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**BEYOND SIMILARITIES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE EUROPEAN
UNION'S MERIT-BASED ASSESSMENT ON GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA**

Bachelor's Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This research critically examines the claimed normativity in the European Union's decision-making process by scrutinizing the cases of Georgia and Moldova through the methodology of Most Similar Systems Design and the Logic of Process Tracing. The work seeks to discern the unexpected disparate outcomes during the membership application in June of 2022, focusing on tracing the consistency of the European Union's assessment of Georgia and Moldova through the lens of Normative Power Europe theory. The central hypothesis proposes that despite the similarities of the candidates, Georgia has been normatively assessed as underperforming compared to Moldova over the span of the past five years, which could offer an explanation for the contrasting decisions in June of 2022. The results of the analysis unraveled that Georgia had not been assessed as underperforming in comparison to Moldova and, therefore, the hypothesis and the claims of the European Union do not hold.

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this research is to critically examine and trace the consistency of the claimed normativity in the European Union's decision-making process, using the cases of Georgia and Moldova. The research aims to examine the unexpected different outcomes between the two similar states during the membership application in June of 2022. The focus of this work is on analyzing and tracing the consistency of the European Union's assessment through the application of normative power and understanding the factors that contributed to the contrasting outcomes in two similar candidates – more simply, whether the European Union was consistently assessing Georgia as underperforming in comparison to Moldova in the past five years and, as a result, that is the explanation for the dissimilar outcomes. For that purpose the following hypothesis is being proposed: although Georgia and Moldova are similar as prospective candidates of the European Union, normatively Georgia has been assessed as underperforming in comparison to Moldova and that explains the contrasting decisions on the candidacy status in June of 2022.

The research contains three main parts: the context creation and theoretical background, the methodology and the analysis with discussion. In the first part, the importance of the Association Trio and the impact of the war in Ukraine is explained in relation to Georgia and Moldova as the selected cases. The theory of Normative Power is introduced in great detail and constructive criticism is evaluated as well. The second part focuses on the choice of methodology, more precisely the Most Similar Systems Design and the Logic of Process Tracing that are ought to be used for the analysis. There are two types of reports that are going to be used for the analysis – Association Implementation Agreement Reports by the European Council and the Reports on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement by the European Parliament on both Georgia and Moldova for the consecutive years of 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022. The third part of the research shall focus on the tracing analysis, in order to discern, whether the hypothesis is correct or false. Further discussion is ought to conclude the results derived from the analysis of the reports and mention possible prospective developments of this research, as well as regard the granting of candidacy status to Georgia in December of 2023 in this light.

The unexpected nature of Georgia's candidacy rejection in June of 2022, despite the shared similarities as potential candidates with Moldova, raised pertinent questions about the consistency of the European Union's normative power and the coherence of its normative

assessment. The value of this research, in substance, is in discerning whether these pertinent questions are well within reason. Furthermore, research is ought to contribute to the academic discourse on the normative power of the European Union and also to encourage exemplary insights into the process of assessment and the following decision-making of the Union.

1 SETTING CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 The Trio: Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine

In the history of the aspiration towards the membership of the European Union, it can be said that a certain pattern is detected when it comes to the following three countries: Georgia, the Republic of Moldova (from here on, Moldova) and Ukraine. The previously mentioned states have been presenting themselves as a trio of post-Soviet countries, that are driven towards the West and the European Union. For instance, in June of 2014 an Association Agreement providing for A Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area was signed by the European Union and the countries of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (European Commission, 1a, 2014). Moreover, in May of 2021 the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the three previously mentioned states also established an Association Trio, which was an official cooperation between the three countries to further develop and deepen the European Integration and to clearly state the shared intention of acquiring the membership in the European Union (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ukraine, 2021). Although the European Union has not officially recognised the joint endeavour of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova in the face of Association Trio, the cooperation still indicates of the readiness to take on the path towards the European Union together.

The mentioned Association Trio has also been paralleled with the Visegrad Declaration, that was established in 1991, between, at the time, the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Hungary, with similar intentions towards the European Integration (Visegrad Group). All of the previously named Visegrad Declaration member states became members of the European Union during the enlargement process in the year 2004 (European Parliament, 2022) – here, however, the parallel between the Visegrad Declaration and Association Trio culminates, since unlike the Visegrad Declaration members, the Association Trio states have been treated differentially by the European Union, as shall be discussed further.

The beginning of the war in Ukraine on the 24th of February in 2022 has drastically changed the flow of the political reality. It so happened, once again, that the three states of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine all together applied for the membership of the European Union, though in slightly different timeframes: Ukraine on the 28th of February 2022, Moldova and Georgia on the 3rd of March 2022 (European Commission, 1b, 2022). By June 2022 the decision of the European Commission was awaited. On the 17th of June 2022 it was stated by the European Commission that the candidate status was to be granted to Ukraine and Moldova

without delay (European Commission, 1b, 2022). Georgia, however, was declined from receiving the candidate status and was only recognized as a potential candidate and was given advice in the areas that still require certain changes and developments (European Commission, 1b, 2022).

Thus, the European Union differentiated Georgia out of the so-called Association Trio in the context of candidacy status granting, which sparked a great number of discussions and speculations. For instance, a Georgian foreign policy analyst Irakli Sirbiladze had suggested two main arguments in favour of equal treatment for all the three applicants: firstly, the three states have a common security challenge in the face of Russian Federation, and secondly, the structural issues with the fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria are also shared by all the three countries (Civil Georgia, 2022). To further develop that idea, it shall be mentioned that evidently Ukraine is currently in the state of war due to aggression from Russian Federation, however, as it was mentioned, the other two states have previously faced and are currently facing security challenges as well – for instance, in the year 2008 Georgia's territorial integrity was threatened, due to the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russian Federation (Minority Rights Group International, 1a). In the case of the Republic of Moldova, the territory of Transnistria has also been militarily occupied by Russian Federation (Minority Rights Groups International, 1b). Therefore, differential treatment of the states of the Association Trio might be understood by the common security threat (Russian Federation) as the European Union's prioritisation of certain states with neglect of unity and, it can be speculated that such understanding of the situation may give more courage to Russian Federation to act up.

