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THE EUROPEAN UNION'S FOREIGN POLICY AND EUROPEANISATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: THE CASE OF EU-GEORGIA RELATIONS

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Abstract: The crisis generated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine has potentiated the principle of democratisation through Europeanisation and highlighted the multiple hypostases of the European Union in its external relations. Democratisation and accession to the European Union are still the main foreign policy objectives of the ex-Soviet states in Eastern Europe. In June 2022, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine received the candidate status. The refusal of the European Council to grant this status to Georgia as well, although specific democratic reforms have been implemented, once again underlined the fact that Eastern Europe and the Caucasus remain areas of ideological confrontation. Russia does not accept the independence in the foreign policy of the ex-Soviet states. On the other hand, the contradictions in the internal policy of the European Union and the divergent perceptions of its foreign policy for the Eastern European area are reflected in its projections regarding the enlargement strategy. This thematic study assesses the cooperation between the European Union and Georgia, especially in the energy field, following the correlation between economic and political objectives, between democratisation and Europeanisation. It formulates questions concerning the European Union's roles in its foreign policy regarding energy cooperation, as an instrument of Europeanisation in the Eastern neighbourhood.

Keywords: energy policy, Europeanisation, democratisation, convergence.

European Union as a foreign policy actor in the Eastern Europe. Energy cooperation as an instrument of Europeanisation

The European Union's foreign policy in the Eastern neighbourhood is anchored in the concept of Europeanisation, conceived as a process of progressive convergence of the partner states (Georgia) and accession candidates (the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) with the *acquis communautaire*, the institutions and the political system of the European Union. But inevitably, Europeanisation contradicts Russia's foreign policy towards the "near abroad." Europeanisation is a concept opposed to the *Novorossiya* (New Russia~~n Empire~~) doctrine implemented by the Kremlin. "Moscow has long held the strategic aim of keeping control over the former Soviet republics, whether their internal governance or their foreign policy choices" (ECFR 2022).

Europeanisation does not condition the democratization of a country, but it is mandatory in the process of joining the European Union and subsequent integration. It is a fundamental concept of the European Union's foreign policy and external relations. The enlargement of the Union, the most crucial point of its foreign policy agenda, is implemented together with Europeanisation. From this point of view, the candidate states consider this concept an accessible tool for

democratisation and integration into the Western model of politics and economy. The former Soviet countries of the European continent entered the democratisation process together with Europeanisation to become members of the European Union. Equally important is the multilateral preparation of the Union to accept new member states.

The mechanisms and instruments of Europeanisation are diverse. However, those that form the basis of the Union's strategic partnerships with Eastern European countries are even more important, as they have a doctrinal dimension (promoting democratic values) and a geopolitical one. The *energy sector* is one of the areas of strategic cooperation of the European Union in this context.

This study aims to identify the roles assumed by the European Union (EU) in the energy policy applied in the Eastern neighbourhood by analysing the strategic documents regarding the relations with Georgia and the comparison with the approaches towards Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. We selected the period between 2009 – when the Eastern Partnership was institutionalized – and the beginning of 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine. The basis of the comparison of the Union's energy policy towards these states was granting the candidate status for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and maintaining only the "European perspective", together with a list of 12 conditions, for Georgia.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was an opportunity to test the European Union's ability to take external action in the energy market, exporting Europeanisation and democratization to partner and candidate countries. By exposing the vulnerability of the European Union in the face of potential energy crises, the war in Ukraine revealed the interdependencies between the EU, its energy suppliers and transit countries, thus highlighting the fact that the Union's energy policy is cross-border *par excellence*. For the Union, foreign policy in the field of energy has become a priority in the eastern neighbourhood. The reason for this is that in this space, "energy is the only field that has generated a multilateral process of sectoral integration of neighbouring ex-Soviet states within the European Energy Community, where the EU acts as a normative, regulatory institution" (Herranz-Surrallés, 2019). However, "although the European

Union has long been labelled as a liberal market actor, its external engagement in energy has acquired an increasingly pronounced strategic dimension" (Siddi & Kustova 2021, 1077).

In part, the turnaround can be attributed to changes in the EU's security environment. Developing the concept of an "arc of instability" around the borders of the Union, the latest example of a geopolitical approach to power relations became all the more evident with the war in Ukraine, considered a critical moment for the Union. Therefore, the EU is caught up in global power changes as it tries to position itself as advantageously as possible in the international order. One of these dynamics concerns the energy transition. The Union claims the leading position in the production of green energy, but at the same time, wants to strengthen its bilateral commitments with partners by introducing cooperation chapters in this field.

In this sense, the study aims to highlight the underlying logic in which the external energy policy of the European Union is framed. It also aims to analyse and help understand the motivations for the Union's external engagements in the energy sector in the Eastern neighbourhood, with final focus on Georgia. Hence the following question, around which the present research revolves: What kind of an actor is the EU in disseminating its energy agenda in the Eastern space and particularly in its relations with Georgia? We argue that the Union primarily adopts the position of a liberal actor in pursuit of strategic and environmental objectives. Moreover, in different degrees of complexity, the EU plays various roles in the relations with Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

There are three main lines of academic literature on EU energy policy. They study (1) EU policymaking regarding the process of Europeanisation of national energy policies, (2) EU energy security through European integration, and (3) EU external energy policy, to which the Union's roles as an international actor are subordinated. The concept of actor helps to assess "the extent to which the EU has become an actor in global politics" and its ability to act and exert influence outside its borders (Bretherton & Vogler 2006, 13; Batzella 2018a, 107-125). In our study, it was applied to external energy policy.

