
THE COMMITMENT OF UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA TO EUROPEAN REFORMS: A DISCURSIVE INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

According to European Union (EU) official documents, what happens in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus affects the EU (European Commission, 2004). Successive EU enlargements have brought these countries closer to the EU their security, stability and prosperity having now a direct impact on the EU. The export of European Union's core norms, such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and market economy is a tool for stabilizing those countries and thus enhancing the EU's eastern border security. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a regional cooperation initiative addressed to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, with the purpose to further enrich and complement the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) launched in 2004. It has powerful incentives. It implies new association agreements including deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with those countries willing and able to enter into a deeper engagement and gradual integration with the European economy. It would also allow for easier travel to the EU through gradual visa liberalisation, accompanied by measures to tackle illegal immigration. However, in order to benefit from those incentives, the EaP countries must approximate their domestic policies with the European *acquis* and adopt the above-mentioned norms. However, despite the fact that the countries listed above have an enthusiastic approach towards the EaP, according to EU documents and reports, their progress in approximating with the EU criteria has been limited. While most

studies focus on the nature of the EaP policy (weak conditionality, small incentives) in trying to explain this puzzle, this article aims to examine the nature of the political factor within those states.

By doing so, the article will use the newest “new institutionalism”, or discursive institutionalism, as labelled by Vivien Schmidt. I believe that the theory is useful for explaining the approximation of Ukraine and Moldova with the European Union norms. The theory helps us to identify both formal actors such as politicians who are part of the decision-making process, as well as informal actors such as different interest groups and their role in the shaping of foreign policy. Secondly, it contributes to identify problems connected with state identity and the way Ukraine and Moldova see the EU and the Eastern Partnership, and what interests and expectations connected with this policy they have. The first part of the article will offer a short description of discursive institutionalism, and the difference between this forth “new institutionalism” and the classical rational choice, historical and sociological new institutionalism. The second part will describe the emergence of the Eastern Partnership tracking its objectives, and the EU’s attitude towards the region. The third and fourth parts will focus on the commitment of Ukraine and Moldova to European reforms.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The literature focusing on institutional change describes three main new institutional theories: rational choice institutionalism (RCI), historical institutionalism (HI) and sociological institutionalism (SI) whose assumptions have been highly debated. RCI takes into account interests as the location and cause of the decision-making within institutions but fails to locate these individual-level motivations within the less formal organizational context. SI invokes cultural norms and institutionalized social practices to understand institutional processes but in the process can be guilty of excluding the actors involved within the interpretation and reproduction of these practices; leaving action without agents. HI cites the limiting effect of past actions to explain specific moments in the process of institutional decision-making through reference to path-dependence

and transferal costs but fails to properly account for punctuations that see institutions blazing new paths in unexpected directions (Hope, 2011:4).

However, recently a new type of institutionalism called *discursive institutionalism* has emerged. The main theorist of the discursive institutionalism is Vivien Schmidt, but assumptions about ideas, and the way they shape institutions can also be found in the writings of Colin Hay or Mark Blithe. In the case of discursive institutionalism, ideas are more dynamic, they are norms, frames and narratives that not only establish how actors conceptualize the world but also enable them to re-conceptualize the world, serving as resources to promote change such as the reconstruction of one actor's identity or the promotion of international norms (Schmidt 2011:54). Discourse is not just "text" (what is said) but also context (when, where, how and why it was said). The term refers not only to structure (what is said or where and how) but also to agency (who said what to whom) (Schmidt, 2008: 304-305). Institutions are simultaneously structures and constructs internal to agents whose "background ideational abilities" and "foreground discursive abilities" (see below) make for a more dynamic, agent-structure approach to institutional change (Schmidt, 2008: 305). Moreover, the interests are "subjective" and not objective or material such as the RI highlights.