Moreover, as it was already mentioned, the structural issues that are causing trouble with European Union accession criteria fulfillment are also largely shared by all three states. For example, according to a comparative overview done in 2021 (Chkhikvadze et al., 2021) the aspect of human rights were rated as 2 (3 being the highest rate) in all of the three countries, meaning the human rights are respected, however, some minor issues still do need improving (Chkhikvadze et al., 2021: 15). The rule of law was rated as 2,5 in Georgia, and as 1,5 in Moldova and Ukraine – in anti-corruption fight the Georgia also was the leader with a 2,5 rate, Moldova and Ukraine rated as 1 (Chkhikvadze et al., 2021: 15). In electoral democracy, however, Georgia had the lowest rate out of the three countries – 1, Moldova and Ukraine were rated as 2 and 2,5, respectively (Chkhikvadze et al., 2021: 15). That being the case, in the context of political principles and the rule of law Georgia's development was summarily most significant, though Ukraine and Moldova's results followed up very close. The previously mentioned results were brought out in order to highlight the similarity between the issues that

all of the three states face and to, therefore, show that the differentiation of Georgia from the so-called trio is a relevant topic for further research.

1.1.1 Two Similar Candidates– Different Outcomes

For the purpose of the given research, it has been decided to leave out the state of Ukraine due to the war, that naturally affects that states' ability to live up to the set standards and norms of the European Union. That being the case, the main interest area for the research is then narrowed down to two states out of the aforementioned trio: the states of Georgia and Moldova. The two countries do have rather a lot in common as candidates, for example, there is a shared past when it comes to the times of the Soviet Union and of the large influence that Russian Federation was able to inflict on the states. In addition, as it was previously stated, both Georgia and Moldova have *de-facto* states that lack international recognition, yet can be a matter of further potential security threat due to the occupation of the territories of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria by the powers of Russian Federation. The two states have been actively aspiring towards the European Union and as it has been already mentioned, both countries even applied for the membership of the European Union at the same time. Although the mentioned similarities of the two candidates are extensive, the outcomes of the applications followed up to be different: European Commission decided to grant the European Union candidacy status to Moldova, but the state of Georgia was not granted such candidacy status in June of 2022.

1.2 Theoretical Framework: Normative Power Europe

The given research shall be conducted through the theoretical framework of the concept of Normative Power Europe. The mentioned approach has been largely popularized by a political scientist Ian Manners and the basis for understanding Normative Power Europe will be taken from his academic work: „Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?“ (Manners, 2002) as well as other relevant academic pieces. It is most relevant to start off with a direct definition of Normative Power Europe that is given by Manners: in its essence normative power is the ability to influence the norms and to affect what is considered appropriate and what is not (Manners, 2002: 239). In the case of the European Union it can be rephrased as projecting the European Union's ideals and standards as obligatory to follow to all its members and the potential members and candidates as well. The phenomenon of normative power is seen by Manners as an alternative to civilian and military powers, as those two seem to be too concentrated on treating the European Union as a highly state-like entity – the concept of

normative power has a focus on the international identity of the European Union and highlights the new political form of it (Manners, 2002: 239-240). For Manners, the civilian and military powers simply reflect the ability to use either civilian or military instruments - normative power, however, is the power over opinion or the ability to shape the conceptions of what is normal (Manners, 2002: 240). The European Union has normative approach at the centre of communication not only within its members but also in the external relations and projects a conditional set of norms in that context as well (Manners, 2002: 241).

Moreover, Manners claims that the normative power is inherent to the European Union due to its undeniable normative basis that it was built on, and the author outlines five of those most fundamental norms: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (Manners, 2002: 242-243). These noble norms were the product of their time, since they were established in the post-war period and created the expectation for the European Union to be the force for the better (Mayer, 2008: 67). In the context of membership application for the European Union the Copenhagen Accession Criteria shall be mentioned, since it emphasizes the three necessary aspects that have also been referred to in the European Commission's statement of recommendations that must be fulfilled by Georgia and Moldova. The three conditional criterias as mentioned are the following: 1) stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; 2) a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU, and 3) the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union (EUR-Lex). The normative basis of the European Union is considered undeniable because all of the previously mentioned norms are represented and projected in various prominent and founding documents, such as, for instance, The European Coal and Steel Treaty or the Copenhagen Criteria (Manners, 2002: 242).

As it was previously mentioned, a state that has the ambition of becoming a member or a candidate of the European Union is required to fit those norms – consequently, this explains why the decision-making of Georgia's rejection by the European Union can be considered either consistently normative or not. If the analysis of the reports by the European Union show that the set norms and ideals have continuously not been reached by the state of Georgia in comparison to Moldova, and the provided recommendations and critiques in reports in the timeframe of five years show that, then the difference of the outcomes can be considered to be of purely normative nature. If not and the provided recommendations and critiques in reports

do not project the consistency of such normative assessment of Georgia's underperformance, then the rejection might not be purely normative – since, if the problematic aspects are consistently highly similar in both of the candidates according to the European Union's own reports, yet the outcomes happen to be contrasting, there may be other reasonings for the difference. For example, perhaps of geopolitical nature. The detailed methodological handling of the research through the „Most Similar Systems Design“ shall be explained in the second chapter.

1.2.1 Criticism of Normative Power Europe

Although the research is based on the theory of Normative Power Europe, it is necessary to mention the criticism and the challenges that the theory faces. For instance, a German political scientist Thomas Diez has tried to point out the weaknesses of the normative power theory proposed by Ian Manners. The most prominent issues will be brought out further. Firstly, it can be mentioned that Diez in general questions, whether normative power can be truly considered a separate entity in itself. The author mentions that Ian Manners strongly emphasizes the distinction between civilian and normative power – however, Diez finds that such distinction comes from a rather reductionist viewing of civilian power as a mere ability to use civilian instruments (Diez, 2004: 617). Diez mentions that it has been proposed that civilian power may be even seen as a particular embodiment of normative power, since it has the same dimension of values but specifically the civilian ones (Diez, 2004: 617-618). Therefore, meaning that the two are not as radically discernible as Manners has claimed.