In correlation with the EU's play in the international arena, we appreciate Europeanisation as "a process of construction, dissemination and initialization of formal and informal rules,

procedures, political styles and common beliefs and norms, which are first defined and consolidated in taking decisions by the Union, and then incorporated into the logic of internal discourse, identities, institutional structures and public policies" (Radaelli 2003, 30). In an external context, including in the energy sector, "the European Union *acquis* export is a central Europeanisation instrument" (Schimmelfennig 2015, 5).

Scholars conceptualized the European Union first as a liberal actor, dependent on its internal energy policy. It developed around a liberal market model, "pursuing its goals through regulatory instruments in external energy governance" (Youngs 2011, 51). But even under these conditions, the debate regarding the position of the European Union as an external energy actor was gradually approached in terms of security. This tendency, understood as a process by which a particular agenda item becomes a security issue or, in Wæver's words, an "existential threat" – resulted from empirical developments and the multidimensional crisis that affected the European Union in the mid-2010s and, as such, is inevitably attached to energy policy (McGowan 2011, 489).

Some academics noted that the EU increasingly used internal market legislation to achieve strategic goals, for example, by maintaining energy relations with Russia and Gazprom, until the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Boersma & Goldthau 2017, 110). However, scholars have had varying interpretations of the increased preference for securitization. Siddi (2019, 126) interpreted the decline in attractiveness for the normative market approach as a consequence of the inclination towards geopolitical strategies at the level of the Union. At the same time, for Talus (2015, 198), the growing concern for energy security reflected interventionist politics. Herranz-Surrallés (2016, 1390) theorized this turn in foreign energy policy under the auspices of energy diplomacy.

Goldthau and Sitter (2016, 238) stated that the European Union's energy engagement manifests in a "grey area" between normative and geopolitical approaches. More recently, Kustova (2017, 100) emphasized the importance of the normative perspective, because "leadership as a regulatory and rule-imposing authority in energy markets is increasingly contested both in terms of the export of rules through the Energy Community, as well as in regional and global energy

governance." Indeed, this trend raises questions about the legitimacy of the European Union's external engagement.

Therefore, we have operationalized the **specific dimensions of the European external energy policy**, resulting in (a) the external dimension of the liberalized internal energy market, (b) the security dimension of the external energy policy, and (c) the intersection of energy security and other foreign policy objectives.

First, the *external dimension* of the internal energy market includes the Union's internal legislation in the field, to which are added initiatives "aimed at creating an integrated energy market together with third countries, i.e. the Energy Community Treaty" (Batzella 2018b, 35). Energy is conceived as an economic good, and the EU's energy policy aims to liberalize and de-monopolize the energy sector to manage interdependence by establishing market rules. The European Commission acts as a liberal public policy actor, using regulatory instruments. It pursues this objective through the energy governance framework. Goldthau and Sitter (2014, 1454) define a liberal actor as "interpreting public policy primarily in commercial rather than geopolitical terms and using policy instruments designed to build and maintain markets open to competition."

Second, the *security dimension* of foreign energy policy requires a higher degree of political intervention and uses "foreign policy means to gain access to energy resources and to establish energy cooperation" through energy diplomacy (Herranz-Surrallés 2015, 915). The main objective is to ensure energy security, responding to the "securitization option" in the Union's energy policy (Boersma & Goldthau 2017, 103). While Member States have traditionally played the main role in this dimension, the Commission has also gradually established itself as political entrepreneur (Schunz & Damro 2020, 136). A notable example, included below in the analysis of EU-Georgia relations, was the engagement in bilateral political negotiations regarding Georgia's accession to the Energy Community. However, EU member states also remain influential actors in this dimension. Given the "vertical blockades" of some member states – such as Germany – which are de facto "reluctant to allow the European Union to play a decisive role in this issue", the dimension of energy security, or external energy policy is constrained by internal divisions and the legal architecture provided by Article 194 TFEU (Princen 2009, 16). In this dimension, the European

Union is conceptualized as a strategic actor, "using various forms of power available in its collection of instruments to pursue (geo)political objectives" (Siddi 2021, 1078).

Third, the *intersection between energy security and other foreign policy objectives* refers to "the pressure to reconcile or achieve synergies between the energy sector and broader foreign policy objectives such as combating climate change" (Herranz-Surrallés 2015, 915). In this scenario, the objective of the Union is to achieve ecological sustainability of energy. Morata and Solorio Sandoval (2012, 107) refer to this process as the "green Europeanisation" of energy policies. It consists of extrapolating environmental concerns into energy policy. This is also serving, as Kustova observed, as a basis for a continuation of the EU's external engagement (2017, 97). We propose conceptualising the European Union as an ecological actor in this dimension.

Based on this operationalisation of the concepts, we formulated three hypotheses regarding the relations of the European Union with Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in the field of energy in the current context:

(1) The more the European Union is involved in exporting its regulatory agenda to its Eastern neighbourhood, the more it is a liberal actor in energy policy (the liberal actor hypothesis).

(2) The more the European Union resorts to foreign policy instruments, including energy diplomacy, to secure its energy supply, the more it becomes a strategic actor (strategic actor hypothesis).

(3) The more the European Union promotes decarbonisation and renewable energy, the more it is an ecological actor (the "green actor" hypothesis).

