentioning. Their approach differentiates three modes of governance used by the EU towards its partners: hierarchical, network, and market governance. Other authors have added to and assessed the concept of external governance, such as Knill and Tosun (2009) for the environmental sector. The influence of EU integration on environmental politics has been widely researched as for example by Andonova and VanDeveer (2012), Braun (2016), Jehlička and Tickle (2004) and Kramer (2004). Literature on the EaP’s external influence on environmental politics however is, with a few exceptions still quite scarce (Torney et al., 2018, p. 3).⁷ This thesis has therefore not only an empirical relevance, but also aims to contribute to scientific literature: It assesses the EU’s environmental external governance modes and tests the empirical relevance of the theoretical differentiation of hierarchical, network and market governance. One publication that had substantial value for this research is the compilation ‘European Union External Environmental Policy – Rules, Regulations and Governance beyond Borders’ by Adelle et al. (2018). They also propose different instruments through which the EU exerts influence, and which are mostly congruent with the concept proposed by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009). The authors combine EU external governance and environmental politics and cover both different sectors, such as biodiversity or water management as well as different geographical regions of EU influence. Buzogány (2018) discusses environmental protection within the ENP which will be relevant for the contextualisation in Chapter 4.1, before turning towards the data overview from the conducted interviews and the subsequent theory-based discussion of the main findings. For this last part of the research, the data collected during the interviews will serve as the main sources, while secondary literature will merely be used to complement or explain certain statements.

Besides analysing *how* the EU influences environmental politics in the EaP countries, the theory of external governance also offers an explanation for the effectiveness of EU influence. Although it needs to be stressed here that it is not the primary goal of this

⁷ Scholarly contributions that have been found in research for this paper are Adelle et al. (2018), Alavi (2016), Schulze and Tosun (2013) or Buzogány (2018).

research to analyse the outcome of EU influence, it is nonetheless useful to include the three steps of rule selection, rule adoption and rule application as separate processes that can be differently influenced by the conditional variable *EU Mode of Governance* (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 801). While conditionality, meaning the EU's capability to cause a political change in another actor through conditions and incentives, is expected to be highest within the EU expansion framework, the EU's influence on its EaP partners differs from this. Effectiveness of conditionality can be higher or lower depending on the different programmes and treaties the partner countries are involved in (such as the DCFTA), a country's interdependence with the EU, its domestic political and economic preconditions as well as various other factors. Nevertheless, the theoretical concept of external governance generally still expects hierarchical governance to be the most effective tool for a sustainable change in policies, politics and polity (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 804). The following theoretical chapter will highlight differences or discrepancies between the different approaches.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Environmental Politics, EU influence, and External Governance

While the concepts of environmental governance, EU influence or external governance have been widely examined in the past years, it is their combination, the EU environmental external governance that remains under-researched (Torney et al., 2018, p. 3). This chapter firstly defines the dependent variable *Environmental Politics* and continues by relating it to the independent variable *Degree EU influence*. The approach of external governance then turns the attention towards processes of EU interaction with partner countries and therefore to the conditional variable *EU mode of external governance*. External governance has been influenced by and is still linked to concepts of EU enlargement. Their examination is necessary in order to distinguish why external governance is better suited as a theoretical foundation, than others. The chapter concludes with a possibility of assessing the effectiveness of EU influence. Where possible, environmental aspects will be integrated into the theoretical considerations.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of European External Governance

The term environmental politics refers to processes that aim to protect the environment or to reduce environmentally harmful practices. It includes both physical elements, such as deforestation rates or emissions, as well as political processes, such as the establishment of environmental agencies, movements or legislation (Hochstetler, 2012, p. 203). Physical and political aspects of environmental politics often intertwine which is why this research concentrates on both parts. The analysis of outcomes of environmental politics has played an increasing role in political science since the 1980s and was often concerned with tracking the long-term nature of these policies (Meadowcraft, 2012, pp. 64–65). Internally, the EU started to engage in environmental protection in the 1970s, when a European Council meeting in Paris “declared the need for a community environment policy flanking economic expansion” (Kurrer, 2020). Since then, EU environmental law has been developing and several multi-annual action programmes, initiatives and strategies have been introduced. Although these frameworks constantly evolve, and internal environmental problems should not be ignored, the EU still has gained a high international reputation for its environmental standards that has been further manifested with the Green Deal in 2020 (European Commission, 2020a, p. 1). Part of this role is the EU’s attempt to transfer environmental standards. It is important to understand that environmental cooperation does not (exclusively) evolve out of a normative strive for saving the planet but has strategic reasons for the EU: “Environment support to and cooperation with these countries is of **strategic importance for the EU to achieve objectives inside the EU** and to improve the **quality of life** of the citizens of partner countries and their **competitiveness**.” (European Commission, 2020b, emphasis in original)

2.1.1. *The Europeanization Approach*

Since its foundation, the EU has been influencing and seeking cooperation with other countries. The EaP has been established in order to support the transformation process and further integration of the partner countries (Korosteleva, 2011, p. 244). The matter of how effectively, and in which areas the EU integrates other countries, has been subject to various theories and publications that are as old as the phenomenon itself. Its

three main theories – *neofunctionalism*⁸, *intergovernmentalism*⁹, and *postfunctionalism*¹⁰ – have tried to grasp EU influence on its existing and future members, as well as decision-making processes in the Union.¹¹ The EU’s focus on democratisation of future members only developed prior to the Eastern Enlargement, while the theories mentioned above focused more on integrational aspects. Democracy promotion can be defined as non-violent actions by an external actor which potentially strengthen democracy in another country (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 10). The *Europeanization*¹² approach stands for a European type of democratisation that has been widely used in the beginning of the 2000s to analyse how the EU affects the democratisation processes of candidate states. Ladrech (2010) and Radaelli (2003) have laid the theoretical foundation, emphasising that the “downloading of the *acquis communautaire*” (Ladrech, 2010, p. 38) affected these countries more significantly than it influenced the older, west European states. The following definition of Europeanization simultaneously provides an understanding for EU influence:

Processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies. (Radaelli, 2003, p. 30)

The approach aims to explain the diffusion of European norms and regulations on all levels of another country. It focuses on processes of institutionalisation as well as how different domestic actors may react to and be affected by European integration (Radaelli, 2003, p. 30).

Schimmelfennig (2012) transfers the concept from the scenario of EU enlargement to its external scope of influence. His definition of Europeanization as the “domestic impact of, and adaptation to, European governance” (Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 656) is

⁸ Broadly explained, neofunctionalism – with Haas (1958) as its most prominent representative – assumes European countries to be bound by a path dependency that will lead to further integration through spill-over effects.

⁹ Intergovernmentalism focuses on national governments as the main actors which compete and cooperate with one another and make decisions based on economic issue-specific preferences (see for example Moravcsik (1999).

¹⁰ Postfunctionalism, for the first time, picks up on the matter of identity and its “disruptive potential of a clash” (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, p. 1116) when meeting functional pressures.

¹¹ For a more detailed overview on the three schools of European Integration and their implications for today’s state of European integration, see Hooghe and Marks (2019).

¹² Even though this thesis is written in British English, original spelling of main concepts or quotes in American English will not be changed, such as Europeanization.

somewhat shorter, but generally agrees with the above. External governance, however, focuses more on the EU perspective, as it is the “projection of EU regulations, institutions and rules of governance beyond the borders of formal membership, in institutionalized forms of coordinated action” (Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 657). Ultimately, a successful external governance can result in Europeanization, or be the result of unintended elements of diffusion (Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 657). While Europeanization aims to analyse forms of domestic compliance, external governance takes a step back and focuses on the influencing, rather than the influenced actor. Even though Ladrech (2010) touches upon the EU’s behaviour towards its candidates when mentioning the adaptational pressure candidate countries endure for several reasons (Ladrech, 2010, 31f.), it is the concept of *leverage and linkage* that puts the EU’s instruments and channels in the centre of analysis.

2.1.2. *Leverage and Linkage*

Leverage, also called *conditionality* or *carrots and sticks paradigm*¹³ proved to be the “most direct democratization strategy” (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 17), and describes one actor’s ability to induce change in another actor through conditions and incentives. It has generally been deemed successful within the EU Eastern enlargements since it ultimately offered EU membership (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 887). Countries which wanted to join the EU first had to fulfil the conditionality criteria, a set of rules that was legally defined by the *Copenhagen Criteria*¹⁴ in 1993. However, leverage without linkage as a second element “has rarely been sufficient to induce democratization since the end of the cold war.” (Levitsky & Way, 2006, p. 379)

The authors define linkage as “the density of ties and cross-border flows between a particular country and the U.S., the EU, and western-dominated multilateral institutions” (Levitsky & Way, 2006, p. 383), and break it into the five dimensions of economic, geopolitical, social, communication, and transnational civil society linkage.

¹³ The carrots and sticks paradigm describes the simultaneous use of incentives (carrots) and sanctions (sticks) “to foster cooperation in areas of mutual consent and interest” (Barbé & Johansson-Nogués, 2008, p. 81).

¹⁴ These criteria include political, economic, and legal requirements for potential members. They must ensure institutional stability, a functioning market economy and competitiveness, and adapt to the *acquis communautaire*, the EU’s body of rules and regulations. Finally, the EU must be capable of taking in new members (European Council, 1993, p. 13).

Besides these different spheres of linkage, it is important to note how the EU acts along them: While leverage operates through the usage of pressure and conditionality, linkage acts on soft power to induce change. The EU first used linkage as a strategy to support democratic change in Latin American countries in the 1980s (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 886). The support of non-state actors and “bottom-up”¹⁵ (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 218) socialisation ideally creates a “boomerang effect” (Levitsky & Way, 2006, pp. 386–387) that exerts influence on a national government by both international actors as well as domestic non-state-actors. It is interesting to note which of the five linkage dimensions is preferred when it comes to operationalisation: For example, Levitsky and Way (2006) focus on business, technocrats, and voters in the group of domestic actors (Levitsky & Way, 2006, pp. 386–387). In a study on the effects of leverage and linkage on 36 EU neighbouring states from 1988 until 2004, Freyburg et al. (2015) operationalise linkage through trade with and geographical proximity to the EU¹⁶ (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 31). Other publications increasingly emphasise civil society¹⁷ as an “immediate addressee” (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 227) for EU linkage (see also Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 219).

2.1.3. *From Governance to External Governance*

Building on Levitsky and Way (2006), Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011) extend the theory by *governance* as a third element (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 218). Their contribution and classification of leverage, linkage and governance can be seen as a direct predecessor for the external governance approach and as a link between EU enlargement and EU external relations. Generally, (global) governance evolved in International Relations (IR) out of the necessity to clarify modes of interaction between sovereign states without a supervisory authority (Rosenau, 1992, pp. 2–3). Governance is the attempt to establish an international order where there is no singular power to

¹⁵ ‘Bottom-up’ was coined as opposite to the ‘top-down’ leverage model and stands for a non-hierarchical way of interaction.

¹⁶ However, they make clear that it was difficult to find other reliable sources on, for example, academic exchanges or communication (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 31).

¹⁷ Among the various definitions of civil society, the EU herself developed an understanding of civil society organisations (CSO) whose relevance lies in the fact that this research will partly focus on civil society actors: “The EU considers CSOs to include all non-State, not-for-profit structures, non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic.” (European Commission, 2012h, p. 3)

enforce it, and therefore consists of “institutionalized forms of co-ordinated action that aim at the production of collectively binding agreements” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 795).

Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2011) leave the sphere of enlargement and transfer the leverage and linkage model to countries without a membership perspective, concluding that both are not likely to make a positive impact on other countries’ democracy (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 903). The EU’s leverage has become ineffective outside of enlargement since it depended on the offer of membership and a country’s political and economic dependence on the EU (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 12; Lavenex, 2008, p. 938; Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 223). Linkage, which they frame as support for civil society and oppositional actors in order to “tackle the societal preconditions for democracy” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 894), is not enough to induce sustainable change, even though it has been constantly used outside of the enlargement framework since the 1980s (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 12). They conclude that the governance approach offers a new opportunity for EU external influence (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 904).

Governance – “less top-down than leverage and less bottom-up than linkage” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 887) – functions on a horizontal level and is directed towards specific policy fields. The concept became popular in the early 2000s with the development of the ENP and aims to rule out the hierarchies and dependencies that are inherent to leverage, and implicit to linkage (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 886). It neither necessarily addresses civil society, nor “affects overarching institutional arrangements of the polity.” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 896) The following definition by Freyburg et al. (2015) captures the essence of the governance approach quite well:

This perspective focuses on democratic governance rather than democracy as such and relies on the transformative impact of democratic norms embodied in sectoral legislation and, concomitantly, policy making by the public administrations of the target states rather than democratic reform as a whole. (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 20)

The transfer of principles of democratic governance – transparency, participation, and accountability – functions by attaching them to material politics (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 11). This strategy, and the fact that external governance does not focus on civil society, makes

cooperation with (semi-)autocratic regimes like Belarus possible, since they do not feel like they have to change their political system (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 896).

The functional elements and impact levels of governance do not become completely clear. On the one hand, it follows an institutionalist approach: the transfer of aspects of the EU *acquis* creates a “legal-administrative basis for democratic governance” (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 11), therefore stressing the production of legally binding agreements. On the other hand, it is emphasised that governance is “mainly based on socialization as a trigger of change, although it can also be linked to the use of conditionality.” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011, p. 896) While not directly targeting those aspects, a certain degree of civil society is still needed for the approach to be successful (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 21). It is therefore what Schimmelfennig (2014) calls an “indirect way of democracy promotion” (Schimmelfennig, 2014, p. 224).

It seems as if the governance approach could potentially incorporate a mixture of leverage and linkage while attempting to rule out their weaknesses. The creation of seemingly horizontal relationships between the EU and third countries ignores inherent interdependencies and hierarchies. This is where the concept of external governance is able to further differentiate different modes of EU attitude towards its partners through the creation of hierarchical, network and market governance. Important to keep in mind are the sectoral approach, as well as the focus on public administrations instead of polity or civil society. These ideally lead to sustainable change through socialisation and a change of mind-sets. Both aspects are inherent to governance and stay relevant with regards to external governance.

2.2. The Modes and Conditions of Environmental External Governance

The theoretical concept of external governance has developed simultaneously to the EU’s systematic foreign policy approach towards its neighbouring countries. Apart from the theoretical necessity to further differentiate the governance approach, the empirical necessity for external governance derives from an external, and an internal reason: With the two eastern enlargements in 2004 and 2007 came the external need to specify the EU’s redefined borders, while the subsequent changes in terms of the Union’s character and responsibilities serve as an internal need (Lavenex, 2004, p. 684).

Since then, a multitude of authors and publications have aimed at manifesting the EU's strategies concerning different countries as well as different sectors and actors. Consulting these sources, it has been noted that a majority of publications on the issue centre around a small range of scholars, with Lavenex and Schimmelfennig clearly dominating publications on EU external governance (Freyburg et al., 2015; see, for example: Lavenex, 2004, 2008; Lavenex et al., 2009; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, 2011; Schimmelfennig, 2012, 2014). While differences between the respective scholars exist, their overall approach distinguishes three different forms of external governance that will be explained below. The approach was picked up by other scholars and applied to specific sectors (see for example Knill and Tosun (2009), for the environmental sector), as well as investigated and differentiated further (Hamann et al., 2018). Deviating therefrom is a book by Adelle et al. (2018), in which they directly combine EU external governance with environmental policies (Adelle et al., 2018). Their theoretical concept describes tools of external governance which can be linked to the approach by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig above.

The main source for the theoretical foundation of this research, while being backed up by the mentioned publications, is Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009). In their essay 'EU rules beyond EU borders: theorizing external governance in European politics', they define external governance as the "extension of internal rules and policies beyond formal membership." (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 791) In other words, the main question is how to motivate partner countries for domestic reforms without the incentive of membership (Lavenex, 2008, p. 938). Torney et al. (2018) define EU external environmental governance as "attempts to transfer the EU's environmental rules, regulations and objectives to third countries and international organisations" (Torney et al., 2018, p. 3), while excluding unintended consequences and only focusing on purposeful activities. This further differentiates external governance from the Europeanization approach, since the latter also included unintended EU influence (Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 657).

Like Schimmelfennig's (2014) governance approach, external governance proceeds from the EU perspective. Its emphasis lies on the extension of the legal boundary when another country is adopting the EU *acquis* without the perspective of membership (Lavenex, 2004, p. 683). The EU's self-perception as a civilian power creates path-

dependencies according to which the Union acts, as in this case on the basis of the enlargement experiences (Lavenex, 2004, p. 686, 2008, p. 938). Therefore, external governance should be seen as a process that is influenced by former experiences of foreign policy but can underlie changes depending on priorities (Lavenex, 2004, p. 683). Nonetheless, the emphasis lies not on an agency-based perspective of the EU as a foreign policy actor, but on norm diffusion¹⁸ through institutional processes (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 794). These processes can take different forms. The external governance approach solves the confusion of leverage and linkage elements that are inherent to the governance approach above through its differentiation into three functional modes: *hierarchical governance*, *network governance*, and *market governance*.

2.2.1. Hierarchical governance

The first form of EU external governance, hierarchical governance, translates to what the leverage approach meant for EU enlargement: The EU and its partner countries interact in a “formalized relationship of domination and subordination” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 797). The desired outcome is harmonisation of the EU acquis through agreements and treaties (Knill & Tosun, 2009, p. 875). In this case, the supranational EU law is stronger, so that non-compliance with pre-determined legal obligations can be sanctioned (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 815). Just as with leverage, the relation, and the way in which the EU exerts influence, are asymmetrical (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 797). While the partner states formally retain full sovereignty, external governance can informally undermine certain elements of the country’s legislative autonomy. With regards to EU environmental external governance, Torney et al. (2018) identify three instruments of which the first is connected to hierarchical governance. The instrument of *manipulating utility calculations* contains incentives and penalties, such as the conditioning of funding or market access in order to further push environmental policies (Torney et al., 2018, p. 5).

¹⁸ Norm diffusion concentrates on processes of interdependent international influences that contributes to the spread of norms, instruments, standards, or specific policies. Its focus does not exclusively lie on governments but includes other national actors as well. Norm diffusion, just as external governance, focuses on processes instead of actual outcomes (Gilardi, 2013, p. 454).

Although the ENP “as such lacks the degree of legal formalization (...), a sectoral perspective on the structures of regulatory expansion shows a more varied picture.” (Torney et al., 2018, p. 5) Especially concerning different policy sectors, cooperation is based on formal rules which are non-negotiable. This view is contradicted by another assessment, in which the dual structure of governance is emphasised: overarching treaties between the EU and third countries belong to macro-policy, and their conditions are predetermined for all countries. However, sectoral differences can be observed on a meso-policy level (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 814). Sector-specific issues are usually handled through network governance and create a higher sense of obligation and precision for compliance than macro-institutional issues which merely stimulate general approximation (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 829). What combines both positions is the fact that macro-institutional (hierarchical) monitoring applies to all governance sectors, and that the inclusivity of network governance depends on how securitised or prioritised the policy sector is for the EU. If it is, the asymmetric interdependence between the EU and national actors prevails (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 830). It is safe to say that the macro-institutional structure of the ENP contains elements of both hierarchical and network governance, and that interaction with national partners varies in each sector (Lavenex, 2008, p. 944).

2.2.2. Network governance

Network governance as a second form of external governance directly opposes hierarchical governance. Where hierarchical systems usually focus on producing binding legislation, networks create less binding agreements that are based on mutual agreement and “often prescribe procedural modes of interaction rather than final policy solutions” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 798). Also called ‘negotiation systems’, actors in network governance are formally equal, although this does not rule out power asymmetries. While EU dominance is not ignored, the approach stresses that partner states have the ability to include their own priorities, and ultimately have to agree to the cooperation at hand (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 816). This mode of interaction which functions mainly through socialisation and can be compared to the linkage strategy of EU enlargement. Assimilation happens through frequent interaction by different actors for whom similar structures and legitimacy are more relevant than

efficiency increase (Knill & Tosun, 2009, pp. 877–878). Since the coordination of interaction is based on a certain level of institutionalisation, coordinative structures are often centralised while interaction happens in a decentralised matter (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 816).

According to Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009), network governance elements can be found within the ENP, where Action Plans are jointly elaborated, and their progress monitored and evaluated by sectoral experts in subcommittees (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 820; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 798). Their desired outcome is nevertheless the approximation to EU standards, which integrates hierarchical governance into the process (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 820). In contrast to the ‘carrots and sticks’ in hierarchical governance, the “deliberative processes, co-ownership, and density of interaction are likely to enhance the legitimacy of rules” (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 820) and hence help expanding them. As Knill and Tosun (2009) point out, especially environmental policies profit from these models of transnational communication (Knill & Tosun, 2009, p. 877). Lesson-drawing from other actors’ experiences and the “diffusion of professional knowledge via transnational networks or ‘epistemic communities’ play an important role in facilitating the cross-national diffusion of policy concepts” (Knill & Tosun, 2009, p. 878). Torney et al. (2018) name similar instruments in their analysis of EU external environmental governance: Firstly, *capacity building* supports through financial aid, technical assistance, or trainings. Secondly, third countries can be convinced through *argumentation and persuasion* to adopt environmental policies (Torney et al., 2018, p. 5). These instruments occur often in combination with one another. Consequently, it would suffice if the EU provided an “institutionalized infrastructure for the exchange of information and policy learning” (Torney et al., 2018, p. 5) and hence make hierarchical or market governance obsolete. On the downside, network governance can lead to a decreasing sense of obligation and precision, since norm adoption does not depend on legal obligations, but political commitment (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 820). Additionally, according to Lavenex’ (2008) observation, the two modes of governance overlap with one another when one turns out to be ineffective on its own (Lavenex, 2008, p. 946). For example, when the EU’s competence and resources in a given field are not strong enough to effectively exert hierarchy, network governance is used as a last resort. Vice versa, a functioning network

governance requires a certain governance capacity on the partner country's side, meaning "a certain degree of independence from central government" (Lavenex, 2008, p. 952). If this is not the case, the network becomes asymmetric, therefore giving more dominance to the EU.

Hierarchical governance seems, in theory, to be more effective than network governance, whose influence is more informal and less binding. This can easily be distorted by asymmetric elements which again leads to a more hierarchical mode of governance.

2.2.3. *Market governance*

External governance can also work through market governance which is traditionally not included as a form of governance by political science since it lacks a general system of rules. In contrast, more recent governance approaches see *competition* as an "institutionalized form of political market interaction" (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 799), and as its perhaps most important element. Formerly integrated in the linkage approach of EU enlargement, market governance is therefore worth being analysed on its own. As in network governance, the competing actors are formally equal and autonomous, which represents a horizontal form of interaction. However, the lower degrees of legalisation and institutionalisation testify for weaker formal relationships (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 815). Within the EU, the Single Market is a good example for market governance. Externally, the EU's impact results from the countries' interdependence with the Single Market, due to which they would face opportunity costs if they did not comply by EU rules. Domestic actors normally have an interest for compliance when the EU is their most important trading partner (Knill & Tosun, 2009, p. 877). Since there is usually neither a legal obligation for compliance nor a monitoring system in place, it is however clear that fulfilment of the EU *acquis* is not the goal within market governance (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 815). It is therefore an indirect and informal form of influence that may lead to the socialisation of governments or societal actors through regular interaction (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 799). With regards to the cooperation partners' equal position, the instrument of *dialogues and negotiation* by Torney et al. (2018) seems to be most consistent with market governance.

Especially the third countries' interdependence with the EU that is an important element in hierarchical governance, and cannot be ruled out in network governance, is often economical in nature. According to Knill and Tosun (2009), regulatory competition between states is a "central mechanism" (Knill & Tosun, 2009, p. 876) able to influence national environmental policies. In terms of a country's market standards, economic integration with the EU can lead to a lowering of their originally high regulatory level, in order "to avoid regulatory burdens restricting the competitiveness of domestic economic actors, mostly industries." (Knill & Tosun, 2009, p. 876) According to the authors, if a country's standards have already been low, it will either keep it that way for the same reason or, as a potentially positive outcome, economic integration could lead to a 'trading up' effect when dealing with high-regulating states. While the latter can especially be witnessed with product standards so that all countries can "benefit from similar arrangements that avoid market segmentation" (Knill & Tosun, 2009, p. 877), the former case of sticking to the bottom is normally true for process standards: "low-regulating states have an incentive to refrain from adopting stricter policies since these might undermine their competitive position." (Knill & Tosun, 2009, p. 877)

To sum up, all three modes of governance seem to be able to influence the EU's partner countries. While hierarchical governance presents the more classical EU enlargement approach through conditionality, network governance focuses on socialising elements like knowledge-transfer, learning or expert exchanges. Market governance as a third mode is characterised through competition and, as network governance, follows a more horizontal approach of interaction. In practice, however, both market and network governance can be impacted by the "shadow of hierarchy" (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 816). Table 1¹⁹ below summarises the main points of each governance mode:

¹⁹ This table is based on Lavenex and Schimmelfennig's overview on modes of external governance (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 800), while adding more detailed aspects that were drawn from the texts discussed above.

Table 1. Theoretical overview of External Governance. Own Illustration based on Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009).

	Hierarchy	Network	Market
Outcome	Harmonisation	Socialisation	Socialisation
Actor constellation	Vertical	Horizontal	Horizontal
Instrument	Conditionality	Cooperation	Competition
Relation	Formal	Mix of formal and informal	Informal
Institutionalisation	High	Medium	Low

Now that the different external governance modes have been introduced, their respective conditions need to be examined. Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009) mean to show which conditions cause the different modes to be effective, and differ between three approaches: the institutionalist, the power-based and the domestic structure explanation.

2.2.4. Explanations and conditions for external governance

Firstly, the institutional explanation presumes that EU external governance is shaped by EU institutions, reflecting the EU's internal governance mode in a given sector. From a rationalist-institutionalist perspective, it seems logical to transfer already existing structures that have proven successful internally (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 802). According to the institutionalist explanation, hierarchical governance will “most likely lead to the effective transfer of EU rules because rules are normally more legalised in this mode than in the network or market modes” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 802). EU rules are more likely to be implemented by other countries when they are binding, precise, and enforceable through strong monitoring and sanctioning. As these elements are inherent to hierarchical governance, it can effectively promote rule adoption and application in other countries. Overall, there is “strong evidence for the pre-eminence of institutional continuities between the ways in which the EU governs internally and its external modes of governance.” (Lavenex et al., 2009, p. 829) At the sectoral level, the ENP is regarded as externalisation of EU policy regimes (Lavenex, 2008, p. 945).

Secondly, the power-based explanation assumes that the modes of external governance are determined by the EU's interdependence and competition with partner countries and

other international actors, such as the United States of America (USA), Russia or the United Nations (UN) with whom the EU has to compete (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 803). In combination with the hierarchical mode, partner countries need to be more dependent on the EU than on other powers, as was the case in EU enlargement. Market governance, only seems to fit the power-based approach if the actors are highly and symmetrically interdependent, since market governance does not foresee a “dominant, centralized governance provider.” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 803) As a counter-argument, economic and political power struggles often intertwine, hence combining the power-based approach and market governance (Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 663). One example for this is the energy policy in the South Caucasian region (Lussac, 2010). The EU’s competition with Russia is here based both on power and economic interest, while a third country’s dependency on EU market integration could lead to higher compliance within the market governance mode. Network governance as a horizontal approach intuitively does not seem to fit the power-based explanation. However, institutionalised communication and learning mechanisms are able to work if power relations are symmetric and the actors are equally interdependent (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 803). Although based on different arguments, the power-based explanation also concludes that hierarchical governance is the most effective mode. Hierarchy and effectiveness are stipulated by EU superior power, not its internal institutional structures.

The third option turns to the partner countries’ domestic structures as a condition for effective external governance: The mode of external governance follows the mode of domestic governance. (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 804) Combined with hierarchical governance, it domestically requires a certain level of rule of law and a strong capacity of administration and implementation. This factor should not be underestimated, since EU norms which entered domestic legislation often “face severe obstacles to effective application” (Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 664). The same condition is valid for network governance in order to ensure decentralised state structures and sectoral differentiation. Otherwise, network governance will tip to more hierarchical modes of interaction, as explained above. Market governance in turn is most effective when the third country already has a high level of economic liberalisation. Overall, the *domestic structures explanation* examines the compatibility of domestic institutions

with the EU: “The more similar third countries are to the type(s) of states, societies, and administration of the EU (...), the better EU rules are likely to fit.” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 805)

Figure 2 summarises the aspects necessary for each EU external governance mode. It is based on the publication by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009) who do not mention how the institutionalist explanation would work within network or market governance. This creates a bias towards the institutionalist explanation in combination with EU hierarchical governance.

Table 2. Indicators for conditions in each EU external governance mode. Own illustration based on Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009).

	Hierarchy	Network	Market
Institutionalist explanation	Legalisation of rules in a certain sector, sectoral interdependence	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Power-based explanation	Third country's dependency on EU	Symmetric power relations, interdependent actors	High and symmetric interdependence of EU and third country
Domestic structures explanation	Rule of law, high administrative and implementation capacity of EU conditions	Rule of law, high administrative and implementation capacity to ensure sectoral differentiation and decentralisation	High level of economic liberalisation

Now that the conditions for external governance and its different modes are clear, the last theoretical step consists of a more specific understanding of *effectiveness* of EU external governance. Lavenex and Schimmelfennig's (2009) definition of EU effectiveness as the “extent to which EU rules are effectively transferred to third countries” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 800) is a circular argument, since the subject of interest (effectiveness) appears in the definition itself. Thus, they offered a three-step-model to better grasp the concept of effectiveness: *rule selection*, *rule adoption*, and *rule application*.

Rule selection on the international level firstly puts a norm by the EU acquis (or other actors like the UN) in the centre of negotiation. It is a relevant first step because –

contrarily to EU enlargement – “it cannot be taken for granted that EU rules will necessarily dominate the negotiations and provide the focal point of EU-third-country agreements.” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 801) Rule adoption as a second step then happens on the domestic level, indicated by the ratification of laws or agreements by a government. Rule application as the last level of external governance effectiveness means that EU rules are “acted upon in political and administrative practice” (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 801), and not just exist on paper. Here, the Europeanization approach and its goal to incorporate EU policies “in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli, 2003, p. 30) again finds its way into external governance.

If the EU is present every step of the way until rule application, this method of tracking EU influence can be an efficient measure to trace its effectiveness. Still, it is not possible to rule out other influential actors or factors that might have played a role in the decision-making and implementation process. Once more, it should be stressed that these criteria for effective EU external governance still provide no proof for causal links between EU influence and a third country’s environmental performance. As Schimmelfennig (2012) puts it: “The biggest challenge for research on Europeanization beyond the EU is the establishment of causality.” (Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 667) This is true not only for Europeanization, but for external governance as well.

To conclude this theoretical chapter, it has become clear that the conditions and modes of external governance above are ideal types that often intertwine in reality. Both network and market governance can be negatively impacted by implicit hierarchical structures between the EU and a partner country. At the same time, market governance can profit from asymmetric interdependencies according to the power-based explanation. While all governance modes will be included in the analysis, the hierarchical mode of governance still seems to be dominant in EU external relations, in which “interdependence and threat play a central role in the legitimation of political order.” (Lavenex, 2004, p. 685) Furthermore, Lavenex and Schimmelfennig (2009) emphasise that the institutionalist explanation will most likely be successful if the EU acts hierarchically towards its partners (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 808). Interestingly, the majority of the examined publications on EU modes of external governance seem to favour network governance over hierarchical governance for its

more horizontal and integrative approach. Still, they generally conclude that hierarchical governance is bound to be more effective and have a lasting impact.

2.3. Hypothesis

The initial puzzle already posed a hypothetical assumption that serves as a foundation for this research. It assumes that the independent variable *Degree of EU Influence* and the dependent variable *Environmental Politics* correlate positively, therefore contributing to higher environmental performance in a third country. The initial expectation would hence be the following: The higher the degree of EU influence on a country, the more likely it is for this country to positively develop in terms of environmental politics, while keeping other factors constant.

However, the puzzle has already indicated a weak correlation for this initial expectation. Therefore, it will not be subject of the analysis, although the methodological Chapter 3 will explain and reflect the quantitative sources used for dependent variable and independent variable. As a potential explanation for a variation of effective EU influence, the EU's different external governance modes with partner countries were identified which serve as a conditional variable. It should be noted that the conditional variable is treated independently from the independent variable, taking a narrower perspective on the research question. Each governance mode constitutes its own hypothesis:

Option 1: The more the network governance mode dominates EU interaction with a third country, the more likely it is for the EU to have a sustainable impact on this country's environmental politics.

Option 2: The more the market governance mode dominates EU interaction with a third country, the more likely it is for the EU to have a sustainable impact on this country's environmental politics.

Option 3: The more the hierarchical governance mode dominates EU interaction with a third country, the more likely it is for the EU to have a sustainable impact on this country's environmental politics.

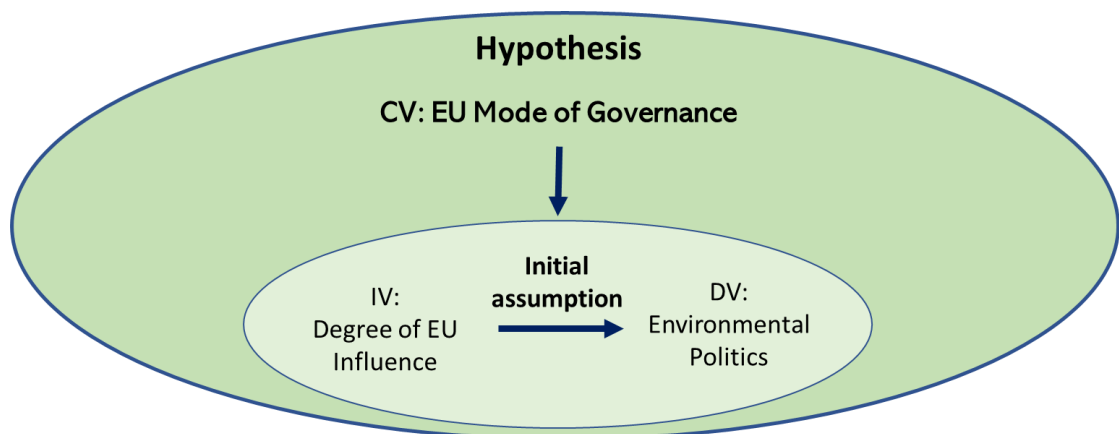
The examination of each of the above options would exceed the frame of this research. As concluded in Chapter 2.2 above, the third option on hierarchical governance is seen

as dominant and most effective in EU external relations. For this research, the hypothesis therefore states as follows: **The stronger the EU's hierarchical governance in a certain country, the more likely it is for the EU to have a sustainable impact on this country's environmental politics, while keeping other factors constant.**

It should be noted that the adjective 'stronger' in the hypothesis is crucial, since the theoretical explanations have shown that the EU has to have enough competence, resources, and incentives to effectively act and interact within the hierarchical governance mode. Otherwise, the interaction could drift off into an asymmetric version of network governance that is equally ineffective (Lavenex, 2008, p. 946). While this puts hierarchical governance in the centre of the analysis, the other two modes of governance will also be examined. This analysis focuses on those factors that are deduced as important from the theoretical foundation. An infinite list of other factors like geography, geopolitical standing, domestic political situation, or economic performance, although potentially influential as well, had to be excluded. This focus not only enables the analysis itself, as contextual factors can be excluded, but also increases the significance of the result of the analysis in relation to the theoretical basis.

Figure 3 illustrates the hypothesis and its relation to independent variable (in the graphic shortened as IV) and dependent variable (DV in the graphic) for better understanding. The hypothesis and conditional variable are highlighted as they present the focus of the analysis.

Figure 3. Hypothesis. Own illustration.



With the usage of both quantitative and qualitative methods, the research does not aim at proving causal links. Accordingly, this factor-centric analysis does not focus on the actual outcomes, but primarily aims to assess their processes. The following methodological chapter further explains quantitative and qualitative parts of the analysis as well as the operationalisation of all variables.

3. Methodology

This research consists of two steps. Firstly, quantitative data was used for the puzzle, concerning the dependent variable *Environmental politics* and the independent variable *Degree of EU influence*. As a second step, qualitative methods will be applied to analyse the conditional variable *EU mode of governance*. Below, the individual methods and sources will be discussed. Before turning to them, it is necessary to explain the case selection in more detail.

3.1. Case selection and comparative case study of Armenia and Georgia

As the focus of this thesis lies on EU influence on environmental politics within the framework of the EaP, the case universe consequently consists of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. The analysis will be restricted to a comparative case study comprising of two countries. The analysis of more cases with the help of qualitative interviews could further validate or question outcomes and presents an opportunity for further research.

The selection process considers the countries' environmental performance as well as their political rapprochement towards the EU. In anticipation of sub-chapter 3.2., the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is consulted. Table 3 provides an overview of the EaP-countries' environmental performance, with Georgia forming the tail end and Azerbaijan as the continuously best case over a time span of ten years.

Table 3. EPI scores for all EaP countries. Own illustration. (Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy et al., 2016)

Country	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Med.
Azerbaijan	79,57	79,74	79,9	81,85	81,87	82,15	81,83	83,08	83,68	83,78	81,745
Belarus	79,2	78,11	77,94	79,55	80,74	79,68	79,77	80,53	81,9	82,3	79,972
Armenia	77,29	78,12	77,78	79,18	77,97	79,45	77,93	81,52	81,24	81,6	79,208
Ukraine	75,62	75,34	75,13	77,06	77,2	77,27	76,74	78,46	79,01	79,69	77,152
Rep. of Moldova	73,63	72,93	73,28	74,81	75,32	75,16	74,22	75,05	75,81	76,69	74,69
Georgia	60,68	61,01	61,45	62,35	61,85	62,27	61,43	64,16	64,05	64,96	62,421

Furthermore, the political proximity to the EU plays an important role for the selection of the cases which broadly separates the countries into two ‘camps’: While Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine chose to seek deeper integration with the EU through the DCFTA, Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, on the other side are hesitant or unwilling to embark on the same way (Paul, 2015, p. 79). When combining this observation with the countries’ EPI results, Georgia qualifies as the first case through its interesting combination of close political proximity to the EU and comparatively low environmental performance, as the graphic in the introduction showed. From the other ‘camp’ of countries not seeking further approximation to the EU, Azerbaijan is an obvious choice, as it performs highest in EPI scores at the same time. Compared to the other EaP countries, however, the collection of qualitative data through expert interviews is particularly difficult in Azerbaijan, since civil society faces repression by the political regime when openly criticising it (European Center for Not-for-Profit Law Sticking, 2020; Mahmudov, 2019). These restrictions have systemic character, since “legislative restrictions have caused complete paralysis in civil society and led to its alienation from the public.” (Mahmudov, 2019)

Armenia stands out as an interesting alternative among these three countries due to its unique institutionalisation of cooperation with the EU: In 2017, they signed the *Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement* (CEPA) which was uniquely designed for and with Armenia, after it joined the *Eurasian Economic Union* (EAEU) in 2015 and therefore was no longer eligible to join the EU’s Deep and Comprehensive

Trade Area. Even though the separate analysis of Russia's role in the region cannot be included in this research, its presence is expected to play a role in the qualitative assessment of the EU's mode of governance towards its partners. Armenia's alternative path of regional integration and political in-betweenness regarding the EU and Russia qualifies it as a second case. Its neighbourhood to Georgia further justifies the comparison of the two countries. Below, Table 4 offers an overview on the Most Similar System Design (MSSD) which applies to the case of Georgia and Armenia: when applying MSSD, "we choose as objects of research systems that are as similar as possible, except with regard to the phenomenon, the effects of which we are interested in assessing." (Anckar, 2008, p. 389) Naturally, neither similarities nor elements of difference are presented in their entirety in this simplified overview. Still, the countries' similarities in various aspects relevant to this research and theory become clear, when looking at their geographical setting, their similar state of democracy²⁰, and economic transformation²¹. The independent variable *Degree of EU Integration* is for the case selection assessed in political terms, while below, it will be measured with the help of the indicator *Amount of Funding*. In this regard, the difference between Georgia and Armenia is of particular interest for this research, since it is expected to cause a variation in their environmental performance according to the original assumption.

²⁰ The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) consists of three individually assessed categories: Political Transformation, Economic Transformation, and the Governance Index. Concerning political transformation, both Georgia and Armenia are categorised as defective democracies (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020a, 2020b). It assesses five indicators: statehood, political participation, rule of law, stability of democratic institutions, and political and social integration. Although they fall in the same category of defective democracy, Armenia, with an overall score of 7.10 (out of 10) is ahead of Georgia which has a score of 6.60.

²¹ The state of Economic Transformation is deemed limited in both countries. Armenia's score of 6.29 (out of 10) is a higher than Georgia's score of 6.18. The Economic Transformation score includes seven indicators, such as level of socioeconomic development, sustainability, and welfare management.

Table 4. Most Similar Systems Design for Georgia and Armenia. Own Illustration.