Another weakness that Diez points out is the fact that it is not possible to make a straightforward distinction between norms and interests, since most often they are intertwined (Diez, 2004: 622). When one takes a look at the historic background of the colonial ambitions of some of the founding states of the European Union, it can become questionable, whether the union promotes its norms, or seeks to achieve certain strategic interests connected, for example, to the on-growing political power or economy. Diez mentions that during the post Second World War period the institutions that were established were, perhaps even unintentionally, mainly projecting the ideals of the United States, in order to build an international community with shared values and purposes (Diez, 2004: 622). And although those ideals are commendable, yet if they are applied with the purpose of achieving certain strategic goals, then there is an instrumental aspect in such action – Manners, however, claimed that normative power is a separate entity and should not be seen instrumentally. The two of the introduced criticisms are not the sole shortcomings of the Normative Power Europe theory, yet, they are

enough to mark that the theoretical framework does have certain deficiencies and is not to be taken as flawless.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter it was shown that the theoretical framework of Normative Power Europe indicates that the European Union projects certain normative standards, especially to its prospective members. The normative standards are ought to be consistently achieved by the states that carry the ambition of joining the Union – in particular research, the states that shall be compared are Georgia and Moldova. European Union proclaims in its official documentation (such as agreement implementation reports) that the decision-making process is merit-based according to the fundamental values that have been established in the base agreements and treaties of the Union. The goal of the research is to analyze the coherence of the European Union's normativity in the candidacy processes of Georgia and Moldova in the implementation reports for the consecutive years 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022 and to observe, whether the explanatory factor for the unexpected differential candidacy outcomes of the two similar states can, therefore, be the consistent normative shortfall of Georgia in comparison to Moldova.

2.1 Research Objectives

In consonance with what has been said, the main objective of the research is to critically examine and trace the consistency of the claimed normativity in the European Union's decision-making process, using the cases of Georgia and Moldova. The research aims to examine the unexpected different outcomes between the two similar states during the membership application in June 2022. Considering the European Union's claim of normative and merit-based decision-making, the research shall analyze the recent Association Implementation Agreement Reports and Reports on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement for the years 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022 issued by the European Commission and the European Parliament, correspondingly. The focus is on analyzing and tracing the consistency of the European Union's assessment through the application of normative power and understanding the factors that contributed to the contrasting outcomes – more simply, whether the European Union was consistently assessing Georgia as underperforming in comparison to Moldova in the past five years and, as a result, that is the explanation for the dissimilar outcomes. The research is also ought to explore, whether the European Union's change in decision for Georgia's candidacy status in December 2023 aligns with the previous

normative assessments. Onwards, the description of the methodological approach and explanation for the case and material selection will be articulated in further detail.

2.1.1 The Value of the Research

The unexpected nature of Georgia's candidacy rejection in June of 2022, despite the shared similarities as potential candidates with Moldova, raised pertinent questions about the consistency of the European Union's normative power and the coherence of its normative assessment. The exploration of these questions is timely, especially due to the recent update of Georgia receiving the candidacy status in December of 2023, rather shortly after being rejected. That depicts the adaptability and flexibility of the European Union and the possible impact of non-normative factors in the decision-making. The given research is ought to contribute to the academic discourse on the normative power of the European Union and also to encourage exemplary insights into the process of assessment and the following decision-making of the Union.

2.2 Methodology: Most Similar Systems Design

For the given research, it has been decided to use the method of „Most Similar Systems Design“. This methodology provides the opportunity to highlight the likeness of the states of Georgia and Moldova as the potential candidates of the European Union, and to explore the European Union's consistency of normative assessment as the proposed factor for the divergent candidacy outcomes in June of 2022.

„Most Similar Systems Design“ (from here on, MSSD) is in itself a comparative method, in particular research the comparison is of two cases: Georgia and Moldova. It is important to note that the cases are to be considered similar in relevant variables, not identical (Danyi C. & Danyi P., 2017: 9). The case selection for MSSD is most often not random but purposeful, so as to choose the cases that do have important factors in common, yet the different outcomes raise questions considering the reasonings behind them (Danyi C. & Danyi P., 2017: 10). MSSD relies on the concept that if two similar cases happen to have unexpectedly different outcomes, then there must be a particular differential factor that has influenced the outcomes beyond the similarities (Tarrow, 2010: 234). In case of the given research such differential variable is the proclaimed consistent normative shortfall of Georgia in comparison to Moldova, that will be traced and examined through the analysis of the previously mentioned reports. The similarity variables, however, are going to be grouped followingly: 1) Georgia and Moldova have similar recent historical background in the context of the Soviet Union which still

sufficiently influences both of the states; 2) Consequently, the role of Russian Federation is still rather large in both of the states; 3) Georgia and Moldova both have territorial integrity issues with *de-facto* states and face common security challenges from Russian Federation; 4) Georgia and Moldova share strong aspirations towards the European Union and have solid relationships with the Union; 5) The recommendations that were provided for both of the countries in June of 2022 were largely similar.

More precisely, the logic of process tracing shall be used, which is a qualitative methodological approach that can be utilized in a paired comparison. Such tracing of process is done through an in-depth analysis of certain mechanisms that are hypothesised to be the explanatory factors behind an outcome (Beach, & Pedersen, 2019: 3-6). In case of this study, the mechanisms that are going to be analyzed are the reports on the implementation of the Association Agreement, for both Georgia and Moldova. The reports themselves will be analyzed through horizontal analysis, which allows to trace and capture the advancements of the states and their normative assessment over the period of five years. The reports are the hypothesised explanatory link between the similarity of the states and the unexpected different outcomes (Bouyousfi, & Sabar, 2022: 85-86) – therefore, the hypothesis is: although Georgia and Moldova are similar as prospective candidates of the European Union, normatively Georgia has been assessed as underperforming in comparison to Moldova and that explains the contrasting decisions on the candidacy status in June of 2022. The method of logical process tracing has been criticized as „story-telling“ by those who are loyal to the strict logic of correlation, however, process tracing is valuable due to the ability of specifically analyzing how a process has occurred and, in so, explaining the particular outcome of interest – or in other words, it can often display that the process in itself is the actual outcome (Tarrow, 2010: 239-240).