Although the hypotheses are not mutually exclusive, this study assesses their importance together and separately.

The thematic study is structured in three sections. The first section analyses the European Union's energy relations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. We have highlighted aspects and progress in the energy field, following the position of each actor in the East-European geopolitical context. The second section similarly describes the relations between the European Union and Georgia in the energy sector, highlighting the typology of roles adopted by the Union to implement its foreign policy objectives. The final conclusions emphasise particularities of

Europeanisation in the compared countries and underline the need for the European Union to assume the role of an agent of democratization at the geopolitical level to avoid the prolongation of the ideological collision both with the authoritarianism outside it and new slippages from the principles of operation of democracy established in the Treaty of Lisbon.

The European Union's partnerships with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in the field of energy: an integrated approach

Ukraine's status as a priority partner for energy cooperation dates to 2003 when the Council of the European Union emphasized the need to promote its convergence with the energy policy of the entire organization. In December 2005, the Memorandum of Understanding on energy cooperation between the two parties was signed. The document combined a regulatory (normative) approach with a concern for security, including a reference to improving the "energy security of the European continent" (European Commission 2005a). However, to the extent that the basis for bilateral energy cooperation was established during the signing period of the Memorandum of Understanding, both in regulatory and institutional terms, the decisive part of the cooperation was triggered in the context of the post-2009 gas crisis (Herranz-Surrallés & Natorski 2008, 77-78).

In early 2009, Ukraine and the EU faced yet another gas crisis caused by Russia. Later, following the EU-Ukraine joint investment conference on the modernization of the gas transit system in March 2009, in June of the same year, the Commission and the international financial institutions reached an agreement on the assistance for the reform of the Ukrainian gas system. This was deemed necessary to ensure the sustainability, reliability, efficiency, and transparency of the infrastructure. On this occasion, EU Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs noted that "the gas dispute between Ukraine and Russia has only reconfirmed Ukraine's crucial role in the Union's energy security. It also emphasized the need to ensure a safe, transparent and reliable transit through Ukraine for a stable gas supply to the EU" (European Commission 2009).

Although energy security was one of the themes of the conference, the occasion was also used to underline the broader goal of convergence of the Ukrainian energy market with the European one, including through the partial harmonization of legislation (especially with the EU

gas market *acquis*), within the context of negotiations for Ukraine's accession to the Energy Community.

Based on the agreement concluded in the spring of 2009, the bilateral cooperation within the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF), between 2009 and 2013, promoted projects framed in terms of energy efficiency in both instruments. This criterion was, in many situations, considered together with energy security. Thus, the concerns related to this agenda item opened the way for a much wider scope of cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. Details of the five energy-related projects approved under the NIF for Ukraine show that priority has been given to investments that meet energy security and efficiency goals. Therefore, following the review of the main financial instruments, we can deduce that, in terms of infrastructure, the European Union promotes two objectives: its role as a strategic actor on the one hand, and efficiency on the other hand. Both contribute to security, as well as energy sustainability, to a certain extent.

For its part, at the regional level, the Eastern Partnership brought together the European Union and the eastern members of the Neighbourhood Policy, energy cooperation being one of its four priority areas. Within the Eastern Partnership, the dimension of energy security was a central issue according to EU documents (European Commission 2008). The emphasis on the development of the external dimension of the European energy policy was amplified in the Europe 2020 Strategy. This was presented as an economic growth strategy not only for the EU, but also targeting "candidate countries and our neighbourhood", being designed to "better help anchor their own reform efforts" (European Commission 2010, 21). Therefore, the energy security agenda, one guided by the EU's strategic actor posture, was also a reason for the expansion of the EU's regulatory space – the scenario of the liberal actor hypothesis – towards its eastern neighbourhood.

Ukraine became a full member of the Energy Community in February 2011. The treaty covers broad blocks of the EU's domestic energy *acquis*, including electricity and gas. It includes rules for internal markets, access to networks, cross-border exchanges and measures to security; promoting renewable energy; energy efficiency measures; oil, with provision for maintaining

minimum stocks; and the environment. In particular, the Secretariat of the Energy Community provides technical assistance for the implementation process and the oversight mechanism.

While, for the EU, the rationale behind the operation of the Energy Community is to create an integrative and secure framework for cooperation and investment, for Ukraine, the Energy Community has political meaning, as a "waiting room" for joining the Union. However, the implementation of convergence measures in 2005-2014 was incomplete, leading to a phenomenon that Wolczuk (2003) called "declarative Europeanisation." Indeed, from its accession until 2014, Ukrainian compliance with the EU energy *acquis* was among the lowest in the Energy Community, with selective implementation and lack of transparency persisting (Herranz-Surrallés 2017, 249).

The Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, signed in 2014 and in force two years later, provided additional incentives for Ukraine to implement the EU energy *acquis*. To date, the document is considered "the most ambitious agreement the EU has ever offered to non-member states" (Van der Loo 2019, 102). According to Article 337 of the Agreement, the objectives of energy cooperation include "energy security, competitiveness and sustainability, which is crucial for the promotion of economic growth and to making progress towards market integration, including through gradual approximation in the energy sector and through participation in regional energy cooperation" (Association Agreement, EUR-Lex 2014a). The annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 and the Russian military intervention in eastern Ukraine in February 2022 are turning points in the EU-Ukraine relations, including in the energy sector. While the political will was sometimes lacking in Ukraine in previous years, the need to synchronize the energy market with that of the European Union became more apparent after 2014. In the spring of 2014, Slovakia and Ukraine signed an agreement allowing reverse gas flows, which became operational in the fall of the same year. The Vojanyi-Uzhgorod interconnection allowed for Ukraine to stop direct imports from Russia in 2016. Moreover, in 2020, a new reverse gas flow between Ukraine and Poland was opened.