Factor / Country	Armenia	Georgia
Border disputes	Yes	Yes
Comparable Country size²²	Yes	Yes
Soviet past	Yes	Yes
State of Democracy²³	Defective	Defective
Economic Transformation	Limited	Limited
Seeking deep integration with the EU	No	Yes

3.2. Quantitative Measures

Both the dependent variable *Environmental Politics* and the independent variable *Degree EU Influence* are measured quantitatively. Even though the analysis will focus on the qualitative assessment of the conditional variable *EU Mode of Governance*, the use of quantitative data that has led to the initial assumption between dependent and independent variables will be presented and reflected in the following.

Not many indices reliably measure a country's environmental performance over a time span of several years or include countries other than western industrial states.²⁴ In order to assess the dependent variable *environmental politics* for the countries of the Eastern Partnership, the EPI was the only index offering comparable data over a time span of ten years. The index is conducted by the Yale and Columbia Universities since 2006 and assesses the environmental performance of 180 states (Hsu et al., 2016; Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy et al., 2016). The EU's *Joint Research Centre* (JRC)

²² The comparison of countries' sizes is relative. Here, the population number of Georgia and Armenia are used as an indicator, since it is "the most commonly used criteria for identifying small states" (Maass, 2009, p. 71). According to the Worldbank, Armenia's population in 2019 was approximately three million inhabitants, while Georgia had a population 3.7 million inhabitants in the same year (Worldbank, 2021).

²³ While the BTI categorises Georgia and Armenia the same, it should be noted that other Indices come to different conclusions. For example, the Democracy Index by Freedom House categorises Armenia as a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime, while Georgia is seen as a transitional or hybrid regime (Freedom House, 2021). Since the BTI is more differentiated in its categories, this research is oriented towards this index.

²⁴ For example, the *Climate Change Performance Index* would be able to effectively measure the dependent variable over a longer time span. However, it does not include the South Caucasian region (Germanwatch e.V., 2021). Another option could have been the *Eastern Partnership Index* that is assessed by the Civil Society Forum and in parts also targets environmental performance. However, this index focuses more on the legislative harmonization with EU standards, and it does not become clear whether the individual reports can be compared to each other (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2020, p. 33).

has conducted several statistical audit in the past in order to assess the EPI's reliability and ensure its transparency, most recently in 2020. (Papadimitriou et al., 2020, p. 2) Overall, the most recent analysis concludes that "the EPI meets the quality standards for statistical soundness and acknowledges the EPI as a reliable composite indicator to measure environmental performance worldwide." (Papadimitriou et al., 2020, p. 20) Other scholars whose publications have been of use for this research also work with the EPI (Hamann et al., 2018, p. 502).

As Figure 3 shows, the index divides environmental performance into the two dimensions *Environmental Health* and *Ecosystem Vitality* that each account for 50 percent of the rating. Each dimension is then divided into several sub-categories to which specific indicators are attributed. The index thus focuses on outcomes of environmental policy, through the comparison of actual performance with policy targets. This is a potentially critical aspect of the index:

To some extent, differences in states' inclinations would be accounted for in the EPI's 'proximity-to-target' methodology, because it considers performance relative to policy goals that reflect states' preferences. (Hamann et al., 2018, p. 502)

Theoretically, a country with low policy targets could still receive a higher rank when fulfilling these targets than a country with high policy goals that are not as easy to reach. However, the EPI's target scores not only derive from countries' preferences, but also consist of internationally agreed upon goals and scientific thresholds (Hamann et al., 2018, p. 503).

While it might be interesting to choose one specific category or even indicator, such as Air Quality or Biodiversity and Habitat, the analysis of the environmental sector as a whole (and the EU interaction therein) might increase the relevance of the analysis' outcome.

Figure 4. Composition of the EPI. Illustration by Hsu et al.; Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy et al. (2016).



The assessment of the quantitative data of dependent and independent variable concerns the time span between 2007 and 2019. The annual changes of indicators and categories in the EPI reports make it difficult to compare the results. In 2020, for example, the EPI for the first time includes a category on waste management within the dimension of *Environmental Health* (Wendling et al., 2020, p. 2). To make their data comparable, the authors have conducted a backcasted data set in 2016 which serves as a basis for this paper. Even though more recent data cannot be directly compared with each other, the authors of the index still provide a 10-year comparison on the basis of the countries' baseline value (Wendling et al., 2020, p. 175). In 2020, Georgia decreased -1.3 points, while Armenia increased +4.5 points from their respective baseline values.²⁵

In the MSSD table above, the *Degree of EU integration* was assessed in political terms, referring to Georgia's more ambitious path of EU integration, while Armenia chose a different path of regional integration by joining the EAEU. Below, the independent

²⁵ The EPI's interactive map displays the individual countries' scores as well as their baseline values (Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy, 2020).

variable is also quantitatively measured through the indicator *Amount of Funding* that each EaP country receives annually, following the assumption that the EU's leverage on a country is higher, the more financial support the country gets: "Bilateral allocations to partner countries will reflect the priorities of the ENP and the level of their ambitions, and commitment to and implementation of reform will continue to guide the allocation of funds under the ENP umbrella programme." (European Commission, 2015g, pp. 19–20) The *Amount of Funding* is therefore a suitable indicator to measure the level of EU influence on a country. The financial instrument that was established with the ENP in 2007 was the European Neighbourhood Programme Instrument (ENPI). From 2014 until 2020, it was followed by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).²⁶ The numbers can be found in the *Annual Action Programme* (AAP) which the EU signs with every partner country.²⁷ The funds explicitly target "(a) national and local authorities; and (b) civil society organisations" (European Parliament, 2014, 32) and both the EU as well as EaP Member States "shall take the necessary steps (...) to ensure complementarity, proper coordination and cooperation with multilateral and regional organisations and entities" (European Parliament, 2014, p. 32). In accordance with the EU's 'more for more' approach, the ENI is subject to conditionality, meaning "that ENI investment is linked to demonstrable progress on reforms to approximate EU standards." (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019, p. 290) Table 5 provides an overview of the contributions from 2007 to 2019.²⁸

²⁶ For the funding period from 2021 until 2027, the new Multiannual Financial Framework is called the *Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)* and presents a fusion of previous individual financial instruments in all the regions, including, among others the ENI, the European Development Fund, and pre-accession assistance (European Commission, 2020d).

²⁷ Each country annually receives its own AAP, counting up to 78 documents that have been consulted to create Table 4. Therefore, they are not separately listed in the bibliography. Each AAP can be found on the website by the European Commission (European Commission, 2020e).

²⁸ The last decimal place was rounded down for values up to and including 4, and rounded up for values 5 and above. The amounts of funding were derived from the AAPs of each country for the time span of 2007-2019. For the respective sources for the numbers, see for Armenia: European Commission (2007b, 2008b, 2009b, 2010c, 2011e, 2012b, 2013b, 2013f, 2014e, 2015b, 2016g, 2017d, 2018d, 2019f); for Azerbaijan: European Commission (2007a, 2008d, 2009a, 2010e, 2011g, 2012a, 2013c, 2014g, 2015d, 2016b, 2017c, 2018g, 2019d); for Belarus: European Commission (2007c, 2008f, 2009e, 2010g, 2011d, 2012g, 2013a, 2014c, 2015e, 2016c, 2017b, 2018a, 2019b); for Georgia: European Commission (2007d, 2008c, 2009c, 2010a, 2011a, 2012c, 2013d, 2014a, 2014d, 2015a, 2016d, 2017a, 2018e, 2019e); for the Republic of Moldova: European Commission (2007e, 2008a, 2009f, 2010b, 2011b, 2012e, 2013g, 2014b, 2014d, 2015c, 2016e, 2018f, 2018h, 2019c); and for Ukraine: European Commission (2007f, 2008e, 2009d, 2010d, 2010f, 2011c, 2011f, 2012d, 2012f, 2013e, 2014f, 2015f, 2016a, 2016f, 2018b, 2018c, 2019a, 2019g)

Table 5. Annual EU funding within the ENPI/ENI framework in million Euro. Own illustration. Data derived from European Commission, 2020e.

Cou./yr.	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18	'19	Med
Ukraine	142	139	116	126	135	138	186	242	160	191	128	147	160	155
Georgia	24	29	27	37	51	60	70	101	100	110	97	79	120	70
Rep. Mol.	40	62	52	66	79	94	100	101	90	89	10	51	18	66
Armenia	21	24	25	28	24	60	41	19	30	20	35	46	46	32
Azerb.	19	22	20	7	31	20	25	22	14	14	14	14	27	19
Belarus	5	5	10	10	14	17	12	19	15	29	29	30	31	17

The division of the two ‘camps’ concerning the level of integration is reflected in the amount of funding: When looking at the average amount of funding in each country, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus clearly are at the tail end. Among those three countries, it also becomes clear that Armenia still receives more financial support within the ENI framework than the other two.

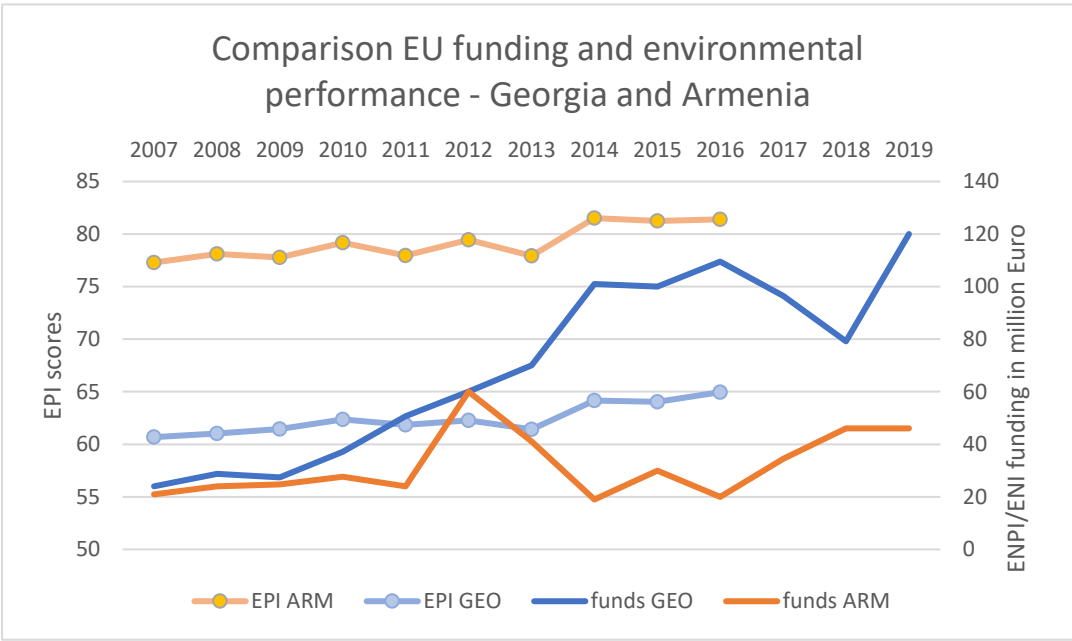
Unfortunately, no differentiated data for environmental actions and funding within the ENPI/ENI framework is accessible, which is why the overall amount is taken as a broad indicator for *the Degree of EU influence*. Still, it is clear that environmental and climate action have been among the ENPI/ENI’s priority areas in the past (EU Neighbours Portal, 2021b). Various regional programmes have been funded under the ENI framework, such as the development of the *Shared Environmental Information System* (SEIS) in programme phases I and II until 2020, or the *Air Quality Governance* in the ENPI countries, *ENPI Forest Law Enforcement and Governance* (FLEG) as well as the *Waste Governance-ENPI East* (European Commission, 2020c). In its communication ‘Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all’, the European Commission (2020a) states:

The European Green Deal makes it clear that environmental and climate challenges require urgent action by the EU and the partner countries. (...) The EU will work together with the partner countries to transform the region into fair and prosperous societies, with modern, resource-efficient, clean, circular and competitive economies, while increasing their environmental and climate resilience, including through more sustainable use of natural resource. (European Commission, 2020a, p. 10)

In combination with the ‘more for more’ approach, which is stressed in the joint communication as a beneficial instrument also for future cooperation (European Commission, 2020a, p. 1), the initial puzzle is once more confirmed: Assuming the importance of environmental protection for EU programmes in the EaP and taking into

consideration that Georgia has chosen a higher political integration with the EU than Armenia, this should somehow reflect in both countries' environmental performance. The weak correlation thereof, as outlined in the puzzle, makes the qualitative assessment of the conditional variable *EU mode of governance* all the more relevant. The research will henceforth concentrate on the conditional variable and the qualitative analysis of the hypothesis. Figure 5 illustrates the contrasting standpoints of Georgia's and Armenia's EPI score on the left, and their ENPI/ENI funds on the right.

Figure 5. Contrast of EPI scores and annual ENPI/ENI funding in million Euro. Own Illustration.



Recalling the original assumption which states that higher EU influence leads to more successful environmental politics in a certain country, the illustration above contradicts this assumption. Even though comparable data for EPI scores from 2016 onwards is missing, the comparison confirms a weak or potentially negative correlation with regards to the original assumption.

3.3. Qualitative Measures

The qualitative assessment of the conditional variable *EU Modes of External Governance* is based on semi-structured expert interviews consisting of open questions. The interviewees are divided into three groups: representatives of environmental ministries, environmental NGOs and the EU Delegation. This way, the analysis will be able to compare perspectives and experiences by different sides. Unfortunately, it was difficult to identify and contact companies that work in environmental fields and are supported within the EaP framework. However, environmental ministries and certain NGOs offered perspectives on economic cooperation with the EU.

In total, 20 entities have been contacted in preparation for the interviews. The list of potential interviewees and relevant environmental actors in Armenia and Georgia has been complemented through research and with the help of the *Heinrich Böll foundation South Caucasus* which play an important role in environmental support in the region. Establishing contact to the respective actors, their responsiveness and reliability varied: Although less Georgian than Armenian entities had been contacted, the NGOs as well as the Delegation of the EU to Georgia²⁹ were more responsive and ready to be interviewed. Establishing contact to the Ministries of Environment was most difficult. Unfortunately, the interview with the EU Delegation to Armenia could, despite repeated requests, in the end not be realised due to illness on the Delegation's side.

In total, seven interviews were conducted between April 6 and 16, 2021 via the digital platform Zoom. Table 5 presents an overview of all interviewed organisations and their representatives.³⁰ The interview transcripts have afterwards been anonymised with respect to the interviewee's personal rights. In the analysis, individual quotes will be displayed using the organisation's code on the very right.

²⁹ Henceforth also called EU Delegation to Georgia or just EU Delegation.

³⁰ The sequence of the interviews first lists NGOs, then environmental Ministries and lastly the EU Delegation to Georgia. This order does not imply any hierarchies.

Table 5. Overview of interview partners and codes. Own Illustration.

No.	Category	Name of Organisation	Country	Organisation Code
1	NGO	Elkana – Organic Farmers Association	Georgia	GEO_NGO1
2	NGO	CENN – Caucasian Environmental NGO Network	Georgia	GEO_NGO2
3	NGO/ Research Center	Acopian Center for the Environment	Armenia	ARM_NGO1
4	NGO	Green Armenia	Armenia	ARM_NGO2
5	Government	Ministry of Environment in Armenia	Armenia	ARM_GOV
6	Government	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA)	Georgia	GEO_GOV
7	EU-Delegation	Delegation of the European Union to Georgia	Georgia	GEO_DEL

The questionnaire consists of three thematical blocks: In order to establish an open and trusting environment, the broad topics were sent to the interviewees beforehand. For the same reason, the first block dealt with the interview partner and the organisation he or she worked for. In the second block, the interviewee was asked problem-centred questions regarding cooperation with the EU, as for example challenges in the application and implementation processes and experiences with different forms of cooperation. The third block then deals with the role of the EU for the sector and region in general. Here, the comparison to other influential actors in the South Caucasus like USAID, bilateral cooperation with EU countries and the EAEU in the environmental sector have been addressed since they, too, can have an impact on how the EU cooperates with its partners.

The general questionnaire was applied to all interviewees. However, it was adjusted to each interviewee in order to include specific characteristics. While for NGOs and environmental ministries, the questionnaire only needed to be mildly modified, it required another perspective for cooperation when talking to the EU Delegation about its experiences in cooperating with environmental Ministries and NGOs. Here, most alterations to the questionnaire were necessary. Still, the interviews aimed at preserving a certain level of spontaneity and flexibility regarding new topics and questions that evolved during the interview. The general questionnaire as well as the transcripts of all

interviews can be found in Annex 1.³¹ Secondary sources, such as Implementation Reports by the EU, as well as independent academic analyses have not only helped in preparing for the interviews but will also support the interviews' outcome.

Overall, the conduction of the interviews has been successful, although certain limitations and difficulties during the preparation and conversation could not be avoided. In general, it is more difficult to establish a trustful environment for the interview partner via internet. Several partners had to be reassured that their data will be treated confidentially. Various relevant actors in the environmental field in Georgia and Armenia did not reply or were not eligible because they had not worked with the EU before. Their expertise has hence not contributed to the analysis below. Still, it can be confidently stressed that the existing interview partners are all important actors in their respective field and country and have had multiple experiences in cooperating and working with or within the EU.

Another problem concerned the language barrier. For some interview partners, it was difficult to express their views in English, which may have impacted their overall depth of contribution. When transcribing the interviews, some statements were edited for clarification and in order to be able to work with the data. In one case, a translator was provided because the interviewee was not at ease with speaking English. During the interviews, questions had to be rephrased in some cases in order to make them more understandable.

Lastly, an involuntary bias on this author's side cannot be ruled out. This bias might concern a rather positive and sympathetic attitude towards non-governmental actors and a rather critical attitude towards governmental and supranational actors like the EU. This, however, with the help of a transparent coding scheme, and a reflexive and self-critical research approach, a realisation of this bias was as far as possible minimised and ruled out. Furthermore, the creation of a theory-based questionnaire beforehand helped to retain the maximum possible degree of objectivity both during the conduction and analysis of the interviews.

³¹ Due to time limitations by the communication tool Zoom, some interviews had to be restarted after 40 minutes. This is why some transcripts are divided into two parts and will be quoted as such.

The evaluation and interpretation of the interviews is based on qualitative content analysis with the help of a coding scheme. A code can be defined as a “researcher-generated construct that symbolises and thus attributes interpreted meaning” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4) to the collected data in order to be later categorised and analysed. The procedure used in this research is based on *open coding*, whose goal is to define and develop categories and sub-categories which are hierarchically structured (Schreier, 2012, p. 111).

Recurring topics in the interviews have subsequently been identified and inductively clustered into subcategories while the categories are oriented along the structure of the interviews that was outlined above. The coding was conducted with the help of the programme MAXQDA Analytics Pro. In the second part of the analysis, the interviews will be analysed according to the dimensions that were deductively identified by the theoretical foundation (see Table 1).

4. Analysis: The EU’s environmental external governance in Georgia and Armenia

After having identified the theoretical foundations, and elaborated on the methodological aspects of the research, this chapter will present the interviews and discuss them on the basis of the theoretical foundation of EU external environmental governance. Before turning to the qualitative analysis, the chapter will give an overview of the main environmental struggles in both case countries, and the legal basis of EU cooperation. This is necessary in order to fully understand the context of the ensuing qualitative analysis.

4.1. Context: environmental politics in Georgia and Armenia and EU cooperation

Environmental policies have been part of the EU’s external governance early on (Lavenex, 2004, p. 681). In its Environmental Action Programme from 2001 to 2010, the European Commission decided to “include environmental issues in all aspects of European Union external relations.” (European Communities, 2001, p. 11) The basis for cooperation are the *Partnership and Cooperation Agreements* (PCAs) with the

respective countries until the end of the 1990s, which include EU environmental standards (European Commission, 2003, p. 11). Additionally, the 'Environment for Europe' framework, besides providing a platform for annual ministerial conferences, explicitly aims to "promote environmental improvement in CEE/NIS³²" (European Commission, 2003, p. 4). EU legislation is expected to "become the principal and most effective means of international law making" (European Commission, 2003, p. 14) concerning environmental standards in the EaP. Between 2012 and 2015, the ENP underwent an extensive revision and reform process which strengthened the differentiated integration of EaP countries and the EU's 'more for more' approach (European Commission, 2020a, p. 1; Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 4).

Cooperation within the EaP framework can be divided into regional and bilateral cooperation, the latter remaining "the main way to ensure a tailor-made approach" (European Commission, 2020a, p. 4). The above-mentioned PCAs have evolved into individual bilateral agreements with most EaP countries, such as the DCFTA agreements with Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia or the CEPA agreement in Armenia's case. Individual *Association Agendas* (AAs) "define a set of jointly agreed priorities for action ranging from environmental governance and issue-specific activities to international and regional cooperation on environment issues." (European Commission, 2020c) Ministerial meetings and sub-committees are described as the "backbone of bilateral relations under the ENP" (Freyburg et al., 2015, p. 66), the latter including a sub-committee covering energy, transport and environmental issues. Ministerial cooperation has since 2016 established regular meetings on the environment and climate change that brings together the Ministries of Environment of each EaP partner country and the EU Commissioners for Environment, Climate Action and Neighbourhood Policy (Buzogány, 2018, p. 237).

In Armenia, the CEPA agreement fully entered into force on March 1st, 2021, although large parts of it had already been operating provisionally since 2018 (European Commission, 2021a). In the agreement, two chapters are specifically dedicated to the environment and climate action, although environmental protection and the establishment of sustainable economic standards are cross-cutting other areas, as well

³² The abbreviation CEE stands for Central Eastern Europe. NIS is short for Newly Independent States.

(CEPA, 2018, pp. 20–22). The link between environmental protection and economic development is made clear: “The agreement will help Armenia achieve economic growth and at the same time improve the environment, thanks to the adoption of EU standards.” (European Union External Action Service, 2020) The Armenian Ministry of Environment is working on multiple issues embedded in the CEPA agreement, as for example amending its national water legislation in order to fulfil five EU directives related to water management (EU Water Initiative for Eastern Partnership, 2020, p. 11).

In Georgia, the AA that has also introduced the DCFTA, entered into force in 2016. The DCFTA agreement offers economic facilitations for Georgia, whose most important trade partner is the EU, as well as visa liberalisation for Georgian citizens. In political terms, the DCFTA provides the highest level of integration for the partner countries so far (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2018, p. 2). Concerning the environmental sector, the Agreement includes multiple EU directives and regulations, representing “virtually the whole corpus of EU environmental law and policy” (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2018, p. 153), from environmental governance in general to specific policies like air and water quality, waste management, or chemical management. Environmentally-related EU-cooperation and the implementation of the AA lies with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA) that has been in operation since 2017, after the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resource Protection was merged with the Ministry of Agriculture (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2018, p. 156).

Regional cooperation in the EaP is oriented along four broad areas of cooperation that were identified at the EaP summit in 2017, where the introduction of the ‘20 Deliverables for 2020’ marked the adoption of a new reform agenda (European Commission, 2020a): (1) stronger economy – economic development and market opportunities; (2) stronger governance – strengthening institutions and good governance; (3) stronger connectivity – connectivity, energy efficiency, environment, and climate change; and (4) stronger society – mobility and people-to-people contacts. Additionally, civil society, gender issues and freedom and independence of media have been identified as cross-cutting areas (EU Neighbours Portal, 2021a). Each area is attributed to a Platform that consists of thematical panels, expert working groups or meetings by the national Ministers. Platform 3 covers transport, energy, environment and climate change, and provides “a forum to monitor progress in policy alignment.”

(European Commission, 2020c) On a national level, five working groups have been established by the *Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum* (CSF), of which four are aligned with the Platforms' topics above, and a fifth working group has been added on social dialogue. These national working groups consist of civil society representatives from each country that annually meet and discuss current issues (European Civil Society Forum, n.d.).

Besides cooperation under the framework of the EaP, the EU has established multiple regional initiatives in the EaP countries. *EU4Environment*³³ and *EU4Climate* are two examples that directly target environmental issues. *EU4Business* supports the sustainable development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and *EU4Energy* aims at improving energy security and supply, as well as increasing renewable energies. These initiatives are to a large part funded by the EU and implemented by international organisations like different UN agencies³⁴ or various development banks, such as the *World Bank*, the *European Investment Bank* (EIB) or the *European Bank for Reconstruction and Development* (EBRD). The EU's 'green economy' and 'circular economy' approaches aim at integrating sustainable and environmental standards in all economic sectors and developments (Buzogány, 2018, p. 237).

Relevant is also the EU's *European Neighbourhood Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development* (ENPARD). While having been active in Armenia until 2018, it is currently in its third phase in Georgia until 2022.³⁵ It aims at improving the quality of life by increasing economic opportunities as well as paying attention to "environmental protection and the sustainable management of natural resources." (ENPARD Georgia, 2020) The programme therefore combines economic development and environmental goals.

EU support usually takes one of the following five forms: It works through *grants* which do not have to be repaid; through *tenders* that consist of technical assistance,

³³ The EU4Environment project runs from 2019-2022 and contains 20 Million Euro, of which 19.5 Million Euro are covered by the EU (European Commission, 2020c).

³⁴ Such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE); the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); or the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO).

³⁵ The UNDP-managed ENPARD programme was established in Georgia in 2013 and consists of 77.5 Million Euro in its current phase from 2018 to 2022 (ENPARD Georgia, 2020).

infrastructure or equipment; it can take the form of *twinning* which brings together “public sector expertise from EU Member States and beneficiary countries” (Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, 2021); or consist of *loans, guarantees and blending* which are different forms of financial support or easier access to loans from other actors. Finally, *sector reform support contracts* involve “direct financial transfers to the national treasury of partner countries engaging in sustainable development reforms” (Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, 2021).

4.2. Data overview of the Conducted Interviews

This sub-chapter presents the key findings of the seven conducted interviews. Similar to the way in which the interviews themselves were structured, the sub-chapters first look at the environmental engagement and challenges that the actors are involved with. The second part elaborates on the different types and instruments of EU cooperation that national actors are involved with. The third part deals with processes of EU cooperation, such as application, implementation and evaluation, and challenges therein. Subsequently, the data overview summarises how civil society actors themselves are perceived in their respective countries, and their related problems with their respective state administration. Lastly, the chapter includes the interviewees’ observations concerning the EU’s overall role for the environmental sector. Country-specific information and differences between Georgia and Armenia, as well as the different actor groups, are emphasised.³⁶

4.2.1. *Environmental issues and spheres of involvement in Georgia and Armenia*

The ways in which environmental actors in Georgia and Armenia work are as diverse as the problems they face. The interview partners mainly named environmental problems with which they engage in their own work, so the list is not exhaustive. The main challenges, to which actors in both countries referred to, were issues of waste management, forestry, climate change, and water management. While Ministry representatives focused more on legislative advancements and plans on implementing

³⁶ Due to the unfortunate absence of Data from the EU Delegation to Armenia, a certain imbalance in the detail and depth of the data overview between the two countries cannot be avoided. Still, the statements by other Armenian actors also address observations made by the EU Delegation to Georgia, making the comparison nevertheless relevant.

EU standards, NGOs elaborated on their contribution to legislation or engagement against certain projects.

Country-specifically, the mining sector in Armenia is highly contested and politicised, with the gold mine *Amulsar* in its centre. ARM_NGO2 describes its engagement through making a documentary about the conflict: “and the fight against this project by the local communities and environmentalists throughout the past 14 years. And it was also about the international standards that the project always claimed to follow.” (ARM_NGO2, Part 1, Para. 12) Reasons for the lack of environmental standards are seen to be the government’s responsibility, and “the government’s inability to really manage the sector.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 12) To the representative’s knowledge, whose NGO engages with the mining sector in Armenia, the EU has not been very invested in the issue, even though mining governance is mentioned in the CEPA agreement. Still, “they just have not been very vocal at all” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 8).

While the Armenian environmental ministry mostly focuses on legislative projects in several environmental areas, the consequences of the war with Azerbaijan in the summer of 2020 are of particular importance for the representative:

And also, I would like to say that I think that after the war, the 44-day war, we face new challenges concerning environment. It's about that Azerbaijan used some kind of weapons that had a big, big disease for our environment. And that's another problem for us. (...) It's about forest areas, some water areas and so on. (ARM_GOV, Para. 10-12)³⁷

In Georgia, especially the waste sector, forestry, and water management in terms of hydro-power plants are mentioned by all actors. Similar to the mines in Armenia, the hydro-power plants repeatedly lead to protests by local communities which will be picked up again in Chapter 4.2.4. Regarding the waste sector, the EU Delegation observes that it “is very important because the waste management is a huge mess, there are no EU standards. Landfill is just a habit of throwing the waste anywhere.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 7) A Georgian NGO emphasises the overall relevance of the forest

³⁷ It is contested whether Azerbaijani forces actually used weapons to specifically damage the environment. However, it is confirmed that during the fighting period, several forest fires occurred that “were climatologically anomalous, so likely arose directly from the fighting” (Darbyshire, 2021).

sector for the country in terms of energy and water resources, as well as the problem of high rates of deforestation. (GEO NGO 2, Para. 3)

4.2.2. Types and Instruments of EU cooperation

As described in Chapter 4.1., EU cooperation can be divided into bilateral and regional cooperation. The interviews showed that governmental and civil society actors are involved in both, although the latter generally prefer bilateral over regional cooperation.

CEPA and DCFTA

The AAs serve as a basis for bilateral cooperation, which for the EU Delegation, “is a bit our framework and our guidance for what this country wants to reach and what is the mandate of the EU in this country” (GEO_DEL, Para. 5). Together with the government as the EU’s “direct counterpart” (GEO_DEL, Para. 9) in the country, they make sure to adopt and implement EU legislation. Still, the EU Delegation can also issue projects independently, for example through technical assistance, or individual calls for civil society actors. For the Georgian government, signing the AA presented a significant step and introduced “another level of cooperation” (GEO_GOV, Para. 46).

In Armenia, the government emphasises the importance of the CEPA agreement and its environmental framework with regards to the international armed conflict of 2020. In general, the CEPA agreement “includes all spheres of environment: starting from education, to NGOs, to the legislation level, to adoption of Armenian legislation to European standards” (ARM_GOV, Para. 8). An Armenian NGO sees it more differentiated, stating that CEPA does not contain “all elements of an association agreement, but it has lots of elements of harmonising, and taking EU directives as guidelines” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 12). Still, ARM_NGO1 emphasises the impact that the CEPA agreement would have on environmental governance if the Armenian government actually fulfilled all the aspects of the agreement.

Georgian NGO representatives report that the legal obligations that come with the DCFTA make the EU more influential: If environmental goals are “attached to the financial conditions like direct budgetary support, the government takes it seriously because if they don't deliver, they will not get the budget. So that's why they take it

serious.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 3) This statement also implies an opportunism or at least pragmatism on the Georgian government’s side to merely fulfil obligations if there are financial merits to gain from it. Also, they criticise that the EU could use its financial leverage more decisively (GEO_NGO1, Para. 58).

Capacity building and regional cooperation

All interview partners positively assessed capacity building measures by the EU, as well as technical assistance and twinning. For example, both Ministry representatives agree that trainings are a regular part of EU assistance. (GEO_GOV, Para. 8; ARM_GOV, Para. 24) An Armenian NGO describes how its employees profited from these measures: “The experience of our engineering teams working with the European and international teams, it's been mind-blowing. I mean, they have grown so much from these interactions with these really world class organisations and institutions.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 2) A Georgian NGO representative recalls that already in the past, international support in Georgia not only manifested through funding, but also “a lot of trainings and lots of exchanges, a lot of trips to the West” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 27).

Regionally, the ties between the South Caucasian countries depend on the countries. While cooperation with Azerbaijan is difficult for Armenia and Georgia, a Georgian NGO recalls that in Armenia, “we have a strong partner, I mean relatively strong partner.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 7) Because of the restrictions NGOs face in Azerbaijan, GEO_NGO2 reports that cooperation with Azerbaijani civil society actors only happens occasionally. GEO_NGO2 was therefore surprised when learning in a forum about Azerbaijan’s and Armenia’s advance in renewable energy:

And I have to say that Armenia and Azerbaijan are ahead of Georgia. I mean, I was thinking that we are doing better because we have so much support of Germany, USAID, whatever, and we are part of energy community. But actually we are the most behind and even Azerbaijan which has so much oil is much ahead of us with renewable energy and energy efficiency and has adopted legislation which is in line with EU eight years ago that we adopted just last year. (GEO_NGO2, Para. 7)

This statement is not only of interest because of its implicit paraphrasing of this research’s initial puzzle. It also implies that all the international support by various

donors did not make Georgia leading the field of renewable energies in the region, which the NGO representative cannot explain.

Regional programmes that encompass all EaP partner countries have a controversial reputation. Both governmental and civil society representatives report to be or have been involved in various frameworks, such as the *Erasmus+* Programme, the *Black Sea Cooperation*, the former *Horizon 2020* – succeeded by *Horizon Europe* – as well as ENPARD, *EU4Environment* and *EU4Climate*. Their benefits include funding as well as enhancing connectivity between actors of the different EaP countries and beyond: ARM_NGO1 reports about a project of the *Black Sea Cooperation* programme, whose aim is to combine partnerships of universities, governments and other civil society actors within the Black Sea region (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 18). Some actors even seem to be proud of being part of regional programmes, such as “the famous ENPARD projects by the EU” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 6) In contrast, transnational programmes are criticised for outsourcing their implementation to other international organisations like the UNDP, OSCE or the World Bank:

I've found that it's more efficient when EU works directly with the partners, international partner or local partner, than with multilateral agencies like UN agencies (...). [W]hen you have the multilateral agency, you don't have this kind of ownership or you don't have this commitment and usually the quality is missed. (GEO_NGO2, Para. 9-11)

The outsourcing of programme implementation to multilateral agencies by the EU can also lead to the exclusion of national and local actors, as GEO_NGO1 recalls for the previous ENPARD programme cycle: “the previous ENPARD was directly distributed between FAO and UNDP. And there was not any more possibility for local actors to tender for these ENPARD programmes.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 62) Before that, the NGO had participated in previous ENPARD projects that were subject to open competition. In contrast, GEO_DEL points out that for the regional programmes, the international organisations “have expertise in all the countries that I believe not all the civil society has” (GEO_DEL, Para. 13) and are therefore better suited to manage these projects. Furthermore, according to GEO_DEL, these regional programmes also serve the goal of getting the EaP countries to the same level:

[T]he spirit of the Eastern Partnership is also to have all these countries work better together and, you know, sharing information, going at the same speed and so on. It's sometimes a bit more difficult because in Georgia there is a tendency to be so, so attracted by the EU that they want to be the first and the first with a membership commitment and all

that kind of thing. And they tend to forget about their natural partners also, which are the other countries of the Eastern partnership, which I personally find a little bit stupid, but I mean, it's OK. But that's an important element, where I think we are pushing more than they are. (GEO_DEL, Para. 37)

This statement contradicts the EU's official differentiated and 'more for more' approach. While Georgia is not actively held back in its development, it indicates the notion of the EU Delegation 'pushing' towards more regional cooperation as opposed to individual development. Furthermore, the impression of the EU favouring all countries to go at the same speed suggests a compromise, in which Georgia, here depicted as very eager for deeper integration, would certainly lose. If regional programmes indeed were designed to not only improve cooperation between EaP countries but also level their development, this would certainly oppose the EU's official strategies. Furthermore, the statement contains a clearly superior attitude and self-perception vis-à-vis Georgia.

Network structures and the EU Green Deal

NGO representatives overall experience an increase of connectivity through cooperating with the EU. Firstly, applications to EU grants might require finding partner organisations, which will be further examined in Chapter 4.2.3. Several interview partners are involved in the CSF which is structured along thematic sub-groups. ARM_NGO1 suggests that there should be more interaction between the different sections "because it's very silent right now, environmental people at their work and (...) gender people with gender related gender issues are focused on their issues and human rights people are focused on their issues." (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 42) ARM_NGO2 is part of the CSF and reports to have received EU grants through this membership more easily and states that "especially for the new organisations, (...) it's better to get involved in such networks." (ARM_NGO2, Part 1, Para. 44) However, it also describes the forum's inner hierarchy between old and new members, and opaque procedures of voting representatives who get to travel to Brussels and report on current issues every two years (ARM_NGO2, Part 1, Para. 47-49).

The European Green Deal, even though not an instrument itself, is seen as an opportunity in both countries to put more environmental topics on national agendas as a cross-cutting aspect. ARM_NGO1 observes that "even when there's a broader civil society focus, there's always an element of environment in the European Green Deal

that is added” (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 18); and GEO_NGO2 emphasises that “*even* the government of Georgia is trying maybe to work on a Georgian Green deal somehow, to tune with the European processes” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 35; *italic added*). The emphasis implies that the Georgian government would probably stay inactive without the Green Deal’s mobilising force. GEO_DEL also observes a change towards prioritisation of environmental issues in the whole region since the Green Deal was introduced. This prioritisation will be further manifested in the next programme cycle, a fact that evoked both surprise and delight from GEO_DEL: “[F]or the next programming, 2021 to 2027, actually 30 percent of all our assistance has to go to climate objective, climate meaning environmental. Can you imagine?” (GEO_DEL, Para. 27)³⁸ ARM_NGO1 confirms that the Green Deal further strengthens the EU as the main environmental donor in the South Caucasus, observing that “in terms of overall environmental funding, again, not Armenia specific, (...) the EU is going to have the lion’s share (...), especially with the European Green Deal.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 22)

The importance of funding

Independently from bilateral or regional programmes, financial support is among the most important instruments: NGOs in Armenia and Georgia emphasise that their main source of income are grants, of which the EU is the main donor: “[O]ur organisation members pay membership fees. But it’s not big and it constitutes only about one percent (...) of our full budget and the main source of our financing is donor money. So, we are active on this market of writing projects. Mostly, we work with European donors.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 6; see also ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 18)

As GEO_NGO1 recalls after experiencing a rapid growth due to extensive EU funding several years ago, financial cooperation creates obligations to not only fulfil the projects, but also to have the capacity to “convey these [European] values through your programmes” (Para. 18). In 2008, its main donor organisations stopped working in

³⁸ Indeed, the European Council in 2020 set a climate target of 30 percent for the programme period 2021-2027, “applicable to the total amount of expenditure from the EU budget 2021-27 and Next Generation EU” (European Commission, 2021b).

Georgia because “some of them decided that we are now already a middle-income country, and they don’t finance anymore.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 18) In order to survive, the NGO applied for several EU *tenders*, of which the majority was financed. The adaptation to this new level of professionalism was difficult, but in the end, as GEO_NGO1 concludes, made it more flexible and stronger: “And even with this covid situation, we were maybe trained how to cope with difficulties.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 18)

The dependency on donor money leaves the NGOs volatile to sudden changes and the donor organisations’ parameters and priorities. In the end, it is the EU’s decision where and how much money it wants to invest:

I think it's better to target one specific area, a few areas where we think they can be good and work with us and so on, and we try for sure to help them survive and so on. But I would personally not see the added value to put tens of millions every year on civil society because, you know, their capacity is also limited (...). I would prefer to have just a few NGOs, very competent in one sector rather than a multiplication of twenty actors with general knowledge and so on. (GEO_DEL, Para. 11)

While this statement by GEO_DEL cannot be transferred to the situation in Armenia, the experience of an Armenian NGO fits the notion of the EU choosing specific areas for investment. It reports about the geographical imbalance concerning sustainable agriculture projects by the EU, stating that southern regions in Armenia were excluded because the northern parts were considered cleaner. In the city of Jermuk that lies in direct proximity to the above-mentioned *Amulsar* gold mine project, “the community is automatically left out from projects that could develop alternatives, for example, agricultural projects.” (ARM_NGO2, Part 2, Para. 12) According to their experience, EU agricultural projects are issued in the north of Armenia, while the southern regions merely have access to calls on organic agriculture that they cannot apply for because of high EU standards and their proximity to industrial plants. ARM_NGO2 stresses that “it sort of forms policy, as you can understand, for the country (...), this concentration on the North and creating this conflict with the South” (ARM_NGO2, Part 2, Para. 16-18). However, they observe the same behaviour with other organisations such as the UNDP, as well.

Connected to the observation above is the accusation of the EU applying double standards when prioritising economic benefits over democratic concerns in Armenia.

ARM_NGO2 recalls that they hesitate to raise problems with the EU because “quite often when the issues are raised that, for example, there are undemocratic processes, the response is mostly prioritising the economic benefits rather than democratic processes.” (ARM_NGO2, Part 1, Para. 69) This view is supported by ARM_NGO2, stating that clashes between the EU and the Armenian government happened very rarely:

It's all accommodating, discussing, you know. Even if you have the most brutal government here, you know, they would still sit down and accommodate things, like a lot of civil society organisations were not put out for (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 36).

This view is only partly confirmed GEO_NGO1, stating that “unfortunately, sometimes businesses and temporary economic benefits by some actors are put higher” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 10) than environmental or health benefits. Still, the EU in their experience successfully combines economic development and environmental standards, coinciding “with our vision of development” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 12).