2.2.1 The Shortcomings and the Advantages

It is relevant to mention some of the most common critiques that have been voiced concerning MSSD and the paired comparison methodology in general, and the counter-arguments to those concerns. Most often, the usual critiques circle around the non-representativeness of the small-N analysis and the atheoretical case selection – meaning that the choice of only two specific cases is not enough to cover larger phenomena and the selection of the cases is „biased“ to a sufficient extent (Tarrow, 2010: 247-248). On the contrary, paired comparisons offer a more intimate and in-depth examination that can contribute to the demonstration of a theory more convincingly than a rather superficial large-N analysis (Tarrow, 2010: 249). Additionally, the

intentional case selection is quite common in area studies and, for that reason, is not necessarily problematic but rather natural, since the differences in the processes or outcomes in similar and comparable cases can be highly noticeable without too much of initial investigation (Tarrow, 2010: 249).

2.3 Case Selection

The cases of Georgia's and Moldova's candidacies are highly relevant when it comes to the concept of normative power and the consistency of its application in the decision-making of the European Union. Firstly, both of the states share the ambition and aspiration of becoming a member of the European Union and that can be confirmed with the obvious fact that the two states have applied for the membership. More importantly, both Georgia and Moldova have been normatively assessed by the Union's institutions at least over the course of the last five years, in order to examine the compliance of the states with the necessary standards. It is also of great importance that the decisions on the candidacies of the states are fairly recent and, therefore, yet not outdated – Moldova received its candidacy status and, on the contrary, Georgia did not receive it in June of 2022. The fact that most recently Georgia was granted the candidacy status, in December of 2023, adds an additional layer of interest to the topic that is being researched, since such a quick change of the decision concerning candidacy can be also discussed in the context of the consistency of the European Union's normative assessment. The two countries share various similarities that will be explained in depth in the analytical chapter, that is the most important criterion for the choice of these two states.

2.4 Material Selection and Limitations

As the main focus of the given research is to examine the consistency of the normative assessment by the European Union's normative power and, in so, to find out whether Georgia really was consistently assessed as underperforming in comparison to Moldova and, therefore, persistently falling short on the merit-based evaluation – it is reasonable to use the reports that most directly analyze the developments of both of the states on the path towards the European Union.

There are two types of reports that are going to be used for the analysis – Association Implementation Agreement Reports by the European Council and the Reports on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement by the European Parliament. These documents have been chosen, due to the fact, that they provide clear insights to the normative

evaluation by the European Union during Georgia's and Moldova's process of aspiration towards the Union membership. More precisely: the Association Implementation Agreement Reports on Georgia (issued by the European Commission) for the years 2019 and 2021, and the Reports on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement on Georgia (issued by the European Parliament) for the years 2018 and 2022; the Association Implementation Agreement Reports on Moldova (issued by the European Commission) for the years 2018, 2019 and 2021, and the Report on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement on Moldova (issued by the European Parliament) for the year 2022.

The timeframe of five years was chosen as it was most optimal, considering the limited capacity of the thesis, in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the reports to trace and compare the normative assessment of the two states and to evaluate this normative assessment as the proposed factor for the differential outcomes of the similar countries. Unfortunately, one of the main limitations is the fact that for the year 2020 there was not issued an equal agreement implementation report or another comparable report on Moldova and, for that reason, the year 2020 will be left out of the analysis. In order to maintain consistency and parity, the report for the year 2020 will be excluded for both of the states. It is most evident that the inclusion of all relevant reports is necessary for a comprehensive examination. Yet, this misfortune is not of majorly critical character, since the reports for the years 2018, 2019 and 2021, 2022 are available, hence the developments of the states and the European Union's normative assessment are nevertheless traceable through the period of recent years.

3 ANALYSIS

3.1 Similarities of Georgia and Moldova

As it was previously mentioned in the methodological chapter the similarity variables shall be classified followingly:

- 1) Georgia and Moldova have similar recent historical background in the context of the Soviet Union which has influenced both of the states;
- 2) Consequently, the role of Russian Federation is still rather large in both of the states;
- 3) Georgia and Moldova both have territorial integrity issues with *de-facto* states and, in so, face common security challenges from Russian Federation;
- 4) Georgia and Moldova share strong aspirations towards the European Union and have solid relationships with the Union;
- 5) The recommendations that were provided for both of the countries in June of 2022 were largely similar in their content.

Georgia and Moldova were both occupied by Russian Federation and confined to be a part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (from here on, the Soviet Union). Although Georgia was forcefully co-joined to the Soviet Union 18 years earlier than Moldova, both of the states gained their independence only in 1991, which means that for an extensive period of more than 50 years, both of the states' recent history was, in fact, the common history of the ruling Communist Party (Minority Rights Group International; 1a, 1b). That anticipates the similarity in the struggle of the two states on the path of becoming democratic and sovereign parliamentary republics, after being coerced into the standards and norms set by the Communist Party for a substantial amount of time.

Stemming from the extensive coercion by Russian Federation the states were inevitably highly influenced not only in the political criterion, but, for instance, culturally. It is common for all post-Soviet states that the amount of people that speak and understand Russian language remains relevant, since during the times of the Soviet Union Russian was the official language and very commonly expected to be spoken fluently. Such influence can still be relevant nowadays, since the people with knowledge of Russian language ought to be more exposed to the familiar informational environment of the propaganda that is being produced by Russian Federation, such as the official governmental TV channels and other news formats of Russia (Minority Rights Group International; 1a, 1b). Another still relevant influence of Russian

Federation concerning Georgia and Moldova, is the economic aspect of cooperation. According to the World Integrated Trade Solution reports for the year 2021, it can be mentioned that both of the states have strong trading ties with Russian Federation, Russia belongs to the top five export and import partners of Georgia and Moldova, other main trading partners such as the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Türkiye are also shared by both of the states (World Integrated Trade Solution 1a, 1b: 2021).

Georgia and Moldova both struggle with territorial integrity, as the countries have *de-facto* states that lack international recognition, yet act as autonomous regions. The main problematic aspect of those regions is, however, once again connected to Russian Federation, since the *de-facto* states are highly pro-Russian and the ideas of merging with Russia are consistently up for the discussion (Minority Rights Group International; 1a, 1b). Such regions ruin the necessary imposition, settled by the European Union, of territorial integrity for both of the states, and the closeness of those regions with Russian Federation create consistent tensions concerning state security. Especially, if the current geopolitical threat in the context of Russian Federation's war against Ukraine is taken in consideration.