For Ukraine, membership of the European Energy Community through integration into the common market was not seen as purely technical. The changes of government in Moldova and Ukraine (in April 2013 and February 2014, respectively) and the complicated context created after

the annexation of Crimea by Russia appear as a catalyst for more compliance with the Energy Community *acquis*. Synchronization with the EU energy market represented at the same time a political declaration by the Ukrainian authorities of adherence to European values.

In this context, the European Union responded with a specific instrument to support Ukraine's political and economic reforms. In April 2014, the Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA) was created. Its mandate was to assist Ukraine in implementing the Association Agreement and the Free Trade Agreement. Within the SGUA, a thematic group on energy and climate has been created. Together with the Secretariat of the Energy Community, SGUA has been closely involved with Ukrainian parliamentarians in the efforts to reform the national energy market. That was a context in which the Union seized the opportunity to push for as many reforms as possible, since the political will was symmetrically strong on the Ukrainian side.

Also, at the political level, the Commission has made efforts to strengthen energy security through the new energy resilience strategy, creating essential links between the internal and external dimensions of the energy policy framework on the one hand and environmental objectives on the other. In the "Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union", the Commission presented the external dimensions of the internal purposes, including security, market integration with Eastern partners, energy efficiency, decarbonisation and renewable energy technologies (European Commission 2015).

In addition, the European Union's Global Strategy (June 2016) included references to climate protection and energy security as priority issues for the European External Action Service (EEAS), both in its immediate neighbourhood and at the global level. Earlier, in 2015, the Council's conclusions on the "EU Action Plan on Energy Diplomacy" supported the need for "coherent EU foreign and energy policy action, taking into account geopolitical developments" (EEAS 2016, 22-23).

The upgrade in 2016 of the Memorandum of Understanding from energy cooperation to the Strategic Cooperation Partnership was yet another political boost for Ukraine and a wake-up call for Russia. The new document was mainly framed around "energy security, solidarity and trust", and highlighted the need to harmonize the Ukrainian energy market with the European one.

Ukraine is the largest gas market of the countries in the Energy Community and, since 2014, has performed well overall in the implementation of the Energy Community Treaty. The energy agenda remains a crucial part of EU-Ukraine relations, opening new avenues of cooperation. For example, after the announcement of the European Green Deal project, a high-level dialogue was triggered, both technical and political. The Union has also identified Ukraine as a priority partner in its hydrogen strategy, presented in 2020. Consequently, Ukraine will become, together with the Union's southern neighbourhood, one of the centres for producing clean hydrogen.

Interestingly, the Commission has framed the mechanism for building hydrogen cooperation as "energy cooperation and diplomacy" (European Commission 2020). Therefore, it appears that the EU's latest engagement in external energy policy towards Ukraine is based on all dimensions of the EU as an energy actor, as identified in the analytical framework of this study. At this point, we note that while the Union's promotion of hydrogen favours green diplomatic action, it is also pursued from the perspective of a more substantial strategic role, contributing to the achievement of energy independence.

Returning to the hypotheses, we find that the scenario of the liberal actor is the correct description of the external energy role of the European Union vis-à-vis Ukraine during the discussed period. However, the liberal actor hypothesis coexisted with the strategic actor hypothesis, as the Union identified strategic objectives (energy security) and used a set of diplomatic instruments to secure them. The European Union has also used its regulatory instruments and environmental policies to achieve its strategic objectives. The convergence of regulations with the European internal energy market has also contributed to the achievement of security of supply for both the Union and Ukraine. Moreover, the example of hydrogen reveals that the EU's energy market game vis-à-vis Ukraine is increasingly multidimensional and pursues multiple goals. In this context, the different types of roles "played" by the Union in the energy market enable the achievement of different goals.

The **Republic of Moldova (RM)** has been a member of the Energy Community since 2010, and its relations with the European Union in this strategic sector were formalized through the Association Agreement that entered into force on July 1, 2016. In October 2021, in response to the

energy crisis arising from the political pressure of Moscow, the first high-level Strategic Dialogue took place between the RM and the European Union on the topic of energy.

Chisinau was at that time in a difficult situation in the energy field, and a security approach was necessary from the government. The European Union adopted the same position in its strategic partnership with the accession candidate, which has made remarkable progress. Being, until recently, in a relationship of dependence on Russia for energy, the Republic of Moldova had to counter the coercive diplomacy of the Kremlin regime. In the fall of 2022, the country faced a three-dimensional vulnerability regarding the natural gas requirement: to resist Moscow's political pressures in this sector, to find alternative sources of supply, and to find them at affordable prices.

The solution came toward the end of 2022, with the supply of gas by Romania's *Petrom* through the Iași-Ungheni gas pipeline. The first delivery was of 1,023,266 cubic meters on December 3, 2022. Another 4.3 million cubic meters arrived through the gas pipeline Isaccea – Orlovka (Europa Libera Romania 2022). Also, 80% of the electricity needs of the RM come now from Romania after the electricity infrastructure in Ukraine was systematically bombed by the Russians (Europa Libera Romania 2022).

