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Liana Grigoryan

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# EU Policy in Eastern Partnership Countries

A Comprehensive Analysis of Conflict  
Resolution and Peacebuilding Strategies

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CES, Master's Programme in Human Rights  
and Democratisation in the Caucasus

Liana Grigoryan

# EU Policy in Eastern Partnership Countries

A Comprehensive Analysis of Conflict Resolution  
and Peacebuilding Strategies

**Политика ЕС в странах Восточного партнерства**

Комплексный анализ стратегий разрешения конфликтов и  
построения мира

**ԵՄ քաղաքականությունը Արևելյան գործընկերության երկրներում**

Հակամարտությունների լուծման և խաղաղության ամրապնդման  
նազանվարությունների համապարփակ վերլուծություն

# Foreword

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- Grigoryan, Liana, *EU Policy in Eastern Partnership Countries: A Comprehensive Analysis of Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Strategies*. Supervisor: Arusyak Aleksanyan, Yerevan State University (YSU). Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in the Caucasus (CES), coordinated by Yerevan State University.
- Mugisha, Merveille, *Examining the Effects of Inheritance Practices on Women's Socio-Economic Rights in Burundi*. Supervisors: Susan Mutambasere, Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria and Untalimile Crystal Mokoena, School of Law, University of Venda. Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa, coordinated by Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa (HRDA), coordinated by Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria.
- Nicolaou, Orestis, *EU Border Policies Between Securitisation and Human Rights: The Impact of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum on BiH and The Western Balkans*. Supervisor: Anna Krasteva, New Bulgarian University. Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe (ERMA), coordinated by University of Sarajevo and University of Bologna.
- Nukiry, Laila, *The Effect of Parental Mediation Strategies on the Autonomy of Opinion Formation of Adolescents in Beirut: A Comparison Between Secular and Non-Secular Schools*. Supervisor: Carol Al-Sharabati, Saint Joseph University, Arab Master's Programme in Democracy and Human Rights (ARMA), coordinated by Saint Joseph University (Lebanon).

- Salakhunova, Alina, *Decentralization and Renewable Energy Policy in Central Asia: Exploring the Role of Local Governance and Community Participation*. Supervisor: Sergey Sayapin, KIMEP University (Almaty, Kazakhstan). The Master of Liberal Arts in Human Rights and Sustainability (MAHRS - GC Central Asia), coordinated by the OSCE Academy in Bishkek.
  
- Torres Cuenca, Laura, *El camino del retorno. Experiencias de mujeres rurales víctimas del conflicto armado en el proceso burocrático de ingreso al Registro de Tierras Despojadas y Abandonadas Forzosamente para el departamento del Cesar, Colombia*. Supervisor: Ezequiel Fernández Bravo, Universidad Nacional de San Martín - Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas (UNASAM-CONICET). Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LATMA), coordinated by National University of San Martin (Argentina).

# Biography

Liana Grigoryan is a political scientist with a Master's degree in Human Rights and Democratisation from the Global Campus of Human Rights and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Yerevan State University. Her academic interests focus on the European Union's policies and their impact on the Eastern Partnership countries. She specializes in analysing the EU's role in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, with a particular focus on its peacebuilding instruments and efforts to strengthen democratic institutions in these nations. Following her Master's studies, Liana contributed to the government sector, working on projects related to human rights, democratic governance, and EU integration processes.

# Abstract

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) region has long been at the center of geopolitical tensions and conflicts that challenge regional stability and security. The European Union (EU) has been actively involved in these EaP countries, implementing various policies and strategies aimed at conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Understanding the effectiveness of these efforts is crucial, given the ongoing and evolving nature of conflicts, including recent escalations in Ukraine. This study is significant as it provides an in-depth analysis of the EU's conflict resolution and peacebuilding approaches, contributing to the broader discourse on international conflict management and regional stability.

This research explores the effectiveness of the EU's policies and strategies by analysing their impact on conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. It examines the various mechanisms and tools used by the EU, including diplomatic engagements, economic assistance and security cooperation, and assesses their outcomes. The study also includes a comparative analysis to evaluate the effectiveness of EU strategies across different countries in the region, highlighting similarities and differences in their approaches.

EU policies have had some successes in mitigating conflicts and promoting stability, but significant challenges remain. Persistent conflicts and crises continue to undermine stability despite EU interventions. The research highlights that while the EU's diverse mechanisms and tools have contributed to peacebuilding, there are gaps in their effectiveness and implementation. The study concludes with recommendations for improving EU strategies and interventions, aiming to enhance their impact and address the complexities of conflict resolution in the Eastern Partnership region.

# Table of Abbreviations

<b>AA</b>	Association Agreement
<b>AP</b>	Action Plan
<b>CEPA</b>	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
<b>CORLEAP</b>	Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>CSO-LA</b>	Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities
<b>CSDP</b>	Common Security and Defence Policy
<b>CSTO</b>	Collective Security Treaty Organization
<b>DCFTA</b>	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
<b>EAEU</b>	Eurasian Economic Union
<b>EaP</b>	Eastern Partnership
<b>EFSD</b>	European Fund for Sustainable Development
<b>EIDHR</b>	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

<b>ENI</b>	European Neighbourhood Instrument
<b>ENP</b>	European Neighbourhood Policy
<b>ENPI</b>	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
<b>EPF</b>	European Peace Facility
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUAM</b>	EU Advisory Mission
<b>EUMAM</b>	European Union Military Assistance Mission
<b>EUMM</b>	EU Monitoring Mission
<b>Euronest PA</b>	Euronest Parliamentary Assembly
<b>FTA</b>	Free Trade Area
<b>IcSP</b>	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Persons
<b>MFA</b>	Macro-Financial Assistance
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>PCA</b>	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
<b>PSC</b>	Protracted Social Conflict
<b>SALW</b>	Small Arms and Light Weapons

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<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

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# Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The newly independent states, including Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, found themselves navigating a complex transition from Soviet rule to establishing their own sovereign governments. Recognising the strategic importance of this region, the European Union (EU) initiated policies aimed at fostering stability, promoting democratic governance, and encouraging economic development through various instruments, such as the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

The EU's engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in these countries has been a critical aspect of its broader foreign policy strategy. By deploying a range of diplomatic, economic, and security tools, the EU sought to address the root causes of conflicts, support the reconstruction of war-torn areas, and promote reconciliation among conflicting parties. These efforts were designed not only to secure peace but also to align these nations more closely with European norms and values.<sup>1</sup>

However, despite the EU's considerable investment in peacebuilding initiatives, the conflicts in Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have not been fully resolved. To explore the European Union's conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies, I will focus on three case studies: Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. Georgia's early engagement with the EU through ambitious policies and investments highlights its strategic importance in the South Caucasus and underscores the EU's commitment to regional stability and democratic governance. Georgia's

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<sup>1</sup> A Kartsonaki and S Wolff, 'The EU's Responses to Conflicts in Its Wider Neighbourhood: Human or European Security?' (2015) 29(2) *Global Society* 199.

challenges with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, along with internal political divisions, serve as a foundational example for understanding the EU's response to conflict resolution in the region. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, with its complex historical and geopolitical dimensions, reveals the challenges the EU faces in addressing conflicts influenced by regional powers. Meanwhile, the ongoing war in Ukraine exemplifies a significant shift in the EU's approach and carries profound geopolitical implications.

The EU's assistance in these conflicts underscores both the complexities of conflict resolution in the post-Soviet space and the limitations of external interventions in deeply rooted regional disputes. Despite significant efforts, these conflicts persist, illustrating the challenges the EU faces in promoting sustainable peace and stability in its Eastern Partnership countries. Incorporating an analysis of the EU's response to the conflict in Ukraine, the internal political dynamics in Georgia, and its mediation efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the EU's role and strategies in the region.

Topicality of the study: Ongoing conflicts in Eastern Partnership countries pose significant challenges to regional stability and security, making it crucial to examine the effectiveness of the EU's peacebuilding and conflict resolution methods in these regions. With the recent escalation of violence, particularly in Ukraine, understanding the EU's role in managing these complex geopolitical issues is more critical than ever.

Additionally, the European Union's response to internal political turmoil in Georgia, combined with its ongoing mediation efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, highlights a shifting geopolitical landscape and prompts a reassessment of the EU's role as a geopolitical player.

Moreover, there is currently no comprehensive analysis that encompasses all the mechanisms and tools—both security and non-security—that the EU employs in the Eastern Partnership region to address these conflicts. This study aims to fill this critical gap by thoroughly evaluating the full spectrum of EU interventions and their impact on peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Furthermore, there is a notable gap in the academic literature regarding the development and examination of peacebuilding and conflict resolution theories, particularly in the context of the Eastern Partnership region. This study seeks to address this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the EU's strategies, thereby contributing to both the academic discourse and practical policy-making in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

**Aim of the study:** The aim of this study is to conduct a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the European Union's policies and strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries—Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. This research seeks to systematically evaluate the full spectrum of mechanisms and tools employed by the EU, including both security and non-security measures, to address and mitigate ongoing conflicts and to foster long-term stability in these regions.

The study will investigate how various EU strategies and instruments have been implemented and assess their impact on conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. This includes a thorough examination of diplomatic engagements, economic assistance, security cooperation, and humanitarian support. By analysing the diverse mechanisms and tools used by the EU, such as political dialogue, economic incentives, sanctions, peacekeeping missions, and capacity-building programs, the research aims to understand their collective effectiveness and identify best practices.

Additionally, the study will highlight both the successes and limitations of the EU's approach in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, taking into account the unique political, historical, and social contexts that influence conflict dynamics. This analysis is intended to uncover which strategies have been effective, what challenges persist, and how future EU policies might be improved to better address the complexities of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in these specific countries.

**The research object** of this study is the European Union's policies and strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Eastern Partnership countries.

**The research subject** is security and non-security measures employed by the EU in addressing conflicts and fostering stability in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine.

**Research questions:** This study seeks to critically assess the EU's role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the EaP region by exploring the following research questions:

- What kinds of mechanisms and tools (both security and non-security) have been employed by the EU in its efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace in EaP countries?
- How effective are the European Union's conflict resolution and peacebuilding policies and strategies in addressing and mitigating ongoing conflicts and fostering stability in EaP?

**Academic and practical value:** The thesis holds significant academic and practical value. Academically, it provides a detailed examination of the EU's policies and strategies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. By integrating theoretical frameworks with empirical data, the thesis addresses a crucial gap in the literature, offering a critical review of both security and non-security measures. This analysis enhances the understanding of how these strategies impact regional stability and peacebuilding efforts. Practically, the thesis includes a comprehensive financial review that sheds light on how EU resources are allocated and utilized, which is vital for optimising future investments aimed at fostering stability and resolving conflicts. Additionally, the study examines major developments, such as the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, providing the latest updates on these situations and analysing their impact on EU policies. This approach offers valuable insights into how current conflicts influence the EU's strategies and helps refine future policy and resource management.

**Methodology:** To achieve these objectives, the research employs a robust methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative component includes a detailed analysis of policy documents, literature reviews, and case studies to gain insights into the EU's strategies and their effectiveness. This will be complemented by a quantitative analysis of relevant data, such as conflict metrics and economic indicators, to assess the impact of the EU's interventions and identify trends

and patterns. A comparative analysis will be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of EU strategies across Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, highlighting similarities and differences in their conflict resolution and peacebuilding approaches.

**Operationalisation:** Within this work, security mechanisms used by the EU in EaP countries are operationalised through conflict, peace, and security category sectors, including security system management and reform, civilian peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution, participation in international peace-keeping operations, reintegration and SALW control, and the removal of land mines and explosive remnants of war subcategories. Non-security instruments are operationalised within the government and civil society sector, which encompasses public sector policy and administrative management, legal and judicial development, macroeconomic policy, enhancement of democratic participation and civil society, elections, legislatures, media and the free flow of information, and human rights and other subcategories data of OECD Official Development Assistance<sup>2</sup> provided by the EU Aid Explorer.<sup>3</sup> By integrating these methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the EU’s conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives in the Eastern Partnership countries.

**Literature Review:** For the analysis, I utilised key theoretical frameworks, including John Paul Lederach’s Conflict Transformation,<sup>4</sup> Edward E. Azar’s Protracted Social Conflict,<sup>5</sup> John Burton’s “Human Needs” Approach,<sup>6</sup> and Johan Galtung’s Structural Violence.<sup>7</sup> These theories provide a foundation for understanding the theory of conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Additionally, the study incorporates crucial information from EU documents and resources. The official website of the EU and the European Commission’s Eastern Partnership section, along with the European

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<sup>2</sup> OECD, ‘List of CRS Purpose Codes and Voluntary Budget Identifier Codes’ (OECD, 2019). <<http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/purposecodessectorclassification.htm>> accessed 7 July 2024.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer* (2024) <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (United States Institute of Peace Press 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Edward E Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict* (Dartmouth 1990).

<sup>6</sup> John Burton, *Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflict (Handbook)* (University Press of America 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (Sage Publications 1996).

External Action Service<sup>8</sup>, offers essential background on EU policies and strategies. For a comprehensive financial review, the EU Aid Explorer is particularly important, providing detailed insights into the allocation and impact of EU financial support for conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives.<sup>9</sup> The EU Lex database was used to access relevant legislative documents and policy frameworks.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the EaP Index and related research were examined to analyse the progress and challenges in implementing EU policies and strategies in the Eastern Partnership countries.<sup>11</sup>

Structure: This paper is composed of the following sections: Abstract, Introduction, and the Main Body, which comprises three chapters, Conclusion and Bibliography. Chapter 1 presents a literature review on conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies. Chapter 2 explores the historical and political context of Eastern Partnership countries, highlighting their diverse paths and challenges in European integration. Chapter 3 focuses on EU policies and instruments for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Ukraine, Armenia, and Georgia, including a financial review of EU support.

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<sup>8</sup> European External Action Service, 'Eastern Partnership' (EEAS, 2020) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-partnership\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-partnership_en)> accessed 26 July 2025.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer* (2024), <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August, 2024.

European Commission, *The EU's Association Agreements with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine*, MEMO, Brussels, June 23, 2014, <[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO\\_14\\_430](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO_14_430)> accessed 15 July 2024.

<sup>10</sup> European Union, *EUR-Lex: Access to European Union Law* <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/homepage.html>> accessed 15 July 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Gwendolyn Sasse, 'The European Neighbourhood Policy: Conditionality Revisited for the EU's Eastern Neighbours' (2008) 60(2) *Europe-Asia Studies* 295 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130701820150>>

Oana Lungescu, 'EU Reaches Out to Troubled East' (BBC News, 2009) <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8035710.stm>> accessed 26 June 2024.

# 1. A literature review on conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies

As the geopolitical landscape has shifted significantly since the end of the Cold War, peacebuilding and conflict resolution theories have also evolved, with a growing emphasis on new approaches. Examining the theories of peacebuilding reveals that they often lack comprehensive frameworks. Although the field has gained importance both in theory and practice, it remains underdeveloped in certain areas. Over the past decade, a surge in the literature on peacebuilding has emerged, primarily authored by diplomats and military professionals using single case study methods. These works typically focus on assessing the effectiveness of different peacebuilding tools in specific conflict scenarios rather than providing a deeper scientific exploration of this complex social phenomenon. This limited scope has influenced the practice of peacebuilding. As Kenneth Bush notes, problem-oriented approaches “inevitably exclude more than they include” and contribute to “inflationary and deflationary tendencies” in how practitioners and policymakers label their initiatives as ‘peacebuilding’.<sup>12</sup> This has led to a constrained accumulation of knowledge and a lack of comprehensive theoretical models for evaluating the effectiveness of peacebuilding activities. In this context, it is evident that most peacebuilding missions are justified primarily by appeals to human rights and democratization.

Conflict management, prevalent during the Cold War, focused on mitigating conflicts through state-centric methods such as negotiations, tactical bargaining, and coercive interventions. This approach was deeply rooted in the state-centric international

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth David Bush, ‘Commodification, Compartmentalization, and Militarization of Peacebuilding’ in T Keating and WA Knight (eds), *Building Sustainable Peace* (United Nations University Press 2004).

relations framework of the Cold War era.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, some scholars and practitioners argue that “conflict management” more accurately reflects the inherent nature of conflict as an ongoing and inevitable aspect of human society, suggesting that conflict can only be managed rather than fully resolved. In this regard conflict resolution theory serves as an overarching concept that encompasses various theories related to conflict, which have either directly influenced the development of peacebuilding or laid the groundwork for its advancement. Unlike conflict management, which aims primarily at handling rather than truly resolving conflicts, conflict resolution theory addresses deeper, more systemic approaches to resolving disputes.<sup>14</sup>

Despite this perspective, the term “conflict resolution” is preferred by many for its ability to encapsulate the essence of a more humanistic and aspirational approach. This term is seen as more aligned with the goal of transcending the limits of current understanding and striving for comprehensive solutions to conflict.