The two states are clearly on the path of aspiration towards the European Union, the most obvious evidence for that is the application for the Union's membership in June of 2022. However, it shall be mentioned just as in the theoretical chapter, that both of the countries were a part of the so-called Trio that was perceived rather uniformly by the European Union and cooperated substantially on the path towards their prospective membership. The political and economical ties of Moldova and the European Union were strengthened with the signing of an Association Agreement in 2014, which obliges the state to commit to a large set of standards such as valuing democratic and sovereign utilities, fundamental rights, liberal and free market economy principles, as well as much more (European Parliament, 1b). Such Association Agreement, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, was also signed between the European Union and Georgia, but in 2016 (European Parliament, 1c). Both of the countries have received extensive financial aid and support from the European Union, in different forms such as grants, but loans as well – for instance, Moldova has been supported by the European Union with over 1.09 billion Euros just in the last two years (European Parliament, 1b) and Georgia receives around 100 million Euros on average each year from the European Union to keep developing the aspect of economy and good governance (European Parliament, 1c). That also indicates the serious approach of the European Union towards these two states and shows the willingness to invest into the aspiring candidates and prospective members of the Union.

When it comes to the recommendations that were provided by the European Commission to Georgia and Moldova in June of 2022, together with the final decisions on the candidacy, it can be claimed that they were interestingly similar in their general content and the most emphasized issues were similar. Both of the countries received recommendations that drew attention to the main problematic points that are expected to be settled and developed, Georgia received twelve and Moldova received nine recommendations. The main conclusion from both of the opinions claims that in general, both of the states have been successful in establishing solid basis for further alignment. However, both were encouraged to continue the committed fight against corruption and to strengthen the specific institutions of Anti-Corruption - Anti-Corruption Agency in case of Georgia and National Anticorruption Centre in case of Moldova (European Commission, 1c; 1d). Both Georgia and Moldova are ought to go through with effective judicial reforms to ensure transparency and independence of the prosecution chains (European Commission, 1c; 1d). The European Commission (1c; 1d) also stressed the importance of the civil society and the securing of fundamental human rights, as well as encouraged the process of „de-oligarchisation“. The political criteria were assessed as satisfactory in both Georgia and Moldova, and the economic criteria was considered decent as well, with the nuance of considerations towards the competitive market pressure in the European Union that the states need to be consistently aware of and prepared for (European Commission, 1c; 1d).

3.2 Reports on Georgia

As it has been outlined above in the chapter of methodology, the reports on the implementation of Association Agreement will be analyzed consecutively for the following years: 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022. This particular section shall focus on the analysis of the reports on Georgia.

The „Report on the Implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Georgia for the year 2018 (European Parliament, 2018) begins with the general positive assessment of the developments of Georgia but notes the necessity of extra regard towards the labour standards, discrimination against vulnerable groups and environmental protection (European Parliament, 2018: 3). In 2018 Georgia was only at the beginning of its' European path and, for that reason, it was stressed that Georgia is expected to assign qualified officials in order to establish the necessary norms and to develop the necessary institutions for the proper implementation of Association Agreement (European Parliament, 2018: 7). In the aspects of political dialogue, the European Union assessed Georgia's evolving strengthening of democracy and stressed the

importance of opposition in a parliamentary republic (European Parliament, 2018: 8-9). The European Union was welcoming of the pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution and found it positive that Georgia takes great efforts in keeping a dialogue with Russian Federation (European Parliament, 2018: 9). The issues with corruption were found to be tackled mainly at the low and mid-level, however, high level cases of corruption were only yet to be tracked independently and transparently (European Parliament, 2018: 10). The Georgian Government at the time failed with the establishment of new legislations that were adopted in order to improve the public's access to information – nevertheless, it was stressed that on the Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index Georgia showed sufficient progress and moved up to a 61st place in 2018 (European Parliament, 2018: 10). The encouragement for clear and transparent policies based on human rights were especially relevant, due to the case of an Azerbaijani journalist abduction that, unfortunately, according the European Union's assessment lacked proper investigation (European Parliament, 2018: 11). In the economic area, the deepening of trade relations between Georgia and the European Union were positively noted and in the area of energy, Georgia was successful in joining and implementing multilateral environmental agreements, yet it was stressed that the issues of air pollution need to be taken more seriously in consideration (European Parliament, 2018: 13).

In the report for the year 2019, it was assessed that the presidential elections that were held in 2018 were largely satisfactorily competitive and well administered, although some misuse of power resources were noticed (European Commission, 2019b: 2). The media freedom was rated the same as for the previous year, yet the foundation for civil society remained weak (European Commission, 2019b: 3). However, in the aspect of corruption, Georgia scored higher than any other country within the European Neighbourhood Policy, and that required to be handled as effectively as possible (European Commission, 2019b: 3). Fundamental rights such as gender equality, anti-discrimination and children's rights were of strugglesome implementation for Georgia and, it was especially noted that the independent investigation mechanisms failed to further investigate the abduction of the previously mentioned Azerbaijani journalist (European Commission, 2019b: 4). In the context of freedom and justice, Georgia did implement various judiciary strategies, for instance, prosecutorial strategy with new ethics, and strongly continued the fight against organised crime and illegal activities, yet failed to ensure data protection of citizens' according to the heightened complaints (European Commission, 2019b: 7-8). In the economic development, Georgia continued scoring high as one of the key partners for the European Union and as a positive international business environment, yet the unemployment statistics remained high and that had caused the continuity

of poverty among the citizens (European Commission, 2019b: 11-13). Georgia's general level of energy aquis was rated at about 23%, and the state continued its development on the path towards renewable energy with the promotion of hydro power and electricity parks (European Commission, 2019b: 15).

In spite of COVID-19, Georgia continued the cooperation with the European Union and overall was positively assessed in the report of 2021. In 2020 the first round of parliamentary elections were held and the competitiveness of the elections was rated as satisfactory by the observers, however, certain issues such as voter pressure and unreasonable unification between the ruling party and the state were noticed and criticized (European Commission, 2021b: 3). The media was assessed as pluralistic and independent and in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index Georgia maintained its 60th rank (European Commission, 2021b: 4). On the topic of fundamental rights, Georgia adopted a substantial amount of new amendments that ensure better protection against discrimination, provide paid maternity leave and the regard towards the permitted working time – the significant problem, however, remains with the violence against children and a large gender inequality (European Commission, 2021b: 5). When it comes to the anti-corruption measures, there was no decision taken by Georgia on the establishment of an Anti-Corruption Agency and according to the 2020 Transparency International corruption perception index, Georgia scored 56/100, which was not a positive indicator and pointed to the states' stagnation on that matter (European Commission, 2021b: 8). The previously mentioned complaints on data protection remained relevant among citizens, but it shall be noted that Georgian Parliament initiated a new data protection law to counter that issue (European Commission, 2021b: 9). In the economical aspects, Georgia continued ranking as great business environment and adapting the necessary strategies that are required by the European standards, yet the problematic aspect of unemployment remained, especially due to the challenging situation with the pandemic (European Commission, 2021b: 11-12). On the energy and climate action Georgia set the basis for further developments by establishing energy efficiency policies and enhancing the institutional set-up by creating the Climate Change Council (European Commission, 2021b: 15).