According to the discursive institutionalism theory, institutions are more dynamic, change and continuity occurring through ideas and discursive interaction. Due to this aspect, the explanation of change is not resumed at an exogenous shock as the three "old" new institutionalisms assumed, but is rather an endogenous process through background ideational and foreground discursive abilities (Schmidt, 2010: 5). The *background ideational abilities* are defined as agents' internal capacity to act in any meaning context and to create and maintain institutions. And the *foreground discursive abilities* are defined as people's abilities to think and speak outside the institutions in which they continue to act (Schmidt, 2011: 48). Another aspect that must be highlighted is the fact that discourse might fail or succeed due to several factors such as: relevance of the issue at hand, appropriateness, but also consistency and coherence across policy sectors. Also, consistency may lead to rhetorical entrapment, committing

speakers to action (Schmidt, 2008, 2011). Also, Schmidt distinguishes between two types of discourse: the *coordinative discourse* which consists of the individuals and groups at the centre of policy construction who are involved in the creation, elaboration, and justification of policy and programmatic ideas and the *communicative discourse* consisting of the individuals and groups involved in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of political ideas to the general public, who also contributes to it (Schmidt, 2008: 310-311, Schmidt, 2010: 3-4).

While Schmidt tries to explain change and continuity, recent writings focusing on the new institutionalism innovations claim the fact that the theory is also useful in order to explain not only maintenance and change of institutions, but also a *policy stasis* (Hope, 2011). In the next parts, the article will examine the change and continuity/policy stasis in the relation between the EU and Ukraine, and the EU and Moldova.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

The EU security strategy mentions, “Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world”. The document identifies several threats to the EU’s security such as energy dependence, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, but also regional conflicts, violent or frozen conflict “which persist on our borders, threaten regional stability”. Moreover, the document specifies that “the integration of acceding states increases our security but also brings the EU closer to troubled areas” (European Council, 2003: 7). Other documents related to the European Union’s foreign policy towards its eastern and southern neighbours, describe the EU as having a duty towards its citizens and its neighbours (European Commission, 2003) or as having the task to promote a ring of friends and share the benefits of enlargement with neighbourhood countries and preventing new dividing lines on the continent (European Commission 2004). However, the documents do not mention anything about any further integration perspective into the EU.

The Eastern Partnership represents the backbone of the EU’s foreign policy towards Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus countries as a specific Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Launched in

May 2009 at the Prague Summit, the EaP fosters the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. This new policy would imply new Association Agreements including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between the EU and the EaP members, and it would also allow for an easier travel to the EU through the visa liberalization process. The Partnership will also promote democracy and good governance, strengthen energy security, promote sector reform and environment protection, encourage people to people contacts, support economic and social development and offer additional funding for projects to reduce socio-economic imbalances and increase stability (European Council 2009). The policy has both a bilateral track and a multilateral track emphasizing four thematic platforms focusing on democracy and human rights protection, economic approximation with the EU, energy security and people-to-people contacts. The members of the EaP have to fulfil several tasks in terms of approximation with the EU standards in order to qualify for the signing of a new Association Agreement and be part of the DFCTA.

After reading the above-mentioned EU key documents some conclusions can be drawn. First of all, it can be said that the EU has built its policy towards the Eastern borders according to a security vision on the area, the EU being surrounded by countries easily prone to internal and external conflict. Secondly, in order to tackle those security challenges the EU decided to export its set of core norms (democracy, rule of law, human rights, market economy) towards this space and to attract those countries into a greater economic integration project.

THE DISCOURSE ABOUT THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE EAP IN UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA

Ukraine represents a key partner for the European Union and within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. The relations between the EU and Ukraine started at the beginning of the 1900s. In 1994 Ukraine signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, which came into force in 1998. From 2004 the country has been included in the European

Neighbourhood Policy programme, and starting from 2009 is part of the EU's newest initiative towards the Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, the Eastern Partnership.

The analysis of key documents on Ukraine's foreign policy is relevant for highlighting the country's identity in terms of foreign policy and its interests and preferences. According to the "Law of Ukraine about bases of domestic and foreign policy", the country's foreign policy will be based on principles such as the sovereign equality of the state, abstention from threat by force, or political independence of any foreign state; respect for territorial integrity. It also mentions the fact that Ukraine has to make use of its international potential in order to develop itself as a sovereign, independent and democratic state (Ukrainian Parliament, 2010: 1-2). Unlike the 2003 Law on Fundamentals of National Security, which declared full NATO membership to be Ukraine's foreign policy goal, the present law speaks about the non-allied status of Ukraine, bans Ukraine's admission to NATO, but on the other hand states that the country's major foreign policy priorities are the integration with the European Union and closer cooperation with Russia, both Russia and the EU being called Ukraine's strategic partners (Ukrainian Parliament, 2010: 9-12).