According to Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his 1992 report as the UN Secretary-General, peacebuilding encompasses a range of strategies and actions implemented after the conclusion of war. These efforts involve deploying military and civilian personnel with the goal of “identifying and supporting structures that will strengthen and consolidate peace”.<sup>15</sup> His report introduced a new classification of peace operations, influenced by the transformative changes of the post-Cold War period. A key aspect of this classification, particularly relevant for this study, is the distinction between peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and post-conflict peacebuilding, with a clear separation between peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Upon examining Boutros-Ghali’s report thoroughly, we can see that peacebuilding is primarily viewed as an activity in the post-conflict phase. Additionally, the classification emphasizes the importance of non-security instruments in peacebuilding,

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<sup>13</sup> Oliver Ramsbotham, ‘Reflections on UN Post-Settlement Peacebuilding’ in Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse (eds), *Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution*, vol 7, issue 1 (Frank Cass 2000, London, Portland).

<sup>14</sup> Michelle Parlevliet, ‘Bridging the Divide - Exploring the Relationship Between Human Rights and Conflict Management in Track Two’ (2002) 11(1) *Track Two* <[http://ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za/archive/two/11\\_1/bridging.html](http://ccrweb.ccr.uct.ac.za/archive/two/11_1/bridging.html)> accessed 05 August 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping, Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992* (United Nations 1992) <<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/145749?ln=en&v=pdf>> accessed 7 August 2024.

including the organisation of elections, the strengthening of civil society, the enhancement of human rights protection systems, the training of judiciary and police forces, as well as financial assistance and economic reforms.<sup>16</sup>

The aim of the study is to explore the EU's approach to conflict management and peacebuilding by examining various theories that differentiate between types of peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms. Understanding these theories is essential for grasping the nuances of how the EU addresses conflicts and works towards sustainable peace. One of the key theories that will be examined in this study is Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence.

Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence refers to the ways in which social structures or institutions harm or disadvantage individuals. Unlike direct violence, which involves physical harm or aggression, structural violence is embedded in the fabric of society and manifests through systemic inequalities and injustices. Galtung argues that structural violence occurs when social structures prevent individuals from meeting their basic needs and achieving their full potential. This form of violence is subtle and often invisible, operating through societal norms, policies, and practices that perpetuate disparities and limit opportunities for certain groups. Examples include economic disparities, discrimination based on race, gender, or class, and inadequate access to essential services like education and healthcare. The structural violence emerges "when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realisations are below their potential realisations" Johan Galtung's model of conflict is often depicted as a triangle, and the base of this triangle is the fundamental causes of violence, which represent the underlying structure of society.<sup>17</sup>

Inside the triangle, there is a web of conflicting objectives, attitudes, and behaviour. In societies with structural inequalities, incompatible goals often lead to conflicts of interest as differing groups struggle over limited resources and opportunities.

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<sup>16</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping, Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992* (United Nations 1992) <<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/145749?ln=en&v=pdf>> accessed 7 August 2024. 172.

<sup>17</sup> Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research' (1969) 6(3) *Journal of Peace Research* 167, 168.

Attitudes encompass the subjective aspects of the conflict, including the perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of the parties involved. These can involve prejudices, mistrust, and emotional responses that shape how parties view each other and the conflict itself. Behaviour involves the actions and responses of the parties in the conflict. This includes both direct confrontations and indirect behaviours, such as passive resistance or non-cooperation. The way parties act and react can either escalate or de-escalate the conflict.

Galtung's model emphasises that to understand and resolve a conflict, it is crucial to address all three components. Effective conflict resolution requires not only tackling the structural issues at the heart of the conflict but also working to change negative attitudes and modify behaviours that perpetuate the conflict. He argues that peacebuilding, rather than traditional peacekeeping or peacemaking, is the only viable method for addressing these deep-rooted structural causes of violence and achieving resolution.<sup>18</sup>

Johan Galtung, a prominent peace researcher, introduced the concepts of "negative peace" and "positive peace" to distinguish between different approaches to understanding and achieving peace. Negative peace is the absence of direct violence or conflict, where hostilities have ceased but underlying issues remain unresolved. Positive peace involves the presence of social justice, equality, and reconciliation, addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering long-term harmony.<sup>19</sup>

Galtung's role was instrumental in shaping the field of peace studies, particularly through his development of concepts that have become central to understanding and addressing the root causes of conflict.

Edward E. Azar's theory of Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) delves into the nature of conflicts that endure over long periods. He argues that these conflicts are often deeply rooted in historical grievances related to ethnic or communal identities, which are intensified by political and economic structures. Such conflicts are typically resistant to resolution due to their complexity and the entrenched nature of the issues involved. The communities involved usually have a long history of marginalisation or exclusion, which

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<sup>18</sup> Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research' (1969) 6(3) *Journal of Peace Research* 103–113.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid* 132.

perpetuates animosity. Often, these conflicts occur in states that are failing or have failed, where the government lacks the capacity or legitimacy to address the grievances of different groups effectively. Additionally, protracted conflicts frequently involve international actors, either as mediators, supporters, or participants, adding another layer of complexity to the resolution process. Azar's theory also considers how conflicts evolve over time, shifting from initial grievances to more entrenched and violent forms of struggle, involving various actors with differing agendas. Azar also emphasises that to mitigate the impact of external systemic causes of protracted social conflict, it is crucial to develop responsive social institutions.<sup>20</sup>

He cautions that traditional peace initiatives, which often rely on patron-client relationships, can further fragment political institutions and exacerbate conflicts. Therefore, he suggests that strategies aimed at transforming these patron-client dynamics should be supported through multilateral efforts. According to Azar, addressing protracted social conflict requires two key tasks: closely monitoring the evolving dynamics of the conflict and focusing on its social, economic, and political roots. He warns that if peacebuilding efforts are narrowly defined and fail to address the underlying causes and dynamics of protracted social conflict, they risk deepening the cycle of violence and despair.<sup>21</sup>

John Burton's theory emphasises addressing the fundamental human needs of individuals involved in conflicts. His "human needs" theory, also known as the "generic theory of conflict," presents an alternative perspective on conflict. Burton argues that conflicts often arise when basic needs—such as security, identity, recognition, and autonomy—are unmet. Burton identifies nine universal human needs, with identity, security, and distributive justice being particularly crucial. Unlike negotiable interests, these universal needs are essential for every human being's existence. While they may be suppressed temporarily, they inevitably resurface, leading to what Burton terms "protracted social conflicts". Therefore, meeting these basic human needs is essential for achieving lasting and sustainable peace.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Edward E Azar, *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict* (Dartmouth 1990) 133.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid* 139.

<sup>22</sup> John Burton, *Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflict (Handbook)* (University Press of America 1987) 29.

One interesting component of Burton's theory is the role of the third party. According to Burton, the third party's role is crucial in establishing an environment where conflicting parties can identify and articulate their issues. The third party facilitates this process by providing the necessary tools and frameworks for problem-solving and helping the parties reframe their problems. This approach encourages the development of creative solutions and supports effective communication, which are essential for addressing the underlying needs of the conflict and fostering sustainable peace. So, the idea was that official matters could be discussed in a more informal setting, allowing ordinary citizens, civil society actors, to participate in the official debates.

As Richmond notes, John Burton's problem-solving approach reintroduced the individual into conflict management, emphasizing that resolution at the diplomatic level requires the consent of the individual citizen.<sup>23</sup>

His theory has not escaped criticism; the most prominent critiques focus on its universal approach to human needs and the conflict resolution methods he proposed. Critics argue that the theory lacks a clear method for verifying the existence of these universal needs. Moreover, some critics assert that the theory's purported universality is problematic, as it often imposes a Western-style discourse as dominant.<sup>24</sup>

An American Professor of International Peacebuilding, John Paul Lederach developed a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution that involves blending immediate interventions aimed at stopping violence with a broader, long-term process of resolving the conflict. Central to his long-term strategy is the recognition and support of the cultural practices and resources inherent within the conflict setting, which are crucial for sustainable peacebuilding.

The principle of indigenous empowerment suggests that conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources within a given setting. This involves a new set of lenses through which we do not

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<sup>23</sup> Oliver Richmond, *Maintaining Order, Making Peace* (Palgrave 2002).

<sup>24</sup> Raymond Cohen, 'Language and Conflict Resolution: The Limits of English' (2001) 3 *International Studies Review* 1, 30.

primarily ‘see’ the setting and the people in it as the ‘problem’ and the outsider as the ‘answer’. Rather, we understand the long-term goal of transformation as validating and building on people and resources within the setting.<sup>25</sup>

In Lederach’s framework, a conflict-affected society is depicted as a pyramid with key military and political leaders at the top, middle-level leaders in sectors like health and education, and senior military officials and the general population, including common people, refugees, and local leaders, at the base. For peacebuilding to be effective and lasting, strategies must be coordinated across all three levels of society. He proposes different strategies for each level of the affected population. In Lederach’s theory, a crucial element for achieving a negotiated settlement is the role of mediators. According to him, effective mediators are essential as they facilitate dialogue and negotiations between conflicting parties. These intermediaries, often supported by foreign governments or international organisations, help bridge gaps and foster communication, which is vital for reaching a consensus. Lederach emphasises that while mediators play a significant role, it is also important to recognise the contributions of local actors and middle-range leaders who can support and sustain the peace process at various levels. His approach marks a significant shift in peacebuilding practices, emphasizing the value of local peacemaking resources over external actors like diplomats and international peacebuilders, who were traditionally given more importance.<sup>26</sup>

For Lederach, reconciliation is essential to conflict transformation. He advocates shifting the focus from merely resolving issues to prioritizing the restoration and rebuilding of relationships, using reconciliation as the central component of peacebuilding. Lederach views reconciliation as a process that creates the social space needed to confront the past, envision a shared future, and reframe the present.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> John Paul Lederach, ‘Conflict Transformation in Protracted Conflict: The Case for a Comprehensive Framework’ in Kumar Rupesinghe (ed), *Conflict Transformation* (Macmillan 1995) 212.

<sup>26</sup> John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (United States Institute of Peace Press 1997) 44–54.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid* 24.

Another important milestone that we explored was Lederach's "integrated framework of peacebuilding", which not only connects local strategies with systemic issues but also emphasises the significance of timing in the peacebuilding process. This framework includes a detailed time dimension, beginning with crisis intervention, which occurs over 2 to 6 months, focusing on immediate actions to stabilize the conflict and prevent further escalation. Following this, there is a phase dedicated to preparation and training for change, lasting 1 to 2 years, where local actors are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to support the transition towards peace.

The framework then moves into the design of social change, a longer-term phase spanning 5 to 10 years, where strategies are implemented to address the deeper, structural causes of conflict, fostering sustainable transformation within society. Finally, the process culminates in the fulfilment of the desired future, which extends over 20 years and beyond, envisioning a time when the goals of peacebuilding have been fully realised, and the society has achieved lasting stability and peace. This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of long-term strategic planning, recognising that true peacebuilding involves not just immediate conflict resolution but also the creation of conditions for enduring peace over decades.<sup>28</sup>

After the Cold War, conflict resolution and peace theories underwent significant changes, shifting away from traditional state-centred approaches to more holistic methods that addressed the underlying causes of conflict. These new theories placed greater emphasis on reconciliation, social justice, and the inclusion of individual and community needs in global peace efforts, fundamentally transforming the way conflicts are understood and managed.

Within this work, Lederach's theory of conflict transformation will serve as a theoretical framework for researching EU conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies due to its comprehensive and inclusive approach. His theory emphasises addressing the root causes of conflict through a multi-tiered framework that integrates short-term interventions with long-term solutions.

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<sup>28</sup> Cynthia Sampson and John Paul Lederach (eds), *From the Ground Up: Mennonite Contributions to International Peacebuilding* (Oxford Academic 2000) 55 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195136425.001.0001>> accessed 27 August 2024.

Lederach's "comprehensive approach" advocates for recognising and leveraging local cultural resources and indigenous empowerment, which aligns with the EU's focus on integrating local perspectives and fostering sustainable peace. His model, which incorporates a three-tier system involving top-down, middle-range, and bottom-up approaches, will help us to evaluate the effectiveness of the EU's multi-faceted strategies in managing conflicts and building peace. By focusing on reconciliation and relational aspects, Lederach's theory also complements the EU's emphasis on human rights, social justice, and community involvement. This alignment makes Lederach's framework an ideal basis for analysing and understanding the EU's strategies in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

## 2. Historical and political context of Eastern Partnership Countries

### 2.1 From ENP to EaP: Shaping EU's Eastern foreign policy

The Eastern Partnership emerged in a complex historical and political context marked by the post-Soviet transition of Eastern European countries, evolving EU policies, and regional geopolitical dynamics. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine faced significant political, economic, and social challenges. The transition from centrally planned economies to market economies and the establishment of democratic institutions were fraught with difficulties. The European Union's enlargement in 2004 and 2007, which brought in many Central and Eastern European countries, shifted the EU's borders closer to the former Soviet republics. This expansion heightened the EU's interest in promoting stability, security, and prosperity in its eastern neighbourhood.

Understanding the historical and political context of this region is essential to grasp the complexities and challenges of EU policies and their implementation. In 2004, along with the enlargement of the European Union to 10 countries, the EU developed the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It covered the EU's sixteen neighbours – Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia. The European Neighbourhood Policy is a key foreign relations instrument of the European Union, which focuses on several key areas, including political cooperation and economic integration, which involves facilitating closer political and economic ties through agreements, reforms, and trade initiatives. Promoting democracy and governance, supporting sustainable economic development through reforms and

investments, and addressing regional security challenges through cooperation on border management and conflict resolution are also central to the initiative. The overall goal of the Eastern Neighbourhood is to foster stability and prosperity while offering the partner countries a pathway to closer integration with the EU.<sup>29</sup> In May 2008, Poland and Sweden introduced a new initiative aimed at fostering cooperation with post-Soviet states. This initiative was driven by several factors: Eastern European countries' desire for closer integration with the EU, the EU's need to bolster its eastern foreign policy, and the prevailing security concerns in the region. The Russian invasion of Georgia expedited the development of this initiative, leading to the official launch of the Eastern Partnership as a key component of the European Neighbourhood Policy at the Prague Summit on May 7, 2009.<sup>30</sup> The transition from the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to the Eastern Partnership (EaP) reflects the EU's evolving approach to strengthening ties with its eastern neighbours. Initiated in 2008 and formally launched in 2009, the EaP has built on the foundations of the ENP while introducing a more focused and flexible framework tailored to the diverse aspirations of partner countries.

The EaP was introduced as a specific initiative within this broader policy framework to enhance cooperation with Eastern European partners. Russia has often perceived the EU's initiatives to strengthen relations with these countries as an intrusion into its sphere of influence, resulting in heightened tensions and conflicts, including the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> For the EU, the Eastern Partnership serves as a strategic instrument to enhance stability and security along its eastern borders. By backing democratic reforms, promoting good governance, and fostering economic growth, the EU seeks to establish a zone of stable and cooperative states that can work as partners in tackling regional challenges. It is founded

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<sup>29</sup> Meltem Müftüleri-Baç, 'The European Neighbourhood Policy' (October 2019) *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1082>> accessed 27 August 2024.

<sup>30</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit' (7 May 2009, Brussels) <[www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009\\_eap\\_declaration.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009_eap_declaration.pdf)> accessed 26 August 2024.

<sup>31</sup> Oana Lungescu, 'EU Reaches Out to Troubled East' (BBC News, 5 May 2009) <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8035710.stm>> accessed 26 June 2024.

on a commitment to the principles of international law and fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and basic freedoms. It also includes support for a market economy, sustainable development, and good governance.