4.2.3. Processes and Challenges of EU Cooperation

The application and implementation processes for EU programmes are, according to all interview partners, fair and transparent. One Armenian NGO positively highlighted a two-phased application process that allow NGOs to hand in a broad concept first and only upon approval the full application. (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 28) GEO_NGO2 stresses the EU’s impartiality compared to corrupt structures whenever they engage with government funding: “If the proposal is clear, convincing and it's proper value for their work, finance, budget, whatever, you usually win.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 17)

Application Processes

Nevertheless, applying for and implementing EU projects provides various challenges for local actors in both countries. Overall, the representatives seemed quite reflected about potential difficulties, which they were able to see as opportunities at the same time. Mostly, challenges because of bureaucracy, writing proposals and competition were mentioned.

One issue is the bureaucratic effort, which is addressed both by civil society and governmental representatives: “[T]hey're very, very complicated rules of implementation, and if you don't have the financial, the controls and the accounting

systems in place on the project management capacity, you're going to have a very hard time, you know.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 30; see also GEO_GOV, Para. 14) While the interview partners themselves seem meet these requirements, they pointed out that for smaller NGOs, this might present a higher challenge. On the other hand, GEO_GOV points out that especially in the environmental sphere, it could be dangerous to be less thorough:

[W]e have to pay attention to the quality of the programmes. And so timing and the bureaucracy is often related with quality. So, if we are rushing too much, then there will be higher probability of mistakes. And so, if we are talking about the sustainable goals and long term visions, then I guess simplification is not that easy. (GEO_GOV, Para. 64)

Connected to bureaucracy is the writing process of the application that requires long research and a proficient use of English. GEO_NGO2 described this both as a challenge, as well as a positive experience:

So, it's a great experience for us personally, because when you write the proposal, it's like a master thesis. I mean, you have to research a lot. It's a two-months, three-months, heavy research. You have to read the laws. You have to educate yourselves. You have to really make these European values your values. (GEO_NGO2, Para. 9)

Especially the last sentence reveals an eagerness on the civil society's side to sustainably adapt to EU³⁹ standards. GEO_NGO1 puts it more pragmatically, stating to be active “on this market of writing projects” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 6).

As the comparison of applying to EU grants to a market in the quote above already implies, different NGO representatives perceived the competition for EU grants to be quite high, or even “out of this world” (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 25). While all actors are aware of this highly competitive situation, their lack of criticism suggests that they seem to accept it as given. Some statements even suggest that civil society actors embraced their competitive environment by succeeding to dominate a certain sector: “[T]he EU has this environmental component where we are the most competitive in the country at this stage in agriculture especially. So, it's our domain.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 20) The systematisation of competition is created by the EU itself, according to which grants are like a prize to be won: “We organise some competitions, some calls, proposals. And some NGOs or other actors can win some EU grants in order to

³⁹ The interview partners seemed to use EU and European as synonyms.

implement activities.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 5) GEO_DEL recognises that “NGOs are fighting quite a lot, the civil society has quite a lot of actors.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 15)

Interestingly, there seems to be competition among donors as well. As GEO_GOV explained, it is among its tasks to manage the different donor projects and make sure that they do not cover similar fields of action:

[O]ther donors are also very active. So, there is a very big competition in this direction. (...) [W]e are always trying to coordinate this process in order to avoid overlaps. (...) [I]t's not in the interests of the donors to spend money on the same things. (...) So, it's somehow split between different partners and donors. And then we are coordinating this process. (GEO_GOV, Para. 37-39)

Although the Armenian counterpart did not mention similar structures or tasks, ARM_NGO1 at least confirms that there exists a sectoral division between different actors in Armenia, recalling that US funding “have been very focused on water management issues” (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 15-17) and that it is rather difficult to receive funding from them in other areas.

For the same NGO, its main challenge is to find the right consortium when applying to EU grants: “They require group applications, which I think is a very positive element of EU projects, is that it makes you find partners and start working with them and connecting institutions and connecting research agendas.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 22) For many NGOs, this can be major challenge if they are not as connected to other actors. ARM_NGO2 which is also involved in a CSF working group, confirms this observation, stating that its membership was what made the application process to EU grants so easy: “[B]eing part of this kind of networks makes things easier, to be honest, as compared to when you apply, for example, for a grant as some unknown and I don't know, especially for the new organisations, new NGOs.” (ARM_NGO2, Part 1, Para. 44)

Implementation processes

With regards to the implementation processes of programmes, various interview partners confirm monitoring instruments to be in place, such as interim reporting. Both the EU Delegation to Georgia and environmental Ministries in both countries were satisfied with the state of cooperation, the latter repeatedly emphasising their mutually

good communication. Implementation challenges were agreed to be based on one's own side: "The challenge is, because, as I mentioned, there is a lack of knowledge, lack of experience, poor infrastructure, equipment, laboratory capacities." (GEO_GOV, Para. 42) GEO_DEL (Para. 17) confirms that governmental weaknesses sometimes lead to a delay of implementation, while GEO_GOV (Para. 8) acknowledges that some issues are much harder to implement than to adopt. GEO_NGO1, however, sees it in the EU's responsibility "to work more with the government to implement those obligations that they have (...). However, often all of this stays on paper and the real implementation of it is not taking place." (GEO_NGO1, Para. 36) ARM_GOV would like to see more emphasis on institutional support, and even sees it within the EU's responsibility to make sure that a programme is successful: "[T]here are some tools of monitoring, because if a programme is failed, I think it's first of all, the problem of European Union or European side, because they must control the whole process." (ARM_GOV, Para. 42)

ARM_NGO1 observes how in the past years, the EU's regulations for implementation have become more strict, and expects countries to develop own capacities. Interestingly, the interview partner here clearly takes the EU's side. Armenian NGOs and state administration are depicted as children that have to grow up: "I mean, you can't be hand-held for 20 years, 30 years. You have to grow into - you have to have the systems in place, right? (...) [Y]ou're not doing the organisations any favour if you're too relaxed because they really need to build capacity." (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 30-32) The EU should not be soft with the organisations, having itself "quite a bit of administrative burden" (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 32) to manage.

However, ARM_NGO2 seems especially frustrated with EU communication and is asking "firstly to reply to messages which I never got, and replies from any commissioner or whoever I wrote regarding this unsustainable landfill project." (ARM_NGO2, Part 2, Para. 23) GEO_NGO2 confirms a lack of communication and support on the EU's side during the implementation phase: "I understand that they're very busy, and we would love them to have more attention on us, to be more engaged in the doing the project implementation, even to give coaching and back-stopping and some advice again" (GEO_NGO2, Para. 19). The interview partner contrasts the EU's

activities with those of other donors such as USAID, which in comparison behave more like a supervisor:

They have almost everyday contact with you and sometimes even too much. You have to report almost everything. But they have engagement, and they really care. But with the EU, they're over-busy, I mean, they don't have this engagement, unfortunately. (GEO_NGO2, Para. 19)

GEO_NGO2 wishes for the EU to be more a political partner in general and provide more institutional rather than project-based support to local actors. Recalling ARM_NGO1's statement, it seems as if other civil society actors wish for more guidance or 'hand-holding' by the EU, for example in conflicts with the state administration: "[W]e would want them to be on our side when we have a big important meeting with the government or parliament." (GEO_NGO2, Para. 28)

In contrast to the views expressed above, GEO_NGO1 reports that the EU treats them openly and both provides as well as asks the NGO for advice in return. (GEO_NGO1, Para. 16) One possible explanation is that the degree of EU involvement might depend on the respective programme manager, as GEO_NGO2 recalls: "[S]ometimes the project manager from EU is very engaged, coming on the field or whatever, and sometimes we have cases when they officially say that they don't have time" (GEO_NGO2, Para. 21).

Generally, cooperation and communication stagnated in Armenia both due to the global pandemic and the international armed conflict with Azerbaijan in 2020: "Communication was not really taking place because it was not, you know, also safe in the sense to raise problems during war time." (ARM_NGO2, Part 1, Para. 69) Also in Georgia, the pandemic led to a decrease of communication between the EU Delegation and its partners from civil society (GEO_DEL, Para. 15).

Evaluation processes

After a project phase is completed, certain evaluation mechanisms seem to be in place. On the NGOs' side, evaluation, similar to implementation, mainly consists of a final report that has to be handed in. Again, GEO_NGO2 mentions the lack of interaction with the EU:

[T]he evaluation is very good, excellent, but human interaction is very limited. And this we are missing. We are really missing their support. I mean, they let us do and then we report, and they sometimes even don't give feedback, you know? But again, it depends on personnel. (GEO_NGO2, Para. 29)

Concerning governmental cooperation with the EU, GEO_GOV reports of an independent evaluation mission that issues a report and provides propositions to solve challenges for the next project phase. In this process, the MEPA is usually involved (GEO_GOV, Para. 40). Contrarily, ARM_GOV is not aware of similar evaluation structures: “If we fail the project concretely, then the next project, I think the next project will not be launched.” (ARM_GOV, Para. 42) While this statement does not prove the actual absence of any other evaluation structures, the evident black and white picture of a project either being a success, or a failure does not fit the feedback and improvement approach as described above by GEO_GOV (Para. 40). At the very least, it implies a lack of information about evaluation possibilities on the environmental ministry’s side. GEO_DEL especially observes problems in the follow up of projects, whether they have provided a training or prepared a draft:

But if it's not followed up after by the local institutions, either pushing a lot to the adoption process or having really the staff which has been trained continuing the very same job, of course, some energy has been lost and some of the things that we're promoting is just disappearing. But perhaps it's one risk of cooperation. (GEO_DEL, Para. 13)

This statement reveals that the government apparently lacks the capacity to sustainably implement some projects and indicates that the Georgian government is in the sole responsibility to follow up on projects and see to their implementation.

4.2.4. The Role of NGOs and Challenges of State-Cooperation

This sub-chapter focuses on problems that NGOs face when cooperating with governmental authorities, which is connected to the way civil society actors and their role in the countries are perceived by both EU and governments. As the interview results show, conflicts between NGOs and Ministries are influenced by EU involvement and their respective relation to the EU, as well.

The interviews confirm regular cooperation between the environmental ministries and civil society actors both in Georgia and Armenia that is also manifested in specific structures, such as advisory boards. Ministries and NGO representatives seem to be aware of the necessity to work together. For example, ARM_GOV stresses the

importance of EU support for civil society, since “it’s important also for us because it’s a very important component of democracy in Armenia.” (ARM_GOV, Para. 46) While the Ministry’s side has nothing to complain about in their cooperation with civil society, ARM_NGO1 criticises a lack of state capacity and mismanagement of staff:

[O]n the one hand, they’re over-staffed. On the other hand, you know, probably 90 percent aren’t doing anything and can’t even do anything because they don’t understand the issues and that the ten percent that can work, they’re overwhelmed. (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 34)

In addition, Armenian NGOs report long waiting periods to get responses from the ministry, which cause delays in many projects (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 34; ARM_NGO2, Part 2, Para. 23). In general, communication with state administration in Armenia seems to be as much an issue for NGOs as communication with the EU. On the one hand, ARM_GOV representative describes its “intensive links” with NGOs to be “an important tool in order to receive all the problems” (ARM_GOV, Para. 14). On the other hand, ARM_NGO1 representative expresses the frustration about the government’s advisory boards, stating that “those are very symbolic. They are just for show, right. They don’t get meaningful impact into decision making processes.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para 34) According to the interview partner, there is no real policy dialogue with the national government. Local governments seem to be more willing to cooperate, although here, one problem seems to be a certain opportunism towards their tasks. This is assumed to be a Soviet phenomenon, a lack on the local officials’ side to take actions that are not specifically written down in their mandate. ARM_NGO1 wonders how to engage these officials “in a way that they’re not dragged into it or they’re not incentivised by funding, but they actually see an opportunity of getting resources they don’t have locally to solve local issues and problems.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 34)

Interestingly, ARM_NGO1 can also relate to the challenges which the government faces and feels sympathetic with them because “you’re getting all this criticism and your, I think, natural response is to build walls, right.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 34) The interview partner also holds civil society responsible for the mostly confrontational relation between government and civil society. Both would have to contribute to a constructive partnership, whereas so far, the relation has overall been shaped by fights:

I don't know, maybe because of the types of funding that civil society has received, but up to now it's not been about deliberation. It's been about advocacy. It's been about campaigns. It's been about fighting something. And that puts governments usually into fights. And that may have its positive impact, but it also shuts down doors. (ARM_GOV, Para. 14)

In Georgia, the controversies are similar. GEO_NGO1 has been working both with the agricultural, and the environmental part of the Georgian MEPA after its merge. In their experience, the environmental section of the Ministry is stronger, has more capacities, and is easy to cooperate with since “our visions and attitudes are the same.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 22) With the agricultural part, the NGO reports to have a rather tense relationship: “Because of their so-called economic benefits, we have to fight with that side to... [pause] And it's not so easy.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 22) As in Armenia, this problem is said to be caused by the country's Soviet heritage, during which times agriculture was an important part of the economy. Nowadays, many consultants still work in the ministry and are “dominated with this idea of big market and the model cropping and the industry farming” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 24). The rather pragmatic and profit-oriented attitude is supported by GEO_GOV's statement who, when asked about the main environmental challenges for the country, directly proceeded to a description of the AA, its accomplishments and current cooperation with the EU (GEO_GOV, Para. 8). Similar to the question raised by the Armenian NGO concerning local officials above, this creates the impression that environmental issues are only taken seriously when they are manifested in an EU programme or present a goal to be achieved. A statement GEO_NGO1 supports this observation regarding the agricultural part of the MEPA, suggesting that the Ministry only takes on easy obligations to ‘tick a box’ and easily get funding:

“[T]hey developed a document for climate change, and this related documentation and the activities they included as their obligations were so stupid! And just because some of these activities are included in some of the projects financed by U.S., by the way, (...) so it will not help the reduction of emissions. (GEO_NGO1, Para. 38)

Again, the country's Soviet past is cited as an explanation for this situation, stating that people care more about the economy and their jobs than about the environment (GEO_NGO2, Para. 3). Only due to the AA, environmental topics move higher on the government's political priority list, because “it has a very strict calendar attached.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 3) GEO_NGO2 reports that they often do not participate in project

calls by the government because these contain corrupt structures⁴⁰: “They usually let their NGOs win who are connected with them through different means there are, you know, bad, poor practices. And we don't participate in these games. We don't engage relatives of Ministry people.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 17) However, no interview partner from Armenia mentioned corrupt mechanisms to impact their work. Whether they do not experience corruption, or they experience it on such a daily basis that they forgot to mention it, cannot be determined.⁴¹

Conflicts between governments and NGOs

The Georgian government in turn acknowledges that NGOs are very active and frequently opposing the ministry, which is “very good because they are, let's say, pushing us to accelerate some directions” (GEO_GOV, Para. 28). At the same time, civil society actors are also seen as a potentially disruptive or disturbing element, as exemplified in the conflict with hydro-power plants: “[t]here is no project related with the hydro-power generation or hydro-power plants that is not brought to the court by the NGOs in the field of environment. (...) Their attitude is not always very constructive.” (GEO_GOV, Para. 28) GEO_DEL agrees that “sometimes some things that should not be politicised are being politicised just for the pleasure of bothering the other and vice versa.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 17) This even leads to the government “being afraid of NGOs” (GEO_DEL, Para. 17) when they attend events.

Ironically, NGOs confirm this observation when dealing with the private sector that, for example in the agricultural sector, does not want to take their advice: “They never invite us because they are afraid that we will say such things that – I don't know. They don't want. They have fear of these environmental considerations.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 40)

⁴⁰ Interestingly, Georgia performs best within the regional division of Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) by Transparency International (TI). In global comparison, Georgia takes 45th place with a score of 56 (of a possible 100 points). The statement above contrasts Georgia's relatively well performance in anti-corruption, and confirms the tendency that the “public seems to be quite pessimistic about the overall situation with high-level corruption” (Bak, 2020, p. 15).

⁴¹ Armenia's score in the CPI 2020 has considerably increased in the past years, putting it in second place after Georgia which leads the TI's regional division of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Globally, Armenia has a score of 49 and takes 60th place. (Transparency International, 2021) The CPI 2020 emphasises Armenia's positive developments in anti-corruption, but warns that the global pandemic and war in 2020 may impact the sustainability of these reforms, especially “safeguarding judicial independence and ensuring checks and balances” (Transparency International, 2021).

Fortunately, not all cooperation with the economic sector is as negative. The representatives also mention projects in which they successfully involve companies. One NGO is currently advocating for a tax change in the waste sector, “addressing the parliament with requests from, I think up to 50 big companies” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 1). Civil society in Georgia therefore also serves as a link between the private sector and the government.

The EU in turn sees itself as a mediator between government and civil society in Georgia, stating that “we always try to bring them together” (GEO_DEL, Para. 23). From an EU perspective, certain conflicts could be avoided if the government was able to prevail against oppositional civil society. In a project to create the new landfill in which the EU was involved, protests caused it to shut down: “[A]nd it was just because a few people demonstrated because the waste site was close to their house and so on. Well, they killed the project more or less, you know.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 23) This observation again resembles the situation in Armenia, where government and civil society both contribute to a confrontational relationship. Increasing polarisation and lack of trust clearly cause concern on the EU’s side, especially with regards to the fulfilment of the AA, where “environmental reforms start to be a bit more sensitive when it comes to changing business interest, the way of doing business. Of course, the government with weak legitimacy is not taking risks.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 35)

Both NGO representatives from Georgia see the need to work with the government in order to change something as a necessary evil. Similar to their experiences with EU cooperation, it is also a question of personnel and personal connections, which again may facilitate corruption: “And we still have informal governance here. There is one guy who is running the country.⁴² So, institution-wise it's not a really strong country. So, personalities matter a lot.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 41) As the interview partner recalls, they often enjoy high support at the Minister’s level, while mid-level commitment is lacking.

⁴² This reference is very likely directed to the Georgian oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili who controls large parts of the Georgian economy and is the party leader of the governing party *Georgian Dream*. (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2018, p. 3).

GEO_DEL observes a limited capacity of NGOs in Georgia. Still, they “believe that civil society has a role to play as a watchdog, as a counter-balance in power and so on. So, we engage them and we work together on the implementation of things.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 9) However, GEO_NGO2 is not satisfied with the attributed role of a watchdog but instead want to be actively involved: “[I]f we become again a watchdog and go in this state of shame and blame, I don't think that we would be able to push forward the legislation, for example.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 5)

Generally, the interviewed NGOs aim for creating a sustainable impact for their society. ARM_NGO1 sees it as its mission “to create this one point in the country where there is trust and the independence and objectiveness of the endeavour.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 8) GEO_NGO2 emphasises the change in society that it wants to achieve:

I mean, legislation is important, but you see change in a long term. But it's also when we see, for example that when legislation passed and when we see the private sector approaching us and asking for the training on waste management. I mean when you see how this law changed their life it's very important (GEO_NGO2, Para. 5).

The self-image of being both a positive influence for and a control mechanism of the government is stressed by several interview partners, one of them emphasising that “we are trying (...) to initiate the topic and brand the issue and then to make it important, like a policy priority for the country.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 3) Also, the majority of the NGOs seem to cooperate with everyone and be everywhere at the same time, being involved in in governance, policy work and research and working with other civil society actors as well as governments and the private sector (GEO_NGO2, Para. 1; ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 2). Various NGO representatives in Georgia and Armenia specifically mention their educational projects, as well, such as through cooperation with national universities or by creating alumni networks for young people. (ARM_NGO1, Part 1, Para. 1; GEO_NGO2, Para. 4) Some characteristics may depend on the size, age and specialisation of the respective NGO – for example, ARM_NGO1 has a strong focus on research and educational projects, ARM_NGO2 mainly focuses on monitoring projects in the mining and forestry sector. In Armenia, civil society actors sometimes do not have the best picture of each other; as already indicated by ARM_NGO1's remarks on their conflictual behaviour towards the government. The interview partner recalls that in the environmental sector “[t]here's lots of people. But I would say it's a very disorganised, it's a very divided sector.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 1,

Para. 24) In Georgia, no similar remarks were noticeable. Interestingly, GEO_NGO2 observes for Armenia that “there are very few organisations, two or three, and they don’t have young people in NGOs so much.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 25) In contrast, ARM_NGO2 notices many grassroots organisations on a community level in Armenia, especially in the mining sector, that do not have the capacities to apply for funding (ARM_NGO2, Part 2, Para. 34). An awareness of the funding differences between Georgia and Armenia since the 1990s could be confirmed, which are even seen as a reason for their different states of civil society: “[I]t was really boosted here because of the international support in Georgia and there, there is not so much funding for civil society.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 27)

4.2.5. Importance of the EU for the environmental sector and other partners

The last part of the interviews concentrated on the EU’s importance for the environmental sector and their respective country in general. While many aspects have already been described above, it is relevant to look at how the EU’s role is assessed in relation to other actors and organisations with whom the interview partners cooperate because they might in turn impact upon the EU’s influence.

Apart from the EU’s mediating role between government and civil society, its environmental self-image is a global one, with climate constituting “the number one priority. The EU is a green power. I think that’s the image we want to give, and that’s really what we are also doing more and more in practice.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 27). A Georgian NGO confirms that it is mostly “oriented toward European donors and projects, the tenders that they announce because the environmental component is always present there, while with other donors, it might not be present.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 8)

Overall, the EU’s impact on environmental politics is undisputed. In the experience of the MEPA, the “EU has definitely brought a push when it comes to the legislative framework and the capacities of the implementation of the government and so on.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 25) As described above, the Georgian MEPA coordinates all donors’ activities and makes sure that no activities overlap. The fact that within the MEPA, the responsible department is called ‘International Relations and European Integration

Department’ indicates the importance and extent of EU involvement in Georgia, while every other partner is subsumed under ‘international relations’ (GEO_GOV, Para. 2).⁴³

The EU is still seen as the final goal for both civil society and governmental representatives in Georgia. The statement by GEO_GOV that “we are trying to catch up with the European Union in terms of reforms, in terms of legislation, development, etc” (GEO_GOV, Para. 10), shows an implicit hierarchy between EU and national government. For civil society actors, the EU is “the reference point for the environmental governance” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 37) as well as for good governance and democracy in general. One of its main contributions is its financial leverage on the state administration that, compared to other partners, makes it more influential:

EU programmes require a high competitiveness. But their impact is higher because they cover more actors and the amount of the money is, of course, higher, and also, they have also pressure on the government to develop things in their way, in a better way. And that’s why their influence is higher, especially as we have this accession perspectives. (GEO_NGO1, Para. 58)

The reference to the EU membership perspective, which was so far neither confirmed nor declined from the EU’s side (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2018, p. 1; Lavrelashvili & van Hecke, 2021), reveals that nevertheless, belief and hope for an EU accession are a great motivator and even unspoken increase the Union’s influence as well as further manifest the image of ‘catching up’. However, GEO_NGO1 (Para. 54) calls for higher pressure in order to make changes sustainable.

The role of the EAEU

The Armenian government also confirms the EU’s importance for the environmental sector, which is manifested through the CEPA agreement. ARM_GOV seems to take pride in the uniqueness of the CEPA agreement, stressing that “[t]his is some kind of unique partnership because Armenia is the only country that is both member of Eurasian Union and also has such kind of deep cooperation with the European Union.” (ARM_GOV, Para. 54) However, one should not forget the EAEU as Armenia’s most relevant partner next to the EU. ARM_GOV admits that while environmental projects

⁴³ Even though this was not mentioned in the interviews, the counterpart in the Armenian Ministry of Environment is merely called ‘Department of International Cooperation’, while a ‘Department for European issues’ is affiliated to the Ministry of Economic Developments and Investments’ (OECD, 2019).

exist in the EAEU, they are more of a priority for the EU cooperation: “Because one of the parts of our relationship between European Union is the direction of environment. So it's a special focus also on the environment and (...) the Eurasian Union, that's first of all an economic union” (ARM_GOV, Para. 58). Armenian NGOs never heard of any environmental projects funded by the EAEU (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 14; ARM_NGO2, Part 2, Para. 38). In their experience, no other actor invests as much in environmental projects in Armenia as the EU.

While Russia is an influential actor in Armenia through the EAEU, GEO_NGO2 also sees EU engagement as a means to fight Russian propaganda. In their opinion, people in general need to become more aware of the EU's impact on the country:

“Political messaging is very important, again, to fight against Kremlin propaganda. (...) It's very important to say it's EU behind or whatever Norwegian or Austrian behind, we should say so. Because people sometimes old generation think that, oh, Russian products are the best products, you know, because they still watch Russian TV and propaganda is working. So it's very relevant politically and also financially. (GEO_NGO2, Para. 39)

GEO_GOV agrees on the necessity to raise awareness on the population's side, even though it refers to its own and the EU's activities and environmental awareness in general. An even bigger challenge for the government is to communicate with the private sector and convince companies to implement the EU standards, as “the private sector is not always happy with all these developments and the environmental requirements” (GEO_GOV, Para. 56). According to GEO_GOV, the Georgian government is currently planning awareness-raising campaigns to provide further information to the Georgian population. Implicitly taking distance towards Russia, the interview partner stresses that: “It's not a propaganda. It's just sharing existing information.” (GEO_GOV, Para. 62) GEO_DEL simultaneously reports about various campaigns in order to communicate with the overall population:

If you want to succeed in an environment, to reach your objectives, you need all the basic citizens to consider that they have a role to play in this overall picture. So, that's why we are trying to do a lot on communication, to really promote change, to discuss with them and so on. (GEO_DEL, Para. 9)

Neither ARM_GOV nor Armenian environmental NGOs mention similar awareness campaigns or the necessity to better inform the society about EU actions in their country. This difference testifies for the overall tendency of the EU being received as a much more important political partner in Georgia. ARM_NGO1 representative confirms

this impression, stating that: “Certainly on geopolitics, EU doesn't even get involved in Armenia. It's mostly a Russian game, you know.” (ARM_NGO1, Par 2, Para. 38) In terms of the EU's geopolitical presence and importance, there exists a substantial difference between Georgia and Armenia that can potentially impact its environmental influence.

Another important part of the EU's strategy is to support circular economy, SMEs, and sustainable development of rural areas besides its cooperation with the central government. When asked about the EU's impact on Georgia in general, GEO_NGO1 (Para. 33-34) exclusively points out the EU's contribution in strengthening SMEs in the agricultural sector and getting businesses to consider and solve their environmental issues. The NGO recently finished a project with EU funding that aimed at local development in the Adjara region, where they created various projects like “eco-tourism projects and agricultural projects and protected area projects. So that was very, very important. Because when we started, everybody wanted to create wine yard, wine yard, and wine cellar.” (GEO_NGO2, Para. 5) GEO DEL (Para. 21) also confirms the importance of regional involvement, connected to decentralisation and the cooperation with local authorities.

The importance of other actors

Apart from the EU, other actors and organisations play an important role in both countries. Firstly, EU cooperation also includes the EU's banks, such as the EIB, EBRD and other national banks. Even though they were not addressed independently in an interview, some of the interview partners mentioned their involvement in the country. Secondly, numerous International NGOs (INGOs) or state agencies, as already mentioned in the subchapter about regional cooperation, are quite active in Armenia and Georgia and cannot all be listed here. For some NGOs, they used to be more relevant in previous years before they turned to EU cooperation. For example, one Georgian NGO remembers that the INGO *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World) “played the crucial role for our organisation because this was the donor that helped us in a capacity building. Without them, we would not be competitive for EU projects now.” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 58) GEO_NGO2 emphasises USAID's high impact, which works more closely with them and offers more assistance. GEO_DEL in turn is not aware of

any details concerning US engagement in Georgia, stating that “I think they are quite active, not as strong as us, (...) but I think they do quite something.” (GEO_DEL, Para. 31) In Armenia, USAID has apparently pulled back with its engagement since the 2000s. Now, they are mainly present in the water sector (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 22).

Again, both government representatives emphasise that the international actors’ involvement depends on the sector, such as the *German Corporation for International Cooperation* (GIZ) that is mainly focusing on forestry, or the UNDP on climate in Armenia (GEO_GOV, Para. 6; ARM_GOV, Para. 8). GEO_DEL (Para. 31) recognises sectoral focuses of other actors, such as the Asian Development Bank being invested more in the water sector, or the World Bank being active in the energy field. As mentioned above, many international actors are involved in the implementation of EU regional programmes, such as the *Food and Agriculture Organisation* (FAO) and the UNDP that “are ensuring enforcement of the grant component” (GEO_GOV, Para. 26) of the ENPARD programme.

As a third source of cooperation, all interview partners emphasise their bilateral cooperation with individual EU countries. Especially Germany is considered an important partner in environmental work in Armenia, representing “the primary funding source for biodiversity related work.”⁴⁴ (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 28)

4.3. Analysis: EU environmental external governance in Georgia and Armenia

All three kinds of EU external governance could be found in the statements of the interview partners. As predicted by Lavenex (2008, p. 946), the empirical presence of hierarchical, network and market governance proves to be often complex and intertwining. The following analysis connects the interviews’ main findings elaborated in Chapter 4.2. with the theoretical foundations from Chapter 2. The first section concerns Armenia, followed by the second on Georgia. Sub-chapter 4.3.3 concludes the

⁴⁴ The frequent mention and emphasis on the importance of Germany may also be related to the German nationality of this author.

analysis with a comparison of the two countries. Table 6 (p. 76) offers a summary of the analytical findings of this research.

4.3.1. Environmental External Governance in Armenia: Connectivity, equal partnerships and lack of trust

Elements of hierarchical governance could be determined in cooperation with the Armenian government. Typical for the governance approach, the statements by ARM_GOV confirm the EU directives' dominance over Armenian environmental legislation. Environmental aspects of the CEPA aim at changing this national legislation. The EU's environmental influence has, through the introduction of the *Green Deal*, even been exhilarated because it now requires environmental policies to be part of other programmes, too. However, it was stressed that while EU legislation was accepted as superior, the government has been able to include its own priorities and has been treated as an equal partner. This indicates the existence of network governance structures within the EU's traditionally hierarchical sphere of legislative influence. Armenia's special position should be considered here: The CEPA has not, as ARM_NGO1 rightly pointed out, all the elements that an AA usually has. It can hence be assumed that EU conditionality has been somewhat weaker during the engineering phase of the CEPA. Nonetheless, according to ARM_NGO1 (Part 2, Para. 34), the EU's financial leverage seemed to have had an unfavourable impact on governmental work, having created a certain financial opportunism and unwillingness to cooperate without financial incentives.

Harmful hierarchical structures can also be found in the formally equal relationships of EU and national actors. As the data overview makes clear, EU regulations have grown stricter towards its partners in the past years. The view that Armenian environmental actors cannot be hand-held by the EU forever reveals a tendency towards hierarchical governance that puts the EU in an almost parental position, and Armenian actors in one of subordinates or even children. While this image could be perceived as extreme, ARM_GOV, when passing responsibility for a programme's success or failure solely to the EU, even manifested these hierarchical role attributions. The theoretical assumption is hence confirmed that network governance can be distorted by hierarchical elements when one partner is lacking capacity. Both EU and Armenia are trapped in a dilemma

here: On the one hand, when the EU pushes for more capacity and responsibility on its partners' side, this can be interpreted as 'positive' hierarchical governance since it aims at establishing a more equal partnership. On the other hand, it consolidates the EU's position as the superior.

A possible reason for this situation is the misplacement of EU funding that might be, as ARM_NGO1 (Part 2, Para. 34) suggests, too much project related. This could lead to financial opportunism as has been observed with the governments. Environmental targets would be chosen according to how easily they are solved in order to be able to 'tick the box'. Instead, as both NGO and Ministry representatives agreed, financial support should be more targeted at changing the institutional core of both governmental and civil society structures. As the theoretical chapter pointed out, this is not the focus of EU external governance that rather concentrates on democratic processes than overall democratic reform (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 794).

With regards to network governance, several aspects could be confirmed: Firstly, trainings, exchanges and capacity building seem to have an empowering effect on both civil society actors and the government in Armenia. Secondly, the interview partners reported that many environmental NGOs in Armenia engaged in EU networks or regional programmes such as the *Black Sea Forum* or the CSF. Involvement in these networks allowed civil society actors to apply for EU funding more easily in some cases due to their connections within the networks. Thirdly, EU calls often requested group applications, which also increased the NGOs' intersectional connectivity. However, network governance could be enhanced through more cross-sectoral connectivity and higher activity in general. Furthermore, a lack of communication and responsiveness on the EU's side weakened its connection to national environmental actors. Lastly, hierarchical structures within the networks diminish their efficiency and empowerment. This circumstance, as well as finding the right consortium for group applications is especially challenging for new and small NGOs, since they often lack capacity and connections. ARM_NGO2 confirmed that networks like the CSF mostly consisted of more established NGOs. Since the environmental civil society sector is mostly grassroot-based and happening on a community level, it can be assumed that many young and small organisations have no access to EU funding. The fact that the EU does

not seem to get involved with the mining conflict in Armenia reinforces this tendency, since the mining issue represents a major mobilising momentum for communities.

A lack of trust and communication further impacts the efficiency of EU network governance with environmental NGOs. As explained in Chapter 2, EU external governance focuses on reforming democratic governance, instead of reforming democracy itself. This implicit kind of democracy promotion allows the EU to work with non-democratic governments, and results in the NGOs' criticism of the EU having double standards. ARM_NGO2 even felt like there is no use in approaching EU officials, as complaints about undemocratic practices have in the past been ignored or EU decisions have favoured economic advantages. It should be noted that the EU's systemic cooperation with governments, and the way its environmental programmes are designed concern different levels of cooperation. Still, the way in which the EU's systemic hierarchical governance functions can negatively impact its network governance.

The interviews showed that cooperation and specifically application processes contain elements of market governance: While application requirements have been described as transparent and fair, they also required a high bureaucratic effort, as well as the capacity to engage employees exclusively with the writing of applications and, later on, reports. The competitive nature of EU cooperation was generally accepted as a given, and the challenges mentioned above were often regarded as learning opportunities. These aspects are favourable for the EU's explicit goal to improve the competitiveness of national actors in EaP countries (European Commission, 2020b), as well as to socialise them accordingly. However, this leads to a general need for competitiveness that especially small NGOs cannot fulfil. The competition in the environmental sphere is likely to put economic thinking ahead of environmental goals and socialises civil society actors accordingly. Nevertheless, the competitive aspect of EU support is more related to market governance, instead of the cooperative elements that network governance strives to strengthen.

The relationship between governmental and civil society actors is, according to the latter, superficial and conflictive. Advisory boards that aim to include environmental NGOs in certain processes seem to be rather symbolic. Cooperation with the Ministry of

Environment has been described as ineffective due to a lack of both capacity, know-how and willingness. At the same time, and this observation is connected to the project-oriented funding described above, environmental NGOs are mostly “fighting something” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 34), opposing the government on various issues, hence not contributing to a constructive relationship themselves. The misplacement of EU funding towards individual projects, according to ARM_NGO1, can facilitate this confrontational relationship.

Lastly, the international armed conflict with Azerbaijan and the global pandemic in 2020/21 created additional problems for Armenia’s cooperation with the EU, both impacting communication and the continuation of ongoing programmes. Civil society actors mentioned that contacting the EU for support during the international armed conflict would have been too dangerous, which implicitly confirms the EU’s absence during this time. The assessment of ARM_NGO1 that the EU would not get involved in geopolitical conflicts in Armenia has been confirmed by several media reports during the period of war (Grgic & Knoll-Tudor, 2020; Wesel, 2020). This factor further diminishes the EU’s status as a reliable partner for environmental actors in the country and weakens its conditionality towards the government according to the power-based approach of the external governance theory.

4.3.2. Environmental External Governance in Georgia: Financial leverage and competitive structures

The bilateral environmental relations between the EU and the Georgian government contain several elements of hierarchical governance. Both environmental NGOs and MEPA acknowledge the EU’s financial leverage on the Georgian government in legislative matters within the framework of the DCFTA which makes the EU more influential compared to other donors. As in Armenia, the influence of the EU as a green power was expected to increase due to the Green Deal and its requirement to cross-sectionally include environmental aspects. While civil society actors see the EU as a reference points for environment governance and democracy alike, the EU also represents the government’s final goal to which it is aspiring. Nonetheless, aspects of network governance can be observed when governmental priorities and opinions are considered by the EU. Environmental NGOs would like for the EU to use its financial

leverage more decisively: Without the EU's continuous pressure, financial conditionality, and flagship initiatives like the Green Deal, it is not expected that legislative changes would last or be implemented (GEO_NGO1, Para. 54; GEO_NGO1, Para. 9). If the Georgian government merely adopts EU directives for financial merits and chooses its environmental goals accordingly, this might obstruct the implementation of new legislation. GEO_DEL confirmed that the follow-up on projects by local institutions was often missing due to lacking capacities. These aspects, as well as Georgia's EU membership aspirations that have also been confirmed in the interviews, account for a hierarchical relationship with the EU. The implication of a certain financial opportunism by the government raises the question whether financial conditionality also leads to a sustainable change of mind or norm diffusion according to the external governance theory.

With regards to network governance, its requirements of equal partnerships and horizontal communication have been observed in several spheres of cooperation with the EU. Firstly, capacity building and trainings include a network governance perspective both in governmental, as well as NGO cooperation with the EU, and can even be confirmed to have been part of EU-Georgian relations early-on. Secondly, communication between the MEPA and EU is, according to both sides, open and responsive. Thirdly, application processes have been described as fair and impartial by NGO representatives. Bureaucratic challenges and capacity difficulties with regards to applications are regarded as an opportunity, to "really make these European values your values" (GEO_NGO2, Para. 9). These application requirements potentially contribute to fulfilling the aim of socialising with EU norms and values within the structures of network governance.

A problematic aspect of network communication is the lack of communication by the EU that partly disrupts and weakens network governance with environmental NGOs. In comparison with USAID as a role model for reliability, responsiveness and support, the EU is depicted as not being involved enough with its national partners. The fact that the MEPA and environmental NGOs experience communication with the EU so differently attests for a disbalance of EU cooperation and communication in favour of the government. The NGOs' observation that communication often depends on the responsible project manager on the EU's side strengthens their call for more

institutionalised forms of cooperation instead of the project-based approach. Overall, the demands contain both elements of hierarchical and network governance: NGOs would like the EU to cooperate more within implementation processes in the light of an equal partnership, and at the same time use its leverage to support them in conflicts with the government.

The relationship between environmental civil society actors and the MEPA is partially evaluated positively by both sides, for example by confirming the same set of values. However, cooperation is also seen as a necessity and often marked by conflicts: While NGOs accuse the government of corrupt structures and parts of the MEPA being profit-oriented, NGOs in turn are depicted as unconstructive and confrontational by GEO_GOV. Both impressions are confirmed by GEO_DEL, although with a tendency towards the government's perspective, stating that the government needs to prevail against certain campaigns that overly politicise certain issues (GEO_DEL, Para. 17). At the same time, the EU sees itself as a mediator between the Georgian civil society and the government, therefore assuming a hierarchical relationship vis-à-vis both. Contrary to this self-image, the EU does not seem to be overly involved in mediating these conflicts, as GEO_NGO2's (Para. 29) request for this very support shows.

Regional programmes not only support national actors through funds but increase their connectivity in Georgia and with other EaP countries in accordance with the network governance approach. They generally enjoy a good reputation with environmental NGOs which are even proud to be participating in them. However, the outsourcing of some programmes' implementation towards international actors like UN agencies disturbs the creation of equal partnerships: The practice firstly excludes national and local NGOs from participating, and secondly potentially impacts the quality of results due to the fewer sense of commitment in both projects and respective countries. GEO_DEL's statement that the outsourcing of management is due to the organisations' transnational know-how and high capacities explains this practice (GEO_DEL, Para. 13). Nevertheless, it might negatively impact on cooperation with environmental NGOs and create unwanted hierarchies.

Furthermore, there potentially exists an inconsistency between the EU's official strategies and the views, or maybe even modes of action within individual EU

Delegations: The statement by GEO_DEL, indicating that one purpose of regional cooperation within the EaP is “going at the same speed” (GEO_DEL, Para. 37), opposes the EU’s differentiated and ‘more for more’ approaches. While the enhancement of regional cooperation between all EaP countries is an important goal, it would disagree with the network governance approach to restrain Georgia in its development only to get it to the same level as other EaP partners. The reference to the other EaP countries as Georgia’s “natural partners” (GEO_DEL, Para. 37) which the country tends to forget, even shows that Georgia’s motivation for EU membership might be uncomfortable for the EU. A scenario in which Georgia is ready to apply for EU membership could put the EU in an unwanted position. It should be noted that GEO_DEL’s statement is merely an indicator and cannot fully confirm such a practice or tendency. In the very least, the statement supports the environmental NGOs’ experiences that personal views and engagement can play an important role in the realisation and effectiveness of EU programmes.