Furthermore, the National Security Strategy of Ukraine from 2012—"Ukraine in Changing world"—also backs the cooperation with both the EU and Russia but additionally it mentions that Ukraine has to pursue a balanced foreign policy in relations with key international partners (Ukrainian Presidency, 2012). The document mentions the following as the main threats for Ukraine's security: the deterioration of the regional security environment around Ukraine, due to the existence of frozen conflicts near its borders, and internal instability in many countries from the region; terrorism and the spread of nuclear weapons; unresolved border issues, but also vulnerabilities stemming from the domestic policy such as the lack of an effective government or the systemic corruption within the institutions, or lack of scientific or technological innovation (Ukrainian Presidency, 2012). Also, threats to economic security such as the dependence of the domestic market on the foreign economic situation, as well as the combat of smuggling, threats related to energy

security such as “excessive dependence on imported energy, unresolved problem of diversification of sources and routes of supply, insufficient use of its energy resources, but also “inefficient use of energy resources, the relatively slow pace of introduction of new technologies”; are mentioned as vulnerabilities for the country’s national security (Ukrainian Presidency, 2012). Ukrainian decision makers recognize the fact that “Ukraine sees the process of European integration as a tool for systemic domestic reforms intended to draw our country closer to European standards, secure a decent place in the European economy and help the country become a powerful, advanced and high-tech state”. (Bilorus, 2012: 56), thus the European integration is a strategic goal for Ukraine and the European vector remains a foreign policy priority (Yefrenov, 2012: 57).

In the case of Moldova, the first important institutional contact between Brussels and Chisinau is based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1994, and came into force in force in 1998. In 2004, the country was included in the European Neighbourhood Policy, and in 2009 in the Eastern Partnership initiative. In the 1990s, Moldova opted for “permanent neutrality” in order to calm down both Transnistria and Russia so as to minimize the threats to national security (Kyrvelite, 2009:165). However, the hopes attached to neutrality have not been realized, and today Moldova encounters the same security problems. Analyzing the state’s key documents, it could be observed that the integration into the EU was not a top priority in the 1990s. For example, the 1995 National Security Concept did not mention anything about the European Union (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 1995). However, in 2005, the political discourse from Chisinau has changed and EU membership became the country’s strategic goal (Chirila, 2013). Vladimir Voronin, Moldova’s communist president, stated that if Russia does not want to help Moldova solve the Transnistrian conflict, then the EU might do that, and declared the European integration as a foreign policy objective (Interview with a political expert, September 2012). But, in practice the Communist Party’s EU policy was implemented in a formalistic manner, and the country’s foreign policy vector fluctuated between Russia and the West (Kyrvelite, 2009:166). Moldova’s commitment to EU values became

clearer in 2009. After the early parliamentary elections, which took place on 29 July 2009, four pro-European parties got the majority in country's legislative (they have formed the alliance "For European Integration"), and Moldova firmly turned towards pro-Western orientation.

EU integration was a top priority for the coalition, which obtained power in 2009 – the Alliance for European Integration. Also, for the Iurie Leanca's cabinet, which took office in 2013, after a political crisis within the AEI, the EU was considered to be a stabilizing factor in the area, and this is why the Republic of Moldova will struggle to integrate into the EU. This type of discourse is best highlighted and detailed in the country's National Security Strategy for the period 2009–2013. According to Moldova's 2008 National Security Strategy (which was updated in 2011) one of the country's main objectives is to accelerate the political, economic and social reforms, especially those connected with the EU's standards in order to further qualify for integration into the EU (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2011). The greatest challenges to the country's security are connected to the Transnistrian conflict and the illegal presence of a foreign army on Moldova's territory, and the lack of control over the Transnistrian segment of the Moldovan–Ukrainian border, which favours organized crime. At the same time, the threat of foreign coercion, "political or other, in order to influence the foreign and domestic policy of the Republic of Moldova is real." There are also threats associated with domestic vulnerabilities such as unilateral dependency on foreign monopolistic energy systems, corruption and management deficits within the state administration, but also economic migration, unemployment, population aging and low birth-rate phenomena. (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2008, 2011). The European Union has been described as a "factor that stabilizes the European security system and broadens the geographic area in which political, economic and social developments on the basis of democratic principles.... The national security of the Republic of Moldova may not be conceived separately from the European security", and the process of "European integration and acquiring of EU membership will positively influence and consolidate the security of the Republic of Moldova and will bring stability and prosperity to the country" (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, 2011).