The crisis in Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea, has significantly influenced the Eastern Partnership, leading to a stronger focus on stability and security. The 2015 European Neighbourhood Policy Review reflects this shift by emphasising the connection between political and economic development and security goals. It highlights that the EaP now prioritises stability, with development efforts linked to security objectives and preventing radicalisation. The review also introduced enhanced security measures for both the Eastern and Southern regions, including reforms in the security sector, counter-terrorism efforts, and actions against organised and cybercrime. Additionally, there was a call for the ENP/EaP to increase its relevance for EU Member States and partner countries, suggesting greater flexibility to address changing needs, a more tailored approach to individual partner priorities, and improved partner ownership.<sup>32</sup>

The EU establishes its relations with Eastern Partnership countries through Association Agreements, Free Trade Areas (FTAs), and visa liberalisation. A fundamental principle guiding the EU's relations with its neighbours is differentiation, which acknowledges the varying aspirations of partner countries regarding their relationship with the EU. Consequently, the EU offers tailored partnerships to its neighbours. Joint documents, such as Partnership Priorities and Association Agendas, are developed collaboratively with each country, focusing on mutual interests. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and allows for flexibility in aligning support with each partner country's goals. The Eastern Partnership aligns with the broader goal of enhancing the stability, prosperity, and resilience of the EU's neighbours, as outlined in the Global Strategy for the EU's foreign and security policy.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Maryna Rabinovych, *The Development Dimension of the Eastern Partnership Following the 2015 EaP Review: Successes, Challenges and Prospects* (Kyiv School of Economics, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2022) <[www.kas.de/documents/270026/0/Final+21-02-22+The+Development+Dimension+of+the+Eastern+Partnership+following+the+2015+EaP+Review+Successes%2C+Challenges+and+Prospects.pdf/929b5a98-87dc-3f8d-090f-1085e27ae3ac?version=1.0&t=1614179072562](http://www.kas.de/documents/270026/0/Final+21-02-22+The+Development+Dimension+of+the+Eastern+Partnership+following+the+2015+EaP+Review+Successes%2C+Challenges+and+Prospects.pdf/929b5a98-87dc-3f8d-090f-1085e27ae3ac?version=1.0&t=1614179072562)> accessed 7 February 2025.

<sup>33</sup> Nicole Koenig, 'Taking the ENP Beyond the Conception-Performance Gap' (Jacques Delors Institut Policy Paper, March 2016) <<http://www.institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/enpstrategicorientation-koenig-jdib-mar16.pdf>> accessed 28 July 2024.

The Eastern Partnership operates through a combination of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to enhance cooperation with its partner countries. Bilateral cooperation is tailored to the unique needs and goals of each partner, focusing on reforms and priorities established through agreements such as Association Agreements (AA) or Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA). This approach aims to strengthen political and economic ties and align partner countries' systems with EU standards.

The relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus evolved significantly after the 2015 review of the ENP, which emphasised the importance of ownership and differentiation in EU policy. This shift led to a more customised approach for each country. For Armenia, this resulted in the signing of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which came into force on March 1, 2021.<sup>34</sup> Relations with Azerbaijan continued to be guided by a strategic partnership framework, focusing on energy cooperation and regional security.<sup>35</sup> Belarus experienced a different trajectory. While it had actively participated in the multilateral formats of the Eastern Partnership, the EU suspended its political engagement with Belarus following the 2020 presidential election and subsequent human rights violations. On June 28, 2021, the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Belarus would suspend its membership in the Eastern Partnership. According to the October 2020 Council Conclusions, the EU decided to maintain cooperation with Belarus within the Eastern Partnership's multilateral framework at a non-political level and to enhance collaboration with key non-state Belarusian stakeholders.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> European Union, 'Joint Proposal for a Council Decision on the Conclusion, on Behalf of the European Union, of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the Other Part' (25 September 2017) EUR-Lex <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017JC0037#>> accessed 17 June 2024.

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, 'EU and Azerbaijan Enhance Bilateral Relations, Including Energy Cooperation' (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, 18 July 2022) <[https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-azerbaijan-enhance-bilateral-relations-including-energy-cooperation-2022-07-18\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-azerbaijan-enhance-bilateral-relations-including-energy-cooperation-2022-07-18_en)> accessed 17 June 2024.

<sup>36</sup> European Council, 'EU Relations with Belarus' (2024), <[www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/belarus/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/belarus/)> accessed 30 July 2024.

The Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (AA/DCFTAs), finalized in 2014, have significantly advanced the relationship between the EU and Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine.<sup>37</sup> These agreements are designed to deepen political ties and foster economic integration by aligning the legislation and standards of these partner countries with those of the EU. A central goal of these agreements is to improve the lives of citizens in a meaningful way. A prime example of this progress is the introduction of visa liberalisation, which was implemented for Moldova in 2014 and later for Georgia and Ukraine in 2017.<sup>38</sup> On July 17 of 2024, after extensive negotiations, the European Union approved the European Commission's proposal to begin visa liberalization talks with Armenia, a decision made at the ambassadorial level across all member states. According to the decision, the visa requirement will be lifted once Armenia meets all necessary criteria. Typically, Brussels outlines four key requirements, ranging from effective border management to combating organized crime and corruption. Examining the history of EU relations with these countries reveals a consistent approach in fostering closer ties through such agreements and initiatives.<sup>39</sup>

The Eastern Partnership employs several mechanisms to achieve its goals and has seen varying degrees of effectiveness in different areas. Flagship initiatives and programs are integral to the EaP, addressing key areas such as regional development, energy efficiency, and support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The EU provides financial assistance through various instruments, including the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), and other external assistance programmes.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> European Commission, *The EU's Association Agreements with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine* (MEMO, Brussels, 23 June 2014) <[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO\\_14\\_430](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/de/MEMO_14_430)> accessed 15 July 2024.

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, 'Visa Liberalisation with Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia' (Migration and Home Affairs) <[https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/international-affairs/collaboration-countries/visa-liberalisation-moldova-ukraine-and-georgia\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/international-affairs/collaboration-countries/visa-liberalisation-moldova-ukraine-and-georgia_en)> accessed 17 July 2024

<sup>39</sup> Heghine Buniatian, 'EU Set to Provide Non-Lethal Assistance to Armenia' (Ազատ Եվրոպա/Ազատություն ռադիոկայան, 17 April 2024) <[www.azatutyun.am/a/32909510.html](http://www.azatutyun.am/a/32909510.html)> accessed 1 July 2024.

<sup>40</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *Eastern Partnership Index 2023: Charting Performance in the Eastern Partnership: Democracy and Good Governance, Policy Convergence and Sustainable Development* (Eastern Partnership Index, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels, 2024) <<https://doi.org/10.17613/ks3t-et13>> accessed 7 August 2024.

A notable feature of the EaP is its emphasis on public engagement through the Civil Society Forum. This Forum aims to build connections between non-governmental organisations and public authorities, supporting dialogue and collaboration. It operates based on the thematic platforms of the multilateral dimension of the EaP and receives funding from the European Commission. National platforms have been established in each partner country to facilitate local civil society engagement, with the Ukrainian platform, for example, uniting over 140 NGOs. These platforms provide valuable recommendations and proposals to government bodies, EU representatives, and international organizations. Additionally, the EaP fosters the establishment of expert NGOs in member countries to address specific national issues and challenges.<sup>41</sup>

In the Eastern Partnership, Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) are pivotal in enhancing regional cooperation and local governance. Euronest is a parliamentary assembly established in 2011, designed to facilitate dialogue between the European Parliament and national parliamentarians from the EaP countries, including Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. It provides a platform for exchanging experiences and addressing issues related to democratic development, economic integration, and regional stability. Euronest aims to strengthen political dialogue and collaboration between the EU and its eastern neighbours, helping to align legislative frameworks and support reforms. Notably, Belarus does not currently participate in Euronest meetings due to democracy-related political issues in the country.<sup>42</sup> CORLEAP was also established in 2011 and serves as a platform for dialogue between regional and local authorities from the EU and EaP countries. It consists of 36 representatives—18 from the European Committee of the Regions and 18 from local and regional authorities of the EaP countries, with three representatives from each of the six EaP countries. CORLEAP focuses on fostering cooperation at the regional and local levels,

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<sup>41</sup> Hrant Kostanyan, 'The Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership: Four Years On – Progress, Challenges and Prospects' (Report commissioned by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, January 2014) <[http://archive.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/HK-EaP-Civil-Society-Forum-\(2\).pdf](http://archive.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/HK-EaP-Civil-Society-Forum-(2).pdf)> accessed 25 August 2024.

<sup>42</sup> EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly, 'Understanding the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly (PA)' (2021) <[www.europarl.europa.eu/euronest/en/about/introduction](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/euronest/en/about/introduction)> accessed 7 August 2024.

promoting decentralised governance, and supporting local development. It provides a forum for exchanging best practices, discussing local issues, and enhancing the role of local authorities in implementing EaP objective.

The ongoing evolution of the EaP, including the introduction of new long-term policy objectives and strategic agendas, highlights the EU's commitment to adapting its approach to meet the changing needs of its partners. This dynamic and responsive framework aims to strengthen resilience, promote sustainable development, and achieve meaningful outcomes for society, reinforcing the EU's role as a key partner in the region's progress and stability. Overall, the effectiveness of the EaP mechanisms varies across different countries and sectors. While the initiative has succeeded in promoting significant reforms and deeper EU integration for some partners, challenges such as political instability, governance issues, and resistance to reform continue to affect its overall impact.

## **2.2 Eastern Partnership countries and the EU: Diverse paths and challenges in European integration**

Each Eastern Partnership country follows a unique trajectory in its relationship with the European Union, influenced by its distinct historical, political, and economic contexts. These countries grapple with varying internal challenges and external pressures as they seek to align with EU standards and policies. Some pursue deeper integration and reform with the EU, driven by aspirations for economic modernization and political alignment. Others balance their EU ambitions with complex regional dynamics and strategic alliances.

Armenia's relationship with the EU is nuanced, reflecting its geopolitical position and historical ties with both Europe and Russia. The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed in 2017, is central to Armenia-EU relations. CEPA covers a broad spectrum of cooperation areas, including trade, governance, and sectoral policies, without conflicting with Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Armenia has shown commitment to reforming its judiciary, fighting corruption, and modernising its economy, benefitting from

EU technical and financial support.<sup>43</sup> Following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, the EU drastically changed its approach, with heightened interest and engagement in Armenia, creating new opportunities for deepening ties. This shift in EU policy reflects a strategic move to support Armenia's stability and development amid regional tensions.<sup>44</sup> Recent statements by EU and Armenian officials underscore the mutual interest in strengthening relations, with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan welcoming increased EU support in his October 2023 speech at the European Parliament. The evolving dynamics offer various avenues for further cooperation and partnership between Armenia and the EU.<sup>45</sup>

Azerbaijan's relationship with the EU is largely pragmatic, driven by mutual economic and energy interests rather than a broader political alignment. Azerbaijan is a crucial partner in the EU's energy diversification strategy, particularly through the Southern Gas Corridor, which reduces EU dependence on Russian gas. The Partnership Priorities Agreement of 2018 outlines areas of cooperation, focusing on economic diversification, governance, and connectivity.<sup>46</sup> However, Azerbaijan's authoritarian governance, human rights record, and limited progress in democratic reforms pose significant barriers to deeper political integration with the EU. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also adds a layer of complexity to EU-Azerbaijan relations.

Among the EaP countries, Belarus has the most strained relationship with the EU, primarily due to its authoritarian regime and close alignment with Russia. Following the disputed 2020 presidential election and subsequent crackdown on opposition and civil society, the EU imposed sanctions on Belarusian officials

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<sup>43</sup> European Union, 'Joint Proposal for a Council Decision on the Conclusion, on Behalf of the European Union, of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the Other Part' (EUR-Lex, 25 September 2017) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017JC0037#>> accessed 17 June 2024.

<sup>44</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), 'The European Union and Armenia | EEAS' (21 July 2021) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/armenia/european-union-and-armenia\\_en?s=216](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/armenia/european-union-and-armenia_en?s=216)> accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>45</sup> Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 'Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Speech at the European Parliament' (17 October 2023) <[www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2023/10/17/Nikol-Pashinyan-Speech/](http://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2023/10/17/Nikol-Pashinyan-Speech/)> accessed 25 August 2024.

<sup>46</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), 'Partnership Priorities between the EU and Azerbaijan Reinforce the Bilateral Agenda | EEAS' (7 November 2018) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/node/48244\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/48244_en)> accessed 9 June 2025.

and entities. The EU engages selectively with Belarus, focusing on areas like border management and environmental protection, but comprehensive political and economic integration remains off the table. The regime's resistance to democratic reforms and human rights improvements continues to hinder the development of closer EU-Belarus relations. As was mentioned above, Belarus suspended its membership.<sup>47</sup>

Georgia is one of the most advanced EaP countries in terms of EU integration, driven by strong pro-European aspirations and substantial progress in democratic reforms. The Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, signed in 2014, have facilitated closer political and economic ties with the EU.<sup>48</sup> The visa-free regime granted in 2017 further solidified Georgia's European orientation. However, internal political polarization, judicial independence issues, and ongoing conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain challenges. Georgia applied for EU membership in March 2022. On 17 June 2022, the European Commission issued its opinion on the application, and the European Council recognised Georgia's European perspective on 23 June 2022, suggesting that candidate status would be granted once certain priorities were met. On 8 November 2023, the European Commission recommended granting Georgia candidate status, contingent on further reforms.<sup>49</sup>

In July 2024, the EU suspended Georgia's membership process and froze a €30 million allocation to Georgia's Ministry of Defence. On May 14, the Georgian Parliament passed the so-called Foreign Agents Law, which was heavily criticised domestically, as

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<sup>47</sup> Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Belarus, 'The European Union and Belarus' (29 July 2021) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/belarus/european-union-and-belarus\\_en?s=218](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/belarus/european-union-and-belarus_en?s=218)> accessed 3 August 2024.

<sup>48</sup> European Union, 'Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and Their Member States, of the One Part, and Georgia, of the Other Part' (16 June 2014) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/association\\_agreement.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/association_agreement.pdf)> accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, 'EU/Georgia Association Agreement' (EEAS, 30 August 2014) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/association\\_agreement.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/association_agreement.pdf)> accessed 22 August 2024.

well as by the EU and the US. Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated that the EU doors would close for Georgia if its government continued its actions.<sup>50</sup>

Moldova's relationship with the EU has been marked by significant progress and recurring challenges. The Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area signed in 2014 have been pivotal in driving Moldova's EU integration, and fostering trade and governance reforms. However, Moldova has faced political instability, corruption, and oligarchic influence, which have hindered consistent progress. The unresolved Transnistria conflict is another major obstacle. Moldova applied for EU membership in March 2022. On 17 June 2022, the European Commission issued its opinion, and the European Council granted Moldova candidate status on 23 June 2022. On 8 November 2023, the Commission recommended opening accession negotiations, and on 25 June 2024, the EU formally opened negotiations at an intergovernmental conference in Luxembourg.<sup>51</sup>

Ukraine's relationship with the EU has undergone significant transformation, particularly since the Euromaidan revolution and subsequent conflict with Russia. The Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area signed in 2014 have driven substantial reforms in governance, anti-corruption, and economic sectors. The visa-free regime granted in 2017 further strengthened Ukraine's ties with the EU.<sup>52</sup> Ukraine applied for EU membership on 28 February 2022, and the European Commission issued its opinion on 17 June 2022. The European Council granted Ukraine candidate status on 23 June 2022. On 8 November 2023, the Commission recommended opening accession negotiations, which were formally opened on 25 June 2024 at an

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<sup>50</sup> Faustine Vincent, 'Georgia's EU Accession Process Frozen in Wake of "Foreign Influence" Law' (Le Monde, 12 July 2024) <[www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/12/georgia-s-eu-accession-process-frozen-in-wake-of-foreign-influence-law\\_6682413\\_4.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/07/12/georgia-s-eu-accession-process-frozen-in-wake-of-foreign-influence-law_6682413_4.html)> accessed 27 July 2024.

<sup>51</sup> European Commission, 'Moldova' (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, DG NEAR, 9 July 2024) <[https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/moldova\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/moldova_en)> accessed 2 August 2024.

<sup>52</sup> European Union, 'Association Agreement between the European Union and Its Member States, of the One Part, and Ukraine, of the Other Part' (29 May 2014) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A2014A0529%2801%29>> accessed 24 August 2024.

intergovernmental conference in Luxembourg. Despite significant progress, challenges such as the ongoing conflict in Donbas, Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion in 2022, and persistent corruption and political instability remain substantial hurdles.<sup>53</sup>

Research reveals that after Russia's unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the situation is no longer the same as it was before. The EaP 2023 index shows that the war had far-reaching effects on the entire Eastern Partnership region and triggered one of the biggest and fastest-moving humanitarian crises in recent history. The Eastern Partnership Index (EaP Index) is a distinctive data-driven monitoring tool created by civil society. It tracks progress in the six Eastern Partnership countries in areas such as democracy, good governance, rule of law, alignment with EU policies, and sustainable development.<sup>54</sup> The 2023 Index ranks Moldova in first place with a score of 0.7, followed by Ukraine in second place with a score of 0.66. Georgia ranks third with an overall score of 0.63. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus rank fourth (0.61), fifth (0.47), and sixth (0.45), respectively.<sup>55</sup>

The 2023 EaP Index illustrates a significant shift in the alignment of Eastern Partnership countries with the EU, influenced by recent geopolitical events, particularly the ongoing war. This period has seen some EaP states strengthen their ties with the EU, while others have distanced themselves, reflecting a more stratified and nuanced landscape within the partnership.