The application processes for EU programmes, despite their potentially positive effects of socialisation and professionalisation, mainly constitute the principle of competition. Both NGO representatives’ and GEO_DEL’s statements clearly indicate competitive patterns that fit the market governance approach: NGOs are “active on this market of writing projects” (GEO_NGO1, Para. 6) and aim to succeed to dominate their respective domain, while the EU reports that “NGOs are fighting” (GEO_DEL, Para. 15) in order to “win some EU grants” (GEO_DEL, Para. 5). Like in Armenia, the environmental NGOs seem to accept this requirement, which indicates that the socialising aspect of market governance is working. According to the environmental NGOs’ experiences, the EU shares the same vision of sustainable development, and hence does not prioritise economic benefits over environmental standards. Even though NGOs are not primarily economic actors, they compete with each other on the market of EU funds. Formally, the theoretical indicator of a horizontal actor constellation seems to be fulfilled, since eligible NGOs are equal and the application processes transparent. However, as statements by the interview partners confirmed, smaller and newer NGOs are not competitive enough to successfully take part in this market and could de facto be excluded from it.

4.3.3. Comparison: EU cooperation, reliability and geopolitical implications

Several similarities of EU external governance in Georgia and Armenia with regards to their environmental sector have been pointed out already: It has become clear that actors in both countries see the EU as an important, or even the most important partner in environmental cooperation. Furthermore, aspects of network governance within capacity buildings and trainings seem to be well established and effective for governments and NGOs. With regards to the research question, this last analytic chapter will highlight several findings of EU cooperation that stand out when comparing the two cases: (1) the EU's cooperation patterns with different national actors; (2) the wish for more political and institutional support by the EU; and (3) the role of EU cooperation compared to other partners.

Firstly, cooperation between the EU and national actors shows a concentration on national governments. While both governments and the EU Delegation to Georgia agree that NGOs are important to monitor governmental work, there was a tendency in the interviews for the government and EU Delegation to rather concentrate on one another. Even though experiences from the EU Delegation to Armenia are missing, the statements of NGOs confirm that the EU's foremost goal is to work with governments, "even if you have the most brutal government here" (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 36) GEO_DEL itself confirms the government as its direct counterpart while NGOs are described to be too confrontational and unconstructive. This speaks for the establishment of a more equal partnership between the EU and national governments than with civil society actors. The impression arises that the level of EU engagement in a country is primarily dependent on its cooperation with the government. Even though the national circumstances do not allow EU cooperation to function along the theoretical domestic structures explanation, the conflictual relations between the government and civil society in Georgia and Armenia make it more difficult for the EU to positively impact environmental politics.

Nonetheless, hierarchical governance prevails in both countries in changing environmental legislation, especially with regards to the EU's financial leverage. The EU's conditionality on national and local state administration seems more distinctive in Georgia than in Armenia which is based on the former's higher political commitment

within the DCFTA. Vice versa, the EU is regarded as more influential than other international actors due to its political and financial leverage. The implication of a certain financial opportunism by the government raises the question whether financial conditionality also leads to a sustainable change of mind or norm diffusion according to the external governance theory. The need to catch up to the EU presumably creates a more hierarchical relationship between the EU and Georgia. Both government representatives emphasised their wish for more institutional support by the EU which was also supported by all interviewed civil society actors.

Secondly, environmental NGOs in both countries wish for the EU to become a more reliable partner. The socialising effects of writing EU applications and their competitive environment speak for the existence of both network and market governance characteristics. However, environmental NGOs in Georgia show an eagerness to adapt to EU regulations and standards, whereas their Armenian counterparts, even though regarding EU environmental standards as best practice examples, are more pragmatic towards the EU as a partner. Their lack of trust towards the EU, as well as the accusation of double standards has not been visible with Georgian NGO representatives. Their demands concentrate on more institutional assistance and higher political support by the EU, while Armenian civil society would not even expect such a level of commitment. Still, the NGOs' call for more EU control over the government exemplifies a request for more hierarchical governance. Still, their wish for the EU to become a more reliable, more connected partner, is the same. While the network governance approach foresees a mix of formal and informal cooperation, NGOs in both countries would want for EU network governance to become more institutionalised instead of remaining based on projects.

Thirdly, the role of EU cooperation compared to other partners is quite different for Georgia and Armenia. The interviews have made clear that the geopolitical implications impact EU environmental cooperation in Georgia and Armenia. While for Georgia, the EU is overall the most important political and economic partner, Armenia's position in-between the EU and the EAEU naturally decreases the conditionality of the EU. According to environmental NGOs, part of the EU's political importance for Georgia is its power to fight Russian disinformation. The dependency on the EU as an ally against

Russia speaks for the power-based explanation for EU external governance in Georgia. In Armenia, the same power relations lead to the contrary effect of the EU not getting involved in geopolitics: “It’s mostly a Russian game, you know.” (ARM_NGO1, Part 2, Para. 38) Instead, the EU’s importance mostly lies in the transfer of legislative directives which points to the institutionalist explanation for EU external governance in Armenia. According to the power-based explanation within the external governance, it can decrease the EU’s influencing force if another actor is perceived more powerful. In Georgia, the institutionalist explanation works in parallel with the power-based condition.

In both countries, interview partners agreed that the Green Deal will further support the EU’s position as the main environmental power in the South Caucasus. Having observed the sectoral division of environmental topics among different donors, this raises the question whether an increasing dominance of the EU in the environmental sphere could also raise problems for local environmental actors. Firstly, it might lead to the funding market becoming more homogenous if other international donors decide to ‘leave the field’ to the EU. This could reduce funding opportunities for NGOs, as already experienced in the past when donors decided to leave the region. Secondly, it increases the EU’s responsibility to not only work with national governments as their direct counterpart but grant the same position and importance to environmental NGOs. If the EU decided not to get involved in certain conflicts or issues, such as apparently the case with the mining sector in Armenia, civil society actors would in the worst have nowhere else to turn to. The more dominant the EU is in the region as a donor, the higher its responsibility for a steady and responsible involvement.

Table 6. Overview of analytical findings. Own Illustration.

Legend	Armenia	Georgia
Category	EU-Government cooperation	
Positive (+) and negative (-) findings	(+) EU environmental directives transferred to national legislation on basis of CEPA (+) national priorities taken into consideration (-)/(+) close cooperation and communication – but less in 2020 due to armed conflict, Covid (-) financial opportunism	(+) EU environmental directives transferred to national legislation on basis of DCFTA (+) national priorities taken into consideration (+) trainings enhance capacity (+) membership aspirations as motivator (+) open, responsive cooperation (-) financial opportunism

	(-) superior-subordinate relationship due to government's lack of capacity	(-) implementation challenges
Theoretical context	Hierarchical governance: weaker conditionality. Network governance: equal partnership, but socialisation questionable	Hierarchical governance: strong conditionality, financial leverage Network governance: equal partnership; but socialisation questionable
Cat.	EU-NGO cooperation	
Pos. (+) and Neg. (-) findings	(+) bureaucratic challenges during application seen as opportunity (+) empowerment through trainings, capacity building (+) connectivity through group applications (+)/(+) competitive environment socialises and empowers actors, but excludes small NGOs (-) EU funding too much project-oriented (-) lack of trust and communication	(+) empowerment through trainings, capacity building (+) fair, impartial application processes (+) application challenges seen as learning opportunity (-)/(+) competitive environment empowers NGOs, excludes smaller actors (-) lack of communication, depends on responsible person on EU side (-) lack of support during implementation
Theory	Network Governance: socialisation through connectivity Hierarchical Governance: lack of trust Market Governance: potential socialisation through competitiveness	Network Governance: socialisation through fair application processes Hierarchical Governance: socialisation through competitiveness
Cat.	Regional programmes and networks	
Pos. (+) and Neg. (-) findings	(+) higher connectivity (+) easier access to funding (-) inactivity of networks (-) not enough cross-sectional engagement (-) inherent hierarchies in networks (-) challenge for young NGOs	(+) higher connectivity (+) proud of participation (-) outsourcing of implementation to IOs decreases effectiveness (-) challenge for and potential exclusion of young, small NGOs
Theory	Network Governance: Potential socialisation through networks; Hierarchical Governance: difficulties through hierarchies and exclusion of actors	Network Governance: Potential socialisation and empowerment; Hierarchical Governance: exclusion of actors through outsourcing to IOs
Cat.	State-NGO cooperation	
Pos. (+) and Neg. (-) findings	(+) importance of NGO acknowledged (-) advisory boards ineffective and symbolic (-) lack of capacities, poor communication on government's side	(+) established cooperation btw. MEPA and NGOs (+) partly same vision (+) importance of NGOs acknowledged (-) cooperation partly seen as necessary evil (-) NGOs depicted as confrontational, unconstructive (-) Government partly depicted as corrupt, unreliable
Theory	Hierarchical Governance: No support by EU expected due to lack of trust Domestic structures explanation: conflicts impact EU cooperation	Hierarchical Governance: EU self-image as mediator; NGO demand for more hierarchical appearance of EU for support Network Governance: continuous, stable

		State-NGO relations
Cat.	Role of EU compared to other actors	
Pos. (+) and Neg. (-) findings	(+) Green Deal (-) lack of EU involvement in geopolitical conflicts	(+) Green Deal (-) more stable and reliable political support by other donors (USAID) in NGO experience
Theory	EU external governance mainly underlies institutionalist explanation, as EU role seems too weak according to the power- based explanation seems	EU external governance underlies power- based explanation and institutionalist explanation

5. Conclusion: Policy implications to enhance EU environmental external governance in Georgia and Armenia

The objective of this thesis was to analyse why EU mechanisms aiming at environmental politics in post-Soviet countries are in some cases more effective than in others. The initial puzzle indicated a weak or even negative correlation between the independent variable *Degree of EU influence* (assessed through the Amount of Funding within the ENPI/ENI framework from 2007 to 2019) and the countries' environmental performance which measured the dependent variable *Environmental Politics* with the help of their EPI scores. This observation did not fit the EU's international role as a democratic and green power. The focus of the thesis was hence narrowed down to the conditional variable *EU Mode of Governance* as the explanatory factor of interest in this research in order to assess differences and similarities of EU cooperation and its impact on partner countries.

The research question was approached from the theoretical perspective of EU external governance which introduced hierarchical, network and market governance as three potential modes of cooperation. While hierarchical and network governance were overall transferred from the EU enlargement concepts leverage and linkage, market governance was only recently accepted as a potential mode of cooperation due to the potential impact of economic relations. The concept of hierarchical governance, even though weaker within the EaP framework than in its original enlargement context, was still seen as most likely to positively impact environmental politics. The theoretical chapter therefore concluded with the following hypothesis: The stronger the EU's hierarchical governance in a certain country, the more likely it is for the EU to have a

sustainable impact on this country's environmental politics, while keeping other factors constant.

The comparative case study focused on Armenia and Georgia out of the case universe of EaP countries. The methodology included both quantitative and qualitative data, although the focus of the analysis lay on the latter: The use of quantitative data in the puzzle served as a basis for the qualitative analysis of expert interviews that were analysed on the basis of inductive coding and deductive open sub-coding. In total, seven interviews were conducted with representatives of environmental ministries and NGOs in Georgia and Armenia, as well as the EU Delegation to Georgia. In order to include the private sector and the theoretical basis of market governance in the analysis, the interview partners were also asked about their cooperation with economic actors and its implications for EU cooperation. The interviews covered the entities' experiences with different kinds and phases of EU cooperation, as well as their cooperation with other actors. The missing data from the EU Delegation to Armenia made the comparison of EU perspectives in Georgia and Armenia more difficult, and certainly weakened the comparable force of the analysis. Furthermore, quantitative data for the EU's environmental funding within the ENPI/ENI framework could have established a more stable link between the independent variable Degree of EU Influence and the dependent variable Environmental Politics. The qualitative analysis of expert interviews does not presume to establish causal links between the EU's modes of cooperation and the effectiveness of EU influence on environmental politics.

Still, the research proved to be methodologically consistent and provides a starting point for further research in the environmental external governance field and beyond. Subsequent research should engage with the question to what extent same cooperation patterns that were determined for the environmental sector could be observed in other sectors. Furthermore, the inclusion of other donor organisations could help create a more consistent picture of international cooperation processes. It is possible that the identified problems not only apply to the EU but other donors and international actors in the region as well. The statement by a Georgian NGO representative further manifested the puzzle of this research, wondering why Georgia, despite of all its international support, comes last when comparing the state of renewable energies with Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The thesis adds to the discussion of the EU's contribution to the EaP countries with special regard to the environmental sector. It would hence be relevant to apply the methodological approach to all countries of the EaP in order to find out whether the findings of this research can be confirmed more generally. Here, the consultation of a higher number of environmental actors in EaP countries could confirm the representativity of this research through generalised questionnaires and subsequent quantitative analysis.

With regards to theoretical implications, the analysis has shown that there are positive and negative manifestations of each governance form. Even though the categorisations of hierarchical, network and market governance are useful to assess how the EU interacts with its partners, the findings suggest that it is necessary for them to overlap and intertwine in order to have an impact. However, more emphasis on how the modes can most effectively be combined in order to induce change in reality could enhance the explanatory power of external governance theory. Some governance forms appeared where they were not expected, such as the market governance's characteristic of competition in the civil society's cooperation with the EU.

Therefore, the research's hypothesis cannot be confirmed. The interviews showed that hierarchical aspects such as financial leverage and conditionality are necessary to sustainably impact environmental legislation and its implementation. Environmental NGOs even call for the EU to use its leverage more and be more politically dominant. While hierarchical governance is hence still an important tool for the EU especially with regards to legislative changes, the analysis has revealed that it is neither sufficient to induce sustainable change nor helpful with the implementation of legislative reforms. Instead, socialisation and norm diffusion within the market and network governance modes seem to be essential for the EU to have a sustainable impact on a country's environmental politics. Still, these modes of cooperation present their own difficulties, as for example an overly competitive structure in the NGOs showed.

The focus on the conditional variable *EU Mode of Governance* proved to offer possible explanations to the research question: "Why are EU mechanisms aiming at environmental politics in post-Soviet countries in some cases more effective than in others?" The potentially misplaced usage of cooperation instruments is able to weaken

the effectiveness of the EU's involvement or make it obsolete in the worst case. While the EU's importance for the environmental sector has been repeatedly stressed both by NGO and governmental representatives, legislative reforms lack implementation and other programme forms require more 'follow-up' to be effective. With regards to the EU's even growing green power in the region, it is even more important to solve these shortcomings.

In order to further answer the research question, the findings are summarised in two policy implications that could make EU cooperation in Armenia and Georgia more effective:

Firstly, the EU's relationship with environmental NGOs should become more institutionalised. This would make the EU a more reliable partner towards civil society actors in contrast to the current project-based cooperation. It could further prevent the dependency of cooperation on personal relations and contribute a more horizontal relationship not only with governments, but also with environmental civil society actors. In order for environmental NGOs to get more actively involved in political processes, they EU's financial leverage could be used more decisively in both countries, although it is likely to have a higher impact in Georgia. The establishment of equal partnerships with environmental NGOs is hence more relevant in Armenia, where EU has less financial leverage on the government to induce change.

At the same time, the conflictual relationship between civil society and state administration will further impact cooperation. It should be in the EU's interest to improve the relationship between the state and civil society in the environmental sphere so that its own programmes and support have a higher impact. In order for the EU to take a mediating role, part of its network governance approach should not only be to It should establish equal cooperation with its partners, but among national actors, as well.

Secondly, EU's self-prescribed role as a Green Power should coincide with its geopolitical involvement. The Green Deal is likely to strengthen the EU's position as the main environmental power in the South Caucasus. The increasement of the climate objective's share to 30 percent of EU assistance in the EaP will provide further support to environmental policies in the region. With regards to the sectoral division of environmental topics among different donors, the EU's domination of the

environmental sphere could lead to a homogenisation of the funding market. If the EU decides not to get involved in certain conflicts or issues, such as is apparently the case with the mining sector in Armenia, civil society actors in a worst-case scenario will have nowhere else to turn to. The more dominant the EU is in the region as a donor, the higher its responsibility for steady partnerships with all relevant actors.

Concludingly, the EU's impact on the environmental sectors in Georgia and Armenia cannot be underestimated. This research confirmed promising elements of EU environmental external governance, especially with regards to its legislative effects on governments, and its empowering effect on environmental NGOs. In order to create a more sustainable impact and strengthen these possible elements, the EU should be more consistent with its own vision and create equal partnerships with all relevant national actors.

Statutory Declaration

I hereby confirm that the present master's thesis on

*EU-Influence on Environmental Politics in the Post-Soviet Space:
A Comparison of Armenia and Georgia*

is a result of my personal work and that no other than the indicated aids have been used for its completion. Furthermore, I assure that all quotations and statements that have been inferred literally or in a general manner from published or unpublished writings are marked as such. Beyond this I assure that the work has not been used, neither completely nor in parts, to pass any previous examination.

Berlin, May 16, 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Worsch', with a stylized, cursive script.

Laura Worsch

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Appendices

Appendix A.: General Questionnaire

Lead Question	Sub-Questions	Est. time
Greeting, Smalltalk, Outline Data Consent		3 min.
First Block: Contextualisation of the interview partner and his*her NGO/ Company/ Ministry		7 min.
1. Could you please tell me about yourself, your career and your role in the organisation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How long have you been working there? - What are your responsibilities? - Which projects are you currently involved in? 	
2. Please tell me more about your organisation and its projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the main tasks and projects of your organisation? - Which are your cooperating partners, apart from the EU? 	
3. What are the main environmental challenges in your country?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - how are you concerned with in your work? 	
Second Block: Cooperation with the EU		25 min.
1. Please describe the cooperation you had with the EU so far.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did the EU assist you in your work? - Which projects were funded? - What was their content? - How long did they last? - Do EU projects generally fit the environmental work you are doing? 	
2. Regarding the application process, what are the challenges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there big competition for EU funding in your field and region? - Is the application information understandable, transparent, and easy to access? - How long before you receive an answer about your application? - What do you pay special attention to with regards to the application? - What, in your experience are the biggest difficulties when applying for EU funding or other cooperation? - Have there been many regulations you needed to meet before the project could start? 	
3. How would you describe the implementation process of the project and interaction with the EU?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the challenges of implementation? - Does the EU monitor your work during the project phase? If yes, how often did you interact? - Do you have a specific contact person on the side of the EU? - How flexible is the cooperation with the EU regarding time frame and content of the project? - Do you have access to support in the case of implementation difficulties? - Knowledge transfer/trainings by the EU: how do you assess the expertise of the trainers and experts? - Would you say the cooperation is rather centralised and formal? - Has the EU ever withheld funding for some reason? 	

4. What is your overall impression after completing cooperation with the EU?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How effective is the process of implementation in your experience? - Does cooperation with the EU result in other benefits, i.e. membership in environmental networks, more contacts to other actors? - Have you felt that the EU side takes you and your expertise seriously? - Has cooperation with the EU in your experience generally been positive, or negative? - Does a reflection process after the completion of a project exist? - Is it possible to give feedback about the cooperation? - Are there aspects that could be improved in EU cooperation? 	
5. Has cooperation with the EU changed over the past years?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did the application process change, i.e. become easier or more complex? - Did you see a change in cooperation after the 2016 remodelling of the EaP? - Have environmental goals changed, either from your or the EU side? - Has the way the EU interacts with you as a cooperating partner changed, i.e. has it become more or less hierarchical, professional or formal? - Have the EU's goals of the cooperation changed? - In your experience, have the EU's requirements changed? 	
Third Block: Role of the EU for own work and the sector in general		15 min.
1. How does the EU's expertise concerning your field and region impact the cooperation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could formalities be changed if the case-specific status quo could not meet them? - Do you feel the EU has expertise in your field and region? 	
2. Compared to other actors in your region, how relevant is the EU in your opinion?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your experience, does cooperation with the EU impact the project, your work, and the region in general (positively or negatively)? - Which other actors do you consider relevant in the sector and region? 	
3. What other conditions impact your cooperation with the EU?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the domestic political context make cooperation with the EU easier or more difficult? - Is the presence of other actors beneficial or hindering for EU cooperation? 	

Appendix B: Interview Transcripts

A detailed overview of the coded interview segments can be accessed via this link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ojtv2Knc9RCIF7prtyCHcVZI_U_U6jE9/view?usp=sharing.

Interview 1 – GEO_NGO1 – Elkana Farmers Association

1. **Interviewer** [0:00:04.0] Then let's start with some information about you. You are the director of Elkana. How long have you been working in this position and what are your main responsibilities?
2. **Interview Partner** [0:00:21.0] So the Organisation of Elkana has been founded in 1994 as a vision of a few people from Georgian Green party and movement who are all in the region. Georgia had good perspectives in organic farming development, and that was the main purpose of the organisation and the establishment of the organisation, also EU funds and Germany, especially German funding, have played a crucial role. That was the organisation Diakonische Werk for catastrophic - uh, help in catastrophes. So in that period, Georgia was in a very difficult situation. People were starving because in Soviet times, Georgia was an agricultural country that was supplying big Soviet market with mainly cash crops like citruses, wine and tea. After collapse of Soviet Union, all these marketing links were broken, also supply links. And you can't survive just with tea, wine and citruses. Therefore, people were starving. It was a very difficult situation, and in this situation, it was a bit strange to think about organic farming. But still there were people, regional people, and thinking about that and Diakonisches Werk also helped them in establishing the organisation and also capacity building of the organisation. Later it was EZE and later ED, these are the same organisations from Germany. Now it's called the Brot for the World, and they are still somehow supporting us. So in the establishment of Elkana as a successful consultancy organisation and non-governmental organisation, they played a really big role because this was oriented not on the - it was not a project based orientation, but it was capacity. It had a capacity building orientation. And then there were also other donors from Europe, for example, Misereor, they worked for us, for example, with the office: in an agreement, it was said that if after 10 years we will continue work in the same direction we can, it will become our property. And so in the establishment and the development of the organisation, in its capacity building, European funds have played and are still playing a big role.
3. **Interviewer** [0:04:25.0] OK, I think we will come back to the other donors and organisations you work with a bit later. But it's good what you that you already started with the EU. Maybe we can turn to how you cooperate with the EU. Can you describe the cooperation you've had so far?

4. **Interview Partner** [0:04:49.0] Yes. So I will continue with that, that I personally joined the organisation later, not 1994, but 1996, in the beginning as a public relations person. And later on, in 2003, I became director. And [pause] according to our - so we are farmers organisation, which has a main governing body, the Congress. They elect the board and the board appoints directors, so I am the appointed director. And this since 2003, my contract has been renewed for the third time already. So this is in general, you also asked about what are - what is my responsibility. Actually the board delegates full responsibility to me on management of the organisation. So all ongoing activities, including a relationship with donors and recipient parties. This is my responsibility.
5. **Interviewer** [0:06:30.0] OK, thank you. OK. Nice, then, yes, let us turn to the second block. In which projects, or which kind of cooperation did you have with the EU so far?
6. **Interview Partner** [0:06:54.0] Uhm, I would like to mention that since its establishment Elkana maybe had about, maybe already more than 100, 150 projects implemented and most of those projects are from the European funding, if not all of them, but most of them. So most of them are from European funding. We were part of the famous ENPARD projects by EU, different Union projects. We are active also in cooperation projects in EU funded Black Sea programmemes or Horizon 2020. So we are actively - we actively work on fundraising because you need the support. So because we have a membership fee, our organisation members pay membership fees. But it's not big and it constitutes only about one percent - it's not one percent of our full budget and the main source of our financing is donor money. So we are active on this market of writing projects. Mostly, we work with European donors.
7. **Interviewer** [0:08:51.0] OK. Do you think that the EU projects that you apply for generally fit the environmental work that you do in Georgia?
8. **Interview Partner** [0:09:06.0] Yes, yes, and that's why we are always oriented, mostly are oriented toward European donors and projects, the tenders that they announce because the environmental component is always present there, while with other donors, it might not be present. And there this environmental component is always very strong. And this gives us the possibility to be competitive, also with our values that our organisation has.
9. **Interviewer** [0:09:54.0] It's interesting that you mentioned the competitiveness, because while I was doing my research, I was wondering if the EU interest in enhancing environmental protection and environmental standards is, um, a problem or maybe contradicts its economic interests, for example, competitiveness. What do you think about that?

10. **Interview Partner** [0:10:25.0] In my opinion, in our vision, it's the other way around: we pay too much to them for not paying and we don't count this in money. Unfortunately, sometimes businesses and the temporary economic benefits by some actors are put higher while finally we pay for that with our health, our deteriorating environment, which influences negatively also economic benefits. In our mission, we say that we work for economic benefits in rural areas, but with vision of environmental considerations. So this is very important. So in our opinion, there is no economic benefit without environmental considerations, because this relates to our health, health of our environment, health of future generations, access to resources and many things that are neglected today's business transactions. We have to think about future.
11. **Interviewer** [0:12:25.0] And do you think that the EU projects have a balance of competitiveness and economic development and environmental standards?
12. **Interview Partner** [0:12:41.0] In my opinion, the best example of that is EU. And that's why for us, working with EU is, uh, comfortable and still we mostly work with EU money because for us, it coincides with our vision of development.
13. **Interviewer** [0:13:15.0] Then maybe let us turn to when you apply for EU funding or for an EU project, what would you say is, are the challenges when you apply? What do you have to pay attention to?
14. **Interview Partner** [0:13:33.0] Of course, you have to propose a good project proposal. It should be written in good English and you need to work very hard. It needs quite big efforts. And for many small organisations, it might not be - and organisations that do not have special, uh, persons dedicated to project writing or skilled in project writing, it might be a problem because it requires quite good skills, high skills to to be competitive.
15. **Interviewer** [0:14:41.0] And do you feel that there are many regulations that you need to meet before a project can start?
16. **Interview Partner** [0:14:52.0] Uhm. I don't think that it's something very - something like you can't do that. For a bigger project, of course it's required to have - that your turnover is significant in order to be eligible. But I feel this is normal. It's not something impossible. And also, we also started as a very small organisation. As I remember when I came in 1996, the first project I made, and I made it just by chance because my brother was a physicist. They used to use this technology: it was very new, this Internet. So I made the project 'Elkana Internet', and it was also submitted to some EU - no, it was not EU funding, it was Soros Foundation. And this immediately gave us such a big advantage reaching different people. It was a really big competitive advantage when this project was accomplished and we immediately started talking with some partners in different countries. We stopped the introduction of Monsanto potatoes to Georgia. And so we were everywhere

immediately. And it was such a big jump. And after that, step by step, we are developing. [Pause] I don't see that we had some specific problem. Just in the - there was a period when I became director after some time later, there was a shift: before, donors' money was fully driven to non-governmental organisations. But after the Rose Revolution, after a few years of Rose Revolution, it has been changed and especially from European Union and also from other donors, the money was channelled through the governments. So it became kind of governmental programmemes. And also there were changes in some... for example, in Holland, we had the very big donors this Oxfam Novib, one of our main donors for that time. And they just lost financing because of some changes in government. And we lost to them almost overnight. So they said that they will not be able - so we already had negotiated with them some programmeming, and the next day, they say that even we are not able to pay you the last payment because we also lost all our support, governmental support. So there was a bit critical situation, and at that time, there were many NGOs and civil society organisations, lots of them, they still exist on paper. But there was a crisis which was 2008, or 2009 or like that, so it was a pretty difficult time for us. But we've survived and managed to survive.

17. **Interviewer** [0:19:31.0] And was this because of the war in 2008?

18. **Interview Partner** [0:19:37.0] No, because of changing of financial flow. So many donors stopped working because some of them decided that we are now already a middle-income country and they don't finance anymore. For example, Misereor also left, Novib, our main donors left. It was intangible, catastrophic situation in Georgia. And also most of the donors we had started working with, state programmemes like EU, they developed this ENPARD programmeme for development, which was together with government. Before we were not so much looking for Tenders, we were more a grant consuming, grant dependent organisation. We are not selling our services, but this changed environment somehow pushed us to look to other markets and we also started selling our services to different organisations, participating in different Tenders. And we had already quite good experience in projects. And this also helped us to survive. Yes. And actually, then we had another problem when we survived: So to survive, we started the writing and participation in almost every Tender that was close to our activities and finally it appeared that about 90 percent of those projects were financed. And then [laughs] since the problem of rapid growth, then, especially when you need to also - you have certain values and you need to convey these values through your programmemes. So this rapid growth is a bit difficult and also challenging. Yes. And there was another type of organisational problems, how to deal with this. At present stage we feel better. And even with this covid situation, we were maybe already trained how to cope with difficulties. So and we were one that - we maybe don't advertise too much our activities somehow. I am against that. So we are not too much - or maybe other organisations have a better publicity of what they do. But this is our position: we don't advertise too much, but we were really fast to change to these distant services, develop different instruments for that, providing help to our farmers to meet the requirements, giving them information. So we are quite fast adjusting and also managing in the way that, actually our office was not closed, only recently. But it was a mistake of our

administrator. For one week we had to close because one person became covid infected and it was only one week closure of the office and even in the period of total closed down, because we work - it coincided with spring and in spring, people have to work, and especially we had a big project on organic farming and certification that you have to start all these internal controls. So we asked the ministry to - and so we were able to continue and do our work. So we were working without any problems.

19. **Interviewer** [0:25:00.0] OK. About the ministry, you mentioned that after the Rose Revolution, the money was channeled through the government. Is this still the case or the funding, for example?
20. **Interview Partner** [0:25:14.0] It's not directly channelled through the government, but it's with - government announced tender and then it's EU money, and a big portion goes to the government, governmental capacity building. But there is still a slot for NGOs, for Tenders. It is not the grant money that you apply for, but you participate in tender and you have to be highly competitive in these systems. And it's not easy to get that money, though. We were quite successful: We had about five ENPARD projects, and also we are providing services also to another. So, like, maybe we were not in the consortium, but we provided services to the consortium because again, the EU has this environmental component where we are the most competitive in the country at this stage in agriculture especially. So, it's our domain.
21. **Interviewer** [0:26:40.0] And do you feel, do you feel that this cooperation with the, for example, Ministry of Environment in Georgia, do they support you? Does it help your work or is it more difficult for you to work with them?
22. **Interview Partner** [0:27:01.0] Well, you know, we don't have separate Ministry anymore. We don't have separate Ministry of environment since - so after this - since six, seven years, at minimum. They merged the Ministry of Agriculture. We have Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, though their minister remained from the Ministry of Agriculture and he's still the same for quite a long period. He came before merger and continues after merger as well. [critical voice] In my opinion, the environmental part of the ministry is stronger because in Georgia the environmental ministry was... At least the people that work there have better capacities and in the end with them, we had the very good and the tight cooperation, especially with the Department of Biodiversity, because we were working on agricultural biodiversity conservation. We developed together with them a strategy. So we were involved all the time with all of this activity, and our visions and our attitudes are the same. And we work very closely in a synergic way since the establishment actually. Especially there were some people working there that were very open to cooperate. Always they were open to cooperate with NGOs and even use NGOs to do work. So they were very clever at bringing people together to work on the issues that the ministry has to work. There are also, of course, some controversial issues where you have to fight. But there were many issues that we were working together and very well. And still we continue: We are in the special

committee which works on these biodiversity issues. And this agricultural biodiversity is covered by us, etc. As with the Ministry of Agriculture, this part which represents the ministry, this is the bigger part and with them we have often quite, quite tense relationship or we have to always work with them. And because of their so-called economic benefits, we have to fight with that side to... [pause] And it's not so easy.

23. **Interviewer** [0:30:58.0] Because of the environmental standards that you want to include?

24. **Interview Partner** [0:31:03.0] Yes. An also, in agriculture in general in Georgia, there is a very big influence from former Soviet Union and also many of consultants who now stay with the ministry. They are dominated with this idea of big market and the model cropping and the industry farming and you always have to fight with them and they often are very influential, influential... [cat jumps on table] I also have sometimes - I now stay at my mother's place because she had problems. At my place, I also have a cat and he's also coming around.

25. **Interviewer** [0:32:07.0] OK, so OK. But that was a really interesting what you just said. I also wanted to ask about the main, the main challenges that you have in the economic sense in Georgia.

26. **Interview Partner** [0:32:22.0] Yes, uh, so and just in our opinion, Georgia is not a big country and with our complicated landscape, we are not able to be competitive on the cheap agricultural market. Our future or our economic benefit is in quality production and quality goods. And this is important to know, and especially when the government pays now big attention to tourism development. This is also a potential export market because tourists pay here. This is also challenging to Georgia. But also when tourists come, they want to see something - to have some unique experience and not eat Brazilian frozen chicken and pork meat. And so this is that we are discussing all the time.

27. **Interviewer** [0:33:49.0] Maybe let us come back to EU one more time. Um, I would like to ask, when you cooperate with the EU in a project, is there a lot of monitoring during the project? Or only after when you have to write a report, for example.

28. **Interview Partner** [0:34:12.0] Well, there is sometimes - there are not a lot of, but there is mid-term evaluation often, especially audit, a financial audit is done. And that's... It's not something extraordinary. So we are used to that.

29. **Interviewer** [0:34:47.0] OK, cool.

30. **Interview Partner** [0:34:49.0] And we know also with all other donors this evaluation, audit, etc., you also started doing also institutional audits, before it was

more project based. But now we are at the stage that we need to make this institutional audits.

31. **Interviewer** [0:35:09.0] OK. And after you complete cooperation with the EU on a certain project, do you feel, um, do you feel that the implementation of the projects are effective through EU support?
32. **Interview Partner** [0:35:29.0] I think, yes, in most cases. Maybe it's not 100 percent. Actually what is planned is implemented. And I would say that it has also an impact.
33. **Interviewer** [0:35:52.0] How is that impact? How do you, especially with the years of experience that you have, what is the impact of the EU?
34. **Interview Partner** [0:36:06.0] Development of small and medium businesses, also in agriculture, which is also supported by... Also, for example, such businesses that take into consideration their environmental issues.
35. **Interviewer** [0:36:41.0] And is there anything that you feel would - or how do I say this - do you feel something needs to get better when cooperating with the EU? Are there any difficulties that you have experienced over the years? Anything that you would propose to the EU should become better?
36. **Interview Partner** [0:37:11.0] Maybe [laughs] it will be better to have more - to work more with the government to implement those obligations that they have, because a big portion of EU money goes to the government officials for some programmes, also for capacity building, for regulations, improvement, also implementation of the different environmental measures. However, often all of this stays on paper and the real implementation of it is not taking place. And this is very important that... [Pause] All these regulations, systems, that they are actualized and not just on their paper on some levels, which is not implemented in reality.
37. **Interviewer** [0:38:36.0] That's really interesting. OK. And I mean, you already mentioned or talked about the change that you experience -
38. **Interview Partner** [0:38:48.0] And also, I will add one more issue now. So, for example, the civil society developed different platforms and we work there, but sometimes, especially it's not so much from the environmental side of it. But in agriculture, especially the ministry tries to take obligations, such obligations that are not meaningful, but just to tick that it is done, something that can be easily achieved, that they do. They can make it with some donor, other donor support or something, and they will not make any effort. For example - it was then said that the excuse of covid - but they developed a document for climate change, and this related documentation and the activities they included as their obligations were so stupid!

And just because some of these activities are included in some of the projects financed by U.S., by the way. And it is contra - [laughs] so it will not help the reduction of emissions. And they did not ask us for consultations. Just through the environmental platform, we found out that some things are written that are not relevant to the part of agriculture, and then we sent a letter with corrections and suggestions from our side.

39. **Interviewer** [0:41:22.0] And now you are included as well, and your suggestions?

40. **Interview Partner** [0:41:28.0] At least it is said that we are included. So it all happens very often. For example, we are very active in Hazelnut sector where we are first introducing - this is also European money with Switzerland and Danida, Danish cooperation where we... This is the first time about 800 farmers, they have this internal control system already recognized by EU accreditation body. And we work with organic and the Rain Forests Alliance and UTZ certification systems. And we ask them to invite us if there is any meeting with hazelnut producer, also to say what we are doing, to make an exchange there. Never. They never invite us because they are afraid that we will say such things that - I don't know. They don't want. They have fear of these environmental considerations. They say every time that the organic and quality control is a very important and they developed a strategy document last year, in 2019, strategy document. It was funny. The strategy document was for 2021-2023. But, still, a strategy document and there even the word 'organic' was not mentioned. And then we developed a petition and then this was discussed in the Parliament and the Parliament forced them to put at least on objective level, that together with so-called climate smart agriculture, also organic agriculture is mentioned. They don't want to have additional obligations and they have tried to avoid to have additional obligations. This is such a tendency, what I see.

41. **Interviewer** [0:44:13.0] And this is the government now? OK, and who forced them to put it on the agenda then - the EU or?

42. **Interview Partner** [0:44:22.0] No, no. Parliament, parliamentary committee. Because we made a petition, it was signed by people. And then after that, the parliament can discuss and then they discussed and then it was like that.

43. **Interviewer** [0:44:44.0] And what was this environmental platform you mentioned, through which you learned about the, um, the new -

44. **Interview Partner** [0:44:54.0] That is the Climate Initiative. These are also both financed by EU programmes, also Georgian Greens which are part of the Friends of the Earth movement. They have also climate talks [coughs] through that.

45. **Interviewer** [0:45:23.0] Do you think that cooperation with the EU makes networking better for you and your NGO?
46. **Interview Partner** [0:45:37.0] Sure, sure. Yeah, because we are also in this Eastern Partnership network where we are also active. And through that there is interaction and also.... But in my opinion, this network needs to be more active. It's a bit... [pause] It's political, but it can have more influence. Also, there may be... It's too wide maybe, and because of that it's difficult to really have good cooperation. [15.1s] Now it's improved, it's better there were some changes, but for some time it was it was fully occupied by mostly Russian speaking, former Soviet mentality people. It was very difficult to go through it. Now, it's improved.
47. **Interviewer** [0:46:55.0] OK, it's interesting that you mention that. And this is my last question about EU cooperation: Do you think that there have been any changes, especially since you work with them for such a long time? For example, in 2016, the Eastern Partnership was reviewed, there were some changes. Do you did you feel a change in cooperation?
48. **Interview Partner** [0:47:19.0] Exactly. I meant that, that it's changed and now it's more active. It's much better organized. Yes.
49. **Interviewer** [0:47:29.0] OK. And also cooperation in general? How did it change, what has been better since then?
50. **Interview Partner** [0:47:39.0] Also, cooperation from the local office, and also networking has been improved. So and there are better possibilities to interact and communicate. And there were also small coalition projects, maybe they were very tiny, very small, but it also helps also bringing some more people to a common ground.
51. **Interviewer** [0:48:15.0] Which coalition do you mean?
52. **Interview Partner** [0:48:20.0] In the Eastern Partnership, there was a possibility for a very small project, like five thousand euros coalition project of small organisations, and this was somehow a challenge for smaller organisation to do something with others and also to be a network and to support. It was interesting, I think it was good. Also, it coincided with this covid period and especially for the smaller groups, it was really helpful.
53. **Interviewer** [0:49:08.0] OK. Then let us turn to the last block, the role of the EU for your own work, but also for the whole sector and Georgia in general. How does, in your experience, the EU, the EU's expertise, impact your field of environmental work?

54. **Interview Partner** [0:49:38.0] In my opinion, it has in general positive influence because, oh, though governments always say that we can't implement these SETs in Euro Union. But they also have obligations, so they have to follow at least some plans. So it makes certain pressure on that. And my opinion they need [pause] more high pressure in order to remain, go into that direction.
55. **Interviewer** [0:50:42.0] And do you feel that the EU takes your expertise as environmental NGO serious? Do you feel treated as an equal partner?
56. **Interview Partner** [0:50:55.0] Yes, yes, sure, sure, sure, sure. But it's also very important that even if we don't know something - so we never feel there that we are treated as second level. They respect us and are always asking our opinion. So this is very important that we feel that and that we don't have any fears to express ourselves, our opinions.
57. **Interviewer** [0:51:46.0] Yes, OK. And to come back, what you mentioned in the very beginning, all the other actors and donors that you work with compared to them, so to USAID to Misereor to Brot für die Welt - how do you see the EU's influence in Georgia and in your sector?
58. **Interview Partner** [0:52:18.0] For example, if I say if you mention Bread for the world, they played the crucial role for our organisation because this was the donor that helped us in a capacity building. Without them, we would not be competitive for EU projects now. EU programmes require a high competitiveness. But their impact is higher because they cover more actors and the amount of the money is, of course, higher, and also they have also pressure on the government to develop things in their way in a better way. And that's why their influence is higher, especially as we have this accession perspectives and also this - we are part of this Deep and Comprehensive Agreement [DCFTA]. And so these are the instruments with which the EU can be more influential. But in my opinion, still, EU is not using this in a full way. So, with this political crisis here, I don't know how long it will last. So but this is also EU policy: that people, that countries have to deal with their own problems on their own. Maybe.
59. **Interviewer** [0:54:49.0] So maybe for me to try to sum it up. You think that the EU treats you as a partner equally, but it could do -
60. **Interview Partner** [0:55:07.0] Personally, I have this feeling.
61. **Interviewer** [0:55:10.0] Mhm. But it could do more concerning the government and could pressure more? OK, let me see if I forgot any important question. [pause] Yes, maybe if you - yeah, I think we still have five minutes. Did the requirements for EU

corporations or for applying for grants or something. Did it change in the last years, also since 2016, or has the process stayed the same?