However, the calculations are still uncertain for the winter of 2023-2024. If the winter is warm, the RM could manage with what it imports from Romania, directly and through transit, and what it extracts from stocks. However, during a cold winter, with high consumption, it still needs Gazprom (Economedia 2023).

The energy crisis in the Republic of Moldova has two dimensions: the international one - the dependence on Russian gas and Transnistrian electricity - and the internal one - the socio-economic consequences and the potentially destabilizing effect of an energy crisis. The RM is not only a collateral victim of the war in Ukraine; Russia's energy pressure levers are part of its hybrid war. Maintaining economic instability and pressure on the population in the RM would contribute to the destabilization of Ukraine, as Russia tries to create new fronts to put pressure on Kyiv.

As part of the European Union's commitment to support the Republic of Moldova, the High-Level Dialogue on Energy was launched in October 2021 as a political-diplomatic cooperation format specially created to counter security challenges in this sphere. Following the energy crisis

that Chisinau has dealt with since October 2021, the Union's direct support has facilitated the first gas purchases from non-Russian sources, paving the way for the country's energy diversification and independence. The RM can also be part of the newly established Energy Platform of the EU, which coordinates measures to ensure energy supply at affordable prices.

As of March 2022, the EU also supported the emergency synchronization of the electricity grids of the RM and Ukraine with the Continental European Grid following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. This is both a practical and a strategic initiative, helping to accelerate the Republic's path to energy independence. The European Commission announced on June 30, 2022, that "the trade of electricity between Ukraine and Moldova with the EU has officially started, further strengthening the energy security in the region. Diversification of supply will then be further accelerated with the development of renewables, which remains a key area of energy cooperation between the EU and (the Republic of) Moldova" (European Commission 2022a).

In this context, the Union's intervention is useful regarding energy security. The EU must consider both short-term action, such as financial assistance to help Chisinau purchase gas on international markets, if necessary; and in long-term action, such as accelerating interconnection with the energy networks of EU member countries and increasing energy efficiency in the RM, through the supply of renewable energy. The Union should address both timelines – otherwise Chisinau will continue to spend resources on short-term solutions without investing in long-term ones that could increase its energy independence, and thus resilience.

During the second meeting in the format of the Energy Dialogue, at the end of June 2022, the relevant European Commissioner, Kadri Simson, stated that "following the EU Leaders' recent decision to grant the Republic of Moldova, alongside Ukraine, the EU candidate country status, our relations have taken on a new dimension. We are already working closely together on energy issues, but we will strengthen our partnership further and prepare the Moldovan energy system for its European future" (European Commission 2022a). In December 2022, the European Union reiterated its support to the RM and its energy sector within the third high-level energy dialogue, concerning the 250 million euros announced by the President of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, on the occasion of his visit to Chisinau in November (European Commission 2023).

The European Union opted for the role of energy security actor and an integrated approach to Ukraine and the RM. This tactic was favoured by the geopolitical and economic impact of the war in Ukraine, as well as the granting of candidate country status to the two partner countries. By comparison, without this status – a decisive formal stage in relations with the EU – Georgia cannot benefit from the same level of political and economic commitment from the Brussels. Another reason worthy of consideration in the EU's decision is the geographically disadvantageous position of Georgia, with no common borders with the eastern extremity of the Union. The geographical proximity to Russia favours political closeness to it and, consequently, the regression of Europeanisation and democratization at the level of the elites, despite the population's overall support for joining the Union.

The EU – Georgia cooperation: a differentiated approach

The **strategic partnership** between the European Union and **Georgia** reveals a testing ground for the functionality of the Union's geopolitical instruments. Despite the support of the Georgian population for Europeanisation and implicit democratization, high-level relations with the Union entered a grey zone, with the refusal of the Council of the European Union to grant to Georgia the status of a candidate country for accession. Regarding the public attitudes toward the country's foreign policy orientation in particular, an opinion poll from August 2022 found that 47% of Georgians believe their country's foreign policy should be "pro-Western", while 31% want a policy that is "pro-Western with good relations with Russia". Only 7% opted for a "pro-Russian policy with good relations with EU/NATO" and 2% opted for an "exclusively pro-Russian line" (National Democratic Institute 2022).

The poll also found that – true to a pattern that has held for years – "75 per cent of Georgians support their country's bid for EU membership. At the same time, following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Georgian public opinion has remained in support of a cautious approach towards Russia. In April 2022, 47 per cent said they backed the government's approach, up from 23 per cent. The core of the Georgian Dream electorate backs caution vis-à-vis Moscow." (ECFR 2023).

EU – Georgia relations began formally in 1992 following the recognition of Georgia's independence by the European Economic Community. On April 22, 1996, the representatives of the European Union member states, the President of the European Commission and the President of Georgia signed, in Luxembourg, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which entered into force in 1999. On March 11, 2003, the European Commission published the Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on "Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: a new framework for relations with our eastern and southern neighbours." The document aimed to provide a framework for developing EU relations with the countries of the southern Mediterranean, Russia and the newly independent states that appeared on the map of Europe due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A new foreign policy of the Union was being formulated in relation with the depth of relations between each country and the European Union.

The main milestones of bilateral relations were the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan, 2004; The Civilian Monitoring Mission following Russia's violation of Georgia's territorial integrity in the provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (EUMM Georgia); the Eastern Partnership in 2009; the Association Agreement and Free Trade Agreement (2016 – present); and the European perspective given in June 2022, along with a list of 12 priorities to be met by Tbilisi to receive candidate status.

