

## Normative power and economic orientation of EU foreign policy in Eastern partnership initiative (Case study: Moldova and Belarus)

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: International Relations                      Scope: EU: Moldova &amp; Belarus</p> <p>Received: 24 August 2024                      Revised: 14 September 2024                      Accepted: 15 September 2024                      Published online: 05 October 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b>                      conditionality,                      Eastern partnership initiative,                      European neighborhood policy,                      Europeanization,                      normative power.</p>	<p>Following the expansion of the European Union to ten Eastern European countries in 2004, serious discussions were raised regarding the risk of further expansion. The European Neighborhood Policy was a solution to further expansion without formal annexation. In 2009, the European Union and its six Eastern partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus) launched the Eastern Partnership initiative based on a commitment to fundamental values, market economy, sustainable development and good governance. As can be clearly seen in the text of the neighborhood policy and the Eastern Partnership initiative, the European Union places great emphasis on the procedures and norms based on European values and tries to define its foreign relations based on these norms. The current article seeks to answer the question, how has the normative power of the European Union affected the economic dimension of its foreign policy in the Eastern Partnership initiative, with an emphasis on Belarus and Moldova? In response, it may be possible to hypothesize that the European Union's emphasis on the norms of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law has activated the conditionality mechanism in the economic dimension of the European Union's foreign policy. Examining the two case studies of this article, namely Belarus and Moldova, and their commercial and economic relations with the European Union, clearly indicate the use of the European Union's conditionality mechanism. To test this hypothesis, Schimmelfnig's theory of Europeanization and process tracing method has been used.</p>

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**Extended Abstract****Introduction**

In the early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union heralded the beginning of the spread of liberal democracy and market economy across the European continent. Based on this optimism, during the largest accession wave in May 2004, 10 new countries joined the EU. As a result, the European neighborhood policy for the first time in the Commission's statement entitled "Wider Europe; Neighborhood: A New Framework for Relations with Our Eastern and Southern Neighbors" was detailed in a May 2004 strategic report.

Since the design of this policy, the European Union has emphasized that it offers a tool to strengthen relations with partner countries, which is different from the possibilities available to European countries based on Article 49 of the European Union Treaty. The aim of the Neighborhood Policy is to share the benefits of EU enlargement with neighboring countries in order to promote stability, security and prosperity for all stakeholders; without creating an obligation for them to enter the union. Relations with neighbors will be established based on mutual commitment to common values, mainly in the areas of rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights and principles of market economy and sustainable development.

In 2009, the European Union and its six Eastern partners, including Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, launched the Eastern Partnership Initiative based on a commitment to fundamental values (including democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms), a market economy. They launched sustainable development and good governance. Referring to the text of the main documents of the neighborhood policy and the Eastern Partnership Initiative clearly shows that the European Union, in establishing and expanding its relations with its neighbors, places great emphasis on procedures and norms based on European values and tries to base its foreign relations on these define norms.

**Aims**

This article seeks to answer the question of how the normative power of Europe has affected the economic orientation of the European Union's foreign policy in the Eastern Partnership initiative, with an emphasis on Moldova and Belarus. In response, it may be possible to hypothesize that the European Union's emphasis on the norms of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law has pushed the economic direction of the European Union's foreign policy towards the activation of the conditionality mechanism. In this article, to test the hypothesis, Schimmelfning's theory of Europeanization and the process tracing method have been used.

## **Methods**

The method chosen for this article is the qualitative method. Among the qualitative research methods, case study and process tracing type have been selected. The data collection method in this article is also a documentary method. The resulting data will be analyzed based on the process tracking research method. A case study is a research method that relies on a single case rather than a population or sample. When researchers focus on one case, they can make detailed observations over a long period of time. Based on this, it seems that the case study method can help us in writing this article. Based on this and in order to apply the case study method, we have chosen two countries that are members of the Eastern Partnership Initiative, namely Belarus and Moldova, as two case studies.

## **Discussions and Results**

The European Neighborhood Policy and specifically, the Eastern Partnership Initiative, under the influence of normative power and emphasis on the three norms of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, have moved towards the activation of the conditionality mechanism. The European Union uses both positive and negative conditionality in its foreign relations. Of course, in using this mechanism, priority has been given to positive conditionality, based on the assumption that it is the best option for establishing a democratic and friendly relationship, as well as for long-term prosperity and stability within the borders of the European Union. Based on this priority, the European Union will pay the reward if the conditions are met by the target government, and if it is not met, it will refuse to grant the reward.

Regarding the two cases studied in this article, i.e. Belarus and Moldova, the examination of the foreign policy of the European Union during the years 2009 to 2022 towards these two countries shows that in the economic dimension, the use of the conditionality mechanism has seriously been considered. To make this issue clearer, we considered the two main indicators of the trade volume of these two countries with the European Union and the amount of financial aid and investment of the European Union in these two countries. Examining the relevant statistics and graphs shows that despite the existence of some exceptions, in general, the status of these two indicators is a function of the degree of realization of European norms in the two countries of Belarus and Moldova.

As an example, we can point out the suspension of the process of approving the partnership and cooperation agreement of the European Union with Belarus in 1997, following Lukashenko's attempt to change the constitution in the 1996 referendum. The same procedure can be seen regarding Moldova, with the difference that Moldova has had a much better situation than Belarus in terms of compliance with

European norms, and accordingly, this country's relations with the European Union in the form of the Eastern Partnership initiative have made significant progress. The signing of the deep and comprehensive free trade agreement between Moldova and the European Union in 2014 can be considered a turning point in these relations.

### Conclusion

As we have seen in this article, the European Union, in the context of exercising normative power and by giving priority to its own norms, has tried to adjust its economic relations with the two countries that are members of the Eastern Partnership Initiative based on their level of commitment to complying with principles and norms. In this regard, the EU's trade relations with Belarus are not in a good condition due to the country's non-obligation to European values and norms in the field of trade and investment relations is at a higher level in terms of trade and investment.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

### Authors' contributions

All authors contributed to the original idea, study design.

### Ethical considerations

The authors have completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc.

### Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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