The 'Associated Trio'—Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine—has become less distinct as a cohesive group. The boundaries between EU neighbourhood policy and enlargement policy have blurred, reflecting the evolving dynamics within the region. Although Ukraine and Moldova are making considerable progress toward EU accession, Georgia's EU approximation efforts have

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<sup>53</sup> European Commission, 'Ukraine' (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, DG NEAR) <[https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/ukraine\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/ukraine_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>54</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *Eastern Partnership Index 2023: Charting Performance in the Eastern Partnership: Democracy and Good Governance, Policy Convergence and Sustainable Development* (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels, 2024) 2 <<https://doi.org/10.17613/ks3t-et13>>.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid* 12–14.

stalled. This stagnation is attributed to setbacks in fundamental freedoms, democracy, and governance, alongside the government's attempts to appease Russia, which diverges from the EU's expectations.<sup>56</sup>

Armenia, while still performing well overall, is facing challenges such as reform fatigue and discrepancies between legal frameworks and actual practices. These issues have led to a noticeable slowdown in its approximation process with the EU. The Index not only highlights the growing divide between the top-performing countries and others but also brings to light new issues and emerging trends affecting the EaP's relationship with the EU. The ongoing war has had widespread repercussions across various policy areas, including the economy, environment, media, and human rights, with noticeable effects across all Eastern Partnership states. This conflict underscores the fragile nature of peace in Europe and Russia's blatant disregard for sovereignty, human rights, and the rule of law. However, it also highlights the resilience of independent civil societies throughout the EaP region.<sup>57</sup>

The ongoing conflict has negatively impacted Ukraine's performance in the 2023 EaP Index, mainly due to the constraints of Martial Law imposed since February 22, 2022.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Ukraine remains committed to reform, showing significant advancements in independent media, freedom of expression, judicial independence, and anti-corruption efforts. The conflict's impact is most noticeable in reduced state accountability and poorer results in energy and environmental policies, which have suffered from war-related damage and environmental crimes. Moldova and Ukraine's high rankings reflect that EU candidate status enhances the credibility and effectiveness of EU conditionality, enabling pro-EU authorities and civil society to drive reforms. However, the EaP Index also indicates that EU approximation is an evolving process that can face setbacks due to internal or external factors or reform fatigue.

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<sup>56</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *Eastern Partnership Index 2023: Charting Performance in the Eastern Partnership: Democracy and Good Governance, Policy Convergence and Sustainable Development* (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels, 2024) 2 <<https://doi.org/10.17613/ks3t-et13>> 14.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid* 15.

<sup>58</sup> Euronews, 'Ukraine Expands Martial Law to Boost Defences near Occupied Areas' (Kyiv, 29 April 2024) <[www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/04/29/ukraine-expands-martial-law-to-boost-defences-near-occupied-areas](http://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/04/29/ukraine-expands-martial-law-to-boost-defences-near-occupied-areas)> accessed 18 June 2024.

Rather than weakening relations, the war has actually strengthened the ties between the EU and most EaP countries. One significant development was the rapid EU candidate status granted to Ukraine and Moldova in June 2022, just four months after their applications were submitted. This conflict has also spurred increased trade, transport, and energy connectivity between the EU and several EaP states.<sup>59</sup>

In the 2023 EaP Index, Moldova and Ukraine have secured the top two positions, reflecting their substantial progress in meeting EU reform goals and aligning with EU standards despite challenging conditions. Both countries have made notable advancements, particularly in reinforcing the rule of law through enhanced judicial independence. Moldova's first-place ranking is due to its exceptional performance in areas such as election-related reforms, political pluralism, anti-corruption efforts, and equal opportunities, which gave it an advantage over Ukraine, the second-best performer.<sup>60</sup>

The EaP Index highlights growing scepticism among civil society organisations (CSOs) about the government's approach to EU-related reforms, pointing out issues with the lack of structured and transparent consultations. Georgia has seen a significant decline in its scores for democracy, governance, and policy convergence, reflecting increased political polarization. The country's performance has deteriorated notably across almost all areas covered by the Index, including democratic rights, elections, anti-corruption efforts, human rights protections, state accountability, independent media, public administration, market economy, and environmental policies. The only exception to this decline is freedom of assembly, which has shown relative stability within the broader category of freedom of opinion and expression.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Katarzyna Wolczuk, 'Overcoming EU Accession Challenges in Eastern Europe: Avoiding Purgatory' (Carnegie Europe, 2023) <<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/06/overcoming-eu-accession-challenges-in-eastern-europe-avoiding-purgatory?lang=en&cer=europe>> accessed 6 July 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *Eastern Partnership Index 2023: Charting Performance in the Eastern Partnership: Democracy and Good Governance, Policy Convergence and Sustainable Development* (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels, 2024) 11 <<https://doi.org/10.17613/ks3t-et13>>.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid* 16.

In the 2023 EaP Index, Armenia has shown stability overall but faces challenges in several key areas. The country has experienced setbacks in democracy and governance, particularly in state accountability, independent media, freedom of expression, and anti-corruption efforts, although there have been improvements in judicial independence. This decline has led to Armenia losing its top position in democracy and governance from the 2020-21 Index. Issues related to national security policies and potential reform fatigue are contributing to these challenges. Azerbaijan is moving towards stronger authoritarianism, with noticeable declines in state accountability, freedom of expression, and anti-corruption. The country's practices are increasingly at odds with EU democratic norms.<sup>62</sup>

Belarus remains highly authoritarian, with most independent civil society elements and opposition forces suppressed. The Index shows a decline in state accountability due to increased presidential power and rule by decree. While some areas like human rights and democratic rights show apparent improvements, these are often undermined by the regime's manipulation of laws to serve its own interests. Belarus' divergence from EU standards is also evident in its market economy and energy policies, reflecting greater dependency on Russia and the impact of Western sanctions.<sup>63</sup>

The relationships between EaP countries and the EU are diverse and shaped by each country's unique historical, political, and geopolitical contexts. Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine have made notable strides towards European integration, driven by strong domestic reform agendas and significant EU support. Azerbaijan and Belarus maintain more transactional and limited relationships with the EU, constrained by their authoritarian regimes and strategic alliances with Russia. Moldova exemplifies a complex relationship marked by significant progress and ongoing

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<sup>62</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *Eastern Partnership Index 2023: Charting Performance in the Eastern Partnership: Democracy and Good Governance, Policy Convergence and Sustainable Development* (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels, 2024) 2 <<https://doi.org/10.17613/ks3t-et13>> 17.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid* 16-21.

challenges. The EU's engagement with these countries reflects a careful balance of promoting democratic reforms, supporting economic development, and navigating regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions.

### 3. EU Policies and Instruments for Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding in the Eastern Neighbourhood: Case Studies

#### 3.1 Evolution of EU engagement in conflict resolution strategies in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine

The European Union's involvement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in its Eastern Neighbourhood has evolved significantly. Initially focused on diplomatic efforts and development aid, the EU has progressively deepened its engagement in response to the growing complexity of regional conflicts. In EaP countries, the EU has employed a range of instruments, from political dialogue and economic sanctions to financial support and civilian missions, aimed at stabilising the region and promoting long-term peace. The effectiveness of these strategies, however, varies across different contexts, reflecting the diverse political landscapes and challenges each country faces.

To examine the European Union's conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies, I will analyse three distinct case studies: Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. Each of these studies provides a nuanced understanding of the European Union's conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies across different geopolitical and conflict contexts. Georgia was the first in the South Caucasus to experience significant EU engagement through ambitious policies and investments. This early involvement highlights Georgia's strategic importance and the EU's commitment to fostering democratic governance and regional stability. The EU's support in Georgia, particularly in security sector reforms and conflict prevention, serves as a foundational example of its strategies in a post-Soviet state with complex regional issues.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict holds special significance due to its unique historical and geopolitical dimensions. Examining the EU's response to this conflict—ranging from cautious initial approaches to more assertive actions—provides insight into the challenges faced when engaging with conflicts influenced by regional powers like Russia. Armenia's alignment with the Eurasian Economic Union further complicates the EU's efforts, making it a crucial case for assessing the effectiveness of EU policies in such contexts.

Ukraine's inclusion is justified by its ongoing conflict with Russia, which has profound geopolitical implications. The EU's role in Ukraine, particularly after the annexation of Crimea and the escalation of the conflict and Russian invasion in 2022, showcases a significant shift towards a more proactive and interventionist stance. Analysing Ukraine provides insight into the EU's strategies for stabilising the region, supporting state-building, and navigating the broader geopolitical ramifications of the conflict.

The European Union's approach to the South Caucasus has long been characterised by a largely passive political stance, often limited to issuing declarations and communications. This region did not initially command significant attention from the EU, even after the republics gained independence in 1991. The enforcement of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) marked a shift toward more active engagement, but even then, the South Caucasus remained a lower priority compared to other regions. The EU began discussions on enhancing its involvement in the South Caucasus around 1999, and by 2001, various assistance programmes were initiated, focusing on fostering democracy, civil society, and economic development. Despite these efforts, the EU's relationship with the South Caucasus countries was primarily defined by unilateral aid, including financial support, humanitarian assistance, food security initiatives, rehabilitation projects, and technical assistance.<sup>64</sup>

When comparing the EU's engagement with Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, it becomes evident that Ukraine was the first country where the EU began a more proactive and comprehensive approach. This is particularly clear when comparing the

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<sup>64</sup> Esmira Jafarova, 'EU Conflict Resolution Policy Towards the South Caucasus' (2011) 10(3) *Connections*, 64–65 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26326244>> accessed 01 August 2024.

partnership and cooperation agreements signed with Armenia and Georgia to those with Ukraine.<sup>6566</sup> The agreements with Ukraine and Moldova were more comprehensive, including the objective of establishing a free-trade area with the EU, a goal notably absent from the agreements with the South Caucasus countries.<sup>67</sup> In the initial stage, the EU refrained from involving itself in the conflict resolution mechanisms for the secessionist movements in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, highlighting the limited scope of its engagement in the region during the 1990s and early 2000s.

The first major signal for the EU in the South Caucasus came with the Rose Revolution in Georgia. This event marked a turning point, prompting the EU to take a more active role in the region, particularly in the areas of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The EU's direct involvement in conflict resolution in the South Caucasus began in 2003 with the appointment of a Special Representative. This role was established to aid conflict prevention and resolution, foster dialogue with key regional actors, and support the development of a comprehensive EU policy toward the region.<sup>68</sup>

A significant milestone followed in 2004 when Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia were formally included in the European Neighbourhood Policy.<sup>69</sup> With the region's growing strategic importance, particularly in terms of energy resources and transportation routes, the EU began to reassess and expand its engagement

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<sup>65</sup> European Communities and Armenia, 'Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the Other Part' (Official Journal of the European Communities L 239/3–50, 9 September 1999) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A21999A0909%2801%29>> accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>66</sup> European Communities and Georgia, 'Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and Georgia, of the Other Part' (Luxembourg, 22 April 1996) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A21999A0804%2801%29>> accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>67</sup> European Union, 'Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and Georgia, of the Other Part' (EUR-Lex, 1999) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A21999A0804%2801%29>> accessed 22 August 2024.

<sup>68</sup> Gwendolyn Sasse, 'The European Neighbourhood Policy: Conditionality Revisited for the EU's Eastern Neighbours' (2008) 60(2) *Europe-Asia Studies* 295 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130701820150>>

<sup>69</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy* (COM (2004) 373 final, Brussels, 2004) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/ALL/?uri=celex%3A52004DC0373>> accessed 07 July 2024.

in the South Caucasus. The EU's decision to deepen its involvement was also influenced by the anticipated closer proximity of the South Caucasus to EU borders following the enlargement to include Romania, Bulgaria, and potentially other countries in the Balkans.

Similarly, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 was a crucial signal of the country's desire for democratic reforms and closer alignment with European values. This pivotal event led the EU to increase its support and engagement with Ukraine. Additionally, Ukraine's strategic location made it a key player in the EU's interests, particularly in terms of energy transit routes and regional stability.<sup>70</sup>

Following the incorporation of Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine into the European Neighbourhood Policy 2004, Action Plans (AP) were adopted in November 2006 to align these countries with European standards.<sup>71</sup> These Action Plans represented a pivotal moment in the EU's engagement with its eastern neighbours, outlining a framework for political and economic reforms. However, despite these ambitious goals, the ENP faced challenges in effectively addressing conflict resolution. The ENP Strategy Paper and the accompanying Action Plans did recognize the importance of conflict resolution, but their approach was criticised for being too abstract and lacking concrete measures. The strategy was more focused on general facilitation rather than offering specific, actionable steps to enhance the EU's role in resolving conflicts.<sup>72</sup>

The analysis presents that, for the EU, achieving security in these countries depended on the implementation of reforms in critical areas such as justice and security sector reform. The goal was to strengthen democratic institutions and create a more favourable environment for conflict settlement. Consequently, the

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<sup>70</sup> Katarzyna Wolczuk, Rosaria Puglisi, and Pawel Wolowski, 'Ukraine and Its Relations with the EU in the Context of the European Neighbourhood Policy' in Sabine Fischer (ed), *Ukraine: Quo Vadis?* (European Union Institute for Security Studies 2008) 87 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07049.7>> accessed 07 July 2024.

<sup>71</sup> European Union, 'European Neighbourhood Policy: Recommendations for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and for Egypt and Lebanon' (EUR-Lex, 2006) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/european-neighbourhood-policy-recommendations-for-armenia-azerbaijan-and-georgia-and-for-egypt-and-lebanon.html>> accessed 22 August 2024.

<sup>72</sup> European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper* (Brussels, 12 May 2004) <[https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-01/2004\\_communication\\_from\\_the\\_commission\\_-\\_european\\_neighbourhood\\_policy\\_-\\_strategy\\_paper.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-01/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf)> accessed 24 August 2024.

EU prioritised supporting these reform processes as a foundational step in its broader strategy for enhancing regional security and stability. The EU's approach to conflict resolution in the South Caucasus through the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans was inconsistent and lacked a clear, cohesive strategy. While the Action Plan with Azerbaijan emphasised sovereignty and territorial integrity, the one with Armenia highlighted the right to self-determination, reflecting a contradictory stance. This inconsistency suggests that, despite identifying conflict resolution as a priority, the EU was hesitant to directly engage in resolving conflicts in the region at that time.<sup>73</sup>

When the Eastern Partnership was launched in 2009, it was seen as a significant upgrade to the EU's engagement with Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. However, this enhanced offer came with certain expectations: partner countries were anticipated to align closely with EU rules and standards. While the Eastern Partnership aimed to facilitate legal approximation with EU regulations, it fell short in several key areas. The emphasis on legal alignment did not effectively bolster the EU's conflict resolution mechanisms or adequately address the need for political reform. Furthermore, the broad application of EU standards often clashed with the socio-economic realities of the post-Soviet region. This disconnect hindered the potential for meaningful transformation and left the partner countries grappling with the challenge of reconciling EU norms with their own complex domestic situations.

Analysis shows that from 2000 to 2009, the EU's engagement in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine was predominantly indirect, employing soft power techniques to influence post-Soviet states. The EU focused on promoting reforms in governance, economic development, and legal systems through methods such as development aid, technical assistance, and diplomatic outreach. This strategy aimed to align these countries with European standards and foster stability without direct intervention in conflicts. The approach sought to gradually induce transformation by supporting institutional modernisation and encouraging democratic practices, leveraging indirect influence and strategic partnerships rather than direct conflict resolution.

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<sup>73</sup> Laure Delcour, 'The European Union, a Security Provider in the Eastern Neighbourhood?' (2010) 19(4) *European Security* 535 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2010.528398>>.

The conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are deeply rooted in the complex history of the Caucasus region, where ethnic, political, and territorial disputes have persisted for centuries. Both regions were part of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic during the Soviet era, but tensions over national identity and autonomy simmered beneath the surface. In Abkhazia, the relationship between the Abkhaz people and the Georgian government became increasingly strained during the Soviet Union's later years. Abkhazia was initially a separate Soviet Socialist Republic but was later merged into the Georgian SSR as an autonomous republic. Despite its autonomous status, Abkhaz identity and culture were often overshadowed by Georgian influence. This marginalisation led to rising nationalist sentiments among the Abkhaz, who feared losing their cultural and political identity. The situation in South Ossetia was somewhat similar. South Ossetia, inhabited mainly by the Ossetian people who are ethnically distinct from Georgians, was also granted autonomy within the Georgian SSR. The Ossetians, like the Abkhaz, harboured concerns about the preservation of their identity and autonomy. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s exacerbated these tensions, as nationalist movements gained momentum across the former Soviet states. As Georgia moved towards independence in the early 1990s, the central government's efforts to assert control over its territories were met with resistance in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>74</sup> In Abkhazia, tensions escalated into a full-scale war in 1992-1993. The Abkhaz forces, with support from Russian volunteers and North Caucasian fighters, managed to expel Georgian forces from the region. The conflict resulted in significant loss of life, the displacement of ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia, and the region's de facto independence, although it remains internationally recognised as part of Georgia. In South Ossetia, a similar conflict erupted around the same time. South Ossetian forces, also with Russian backing, clashed with Georgian troops. The

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<sup>74</sup> Wojciech Bartuzi et al., 'Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh: Unfrozen Conflicts Between Russia and the West' (OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, 19 April 2018) <[www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-report/2008-07-15/abkhazia-south-ossetia-nagorno-karabakh-unfrozen-conflicts-between](http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-report/2008-07-15/abkhazia-south-ossetia-nagorno-karabakh-unfrozen-conflicts-between)> accessed 5 August 2024.

conflict led to the establishment of a fragile ceasefire in 1992, leaving South Ossetia with de facto independence but without international recognition. Tensions remained high, with occasional flare-ups of violence, particularly in 2004 and 2008.<sup>75</sup>

The European Union's involvement in Georgia's separatist conflicts began in the 1990s, initially concentrating on providing humanitarian aid. Between 1992 and 2006, the EU invested considerable resources in these regions, allocating €25 million to Abkhazia and €8 million to South Ossetia, with over €100 million dedicated to humanitarian efforts, including assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs). After the 2008 war, the EU maintained its support, channelling €61 million through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and an additional €6 million for IDP projects following the end of the OSCE mission in Georgia.<sup>76</sup>

The situation changed significantly after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. The EU's involvement in Georgia shifted from a predominantly indirect role to a more direct engagement in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Under the French Presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, the EU played a key role in brokering a six-point ceasefire agreement on August 12. Following this, the EU established a Special Representative for Georgia and launched the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) on October 1, 2008. The EUMM, staffed by over 200 monitors, was tasked with overseeing implementation of the ceasefire and monitoring the withdrawal of Russian and Georgian forces. While the mission was mandated to cover all of Georgia, it faced limitations as it could only access areas under Georgian control due to restrictions imposed by Russia. Despite these constraints, the EUMM became an essential presence, stepping in after the cessation of OSCE and UN monitoring

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<sup>75</sup> Natia Chankvetadze and Ketevan Murusidze, 'Re-Examining the Radicalizing Narratives of Georgia's Conflicts' (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 5 December 2021) <<https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/05/re-examining-the-radicalizing-narratives-of-georgias-conflicts?lang=en&center=europe>> accessed 5 August 2024.

<sup>76</sup> Nicu Popescu, 'Europe's Unrecognised Neighbours: The EU in Abkhazia and South Ossetia' (CEPS Working Document 260, Centre for European Policy Studies, 2007) 27–30 <<https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/1476.pdf>> accessed 5 August 2024.

missions. One of the criticisms of the EU's response to this war was that Georgia exposed deep divisions within the European Union (EU) regarding Russia, and highlighted the need for a more proactive and coherent policy towards Eastern Europe.<sup>77</sup>

The EU's initial responses were fragmented, reflecting varying national perspectives on Russia's intentions and the EU's role. Despite successfully brokering a ceasefire through French mediation, the EU's neutral stance during the conflict limited its ability to effectively support Georgia or counter Russian actions.

If the EU had responded more decisively and effectively to the conflict in Georgia, it might have influenced the dynamics in other neighbouring regions experiencing frozen conflicts. A stronger EU stance could have demonstrated a clearer commitment to regional stability and conflict resolution, which might have impacted the behaviour of other actors.

As was mentioned the key development in the EU-Georgia relationship was the signing of the Association Agreement in 2014, featuring the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.<sup>78</sup> This agreement, which provides Georgia with access to the EU's single market, aims to enhance trade by eliminating barriers and aligning Georgian trade practices with EU standards. While the DCF-TA is expected to drive economic growth, boost exports, attract foreign investment, and strengthen Georgia's regulatory framework, its primary focus is on economic benefits rather than security. The AA promotes European standards in governance and human rights, but it does not directly ensure security or address regional conflicts.

In addition to its economic focus, the EU has supported Georgia through initiatives aimed at enhancing mobility, education, and research collaboration. The country participated in programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020, which support educational reforms and research cooperation aligned with European standards. Financially, the EU has provided significant support to Georgia through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the primary source for budget support and complementary measures. Additional targeted funding has come from thematic budget

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<sup>77</sup> Amanda Akçakoca et al., 'After Georgia: Conflict Resolution in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood' (EPC Issue Paper No 57, European Policy Centre, 2009) 14–16.

<sup>78</sup> Electronic Database of Investment Treaties, 'EU - Georgia Association Agreement (2014) - Electronic Database of Investment Treaties (EDIT)' (2014) <<https://edit.wti.org/document/show/e9fddb57-9a0a-4443-ad3c-fa823445074d>> accessed 5 July 2024.

lines such as the Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities (CSO-LA), the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). Georgia has also benefitted from two Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) operations aimed at macroeconomic stability, with further aid during the COVID-19 pandemic through the EU's Team Europe approach, which allocated EUR 150 million in emergency MFA for Georgia.<sup>79</sup>

Today, the relationship between the EU and Georgia remains complex and dynamic. Inter-political turmoil in Georgia has significantly impacted its relationship with the EU, leading to the freezing of its candidacy status. The controversial Foreign Agents Law and other internal political challenges have strained the country's EU aspirations, culminating in a suspension of its membership process and associated aid.<sup>80</sup>

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has deep historical roots that intensified after Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Ukraine remained divided between pro-Russian and pro-Western factions. This divide became pronounced in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea following the Euromaidan protests, which ousted pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich and led to the establishment of a pro-Western government in Kyiv. The annexation was followed by conflict in Eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists declared independence in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, resulting in a protracted war that continued until 2022. Tensions had been brewing since 2004, during the Orange Revolution, when protests over alleged electoral fraud led to the election of pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko. His presidency aimed to strengthen ties with the EU and NATO but faced resistance from Russia and internal divisions.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> European Commission, *Georgia – Comprehensive Sectoral Evaluation: Final Report* (September 2022) 5–7 <<https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/GEO%20CSE%20-%20Final%20Report%20-%20September%202022.pdf>> accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>80</sup> 'Paweł Herczyński: Adoption of Foreign Agents Law Has Frozen Georgia's EU Integration' *Civil Georgia* (19 June 2024) <<https://civil.ge/archives/613381>> accessed 24 August 2024.

<sup>81</sup> Wilson Center, 'The Orange Revolution and the Maidan Parliament' (18 January 2005) <[www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-orange-revolution-and-the-maidan-parliament](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/the-orange-revolution-and-the-maidan-parliament)> accessed 5 July 2024.

The political landscape in Ukraine experienced a profound shift in 2010 when Viktor Yanukovich, who had been elected President, chose to align Ukraine more closely with Russia rather than pursue an Association Agreement with the European Union. This decision was met with widespread disapproval and criticism from many Ukrainians who saw the Association Agreement as a path towards greater integration with Europe and reform. In late 2013, the rejection of the EU Association Agreement led to mass protests in Ukraine, known as the Euromaidan movement. The movement, which began in Kyiv's Independence Square, quickly grew into a broad-based popular uprising against Yanukovich's government. Protesters demanded closer ties with the EU and greater political and economic reforms. The Euromaidan protests were characterised by their scale and intensity, drawing hundreds of thousands of people to the streets. The movement culminated in February 2014 with the ousting of Yanukovich and the establishment of a new interim government. The success of the Euromaidan Revolution marked a pivotal moment for Ukraine, signalling a decisive shift away from Russia's sphere of influence and towards a pro-European orientation. This transition set the stage for Ukraine's European integration efforts and significantly altered the country's geopolitical trajectory. The revolution also led to significant repercussions, including Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, further complicating the region's relations and security dynamics.<sup>82</sup>

In June 2014, the newly elected President Petro Poroshenko signed an EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which came into effect in September 2017.<sup>83</sup> This shift was met with immediate aggression, as Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea in March 2014 set the stage for ongoing conflict. The European Union's role in conflict resolution remained limited, with France and Germany assuming a more prominent role in mediating through the 'Normandy format,' which included Ukraine and Russia. When the Ukraine-Russia conflict began in the spring of 2014, the European Union was hesitant to become directly involved and even

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<sup>82</sup> James Krapfl and Elias Kühn Von Burgsdorff, 'Ukraine's Euromaidan and Revolution of Dignity, Ten Years Later' (2023) 65(3-4) *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 325, 325-34 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2023.2293420>>.

<sup>83</sup> European Union, 'Association Agreement between the European Union and Its Member States, of the One Part, and Ukraine, of the Other Part' (29 May 2014) <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A22014A0529%2801%29>> accessed 24 August 2024.

avoided labelling the situation as a war. Instead, the EU focused on supporting Ukraine's internal reforms, while imposing sanctions on Russia for its illegal annexation of Crimea. However, the EU did not engage in conflict resolution, leaving this role to the Normandy format, where France and Germany acted as mediators alongside Ukraine and Russia. Although the EU acknowledged the risks of its energy dependence on Russia, as evidenced by the European Commission's 2014 report, actions to mitigate this dependence were minimal, with Germany proceeding with the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.<sup>84</sup> The EU's reluctance to confront multipolar competition until 2022 partly explains its failure to curb Russia's aggressive actions. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine might have been avoided if the EU had responded more decisively in 2014.

It is important to mention that the Normandy format was not an EU-driven initiative, and the involvement of France and Germany did not represent the EU as a whole. This format, including Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE, led to the Minsk Agreements aimed at establishing a ceasefire in eastern Ukraine, with provisions for local elections and a special status law for the conflict areas. The Minsk agreements, established in 2014 and 2015, aimed to cease hostilities in eastern Ukraine by implementing a ceasefire and outlining steps for political resolution, including local elections and special status for conflict areas.<sup>85</sup> However, the agreements lacked effective enforcement, allowing Russia to continue exerting control and ultimately failing to achieve lasting peace. Ultimately, the agreements were not implemented as intended, becoming a temporary measure that reduced conflict intensity but failed to resolve the underlying issues. This situation led to a prolonged standoff, effectively freezing the conflict until 2022.<sup>86</sup>

Despite differing views among EU member states on the geopolitical competition with Russia, there was a strong consensus on the need to support Ukraine's political and economic reforms from 2004. Between 2014 and 2022, while the EU refrained from direct involvement in the conflict, it significantly bolstered

<sup>84</sup> Tatyana Malyarenko and Stefan Wolff, 'The Logic of Competitive Influence-Seeking: Russia, Ukraine, and the Conflict in Donbas' (2018) 34(4) *Post-Soviet Affairs* 191 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2018.1425083>>.

<sup>85</sup> Cindy Wittke, 'The Minsk Agreements – More than “Scraps of Paper”?' (2019) 35(3) *East European Politics* 264 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2019.1635885>>

<sup>86</sup> European Parliament, 'Ukraine: The Minsk Agreements Five Years On. At a Glance' (15 March 2020) <[www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/646203/EPRS\\_ATA\(2020\)646203\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/646203/EPRS_ATA(2020)646203_EN.pdf)> accessed 13 May 2024

Ukraine's resilience through a variety of measures. The Association Agreement catalysed reforms across multiple sectors, including decentralisation and anti-corruption efforts, with the EU providing vital political, financial, and organisational support. However, the EU did not grant Ukraine a membership prospect during this period. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area within the AA helped align the Ukrainian economy with the EU's single market by integrating EU rules and regulations into various sectors.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, EU-Ukraine cooperation extended to reforms in local governance, public administration, and justice.<sup>88</sup>

In 2014, the EU took significant steps to assist Ukraine by deploying the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) tools, leading to the establishment of the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Kyiv, with regional offices in Lviv, Kharkiv, and Odesa. The primary aim of EUAM Ukraine was to support the reform of Ukraine's security sector, focusing on the police, judiciary, and border guard services. Between 2014 and 2021, the EU also committed substantial financial resources to address the impact of the ongoing war in Donbas. This support included funding for reconstruction efforts and assistance to internally displaced persons, reflecting the EU's broader commitment to stabilising Ukraine amidst the conflict.<sup>89</sup>

The European Union's response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has been one of the most decisive and comprehensive in its history, marked by swift and multifaceted actions. The EU imposed extensive sanctions on Russia, targeting key sectors like finance, energy, and defence, and also placed travel bans and asset freezes on Russian officials and entities linked to the government.

In addition to sanctions, the EU has provided significant financial and military support to Ukraine. As of August 2024, the EU had disbursed €12.2 billion under the Ukraine Facility, with a total of over \$121 billion allocated for financial, military, humanitarian, and refugee assistance since the war began. European leaders

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<sup>87</sup> Michael Emerson and Veronika Movchan (eds), *Deepening EU-Ukraine Relations: Updating and Upgrading in the Shadow of Covid-19* (3rd edn, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers/Center for European Policy Studies 2021) 12–15.

<sup>88</sup> Vsevolod Samokhvalov and Alexander Strelkov, 'Cross-Dimensional Network of Democracy Promotion: Public Administration Reform in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine' (2020) 43(7) *Journal of European Integration* 799 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1807537>>.

<sup>89</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), 'EUAM Ukraine: European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine' (30 November 2020) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/missions-and-operations\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/missions-and-operations_en)> accessed 8 August 2024.

committed an additional \$54 billion in February 2024 to support Ukraine's recovery and EU accession efforts, bringing total EU support to over \$162 billion. Of this, \$13.1 billion has already been disbursed, with further funds allocated to attract investment and support recovery. The EU has also provided over \$42 billion in military aid, including ammunition, air-defence systems, tanks, and fighter jets. This aid includes \$6.6 billion from the European Peace Facility and bilateral contributions from member states. In March 2024, a dedicated Ukraine Assistance Fund worth \$5.4 billion was established to further these efforts. The EU has also allocated \$2.2 billion for joint procurement of artillery ammunition and \$535 million to boost the EU defence industry. Additionally, the EU has become the largest military training provider for Ukrainian forces, with plans to train 60,000 personnel by the end of 2024 under the \$390 million Military Assistance Mission. Humanitarian efforts include \$27 million for de-mining liberated territories.<sup>90</sup>

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 significantly impacted the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM), leading to an expanded mandate that included facilitating refugee flows and humanitarian aid, as well as supporting the investigation and prosecution of war crimes. As the conflict intensified, the EU launched the European Union Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM Ukraine) in November 2022 to train 15,000 Ukrainian armed forces personnel, with the goal later increasing to 30,000.<sup>91</sup>

The situation changed dramatically after February 2022, with the European Peace Facility (EPF) becoming a crucial tool for financing the delivery of military equipment to Ukraine by EU member states. The EPF, originally designed as a common off-budget fund for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), was rapidly adapted to meet the needs of the Ukrainian military,

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<sup>90</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), 'EU Assistance to Ukraine in US Dollars' (EEAS) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-states-america/eu-assistance-ukraine-us-dollars\\_en?s=253](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-states-america/eu-assistance-ukraine-us-dollars_en?s=253)> accessed 25 August 2024.

<sup>91</sup> Alexandra Brzozowski, 'EU Ramps Up Military Support, Doubles Training Mission Targets for Ukraine' *Euractiv* (2 February 2023) <[www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/eu-ramps-up-military-support-doubles-training-mission-targets-for-ukraine/](http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/eu-ramps-up-military-support-doubles-training-mission-targets-for-ukraine/)>.

alongside bilateral aid from individual member states.<sup>92</sup> In conclusion, it is evident that following the 2022 war in Ukraine, the EU significantly shifted its policy by providing military assistance, underscoring its role as a key player in conflict resolution.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began to escalate in the late 1980s, as the Soviet Union entered a period of political and economic turmoil. The policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) initiated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev inadvertently allowed suppressed nationalist sentiments to resurface across the Soviet Union, including in Nagorno-Karabakh. The modern phase of the conflict began in February 1988, when the Nagorno-Karabakh regional legislature passed a resolution requesting the transfer of the oblast from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR. As the Soviet Union weakened, the conflict escalated into full-scale war between 1991 and 1994. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence as the Republic of Artsakh, though it was not internationally recognised.<sup>93</sup>

The Bishkek Protocol, brokered by Russia in 1994, established a ceasefire that granted Nagorno-Karabakh de facto independence with a self-declared government in Stepanakert. Despite this status, the region remained heavily dependent on Armenia for economic, political, and military support.<sup>94</sup> This ceasefire remained in effect until September 2020.