62. **Interview Partner** [0:55:54.0] I think it's the same, but are just different... Yes, yes, it has changed in the worse manner. Yes, yes. I noticed - how could I forget that. So it was in 2016, but later? Before this, it was open competition, because we now also participate in other Tenders of EU and I have now focused on that and this new ENPARD is not yet open and we don't know what to expect of it. But the previous ENPARD was directly distributed between FEO and UNDP. And there was not any more possibility for local actors to tender for these ENPARD programmemes. It was EU at that stage already - so they just made outsourcing of this money to these two big international players, FEO local office and UNDP local office. So they were implementing - this was kind of support programmeme for rural areas in cooperation with the ministry. Sometimes in some portions, we were also invited as consultants, but it went without full participation of - and this was really very negative. How could I forget to mention that. Just it was a bit earlier and now we were told that there will be next ENPARD, but it is not yet announced. We don't know how it will proceed, but for this previous what we used to make consortiums and participate in tenders, this was... [pause]

63. **Interviewer** [0:59:01.0] Not possible?

64. **Interview Partner** [0:59:04.0] Not possible anymore. They just financed these two international organisations active here and that was it.

65. **Interviewer** [0:59:17.0] Did you complain about it? Was there a possibility to it?

66. **Interview Partner** [0:59:21.0] Yeah, actually, yes. All the locals here. They complained, but the decision was not change.

67. **Interviewer** [0:59:34.0] Thank you very much. That was a very interesting last information. Is there anything else that you think is relevant or very important that I did not ask about or that we forgot to talk about?

68. **Interview Partner** [0:59:59.0] No, no. OK, if I recall something, I will let you know.

69. **Interviewer** [1:00:08.0] Yes, you can always write to me also if you have any questions or. OK. Then I think we are at the end one hour, so we really stick to the time frame. Do you have any other questions for me about anything?

70. **Interview Partner** [1:00:29.0] It will be interesting to see what will be final results. It will be public this - or just for you?

71. **Interviewer** [1:00:49.0] So, so far it's not planned to publish it. But I have been speaking to the Heinrich Böll foundation. Yes. Because they helped me with the contacts to different NGOs. So maybe they would be interested in publishing a shorter version, because in total it will be like 60 pages. So it's too long, but maybe a summary or an essay or something like that. Now, oh, and something that I forgot to ask you, would you like to to be, like, stated anonymously or can I quote you by name in my master's thesis?
72. **Interview Partner** [1:01:36.0] Yes, you can quote me. Yeah, OK, thank you.
73. **Interview Partner** [1:01:41.0] But if that quotation from me will be included just communicate with me.
74. **Interviewer** [1:01:48.0] Yes, yes. I will send you the whole transcript.
75. [1:01:51.0] If it just among interviews, it's not a problem. But if you say something that I said this and this. So I would like to see.
76. **Interviewer** [1:02:03.0] Yes, OK. Cool, then I think we are at the end. Maybe if it's all right, I will maybe maybe contact you and ask you again about a context to the Environment Ministry if you have them, maybe they are not replying to me and then I will approach you, but let's hope they do. OK. OK, cool. Thank you so much for your time. And yeah, all the best to Georgia. I miss it dearly. I want to come back.
77. **Interview Partner** [1:02:39.0] So you have been to Georgia?
78. **Interviewer** [1:02:41.0] Yes. Last year.
79. **Interview Partner** [1:02:44.0] You had to work here or you've been -?
80. **Interviewer** [1:02:46.0] I worked for the Heinrich Boell Foundation for five months, I did an internship in Tbilisi.
81. **Interview Partner** [1:02:55.0] Maybe you wrote that to me, but maybe I forget because also others wrote.
82. **Interviewer** [1:03:02.0] No problem. So for five months last year, I stayed. And if possible, after I finished my studies, I want to come back.

83. **Interview Partner** [1:03:18.0] But great, you can visit our organisation there. Yes, we have also we had also won the personal internship and she also wants to come because of covid she not able to. She works with us. She's Italian. She works online with us.

84. **Interviewer** [1:03:44.0] Yeah. OK, yeah, that's OK. Thank you. Have a good day. And yes, talk soon. Thank you. Bye bye.

Interview 2 – GEO_NGO2 – Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN)

1. **Interview Partner** [0:00:01.0] OK, so briefly about CENN, that was in 1998, twenty three years ago now, and it was like a really different time in 1998. So after independence, and civil war and all that. And there was a difficult time, corruption and stuff like that. So I was coming back from CEU, Budapest and they initiated the project with my colleagues, students actually from Armenia and Azerbaijan to create the composed environmental NGO Network, that was just a project to have a communication between environmentalists of three countries. And the idea is actually that the Caucasus is one ecosystem. It's one big watershed and in terms of biodiversity it's important to have to deal with the region as an eco-region. And actually, the ecoregion is not only in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, but also part of Russia, and part of Turkey and Iran. So six countries are all in one ecoregion. And at some point we also had that coordinator in Russia and then we decided to focus on three countries. So when we started in 98, we were more like a bare grassroots organisation. Our role was shadow monitoring and shadow reporting and shaming and blaming, this kind of stuff, because the governance was very poor in all the countries, and so - and we had to fight quite a lot. And at that time came we had a team that - we had a coordinator in Armenia as I said. And in Armenia, we worked with American University of Armenia and in Azerbaijan, we had ISA, it was a small American organisation. So we had a coordinator from there and we started with a small grant from American NGO. But then in 2003, when we had the Rose revolution in Georgia, we decided to participate in the development of the country in Georgia especially. So we reviewed our mission and we decided to be a development-oriented organisation and to promote the sustainable development, values and practices in the region. But we still kept the regional focus. So our slogan is 'Shaping the future by changing today' actually. And we are working with everybody actually, we are working with our competitors like a civil society development and institutional strengthening good governance, also very active in our research and policy work. I'll tell you what we do. We also to work with the private sector on compliance management. And we also work with civil society and use a lot on knowledge management and awareness raising and communication. So in terms of thematic direction, environment and sustainable development became very broad. So we covered more or less everything. But we have now, uh, seven core directions: so one is environmental protection and sustainable management of resources, natural resources and energy. The second direction is climate change and disaster risk reduction policies which you can see on our website, we have projects, programmes on climate. We also work on green economy now, it's circular economy and trying to promote green entrepreneurship, social enterprising, resource efficiency. We also work on rural development and socio-economic development, so promoting European approaches. We also mainstream an inclusive approach and gender mainstreaming in our work and sustainable development and the promotion of SDGs. So in terms of areas, we are active in forestry, land degradation, watershed management, we also have a project now on climate change and disaster risk reduction, we have projects on Youth engagement in green social enterprises. We

have projects on air governance. Now we are initiating the project on energy, renewable energy and energy efficiency. We have also programmes on waste management. So more or less everything, a lot of things. I mean, sometimes when we talk about what we do, a lot of people are confused because we have many projects. But some projects are very long - several years, four or five years. Some are very small and can be three months long and are very important and dear to us. We have for example, very small projects, three months long, projects of food waste. But it's very important for us because we're trying to initiate the reform for food waste and to create food banks. It was a lot of food is being wasted from supermarkets and restaurants, and we are engaging, engaging with private sector in this area to prepare their policy recommendations. And now we're addressing the parliament with requests from, I think are up to 50 big companies to change the tax legislation. And it will probably happen. So it's quite, quite interesting things. Yeah. So now, I mean, while we are around 65 people. We are working in Tbilisi full time and then we work like, like you would work in the West Europe. So it's not like usual Georgian NGO. I mean any time, leaving any time and having [audibly incomprehensible] - from nine until six and very strict discipline on an operational level. And we are like any international organisation. A bad way of international ideal was we have mostly Georgians here, but we are also ethnically diverse because we have projects in mountain areas and vulnerable areas. So we have Armenian colleagues - but Georgian citizens - but Armenian knows Azerbaijani because we are working in an Azerbaijani community with Chechens in Pankisi and we are also European. We have now an American colleague, and one German colleague, and we have sometimes a volunteer. I think we will have a German volunteer soon. So, yeah, it's quite diverse.

2. **Interviewer** [0:06:58.0] OK, yeah. I've seen on your website that you have so many things that you accomplished already. The list is incredible. So I was wondering if you could maybe name, I don't know, I don't want to say a number but name like in your opinion, the most important accomplishments that CENN has done since its foundation or in the past couple of years?
3. **Interview Partner** [0:07:23.0] Well, I think we have a list of what we've done every year. Well, what's important, what we've done - I mean, I can list you the policy work which we - but first, what's important is that we are trying to initiate the topic and brand the issue and then to make it important, like a policy priority for the country. For example, when we started Disaster Risk Reduction, DRR, and then we started in 2007, nobody was thinking about DRR of what was Disaster Risk Reduction. And Georgia was very poor and, and we have the good communication mechanisms. So we have our mailing list with thirty percent more than thirty thousand subscribers, and we are issuing the news every day. So we have also projects with schools, we work with around thousand schools around the country and these school kids' eco clubs are really aligned to us. So it's like an army of young people talking about something. So they are always - and it's helping to prioritize these issues in their communities, families and media. I mean the recent accomplishment we've done - we just had a meeting on that - for example, the forestry sector is very, very important sector for Georgia because it covers half of

the country and it's very important for the state and its priority for many things: for livelihood, water resources, for rural energy. 80 percent of rural energy depends on fire and illegal consumption of forest is very high. 75 percent of forest is illegally consumed and stolen. It's not sustainable. So we're trying to promote the reform in this sector. And that's like seven, eight years ago, we started to boost the forest reform and we initiated the forest policy was - we lobbied it through the multi state processing and then it was adopted by the parliament of Georgia forest policy department and gave the birth to the forest reform and the legislation and so forth. And that case for us, I mean, EU Association process is very important for us, very. Because the environment has never been a priority for Georgia, for any post-Soviet country, environment is always something lagging behind. But, [pause] all of the old censuses and social assessments show that people care about the economy, jobs and the integration of Abchasia or sectoral political issues. But the environment is something like seventh, eighth or tenth issue. So it's not priority politically. But the environment became part of the European Association Agenda, Association Agreement, and it has very strict calendar attached. And so, that this legislation has to be adopted by this year and this institutional reform should happen that year. And it's not only the agenda, but if they're attached to the financial conditions like direct budgetary support, the government takes it seriously because if they don't deliver, they will not get the budget. I mean, they will get funding for their budgets. So that's why they take it serious. But forestry is not part of the EU Association Agreement. And it happened because EU countries - in EU, forests are merely privately owned and it's not regulated at EU level. Each country regulates forestry on the country level, county level. So EU does not have directives on forestries as it has on climate or biodiversity, or water. So that's why, I mean, for that we needed to work hard to make sure this policy passed, for example.

4. **Interview Partner** [0:11:49.0] We also managed to push forward the waste management legislation, also to help the waste management reform. It's also a very complicated problem. I mean, there, for example, we developed three main important legislation, laws for waste management, we developed I think 16 waste management plans for 16 municipalities and city of Tbilisi, which is like one third of the country. The waste management plan was developed by the Senate, it was approved by the Tbilisi Council. And for example, last year, we helped them first a little bit and then the environmental committee of the parliament to develop the Green Budget Project based on - and it was approved by the parliament - based on that the Ministry of Environment can increase the budget for Green initiative, so I think raising the green finance. So this happened there. And on policy level, the achievements we had were also capacity on special events: for example, we initiated several curricula of educational programmemes, curricula for several universities in Georgia and also Armenia. For example on circular economy or green innovation, on rural development, on energy, renewable energy and energy efficiency and forests in different universities. This became a credited part of the curricula. So we also managed to establish on the user level the annual use of competition for schools, and it's being held every year together with different ministries and schools. And so we have, I don't remember how many alumni - there are these young people called CENN alumni - who became partners and went through this set of

competitions and became part of the green camps we have every year in our training center.

5. **Interview Partner** [0:14:05.0] So I think for me, what is important when I see that we change lives of people. I mean, legislation is important, but you see change in a long term. But it's also when we see, for example that when legislation passed and when we see the private sector approaching us and asking for the training on waste management. I mean when you see how this law changed their life it's very important. And also to see how our grants, competitions or students competition changed all that. So we also have had quite big EU projects on rural development and there we had the subgranting programme - for example, this is our catalog, Keda LEADER catalogue. I think you can see on our website, I can send you. Here you have a ninety-five, I think, or ninety-seven projects that we supported in the rural areas of just one municipality and they are great projects. It's a small municipality mountains of Adjara. And the idea was to work there to create local action group, to create the local development plan. We got around one million euros for our project which was sub-grants and we funded around 100 projects, and we created different projects like tourism, eco-tourism projects and agricultural projects and protected area projects. So that was very, very important. Because when we started, everybody wanted to create wine yard, wine yard, and wine cellar. But then they became [acoustically incomprehensible]. [0:16:03.0] So we had, I mean, we are proud of some policy work and some youth work and some educational work. And I think we are creating the fashion of the environment I can say. Because for us it's very important to brand the issue and to bring to the priority at the policy level. So we achieve a certain level of confidence from state, private sector and communities where we're working. It's not easy because we are not always tuned with the state. Sometimes we are not happy with what the government does, but for the moment, we still believe that it's possible to work with them and change policies because if we become again a watchdog and go in this state of shame and blame, I don't think that we would be able to push forward the legislation, for example. So for the moment, we believe that it's still possible with the help of the EU association process to push forward reforms and changes.
6. **Interviewer** [0:17:18.0] That's actually a nice moment to turn to EU cooperation. Just one more question about your work: You say that you work in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Do you work in each country equally or is there a certain bias towards Georgia or Armenia?
7. **Interview Partner** [0:17:36.0] No, no. We specialised here and we have been always in Georgia because of many reasons, because it started here. [Acoustically incomprehensible] and then it developed. We started with one project and then it grew up and grew up. And it's not only because we were strong, but Georgia always enjoyed high financial support and political support of international donors. It was always easy in Georgia for civil society to start working and continue working. Even we have some difficulties, it's not surprising like it would be in Estonia or in Germany, but at least you are safe. I mean, if you work hard and if you are

consistent with your action and persistent, you can achieve the results. But politically, even during Shevardnadze's time in the 90s, after the independence of Georgia, Georgia always was free for civil society. So the government let the international donors come freely and we had free media. Then it became a bit more difficult. Now there is a pressure, political pressure on media, maybe reduced, but in terms of international support, it was always quite serious support. It first started with USA, the U.S. government. Then EU started during the last ten years, maybe more. EU's presence has increased and it is continuous increasing. In Armenia, we have a strong partner, I mean, relatively strong partner. In Azerbaijan now, it's very difficult because of the political situation, because the government... It happened like, I don't know, ten years ago that the government in Azerbaijan changed legislation in a way that NGOs cannot - I mean, they need to be registered and they cannot have bank account. So sometimes, I mean, we have a project now where engage with Azerbaijan, where we work on individual basis, on individual contracts. We cannot work with NGOs because they don't have a lot of privilege. But I mean, I just had this discussion of energy, renewable energy and energy efficiency. And I have to say that Armenia and Azerbaijan are ahead of Georgia. I mean, I was thinking that we are doing better because we have so much support of Germany, USAID, whatever, and we are part of energy community. But actually we are the most behind and even Azerbaijan which has so much oil is much ahead of us with renewable energy and energy efficiency and has adopted legislation which is in line with EU eight years ago that we adopted just last year. So things are developing in Armenia and Azerbaijan as well, but only now the donors are working on individual basis than on a regional basis.

8. **Interviewer** [0:20:59.0] That's really interesting. OK, let's now turn to how CENN cooperates with the EU when you recall their experiences you had while cooperating with in the past, how would you describe it? What comes to mind?
9. **Interview Partner** [0:21:22.0] Oh, well, I mean, we had a political cooperation and we had also the contractual. With political I mean that when we have the EU commissioners coming from Brussels or EU parliamentarians coming to Brussels and we talk about Georgian politics and development issues. I would be happier if there is more engagement on the politics, policy level with civil society. Because for the moment we have more on the project based or contractual based engagement. But it would be also good to engage with them and to give our feedback on policy developments in Georgia, how and where civil society needs support. Because I can compare with USAID and EU. I have worked with USAID: if they are working with you and you are the US partner, they are your political partners, you know, and you have a direct access with ambassador whenever there's people from US. I mean, they are considering you as an informant on your country for political change. And it's very important because when I want to change something in my country that cannot leverage, it's important to have the European or American partners to leverage politically because they have other political... So with EU, I would be happy if there was more engagement on a policy level with the civil society organisations. We are working more on the project based, programme and project based, thematic based. What I like with EU, when we're working on a project, it's a

great learning experience for us, because when there is a new programme coming, for example, there is an agenda. Every programme brings about new European practices and values, for example EU approves Climate strategy and then they start a project on climate in Georgia. And you have to align your programme to the EU Climate Directive or if there is a law you have to align. So, it's a great experience for us personally, because when you write the proposal, it's like a master thesis. I mean, you have to research a lot. It's a two-months, three-months, heavy research. You have to read the laws. You have to educate yourselves. You have to really make these European values your values. And then you come up with some ideas, you know. I write projects myself and I really enjoy it because for me, it's every time a learning outcome. So usually in terms of references EU calls are very well written. I mean, yeah, they're going to get a good description of Georgian situation and then during implementation, you bring about new new practices. For example, now that they're talking about personal, rural development we took this leader approach of rural development, which is EU's approach, which we did not know. And during the last four years, we've been applying this leader approach, which we learned and now brought it into practice. Now, there is a new approach for us, which is human rights-based approach. And now the EU projects are always highlighting this RBA [rights-based approach] in our projects. And now the EU has also a new approach, which is good. I think Stronger Together it's called, where they want EU projects to synergize and to complement each other. So now we have one project, the EU for Youth. So, there are several projects: EU for Youth, EU for Climate, EU for Environment EU for business, EU for media or EU for energy. And then under this programme, they have the pro- [audibly incomprehensible]. So, we have now one, which is EU4Energy, ah not energy but Youth, we are under EU ENPARD which is rural development. And yeah, so what I like is that every project is aligned to not only technical things, but it's also bringing European values and practices into reality. [Pause] Yeah, so, I mean, and it's of course aligned to the association process, which is good. For me personally if you write a recommendation... I mean, as a local actor here, I've found that it's more efficient when EU works directly with the partners, international partner or local partner, than with multi agents, multilateral agencies like UN agencies, because whenever we see EU working with UN agencies or OSCE or UNEP or UNDP or they have also UNIDO or.... And there are projects with like six countries, for example they have EU4Environment, EU4Climate. There's six agencies united like World Bank, UNIDO, UNEP, OSCE, UNDP working in six countries, the Eastern Partnership countries. And these projects are not usually so efficient from what we find, and I think that the EU is aware of that.

10. **Interviewer** [0:27:52.0] And what do they do more? Is it more this like regional approach that you would favour or is it more with the big agencies?

11. **Interview Partner** [0:28:05.0] No, I mean, regional approach is good, but I would prefer that you work directly with implementing partner rather than this multilateral, because they are not that efficient as well. I mean, if you worked with bilateral agents like the Austrian Development Agency, or GIZ, whatever, bilaterally, then it's... I mean, you have that commitment you have that ownership, you know. They

work for their countries. But when you have the multilateral agency, you don't have this kind of ownership or you don't have this commitment and usually the quality is missed.

12. **Interview Partner** [0:28:59.0] [Break because someone came in to ask something of the interview partner.]

13. **Interview Partner** [0:30:27.0] We can move on.

14. **Interviewer** [0:30:29.0] OK. OK. Where were we?

15. **Interview Partner** [0:30:33.0] Um, yeah, these big projects here.

16. **Interviewer** [0:30:36.0] Yeah. So, um, maybe let us talk about how when you apply for EU cooperation, funding or grants, what do you have to pay attention to? What are the challenges in the application process?

17. **Interview Partner** [0:30:52.0] Well, we don't find it - I mean, I'm always saying to my colleagues that usually in my experience, the process is very competitive. It's never biased. I cannot say that there is anything - I mean, with EU we know whenever we submit a good proposal, we usually win. And it's very transparent, very fair with EU. And I think they are giving the international evaluators, I mean, because it's quite corrupt country still. And in my experience, whenever there is a Tender where the Ministry people are involved, although they say that they like our policy, they usually don't let us win. They usually let their NGOs win who are connected with them through different means there are, you know, bad, poor practices. And we don't participate in these games. We don't engage relatives of Ministry people. And if the minister - [incoming call] I'm sorry I will have to disconnect the Skype - the ministry people involved in the decision makings we know that we might not pass because of corruption. But with EU, I always know that I think they have even a blind process. They don't know which organisation is submitting. I think so. And I also say to other partners, they don't care how strong the organisation is or what is your reference, they care for the quality of proposal. If the proposal is clear, convincing and it's proper value for their work, finance, budget, whatever you usually win, you know. So that's why I mean, it's challenging because you have to work hard to prepare the proposal. But for me, the most difficult is to develop the concepts, which is like five pages. People think it's very easy, five page concept. But the concept is the most difficult for me because it's like poesy, you know. You have to have an idea which is really different or that you really need it, really changing the life of your beneficiaries. And it should be convincing. But for me, I have to compliment EU that they have a very fair process like different from other, again, multilateral agencies. I'm not happy about, I can clearly say with UNDP we are very unhappy and they are playing the government's game. But the EU is very good.

18. **Interviewer** [0:33:49.0] Okay. And how about the implementation process?
19. **Interview Partner** [0:33:55.0] Yeah, no. Well, I mean, the only thing is that usually - they have the local staff, local delegation. I understand that they're very busy, and we would love them to have more attention on us, to be more engaged in the doing the project implementation, even to give coaching and back-stopping and some advice again, if we can. Again, if we compare - I mean, with UNDP is like a bad experience, but we have a good experience, for example with USAID. With USAID projects, they are engaged with you completely. I mean if you have a project with USAID, then the guys from their agency are like your supervisor. They have almost every day contact with you and sometimes even too much. You have to report almost everything. But they have engagement and they really care. But with the EU, they're over-busy, I mean, they don't have this engagement, unfortunately.
20. **Interviewer** [0:34:55.0] So how is it then after a project is finished? You just hand in the the monitoring - like, the report?
21. **Interview Partner** [0:35:05.0] Yeah. That's it. And of course it also depends who is the... I mean, one person sometimes the project manager from EU is very engaged coming on the field or whatever, and sometimes we have cases when they officially say that they don't have time - and probably they don't have time. But, yeah. Here's a question we have to resolve.
22. **Interviewer** [0:35:39.0] OK. Would you say that cooperation with the EU is rather centralized and formal, or more on an informal basis and decentralized?
23. **Interview Partner** [0:35:55.0] No, now it's more centralized. They are making it more formal. And now, I mean, the good thing is that they are trying to improve the efficiency. So they are making a lot of emphasis on digitalization and digitalization of their own processes. But they are still in that transition period for now they are consolidating everything is digitalizing. For example, they are consolidating in our communication. Now everybody has to communicate to one department of PR, which is good. But in the meantime, they are already there, I mean, it's a big transition period. Now, they also went to new project OPSIS or how it's called? I don't know. There is a new - OPSIS I think it's called - where you have to upload your reports. Yeah, OPSIS. So they're moving towards that. And now there's a training going on OPSIS management now they have this portal on uploading your proposal, which is great. You don't need to print anything. They are improving their own old processes, which is going to work better. But but they are not still there.
24. **Interviewer** [0:37:42.0] Do you, I mean, from the work you do in Armenia, do you see any differences in application or also implementation in Armenia?

25. **Interview Partner** [0:37:53.0] Yeah, of course it depends on the persons because they differ. I think operations with the EU is bigger here. I mean, some programmes are starting first in Georgia and then in Armenia, for example, for rural development. And some priorities are, of course, different. Yeah, I think overall operation of EU is bigger in Georgia than in Armenia, because, I mean. [long pause] That's why I was surprised. I was thinking that the energy in Georgia was ahead because of the bigger operations and finance, but I was happy to hear that Armenia is doing much better, which is great. But in terms of civil society, it's much worse situation in Armenia. And in Azerbaijan, it's non-existent almost. In Armenia, there are very few organisations, two or three, and they don't have young people in NGOs so much. It's mainly like the old people having other daily jobs, like scientists and they're having NGO doing other work - they're working in universities and they have also NGO or something like that, but not as their main job. There are a few organisations, I mean, with quality.

26. **Interviewer** [0:39:22.0] Why do you think that -?

27. **Interview Partner** [0:39:24.0] Because of the funding and funding opportunities. I mean, if it was really boosted here because of international support in Georgia and there, there is not so much funding for civil society. There was a lot of not only funding, but political support from international community for civil society development, a lot of trainings and lots of exchanges, a lot of trips to the West to see, internships. And we also had a huge support. I mean, for example, again, USAID again is a good example. They invested in CENN a lot of money to strengthen institutionally. Because we were their partner, they helped us to develop our operational manual, our internal system. They even developed our Internet security. I mean, they adopted us and helped us grow. EU does not have that approach. Again, this is because USAID is bilateral. They serve their country. They like to work with us. EU is multilateral and there is not - but still it's good! But I would prefer if the EU also had some type of work of USAID to politically help NGOs. You know, so many organisations, Transparency International, Soros organisation, are making a difference in Georgia. Let's help Transparency International to become even stronger, to make a big impact on corruption. So, I mean, USAID does like that: they help us, like few organisations, local organisations, they identify so-called leaders and they help them. The EU does not do like that, it has a different strategy. But at least EU is free to whatever. But it would be better if they also invested not only funding and contracting, but also political support of organisations, institutional support of organisations rather than fully project-based.

28. **Interviewer** [0:41:30.0] Yeah, that's actually a very good transition to my next question, which would be how do you, like, after completing several projects with the EU, multiple projects, how do you assess their efficiency from the way they work?

29. **Interview Partner** [0:41:51.0] [Pause] Again, I have to say that whatever is written, there are papers, the evaluation is very good, excellent, but human interaction is very limited. And this we are missing. We are really missing their support. I mean, they let us do and then we report, and they sometimes even don't give feedback, you know? But again, it depends on personnel. Some people do, but, as far as I know, we have multiple projects and none of them are as much in touch with us as much as USAID. So it means that all these people cannot be - I mean, as I understand, they are lacking human resources and they are overloaded, so they don't have time for individual projects to respond. So, I mean, what we miss, is - for example, we would want them to be on our side when we have a big important meeting with the government or parliament. When we talk about EU's policies or whatever, it would be good if EU would also be with us at the meeting. USAID would help in all of this, whether we had a meeting with the minister or the head of the parliament. But the EU, they let us go, they trust us, said they would not come. Maybe because there is not enough time they don't have. They are just understaffed, that's my feeling.
30. **Interviewer** [0:43:25.0] But do you feel that they take you and your expertise seriously? Do they treat you as an equal partner?
31. **Interview Partner** [0:43:34.0] I think yes. Yes, they do. Yes. Yes.
32. **Interviewer** [0:43:37.0] OK. OK, then. In terms of I mean, CENN as you said, was founded in 1998. And you've been working with the EU and other partners for a long time. Do you feel there has been any change in the past years, for example, since 2016 when there was a review in the EaP structure?
33. **Interview Partner** [0:44:10.0] Yeah, I mean, it's changed. Yes, it's changed. I think there are more regional projects, more Eastern Partnership projects, which is good. Efficiency's not bad, as I said. But it's good to have this Eastern partnership approach, I think, anyway. [pause] And what's also changed is that - [pause] I just wanted to say something I forgot. I forgot something was. Yeah, at some point, but they dropped this idea, at some point they wanted NGOs to speak in one voice and it was not a good idea. They say, oh, we don't want these multiple, I mean, why don't you organize, create this Eastern Partnership Civil Society forum and speak in there, and this was a failure. This Eastern Partnership Civil Society forum, it didn't work. I mean, we were part of that, also co-ordinator of the working group, one of the groups. And I always said that. I mean, we have a slogan 'proud to be diverse'. And in many ways it's good to be diverse, great to have bio diversity, to have a human diversity, gender diversity, everything. So why do you want NGOs to talk in one voice? Let them have many voices. And this was not appropriate, I think they dropped this idea and also they have now this 'Stronger Together' idea, not only EU projects to be together, but also the EU is always trying to streamline the messages with other EU countries. So they have exercises every year with European countries and EU come together at a meeting. And they agree on the priorities and the key messages to the government and they try to work, which is also important. And I was happy to - I was part of one these exercises: they ask the several people to brief

them on different topics. So I was asked on environment and climate. And so there was someone on the economy and someone on governance. So I've seen myself what kind of exercise we're about to start. I think now they are into the EU - I mean we are now in the association process. Sometimes we would want them to be stricter to the government, you know, because in certain areas where the government is delayed with the legislation. But I think I mean there are steps of diplomacy that they cannot go beyond.

34. **Interviewer** [0:47:09.0] Have you experienced that the EU's goals or requirements have changed at some point in the past years?
35. **Interview Partner** [0:47:20.0] Yes, now it's changing because the European Commission, you have a new president and the old new commission and of course, the agenda is good for us. It's greener. It's a green agenda with the climate change, digitalization and Youth. And this is really great for us. Now when EU prioritized this green economy and circular economy and climate. Now, even government of Georgia is trying maybe to work on a Georgian Green deal somehow to tune with the European processes to be associated. So, yes, it's changed, but it's changed because I think the new leadership in commission.
36. **Interviewer** [0:48:12.0] OK. OK, then I think we can already turn to the third block about how you perceive the role of the EU in general for your own work, but also for the environmental sector in Georgia.
37. **Interview Partner** [0:48:30.0] And again, for us, the EU is the reference point. Because without the EU, it would have been very difficult to lobby the environmental changes or reforms because, again, it's not in the political agenda, I mean, voluntarily. And awareness of people is very low. The great thing is that younger generation and younger, better schools are really sharing new ideas, environmental ideas, because of, I think Internet and YouTube. Yeah, I hope they don't watch the Russian cartoons, but I think European cartoons, they have also some environmental content on waste management and on Earth and this kind of things. So the young generation is very, very much with us. And if not for the EU Association Agreement and EU green pledges now, it would have been very difficult for us. So EU is also reference point for democracy, of course, and good governance, because without good governance and democracy, nothing could happen. So I think it's critical, like anti-corruption and measures and good governance and even judiciary reform, because without a clean judiciary system, nothing would work. I mean, we would have corruption in forestry, corruption in everything. You know, there would be corruption everywhere. So that's why I believe very much in the work of Transparency International, because they are very vocal about governance issues. And when I met politicians, I mean, European and American politicians, I would not start only from environment, I start with good governance and anti-corruption and judicial system because they set the key for good environmental governance. So EU is a strong partner, political partner in good

governance, democracy, and of course, the reference point for the environmental governance.

38. **Interviewer** [0:50:53.0] OK, and apart from the reference point, as EU as an ideal, how, compared to the other actors that you mentioned, like USAID or also, let's say, Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union, how relevant is the EU as an actor?
39. **Interview Partner** [0:51:15.0] It's a very, very important and it is very good that they are trying to bring the projects together and now they are trying to message together. And because this political messaging is very important, again, to fight against Kremlin propaganda. Because if you go to villages, people say, oh, Russia is good. And that's why for European project it is very good to say: OK, you know, these projects which was in Keda will be supported by the EU and not Russia and all these jobs you have all this improvement in your life is EU behind. So that's why for us, it's very important, of course, that we are trying to also position CENN, but it's not so much important politically. It's very important to say it's EU behind or whatever Norwegian or Austrian behind, we should say so. Because people sometimes old generation think that, oh, Russian products are the best products, you know, because they still watch Russian TV and propaganda is working. So it's very relevant politically and also financially.
40. **Interviewer** [0:52:32.0] Okay. You also mentioned that you work with the ministries and government representatives. Do you feel that cooperating with them is more support or hindering your own work?
41. **Interview Partner** [0:52:50.0] Well, I mean. [pause/sighs] I mean, we cannot do anything if we are not working with them. I mean, whether it's petition or policy. If we want to change anything, we have to work with the government. Sometimes it's easy to work. I wouldn't say helping, but yeah, again, it depends on personality because institutions are very young, like twenty-five years country. I mean there is no institutional memory and vision of like culture, you know, so much and the ministers keep changing all the time. We had the Ministry of Environment that was matched two years ago with Agriculture, Ministry of Energy was matched with Economy. So it keeps changing all the time. And we still have informal governance here. There is one guy who is running the country. So, institution-wise it's not a really strong country. So personalities matter a lot. And that's why we are usually strong, and we can make strong impact if we cooperate with the other partners like with GIZ or FEO or whatever that we're pushing - or with the private sector, you know. And that's why we usually want to have EU with us, because then we could be much stronger to lobby. So I would not say - and capacity to deal with people in the government is not high. They're not really motivated. I mean, they are neither helping nor hindering. They are just there and you need to push, push, push, push. Usually we have a strong support at the highest level, like with a minister. We have a strong support, they want to, but usually mid-level, it's difficult to work with. Commitment is missing usually.

42. **Interviewer** [0:54:58.0] I already talked to another environmental NGO in Georgia today, and they mentioned that it has been changed at some point, that some EU funding or grants don't go directly to the NGOs, but to the ministries or governments first, and then they kind of give the money to the different NGOs. Have you experienced that as well?
43. **Interview Partner** [0:55:26.0] It's not to the government, but usually there is one scheme that on the, I mean - there is a call for NGOs. I mean, there are three different schemes. There is a call for NGOs. There's a call for UN agencies. We're not competing with UN agencies. There are a different slot and there is a call for private sector. And usually for the private sector, they are developing the Tender documents like terms of references with the ministry people. They want to issue the call on air governance or waste management. So they draft that call with them. And then usually they issued their call. And then I think the ministry has a say to select and in that case, when the ministers has a say to select, it might be a biased process. But in that case NGOs do not participate whenever there's more private companies, international private companies like European. But EU does not give to government, never, any grant money. They just give to this UN agency, like, UNDO, what I told you, these six agencies and if it's managed by, let's say UNDP, then it's like a ministry deciding - and there, UNDP has calls usually for small projects. And in that case, we never participate because I know that it's not fair. Usually, they give to the ministry people and normally say NGOs, but there is no instrument where EU is giving to the ministry for the NGO funds. I don't know. At least I don't know.
44. **Interviewer** [0:57:25.0] OK, OK, let me check, I think that I have asked all the questions that I wanted to ask. Do you think, do you feel like I've forgotten something? Is there anything that you'd find relevant?
45. **Interview Partner** [0:57:41.0] No, I don't know. So it's your master's thesis, right? All right. Yeah. So do you have a supervisor from the region or.
46. **Interviewer** [0:57:53.0] My supervisor is from the University of Tartu in Estonia. Yes, but I had help, I think. I'm not sure. I think I texted you that in the first e-mail. I had to help from the Heinrich Boell foundation South Caucasus because I worked for them last year when I lived in Tbilisi for five months. Yes. So they helped me a lot with that. And yeah.
47. **Interview Partner** [0:58:23.0] OK, yeah. And you were German yourself right or. OK, very good. Yeah. So and your Master is on environment or politics?
48. **Interviewer** [0:58:38.0] It's more politics in general. But I, like my personal focus is environmental politics in post-Soviet countries.

49. **Interview Partner** [0:58:50.0] Well, it will be interesting to see your final results.
50. **Interviewer** [0:58:54.0] Yeah, I can, I will definitely send you the master's thesis when you're interested. It's due mid-May, so. Yeah.
51. **Interview Partner** [0:59:05.0] And it's on post-Soviets or Caucasus. What is it?
52. **Interviewer** [0:59:11.0] It's only comparing, like my master's thesis is only comparing Armenia and Georgia.
53. **Interview Partner** [0:59:17.0] Well, OK.
54. **Interviewer** [0:59:18.0] I will hopefully talk to more Armenian NGOs, to the environmental ministries in Georgia and Armenia and also to the EU delegations in both countries.
55. **Interview Partner** [0:59:32.0] OK. Did you speak with EU delegation here?
56. **Interviewer** [0:59:35.0] Not yet. Next week. I already have a date.
57. **Interview Partner** [0:59:40.0] With Alexandre?
58. **Laura Worsch** [0:59:41.0] Yeah.
59. **Interview Partner** [0:59:43.0] Ah okay. Alexandre is a new one for us. We never worked with him, so he has just started. He seems to be responsive to compare with other previous projects. So we'll see. We started a project on climate change recently now and he's our desk. OK. So good luck and if there is anything please let us know.
60. **Interviewer** [1:00:08.0] Thank you so much for your time. I wanted to ask one last thing. Is it okay, or no to say differently: would you rather be named anonymously? Because I will work with the data that I get from this interview and I can either quote you by name or -
61. **Interview Partner** [1:00:31.0] You can quote me. I mean, there is nothing confidential. Yeah. OK, well, good luck. Yeah. If you happen to be in Tbilisi throw us a visit.
62. **Interviewer** [1:00:45.0] I hope to come back to Tbilisi this year. Let's see.

63. **Interview Partner** [1:00:49.0] OK. We might have a German volunteer from the Bread for the World and I think they're sending every year, we had last year for two years the young volunteer I think seventeen years old, just out of school. She as living in Keda and she was loving to stay there. But then because of Covid, she had to leave because of her protocol. But now I think we will have a new person coming. I don't know when though.
64. **Interviewer** [1:01:20.0] Yeah, good. Lots of luck with all your projects of your work and thank you.

Interview 3 – ARM_NGO1, Part 1 – Acopian Center

1. **Interviewer** [0:00:04.0] Let's start with you and the Acopian Center. You are the director, if I understand correctly.
2. **Interview Partner** [0:00:11.0] Yes, I'm the director of the Center for the Environment, which is a center that was established in Armenia in 1992 under a different name. But then in 2008, it was given this name and it was started by an Armenian philanthropist in the US and he was a migrant from Iran in the 1950s, went to the US, became fabulously wealthy in the electronics industry, but he had a passion for wildlife and wildlife conservation. So, when Armenia became independent, AUA opened its doors in ninety-one. Soon after, he contacted the UN management and said, you need to have an environmental management conservation center. And so he started supporting and then the first big initiative was this initiative called Birds of Armenia. So we ended up publishing this kind of field guidebook and kind of a - it remains the only field guidebook in Armenia and also a compendium of, you know, more for academic use, a handbook of, you know, birds of Armenia and. And so, and then thereafter, in 2008, before he passed away he [audibly incomprehensible] the center and the university named the center after him and a lot of the initial phases of the center was focused on biodiversity issues and the birds kind of birds of Armenia. It was a big campaign that started first and then afterwards. Then as each director came, they added their own kind of interests, but they were mostly focused on biodiversity issues and species related issues. And in 2013, 14, I took over - actually 13 I took over the center. And since then we've grown our areas of interest of beyond biodiversity, although biodiversity remains a very important element. But we're working on sustainable energy, climate related issues, water related issues, the role of technology in environmental management and governance. And mining became a focus area for our work because we do have a relatively active metal mining sector in Armenia and - that's kind of been broadly our focus, and we've also had a good focus on working with communities and outreach with communities so that we're not pure research, but we also engage with at community level and also with government officials and policy makers. So there's kind of policy impact and also community level work that we've done. We also offer the environmental courses that AUA offers to students. So, I mean, let me just quickly. Share with you the screen, if you don't mind, can you let me share?
3. **Interviewer** [0:03:41.0] Yes, the question is, how do I do that?
4. **Interview Partner** [0:03:44.0] On the next to share screen? There is an arrow. Just click enable multiple users to.
5. **Interviewer** [0:03:49.0] Now? Should be fine I think.
6. **Interview Partner** [0:03:52.0] Yes. So if you go to our website, you see kind of a whole host of stuff about us and the work we do, and right now, for instance, we've got a project going on with a European Horizon 2020 project on policy expertise and trust. The topic is focused on climate change here. But we're working with a

consortium of universities and organisation from Europe focused on the issue of trust and trustworthiness of experts, trust in and trustworthiness of experts, and also how does that expert and policy advice process work? What are the good examples? We're looking at the Nordic examples and also other countries. And then finally, what we're going to do in Armenia and six or seven other countries in this consortium is do citizens assembly on climate related issues. This will be in the last year of the conference. This is more on environmental governance related issues that we're working on. We've got then on the technology side the Black Sea Cross-border Cooperation Project where we're using Copernicus as the Earth observation platform from which we can develop tools of monitoring the Black Sea region where, you know, our partners are from Greece, Georgia, Ukraine and, and then you know, we've got done - we've done work on a wild harvest, related issues and how you manage the wild harvest. We've done a conference on forest related issues with Heinrich Böll within this Green Lab in a few years ago, 2019. Then we've got this other Horizon 2020 project. Again, the role of technology in environmental management, how to use drones, to improve the first responders situational awareness so that it can respond better. We did five years in a row an ecotourism conference. We have a very active project going on at Hohenheim University on biodiversity and again, participatory tools, mapping tools that can be used to enhance biodiversity conservation and the water related research. We've developed a lot of online tools for educational tools, environmental topics for decision makers. We're very active in the waste management area and research on waste related issues, both from the policy level and also just on the ground. Right now, we've finalized developing guidelines for communities on waste management planning. And so there's a whole host of stuff that we're investing in. And also we offer, as I mentioned, we offer the courses basically, at AUA we also have a minor. We don't have a degree programme yet, but there's a number of courses, environmental courses that we offer. And one of the things that is on our plate this coming year is thinking about A) certificate programmes for professional development purposes and environmental topics. And the second one is a degree programme on environmental related topics. And there I think it's going to be very - one of the areas we're going to explore very actively is partnering with European universities, so.