It could be concluded that there is a compatibility of interests between the parties. On the one hand, the EU wants to export its set of norms in order to stabilize its Eastern Neighbourhood, and on the other hand, both Ukraine and Moldova seek to tackle several vulnerabilities in different areas such as the economy, energy, scientific and technological innovation but also the delicate Transnistrian dossier in the case of the former state.

WHAT IS BEHIND THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE?

Despite the above-mentioned aspects, according to the European Commission's progress report for 2013 there is still a lot of work to do in terms of approximation with the EU standards for both countries. Ukraine stepped up its efforts to implement the priorities of the Association Agenda. However, much remain to be done. Corruption perception remains very high and Ukraine is invited to implement several reforms in areas such as the country's electoral system, judiciary system, it has to ensure that the constitutional reform process is carried out in an inclusive and transparent way, it should refrain from introducing protectionist measures in breach with its WTO commitments, and it should comply with its obligations under the Energy Community Treaty, as reflected in the Association Agreement and the Association Agenda (European Commission 2013a). Moldova, on the other hand, addressed most of the key problems but still has other problems related to corruption and the justice and law enforcement systems (European Commission 2013b).

Ukraine

When speaking about background ideational abilities one must take into account several aspects according to Schmidt's three levels of ideas, ranging from visions about the world, ideas, values, frames of analysis, to policies and policy solutions (Schmidt, 2008: 307-308). In the case of Ukraine, president Yanukovich¹ seemed to have returned to the multi-vector policy, more specifically to balance the influences of the West and

¹ *The manuscript of this paper was closed and submitted in the course of the autumn of 2013, and obviously did not have the chance to reflect upon the still ongoing crisis in Ukraine as of spring-summer 2014. (The editors)*

Russia and to draw benefits from both. As it has been shown in the first part of the article, as the Ukrainian law on foreign policy mentions, the country has to use its international potential in order to develop as an independent and sovereign state. This might mean that the decision makers from Kiev were aware of the country's status—the so-called geopolitical pivot, as Brzezinski described it (Brzezinski, 1997: 40), and this is why might have their own requirements for the EU. Moreover, in the domestic political discourse Ukraine is often described as a civilizational bridge “between Russian and the EU, and even more between European and Eurasian spheres” (Yefrenov, 2012: 58). However, those aspects do not fully explain the country's foreign policy conduct, and a deeper examination of the actors involved in the discourse is necessary.

This is why we should look at the foreground discursive abilities, which explain through the “logic of communication” how the institutions change and persist. At the level of the communicative discourse, the political decision makers prefer to keep a status quo, rather than push for political liberalization (Interview with NGO expert, October 2012; Gnedina – Sleptsova, 2012: 3). At this communicative discourse level we have to take into account the influence of interest groups, namely the Ukrainian business elite. However, it is difficult to place the business elite only at the level of the communicative discourse, due to the fact that some of them are or were part of the decision-making process.