The relative calm was shattered in April 2016, when intense fighting broke out along the Line of Contact. The four-day conflict often referred to as the April War or the Four-Day War, resulted in hundreds of casualties on both sides and some territorial changes, with Azerbaijani forces reclaiming several strategic positions. The April War underscored the fragility of the ceasefire and highlighted the risk of a renewed large-scale conflict.<sup>95</sup> During the Four-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016, the European Union played a relatively restrained role, reflecting its broader

<sup>92</sup> European Peace Facility (EPF), *EEAS* (February 2024) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-peace-facility-epf\\_en](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-peace-facility-epf_en)> accessed 26 July 2024.

<sup>93</sup> Shahen Avakian, *Nagorno Karabagh: Legal Aspects* (5th edn, 2015) <[www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/nk-eng-2015.pdf](http://www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/nk-eng-2015.pdf)> accessed 26 August 2024.

<sup>94</sup> OSCE Minsk Group, 'The Bishkek Protocol' (5 May 1994) Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

<sup>95</sup> Laurence Broers, *The Nagorny Karabakh Conflict: Defaulting to War* (Chatham House 2016) <[www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/NK%20paper%2024082016%20WEB.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/NK%20paper%2024082016%20WEB.pdf)> accessed 11 July 2024.

cautious approach to conflicts in the South Caucasus region. The EU's response to the escalation was primarily diplomatic, urging both sides to adhere to the ceasefire and engage in renewed negotiations under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. The EU expressed concern over the outbreak of violence and called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, emphasising the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.<sup>96</sup> However, the EU's involvement was largely limited to issuing statements and supporting the efforts of the OSCE Minsk Group, which is co-chaired by France, Russia, and the United States. The EU did not take a leading role in mediating the conflict or in proposing new initiatives to resolve the long-standing dispute, reflecting its cautious approach and its reliance on the established international framework for conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh. The 2016 conflict underscored the EU's limitations in addressing the complex and deeply entrenched conflicts in its Eastern neighbourhood, particularly in regions where its influence is constrained by other major powers, such as Russia

The EU's restrained role during the Nagorno-Karabakh Four-Day War in 2016 can be understood within the broader context of Armenia's geopolitical choices, particularly its decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013 and instead join the Eurasian Economic Union under Russia's influence. This pivotal decision had far-reaching implications for Armenia's foreign policy and its relations with the EU, effectively limiting the EU's leverage and influence in the country, particularly in the security sector.<sup>97</sup> Armenia's alignment with the EAEU, a bloc dominated by Russia, placed the country firmly within Russia's sphere of influence. This geopolitical alignment had significant consequences for the scope of EU-Armenia relations, especially in the security sector, where Russia's dominance was—and remains—pronounced. As a result, the EU found its ability to engage with Armenia on security matters severely constrained, as Russia held the primary influence over Armenia's defence and security policies.

<sup>96</sup> OSCE, 'Press Release by the Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group' (4 February 2016) <[www.osce.org/mg/231216](http://www.osce.org/mg/231216)> accessed 26 August 2024.

<sup>97</sup> Vahram Ter-Matevosyan and others, 'Armenia in the Eurasian Economic Union: Reasons for Joining and Its Consequences' (2017) 58(3) *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 340 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2017.1360193>>.

In contrast, the EU's actions in Georgia, where it played a more proactive role, highlight the difference that political orientation can make. Georgia's political majority firmly aligned the country's future with the European Union, allowing the EU to engage more deeply and assertively in conflict resolution efforts. This was evident in the EU's involvement during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and its subsequent diplomatic initiatives. The Georgian government's commitment to European integration provided the EU with a platform to exert greater influence in the region, particularly in the security domain.

The most dramatic escalation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict occurred in September 2020, when Azerbaijan launched a full-scale offensive, employing advanced military technology, including drones and missile systems. The conflict, marked by heavy casualties and widespread destruction, saw Azerbaijan, with significant backing from Turkey, secure substantial military gains. The war continued until November 10, 2020, when a statement was signed between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia, which established a ceasefire. It included provisions for the deployment of Russian peacekeepers to oversee the implementation of the ceasefire and the return of refugees.<sup>98</sup>

Following this ceasefire, the EU increased its engagement in the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, working more proactively to facilitate dialogue and support long-term stability in the region. In a significant move that highlighted the EU's ambitions and marked a robust response to regional instability, the EU launched a two-month observer mission to the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in the fall of 2022. This mission, developed almost on an ad hoc basis, was modelled after the EUMM mission in Georgia, which had been in place since the 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict. This mission was unprecedented as it was the first of its kind conducted on the territory of a member state of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). It faced criticism from Russia, which argued that the EU's presence could exacerbate regional tensions, and from Azerbaijan, which claimed it led Armenia to adopt a more rigid stance. The short-term mission was followed by a two-year deployment beginning in February 2023,

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<sup>98</sup> Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 'Statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the President of the Russian Federation' (11 October 2020) <[www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/11/10/Announcement/](http://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2020/11/10/Announcement/)> accessed 05 August 2024.

with the option for extension. Around 100 monitors from various EU member states were sent to help stabilise the border areas of Armenia, build trust and enhance security in conflict-affected regions, and support efforts toward normalising relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>99</sup> Despite Azerbaijan's reservations, this move has contributed to reducing tensions and increasing the political cost of potential Azerbaijani aggression against Armenia.

The EU's involvement also included the initiation of the Brussels format talks in late 2021 and early 2022, which quickly positioned the EU as a key mediator in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. This marked a shift from the OSCE Minsk Group, which had previously led peace efforts but saw its influence wane due to Russia's preoccupation with the Ukraine conflict. Under the guidance of European Council President Charles Michel, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev engaged in multiple meetings in Brussels, with additional discussions in Prague and Chişinău.<sup>100</sup> These talks, also attended by leaders such as French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, underscored the EU's growing role in facilitating peace. One of the key recent developments was the meeting on April 5, 2024, in Brussels, where President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, USAID Administrator Samantha Power, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan gathered to reaffirm their support for Armenia's sovereignty, democracy, territorial integrity, and socio-economic resilience. The European Union will launch a EUR 270 million Resilience and Growth Plan for Armenia for 2024-2027. This plan aims to bolster Armenia's socio-economic resilience, support trade diversification, and address the long-term needs of displaced individuals. It will enhance sectoral cooperation, promote regulatory alignment with the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, and support key areas like trade, infrastructure, energy, and aviation safety. The plan builds on the Economic and Investment Plan launched in 2021, which

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<sup>99</sup> Nane Sahakian, 'EU Starts New Monitoring Mission to Armenia-Azerbaijan Border' *Azatutyun* (20 February 2023) <[www.azatutyun.am/a/32279747.html](http://www.azatutyun.am/a/32279747.html)> accessed 15 July 2024.

<sup>100</sup> Wojciech Górecki, 'The EU's Ambivalent Neighbours. Brussels on the South Caucasus' (15 March 2024) *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies* <[www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-03-15/eus-ambivalent-neighbours-brussels-south-caucasus](http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-03-15/eus-ambivalent-neighbours-brussels-south-caucasus)> accessed 15 July 2024.

mobilised over EUR 550 million for strategic investments in connectivity, digital and energy infrastructure, and business development. The EU has mobilised EUR 38.4 million in humanitarian aid and budget support since 2020, focusing on housing, training, employment, and psycho-social support.<sup>101</sup> The consideration of transferring non-lethal military equipment to Armenia under the European Peace Facility highlights the evolving security dynamics in the region. Armenia's increasing alignment with Western interests and the heightened tensions with Russia are reflective of these shifts. Despite criticism from Russia and Azerbaijan, the EU's efforts, including the EUMA, have played a role in reducing tensions and deterring further aggression, signalling the EU's commitment to promoting stability and peace in the South Caucasus.<sup>102</sup>

In conclusion, the European Union's engagement with the South Caucasus has evolved significantly over the years, reflecting shifts in geopolitical priorities and strategic interests. Initially characterised by a passive stance and limited involvement, the EU's approach began to change in the early 2000s, marked by increased support and a more active role in regional affairs. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks in conflict resolution and peacebuilding has been mixed. The EU's initial reluctance to directly address conflicts in the South Caucasus, such as those in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, limited its impact in these areas.

### 3.2 Financial overview of EU support for conflict resolution and peacebuilding

Understanding the European Union's approach to conflict resolution and peacekeeping requires a detailed analysis of its financial interventions and strategic priorities. The EU employs both security and non-security mechanisms to address conflicts, with funding allocated to various areas. Examining these funding

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<sup>101</sup> Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 'Press Release on the Joint Armenia-EU-US High-Level Meeting in Brussels in Support of Armenia's Resilience' (5 April 2024) <[www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2024/04/05/Nikol-Pashinyan-Press-Release/](http://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2024/04/05/Nikol-Pashinyan-Press-Release/)> accessed 05 July 2024.

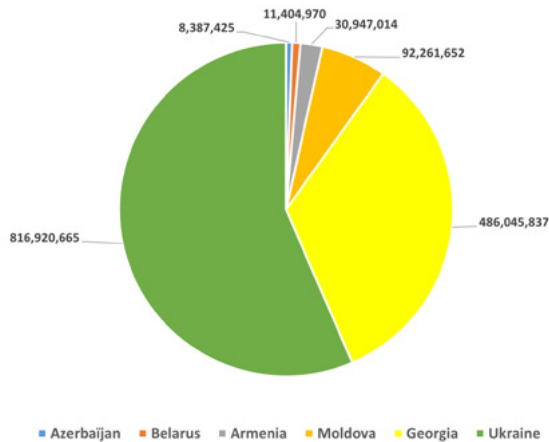
<sup>102</sup> Heghine Buniatian, 'EU To Start Visa Liberalization Talks With Armenia' *Azattyun* (17 July 2024) <[www.azattyun.am/a/33040024.html](http://www.azattyun.am/a/33040024.html)> accessed 17 July 2024.

allocations is crucial for grasping how the EU balances its efforts between immediate security needs and long-term developmental goals. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the European Union's conflict resolution and peacekeeping strategies in Armenia, Ukraine, and Georgia, it's crucial to explore the financial support provided through various EU initiatives. For this purpose, within the thesis, I apply Official Development Assistance (ODA) data to operationalise EU Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Strategies through the EU's financial support under the Conflict, Peace, and Security category, which is divided into five main sub-categories.<sup>103</sup> Security System Management and Reform: This involves technical cooperation with government bodies and civil society to improve democratic governance, civilian oversight, and transparency in the security system. The goal is to ensure security management aligns with democratic norms and good governance principles. Civilian Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention, and Resolution: This sector supports civilian-led activities, including capacity building, monitoring, and dialogue, aimed at preventing conflicts and promoting peace. It includes participation in international civilian peace missions and contributions to peacebuilding funds or commissions. Participation in International Peacekeeping Operations: EU funding in this sector involves supporting peacekeeping operations authorised by international bodies like the UN or NATO. Activities include human rights monitoring, reintegration of demobilised soldiers, and security sector reform, excluding the enforcement aspects of peacekeeping. Reintegration and SALW Control: This sector focuses on the reintegration of demobilised military personnel into civilian life, the conversion of military production facilities to civilian use, and efforts to control and reduce the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Removal of Land Mines and Explosive Remnants of War: EU funding here is directed towards the removal of land mines and other explosive remnants, with activities including stockpile destruction, risk education, victim rehabilitation, and research on

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<sup>103</sup> OECD, 'List of CRS Purpose Codes and Voluntary Budget Identifier Codes' (2019) <<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwebfs.oecd.org%2Foda%2FDataCollection%2FResources%2FDAC-CRS-CODES.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>> accessed 25 August 2024.

demining, all for civilian purposes. Additionally, I use data from the ‘Government and Civil Society’ category (cleaned of Conflict, Peace, and Security) to distinguish and gain a better understanding of the EU’s security and non-security instruments.<sup>104</sup>



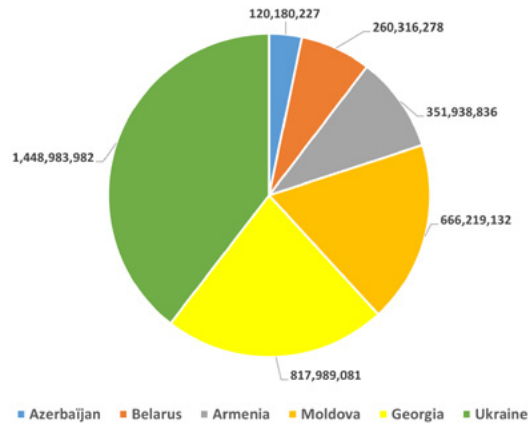
*Figure 1. Total EU disbursements to EaP countries in the conflict, peace, and security sector (2009-2024)*  
*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data*<sup>105</sup>

The total disbursements allocated by the European Union to various countries under the Conflict, Peace, and Security sector. According to the data, Ukraine received the highest EU assistance, totalling €816.9 million. This is because of the EU’s prioritisation of Ukraine’s security and stability, especially in light of the ongoing conflict and the country’s strategic significance in Eastern Europe. Georgia, with €486 million, follows as the second-largest recipient. This is because Georgia plays a crucial role in the South Caucasus, where the EU aims to foster stability and security through reforms and international peacekeeping support.

<sup>104</sup> OECD, ‘List of CRS Purpose Codes and Voluntary Budget Identifier Codes’ (2019) <<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwebfs.oecd.org%2Foda%2FDataCollection%2FResources%2FDAC-CRS-CODES.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>> accessed 25 August 2024.

<sup>105</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer* (2024) <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

Moldova faces challenges related to unresolved territorial disputes and regional tensions, particularly with the Transnistrian region. The EU's financial support aims to address these conflicts and promote stability, reflecting a strong commitment to enhancing security and managing conflict in a region with significant internal and external challenges. Armenia received €30.9 million, which is lower compared to Georgia and Ukraine. This is because the EU's involvement in Armenia is more focused on specific areas, such as targeted security reforms and civilian peacebuilding, reflecting Armenia's unique regional challenges. Also, research revealed that EU began its proactive assistance in Armenia after the 2020 war, addressing immediate needs and long-term stability requirements. Belarus and Azerbaijan, with €11.4 million and €8.4 million respectively, received the least amount of assistance. This is due to their more limited cooperation with the EU, as well as concerns over their lower levels of democracy and governance, which have affected the extent of EU support and engagement.



*Figure 2. Total EU disbursements to EaP countries in the government and civil society sector (2009-2024)*

*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data<sup>106</sup>*

<sup>106</sup> European Commission, EU Aid Explorer (2024) <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

As discussed in the first chapter, the EU employs both security and non-security mechanisms for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. To substantiate this, it is important to examine the EU's funding in the "Government and Civil Society" category, which complements its security initiatives. This funding covers a broad range of areas, including public sector policy and administrative management, public finance management, and decentralization with support for subnational governments. It also includes funding for anti-corruption organisations, domestic revenue mobilisation, and public procurement. Additionally, it supports legal and judicial development, macroeconomic policy, and enhances democratic participation and civil society. The funding addresses elections, legislatures and political parties, media and the free flow of information, human rights, and women's rights organisations. It also works to end violence against women and girls and facilitates orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility.<sup>107</sup> This comprehensive approach underscores the EU's commitment to strengthening governance and societal development, complementing its security mechanisms to effectively address and resolve conflicts. Figure 2 shows a significant increase in financial assistance as a non-security instrument compared to the support provided for security-related sectors (see Figure 1). Ukraine received the highest disbursement, totalling €1.45 billion, followed by Georgia with €818 million. This is substantially higher than the security assistance, indicating that the EU places a strong emphasis on strengthening state governance, the rule of law, and internal affairs in these countries. Moldova, with €666.2 million, Armenia with €351.8 million, Belarus with €260.3 million, and Azerbaijan with €120.2 million, also received considerable amounts, reinforcing this pattern (see Figure 2).