7. **Interviewer** [0:08:08.0] Okay. Yeah, I've seen while preparing for this interview how many projects you're doing and you've done, and it's really impressive. I wondered, could you tell me in your opinion, what were the main accomplishments of the Acopian center in the past years?
8. **Interview Partner** [0:08:26.0] I would say, you know, if I were to point to any accomplishment. This is something to be verified, because we haven't done a rigorous analysis of this, but my sense would be really elevating the environmental topic and the public discourse so that it doesn't become a radical kind of fringe issue, but it becomes more of a mainstream issue to be taken seriously and into consideration and policymaking and economic decisions and social decisions. And I think kind of to create this one point in the country where there is trust and the

independence and objectiveness of the endeavour. And I think that that's kind of an accomplishment that I think is important for the country as a whole. One place where people feel comfortable and there's trust that there's no ulterior motives other than exploring the topics and understanding, you know, the best path forward. That would be, I think, if we actually have done that. I mean, my sense is we have. But if we actually have done that, that would be a great accomplishment.

9. **Interviewer** [0:09:55.0] How many people are working at their Acopian Center at the moment?
10. **Interview Partner** [0:10:00.0] Steady, about 12. But, you know, depending on projects we take on people project based so it can go up to 30, 40 people.
11. **Interviewer** [0:10:12.0] OK, and you've already mentioned the mining issue, but could you briefly describe the main environmental issues in Armenia that you work with or that you're involved in?
12. **Interview Partner** Well, in terms of environmental issues, I would say, use of technology in monitoring environmental governance, I think would be one direction. Mining has been another area of activity. But mining is not only an environmental issue and mining, social, public health, issues of economic justice issues, fairness issues, economic development issues, so occupational safety and health issues. So there's a lot of things in mining that goes beyond the environment. That's why we created this other center called Center for Responsible Mining I don't know if you had a chance to look at it. So. And then the other areas that we're active in right now in terms of biodiversity. So kind of improving the research methods on biodiversity with the university on this project that I showed, this project called Gates, the acronym is Gates. That's the kind of work we've done. We've done some work with, again, human relationship to nature in terms of wild harvest. And, you know, how do you bring the wild harvest into a form that you reduce any kind of negative impact and you make it a more of a sustainable practice? We've done some work on that and right now, also based on this guidance that I showed, we're developing a series of videos, educational tools we're developing, where our hope is that we'll have a campaign again on the birds of Armenia and, uh, and we distribute three thousand copies or so of the text of the book to schools across the country, the are nine hundred schools across the country, and also distribute these videos with some activity handbook so that teachers can integrate them into their courses and use them both as, of course, content, but also possibly as extracurricular. And so we have approval from the Ministry of Education to distribute these books and schools, and we will be doing it with them along with them. It's not going to be all of them. And so and then around that start an awareness raising campaign on birds and bird biodiversity conservation. So those are the kinds of biodiversity work. We're doing right now one on water related issues, we're doing some work around Lake Sevan, and we're looking at how do you reduce the nutrient loads of water, runoff water, surface runoff water or rivers coming into Lake Sevan, because often they either have a sewer in it or which has high nutrient content or they have runoff and wash off nutrients from fields of nitrogen and phosphorus and so on and so. And then it

adds to this nutrient loading of the lake, which as we've seen over the past few summers has led to algal blooms in the lake. And one thing we're working on is kind of some bio remediation, if you will, solutions how you can grow. Duckweed is a plant that grows very fast, but is also absorbs a lot of nutrients quickly. And then once that's absorbed, if it doesn't have the metals and problems with the chlorine pollution toxicity, then it could be used a feed for animals. So it creates a circular economy cycle. So those are the kinds of things we're working on. Or if you don't use it for, for a feed because it's not clean, then you can use it for energy purposes. So, so those are the kinds of things we're doing, environmental related. On the mining, in my opinion, the mining sector's issues are basically governance issues. It's the, uh, it's the government's inability to really manage the sector, I think is the main problem. And there's so much you can expect a company to do, the companies to make profit. The purpose of the company is to make profit. So you can't expect them to, to self-regulate in a way when there's no ulterior incentive to to regulate themselves. So I think consistently there has been a failure of governance in the country. And I don't know if you've done any background reading. I did an article on this in 2018, and it kind of outlines how this failure actually happens and the extent to which the problems is so deep and, you know. And, uh, I mean, they really require - it really requires a serious focus on - on trying to shift how things are done.

13. **Interviewer** [0:16:24.0] I think we'll come back to your experience and your cooperation with the government as well. Maybe for now, let's turn to cooperation with the EU that you've done so far. From what I understand, you are more connected to the USA, right? How how did you - no? OK, because from at least from the history, I got the impression and also from the American University you you cooperate with I got the impression that you are more related towards the U.S. than - OK, then -
14. **Interview Partner** [0:17:04.0] Actually, it's been very difficult to get U.S. Funding for environmental work.
15. **Interviewer** [0:17:08.0] OK?
16. **Interview Partner** [0:17:10.0] They have been very focused on water management issues and it's a long process of partnership and universities work very well. So no, actually, EU has been a much bigger source of support for environmental work.
17. **Interviewer** [0:17:30.0] OK. Could you describe the cooperation you've had?
18. **Interview Partner** [0:17:34.0] Yeah, I think there's three or four modalities of working with the EU. One, of course, is the Erasmus plus modality, which is the University-to-University-Mobility - Student, Faculty and Staff Mobility. And there is also capacity building actions. So that's available, and we've used that and, and we've been part of projects to build capacity. AUA as a whole is using also that quite a bit, not only environmental center. And then, the second area where we've been active is this Black Sea cross-border cooperation programmeme, whose secretariat is headquartered in Romania. This is kind of the interregional work,

modelled on the European interregional support mechanism and I think more from this programme cycle on, it's becoming kind of pretty much almost the same as the interregional European support mechanism. And we've had several projects on that from that modality. And there the idea is that you encourage not only university partnership or collaboration, but regional within the Black Sea region, cooperation countries. But it doesn't have to be the university. It also can be government and civil society. So it's a bigger mix. And then Horizon 2020 is the other, of course, was the other. And now Horizon, you're coming on from next month or so, the first publications of the call. And so those are also the major research funding, which is the major research funding available. And then with the EU delegation here, there's also the individual calls that are made. I have to say we haven't been as successful with the EU delegation calls here so far. And sometimes there's an environmental focus, sometimes it's a civil or broader civil society focus. But even when there's a broader civil society focus, there's always an element of environment in the European Green Deal that is added. And then there's also been some consultancy work with the EU delegation and figuring out their - this was years ago, 2018 or so, maybe 2017, about kind of background research on environmental topics and waste management topics.

19. **Interviewer** [0:20:43.0] OK.

20. **Interview Partner** [0:20:44.0] That's the EU Commission now, but of course, with EU member countries, there's bilateral relationship. So I don't think you're looking at those issues, right?

21. **Interviewer** [0:20:52.0] No, unfortunately, that would be too big. OK, when you apply for an EU grant or for an EU programme, what are the challenges there?

22. **Interview Partner** [0:21:09.0] It's a challenge and an opportunity at the same time. I think the biggest challenge is to make sure you come up with the right consortium. And EU grants pretty much blanket. They require group applications, which I think is a very positive element of EU projects, is that it makes you find partners and start working with them and connecting institutions and connecting research agendas. Also with Horizon 2020, of course, and now with Horizon Europe, the issues are very complex challenges, right? So in those complex challenges, you have to bring in various disciplines and start working together. And EU projects require that so that becomes a challenge to find a consortium, especially if you're from a country like Armenia where you're not as connected. It becomes a challenge. Our success has been that we've been able to link with partners in Europe and across the world, and those partnerships have been successful enough so that there's been repetition. They would come back and wanted to partnership with us again and we come up with ideas and they are interested in pursuing and this, I think for us, finding the, these partnerships is the biggest challenge. And it's not only for us, it's for Armenia in general, right, because when you're, let's say, active research or Europe or an active NGO in Europe, you're highly connected to, to the European scene, right? You know, who's who, who's doing what, you know, you have to be, right. In

Armenia, you have to get to that point. And I think that's, that's the process we're going through. [coughing] Let me just get some water.

23. **Interviewer** [0:23:22.0] Yeah. No problem. OK. Uhm - is it always like that that you have to find other partners to cooperate - like to apply?
24. **Interview Partner** [0:24:09.0] Yeah, I mean, I don't know of a single European project that says you just apply. I mean, you have to come with the partnership. Even the EU delegation grants that are offered through the EU delegation here. They always require at least two or three partners. Which I think is a very positive thing.
25. **Interviewer** [0:24:32.0] And is there big competition in your experience for grants?
26. **Interview Partner** [0:24:37.0] Out of this world the competition. Very, very intense. Yeah.
27. **Interviewer** [0:24:44.0] OK, and -
28. **Interview Partner** [0:24:46.0] But, but the EU is doing well, I think is. It's introduced this two phased application so that you introduce some of the concepts and then if the concept is OK, then you go to the full application, which saves a lot of money and energy and nerves.
29. **Interviewer** [0:25:08.0] Interesting. OK. And, when you've been accepted for a project or programme, how does the implementation process look like? Is there a lot of monitoring, for example, or were there specific challenges to implement these projects?
30. **Interview Partner** [0:25:32.0] They're very bureaucratic, they're very, very complicated rules of implementation, and if you don't have the financial, the controls and the accounting systems in place on the project management capacity, you're going to have a very hard time, you know. And, you know, I think over the years, there's been tolerance, but I think more and more EU is getting stricter and expecting countries to build up capacity because, you know. I mean, you can't be hand-held for 20 years, 30 years. You have to grow into - you have to have the systems in place, right? So. [Pause] So I think. Yeah, it's not it's not to get EU funding, this is not the easiest money, definitely.
31. **Interviewer** [0:26:31.0] That's interesting that you mention that it gets more strict and not less, because I would imagine that in order to support or empower local NGOs, small NGOs, it requires a certain level of flexibility from a donor's side.
32. **Interview Partner** [0:26:51.0] I think, they demonstrate that. But the thing is, you're not doing the organisations any favor if you're too relaxed because they really need to build capacity. And part of building capacity is understanding the accountability and uh, you know, transparency and being able to account for every - I mean, we've had projects where, let's say, some partners, not in Armenia, in another country, you know, they just went the way they would do in their own country and this was completely unacceptable for the EU. You can't prepay people

for work they haven't done it yet. And you can't, you know. And so [coughs]. And so it ended up in lawsuits and this is part of the EU pressuring countries to take this work seriously, it's not a gift, you know, it's for you to do work and to generate results, right. So I think it would be very - it would be a mistake if the EU just was very soft on this. But on the other hand, from the EU side, it has quite a bit of administrative burden on the EU to manage, obviously, these projects.

33. **Interviewer** [0:28:10.0] And is there - so there is monitoring in place also during a project. How does that look like?
34. **Interview Partner** [0:28:19.0] Well, generally, the most standard, typical what happens is interim reports, quarterly reports, financial, narrative reports of what's going on. And then whether it's acceptable or not - We're running out of time, I guess.
35. **Interviewer** [0:28:36.0] Yeah, I just saw that. It's really weird because normally when there are two people in a Zoom, it doesn't happen or it's not supposed to happen.
36. **Interview Partner** [0:28:44.0] Oh, you know why? Because I joined from another, there is three of us.
37. **Interviewer** [0:28:49.0] OK, then maybe in like seven minutes, let's restart because I don't have a pro account. I'm sorry.
38. **Interview Partner** [0:29:01.0] So that's the most standard way and then, of course, there's usually in the management systems, there's, you know, usually a steering committee, you know. With the project and, uhm, and the EU may be part of that in the local projects, not the Horizon 2020, not that, but EU delegation personnel may be on the steering committees and so on. So that's the way it kind of usually works. And then, you know, the rules are, of course, the rules are very thick and you have to make sure whatever purchasing you do, whatever sub-granting you do, whatever expenses you incur, they're all consistent with the rule books and they actually check.
39. **Interviewer** [0:29:54.0] So before we re-start, one last question. What is your overall impression from cooperation with the EU?
40. **Interview Partner** [0:30:15.0] Uhm, I mean, other than just saying positive, I want to I want to see if I can - can we disconnect and connect? Let me think. You know, I want to say something useful, not just. OK.
41. **Interviewer** [0:30:29.0] OK, then see you in a moment.

Interview 3 – ARM_NGO1, Part 2 – Acopian Center

1. **Interviewer** OK, maybe in order to specify the question, because I know it's quite broad: Is in your experience, do you think that cooperation with the EU is effective and does it have a sustainable impact on the work you do?
2. **Interview Partner** [pause] I would say absolutely, yes, because the... For instance, take this RESPONDRONE project: this very much allows us to do - it's the topic of disaster, first responder, kind of situational awareness. It's not only an environmental issue. It helps first responders and environmental conservation, if there's forest fires, natural disasters. But we've been able to bring in engineering know-how and make this really multidisciplinary at the Armenian end and not only the whole consortium and I think that's a positive impact. The experience of our engineering teams working with the European and international teams, it's been mind blowing. I mean, they have grown so much from these interactions with these really world class organisations and institutions. But having said this, of course, it could be the opposite or a disaster or a waste of time if the consortium isn't right. And so you really need to form the right consortium. And I guess sometimes it happens that not the optimal consortium gets approved for the projects that could happen also. But we've been lucky enough to have groups and consortiums and management of this consortium done well so that there's a lot of benefits and that the other part is: it takes two to tango, right. You have to be involved and you have to get things out of it, right. So I think that's very important for all entities from countries like Armenia to, to keep in mind that they're not being given anything. You're expected to deliver, you're expected to, you know, have outputs and you're expected to have value added of participation in the project. And for us, that's been a huge growth experience for our staff.
3. **Interviewer** Are there any aspects that you would say could be improved as well?
4. **Interview Partner** Uhm. [Pause] I mean, when it comes to - Initially, I think for us, the problem was the consortium. [drinks] And this is different from Horizon 2020 to Black Sea Cooperation to Erasmus Plus. I think we're getting also to learn more how to effectively use - and now with Covid, there's no travel, but, there's too much traveling and flying back and forth. It was just very time consuming to do that, traveling back and forth. It was kind of team building. It was impacting the ability for projects to be, you know, there was an important component of success of projects. But I think now, post-covid we'll have a hybrid system where we don't have to fly around the world for every meeting, right. So meeting you face to face conferences and get together would be very, uh, kind of, will have a special place and it'll probably be more effective use of modality. So I think, it might - it's just the amount of time is required to maintain these relationships and run around and, I think that was probably the most, uh - in some ways essential, but in some ways probably could have could be managed better.
5. **Interviewer** Yeah, that's interesting. That's something that I'm hoping for personally, this hybrid system.

6. **Interview Partner** But when you start getting to these projects, you know, it's just your life turns into travel and it's just not fruitful. It's just very frustrating. But you have to.
7. **Interviewer** OK. Is the EU involved in mining as well in Armenia?
8. **Interview Partner** No, EU has not been very active on mining issues. [pause] For reasons perhaps I don't fully understand. But if you look at CEPA, the comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement between the EU and Armenia, which is March 1st, I guess it was approved by the EU parliament. There are elements there related to mining, yeah, about mining governance and mining for uhm, no. I don't know what else to say because they just have not been very vocal at all.
9. **Interviewer** OK.
10. **Interview Partner** And the mining sector has been very contentious in Armenia, especially most recently with one mine that was trying to open up and there are still fights going on. And one of the biggest mines in Armenia, the biggest mine in Armenia, probably the region, the Kajaran mine in the South, molybdenum and copper. It was for the longest time, recently, there was some sales and transfers that happened, but it was seventy five percent German. Right. And even the German government wasn't very vocal. Right. So there was kind of a silence, quite a bit of silence and you know. No, I don't know what else to add on that.
11. **Interviewer** I think you already mentioned it briefly, but has cooperation changed with the EU over the years? You said it became stricter. Is there anything else that has changed, for example, since Armenia joined the Eurasian Union? That was, I think, an important moment.
12. **Interview Partner** Well, there was a shock, I think, to the process. But then Armenia and the EU worked out this alternative agreement, which in many ways doesn't have all the elements. So, again, I'm not an expert in this, but doesn't have all the elements of the association agreement, but it has lots of elements of harmonising, and taking EU directives as guidelines and and approximating, if you will. And so there's lots of elements of that. And if we do end up actually adhering to all the provisions of the agreements and making them happen, it would be a pretty significant impact on the country and its legislative system, especially on the environmental governance, but I'm sure the others as well. So, I don't think the - long term, there has been... I think, the EU policy, the overarching EU policy of the Eastern Partnership, you know, has kind of – that's my view, and again, I'm not an expert, I don't follow these things very carefully, but my view is the Eastern Neighbourhood Partnership policy of the EU has kind of looked over this issue of the Eurasian Economic Union versus joining the EU. Because I think, the recent years, the past year, there's been lots of things happening, but I think there's an awareness in the EU is that we don't want to recreate the Cold War divisions. So the Eastern Partnership, as I see it, the Eastern Partnership policy, the policy has been to

continually break down walls and build bridges to avoid this kind of polarization. I see that as the main kind of effort, so even though Armenia kind of did a quick turn and went the Eurasia route, that was a shock initially. And then they came up with the CEPA agreement, which is in many ways very similar to I guess the Association Agreements.

13. **Interviewer** OK. Do you do you know of any similar projects or opportunities that the Eurasian Union offers to environmental NGOs or NGOs in general in Armenia?
14. **Interview Partner** No, not at all. I don't think anyone, any entity outside of the EU does anything of this scale. And also, you know, a lot of what the EU offers doesn't operate for Eastern Neighbour countries, it's allowing people to join its own initiatives, right. So. And certainly nothing of that scale exists in the Eurasian partnership.
15. **Interviewer** [Cat jumps on table] I'm sorry, it's my mom's cat.
16. **Interview Partner** Cats love to do that.
17. **Interviewer** Yes, they do. Um, OK. It's really interesting. So also when Armenia joins the Eurasian Union, you didn't see any change whatsoever and it didn't have any impact on your work and on your cooperation with the EU.
18. **Interview Partner** But I think, again, whether you're taking that first year after that happened versus what evolved in the following years, you know, I think there was definitely a shock in the first year. And we even saw our, you know, I don't know - I recall like the first year of the, [pause] I think it was Erasmus plus project. Suddenly the local rates went down quite a bit. What you could charge, it was almost like a retribution. But that was short.
19. **Interviewer** OK.
20. **Interview Partner** But again, if you talk to the specialists who follow these things, they may have noticed fundamental shifts. But, you know, there is no less activism in EU opportunities, there's no less EU opportunities now than before. I don't see any loss because, I mean, the question is, is Armenia eligible? As an eligible country, you apply and and the process there may be at some fine level political. But also, in many, many cases, it's a very mechanical means you're eligible, and then you are judged on other factors.
21. **Interviewer** OK, then let's turn to the last block: the role of the EU for your work and the sector in general. I mean, you've covered many things here already. But what I would be really interested in hearing about is comparing the EU with the US and maybe again, Eurasian Union, because from what I've learned from Georgia so far, for example, USAID is really active. So what, what are other important actors in Armenia in general, concerning environmental work?
22. **Interview Partner** I think in the 90s, until 2010, 2012 or so, USAID was the major player in this region, including some environmental work. But after that, kind of

USAID pulled back and... Also, it became much more sector specific, so USAID has continued to work in the water sector and it will continue to work in the water sector. Having said that, it's very interesting that - this is a very side note, just an observation, if you will: USAID spends a lot of money on water systems, but basically the companies that end up getting the water management contracts are European companies like Veolia and all that. [pause] The EU has also been, the EU delegation is also involved in the water sector, they've supported some water sector policy dialog process. This was maybe 10 years ago. So now I think the biggest, in terms of overall environmental funding, again, not Armenia specific, but broadly what is available, EU is going to have the lion's share, is gonna have offering the biggest share, especially with the European Green Deal. I mean, because a lot of the Horizon Europe funding is kind of, structured around the Green Deal. So and that is not a guarantee money for a country like Armenia, but it's an opportunity to get involved in. I don't know what they're planning over the next few years with respect to - kind of through the Delegation in Armenia, media kind of earmarked funding. Right now, a lot of the funding is focused on - the recent call, which is two million and some hundred 60.000 euros - it's focused on a civil society capacity building and monitoring of police and judicial reforms. So there was a call that had an environmental bent to it, in October was the deadline and seven hundred thousand euros, so that's the scale they've been working on in Armenia at the Delegation level, but I think it would be a mistake to just focus on the Delegation funding available because there's this Black Sea Corporation. And, you know, I think a lot of Armenian organisations are now partners in different Black Sea projects. And pretty much all of them are environmentally focused. Some of them may be tourism. But again, with an environmental focus.

23. **Interviewer** Is the environmental sector big in Armenia? I mean, from environmental NGOs.
24. **Interview Partner** There's lots of people. But I would say it's a very disorganized, it's a very divided sector.
25. **Interviewer** OK, let's see. [pause] Yeah, maybe as the last topic, let's turn to what you mentioned initially, your cooperation and work with the government.
26. **Interview Partner** I'm sorry, can I just add one more thing?
27. **Interviewer** Yes, of course.
28. **Interview Partner** The environmental work - I mean, again, if you're talking about EU specifically, then what I said is fine. But there's also, for instance, German funding of biodiversity work. This is very significant in this region. Not only in Armenia, also in Georgia and Azerbaijan. So I think the German funding has been the primary funding source for biodiversity related work. I mean, it's not EU, but it is very significant. Also SIDA is becoming more active in the region, this Swedish international development agency. So, you're going to have some more bilateral activities there.

29. **Interviewer** Yeah, this is something that, that I learned for Georgia as well. That EU is most important in terms of cooperation and then it's bilateral cooperation with EU countries.
30. **Interview Partner** Right.
31. **Interviewer** Thank you. OK, then let us - OK. We have 9.30 now, 11.30, it's in Armenia, right? Right, yes. OK, so how is the situation with the local government and how do you cooperate? What are the challenges there?
32. **Interview Partner** Well, local governments or the national governments?
33. **Interviewer** Both. Just administration.
34. **Interview Partner** Well, with national government, we have several ways of working. [pause] Yeah, I don't know how to approach the issue. I mean, we've got, for instance, we've got initiatives where we're - one is Swedish funded, the other one is an Armenian foundation - where the government kind of identifies priority areas of research. [pause] And then we do the research and there is kind of integration into their policies. That's kind of the idea. It's just been very difficult to get that done, because of the government and its very poor capacity to engage and taking research results and integrating them into policy or their work, right. And I think there's a lot of the weaknesses in the government, national government apparatus in terms of working with advice, external advice. There's institutional gaps there and also I think staffing issues is definitely there. I mean, on the one hand, they're overstaffed. On the other hand, you know, probably 90 percent aren't doing anything and can't even do anything because they don't understand the issues and that the ten percent that can work, they're overwhelmed. They're just not able to. And for instance, we have projects now that have been waiting for responses for four months now, five months. And, you know, OK, I understand it was the war. And this person who we're working with just lost three people in her staff, right. And even when they were there, they weren't really active, you know? I mean, they couldn't really make decisions. So it makes it very difficult to do good paced engagement, you know. I think that's one of the frustrations we've had. And the other frustration I have is that I think when most governments and this is probably related to the first topic, there's just no capacity for dialogue. They would have these kind of NGOs or civil society advisory boards minister would have a scientific advisory board. But those are very symbolic. They are just for show, right. They don't get meaningful impact into decision making processes. And also, you know, and I don't know whether this is a Soviet phenomenon or is the machismo, what is it that, you know, it's discussing and disagreeing and discarding a position, adopting a new position, the process of a dialogue that you give and take and you understand and you grow and change your mind. That's just not something governments have been ready to do. And it's been, you know, whenever you say a policy dialog around this topic, everyone's face just like glazes over. It becomes like blank, you know, they don't even know what you're talking about, right. I think that's one of the frustrations with national governments. With local governments there may be interest and there may be opportunities to

work more with them. We just need to find the right modality because with local governments, the problem also is they have so many kind of formal things and tasks they have to do and also, I don't know, I guess this is everywhere in the world, but this just becomes so articulated in Armenia. I don't know if it's the same in Georgia, but I would assume it's a Soviet phenomenon, you know, that people have their mandate and their mandate is: this is, the law says I have to do X, Y and Z. And anything outside of this is just - I cannot do, I actually cannot. I cannot take interest in the economic growth development of my region because that's not part of my charter as the local government. I mean, the ridiculous things - I mean, coming from a US background where local governments are actually - nothing in the law says you have to do. They just are interested in economic development of their city and they organize things around that. And here, actually, you can't do that, unless the law gives them the mandate to do it. So I think there's these frustrations of working and this also comes in the realm of, kind of cross-sector collaborations or NGOs working with local governments, universities working with local governments. How do you make this happen in a way that they're not dragged into it or they're not incentivized by funding, but they actually see an opportunity of getting resources they don't have locally to solve local issues and problems. So I think that's been the challenge with local governments that we have this whole idea of what we call reality labs at AUA, the University of Armenia, which our new president, she has been around for a year and a half. She's Swedish, actually. She's from - she was the President of Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenborg. So she had she did this over there and it worked. And so she wants to bring these ideas of how do you create this university business, government partnerships, maybe civil society partnerships in addressing complex challenges, local conflicts challenges. And you built a reality lab around it where it's not - no single entity is going to be able to solve the problem, but together, bringing the resources together so that each element could get much closer. And also, it's a longer term engagement, it is not a project based engagement. Right. So it's a much more a platform where you continuously talk and figure out, you know. So we'll see if this works, this approach works. It requires institutional laws also, a back on which we're building. So I think these are the frustrations we've had working with governments. On the other hand, I have to say there's been some occasions, and I don't know if I'm just imagining it or if it actually worked, you put the government in a position where they have to respond. We did, we did this with the mining sector. We did this with forest sector. You know, I mean. [pause] There's ways in which, let's say universities and perhaps NGOs, if they are work cleverly, they can get governments to react and then engage in the topic. But also, what government has done successfully is ignore. I mean, when they don't want to engage - because it can be brutal when you engage publicly. And the form of engagement also has been mostly confrontational, and I think that's one of the things in this region. I'm suspecting it probably was the same way in Georgia. I think governments have so much on their hands. I mean, when you enter government, it's warfare, right? It's just like every direction there's things going on, and decisions you have to make and things you have to implement. You have to show people that you're doing something. So and then you're getting all this

criticism and your, I think, natural response is to build walls, right. To protect yourself because you can't handle it, it's overwhelming. You can't handle all of it. So I think what has also been missing is this culture of constructive engagement and civil society, I don't know, maybe because of the types of funding that civil society has received, but up to now it's not been about deliberation. It's been about advocacy. It's been about campaigns. It's been about fighting something. And that puts governments usually into fights. And that may have its positive impact, but it also shuts down doors. Right. So but maybe along with that, there could be this culture of deliberation, engagement in ways that can get better results. And that's one of the directions we're hoping, for instance, with PERITIA, a project that will organize several citizen assemblies across Europe, including Armenia. So that's one of the ways in which introducing deliberative tools right into, into public discourse and the civil society and public sector engagement.

35. **Interviewer** But I mean, the, the EU is also involved with the government, right. And they're projects that aim at enhancing administrative capabilities.
36. **Interview Partner** Right, of course, there's a lot going on. And with the EU, of course, the government is more responsive because there's direct funding to get. But you know that works also. The EU also has... But you know, with EU, UN, all these agencies, it's very rarely that there would be a clash. It's all accommodating, discussing, you know. [16.8s] Even if you have the most brutal government here, you know, they would still sit down and accommodate things, like a lot of civil society organisations were not put out for. Not so much the EU, but the UN definitely. Their mandate is not to change governments. Their mandate is to work with governments. So that can be frustrating for civil society sometimes. But I mean, of course, these bodies directly work with government and they do have an influence also.
37. **Interviewer** Yeah, that would be my next question, how would you assess the EU's leverage on the Armenian government? [pause] Would you say it's quite high, like let's say the conditionality it has on Armenian government? Because I know from Georgia that it's quite high because Georgian government wants to come closer to the EU if possible. And Armenia, I would guess it's more difficult also because of the Eurasian Union, but -
38. **Interview Partner** Yeah, the Eurasian Union, of course, is on economic issues. Again, this getting into politics that I don't quite understand, but, you know, I think. [pause] Certainly on geopolitics, EU doesn't even get involved in Armenia. It's mostly a Russian game, you know. So, when it comes to environmental and trade and judicial reform and rights protection, the EU Framework and CEPA will have significant impact. So I think the EU has a lot of mechanisms through which it can influence Armenia's developments. And the thing with EU is that it has all these requirements and it's funds, it's also there's funding that comes with this. So. [pause] Yeah, I mean, I think on certain sectors, EU will have significant impacts; on others, EU isn't even interested in.

39. **Interviewer** Okay. Cool, I think. From my side, I have asked all the questions that I wanted to ask, is there anything that you feel like I have forgotten something that you would find important.
40. **Interview Partner** And what is your thesis, I mean, what is your, what is your main claim? What are you trying to - or are you just exploring right now?
41. **Interviewer** No. I mean, from from the theoretical foundation I want to use, it's more about how the EU interacts with its partners on a national, ministry level, NGO level, and ideally also with companies it funds in the two countries. And, yeah, but I mean, you've given me lots of really useful information about how the EU communicates and cooperates in Armenia with NGOs or at least with your NGO and from your experience.
42. **Interview Partner** Now, I mean, with civil society, there's been a lot of - if you want to look more broadly, civil society, not only environmental topics, there's a number of organisations that have worked with the EU on bigger projects. And, you know, Capacity Building and civil society, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, you know, the number of organisations that have worked in this area quite a bit with the EU. They've also worked a lot with USAID so they can give you a compared picture of approaches. So. But environment, I think, you know. [long pause] I mean, one of the things maybe to look into also, is this Eastern Partnership NGO Forum, that is this kind of thematic groups of, I don't know, environment, human rights, education and so on and so forth. So I think one of the directions that the EU can encourage more is this various interest groups, if you will, or sectors of civil society to actually work together because it's very silent right now, environmental people at their work and, you know, community development people their work and gender people with gender related gender issues are focused on their issues and human rights people are focused on their issues.
43. **Interviewer** So more intersectionality so to say.
44. **Interview Partner** Yeah. There's definitely a direction there, a meaningful way of creating these kinds of bridges between. And EU has been actually pretty good doing that but making it conditional on funding. If you want funding, you do it this way and people then explore how to do it that way. So, you know, I think it's. I mean, EU has the tools to encourage that direction, if they put it in the - I think right now, gradually, I think they can get there.
45. **Interviewer** OK. OK, then I think we have reached the end of the interview. Thank you so much again, really, really helpful. Do you have any final questions for me?
46. **Interview Partner** No, just let me know when you have something to show.
47. **Interviewer** Yes, definitely will do. And one last question for you. Would you like me to anonymize quotes from this interview in my master thesis? Because I could either quote you as the director of the European center or I could just, like, leave out

your name basically and mention that one of the interviews was with the Acopian center. And yeah, that would be that.

48. **Interview Partner** No, I mean, I, I don't think I said anything that was scandalous or, you know, it's just, you know, my, my comments are really limited to my experience because I haven't studied this relationship, EU-Armenia. So it's very much limited to my experience. So.

49. **Interviewer** Yeah, but that's awesome. That's all I was looking for really. So thank you very much. And I will send you the transcript as soon as I have it.

50. **Interview Partner** OK, cool. All right.

51. **Interviewer** Have a great day and thanks for your time.

52. **Interview Partner** Thank you. Bye bye.

Interview 4 – ARM_NGO2, Part 1 – Green Armenia

1. **Interviewer** [0:00:02.0] Nice. Thank you. OK, then first question, could you please tell me more about yourself, about your position in Green Armenia?
2. **Interview Partner 1** [0:00:16.0] Mm hmm. Thank you. I am a journalist, documentary - [continues in Armenian]
3. **Interview Partner 2** [0:00:27.0] I will translate.
4. **Interview Partner 1** [0:00:32.0] Yes. [speaks in Armenian].
5. **Interview Partner 2** [0:00:41.0] OK, so, [Interview Partner 1] is the co-founder and the president and the head of this NGO, Green Armenia, and is making documentaries. Yeah, documentary filmmaking, on environmental issues mostly.
6. **Interviewer** [0:01:13.0] And what does Green Armenia mostly work with concerning environmental problems in Armenia? What are your projects?
7. **Interview Partner 1** [0:01:28.0] [speaks Armenian]
8. **Interview Partner 2** [0:01:53.0] So, for example, our organisation made its first movie documentary about monitoring, of mines - [asks Interview Partner 1 in Armenian] It was about all the mining operation in Armenia. So the organisation did this kind of monitoring documentary about the situation. It was translated into English and Czech because it was with Czech colleagues in cooperation with.
9. **Interviewer** [0:02:46.0] OK, interesting. I think I've seen the documentary last year. Yeah, I'm not sure.
10. **Interview Partner 2** [0:02:51.0] Just, that's just like one thing. Next thing.
11. **Interview Partner 1** [0:02:58.0] [speaks in Armenian]
12. **Interview Partner 2** [0:03:37.0] Another documentary, the organisation made was about Amulsar, a mining project and the fight against this project by the local communities and environmentalists throughout the past 14 years. And it was also about the international standards that the project always claimed to follow. And yet the how the environmentalists and locals made it clear that the standards are actually not protecting - well, let's say the standards are benefitting the investors mostly, and the and the companies.
13. **Interview Partner 1** [0:04:36.0] We have, in this film has English subtitles. You can see Amu-R-Sar. Amursar means strong mountain.
14. **Interview Partner 2** [0:04:51.0] Yea, it's a game of words. That's why. The name is Amu-L-sar. But yeah, I mean, you will see - you might have seen it as well. And probably we need to mention that the organisation is operational for like three years. So [Interview Partner 1] has many years of this kind of experience, like making documentaries and stuff. But with the organisation, it's quite new.

15. **Interviewer** [0:05:34.0] Okay, Anything else?
16. **Interview Partner 1** [0:05:46.0] [speaks Armenian]
17. **Interview Partner 2** [0:05:58.0] And so their main cooperation with the EU was another project through EU, Eastern Partnership, Civil Society Forum. There is such kind of thing, really. [laughs] They made a report about mining in Armenia and recommendations that could improve the situation.
18. **Interviewer** [0:06:29.0] And before we come to the to your cooperation with the EU, do you have any other donors or partners that you cooperate with?
19. **Interview Partner 2** [0:06:43.0] [translates; Interview Partner 1 answers]
20. **Interview Partner 1** [0:06:50.0] Yes, Green Armenia cooperated with Nesehnuti and the Global Green Grants Foundation.
21. **Interview Partner 2** [0:07:01.0] The first one is Nesehnuti, it's a Czech Organisation. And the other one is Global something called Global Green Grants.
22. **Interviewer** [0:07:18.0] Just what was the name of the Czech? Sorry, I didn't understand.
23. **Interview Partner 2** [0:07:21.0] Yes, it's a hard name. I think it's Czech, that's what it's hard to. OK, it's Neh-sen-huti something like that. You can see it in the videos, it's also at the end. There is this, you know, acknowledging.
24. **Interviewer** [0:07:47.0] So Green Armenia mostly works in the - concerns itself with the mining sector, or do you have other focuses as well on other environmental issues?
25. **Interview Partner 1** [0:08:00.0] Yes, we have a monitoring about Armenian forest in Dilijan. A member of Green Armenia, who has worked for us in the region has been monitoring the forest.
26. **Interviewer** [0:08:28.0] Cool, I've been talking to Dilijan three years ago. It's so beautiful. It's incredible.
27. **Interview Partner 1** [0:08:35.0] Now we want to monitor water resources in Armenia and want to explain problem -
28. **Interview Partner 2** [0:08:51.0] with small hydro-power plants, small and medium. We have mostly small that are quite harmful. And we would like to monitor the situation with those. But that's that's upcoming. Yeah, because they seriously harm the ecosystem but also deprive the locals from irrigation water, which is also a social problem. But we didn't do it. We plan to do it, hopefully.
29. **Interviewer** [0:09:29.0] OK, then let's turn to our second block, how you cooperate with the EU: can you describe the cooperation you've had so far with the EU?
30. **Interview Partner 2** [0:09:42.0] That project that we mentioned, it's like the only one and it was through mediating organisation. [speaks Armenian to Interview

Partner 1] So this EU Eastern Partnership that - let's phrase it this way: the EU Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, they have like, uh, groups working on certain issues. And Green Armenia is in the group which deals with environment, energy and transportation. And there was a call for regranting. And they applied and each organisation in each of these fields, transportation, energy and environment. They got some funds to do projects in each of these sectors. And Green Armenia is in this, environment specifically mining sphere and has written recommendations on how to improve.

31. **Interviewer** [0:12:13.0] And how did the application process work for this project?
32. **Interview Partner 2** [0:12:22.0] [translates into Armenian]
33. **Interview Partner 1** [0:12:23.0] Oh, yes, very easy, easy process.
34. **Interview Partner 2** [0:12:31.0] And reporting? [laughs] Usually that's the longer part. [translates into Armenian, Interview Partner 1 answers] So the reporting was more like the report itself that they made, or the report with their recommendations to change in the mining sphere. And because [Interview Partner 1] has been in this, it wasn't a hard process, about 10 pages of, you know, reporting, which was not a big deal.
35. **Interviewer** [0:13:23.0] OK, is there a lot of, or did you feel that there is a lot of competition for the grant, for the funding?
36. **Interview Partner 2** [0:13:50.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers]
37. **Interview Partner 2** [0:14:30.0] So I forgot the first part of the question. Sorry. Yeah, you said the competition. Now, [Interview Partner 1] says something that I forgot to say before. [Interview Partner 1] said that the Green Armenia is part of this forum. So and probably that also makes things easier. But [Interview Partner 1] says also that it wasn't hard to get these specific small grants because there were many problems raised and each group member out front was able to get some grant for doing their research there and reporting.
38. **Interviewer** [0:15:20.0] OK, and competition was not so much?
39. **Interview Partner 2** [0:15:23.0] Not so much.
40. **Interviewer** [0:15:26.0] Okay. How did you become part of this working group?
41. **Interview Partner 2** [0:15:30.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers].
42. **Interview Partner 2** So there is an application process that is at every year in January, they can apply and become if they fit the requirements, they can become part of the network.
43. **Interviewer** [0:16:12.0] And this network is the Civil Society Forum?

44. **Interview Partner 2** [0:16:18.0] EU, Eastern Partnership, Civil Society Forum.
Generally, I think networking, and being part of this kind of networks makes things easier, to be honest, as compared to when you apply, for example, for a grant, you know, as some unknown and I don't know, especially for the new organisations, new NGOs. It's better to get involved in such networks.
45. **Interviewer** [0:16:54.0] Are there many new and smaller NGOs in this forum or in this network or is it mostly older and bigger NGOs?
46. **Interview Partner 2** [0:17:09.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers].
47. **Interview Partner 2** [0:18:05.0] So. It's mostly old NGOs. Not many new ones are there, and also when there is a specific system of voting, when there is this chance or occasion when NGOs can go to Brussels to represent specific issues, that's where it's hard to get in, especially if it's a new NGO. Yeah, that's where things get harder because they have this kind of voting, which is – [Interview Partner 1] says it's not very clear how it takes place. Uh, yeah, it's not probably possible for especially new ones to go there, to represent some issues. Yeah, but other than that, yeah, it may be less hard to join them.
48. **Interviewer** [0:19:09.0] And the EU decides who goes or the forum? The NGOs vote?
49. **Interview Partner 2** [0:19:17.0] The forum. That's what I understood. [asks Interview Partner 1 in Armenian] It's done in the forum. Yes. So they decide and they make this voting, which is not very clear for someone like us, like new people. And yes, that's how it works. And then they decide who goes to represent issues and stuff like this.
50. **Interviewer** [0:19:56.0] And this is every year?
51. **Interview Partner 2** [0:19:59.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers]
52. **Interview Partner 2** [0:20:05.0] Before it used to be every year. Now it's every two years.
53. **Interviewer** [0:20:12.0] How long is green Armenia part of this forum, already?
54. **Interview Partner 1** [0:20:23.0] Yes, one year. OK.
55. **Interview Partner 2** [0:20:37.0] I'm in the process [audibly incomprehensible]
56. **Interviewer** [0:20:45.0] Sorry, what what do you say?
57. **Interview Partner 2** [0:20:47.0] I can imagine what you are after. I mean, all these procedures with accessibility maybe.
58. **Interviewer** [0:20:53.0] Yeah, yeah, exactly. Yeah. That would also be my next question. I mean, now we've talked about application process, but, um, how were

there any challenges in the implementation of the project and also challenges maybe with interacting with the EU?