First, one should look at the country's business elite. The business elite from Ukraine has a clear influence on the foreign policy conduct. Some experts even consider that these business elites treat political parties as tools, the same situation was under the Kuchma and Yuschenko presidency but now it reached its peak (Matuszak, 2012: 13). For the small business elites, which focus mainly on the internal market, foreign policy has no great importance unless these relations result in increasing competitiveness on the internal market. But for the big players the access to foreign markets is of key importance. The Ukrainian exports are strongly diversified towards both the EU and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), being difficult to indicate a predominant direction because they are distributed almost evenly. According to statistics, in terms of imports the EU 27 is

Ukraine's main partner with a percentage of 39%, while the Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan represent the source of almost 30% of the Ukrainian imports. In terms of exports, the EU 27 represents the destination of 21.8% of Ukrainian exports, while Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan represent the destination of 26.8% of Ukrainian exports (European Commission, 2013c: 5). Russia is offering Ukraine a regional integration project, which is competitive to that of the EU, namely membership of the Customs Union of the Russian Federation, Belarus and Kazakhstan, and at further stages also of the Eurasian Union, where a common market based on the principles of the four freedoms – the movement of goods, services, capital and labour – would operate. In addition to lifting customs tariffs, Russia offers lower prices for oil and gas (although no precise promises have been made in this context). The DCFTA might bring several benefits however. Some Ukrainian businessmen have made investments in the West, and some of their companies are listed on the Western stock exchange, and they also purchased expensive properties there. For the business elite is less about ideology and more about economic interest (Gnedina – Sleptsova, 2012: 16).

Second, we have to speak about the present political class from Ukraine, which tends to oppose the process of political liberalization, being rather interested in preserving the status quo and preferring to maintain a monopoly to power. A clear example is the action from 2010 when the Constitution of Ukraine was amended in order to boost president Yanucovych's powers, thus transforming the country into a full presidential system (Kuzio, 2012: 561). Yanukovych was neither a democrat nor a reformer; rather he was convinced that his career and future would rely on the monopoly of power which he tries to maintain (Gnedina – Sleptsova, 2012: 3). This idea is also confirmed by, the Freedom House Freedom in the World 2013 report considers Ukraine a partly free democracy with a freedom rating score of 3,5 out of 7, a civil liberties score of 3 out of 7 and a political rights score of 4 out of 7; 1 being the best score and 7 the worst (Freedom House, 2013). Ukrainian foreign policy is not driven by the state's national interests, is rather a "prisoner" of the domestic policy rhetoric (Interview with a political expert, September 2012).

However, the political nature of the EaP should not be neglected either. According to one point of view, Ukraine is less interested in the EaP, because this project is too small for its interests (Interview with a political expert, October 2012). For example, The ENP/EaP lacks an integration perspective into the EU. They promise only a political association and an economic integration on the EU market. Due to the denial of a membership perspective, despite explicit requests from the Ukrainian leadership, the EU's norm promotion has several limits. As the study of Gawrich, Melnykovska and Schweickert (2009) for a county pursuing European integration but which is only an ENP member state might determine the political leaders within those states to adopt a relaxed implementation of EU standards.

Moldova

In Moldova, similar to the situation in Ukraine, there is a discontinuity between what the politicians from Chisinau declare and what they practically do. Also, regarding the country's political regime, Moldova is considered a partly free country but with a better score than Ukraine of 3 in all three fields, freedom rating, civil liberties and political rights (Freedom House, 2013).

However, the problems were generated at the level of the coordinative discourse, the political leaders did not reach a common ground and seemed like they fought for political powers. On 5 March 2013, the deputies from the Chişinău Parliament gave a vote of no confidence to the government lead by Vlad Filat. According to Republic of Moldova legislation in force, the government that receives a vote of no confidence from the deputies must resign in three days. The Alliance for European Integration was governing since 14 January 2011 and was formed by the Liberal Democrat Party (LDP), to which the Prime Minister Filat was part of the Democratic Party (DP) its leader was also the President of the Parliament, Mihai Lupu, and the Liberal Party (LP), led by Mihai Ghimpu. The political crisis from the Republic of Moldova has produced uneasiness in Brussels because it came at a moment when it was expected to sign the DCFTA with the European Union. At the basis of the actual crisis it seems to be more an

adjustment between different groups inside AEI. Experts consider that corruption and the fight for political power was the main reason behind the political instability. The Prime Minister depends on the parties inside the coalition because they hold important positions inside the ministers, through the people that he has named in the management. Every AEI leads the minister in his/her own feudal way through a system of connections and personal loyalties and not according to the law (Minazarari, 2013).