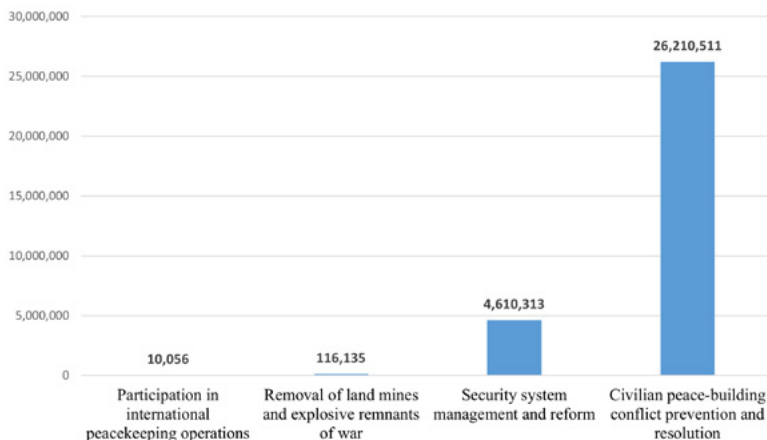
The analysis of the funding distribution across the two sectors, Conflict, Peace, and Security, and Government and Civil Society, reveals a clear prioritisation of governance and civil society by the European Union (EU). The total disbursement for the Conflict, Peace, and Security sector in these six countries amounts to €1.446 billion, whereas the allocation for the Government and Civil Society sector is significantly higher, reaching €3.669 billion. This

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<sup>107</sup> OECD, 'List of CRS Purpose Codes and Voluntary Budget Identifier Codes' (OECD, 2019).

substantial disparity underscores the EU's strategic emphasis on strengthening governance structures and supporting civil society as fundamental components in addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting long-term stability in the region.

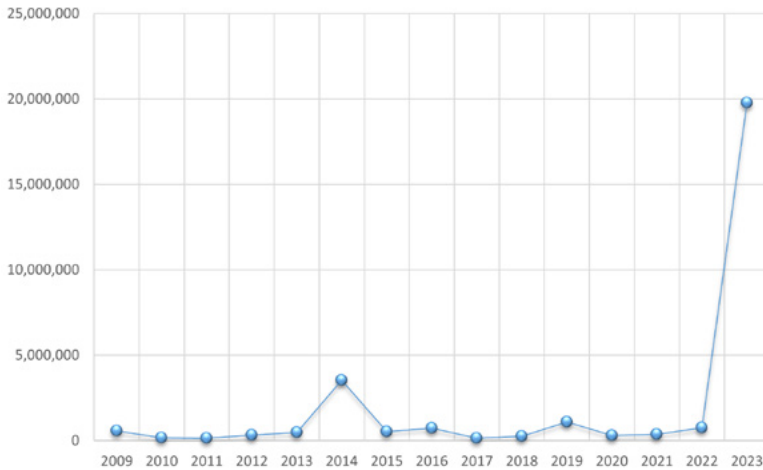
In both the Conflict, Peace, and Security sector and the Government and Civil Society sector, the distribution of financial assistance follows a consistent pattern. Ukraine consistently receives the highest level of support, followed by Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan. This order reflects the EU's recognition of the varying levels of governance and civil society development in each country, as well as the strategic importance of addressing these issues in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The EU's focus on governance and civil society as integral elements of its conflict resolution strategy indicates a fundamental shift in its approach. By prioritising the enhancement of governance structures and the support of civil society, the EU aims to tackle the underlying causes of instability, particularly through the strengthening of state institutions. This approach demonstrates the EU's conviction that sustainable peace and long-term stability are dependent on the effective functioning of state institutions and the empowerment of civil society. Additionally, as our research reveals, the EU has been cautious in its direct involvement in conflicts, preferring to support structural and institutional improvements as a means to promote stability and peace.



*Figure 3. Sectoral disbursements for Armenia (2009-2024)*  
*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data<sup>108</sup>*

Examining the sectoral disbursements in Armenia, Ukraine, and Georgia will be effective for understanding the European Union's priorities and strategies in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. According to the dataset, from 2009 to 2024, the EU has allocated the most funds to civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution in Armenia, with a substantial amount of 26.2 million euros. This is followed by 4.6 million euros dedicated to security system management and reform. In contrast, participation in international peacekeeping operations and the removal of land mines and explosive remnants of war received considerably lower funding, at 10,056 euros and 116,135 euros, respectively (see Figure 3). This distribution reflects the EU's emphasis on supporting civilian-led peace efforts in Armenia. While other areas are also important, the EU's focus on civilian peacebuilding in Armenia aligns with its broader goal of facilitating deep-rooted, systemic changes that address the causes of conflict and promote enduring stability. The data on Reintegration and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) were missing.

<sup>108</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer (2024)* <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.



*Figure 4. Trendline of sectoral disbursements in Armenia (2009-2023)*  
*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data*<sup>109</sup>

The chart illustrates the fluctuation in EU disbursements to Armenia across different years from 2009 to 2023. The most noticeable peak occurred in 2023, where disbursements sharply increased to nearly 19.77 million euros. Prior to this, the disbursement levels remained relatively stable, with minor fluctuations, indicating consistent but lower levels of funding. Another noticeable peak is in 2014, though it is considerably smaller compared to 2023. The fluctuation in EU disbursements to Armenia in 2014 can be linked to several key developments. Following Armenia's decision in 2013 not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU and instead join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) under Russian influence, the dynamics of EU-Armenia relations changed significantly.<sup>110</sup> In response, the EU likely increased its funding in 2014 to maintain engagement with Armenia, supporting democratic reforms, civil society, and conflict prevention efforts despite the geopolitical shift. The support provided by the European Union during the four-day war in 2016 was relatively low. This

<sup>109</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer (2024)* <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

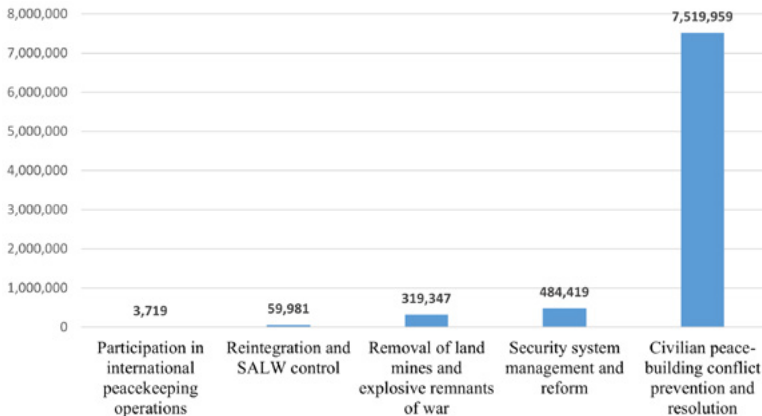
<sup>110</sup> Ruzanna Stepanian, 'EU Sees No Association Accord With Armenia' *Azatutyun* (8 August 2022) <[www.azatutyun.am/a/25105640.html](http://www.azatutyun.am/a/25105640.html)> accessed 27 August 2024.

may also be due to Armenia's decision not to sign the Association Agreement but instead join the Eurasian Economic Union. The EU's response to the escalation was primarily diplomatic, urging both sides to adhere to the ceasefire and engage in renewed negotiations under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group. The sharp increase in EU disbursements in 2023 is related to the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The war had severe consequences for Armenia, leading to a humanitarian crisis, significant territorial losses, and ongoing security concerns. As was mentioned above the substantial funding increase in 2023 likely reflects the EU's response to Armenia's heightened need for humanitarian aid, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding efforts. This surge in funding may also indicate the EU's broader strategic interest in the South Caucasus region, where it sought to reinforce its role as a mediator and peacebuilder amid the continuing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>111</sup> Also, it's important to note that The EU Monitoring Capacity in Armenia began operations on October 20, 2022, after the EU decided to deploy monitoring experts along Armenia's side of the international border with Azerbaijan. This deployment likely played a role in the substantial increase in EU disbursements in 2023 aimed at bolstering Armenia's security and stability in a challenging regional context.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Walter Landgraf and Nareg Seferian, 'A "Frozen Conflict" Boils Over: Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 and Future Implications' (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2024) <[www.fpri.org/article/2024/01/a-frozen-conflict-boils-over-nagorno-karabakh-in-2023-and-future-implications/](https://www.fpri.org/article/2024/01/a-frozen-conflict-boils-over-nagorno-karabakh-in-2023-and-future-implications/)> accessed 25 August 2024.

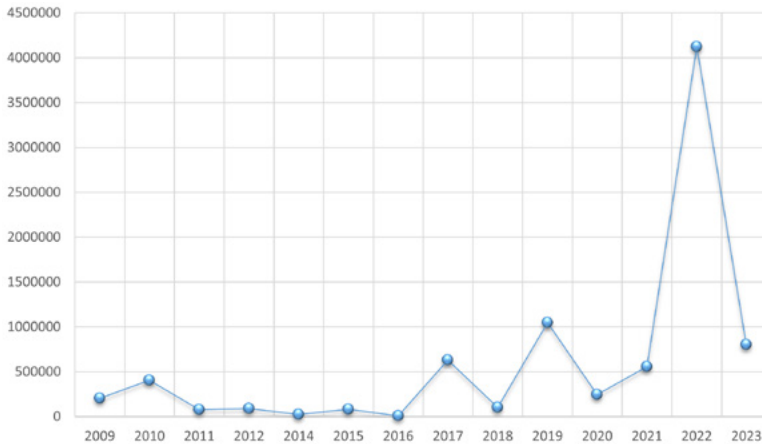
<sup>112</sup> European External Action Service (EEAS), 'EU Monitoring Capacity to Armenia' (2022) <[www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-monitoring-capacity-armenia\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-monitoring-capacity-armenia_en)> accessed 26 August 2024.



*Figure 5. Sectoral disbursements for Azerbaijan (2009-2024)*  
*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data*<sup>113</sup>

Figure 5 shows that in Azerbaijan, the largest disbursement was for civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution, amounting to approximately €7.5 million, while security system management and reform received about €484,419. Comparatively, in Armenia, the EU allocated a much higher sum of €26.2 million for civilian peacebuilding efforts and €4.6 million for security system management and reform. Overall, Armenia received a much higher total disbursement from the EU compared to Azerbaijan.

<sup>113</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer (2024)* <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

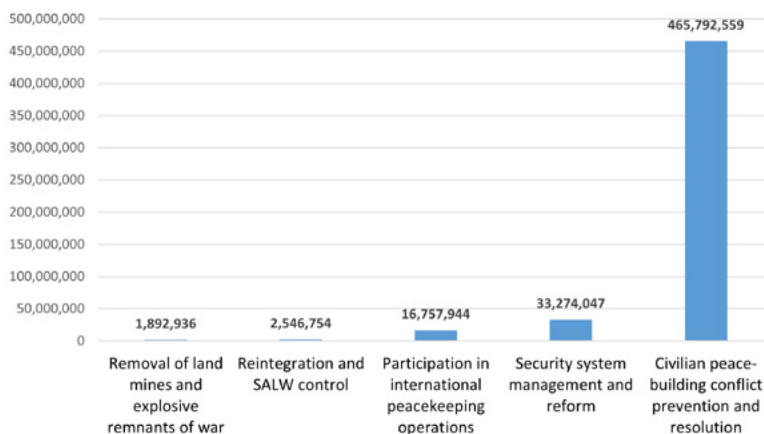


*Figure 6. Trendline of sectoral disbursements in Azerbaijan (2009-2023)*

*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data<sup>114</sup>*

The Figure 6 shows a notable rise in disbursements starting from 2017, which is closely related to the 2016 conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. This increase reflects the EU's intensified efforts to support peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Azerbaijan. The trend continues into 2019 with a significant surge in funding, likely tied to the initiatives aimed at stabilizing the region after the war and preventing further escalations. Additionally, the significant increase in disbursements in 2022, reaching 4,122,028, is related to post-war efforts. As was mentioned in previous chapters following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the EU heightened financial commitments to support recovery and reconstruction efforts. This substantial peak in disbursements reflects investments in rebuilding infrastructure, providing humanitarian aid, and supporting economic and social recovery in the aftermath of the conflict.

<sup>114</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer* (2024) <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

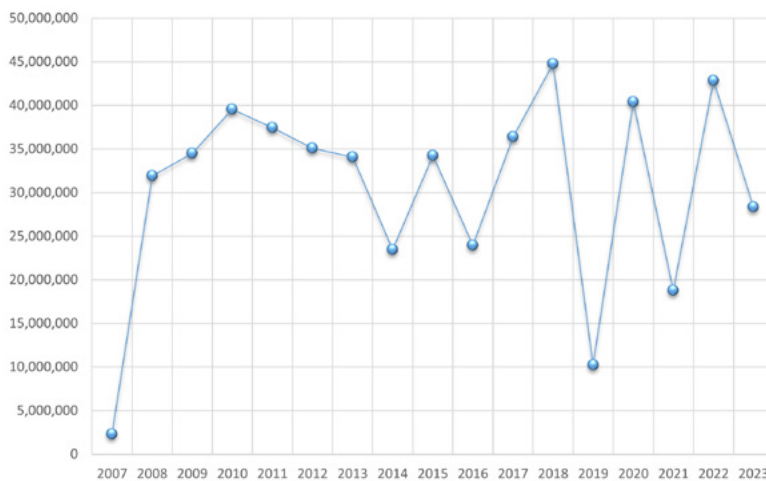


*Figure 7. Sectoral disbursements for Georgia (2007-2024)*  
*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data*<sup>115</sup>

To examine the EU's funding for Georgia, I analysed data from 2007 to 2024, as research revealed a significant increase in allocations starting in 2008. This substantial rise reflects the EU's heightened engagement in response to the 2008 Russia-Georgian War and its ongoing impact on Georgia's stability. The data for Georgia indicates that from 2007 to 2024, the European Union has prioritised funding civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution, with a significant allocation of approximately 465.8 million euros. This substantial investment highlights the EU's focus on promoting long-term peace and stability in Georgia, likely in response to the country's ongoing conflicts and post-war recovery efforts, particularly after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. The EU has also allocated around 33.3 million euros to security system management and reform, which underscores its commitment to enhancing Georgia's security infrastructure and governance. Participation in international peacekeeping operations received notable funding of approximately 16.7 million euros, reflecting Georgia's role in contributing to global peace efforts. In comparison, funds allocated for the removal of land mines and

<sup>115</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer (2024)* <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

explosive remnants of war and for reintegration and Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) control are lower, at approximately 1.9 million euros and 2.54 million euros respectively. These areas received less attention, possibly due to the EU's greater emphasis on broader security reforms and conflict prevention strategies rather than specific post-conflict clean-up operations. Overall, the EU's funding strategy in Georgia highlights a comprehensive approach to supporting peace, security, and governance in the region. In contrast to Armenia, Georgia received a much larger total allocation, particularly in the area of civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution, which amounted to approximately 433.7 million euros (see Figure 3). This reflects the EU's extensive involvement in Georgia's peace efforts, especially after the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, which left lasting impacts on the country's stability.



*Figure 8. Trendline of sectoral disbursements in Georgia (2007-2023)  
Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data<sup>116</sup>*

The disbursement data for Georgia shows several peaks and fluctuations over the years, reflecting both external and internal political dynamics. The early years, particularly 2008 and 2009, show substantial disbursements, which align with the EU's

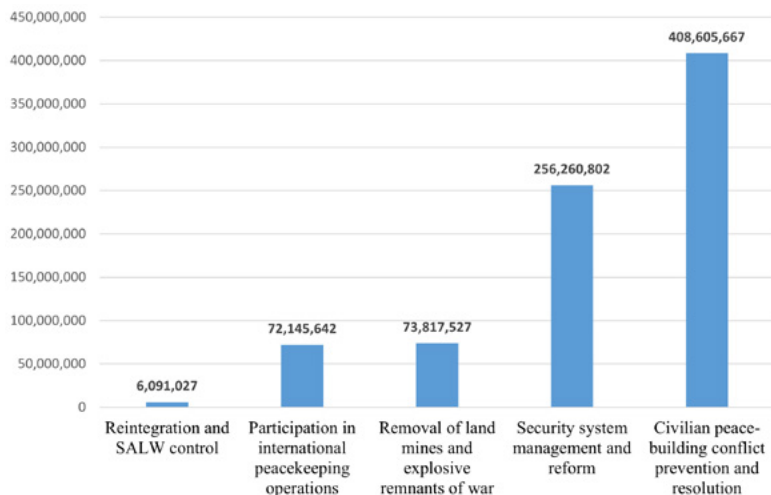
<sup>116</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer* (2024) <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

immediate response to the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict and the subsequent efforts to stabilize the region amidst tense relations with Russia. These high levels of financial support also underscore the EU's commitment to strengthening Georgia's governance structures and addressing internal political challenges that emerged from the conflict. During this period, the EU's involvement was crucial, not only in managing the external threat posed by strained relations with Russia but also in navigating internal political changes within Georgia, such as shifts in government and efforts to consolidate democratic governance. The disbursement amount remained relatively high through 2010 and 2013, but there was a noticeable decline in 2014 and 2016, reflecting evolving geopolitical strategies and internal adjustments within Georgia's political landscape. From 2010 to 2015, the disbursements from the EU to Georgia reflect a period of intense engagement, particularly following the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict. The signing of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area in 2014 was a pivotal moment, as it significantly deepened Georgia's integration with the EU. These agreements not only enhanced economic ties but also underscored the EU's commitment to supporting Georgia's security system. The increase in disbursements from 2016 to 2018 can be linked to the full entry into force of the Association Agreement on July 1, 2016. This agreement was a landmark development in EU-Georgia relations and had several significant implications.