59. **Interview Partner 2** [0:21:18.0] Uh. Which project?

60. **Interviewer** [0:21:21.0] The, I mean, your only did one project, right, with the EU? Or also in general if you have any other experiences.

61. **Interview Partner 2** [0:21:32.0] Yeah. [translates into Armenian, Interview Partner 1 answers].

62. **Interview Partner 2** [0:22:42.0] So the organisation itself hasn't applied to many EU funded projects. But [Interview Partner 1] did in the past and since got - says that the process, the application process is usually quite difficult and involves a lot of papers and bureaucracy. [Interview Partner 1] has been mostly rejected, so [Interview Partner 1] doesn't know what other obstacles could come up throughout the project implementation. But also we heard from others that also throughout the project implementation, that it's a lot of paperwork.

63. **Interviewer** [0:23:34.0] Do you get any reason why you have been rejected?

64. **Interview Partner 2** [0:23:43.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 replies].

65. **Interview Partner 2** [0:23:52.0] I think it's mostly no reason. Mostly, they say the standard: too many applications, bla bla, you know, high competition, basically. So mostly that's the standard answer now.

66. **Interview Partner 2** [0:24:17.0] OK, um, let's see. I mean, coming back to this forum that you're a part of and I mean, you have lots of experience with the EU throughout the years, your work in the field. Do you feel that overall cooperation with the EU is effective and successful?

67. **Interview Partner 2** [0:24:51.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers]

68. **Interview Partner 2** [0:26:07.0] So [Interview Partner 1] said that the forum is quite open in the sense that you can raise problems, etc., whether it affects policy or not, but at least on the level of raising questions, problems, especially in our case environmental. So it's a good platform. Although in the past year, because of the pandemic, it wasn't that easy - [asks Interview Partner 1 in Armenian].

69. **Interview Partner 2** [0:27:30.0] So I was just saying that because of the pandemic, but also because of the war in Armenia, the communication was not really taking place because it was not, you know, also safe in the sense to raise problems during war time. But also [Interview Partner 1] says that from own experience, aside from the organisation, overall raising problems with the EU is questionable as to how these questions affect policies because quite often when the issues are raised that, for example, there are undemocratic processes, the response is mostly prioritizing the economic benefits rather than democratic processes. And this is pretty much a

double standard, which is like [her*his] experience, also my experience, in other projects not related to Green Armenia. But yeah. So whether these questions that we raise are affecting policy making, that's the big question. That's what [Interview Partner 1] is saying.

70. **Interviewer** [0:29:10.0] Yeah. Could you both elaborate more on that? I mean the problems you see with the EU in Armenia and how the EU cooperates with environmental actors in general?
71. **Interview Partner 2** [0:29:42.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers].
72. **Interview Partner 2** [0:31:30.0] So the thing is, when we speak about European projects, we also mean that European banks well, in the sense that they had the experience of working, dealing with the EBRD. Maybe you know it. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. I don't know how much you are interested like in this bank, because maybe you are more interested in the European public institutions. So [Interview Partner 1] said that in case of Amulsar, they have written letters and complaints to this bank expressing that the project and the following activities do not correspond to the bank's own standards as well. Yeah, that's like one experience - [continues in Armenian, Interview Partner 1 answers]
73. **Interview Partner 2** [0:33:04.0] Because the EBRD also has this complaint mechanism. So these NGOs - not only Green Armenia, but others, too - did reply to them with this complaint, using this complaint mechanism. So, yeah. [continues in Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers]
74. **Interview Partner 2** [0:33:47.0] So they applied the complaint mechanism was around the four standards of the bank itself, the environment, human rights and cultural and corruption. In my experience which was with the waste management, because not just EU banks, including European Investment Bank, which is more controlled by the European institutions, public institutions, if I'm not mistaken, but also a European institution was itself involved in the name of which I forgot. But they have some energy agency or something like that. And it was also involved in this public institution. And they approved a landfill project which had no recycling components whatsoever. No recycling, no sustainability component. And it took us took us three years of correspondence with them. So if I was getting replies from the banks, these European public institutions never replied back.
75. **Interviewer** [0:35:26.0] OK, I'm sorry, our time is nearly up. Is it OK if we restart the link? Yeah. Sorry. Just for another 15 minutes. I'll be quick. OK, we'll see you in a minute.

Interview 4 – ARM_NGO2, Part 2 – Green Armenia

1. **Interview Partner 1** [0:00:01.0] You have to have to - you write an article, or a report?
2. **Interviewer** [0:00:18.0] For my master thesis. So it's like a long report, 60 pages.
3. **Interview Partner 1** [0:00:26.0] I can send to you to two films with English subtitles. You can see and analyse them.
4. **Interviewer** [0:00:37.0] Yeah, that would be great. Thank you. That would be very interesting.
5. **Interview Partner 1** [0:00:41.0] And I send to you our report about mining sector. So you can write, maybe, you know, use it.
6. **Interviewer** [0:00:54.0] OK, the one you did with EU support?
7. **Interview Partner 1** [0:00:59.0] Mm hmm. Yeah.
8. **Interviewer** [0:01:00.0] OK. Is [Interview Partner 2] coming back or?
9. **Interview Partner 1** [0:01:06.0] Yes, but [Interview Partner 2] is not here. One minute.
10. **Interviewer** [0:01:52.0] You don't reach [her*him]?
11. **Interview Partner 1** [0:01:55.0] [Interview Partner 2] will come back. We needed the programmeme, the financing for the community of Jermuk. We want to develop agriculture - [continues in Armenian].
12. **Interview Partner 2** [0:03:12.0] [Interview Partner 1] is saying that Jermuk community, because of the... The mining project didn't even start, but the community is automatically left out from projects that could develop alternatives, for example, agricultural projects. But it's not only in the case of Jermuk and this southern region, which is Vayots Dzor, but also the other southern region, Syunik, which is also very much a mining area. And European grants are only concentrating on the northern parts of Armenia, although it's not devoid of mines, but still is considered probably cleaner. I mean, they are forming a policy for Armenia and they make these investments in these northern three regions of the Tavush, Lori and Shirak. And the southern regions are left out, even though, as I'm saying, as we are saying, this Vayots Dzor area where Jermuk is, it doesn't even have mines, and it's in the prospect... It won't work because the locals won't let it happen. But even in this stage of planning, it's already left out from alternatives.
13. **Interview Partner 1** [0:04:50.0] [speaks in Armenian]
14. **Interview Partner 2** [0:05:11.0] For example, at some point UNDP did some project involving some of the villages, not all. In this area of Vayots Dzor is where Jermuk is. But the thing they said, it's because they pick these specific villages

because they were bordering villages, but now the whole region is bordering. So still they are not included in this project. Yeah.

15. **Interview Partner 1** [0:05:43.0] [continues in Armenian]

16. **Interview Partner 2** [0:06:47.0] [Interview Partner 1] is saying that, for example, they fund agricultural projects, green agricultural projects in the north, for example, while for the rest they announce funding for organic type of agriculture, which is kind of impossible in some southern regions. Not just because it's expensive, but also because some of these areas are just too far from organic because of the nearby industrial objects. So it sort of forms policy, as you can understand, for the country.

17. **Interview Partner 1** [0:07:42.0] [continues in Armenian]

18. **Interview Partner 2** [0:08:01.0] And the strange thing is that Lori, one of these northern regions, is also more or less industrial, it has some quite polluted areas and yet organic is not a must for them. So, yeah. So this concentration on the North and creating this conflict with the South is what [Interview Partner 1] is stressing.

19. **Interviewer** [0:08:37.0] OK, and these organic standards are applied by the EU.

20. **Interview Partner 2** [0:08:44.0] Yeah, and quite, quite high standards and it is also expensive to obtain such certificates, at least for these kind of countries. Maybe not so expensive for EU.

21. **Interviewer** [0:08:59.0] I understand. OK. Last question about EU cooperation. If you could write a letter to the EU and say all the things that you would like to change, what the EU could do better in Armenia concerning environmental problems, what would you write?

22. **Interview Partner 2** [0:09:38.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers].

23. **Interview Partner 2** [0:10:25.0] The first is to create also agricultural opportunities for the people in the South so that they have something to choose from and not to be face to face with the mining [audibly incomprehensible]. OK, so that's the first suggestion and the second suggestion is to comply to their standards also - not standards, but like when they talk about democracy to stick to it and not apply double standards based on economic interests. This is her [interview partner 1's] offer and suggestion, and on my part it would be firstly to reply to messages which I never got, and replies from any commissioner or whatever I wrote to regarding this unsustainable landfill project. And one would be, maybe that's too high, but to apply the same environmental standards as they apply in their countries. Because they announced funding this landfill, even when in the EU they planned to stop constructing landfills. I felt quite environmental racism coming from this, you know? And so it would be great to apply - to raise the standard, you know, the bar for countries like us also.

24. **Interviewer** [0:12:17.0] These are great suggestions. Thank you. OK, let's come to the environmental ministry and also, I don't know if you worked - have you worked with the Environmental Ministry before and do you think that it's doing a good job? Does it do good work?
25. **Interview Partner 1** [0:13:05.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers].
26. **Interview Partner 2** [0:13:08.0] Just recently, they joined the public advisory group, let's say it this way, public commission that the ministry has regarding environmental issues that it discusses with civil society actors, so they just joined recently, so it's not easy to give a presentation of satisfaction.
27. **Interviewer** [0:13:41.0] And Green Armenia joined there? And what is your role there?
28. **Interview Partner 2** [0:13:55.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers].
29. **Interview Partner 2** [0:14:16.0] This commission has subgroups and they are - and specifically Green Armenia is involved in water resource monitoring group, mining - [continues in Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers]. So, Green Armenia is involved in this water resource monitoring group, natural resource monitoring group and legislation. There is also another one which they are not involved, but it's like their main activities, like environmental education. So, yeah, that's it.
30. **Interviewer** [0:15:09.0] OK, last question. So what other actors in Armenia are important in environmental work?
31. **Interview Partner 1** [0:15:30.0] [answers in Armenian]
32. **Interview Partner 2** [0:16:15.0] You mean like what other important actors?
33. **Interviewer** [0:16:23.0] Internationally or nationally.
34. **Interview Partner 2** [0:16:26.0] On a local level we have, for example, initiatives that are quite strong, vocal, which is Armenian environmental front, but also the ECOLUR which is an NGO. It is an Environmental News Agency in the sense of raising issues, covering them and raising and public awareness, etc.. But also the communities themselves have become more active in protecting their own rights, environmental including. So yeah, these are the main actors, also some environmental lawyers. [names a lawyer], for example. Yeah, but she also has an NGO. But most people know her name and her work.
35. **Interviewer** [0:17:24.0] And international actors, for example, Eurasian Union, is it also important?
36. **Interview Partner 2** [0:17:32.0] Mh-mh. [laughs] Not that we are aware. I'll ask [Interview Partner 1]. [continues in Armenian, Interview Partner 1 answers] No, not that we know of.

37. **Interview Partner 1** [continues in Armenian]
38. **Interview Partner 2** [0:18:10.0] No, no, we don't really know if they have any component of the environment.
39. **Interview Partner 1** [0:18:23.0] [continues in Armenian]
40. **Interview Partner 2** [0:18:26.0] Yeah. There may be some collaborations or with UNDP that not Eurasian Union, but Russia itself does. But not that we know much about stuff.
41. **Interviewer** [0:18:39.0] OK, yeah, no problem. OK, good. Then I'm done with my questions. Is there anything that you would like to add, something that you find important that I forgot maybe.
42. **Interview Partner 1** [0:18:58.0] No, no. I sent to you all our films and links.
43. **Interviewer** [0:19:05.0] Cool thank you so much. Is it OK if I quote you by name in my master's thesis or would you like to be anonymous?
44. **Interview Partner 2** [0:19:18.0] [translates into Armenian; Interview Partner 1 answers]
45. **Interview Partner 2** [0:19:28.0] It won't be a problem.
46. **Interviewer** [0:19:30.0] OK, cool then. Thank you so much for your time and for talking to me and giving me all your knowledge and expertise. It's been really interesting. And yeah. Also, Sophia, thank you for translating.
47. **Interview Partner 1** [0:19:48.0] Thank you. And good luck with your thesis.
48. **Interviewer** [0:19:50.0] Thank you so much. I will be in touch. Bye bye. Have a good day.
49. **Interview Partner 1** [0:19:55.0] Bye bye.

Interview 5 – ARM_GOV – Ministry of Environment, Armenia

1. **Interviewer** Do you have any other questions for me before we start?
2. **Interview Partner** [0:00:07.0] You sent me three blocks of questions, so maybe we start - not maybe, so we start from the very, very first question about me.
3. **Interviewer** [0:00:22.0] Yes, that would be great if you could tell me a bit about yourself and your role in the Ministry of Environment.
4. **Interview Partner** [0:00:32.0] OK, I'm the press secretary of minister and also head of the Department of Information and Public Relations. That's my current position. But before I worked in National Assembly, in Armenia, in parliament, as assistant to the deputy, and then I had four years of experience working in television as the head of political and information department and also TV host, I had my, uh, I had my TV programme, public and political programme, and also during my experience or during my job, I also had very good experience with European structures, with European foundations, like, for example, Konrad Adenauer Foundation. And the last foundation was Robert Schuman Foundation. Also, I had one of month internship in parliament in 2013 in EPP group. So all in all, that's my experience, if you have any question you can ask me. So concerning my experience.
5. **Interviewer** What are your main tasks in the ministry right now?
6. **Interview Partner** [0:02:34.0] Main tasks are to provide information to the society about the environment, about our job, about our activities, about activity of ministry to minister, OK? About our projects and so on. To provide full information to our society and vice versa.
7. **Interviewer** [0:03:07.0] What are the main projects of the ministry right now concerning environmental problems in Armenia?
8. **Interview Partner** [0:03:17.0] You know, we have many projects, and we are trying to solve these environmental problems with the legislation, improvements concerning forest areas or concerning water areas, concerning, for example, mining areas concerning the - and other spheres of environment. So currently, we are trying to make new legislation packages concerning the forest area. And it's in process. Conserving water reserve area, concerning climate change area. And we also are active with the climate change area. And after our meeting, just I must participate in one of the meeting organized by UNDP concerning climate change.
9. **Interviewer** [0:04:44.0] OK.
10. **Interview Partner** [0:04:46.0] And also, I would like to say that I think that after the war, the 44-day war, we faced new challenges concerning environment. It's about that Azerbaijan used some kind of weapons that had a big, big disease for our environment. And that's another problem for us.
11. **Interviewer** [0:05:25.0] I read about it. It's horrible. Yeah.

12. **Interview Partner** [0:05:29.0] It's about forest areas, some water areas and so on.
13. **Interviewer** [0:05:42.0] OK. And, uhm, before we come to your cooperation with the EU, how do you work together with NGOs in Armenia and how do you see the situation of NGOs, environmental NGOs?
14. **Interview Partner** [0:05:59.0] You know, we have a Council joined to minister, our minister, which includes all the active NGOs, in the environmental sphere, yes? And we have meetings from time to time with that council. They raise all the problems concerning the environment and also, I have intensive links with these NGOs and leaders of NGOs and activists of environmental sphere, and this is an important tool in order to receive all the problems from NGOs and even we are trying to discuss some problems with NGOs, with activists of environmental sphere, and to try to solve that problem like that. This is an important tool in order to understand the processes in this sphere and to make some decisions and to solve that problems.
15. **Interviewer** [0:07:31.0] OK, how many NGOs are in this council that you mentioned?
16. **Interview Partner** [0:07:38.0] The members, 20 members, the main amount of that are NGOs. There are also press representatives from NGO - from environmental sphere, yes. And also, we have partners and members from academic sphere.
17. **Interviewer** [0:08:13.0] OK, interesting. Then maybe let's turn to your cooperation with the EU, I imagine, and I mean, I also did some research on that and there are many programmemes and many ways in which you can cooperate with the EU. But maybe you can just generally tell me about the cooperation you've had so far with the E.U. What comes to mind?
18. **Interview Partner** [0:08:40.0] You know, we have very intensive cooperation, very deep cooperation with the European Union. And you know about the comprehensive and enhanced agreement between Armenia and EU and we in the framework of that agreement, we have a big part of programmemes, and action plans concerning environment. It's very long. If you are interested, I can send you the whole package of that action and so on. It's very big. That's why I can't detailly explain what it is about, but it includes the whole sphere of Environment. Currently we have some projects in action with the European Union, for example, the EU4Sevan. It's a big project by 2024, it's a big project. [pause] And we have also EU4Climate, a regional project with our international partners, also with European Union and UNDP.
19. **Interviewer** [0:10:31.0] Is the first one, was it EU4Sevan, like Lake Sevan?
20. **Interview Partner** [0:10:46.0] Yes. And if you need more details about that programmeme, I can send you the whole package, because it's very long and very big and it's very difficult to explain the whole details, OK?
21. **Interviewer** [0:11:03.0] Yeah. Yeah, that would be great. OK.

22. **Interview Partner** [0:11:07.0] You know, as I mentioned, you know about comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement. And in a framework of that agreement, we have a very big deal concerning environment and the environmental sphere. It's very important for us, especially now after these events a few months ago.
23. **Interviewer** [0:11:37.0] OK, now and I mean overall, how does the EU assist you in environmental work? Is it mostly funding and money or knowledge transfer and training?
24. **Interview Partner** [0:11:53.0] It includes all the spheres, it's advice, it's money, it's infrastructure assistance, it's educational assistance and so on. I can say that just yesterday, in the framework of that agreement, it was started the construction process of soiled waste landfill in one of the regions of Armenia. It's very important for us. And also the ambassador participated in that opening ceremony, that starting ceremony. And so, the process is going on and we have an action plan, yes, by 2030 and according to that action plan, it includes financial assistance and advice and educational and infrastructural assistance and adoption of legislation of Armenia to European standards and so on.
25. **Interviewer** [0:13:26.0] And do you have the impression that the projects and programmes that the EU does generally fit the work you do in Armenia?
26. **Interview Partner** [0:13:37.0] Yes, it's very important for us. First of all, it's exchange of experiences and one of the useful experiences of protecting the environment is European model and we are trying to install that experience in our reality in Armenia through the adoption of, for example, our legislation to European legislation on that sphere and through the education, through the exchanging of experts or professionals and so on. And even our dialog also is some experience, exchange of experience.
27. **Interviewer** [0:14:32.0] I'm not sure how the application process works for the environmental ministry, but are there any challenges? When do you even have to apply for these EU funds? And if yes, are there any challenges?
28. **Interview Partner** [0:14:53.0] You know, all in all, we have no challenges with the work of European structures and organisations from Europe. I can say that our European friends are ready to help us. And if we have good projects, if we have a project that gives us good results for our environment, I think all the projects, I think that our European friends are ready to help us and finance our projects, to help realize the projects and so on.
29. **Interviewer** [0:15:48.0] OK, as far as I understand, sometimes you get money from the EU that you then distribute to environmental NGOs, right. How does that work?
30. **Interview Partner** [0:16:03.0] Well, it's a little bit difficult for me to say how it works in detail. But we have adopted plans, adopted projects - when we talk about bilateral relations on that level. And if it is adopted by European Union, it also has

the financial part of implementation. And as I mentioned, now the main projects are in a framework of CEPA.

31. **Interviewer** [0:16:50.0] OK, but do you then, um, do you then also work within the EU projects with NGOs in Armenia?
32. **Interview Partner** [0:17:01.0] Yes, there are some NGOs that work with European Union. There are many, many - we have a lot of NGOs that are active in that sphere that works. And both of EU [internet connection breaks]
33. **Interviewer** [0:17:26.0] Oh, now you're, now you're back.
34. **Interview Partner** [0:17:29.0] OK, with other international [internet connection breaks]
35. **Interviewer** [0:17:41.0] Somehow, I can't see and hear you anymore. Sorry, I didn't I didn't see you anymore. Oh, yeah, now you're back.
36. **Interview Partner** [0:17:54.0] Yes, so. Our NGOs, especially concerning environmental sphere are very active, they are very active, and they work actively with European Union and other international organisations.
37. **Interviewer** [0:18:24.0] Yeah, OK. But are there any problems or any challenges when you cooperate with the E.U.?
38. **Interview Partner** [0:18:35.0] You know, maybe there are some - there's some current problem, technical, maybe structural and so on, maybe I can't say that there is no problem. But all in all, it's a good experience with the European Union, not only in a sphere of environment, but also all the spheres of our activity, of our society and government activity. You know, we have a very good political dialog with the European partners, it includes also economic components.
39. **Interviewer** [0:19:31.0] OK, and when there is a project ongoing, is there any kind of monitoring from the side of the EU?
40. **Interview Partner** [0:19:42.0] Yes, of course, there are some tools of monitoring, because if a programme is failed, I think it's first of all, the problem of European Union or European side, because they must control the whole process. And, of course, I think there are some mechanisms of monitoring and control over those projects. So, Normal.
41. **Interviewer** [0:20:13.0] What kind of mechanisms? Just like reporting, or do you have a specific contact person that contacts you all the time, or how does it look like?
42. **Interview Partner** [0:20:25.0] No, you know, we have control of that. We talked about our NGOs, and I can say that one of the tools of that control are NGOs, because I have already mentioned they are very active. And if it concerns their sphere, they actively control the whole project. And also, I think I cannot say in detail, but I think European Union or European site also has their control or

monitoring mechanism. And the best monitoring is the result. When we start some project, and after the end of project, we receive the result we needed. It's the biggest and the best control mechanism. If we fail the project concretely, then the next project, I think the next project will not be launched.

43. **Interviewer** [0:21:40.0] OK, let's see. And have there ever been projects that with the EU, I mean, that you weren't satisfied with for whatever reason or that had problems?

44. **Interview Partner** [0:21:57.0] Oh, you know, this is my fifth month in this position. Right. I can't say that we have some projects that were not satisfied - so I don't remember such kind of project.

45. **Interviewer** [0:22:23.0] Yeah, I understand. OK, then. But maybe - Do you have the impression that the EU focuses in cooperation more on your side, on environmental ministry or on NGOs?

46. **Interview Partner** [0:22:45.0] Oh, you know, in a framework of Eastern Partnership. There is a platform, NGO platform and European Union focuses very special attention to NGOs and civil society. And that's one of the important directions of EU activity in Armenia. And it's important also for us because it's a very important component of democracy in Armenia. So, you know, in a framework of Eastern Partnership programmeme, we have also a major forum, platform, which includes the active major actors in Armenia and not only in Armenia, but also all the members of the Eastern Partnership. For example, I am the participant - I participated in the first Eastern Partnership, media forum. It was in Latvia, in Riga. And so it's very useful. Now, it was the first major forum, and so. And of course, we have, concerning your question, I can say that we have a very deep European Union attention on - interest in Armenia. It's not only NGOs, but the environment, economy, small business, economic assistance to Armenia, political and infrastructural, judiciary and so on. Every sphere of our life being so.

47. **Interviewer** [0:25:14.0] Yeah, I mean, from all these focuses, do you feel there is a certain - how do I say this - is it balanced or do you think that the EU is more interested in the economy or more interested in the environment, or is it -

48. **Interview Partner** [0:25:31.0] It's balanced. It's balanced. And also it depends on our priorities. When we talk about CEPA. That agreement was negotiated also by the side of Armenia and it includes our priorities also. It's not only priority of the European Union, but also our other priorities - it's a result of our together work, yes. For example, we said our European partners that we need a solution of these problems. OK. And these problems are included in that agreement. So, I think it's balanced.

49. **Interviewer** [0:26:32.0] Is there anything in the CEPA agreement that you miss or that you - like some issues where you say they should have included this?

50. **Interview Partner** [0:26:44.0] You know, the whole CEPA agreement is very long. I can disperse CEPA for you if it's interesting for you. The first is mobility, yes, between the European Union and visa facilitation.
51. **Interviewer** [0:27:10.0] No, I meant more, sorry, I meant more in the environmental sphere.
52. **Interview Partner** [0:27:20.0] I don't think that I missed something. All in all it includes all spheres of environment. Starting from education to NGOs to the legislation level to adoption of Armenian legislation to European standards, OK?
53. **Interviewer** OK, OK. I mean, you're new in this job, but I mean, do you have dealt in your several career steps with the EU. Do you feel that EU cooperation has changed in the past years, for example, since, I don't know, Armenia has entered the Eurasian Union or CEPA or has there been moments where it changed?
54. **Interview Partner** [0:28:14.0] You know, now I think it's already an institutionalized relation, because we have CEPA agreement and we have a concrete action plan. The CEPA agreement started, all the points started this year. So I can't say that our relations are not active and taking into account the fact that Armenia is a member of the Eurasian Union. This is some kind of unique partnership because Armenia is the only country that is both member of Eurasian Union and also has such kind of deep cooperation with the European Union.
55. **Interviewer** [0:29:32.0] What role does the Eurasian Union play for your environmental work? Are there also similar cooperations?
56. **Interview Partner** [0:29:43.0] We have also, we have also some projects, of course, in the framework of Eurasian Union, and it's also useful because we are in in the same area and economic area, first of all. Of course, we have also an environment agenda in that organisation, and it can only help to solve our environmental problem.
57. **Interviewer** [0:30:19.0] So when you compare your cooperation with EU and Eurasia, what are the differences, environmentally speaking, I mean?
58. **Interview Partner** [0:30:31.0] It's difficult to compare because. [pause] Because I think it's a big issue that we can discuss for another meeting, maybe, but I can say that with European Union, we have very, very big agenda concerning environmental area. Because one of the parts of our relationship between European Union is the direction of environment. So it's a special focus also on the environment and Eurasia - [internet connection breaks] Well, the Eurasian Union, that's first of all an economic union, so that's why we say comprehensive and enhanced partnership with the European Union. It includes all the spheres. It's some kind of balanced relation with the European Union.
59. **Interviewer** [0:32:06.0] What other international actors are important for your environmental work in Armenia? Besides that?

60. **Interview Partner** [0:32:16.0] From the side of EU?
61. **Interviewer** [0:32:18.0] No, other, other than EU.
62. **Interview Partner** [0:32:21.0] For example, United Nation and UNDP, GIZ. That's a German organisation, so.
63. **Interviewer** [0:32:50.0] And if you compare all these actors who - or like, um, yeah, if you can say that, who is most relevant for your work? From all these partners.
64. **Interview Partner** [0:33:07.0] You know, every partner has his priorities, and they all are important for us because it's - [pause] so, for us European Union is one of the main partners in environmental sphere. But also we have some organisations that are environmental organisations and have their specific sphere of cooperation with Armenia. So that's why they all are important for us and we actively work with all our partners.
65. **Interviewer** [0:34:01.0] OK, OK, last question, and I think, yeah, I think we already covered this somehow, but specifically: are there any aspects in EU cooperation, if you could send a letter to the European Parliament, would there be anything that you would like to improve in the cooperation? Are there any aspects?
66. **Interview Partner** It's very difficult, but of course, I would emphasise on the institutional aspect, yes, on institutional aspect in every sphere. To support Armenia more and more and concerning the institution in order to make them stronger, our institutions. I think that's a very important and big challenge for us, and with the experience of European Union - with the best experience of European Union, we can strengthen our institutions in every sphere not only environmental, but also the other parts of our state and of government.
67. **Interviewer** [0:35:35.0] OK, nice. Thank you. Is there anything that you feel that is important that I haven't asked you, that I have forgotten somehow?
68. **Interview Partner** [0:35:47.0] I think we talk about the whole issue. If you need some information, you can write me. I send you the whole information or programme packages or, I don't know. What can I - how can I help you? I'll help you.
69. **Interviewer** [0:36:12.0] Thank you very much. That's really nice. Thank you. Thank you so much for taking the time again. And is it OK for you if in my master's thesis, if I quote you by name, or would you rather be anonymous?
70. **Interview Partner** [0:36:27.0] You can, you can by name. There is no problem.
71. **Interviewer** [0:36:30.0] OK, cool. Amazing.
72. **Interview Partner** [0:36:37.0] I am [name left out] and my name is European.
73. **Interviewer** [0:36:39.0] [laughing] OK, this is amazing.

74. **Interview Partner** [0:36:43.0] OK, it's easy for you to call me by name. OK. It was pleasure for me.
75. **Interviewer** [0:36:55.0] For me too. Thank you so much and I will send you the transcript. And yeah if there are any documents about the environmental cooperation you can send me, I mean it would be useful.
76. **Interview Partner** [0:37:08.0] Yeah.
77. **Interviewer** OK, thank you.
78. **Interview Partner** [0:37:12.0] Thank you. Bye bye.

Interview 6 – GEO_GOV – Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Georgia

1. **Interviewer** [0:00:00.0] I will start the recording now and let's start with yourself, I mean, can you tell me a bit about your career and your position in the Ministry of Environment and Agriculture?
2. **Interview Partner** [0:00:15.0] My name is [name left out]. I'm the head of European Integration and International Relations Department - vice versa, International Relations and European Integration Department, because previously it used to be two separate departments. And two months ago the merger happened at the ministry. And now there is a unified department called International Relations and European Integration Department. I'm the head of this department. And as you can understand from the title of the department, I am dealing with international relations, bilateral cooperation with partner countries, with donors, and also relations with European Union, including the coordination of the implementation of association agreements signed between the EU and Georgia. Regarding my career, I have been working for the ministry since 2011. I used to be a head of the legal department for a few years. Then I was the head of European Integration Department and now I am head of this unified department. I am a lawyer and I am dealing with this EU integration topics, also dealing with donors.
3. **Interviewer** [0:01:33.0] OK, and what are the main tasks of your ministry?
4. **Interview Partner** [0:01:40.0] Actually, there is a quite wide portfolio and mandate that our ministry is responsible for. A few years ago, there was a structural reform within the government of Georgia, and it was decided to merge the two ministries, Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Agriculture. So it became even broader and wider structure with a huge portfolio and a very wide range of issues under our under the mandate of our ministry, starting from agriculture, development of sector, creation policy, developing legislation in the field of agriculture and rural development, also ensuring food safety, veterinary plant protection, scientific research in agriculture, conducting state control over the system of sanitary and phytosanitary systems. In the field of environment to many different topics are under our mandate, including climate change, environmental protection, state control over the natural resources, waste management, circular economy and I guess environmental impact assessment, strategic impact assessment, etc. [laughs] Too big list of, let's say, tasks.
5. **Interviewer** [0:03:17.0] Which are your other cooperating partners other than the EU?
6. **Interview Partner** [0:03:23.0] You mean foreign international partners? Well, it depends on the sector and field, actually. United States of America has been a significant partner in different directions, especially when it comes to agricultural field. Also in the field of environment, USAID, USDA and some other partner

organisations. Apart from that, FAO, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations is a very important partner to the ministry. World Bank, UNDP, EBRD are not so active, but also. IFA, the International Fund for Agricultural Development is also contributing to many directions- The Green Climate Fund, GCF, also supports us actively in the field of environment and climate change. GIZ is actively cooperating with us on topics related to his forestry and some other issues as well. And yeah, that's the main partners. And of course there are some other partners and countries as well - Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, Austrian Development Agency, French Development Agency, the Swedish Cooperation Office and many others. So there are many of donors cooperating with us.

7. **Interviewer** [0:05:05.0] OK. And what are the main environmental challenges in Georgia that you work - or like the spheres in which you work?
8. **Interview Partner** [0:05:16.0] Actually, our agenda is reflected in the association agreement that is signed between the European Union and Georgia. And the main objective of this association agreement is to approximate our legislation and our policy to those of the EU. So in both fields, in agricultural the field and in the environmental field as well. So there is a separate annex which lays down the list of EU directives, EU acquis in the field of environment and climate change and Georgiades commitment to approximate to this acquis. And this process is ongoing, still ongoing and actually even the drafting process is challenging. But more challenges are related to the implementation of the adopted legislation. We chose a gradual approach. We are not transposing everything at once. So we are transposing this legislation according to the timeframes defined by the association agreement. So, one of the important steps was developing strategies, national Environmental Action Programmeme, which also constitutes the framework document and guideline. How should we proceed and what should be implemented by the ministry? We also conducted many reforms in the fields of waste management, particularly of the waste management code, which is in line with the EU regulations. Furthermore, we adopted the Environmental Impact Assessment legislation, which is also according to the EU best practices and directives. And this was relatively - new approaches were introduced by this legislation and it ensures wider participation of the interested parties and civil society and the population of Georgia in decision making process. It also obliges the ministry to conduct public hearings and to ensure this engagement on a practical level. Also, strategic environmental assessment was introduced in parallel with the environmental impact assessment, and the implementation of these requirements are quite challenging since, as I mentioned, many new requirements were introduced by this legislation and the lack of knowledge, the lack of experience we experienced at the ministry. And we enjoy this assistance provided by the donor partners in this regard, staff undergoes permanent trainings. We are also working on some guidelines and manuals in order to efficiently implement this legislation. Apart from that, parliament of Georgia adopted the forest, New Forest Code. It was also developed with the assistance of our partners, international partners. Very recently, Parliament of Georgia adopted the environmental liability law, which is also based on the EU directive. And the

main principle is the polluter pays principle. And it also is legislative packages should ensure improvements in the field of environment and climate change. When it comes to climate change we are also party to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. You might be aware about it. And we undertook significant commitments to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions and to be more ambitious than it is required by the agreement. And Georgia is on its way to fulfil its obligations. And namely, approximately one week ago, the Government of Georgia adopted a new national determined contribution, which is a strategic document in the field of climate change and with the respective action plan. And we are now - we will start now implementation of this document. So these are main developments in this field, but there are many challenges, of course, and main challenge is related with the practical implementation of those legislative acts and the strategic documents. So that could be considered as a challenge. Apart from that, let's say the opinion of the private sector and population is also quite challenging. It requires awareness rising from the civil society side. There are many non-governmental organisations and they are doing a good job, mostly in this respect. And also readiness of the private sector is a challenge, since newly adopted legislation envisages some significant costs for private organisations and private companies, including, let's say, installing different types of filters and different equipment, etc.. So all these things are challenging and requires extra assistance. Only state budget cannot, cannot, let's say, succeed to overcome all the challenges.

9. **Interviewer** [0:10:52.0] OK, now you've already given me a lot of information. Can you describe the EU cooperation that you've had so far? Which kinds of cooperation do you have with the EU?
10. **Interview Partner** [0:11:13.0] We have a very good and fruitful cooperation with the European Union because it's one of the strategic partners for Georgia and you already mentioned that we concluded this association agreement, which envisages that Georgia is associated country, let's say. And we are trying to catch up with the European Union in terms of reforms, in terms of legislation, development, etc. But of course, our partnership is also based on the partner assistance from the European Union side. And we greatly appreciate all the support, financial and technical support provided by the European Union throughout the years in different fields, including fields of agriculture, as well as fields of environmental protection and climate change. So you are more mostly focused on environmental direction, yes, if I correctly understand?
11. **Interviewer** [0:12:11.0] Yes. But also, let's say the sustainable aspect of agriculture or economic sphere.
12. **Interview Partner** [0:12:21.0] In agriculture, we have - I assume you might be aware about this programme, the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development, ENPARD, which is conducted in Eastern Partnership countries. So Georgia is also part of this initiative currently the fourth phase of ENPARD has started, has signed this agreement very recently, and almost 200 million of euros are allocated for different phases of ENPARD. And the main

objective of the programme was the developing and improving agricultural and rural sector. In the beginning the focus was done on agricultural direction, creation of agricultural cooperatives, creation of the strategic documents on the later stage. Then we switched to the rural development direction and the respective strategy and respective programmes were elaborated in. This programme also envisages grants for the farmers, for private sector, and it is also very useful and helpful for them because access on finances is one of the biggest challenges in the agricultural sector. So ENPARD is the biggest programme that supports Georgia in the field of agriculture and rural development. Along with ENPARD, we are several important technical assistance programmes such as the Twinning, CIB, Comprehensive Institutional Building Programme for the National Food Agency and etc. So we have this constant cooperation and it is ongoing. When it comes to environmental direction, we have also regional projects there. You might be also aware we are about EU4Climate and EU4Environment. We are actively participating in these programmes. Apart from that, now we have negotiations with the European Union to develop further assistance programmes for 2021-2027 that might be launched in 2022. I hope so. And all the challenging topics will be reflected in this new cooperation action plan. Let's say so. So this is one of the big programmes and projects. Of course, as I mentioned, there are many twinings, trainings, TAIEX, capacity building and etc.

13. **Interviewer** [0:14:54.0] Well, OK. And what are the challenges in cooperating with the EU or maybe to make it more specific, what are the challenges when you apply for EU funding?
14. **Interview Partner** [0:15:09.0] Uhm, challenges are, let's say so, first of all, it's not a challenge, actually, it's a procedure, I guess. It takes some time and it's usual not only in terms of EU, but also with other donors as well, because when we are applying for the regional projects, it's not only up to EU and Georgia to decide whether to when it can start. Because if other regional countries are participating there, it's not so easy to get this confirmation and agreement simultaneously. So, it takes time. And some - to some point of view maybe bureaucracy. How to call it properly, I don't know. But it takes some time until we apply and then - but it's acceptable for us. And we understand that it will undergo several institutions for the approval. And it takes time. And that's it. I'm not specifying the cooperation only with the European Union, but with other donors as well. Usually - the biggest challenge usually is access to financial resources and direct funding. And donors are not usually very happy with, let's say, financially supporting countries. And it's I also understand this approach. They are aiming at developing programmes which might give us sustainable results. When they pay something for grants, farmers will use it and there will be no, let's say, long term result. And they prefer to provide us with the technical assistance, with knowledge, with strategy, and in parallel with this financial assistance to cope with all the challenges that the ministries, agencies and farmers are facing. So, it's not a shortcoming, I guess, it's a procedure. I cannot specify any particular challenge that I am experiencing when it comes to the cooperation with the European Union in this respect.

15. **Interviewer** [0:17:24.0] Is there something that you have to pay special attention to when you write an application or when a programme is created?
16. **Interview Partner** [0:17:34.0] Actually, I'm not the one who is developing these programmes and applications, I'm just coordinating process. We have our policy departments at the ministry who are - after we negotiate with the European Union, let's say somewhere we need assistance and the EU accepts it. Then we start development of the ToR [terms of references], [internet connection breaks] - EU assistance and this is done by the respective specialist experts and departments and everything is written down, their shortcomings, challenges, plans to what used to be done, costs of these activities and etc. That's how it works with European Union and with other donors as well.
17. **Interviewer** [0:18:28.0] OK. And as I understand correctly, you are the coordinator of certain projects. Do you -
18. **Interview Partner** [0:18:36.0] Yes, not only projects, but also to - collecting all the information to sending it to the donor, also sharing their feedback to our counterparts and organising meetings and etc. Mainly I'm coordinating these processes.
19. **Interviewer** [0:18:58.0] And how is interaction with the EU partners during a project is ongoing. How does it work?
20. **Interview Partner** [0:19:06.0] Yeah, usually we have steering committees or stakeholder meetings and we usually go through the achievements, once the first phase is over. Then we go to check the progress and the implementing partners are making presentations and then our counterparts provide our opinion what was done, what should be done in future and etc. That's how we interact with EU. We have a very good embassy here, a mission, EU delegation mission to Georgia. And they are mainly coordinating this process and they are very flexible guys. And we have no problem when it comes to communication and they are very open, and we have a good cooperation.
21. **Interviewer** [0:19:54.0] OK. Sorry, I'm looking up because there are my questions on another monitor. Just so you know. OK, and in case of implementation difficulties, is there a contact person at the EU delegation that you can come to?
22. **Interview Partner** [0:20:12.0] Yes, depending on a topic or issues, there are persons assigned to different direction, attachés or team leaders, and we are directly communicating with them. It's not also a problem to address the ambassador himself because the minister has a very good cooperation with the ambassador, also the head of cooperation. And there are many tools and means of communication.
23. **Interviewer** [0:20:40.0] OK. Has the EU ever withheld funding for whatever reason? I mean, did some projects not work out?
24. **Interview Partner** [0:20:51.0] I don't remember such a case, of course, there were some particular indicators that we had maybe a slight delay somewhere, but it did

not pose any significant, let's say, results. All disbursements were conducted duly and properly since Georgia is performing. Not bad, let's say so.