In the report for the year 2022 the European Parliament assessed the issue of political polarisation as the continuously defining characteristic of Georgia's political reality and pointed out the necessity to avoid aggressively negative expressions concerning the European Union's institutions and its allies (European Parliament, 2022b: 9). The issue of the much-needed justice reform was also emphasized and it was stressed once again that transparency in judiciary is a requisite for assuring democracy (European Parliament, 2022b: 10). The need to

fight stagnation in high-level anti-corruption was highlighted and the significance of extensive media freedom was strongly criticized – namely, the deterioration in media freedom of Georgia has been a relevant and an urgent problem that is ought to be solved in accordance with independence and respect for freedoms, yet the danger of growing Russian propaganda amongst the citizens of Georgia was also mentioned and called out for prevention (European Parliament, 2022b: 11-12). When it comes to fundamental rights, the authorities of Georgia have been advised to further focus on the rights of women and ensuring gender equality, moreover, the rights of vulnerable groups in general should be secured in a better way, since, for instance, during Tbilisi Pride 2021 there was violence being used against the peaceful participants – a clear indication of intolerance (European Parliament, 2022b: 12-13). Concerning the economical field, Georgia was commended for building a strong basis for a fully functioning marketing economy and was praised for continuously deepening its trade relationship with the European Union, while noting that the energy sector of Georgia is still in need of further development and environmental sustainability has not been reached yet (European Parliament, 2022b: 13-14).

3.3 Reports on Moldova

This particular section shall focus on the analysis of the reports on the implementation of Association Agreement by Moldova.

In the report for the year 2018 it is mentioned that although in the previous year Moldova changed its electoral system, the institutions of the European Union and other non-governmental observers noted non-transparent use of administrative resources for purposes of political nature, which strongly indicates towards oligarchisation and, furthermore, the ownership of media remained rather monopolised and according to the Reporters without Border World Press Freedom Index for the year 2017 Moldova ranked at the 80th place (European Commission, 2018: 3). The efforts of Moldova on public administration reform were assessed as satisfactory, however, further development towards efficient governance was highlighted (European Commission, 2018: 3). The field of fundamental freedoms was criticized, especially in the context of criminal prosecution, since the system in Moldova has showed various times that there is lack of right to security and liberty, the issues with gender equality and child protection were yet to be tackled, although the necessary strategies were approved (European Commission, 2018: 4-5). Judiciary was assessed as in need of proper reform strategy, since transparency and independence were noted to be deficient, as, for

instance, Moldova ranked 132 out of 137 countries on judicial independence in the Global Competitiveness report for the years 2017-2018 (European Commission, 2018: 6). When it comes to anti-corruption measures, Moldova adopted a new anti-corruption strategy, however, the implementation of the strategy was only ought to be forcefully started (European Commission, 2018: 6-7). The highlighted problem of human trafficking in Moldova was also not fully tackled, as the national strategy for combatting trafficking of human beings was not yet approved or adopted by the government of Moldova (European Commission, 2018: 7). The economic development of Moldova was assessed by the European Commission as struggling, since the banking sector was facing difficult situations such as money laundering and non-transparency issues – it was also noted that the business environment of Moldova was unpleasant due to the strong effects of corruption and inconsistency in policies, therefore, the general evaluation found that market economy must be strengthened (European Commission, 2018: 9). Nevertheless, it was stressed that reforms in the financial sector are being successfully pursued by Moldova and, for instance, the protection of intellectual property rights had developed significantly, although the challenges of meeting the necessary labour standards are still in need of progress (European Commission, 2018: 12). Moldova's environment and climate action was noted to be making gradual progress with the ratification and legislation of agreements and strategies concerning climate change – yet, it was stressed that climate change remained a challenge for Moldova due to insufficient institutional framework (European Commission, 2018: 13).

The report on Moldova for the year 2019 started off with regards towards the lack of transparency in the elections of the Chişinău mayor in 2018 – observers noted the lack of respect towards democratic standards and transparency (European Commission, 2019a: 2). Nevertheless, the parliamentary elections of Moldova in 2019 were assessed as satisfactory in the context of competitiveness, although some issues concerning campaign financing and misuse of state resources were raised (European Commission, 2019a: 3). The media ownership remained concentrated and rather monopolised and it was noted that there was a significant deterioration of Moldova in the media freedom ranking by the Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index – Moldova fell to the 91st place (European Commission, 2019a: 4). The reforms of public administration and financial management were in general assessed as successful and efficient, positive steps were taken by Moldova towards stricter requirements on accounting, public procurement and reporting (European Commission, 2019a: 4). When it comes to fundamental freedoms it was, unfortunately, stressed by the Commission that Moldova largely failed in its development in that context – non-transparency in judiciary

continued, discrimination and hate speech towards vulnerable groups (such as Roma, or LGBTIQI+ community) had increased and the issues of gender equality and child protection had been tackled to a certain level by adoption of new legislations, yet the implementation mechanism remained weak (European Commission, 2019a: 5-6). As it was mentioned, the issues of the functioning of judiciary remained most relevant in Moldova and the Commission expressed serious concerns due to the following incidents: the invalidation of the elections of the mayor of Chişinău, non-transparent selection and appointment of judges and excessive use of closed hearing procedures - although it is mentioned that necessary amendments were adopted, the implementation was named to be weak once again (European Commission, 2019a: 7-8). When it comes to fight against corruption, various strategies and legislations were approved by Moldova and the identification of violations in the area of money laundering became more efficient (European Commission, 2019a: 8-9). The issue of human trafficking was given a central role and the government of Moldova adopted a new action plan, the development of cyber security was also praised by the Commission and important progress was achieved by Moldova in the protection of personal data (European Commission, 2019a: 10). The economic development of Moldova was assessed as satisfactory, the banking sector was stable and relevant fiscal measures were adopted on paper, however, the general business environment in Moldova remained unsatisfactory due to the largely common corruption in the World Bank Doing Business Report Moldova ranked 47th out of 190 countries (European Commission, 2019a: 12). Moldova was praised for deepening its trade relationship with the European Union and adopting environmental and climate change legislation, which framed the states' strategic work in the energy sector (European Commission, 2019a: 17-18).