Regarding the EU-Georgia energy cooperation, it is first worth noting that, when analysed in geopolitical terms, Georgia's energy market situation differs from Ukraine's (Emerson & Kovziridze 2016, 127). Since it does not have a common border with the European Union, Georgia has no direct interconnection with any member country from the EU, or from the Energy Community (Energy Community Secretariat 2021). Georgia has a significant potential in hydroelectric energy, as noted by the EU authorities.

With security concerns dominant in the wake of the 2006 Gazprom blackmail, Georgia has sought alternatives to Russian oil and gas over the past two decades. The focus was primarily on investments in pipeline connections with Azerbaijan, making Georgia a critical energy transit point in the Caucasus region. Indeed, through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, Georgia is on the oil corridor between Azerbaijan and Turkey. Running parallel to BTC is the South Caucasus

Pipeline (SCP), which brings Azeri gas to Turkey and is part of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), connected to the European Union through the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). Moreover, Georgia was a key country in planning the White Stream pipeline project, which could connect Georgia to Romania under the Black Sea to bring more gas from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to Europe. Russia's illegal aggression against Ukraine delayed the planning and implementation of the White Stream.

The proposal to strengthen the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy was a response to the growing instability in the region following the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. The Eastern Partnership was conceived as a political forum for applying legal instruments (Samkharadze 2019, 4). However, to diversify its gas supply from Russia, the EU has also actively engaged in political and diplomatic support for the GSC.

In the Eastern Neighbourhood Commission's 2007-2013 Country Strategy for Georgia, published in 2005, energy priorities mainly included security and diversification. The emphasis was on Georgia's role as a transit country for Caspian oil and gas, which the Commission had identified as a strategic alternative energy corridor (European Commission 2005b, 7). The insistence on the BTC oil pipeline and on the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline (Georgian part of the SGC), which connects the Caspian basin to Turkey via Georgia, was a timely element of the discussions on the SGC and the Nabucco gas pipeline, in particular. The Commission supported both, but ultimately failed in 2013. The strategy stated that priority would be given to the broad category of energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. In contrast, infrastructure projects would be supported conditioned on their role in achieving the Union's energy security (European Commission 2005b, 24).

The Black Sea Synergy, launched in 2007, benefited from a relatively low prioritization and consequently achieved results, although limited (Delcour & Manoli 2010, 4). That is why, as early as 2011, it was anticipated that European engagement in the region "can only be successful by closely linking development financial aid to energy and security policy" (Meister & Viëtor 2011, 335). Moreover, the Union's commitment to favour the SGC is characteristic of the strategic approach. Siddi and Kustova (2021, 1077) argued that, by supporting the GSC, the EU tried to

reduce the economic power of other actors, especially Russia, and balance the energy market. Moreover, the EU presented the GSC as an energy diversification project and a political effort to strengthen ties with the eastern neighbourhood, including Georgia.

The Association Agreement between the European Union and Georgia covers energy cooperation in Title VI – Chapter 2, setting the same conditions as in the case of the EU – Ukraine. According to Article 297, "cooperation should be based on the principles of partnership, mutual interest, transparency and predictability and shall aim at market integration and regulatory convergence in the energy sector, taking into account the need to ensure access to secure, environmentally friendly and affordable energy" (Association Agreement, EUR-Lex 2014b).

Together with the Association Agreement, "the Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) has an ambitious goal of integration with the internal market of the European Union. For this reason, it contributes to the modernization and diversification of the Georgian economy. Provisional application of the DCFTA Agreement began on September 1, 2014. Meanwhile, Georgia benefited from the Generalised System of Preferences for several years, and on January 1, 2017, the country terminated the program" (EEAS – European Union and Georgia). Thanks to this Agreement, the EU is now Georgia's leading trading partner, providing, among other things, internet connection and electricity via a submarine cable crossing the Black Sea, ferry connection, and wind energy accessible to a population of over 1 million people.

However, it is interesting that there is no specific mention of intensifying the current cooperation in the energy field, as in the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Article 298 lays the foundations for cooperation in broad areas of common interest, covering regulatory, sustainability, and energy efficiency issues. Energy security was addressed along with further market integration. Thus, unlike in the case of Ukraine, the issue of energy security has attracted less attention among the areas covered by energy cooperation with Georgia. In addition, Article 300 specifies the conditions for a gradual legal implementation of the EU's domestic energy *acquis* and the relevant legislation, together with specific timetables, in Annex XXV. Given Georgia's geographical location, i.e. the isolation from the rest of the European Union's energy market, it has been granted exemptions under the EU's Third Energy Directive.

The European Neighbourhood Instrument for the period 2014-2016 should have mentioned the strategic role of the alternative route involving Georgia. In the 2017 Partnership Implementation Report on Georgia, the Commission briefly noted that the extension of the South Caucasus Pipeline, part of the SGC through Georgia, is nearing completion, revealing - without explicitly mentioning - its strategic role in identifying alternative transit routes for the EU (European Commission 2017b, 13). This could be related to the fact that the Union fundamentally lacks an extensive foreign policy concept for the South Caucasus, including energy cooperation (Meister and Viëtor 2011, 340). According to the renewed programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument, subordinated to the Single Support Framework for the period 2017-2020, the "connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change" sector was allocated an amount between 55.65 and 67.95 million euros, which constituted 15% of the total support (European Commission 2017a, 7).