25. **Interviewer** [0:21:17.0] And that's maybe focus also on the civil society and NGO sector for a moment, because as far as I know, sometimes you receive EU grants that you then distribute to NGOs as well, right? Can you explain how cooperation with them works?
26. **Interview Partner** [0:21:36.0] Yeah, actually, ministry does not distribute these grants. When, you know, when the grant is foreseen by the programme, then European Union, let's say announces calls for these grant programmes and these NGOs and international organisations participate there and others who whoever will be chosen by the European Union then as they will, let's say, conduct these grant components. At the moment, when it comes to ENPARD programmes, there are FAO and UNDP the biggest partners and they are ensuring enforcement of the grant component. But we are also now thinking about creating so-called paying agency in Georgia. You know, it works in European Union that there is an agency, governmental agency which also issues grants and distributes funds coming from the donors. So in Georgia's reality, international organisations and NGOs are doing it. But in the future, we are planning to create this paying agency, which can be also able to distribute grants as well to directly participate in.
27. **Interviewer** [0:22:53.0] OK. And how is your experience in working with environmental NGOs, local NGOs and national NGOs?
28. **Interview Partner** [0:23:05.0] Environmental NGOs are very active. First of all, and very, let's say, how to say, they are frequently opposing when the ministry. And it's very good because they are, let's say, pushing us to accelerate some directions, even though ministry is also very keen to do everything on time. But they are also making some specific focus on different specific directions. And it's very good and very useful. But in some cases, they are not very constructive. Not all of them, but some of them are really, I don't know how to say it, but there is no project related with the hydro-power generation or hydro-power plants that is not brought to the court by the NGOs in the field of environment. And I don't know, I don't know why they are not opposing regarding other types of investments. But this hydro-power is something very special for them and it's not always very constructive from their, let's say, their attitude is not always very constructive.
29. **Interviewer** [0:24:15.0] Mm hmm. Do you have the impression that the EU focuses in - their cooperation focuses more on like - how do I say, like state support, like supporting you as a ministry or more the NGOs?
30. **Interview Partner** [0:24:31.0] We cannot say. They are supporting country itself and this support is divided in different direction. First is the budget support, which is direct support to the state budget. Then is another grant component which is granted to international organisations. So there's the technical assistance, which might be for the state agencies and for the farmers or for the civil society as well. It depends. I

have not calculated, I cannot compare this support, but whatever is needed, the support is provided by the European Union.

31. **Interviewer** [0:25:08.0] And are there any projects where the EU aims at bringing ministry and NGOs together, projects where you have to work together?
32. **Interview Partner** [0:25:19.0] Yes, there are many projects because, as I mentioned, these grand components are implemented by the international organisations and despite the fact that they are, let's say, issuing these grants, they have a cooperation with the ministry. There is a created sort of a steering committee. So where the ministry is also represented and we are also participating in the decision making process to some extent, we are not the one who is deciding at the end of the day. But we have our voice and we can actively cooperate.
33. **Interviewer** [0:25:58.0] Who is deciding at the end of the day, sorry I didn't hear.
34. **Interview Partner** [0:26:02.0] Vote is deciding. There is a when it comes to FAO grants, there is a FAO representative, there is an EU representative. There are different stakeholders, civil society, private sector, etc. And when the decision is jointly.
35. **Interviewer** [0:26:18.0] And when we look at the overall impression you have from EU cooperation, would you say it's effective in environmental terms?
36. **Interview Partner** [0:26:29.0] Oh, yes, it's quite effective, quite efficient, and we are grateful for all the support, but in environmental field, the other donors are also very active. So, there is a very big competition in this direction. So, we have many good donors, and the EU is among them as a strategic partner and as a great contributor to this sector.
37. **Interviewer** [0:26:54.0] OK, that's interesting. So, there is a competition between donors as well?
38. **Interview Partner** [0:26:58.0] We cannot call it competition, but we have many partners, and we are very grateful for this and we are always trying to coordinate this process in order to avoid overlaps. You know that Georgia doesn't want to have these overlaps. Also, it's not in the interests of the donors to spend money on the same things, whatever is being done by another donor. So, it's somehow split between different partners and donors. And then we are coordinating this process.
39. **Interviewer** [0:27:33.0] Interesting. OK. And I mean, I know we've already covered it a bit, but if there if you could write a letter to the EU and say, hey, these things, I wish that we could make this better or that you could make this better, like any improvements that the EU could do. What would you write?
40. **Interview Partner** [0:27:54.0] Yeah, well, after the phase of the programme is over, the evaluation mission is developing a report where they are - it's an independent mission, it's not done by the same people who are implementing the programme. These experts are writing independent report where they very openly and frankly

describe the challenges and whatever could be done better to how sustainable the results can be and what should be taken into account before launching the next phase of the same programme. So all these things are done and the ministry is also actively engaged in this process. We are also providing our opinion position and usually it is also taken into account.

41. **Interviewer** [0:28:46.0] And in the beginning, you mentioned that one of the main challenges for you is implementation of the legislation that you develop also with the help of the EU. Why is it challenging and does the EU also assist you in the implementation, not just legislation?
42. **Interview Partner** [0:29:06.0] Yes, it is. It is a huge challenge for us. And of course, EU also assists us in this implementation process. But the requirements are very, very complex and everything cannot be assisted by the European Union. But whatever is urgent, whatever is identified from our side as a priority, then of course we have a sufficient response from the EU side. The challenge is, because, as I mentioned, there is a lack of knowledge, lack of experience, poor infrastructure, equipments, laboratory capacities. Also implementation poses significant obstacles and the challenges for the private sector because they have to, let's say, adjust their equipment and systems with the requirements of the new legislation. And it's quite costly. That's why we consider that it is challenging. Apart from that, legislation of the European Union and then transpose legislation is not so easy to understand for the population and for the private companies. It requires the development of the guidelines of the manuals to simply understand what is requested and required by the legislation. That's also one more challenge.
43. **Interviewer** [0:30:42.0] OK. Do you - have you experienced any change in EU cooperation over the past years, for example, when in 2016 there was a review of the Eastern Partnership? Or have there been any other moments where you feel something has changed in cooperation?
44. **Interview Partner** [0:31:03.0] Of course, fields of cooperation are I mean, specific direction of cooperation might be changed. But what in terms of - I don't know, you are asking from the procedural point of view or content wise?
45. **Interviewer** [0:31:23.0] Anything.
46. **Interview Partner** [0:31:24.0] Anything, yeah. I guess so far I cannot say that. Something was significantly changed, but these relations are becoming more and more intensive, let's say, and after signing association agreement, it also was a step forward and it was on another level of cooperation after that. And since that time, we are constantly improving our cooperation and broadening areas of cooperation as well.
47. **Interviewer** [0:31:58.0] Have there been changes in the application process, for example, or like in the planning process of projects?

48. **Interview Partner** [0:32:07.0] Well, I was not really engaged in the application process previously, but currently it's done as I described them right now. I don't know how complex or how easy it was before, but now it's quite acceptable.
49. **Interviewer** [0:32:28.0] OK. Do you think that your cooperation is generally, generally more centralised and hierarchical with you, with the environmental ministry?
50. **Interview Partner** [0:32:43.0] Centralised, it depends. No, not very centralised, actually. When it comes to the direct cooperation with the ministry, yes, it's centralised. We have contact with the EU delegation. Apart from that, we have the communication with European Commission respective services, DG Near [Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations] or EEAS [European External Action Service] and etc. I don't know whether we can call it centralised or not, but we have this sort of cooperation.
51. **Interviewer** [0:33:14.0] OK, let's see. Yeah, I think then we already come to our third block, the role of the EU for the environmental sector in Georgia in general. How relevant is the EU for the environmental sector in Georgia?
52. **Interview Partner** [0:33:39.0] The environmental sector is becoming more and more demanding and popular all over the globe, including in the European Union, and you know that it's a top priority for the new college and the new president of the commission. And this Green Deal was her initiative, actually. And the Green Deal is mainly focused on the greening of economy, climate change, circularity and etc. So it's a priority for European Union, it becomes more and more prioritised by the United States, and all the main actors around the globe are focusing on these directions. Accordingly, it's very high on the agenda of the government of Georgia and for Georgia in general. And we are also trying to make more and more emphasis on this greening direction. We are trying to be as ambitious when it comes to the climate change as other developing countries. But in terms of climate change, we cannot compete with the European Union there. I don't know. It's a very ambitious programme to become carbon neutral in Europe for 2050. It's very, very challenging for us. We cannot say that at the moment Georgia is ready to be as ambitious as the European Union is. But we are trying to follow Europe. And if we want to be more ambitious and to have the two sets of similar goals as the European Union has designated, then we will require, of course, additional assistance from EU's side. From this perspective, EU's assistance in the field of environmental climate change is very, very relevant, I guess, and very, very useful since we are trying to follow EU.
53. **Interviewer** [0:35:39.0] OK, are there any other aspects that impact your cooperation with the EU like any domestic political conditions, for example?
54. **Interview Partner** [0:35:50.0] Of course, there are political situations and EU has communication with Georgia on different levels. I'm not in a position to talk from

the political point of view. I'm a civil servant, but there are - there is an ongoing dialog on different areas of cooperation, including policy. And so.

55. **Interviewer** [0:36:14.0] OK. OK, then maybe let me phrase it differently. Um, for your environmental work, are there any problems that hinder you in in doing your work as a ministry from, I don't know, society site or anything, also other institutions?
56. **Interview Partner** [0:36:39.0] Other institutions actually - greening and the environmental protection, climate change is a priority for the entire government. That's why government of Georgia created the Climate Change Council, where all the important ministers are represented and important decisions are submitted to this Climate Change Council and they are together discussing these topics because greening and greening of the economy and climate change, it's not only our ministry's task, because many other ministries are engaged in this process, including the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Health and etc. So these directions are interlinked. So every ministry considers it as a priority and the government itself considers this as a priority. And we are also trying to integrate environmental aspects in all the strategic directions of our other ministries. When it comes to agriculture, we have this climate change and the greening component very strongly in terms of economy, energy we are also trying to integrate our aspects there. And they have this approach that it is a requirement, it is useful for everyone. And we are working on this together. But the one point should be taken into account that the private sector is not always happy with all these developments and the environmental requirements. It's also a matter of mentality, I guess, and awareness rising. In Europe, I understand, of course, there might be companies that are not also very happy with environmental requirements, but they more or less understand the importance of these directions, that it directly impacts your health, your life. And it's very important. And social responsibility is also very high in Europe. We are trying also to develop it in Georgia. There are many companies in Georgia that are happily cooperating with us, but still there, there are many of them which are experiencing some challenges, problems, and they are requesting some delays, maybe postponement of some reforms. And that might be an obstacle where we have to be, let's say, very careful.
57. **Interviewer** [0:39:04.0] Yeah, this is something that I find very interesting in Georgia, and you mentioned that in the beginning, that there was a merger of the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Agriculture, which basically means that there is a combination of environmental protection interests and economic interests, right. How do you combine these two?
58. **Interview Partner** [0:39:26.0] You know, economic development is under the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. Agriculture is, of course, a potent part of economy. And we are trying to develop the sector, especially if we consider that almost half of population lives in rural areas in Georgia and more than half is employed in the agricultural sector. It cannot be neglected and it's also very important direction. But at the same time, management of a ministry always realises

that every project or every programme that is being conducted in the agricultural sector should always consider environmental aspects. And it's even more easy and let's say flexible to integrate these systems when you are managing it rather than another minister or ministry is forcing you to include environmental aspects in your policy. Because we are now responsible against, let's say, a civil society, population, European Union. We have to respond regarding environmental developments and challenges. And if we do not integrate it in other sectors, then we cannot be, let's say, very open and very frankly speaking about environmental direction. So first of all, it's in our interest now to conduct all other activities and to implement and develop economic sectors with a strong emphasis on the environment and the climate change issue. So it's very closely interlinked and I think more or less it's very successful. And now nobody speaks that it was a mistake. In the beginning because there were very active consultations about it, that we should not have emerged these ministries. But now everyone agrees that everything goes smoothly and the environmental matters are becoming more and more demanded and more and more, let's say, implemented in other sectors.

59. **Interviewer** [0:41:34.0] Let's see, do I have other? OK, maybe one last question. Do you think that the EU generally has a good standing in the Georgian society?
60. **Interview Partner** [0:41:49.0] In general? Yes. Can you clarify this question?
61. **Interviewer** [0:41:56.0] Yeah, sorry. I mean, do - all the projects that the EU has and does with you as well, are they acknowledged by the society? Do the people know that the EU is doing so much, funding so much?
62. **Interview Partner** [0:42:13.0] Yeah, it's a good question, actually, and a very important one, because, you know that majority of the population of Georgia is pro-Western and always, let's say, appreciate EU's assistance and EU's support. And the majority of people support our EU and NATO integration. This is a fact. And many surveys were conducted in this regard. But still there is a lack of knowledge. And still strengthening of awareness raising would be necessary to raise awareness of population regarding the funds and programmes supported by the European Union. And that's already, let's say, initiated by the government. Now we are developing an action plan for awareness raising. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is coordinating this process. They have a separate unit dealing with EU and the main NATO integration issues, and they are now developing this action plan, which envisages particular activities, particular programmes that should be presented to the population in order to provide them with sufficient information about whatever is done. It's not a propaganda. It's just sharing existing information. It's a challenge. It's recognised by the government and respective actions are being planned.
63. **Interviewer** [0:43:49.0] OK, great. Thank you. I think I've asked all my questions. Is there anything that you feel like I have forgotten that is important to mention?
64. **Interview Partner** [0:44:02.0] Oh, well, you know better whatever should be, let's say, strongly emphasised in your report, but all the important topics are reflected

there. Of course, we will always welcome any simplification in terms of bureaucracy, in terms of timing and etc. And if your report will somehow contribute to this changes, it will be highly appreciated. But on the other hand, we have to pay attention to the quality of the programmes. And so timing and the bureaucracy is often related with quality. So, if we are rushing too much, then there will be higher probability of mistakes. And so, if we are talking about the sustainable goals and long term visions, then I guess simplification is not that easy.

65. **Interviewer** [0:44:54.0] OK.

66. **Interview Partner** [0:44:58.0] What can I say about it?

67. **Interviewer** [0:45:00.0] Yeah, no, you have given me lots of useful information. Thank you so much. It's been really, really helpful. Is it OK in my master thesis, if I quote you by name or would you rather be anonymous?

68. **Interview Partner** [0:45:17.0] No, I don't have this ambition to be there, if it helps you, then please. But otherwise you can leave me anonymously. You can decide it.

69. **Interviewer** [0:45:28.0] Now because, you know, I have a table where I list all the institutions and interview partners that I've spoken to. But if for whatever reason, you feel uncomfortable with having your name there, I can leave it out.

70. **Interview Partner** [0:45:41.0] And it's not a political issue. I told you about whatever I'm doing in practice, so I don't see that there would be any problem. But if you think that it might cause some problems, then I don't know. If you were writing very negative reports, then it's better to be anonymous. [laughs]

71. **Interviewer** [0:46:02.0] No, I mean, it's not about negative or positive. It's just, I mean, it's scientific. So it's based on, you know, scientific research. So I will - there will be both challenges and qualities inside, as you said.

72. **Interview Partner** [0:46:18.0] If other interviewees are reflected directly, then you can also indicate me.

73. **Interviewer** [0:46:23.0] OK, cool. Thank you very much. Yeah. If you have any more questions, don't hesitate to contact me and I will send you the transcript of the interview as soon as I have it.

74. **Interview Partner** [0:46:36.0] Thank you. Thank you.

75. **Interviewer** [0:46:37.0] Thank you very much and I hope to come back to Georgia this year. I miss it. OK. Have a good day.

76. **Interview Partner** [0:46:47.0] Goodbye.

77. **Interviewer** [0:46:48.0] Bye bye. Thanks.

Interview 7 – GEO_DEL – EU Delegation to Georgia

1. **Interview Partner** [0:00:02.0] I blocked one hour, but at twelve I have to go.
2. **Interviewer** [0:00:11.0] OK then let's start with yourself. Can you tell me a bit about yourself, your career and your role in the EU delegation?
3. **Interview Partner** [0:00:20.0] OK, I'm working for the commission - it's been 10 years that I work in the development and cooperation, so I'm not in the political section as such. I'm in the operations section, that's where we are managing the projects implemented by the EU. I have a profile that I'm - just like you I was always interested in, Eastern Europe, Eastern neighbourhood. So I worked in Kazakhstan, but I started this type of job in Kazakhstan two years. Then I went to Moldova five years and a half and now for two years and half I'm in Georgia. And so, yeah. And, uh, I'm working more specialised, let's say since Moldova on the Green portfolio. Moldova was more focused on energy and environment as minor, let's say. And here is more environment, climate and energy as a minor, because in addition to being a project manager, I'm also team leader, so I'm managing the team dealing with all the sectors of environment, energy and also transport. I'm also managing transport, connectivity and so.
4. **Interviewer** [0:01:37.0] OK, can you tell me more about the kind of work the EU delegation does in environmental terms in Georgia?
5. **Interview Partner** [0:01:46.0] Well, we do a bit of - I mean, first of all, Georgia is an associated country. So we have a key document, which is EU-Georgia Association Agreement, which is a bit our framework and our guidance for what this country wants to reach and what is the mandate of the EU in this country, because we are supporting the implementation of the agreement. Of course, we are doing some political work in the political section. But when it comes more, let's say to the sector of environment we are pushing the EU agenda, helping them to implement all these provisions of the Georgia Association Agreement, which is not that easy because there are, when it comes to environment, climate and also energy, environment, transport, tourism, there are lots of things to be implemented. So we are helping them through different tools, technical assistance, meaning bringing some expertise of experts to work with them to help them prepare the legislation to implement them, and so on. We are providing money for investments, for infrastructural investments in the sector. As of course, when you talk about the environment, it's nice to pass the legislation. But we know, this is a post-Soviet country where you also need to upgrade the infrastructure so there's a lot of jobs being done when it comes to that. Usually when it comes to investment, we are providing blending, meaning that EU is providing the grants, which is added to a loan from the European financial institutions like EIB, EBRD, KfW or AFD, the French Agency for Development so that's it. Sometimes we have also some instruments like budget support. But in environment we have not done that so far. We have also sometimes some grants that we are providing. We organise some

competitions, some calls, proposals. And some NGOs or other actors can win some EU grants in order to implement activities. Now stop me if you have other questions, because I could go on and on. The thing is, honestly when it comes to environment, we are covering more or less everything. Of course, one other additional thing is that now, of course, with the climate key role of the EU leadership, role of the EU around the world, we are doing quite a lot of climate and we are trying to develop climate diplomacy, meaning, you know, really pushing the agenda in preparation upon [audibly incomprehensible] and so on. We are organising a lot of communication because when you talk about the environment, we know it's a lot also to change behaviour. So more and more, we are planning [pause] communication and we have some campaigns. We are participating in events that we are organising, going on TV and so on. So that's it. Now, when it comes to the sectors of intervention. But I guess we will come back to it later. But to be honest we cover, I would say almost everything because the [audibly incomprehensible] and the association agreements covering all sectors, so it can be the water sector, waste sector, biodiversity, forestry, all these important environmental transversal principles, you know, to prepare environmental and social impact assessment, whether environmental strategic analysis to make sure that environmental liability principle is being applied. We are working on air quality, which is a key issue also here in Georgia on climate where we are pushing the overall agenda and trying to push them to develop, let's say, action plans for specific sectors and to implement them so that they can meet their nationally determined contributions. When it comes to energy, we are working on the reform of the energy sector as such, so that it's more transparent, efficient when it comes to gas, electricity. We are also supporting a lot energy efficiency, which is quite a flagship for us, also promoting rehabilitation in buildings and so on. We are also promoting renewable energy sources. Also more on the legislative side so far, although we have a few investments that we also supported, we are rehabilitating some of the hydro-power stations, which can be arranged so that they are more efficient. So that's for the overall picture.

6. **Interviewer** [0:06:29.0] OK, and I mean, you well describe now all the kinds of cooperation you have in Georgia in environmental terms. Would you say there are some kinds of cooperations that are more important in Georgia than others?
7. **Interview Partner** [0:06:44.0] Well, it's difficult to say. I think Georgia, first of all, is starting a bit - from very far, you know, when it comes to environment. As you know, you've been here, it's a very beautiful country, but it's not like environment was a top priority, especially after the fall of the USSR during this crisis here and so on. So unfortunately, it's difficult to say that one sector is more important than another, because I think all of them have to be tackled. Now on our side, we are focusing a lot lately on the link between environment and health because we are trying to do what is important. Georgia is a small country, so it's not like there's a major polluter of the planet because the CO₂ emissions are quite limited because it's not a very - it's a small country and not a very industrialised country. Of course, it could be much more efficient. So we are working with them. But so the angle of

attack that we have sometimes have is one of the link between environment and health to try to improve the quality of life of people and make them understand that it's in their interest to take better care of the environment, because that's why air quality, we try to tackle that a lot, because it's really a problem in the Tbilisi. So I cannot say it's more important. But it's one issue. I would say waste sector, waste sector is very important because the waste management is a huge mess, there are no EU standards. Landfill is just this habit of throwing the waste anywhere. Almost nothing is recycled or sorted out and so on. So by default design, I mean waste management, I think is quite an important sector in Georgia. Biodiversity, forestry is important. I think the Germans are also very active in that. But I think it's important because they have obviously a very beautiful nature with a lot of biodiversity. So we are helping them to create these national parks to have these Emerald networks and so on. Water also, because it's - OK, it's a key resource for this country, like all countries, but here with all the rivers, the mountains and so on, so it's a bit - but I think in general, the key thing if there was one thing is to make sure that the environment, if you want to succeed in the environment, it's a transversal issue which is impacting all the areas of the economy and vice versa is being impacted by all sectors of the economy. So I guess our gain in the fight in the end is to make sure that environment is taken as a priority in all the sectors of this country when it comes to its development and so on, so that people are more aware when they're making a business model when they invest in something, when they build an infrastructure that the environment is one of the things to be taken into consideration in the overall picture.

8. **Interviewer** [0:09:45.0] And in terms of how the EU cooperates with environmental actors, like either NGOs or the ministry, there are different kinds of cooperation, right. Like grants and capacity building. Would you say that for the environmental sector, some forms of cooperation are more important than others?
9. **Interview Partner** [0:10:07.0] Well, I wouldn't say that - once again, I think if you want to be successful in this area, it's due to a comprehensive approach, and so on. So, I would not say that one actor is more important than the other. But naturally, the state institutions are important for us. We are an international institution, power. Our direct counterpart is the ministry, because these are the people, the government of Georgia with whom the association agreement was signed. They are the ones preparing the framework, the laws and making sure they are implemented. So, of course, a lot of our assistance, we do it together. We have to work with them because they are the one creating the framework. Now, all civil society, yes, we use them, they are we always try to have them involved in our projects, sometimes providing direct grants or through just engaging them in the activities that we do, because it's a new approach. We believe that civil society has a role to play as a watchdog, as a counter-balance in power and so on. So we engage them and we work together on the implementation of things. And I think the third element is society as a whole, that if you want to succeed in an environment, to reach your objectives, you need all the basic citizens to consider that they have a role to play in

this overall picture. So that's why we are trying to do a lot on communication, to really promote change, to discuss with them and so on, so that's it.

10. **Interviewer** [0:11:58.0] OK. If we turn now to - like how cooperation works concerning the application process for EU programmes and EU grants, are there any problems that either like ministry or NGOs or other partners have ever approached you with, some challenges they have?
11. **Interview Partner** [0:12:23.0] When it comes to the projects implemented with government, I mean, we are writing together the terms of reference with, of course, the EU has the last say if there was to be a conflict on something, and it's being implemented by experts working with them. So in principle it is doing quite fine, I would say as long, of course, the capacities in the ministry are there and that there are enough people to work with our experts and so on. But usually they are really calling for our support, so when they come, they are really working closely with experts. When it comes to civil society, well, it depends. Some of the activities we are working with them and we give grants and so on. And of course, civil society, I am sure they would like to have even much more grants and much more financial support and so on. But OK, we cannot prevent - they are also sometimes limited capacities and we cannot overflow the market with too much money and so on. So I think it's better to target one specific area, a few areas where we think they can be good and work with us and so on, and we try for sure to help them survive and so on. But I would personally not see the added value to put tens of millions every year on civil society because, you know, their capacity is also limited and sometimes - but it's my very personal opinion that I would prefer to have just a few NGOs, very competent in one sector rather than a multiplication of twenty actors with general knowledge and so on. I think one key issue is the private sector, so that we try to engage, especially we are working on a circular economy, our hope is to be able to see Georgia transforming into a more secular model of economic development. So they also get some grants. Sometimes they get training, support and so on. But of course - but it's also the responsibility of the government of Georgia, to manage to create this link with the private sector and get them engaged in the reform process. But no, overall, I would say, it's working OK. Of course, we can always do better and so on, but I think we are moving forward on the implementation of the association agreement. Sometimes we work also, sorry, I forgot to mention, sometimes we also have regional projects, projects funded by the EU, which, well, Georgia is not the sole beneficiary, it's all the Eastern Partnership countries together, being beneficiary of the project and very often these are being implemented - funded by the EU, but they are implemented by international organisations like OECD, UNDP, UN institutions, can be World Bank also, whatever.
12. **Interviewer** [0:15:25.0] And are there differences in - how do I say this. Because these kind of regional projects were mentioned to me by the NGOs as well, and they would of course, prefer if the EU worked more directly with local actors than in these regional projects with international organisations. What is your opinion on that? Is there one that's more effective than the other?

13. **Interview Partner** [0:15:55.0] But I think the two have to work together. Normally when have these international, I mean, we have this transversal approach of the Eastern Partnership. So usually, unless you find some NGOs or civil society actors which have branches and other actors the regions, the advantage sometimes of these international organisations is that they are each represented everywhere and they have expertise in all the countries that I believe not all the civil society has. After all, normally, some of them develop knowledge which is really high, which is really bringing something new, you know, which maybe some NGOs would not have, which is normal. It's not their mandate to be the best, the technical expert in one sector and so on. But of course, I think the two have to work together in a sense that they did. I think the local the government have this big advantage that they are here at the spot, they know the country, they know its history, what's going on behind and so on. So they have this capacity, certainly. We lay more the messages and better implement it into practice. So once again, I think it's about working together, finding a balance. But that's my feeling. Also, you were talking about shortcomings. Maybe one shortcoming sometimes is that when you have a project, it's about the follow up. If you work in a ministry during two years, the capacities are very low. It's still okay, you can hear a lot of critiques sometimes about the Ministry of Environment, but I personally find them quite good. Of course, when the project is over, it has prepared a draft, or it has provided training to the staff. But if it's not followed up after by the local institutions, either pushing a lot to the adoption process or having really the staff which has been trained, continuing the very same job, of course, some energy has been lost and some of the things that we're promoting is just disappearing. But perhaps it's one risk of cooperation.
14. **Interviewer** [0:17:59.0] OK, would you say there is a lot of competition for EU funding and in the environmental sector in Georgia?
15. **Interview Partner** [0:18:08.0] I would say that when it comes to the state projects, no, because okay we work with state institutions. When it comes to grants, yeah, yeah, the last time we launched a grant on climate, I think there were 15, 20 applications. The NGOs are fighting quite a lot, the civil society has quite a lot of actors. I recognise, I don't know all of them enough, unfortunately, because last year there has been this covid crisis. Of course it limited a bit the interaction. That's one thing I would like to get - I know some of them obviously, some of the actors and some of the actors. But one of my goals, once the situation is improving, would be to meet, to see them more often.
16. **Interviewer** [0:19:06.0] OK, maybe quickly about the implementation process of of certain projects, um, do you see any challenges there, like from the EU side? I mean, you already mentioned after the follow up can be challenging, but during the implementation, are there any difficulties?
17. **Interview Partner** [0:19:29.0] Challenges, I would say, as I said, the implementation, the follow up once the project is over and so on. And then I would say when it comes to infrastructure, you know, that infrastructure - first of all it takes time to build. It's quite complicated. So sometimes there are quite some delays

and the implementation it's quite common, unfortunately. And also, there are some problems about convincing the population sometimes. In Georgia today, we have quite a weak government. There's quite a political crisis. Before the elections it was pre-election periods, of course, they want to be nice guys, not take any risk and so on. So sometimes some of the projects which are being promoted are being a bit blocked, put on hold and stuff like that, which sometimes is a bit surprising. Like we had a waste landfill project, which is only beneficial to create landfill in line with the best standards so that the waste is being treated and not thrown in the river. It was to benefit approximately one million people. It was with KfW, we are doing that together, and it was just because a few people demonstrated because the waste site was close to their house and so on. Well, they killed the project more or less, you know. And quite often now, you know, that there is this issue, about this bigger hydro-power station close to [audibly incomprehensible] I don't know if you follow them, there's a lot of demonstration also ongoing. I'm not taking a position on this one, because it's very specific, it's not funded by the EU. But the population. Yeah. [pause] So infrastructure is complicated and difficult to implement, so there are delays. In Georgia, you have a lot of - people are quite reactive in opposition. Rightly or wrongly, 'cause sometimes honestly, like for this West site, it's only a benefit project but egoists are those who kill it just for their personal interests. And then sometimes you have a risk also that since this country these days is very divided by polarised when it comes to political... That sometimes some issues, environmental issues can be taken. I mean, they are ready to take any issue to confront the government. And I'm not taking any side whatsoever between the current government and opposition. But it's a bit unfortunate that I have the feeling that sometimes some things that should not be politicised are being politicised just for the pleasure of bothering the other and vice versa. And it's also the case in environment, because my sense is West Side, it's not impossible. Actually there were also some opposition parties who put a bit oil on the fire. So, it's a bit blocking the implementation of this key piece, of some of the projects. And one thing obviously is also that - I think we are quite good on working with the government and civil society to prepare legislation to have them adopted. But when it comes to the concrete implementation, of course, it's always more difficult, especially if you start touching upon some economic financial interests, you know.

18. **Interviewer** [0:22:57.0] OK. Would you say that cooperation, like EU cooperation in Georgia is rather centralised?
19. **Interview Partner** [0:23:09.0] No, no, actually, it's quite decentralised. I mean, centralised, in which sense? When it comes to the relation with the commission in Brussels or here locally, when it comes our capacity to go to the regions?
20. **Interviewer** [0:23:21.0] Locally.
21. **Interview Partner** [0:23:24.0] So, I mean, we have a strong policy of going to the regions, of decentralisation to... Really, regional development is one of the key priorities and we have projects - we have even some regions which were selected - Kakheti, Imereti, Guria, Racha, if I am not mistaken, which are considered priority

sectors. So, we do a lot of activities with the regions, with the local authorities. When it comes to beneficiaries, I mean the more beneficiary can be in the regions and the more attracted we have. Personally, I think I mean, of course, you have some very cool areas in [audibly incomprehensible], but I think what is unacceptable is the divide between the capital and the rest of the country. Now, when it comes to preparing the legislation, legislative framework and so on, yeah a key institutions are still here in Tbilisi, the administration, the government and we cannot ignore them. So so I think we work on both sides: when it comes to high level legislative work, of course, we have to work with the ministries, but when it comes to implementation, providing grants, building projects, training people - the more we can go to the regions the more we do it. Maybe it's never enough, but it fits our priorities.

22. **Interviewer** [0:24:57.0] And I mean not only in terms of geography, but also in terms of how a project is planned and then implemented. Is it like the EU draft a project and then this is how it's done? Or can NGOs or like partners also take part in creating the project or like changing it in a way that's more efficient for them?
23. **Interview Partner** [0:25:25.0] It depends. Because if the project is going to be published for competition, we remain a bit secret because we need to limit the information otherwise that the risk is that the competition will not be fair. Now, when we prepare in general projects and so on, you know, when we prepare, for instance, that our... I mean, when we are programming documents and so on. Normally, we also discuss it with civil society so that they bring in their ideas, their views, what they would like us to work on, what they consider important. And so we try to have them inside. Also when we have some projects in general, we try as much as we can, when we have steering committee so that some representative of the civil society are being invited. And we are always pushing for this thing between civil society and the government. The problem is that once again, you know, Georgia is a country where people are very, a bit conflictual and really depending on their team, of the group. So sometimes it's have too much of a tendency to see one another as enemies. And now, with this political polarisation it's even more the case. Instead of considering we are all partners, we all have a little role to play in the process. We can all bring in that additional knowledge, added value. So sometimes the government is a bit scared of NGOs coming to events and then the NGOs they don't respect the government. It's not always the case. Well, we always try to bring them together, but it happens that the trust relation is not very good.
24. **Interviewer** [0:27:16.0] OK. And I mean, after having worked now for two and a half years in Georgia, would you say that overall the cooperation the EU has and the projects the EU does are effective in Georgia, environmentally speaking?
25. **Interview Partner** [0:27:34.0] Yeah. I'm not going to say so because I defend my institution. But no, I think it's a great union. I mean, first of all, we are accelerating environment because five years ago, I don't think it was the number one priority in the region. Now with the Green Deal with the leader role that the EU has on climate, and so on. A lot of things are still to come on, though. But I think when it comes -

yeah, once the project is finalised, I think the EU has definitely brought a push when it comes to the legislative framework and the capacities of the implementation of the government and so on. And when we talk about infrastructure projects the problem is that they take time and sometimes they are delayed. But really, I mean, when you build a new water system in some cities, the value is clear. Especially for the people, the water is being cleaned, before they had nothing. When you build a new landfill, before there was all this waste, now there is a system in place. And so I'm dealing with transport: when you build a piece of the East-West highway, well, if you know how to go to Batumi, but it's already one hour less than it used to be. It's quite concrete results now. So I think it's pretty decent.

26. **Interviewer** [0:28:59.0] OK. Has cooperation in your experience changed over the past years? For example, in 2016, there was a reflection process of the Eastern Partnership. Have there been moments where, in your experience, something has changed in EU cooperation?
27. **Interview Partner** [0:29:22.0] Difficult to say. I think the focus, the regional focus is always more important, I mean for that we want to go to the region. The communication component is always more important also, but we always try to communicate more and more and more and be more visible. For the rest... Yeah, when it comes to environment, and as I told you, it's becoming more and more important, definitely. I don't know when I started - when I was in Moldova and I was dealing with energy and then I had an environment as minor, okay, environment was real minor. But it was related to Moldova where it's not as bad as here. And the Ministry was very weak anyway. I don't know, but now, OK, environment, climate, I mean, I'm really feeling - I'm so happy, I'm so lucky because it's my portfolio, we only talk about that. That's the number one priority. The EU is a green power. I think that's the image we want to give, and that's really what we are also doing more and more in practice. The thing is that now, for the next programming, 2021 to 2027, actually, 30 percent of all our assistance has to go to climate objective, climate meaning environmental. Can you imagine?
28. **Interviewer** [0:31:01.0] That's quite a lot. OK. And has there been a change also in how your partners interact with you, NGOs and administration?
29. **Interview Partner** [0:31:17.0] Hard to say. Now, it's more or less the same. I think one thing that we have more and more now is this notion of Team Europe, that the European Union and it's the union of the member states, we always worked closely together. But now it's even more because we will have - from a communication point of view, but also in order to be even more powerful, we have this concept of teaming up, of Team Europe initiative. And most likely environmental and health will be one of them. So meaning that really the EU and its member states all together, we will focus on this sector much more for years to come and so on. That is going to change because it's really this notion of uniting with other EU member states and putting energy together is becoming even stronger now.

30. **Interviewer** [0:32:07.0] OK, then, yeah, let's turn to our last block. How - like the EU - or let's say otherwise, the importance of the EU in the region compared to other actors. Who are other important actors in Georgia environmentally?
31. **Interview Partner** [0:32:28.0] Environmentally. Well, I think we have it's EU and its member states, knowing that certain member states are more, I think... I would say that, OK, Germany is quite active in environment. Sweden in the sector of waste. France, more and more, in the sector of water, so really we are on the front line. When we talk about the EU, it's EU plus our banks, EIB, EBRD, plus national banks and so on. And so I think we are, most likely, definitely we are the major - when it comes to assistance overall, we are the major players, especially when you consider the grants amounts. Because there's quite a difference between providing loans and grants. Otherwise other actors, external, there's the US. They are also doing something. I think they are quite active, not as strong as us, I would say, because of the EU-Georgia has an association agreement, but I think they do quite something. Although I don't know them so much, I don't know why we don't know them that well. They are a bit far, they have a separate building. We don't cross that often. But if think they are there. Japan has JICA to try to do some field - so they were quite active on air quality. And then as others financiers, we have the ADB, Asian Development Bank. They are doing infrastructure in the water sector, they are quite active. Uh, World Bank is active, also in the area of energy, quite a lot. But yeah, that's what I can say, I mean, I cannot get in the game of who's the strongest or whatever.
32. **Interviewer** [0:34:24.0] I know. Of course, Okay. Now and I mean, I think you already touched this topic briefly, but how do the domestic political conditions impact the environmental work you do in Georgia?
33. **Interview Partner** [0:34:58.0] You mean today's domestic, the current crisis you mean?
34. **Interviewer** [0:35:01.0] Yeah.
35. **Interview Partner** [0:35:02.0] Well, so far, luckily, and that's why I'm happy to work on projects, is that I would not say that it's so... But at some point, obviously, the state institutions, they will not be as efficient as they are moving reforms forward. Especially since we are in the Covid-19 crisis in addition. And secondly, that the thing that I mentioned already, that is by bipolarisation I'm always concerned about... I mean, since the government is weak, it has little legitimacy. So, of course, some of the especially in the association agreement, most of the environmental reforms start to be a bit more sensitive when it comes to changing business interest, the way of doing business. So, of course, the government with weak legitimacy and so on, is not taking risks. And so they will slow down on the implementation of some of these things that I'm a bit scared about when it comes to infrastructure projects. As I told you, sometimes you have blocking forces, rightly or wrongly, but sometimes it's the wrong way. And the government, if it's weak, is giving up because it's like 'I don't want to hear that, that it's coming down little bit

later', this kind of thing. So I'm a bit afraid about that. It will slow down many things and some of the measures will be postponed or not taken because people don't, yeah...

36. **Interviewer** [0:36:35.0] OK, that's interesting. OK, let me see if I've forgotten something, I'm always looking up because I have another screen there with my questions. Just for you not to confuse. No, I think I have asked all the questions that I had. Is there anything that you feel like I've forgotten something that's important concerning your work in Georgia?
37. **Interview Partner** [0:37:14.0] No I think we covered most of the things. Don't forget that one important element of the Eastern Partnership and all the things we do is also regional cooperation. We support Georgia bilaterally, but the idea, the spirit of the Eastern Partnership is also to have all these countries work better together and, you know, sharing information, going at the same speed and so on. It's sometimes a bit more difficult because in Georgia there is a tendency to be so, so attracted by the EU that they want to be the first and the first with a membership commitment and all that kind of thing. And they tend to forget about, they are natural partners also, which are the other countries of the Eastern partnership, which I personally find a little bit stupid, but I mean, it's OK. But that's an important element, where I think we are pushing more than they are. No, that's it, I think you covered it and I think, as we mentioned, that a lot is about to really change behaviour. The position of the population that considers that, of course, you and me, we are rich Europeans, especially our generation. It's quite normal to care about the environment. We are in way that it's part of our life. It's quite obvious to us. But here, still it's something rather new. The people are more, as your famous Berthold Brecht was saying, food first. The rest comes next. And here, it's a new generation in the city, all these people who have a direct link to nature, who are concerned. If you want to succeed in general, you need to extend this. Because some people really are quite - not to blame them, it's normal, it's no different history, different conditions - but I remember when I came here and I took the first time the train to Batumi. On the one hand, I was seeing the landscape wonderful and so on, and on the other I was devastated by how dirty it was, all those plastic bags and all these things. And many people didn't give a shit, really. But this is changing. The trend is positive. That's why I'm saying. But we start from, we don't start from you and me in our European capitals.
38. **Interviewer** [0:39:57.0] Now, that's true. But you. Yeah, I've also noticed a change because first time I was in Tbilisi, or in Georgia in 2018 and then last year and already I somehow had the feeling when I travelled the country that it's a bit cleaner. And also in villages it's more...
39. **Interview Partner** [0:40:17.0] Oh, yeah. I think the trend is going in the right direction and natural evolution of society. I think once you become a bit richer you start caring about some other things and I think this link with health, as I was telling you as well, is really getting through.

40. **Interviewer** [0:40:37.0] OK, great, then I think we've reached the end of our interview. Thank you so much again for taking the time. And as I said, I will send you the transcript. And if there's anything that you object, then just tell me.
41. **Interview Partner** [0:40:52.0] You mean the recording. Oh, you will put it in writing.
42. **Interviewer** [0:40:55.0] Yes.
43. **Interview Partner** [0:41:00.0] And as I told you, it's more I mean, send it to me. But if you use me for something in a document or communication or whatever. Show me how you use me so to say.
44. **Interviewer** [0:41:11.0] No, I mean, what I have to do on in my master's thesis is make a list of all the institutions and interview partners that I've spoken to. And then the question is, if I there can put your name or just the EU delegation to Georgia, which is fine. I mean, that's up to you.
45. **Interview Partner** [0:41:30.0] You can put my name.
46. **Interviewer** [0:41:31.0] OK, ok, great. Then thanks again. And I will be in touch.
47. **Interview Partner** [0:41:37.0] OK. OK. Bye, Laura. Tschüss.
48. **Interviewer** [0:41:38.0] All right. Tschüss.