TOWARDS THE VILNIUS SUMMIT AND BEYOND – WHAT IS NEXT?

The communicative discourse, on the one hand, consist of individuals preoccupied with the legitimization of political ideas to the general public, but on the other hand, encompasses other political actors such as political opposition, experts, think tanks, organized interests or public intellectuals, and finally the general public of citizens and voters to whom this discourse is directed to contribute. Thus, one key actor in this case is public opinion in general. In the case of Ukraine, public opinion towards the European Union shows a rising trend. If in May 2010 only 26% citizens were in favour of a pro-European policy and 40 % preferred a closer association with Russia² in May 2013 the percentage is reversed, with 42% Ukrainian citizens preferring the entrance into the EU, while only 31% preferred the entrance into the Customs Union³. Experts consider that public opinion has the ability, by putting pressures on the decision makers to push the country towards the EU (interview with NGO expert, October 2012). But if in Ukraine the number of those who prefer the integration into the European Union is increasing, in Moldova is exactly the opposite situation. According to a survey from May 2013, 57% of the citizens prefer the EU to the Eurasian Union, but this number is on a downfall compared

² Razumkov, “Which foreign policy direction should be a priority for Ukraine? (recurrent, 2002-2012)” available at http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/poll.php?poll_id=305 accessed on 30.09.2013

³ Interfax Ukraine (2013). Poll: 42% of Ukrainians support entry to EU, 31% prefer Customs Union. Available at <http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/158688.html> accessed on 06.10.2013

for example with 2009, when around 62% of the citizens would have opted for the EU⁴.

If the public opinion might not be a strong argument, such as in the case of Ukraine, the discourse in Moldova is caught in what it is called “rhetorical entrapment” meaning that once they engaged on the path of European integration they cannot go back, and the cost of changing the commitment for a discourse will be too great. Moldova is a small state and it needs the EU in the case of Transnistria but also due to the economic assistance. However, the speed of the approximation with the EU standards remains unknown and unpredictable events might happen anytime, which means that Moldova’s European way might be a bumpy road.

But the European Union’s policy within the EaP must also be taken into account. According to the EU’s official communiqué, the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine was planned to be signed, possibly at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, but only if Ukraine created the necessary political circumstances.⁵ Also Moldova will have to draw lessons from its previous political crisis (European Commission, 2013d). The way the decision makers will see the pressures and messages from Brussels will be decisive in the long run. The EU has to combine a system of sticks and carrots in order to put pressures on the domestic factors from Ukraine and Moldova but should also develop a more clear strategy after the Vilnius Summit. For the moment, it is not known what will happen in the case both Moldova and Ukraine will sign the Association Agreement.

CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the background ideational abilities helps us explain how the institutions were created in a certain meaning context. In both the Ukrainian and Moldovan cases, the EU has been seen as a source of stability in the area, and EU integration has been interpreted by decision makers from

4 IPP Moldova (2013). “Public Opinion Barometer – April 2013”, available at <http://www.ipp.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=156&id=655> accessed on 02.10.2013

5 *As the BBC reported on 29 November 2013, “Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich abruptly froze plans to sign the trade and reform deal last week, under pressure from Russia. The Ukraine agreement, the summit’s centrepiece, would have been a major step towards eventual integration.” (The Editors)*

both states as a means to tackle several security vulnerabilities in different areas. But some of the Ukrainian decision makers portray their country as a civilization bridge between Europe and Asia. The foreground discursive abilities, on the other hand, explain through the “logic of communication” how the institutions change and persist. In the Ukrainian case, as it has been shown, due to business elite and politicians’ preferences, but also as a result of the fact that the EaP is not a sufficient tool for Ukraine’s interest, the process of approximation with the EU standards has its limits. In the case of Moldova, a struggle for power inside the ruling coalition has stalled the country’s approximation with the EU standards. While in the case of Ukraine, the public opinion might put pressure on the decision makers and push their countries towards the EU, Moldova rather seems to be caught in a rhetorical entrapment. However, Eastern Europe represents a very dynamic geographical area and unexpected changes might happen.

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