In this budget, as defined in the European Neighbourhood Instrument 2017-2020, energy efficiency and energy sustainability ranked first among priorities. Indeed, while the document mentioned energy security only briefly in part with specific objectives, the focus is on market reforms, the diversification of renewable energy sources, and energy efficiency solutions. This last issue has been noted as the underperforming element of previous initiatives. Thus, the recommendations included improving the implementation of Georgia's commitments under the Association Agreement, the Energy Community, and the Paris Agreements.

Specifically, the issue of Georgia's geographic location served as the basis for the Commission's political involvement. For the EU, the Energy Community, an example of legally binding sectoral multilateralism, constitutes the basis for the external dimension of its energy policy in the neighbourhood. At the same time, for Georgia, the Energy Community represents an instrument for the modernization of the energy sector. In this sense, the accession to the European Energy Community was intended to accelerate and boost the Europeanisation process initiated with the Association Agreement.

The latest turning point in EU-Georgia relations is granting the "European perspective" to Georgia as compensation, after Brussels refused to grant the status of a candidate country for

accession in June 2022. The main reason mentioned by the Union is Georgia's internal democratic backlash. Consequently, to support the Georgian political and institutional system, the European Commission established a list of 12 priorities for the country to achieve membership candidacy. "Those include addressing issues such as polarisation, democratic oversight, the electoral framework, the judiciary, the media, the appointment of the Prosecutor General and the Ombudsperson, strengthening the independence of its Anti-Corruption Agency, "de-oligarchization," the fight against organised crime, human rights, gender equality and the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes" (Euractiv 2022).

In the "Opinion on the EU membership application by Georgia" published on 17 June 2022, the European Commission states that "overall, as regards the political criteria, Georgia has a foundation in place to reach the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities, even if recent developments have undermined the country's progress. As regards the economic criteria, Georgia has achieved a good degree of macroeconomic stability with a track record of sound economic policy and a favourable business environment." However, further reforms are needed to improve the functioning of its market economy; and, "as regards the capacity to fulfil the obligations of membership, overall Georgia has established a solid basis for further alignment" to the EU *acquis* (European Commission 2022b). The official document containing the 12 priorities for Georgia was discussed in the European Council and finalized with the recognition of the "European perspective" for Georgia on 23 June 2022.

Contradictions in domestic politics have increased European officials' reluctance regarding the Georgian authorities' possibilities to meet the 12 demands fast enough. Georgi Melashvili, the founder of the European Georgian Institute (EGI), confirmed for the Romanian publication *Veridica* that the ruling party is inconsistent in its relations with the West and "is attempting to sabotage Georgia's entry into the European Union" (Veridica 2023). In September, the Georgian Dream Party announced its intention to initiate the suspension procedure of the country's president, Salome Zurabişvili, because "she did not coordinate with the government regarding the visits made to Europe", thus violating certain constitutional provisions (Veridica 2023).

The recent visit to Tbilisi by Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, confirms the warning signals to the government led by the Georgian Dream Party. The statements of Foreign Minister Ilia Darciashvili and the leader of the Georgian Dream Party, Irakli Kobakhidze, on this occasion, according to which all 12 recommendations have been fulfilled, are contradicted by the preliminary report of the European Commission, which states that only three requests have been resolved. In this context, "instead, according to many experts, the Georgian authorities continue to sabotage the country's entry into the European Union" (Shanava 2023).

The ambiguity shown by the authorities in Tbilisi towards the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army also contributed to the strengthening of the cautious position of the European Union towards Georgia. The war in Ukraine is a real test for evaluating countries aspiring to join the EU, while the internal Union environment is, in turn, quite fragmented.

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, despite the traditional solidarity between Georgia and Ukraine as republics that experienced Soviet rule, the relationship between Tbilisi and Kyiv has visibly deteriorated. Georgian authorities officially condemned Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine as "unacceptable" from day one. They also provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine and supported Kyiv diplomatically, intervening in international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. However, also in February 2022, Prime Minister Garibashvili shocked the Ukrainian government by stating "clearly and unambiguously" that Georgia does not intend to participate in economic sanctions against Russia, "as this would harm the country more and our population" (ECFR 2023). Georgian authorities later banned a Ukrainian private plane from landing in Tbilisi to pick up volunteer fighters for the Ukrainian front. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky then recalled his ambassador to Georgia, citing the "immoral position" of Garibashvili's cabinet.

Returning to the issue of the European Union's energy policy, Georgia is less present on its list of priorities. For example, Georgia is not explicitly mentioned in the 2015 Commission Communication on "A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union." Instead, it refers to closer market integration and boosting investment with the other European Neighbourhood Policy countries. For example, compared to Ukraine, the stronger emphasis on the regional dimension

suggests that, for the European Union, energy relations with Georgia are included in a broader geographical framework of the South Caucasus.

Regarding the latest developments, the post-2020 priorities of the Eastern Partnership for Georgia include connectivity, particularly the initiative on fibre optic cables that would be installed under the Black Sea (EU Neighbours East 2021). Significant initiatives of the Economic and Investment Plan for Georgia focus on transport connectivity and digitalization, while energy interconnectivity is realized through technical assistance. Specifically, in 2022, the Commission launched a technical and economic feasibility study to deploy a submarine electric cable under the Black Sea between Georgia and the Union. The project is part of the strategy regarding security of supply and will benefit from an estimated investment of 25 million euros (EU Neighbours East 2021). The formalization of this energy infrastructure project took place on December 17, 2022. An Agreement was signed then in Bucharest between the governments of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary on the Strategic Partnership in the field of green energy development and transport, entering into force on April 19, 2023 (Monitorul Oficial, Part I no. 327 of April 19, 2023). It is a document that also highlights Romania's objective as a security actor in the Black Sea, both as an EU member and as a strategic partner of Georgia.