In spite of COVID-19, the report for the year 2021 depicts rather considerable changes in the political landscape of Moldova and the states' cooperation with the Union – both the presidential and parliamentary elections carried out in 2020 were noted by observers as generally well-managed and it was clear that voters had a choice between political alternatives, moreover, for the first time in Moldova a pro-reform party won the elections, yet it shall be mentioned that some shortcomings were noticed as well: election campaigns contained negative and divisive rhetoric, some concerns over campaign finance oversight were also voiced (European Commission, 2021a: 3-4). When it comes to fundamental rights, media freedom was assessed as weak due to the continuous concentration and monopolisation of media ownership; implementation on the development of human rights were also lacking, the rights to security in criminal prosecution remained unensured, hate speech towards vulnerable groups remained as a relevant problem and gender equality was not safeguarded, as women

still face limited involvement due to gender stereotypes (European Commission, 2021a: 6-7). Judiciary in Moldova was still criticized by the European Union and allegations of questionable and biased decision-making were voiced, yet the fight against corruption was noted to be efficient especially due to the increase in budget for the anti-corruption institutions of Moldova, but also due to the legislation of new laws and strategies that are being actively implemented (European Commission, 2021a: 10-11). Unfortunately, the issues of organised crimes were still reported to be highly relevant and of substantial threat for Moldova, especially when it comes to trafficking of human beings, but in general Moldova's cooperation with Europol Cybercrime Centre remained good, although limited (European Commission, 2021a: 11-12). The economic development did face some difficulties according to the assessment, as the gross domestic product did pass through a steep decline and inflation moderated, banking sector did face instability and the business environment once again remained unsatisfactory due to the lack of judicial independence and continuous corruption (European Commission, 2021a: 13-14). European Union did praise Moldova for the consistent trade relationship and for furthering its legislative development when it comes to energy and climate change, special progress was achieved on chemicals and waste management, moreover, efficient monitoring and reporting systems were established on a national level (European Commission, 2021a: 17-18).

The report for the year 2022 shows that significant development was achieved by Moldova, the reform agenda that was adapted was named „unprecedented“ and its implementation was assessed as rather satisfactory (European Parliament, 2022a: 11). The heavy dependence on Russian Federation's energy by Moldova was highly stressed by the European Union and the need to increase power generation capacity was also mentioned (European Parliament, 2022a: 13). The significance of justice reform was emphasized and it was noted that there is still a general problem with transparency and independence in decision-making processes, the corruption issues were highlighted as well – namely, large-scale corruption is claimed to be the most relevant problem in Moldova (European Parliament, 2022a: 15-16). When it comes to fundamental rights, the concerns regarding overpowering discrimination and hate speech were voiced by the Union, in addition, gender inequality remained an issue, although Moldova had adapted legislation to solve that, yet the implementation of these policies could have been more efficient (European Parliament, 2022a: 17-18). In the economic area, Moldova was once again praised for deepening its trade cooperation with the Union and the need for digital market economy of Moldova was stressed (European Parliament, 2022a: 19). More of devoted commitment was asked of Moldova in the policies of climate change – it is expected that energy efficiency and sustainability shall be

developed further (European Parliament, 2022a: 20, 24). Media freedom remained problematic and was assessed as not satisfactory, since the concentration of media ownership had not been tackled effectively and the necessity of independent media was highly accentuated once again (European Parliament, 2022a: 22).

3.4 Analysis and Discussion

After tracing the reports on both Georgia and Moldova for the years 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022 it seems to be difficult to discern the consistent normative shortfall of Georgia in comparison to Moldova that was assumed as the possible reasoning behind the contrasting decisions on the candidacy in June of 2022. The fundamental problems are generally shared by both of the states and the issues that have been stressed and highlighted the most by the European Union are common. For instance, the aspect of media freedom was criticized throughout the five year span continuously in the reports for Georgia and Moldova – the monopolisation of media ownership was especially emphasized in case of Moldova and in case of Georgia more so the safety of journalists’ and their rights’ were regarded. The judicial system was consistently assessed as rather unsatisfactory in both of the cases and the need for significant reforms were followed through by both countries, yet in case of Moldova questions about the assignment of judges and other relevant professionals of judiciary were raised in a more pronounced way. The elections that had been held during the period of the analyzed reports were considered to be largely in accordance with democratic standards and were assessed as satisfactory, although in both cases some shortcomings (for instance, the aggressive and divisive rhetoric of election campaigns) were noticed. However, the big common issue that must be tackled in Georgia and Moldova is the general level of corruption, as well as especially corruption at high-levels – for Moldova, the business environment was assessed as unpleasant for international partners due to problems with corruption, yet in case of Georgia the business environment was continuously evaluated as friendly and pleasant. The lack of fundamental human rights is also a noticeable assessed similarity between the two states. Georgia struggled mostly with discrimination against vulnerable groups and gender inequality, moreover, the issues of untackled unemployment and child protection were more pronounced. For Moldova, discrimination of such groups as Romas and LGBTQI+ community, and gender inequality were also relevant, however, the critical issues of organised crimes especially in the form of human trafficking and the lack of rights to security during criminal prosecution caught the eye.

In the area of economic development it was evident that Georgia had the upper hand in the assessment throughout the reports – the trade relations with the Union were consistently assessed as pleasantly strong and it was declared by the European Union that Georgia was successful in establishing a strong base of market economy. Although Moldova’s trade cooperation with the European Union was also praised, it was mentioned that there is still a long way to go economy-wise and the base for stability is yet being established. The one issue that can be named as particular in case of Georgia that was not evident in the reports on Moldova, is the mentioning of political polarisation. Nevertheless, taking in consideration the deepness of the nature of all the previously mentioned issues that both of the states share, it became evident that Georgia was not consistently assessed as underperforming in comparison to Moldova and, accordingly, the hypothesis that „although Georgia and Moldova are similar as prospective candidates of the European Union, normatively Georgia had been assessed as underperforming in comparison to Moldova and that explains the contrasting decisions on the candidacy status in June of 2022“ did not prove itself and instead can indicate that there could be other suspected explanatory variables besides the proclaimed merit-based assessment by the European Union.