Returning to the hypotheses, the case of Georgia confirms the finding regarding the case of Ukraine, according to which the role of the external energy actor of the European Union is multifaceted. On the one hand, according to the liberal actor hypothesis, the EU has invested in promoting its regulatory space with Georgia by signing Association and Free Trade Agreements and conducting long and politically demanding negotiations on Georgia's accession to the Energy Community. Within this dimension, the EU has also channelled its environmental objectives and promoted renewable energy projects and legislative harmonization in energy efficiency standards. This action responds to the premise of the "green actor" hypothesis. On the other hand, the analysed period presents elements of the Union's strategic action, especially regarding diplomatic involvement in the SGC project.

However, the assessment of European strategic capability regarding the South Caucasus needs to be more balanced. The European Union lacks a clear strategy towards the region and

therefore misses what Siddi considers "the political power to influence developments to fulfil its geopolitical objectives" (Siddi 2019, 126). This unclear, equivocal approach could be one of the vulnerabilities of the EU's commitment to Georgia in a volatile regional environment, and could induce distrust in other partner countries.

Final conclusions. The EU energy policy in multiple scenarios

The study aimed primarily to find what role the European Union plays in its foreign policy commitments in the field of energy vis-à-vis Eastern European countries. The case of Georgia, compared to those of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, is relevant for the approach according to the context and interests of the Union at this level. Moreover, energy policy is part of the Europeanisation process, so strongly supported by the Georgian population, but its geostrategic dimensions are also increasingly evident.

The European Union does not act uniformly in all three exemplified cases, especially concerning relations with Georgia. Returning to the assumptions of this analysis, it may be correct to say that, as the Union adopts the position of a liberal actor, using economic policy instruments aimed at creating and maintaining free markets, it interprets energy-related issues more and more in geopolitical rather than commercial terms.

Therefore, considering the Union's foreign policy instruments, this analysis confirms the hypothesis of the liberal actor: the Georgian case showed that the EU has firm commitments to exporting its liberal normative agenda in the energy field, both through the Energy Community and the Association Agreements. Considering the motivation of this foreign policy direction, the research found that the EU often acted this way to also secure strategic objectives, thus confirming the hypothesis of the strategic actor.

The investigation of the EU's relations with Georgia demonstrates that the strategic role of the Union is deeply dependent on its interests. As a result, its role as an energy actor and promoter of Europeanisation varies depending on the country with which it relates and the interests involved. Considering the hypothesis of an actor in the green energy market, the comparison showed that the Union increasingly uses energy policy to achieve its environmental sustainability objectives.

The relative importance of liberal, strategic, and "green actor" roles shifts depending on the case/state under consideration. In the case of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, for the period studied, the most relevant roles of the EU were those of a liberal and strategic actor, while the position on the green energy market was less relevant. In the case of Georgia, the liberal and "green actor" roles turned out to be more visible than the strategic role. Consequently, it can be said that the EU's foreign policy game is flexible and relational, shaped by the commitments assumed towards each partner state. However, the Union's multifaceted game raises the question: How coherently does the EU act as an energy actor?

Finally, the foreign policy of the European Union in the period 2009-2022 was, to a certain extent, circular. As energy security was at the centre of the agenda during the 2009 gas crisis, the following years brought what Youngs (2020, 153) identified as an approach that "balances support for gas pipelines with market rules and objectives of decarbonisation." The European Union's propensity for the balance tactic was also observed in its reasoning for allocating external funds intended for energy investments. Likewise, the analysis showed a balance between energy efficiency and security projects in the case of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova on the one hand, and Georgia on the other. However, the energy price crisis in the autumn of 2021, which anticipated the outbreak of war in Ukraine, brought energy security to the top of the European public policy agenda.

The selected case studies also illustrate that a substantive analysis of the European Union's energy cooperation with the countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood needs adjustments. The theoretical interpretation from this comparative study suggests that the Union's external energy policy is still in a zone of unpredictability and indecision between normative (regulatory-focused) and geopolitical approaches, with a green energy agenda increasingly important. However, the evidence indicates that the EU juggles various objectives and motivations in its foreign policy. These facts induce the need for further research on the coherence and efficiency of the EU's external actions, which wear different "masks" at different times in different contexts. Moreover, this study highlighted the potential tensions between the existing normative approaches offered by

the European Union and the Russian Federation. The research emphasises the capacity and legitimacy of the Union to set the rules to regulate regional governance.

It must be noted in the end that the war in Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, changed the European Union's rationale for action in its energy policy towards ex-Soviet countries. The foreign policy of the Union, including in the energy field, is in a process of profound reconceptualization, starting from the imperative to decisively reduce the traditional dependence on Russia. Consequently, the foundations of liberal and strategic actor roles are reconsidered, but this fact does not mean that the traditional roles will be totally abandoned overnight. From this point of view, the opposite can be argued. The analysis of the European Union's foreign policy in the energy field in the last decade will help to understand both the inconsistencies and the future directions.

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