Such conclusion from the process tracing analysis does not immediately indicate, and the goal of the research is not to claim, that the normative power of the European Union in the context of merit-based assessment is non-existent in these cases. Nonetheless, it does show that the claimed normative assessment was not the sole explanatory variable of the differing outcomes for the two states in June of 2022. In the context of Normative Power Europe, the process tracing can be viewed as a particular and detailed example of implementation of normative assessment utilized by the European Union – the two states were genuinely assessed throughout the period of five years to examine the aptness of Georgia and Moldova to the necessary standards implied by the institutions of the European Union. That is one of the positive outcomes of the given research, the fact that the theory of Normative Power Europe was applied in a particular and practical comparative study. Furthermore, aforementioned results from the process tracing logic shed light to the important issue (which was mentioned in the chapter of theoretical background) of the difficult distinction between the projection of noble standards by the European Union to its prospective members and the possibility of potential vested interest behind the decision-making outcomes of the Union. For instance, the significance of the geopolitical atmosphere can be influential in the decision-making process – that is what generally sparks speculations behind the differing outcomes. The initiation of war by Russian Federation against Ukraine was the preliminary reason for the applications for the

European Union's memberships – in so, the assumption of geopolitical reasoning in the decision-making process concerning the candidacy status in June of 2022 does seem within reason. For example, it is possible to refer to the European Parliament's dissatisfaction with the relationship tightness between Georgia and Russia, with claims of Georgia's surplus accommodation of Kremlin that is demonstrated by the states' failure to implement the Union-led sanctions against Russia and the continuous recommencement of direct flights between Georgia and Russia (European Parliament, 1c: 2-3). This particular aspect could be viewed through the following framework: the rejection of Georgia's candidacy status in June of 2022 could be interpreted not as a purely merit-based decision, but perhaps as a soft political nudge for the termination of close relationship between Georgia and Russian Federation – that is not a claim or a hypothesis being made in the given research, yet it could be the natural sequel of this work in order to investigate further explanatory variables. Such research could be done, for instance, through the method of narrative analysis, which could help to discern, whether the European Union (any of its institutions) has mentioned Georgia in a negative light in the context of surplus relationship with Russian Federation.

The fact that Georgia received its candidacy status in December of 2023 could not have been foreseen during the preparation and the main writing period of this work, however, fast changes of such nature in the decision-making by the European Union can be considered of additional relevance for the research. On one hand, it highlights once again the flexibility of the Union and its normative power in accordance with the continuous changes happening in the political sphere. On the other hand, it can furthermore strengthen the results of this research, since Georgia was not continuously underperforming in comparison to Moldova as has been mentioned, the rapid change concerning candidacy status within a year and a half (from June of 2022 to December of 2023) can be well within reason. In this aspect, the possibility for further development of this work can be additionally mentioned: the new detail of Georgia receiving candidacy from the European Union can be researched for the coherence with previous assessments.

CONCLUSION

This research was conducted, largely speaking, through the lense of Normative Power Europe theory. The approach of this theory indicates that the European Union and its various institutions project specific standards to the prospective candidates and members. Such standards as, for instance, democracy, liberty, independence, economical stability, respect for fundamental human rights must be met by the states aspiring towards the European Union. The cases of Georgia's and Moldova's applications for Union's memberships were chosen for comparison due to the interesting nature of outcomes – the two states share many similarities as candidates, such as similar recent historical background in the context of the Soviet Union; territorial integrity issues with *de-facto* states and, in so, the common security challenges from Russian Federation; strong aspirations towards the European Union and solid relationships with the Union; the recommendations provided for both of the countries in June of 2022 were largely similar in their content. However, beyond these similarities, the outcomes on candidacies in June of 2022 turned out to be contrasting, Moldova received its candidacy status, Georgia was only noted as a prospective candidate.

To research the explanatory variable behind the different outcomes of similar candidates the methodology of Most Similar Systems Design and, more particularly, the Logic of Process Tracing, were applied. Since the European Union claims that its decision-making is merit-based, the following hypothesis was proposed: although Georgia and Moldova are similar as prospective candidates of the European Union, normatively Georgia has been assessed as underperforming in comparison to Moldova and that explains the contrasting decisions on the candidacy status in June of 2022. To examine that, the reports on implementation of Association Agreement on Georgia and Moldova for the years 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022 were analyzed. The results of process tracing analysis revealed that the structural issues are also largely shared in both Georgia and Moldova, and both of the states struggle with such aspects as transparent judiciary, high-level corruption, security of fundamental human rights and more. Therefore, it was evident that through the period of five years Georgia was not assessed as continuously underperforming in comparison to Moldova and, in so, the hypothesis did not prove itself to be true. That gives reason for further assumptions of the nature of the European Union's decision not to grant candidacy status to Georgia in June of 2022. Perhaps this way, the surplus relationship of Georgia with Russian Federation was ought to be nudged in the direction of redundancy. The fact that Georgia did receive the candidacy

status in December of 2023 could illustrate the results and relevance of this work even more – such fast change in the decision-making could be explained with the consistent developments of Georgia that were achieved in the period of 2018-2022.

The main goal of the research was achieved – the consistency of the European Union’s assessments on Georgia and Moldova were examined and the results concluded that Georgia was not, in fact, consistently assessed as underperforming in comparison to Moldova. Hence, the continuous underperformance of Georgia, as claimed by the European Union, was not the explanatory variable for the differing outcomes in June of 2022.

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Lihtlitsents

Mina, Jelizaveta Potapenkova, (isikukood: 60111010820) annan Tartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) enda loodud teose

„Beyond Similarities: a Comparative Study of the European Union’s Merit-Based Assessment on Georgia and Moldova“ („Sarnasustest üle: Euroopa Liidu teenetepõhise hindamise võrdlev uuring Gruusia ja Moldova kohta“), mille juhendajateks on Stefano Braghioli ning Helen Urmann,

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