In 2019, the sharp decline in disbursements can be linked to a year of significant change and political crisis in Georgia, which set the stage for the 2020 parliamentary elections. This period was characterised by widespread public dissatisfaction and political unrest as various factions within Georgia grappled with the direction of the country's future.

In 2020, the situation improved, and disbursements increased, reflecting the EU's response to regional security dynamics, including the impact of the Nagorno-Karabakh war. However, in 2021, disbursements decreased again, which can be attributed to the aftermath of the conflict. Substantial financial resources were allocated to Armenia and Azerbaijan to address immediate humanitarian and reconstruction needs, affecting the level of support for Georgia (see Figure 4 and Figure 6). As a result, while Georgia did receive assistance, the overall disbursements were lower compared to previous years due to the prioritization

of urgent needs in the conflict-affected regions. In 2022 and 2023, the disbursements declined slightly but remained substantial, indicating continued EU support in the face of ongoing regional tensions and internal challenges in Georgia.



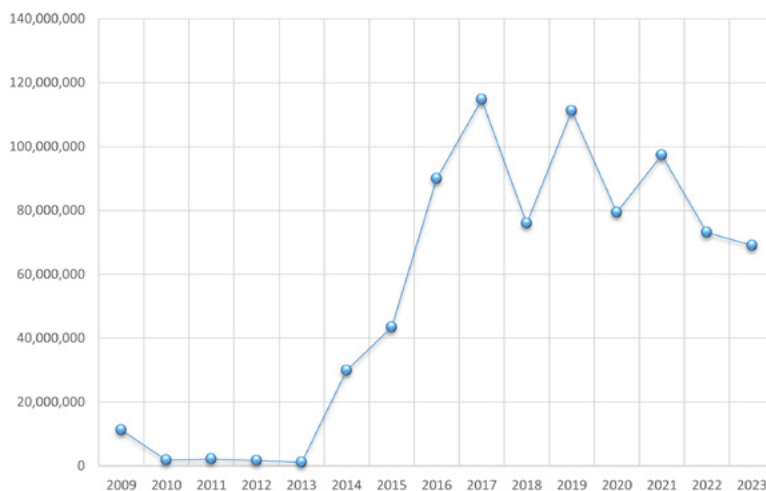
*Figure 9. Sectoral disbursements for Ukraine (2009-2024)*

*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data<sup>117</sup>*

The EU's financial disbursements to Ukraine across Security sectors highlight the strategic importance of stabilising and rebuilding the country amidst ongoing conflict. The largest allocation, 408.4 million euros, was directed towards civilian peace-building, conflict prevention, and resolution, reflecting the EU's commitment to fostering long-term peace and addressing the root causes of conflict in Ukraine. Significant funding of 256.3 million euros was also allocated to security system management and reform, underscoring the need to modernise Ukraine's defence and security institutions in response to the challenges posed by internal unrest and external threats. The EU's focus on removing land mines and explosive remnants of war, with 73.8 million euros, further illustrates the urgency of clearing large areas of Ukraine

<sup>117</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer (2024)* <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

contaminated by ongoing military activities. Participation in international peacekeeping operations received 72.1 million euros, highlighting the EU's support for Ukraine's active role in global security, even as it faces significant internal challenges.



*Figure 10. Trendline of sectoral disbursements in Ukraine (2009-2023)*

*All figures in euro. Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data<sup>118</sup>*

The disbursement figures from 2009 to 2023 for conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in Ukraine reveal a trend that corresponds with the country's geopolitical situation and the escalation of conflict. The data shows a significant increase in funding beginning in 2014, which can be linked to both the onset of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia, as well as the signing of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine on June 27, 2014. The years 2015 through 2019 saw substantial disbursements, reflecting intensified international efforts to stabilize the situation and support Ukraine's security and governance reforms. The peak disbursement in 2017, with €114,747,402, corresponds to the

<sup>118</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer* (2024) <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

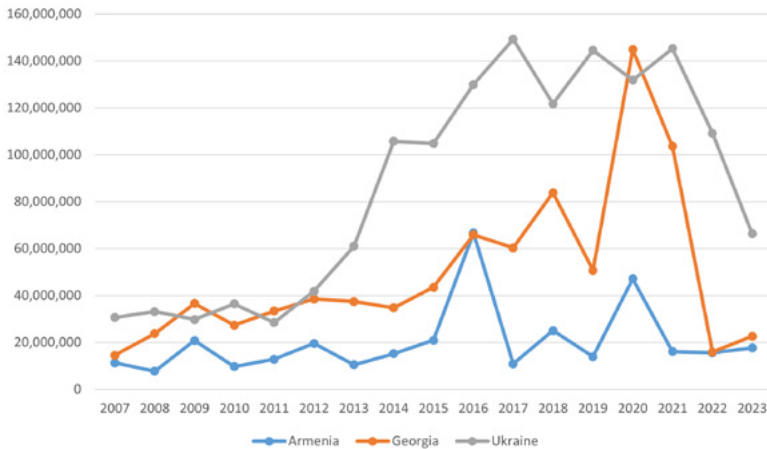
implementation of major reforms and increased international aid to address the ongoing conflict and its humanitarian consequences. Additionally, the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine fully came into force on September 1, 2017, after which the EU significantly increased its support to Ukraine, further enhancing funding and resources for conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts.

This high level of funding continued through 2019, with another peak at €111,211,547, before starting to decline in 2020. The significant decline in 2022 and 2023 suggests a possible conclusion of specific projects, reallocation of funds, or a shift in international priorities, possibly influenced by the evolving situation on the ground or changes in the geopolitical landscape. The steep decline in disbursements for 2023, might be explained by the EU's reallocation of funds towards immediate humanitarian aid and crisis management. Additionally, the decline could reflect a strategic decision to encourage Ukrainian self-reliance in certain areas, with the EU stepping back from direct financial involvement as local institutions and governance structures are strengthened (see Figure 10). It is important to emphasise that this does not mean the EU decreased its overall assistance; rather, it signifies a change in the EU's approach, allocating substantial resources to other critical areas. The EU and its Member States have provided €39 billion in military aid to Ukraine, including €6.1 billion through the European Peace Facility for military equipment delivery. In March 2024, the Council established a specific Ukraine Assistance Fund of €5 billion, raising the total European Peace Facility support to €11.1 billion. Additionally, the EU Military Assistance Mission for Ukraine, with a budget of €362 million, is addressing the training requirements of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and has already trained 52,000 Ukrainian soldiers.<sup>119</sup>

Furthermore, the data provided under the Conflict, Peace, and Security category do not reflect allocations during active military actions. Instead, this data illustrates the EU's assistance focused on preventive measures, including civilian oversight, transparency in the security system, capacity building, monitoring, and dialogue aimed at preventing conflicts and promoting peace.

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<sup>119</sup> European Commission, 'EU Military Support to Ukraine' (2024) *EU Solidarity With Ukraine* <[https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/eu-assistance-ukraine/eu-military-support-ukraine\\_en](https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/eu-assistance-ukraine/eu-military-support-ukraine_en)> accessed 26 August 2024.



*Figure 11. Trendline of disbursements by European Union in government and civil society sector in Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine (2007-2023)*

*Own presentation based on EU Aid Explorer data<sup>120</sup>*

After analysing in detail, the EU disbursements in the Conflict, Peace, and Security category for each country, it is essential to provide an overall assessment of the funding trends in the Government and Civil Society sectors in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. The analysis of these disbursements reveals a clear correlation between EU funding patterns and the geopolitical dynamics of the region.

From 2011 to 2016, a significant increase in investments was observed across all three countries, coinciding with the signing of Association Agreements. During this period, the EU substantially increased funding in areas such as democracy, human rights, and governance, aiming to strengthen democratic institutions and improve governance structures. This strategy was viewed as a crucial means to promote long-term stability and development in the region.

<sup>120</sup> European Commission, *EU Aid Explorer* (2024) <[https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients\\_en](https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/explore/recipients_en)> accessed 24 August 2024.

However, after 2020, the trend shifted, with noticeable declines in investment. In Georgia, this decline can be attributed to internal political developments, particularly the passage of the controversial Foreign Agents law in 2023, which strained relations with the EU and led to a suspension of financial support. In Ukraine, the decrease in funding resulted primarily from the EU's reallocation of resources towards military assistance in response to the ongoing conflict with Russia, prioritising defence and reconstruction efforts. In Armenia, the decline in investment is linked to the aftermath of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, which prompted a reassessment of EU priorities and a more targeted approach to conflict management and stabilisation.

The shifts in EU funding patterns reflect the evolving geopolitical landscape and the EU's recalibration of its strategies in response to changing security concerns. Initially, the EU prioritised non-security mechanisms to achieve peace, focusing on governance, human rights, and democracy. However, as the region faced escalating security challenges—particularly the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine—the EU adjusted its approach, placing greater emphasis on military sector funding, with Ukraine serving as a prominent example of this shift.

In conclusion, it is evident that in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, the majority of the EU's financial allocations have been directed towards Civilian Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention, and Resolution. This emphasis on civilian-led activities, such as capacity building, monitoring, and dialogue initiatives, reflects the EU's commitment to long-term strategies for preventing conflicts and fostering sustainable peace. By investing in these areas, the EU aims to enhance the capacity of local communities and institutions to manage and resolve conflicts internally, thereby promoting stability and resilience in the region.

The substantial increase in financial support during periods of heightened conflict—such as the escalation in Ukraine starting in 2014, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, and the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War—demonstrates the EU's strategic approach to addressing regional instability. The focus on civilian peacebuilding and governance reforms highlights the EU's commitment to addressing the underlying causes of conflict and promoting stability through a combination of security and non-security mechanisms.

## 4. Conclusion

After thoroughly examining the European Union's peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms, it becomes evident that Lederach's peacebuilding theory provides a foundational framework for understanding the EU's approach. As highlighted in the first chapter, Lederach emphasises that reconciliation is central to conflict transformation, advocating for a shift from merely addressing issues to prioritising the restoration and rebuilding of relationships. The EU's strategies reflect this emphasis, focusing not just on immediate conflict resolution but also on fostering long-term relationships and societal rebuilding, aligning with Lederach's view of reconciliation as crucial for sustainable peace.

Another significant milestone explored is Lederach's "integrated framework of peacebuilding," which outlines a structured approach to addressing conflict through various phases. The examination reveals that the EU's engagement in conflict situations aligns closely with this framework. The EU dedicates substantial resources to preparation and training for change, equipping local stakeholders with the necessary tools and knowledge for navigating transitions towards peace. Additionally, the EU's long-term strategies reflect the design of social change, addressing deeper structural issues and aiming for sustainable transformation within societies. The substantial financial allocations directed towards these areas underscore the EU's commitment to both immediate crisis management and long-term stability, demonstrating a comprehensive approach that mirrors the principles outlined in Lederach's framework. However, it is evident that long-term policies are designed by the EU primarily in response to post-conflict scenarios.

One of the most important conclusions reached is that before the 2022 war in Ukraine, the EU generally refrained from direct involvement in ongoing conflicts during their active phases. Instead, the EU's role primarily focused on providing support to governments through financial aid and other forms of assistance. This approach allowed the EU to offer crucial support to affected governments and address immediate needs without directly engaging in the military aspects of the conflicts. This strategy underscores the EU's preference for a more supportive and indirect role in conflict situations, aligning with its broader peacebuilding and conflict resolution frameworks that emphasise long-term stability and reconstruction rather than immediate military intervention.

Since the beginning of 2022, the conflict in Ukraine has emerged as one of the most significant geopolitical crises of the past decade, profoundly influencing regional security, international relations, and global governance. The war has been marked by its complexity and the involvement of various international actors, creating a multifaceted crisis with widespread implications. The onset of the Ukraine conflict in 2022 marked a significant shift in the EU's policy. The EU's unprecedented response included funding military equipment for Ukraine, enhancing defence cooperation, and activating the Temporary Protection Mechanism for Ukrainian refugees. This shift demonstrates the EU's capacity to adopt more assertive and comprehensive strategies in acute crises, although such responses were previously absent in the South Caucasus and other regions. As a result, the EU has now transformed into a more influential geopolitical player on the global stage.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine has not only had immediate consequences for the country's people and infrastructure but has also had a profound effect on the European Integration processes of Eastern Partnership countries. The conflict has reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the region, influencing the EU's engagement with its neighbours and altering the dynamics of its external relations. This has led to a re-evaluation of strategies and policies, as the EU seeks to navigate the evolving challenges and reinforce its role in promoting stability and security in the region.

The European Union's role in conflict situations is primarily focused on peacebuilding rather than direct conflict resolution. This approach is evident when examining the EU's involvement in various conflicts. During the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2016,

the EU's engagement was largely restricted to political declarations and diplomatic expressions of concern. The EU did not take a proactive role in mediating or resolving the conflict, reflecting a more restrained approach to direct intervention.

However, the dynamics shifted significantly following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. After the conflict, the EU became notably more active and engaged, positioning itself as a key mediator in the aftermath. This shift in strategy underscores the EU's focus on long-term peacebuilding and its commitment to fostering dialogue and reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan. By leveraging its diplomatic resources and fostering international cooperation, the EU aimed to support a sustainable resolution and help stabilize the region.

The analysis of the EU's financial disbursements to Eastern Partnership countries reveals a strategic approach that prioritizes governance reforms and civil society support as crucial for long-term stability. The variance in funding reflects a tailored approach based on each country's unique challenges and geopolitical significance. Ukraine received substantial assistance due to its frontline status in the conflict with Russia, while Armenia saw increased support following the 2020 war. In contrast, Azerbaijan and Belarus received less support, reflecting the EU's preference for linking financial assistance to governance and democratic standards.

The research revealed that in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, the majority of the EU's financial allocations have been concentrated on Civilian Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention, and Resolution. It also became evident that the EU significantly increased its funding only after major conflicts, such as the escalation in Ukraine starting in 2014, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, and the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.

The European Union employs a range of mechanisms and tools in its efforts to resolve conflicts and promote peace in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, encompassing both security and non-security dimensions. On the security side, the EU has increasingly engaged in direct support for military and defence capabilities, as demonstrated by its unprecedented funding for military equipment in response to the 2022 conflict in Ukraine. This marks a significant shift from its traditional role, highlighting the EU's growing willingness to provide direct military support in certain contexts.

In addition to direct military assistance, the EU has focused on non-security mechanisms that aim to address the root causes of conflict and foster long-term stability. These non-security tools include substantial investments in governance reforms, civil society support, and economic development. The EU has prioritised strengthening state institutions, the rule of law, and democratic processes, recognising that effective governance is crucial for sustainable peace.

The EU's involvement in conflict resolution has also included supporting international and regional organizations, such as the OSCE Minsk Group, to mediate and address conflicts. The EU has facilitated high-level negotiations and observer missions to monitor and support peace processes, demonstrating its commitment to diplomatic engagement. However, these efforts have often proven to be relatively ineffective in achieving substantial progress. One key issue with the EU's support for such organizations is that it has generally been insufficient to overcome entrenched geopolitical dynamics and deep-rooted conflicts. The OSCE Minsk Group, for example, has struggled to facilitate meaningful resolutions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, despite the EU's backing. The group's mediation efforts have frequently been stymied by the complex and contentious nature of the conflicts, as well as the significant influence of other major powers, such as Russia, which complicates the peacebuilding process.

While the European Union's mechanisms for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries are indeed significant, their overall effectiveness is often limited by the EU's tendency to adopt a reactive rather than a proactive approach. The EU's strategies, while substantial, lack a comprehensive framework for preventing conflicts and addressing underlying issues before they escalate into active crises.

The EU's mechanisms, including military support, governance reforms, and civil society assistance, are critical for stabilising regions and fostering long-term peace. However, these tools are generally applied after conflicts have begun, focusing on managing the consequences and supporting recovery rather than preventing the initial outbreak of violence. For example, while the EU has invested in governance and democratic processes, these efforts are often too late to address the immediate triggers of conflict that have already emerged.

Additionally, the EU's conflict prevention mechanisms are relatively underdeveloped. The Union's approach has historically lacked the proactive measures needed to mitigate tensions and address potential conflict triggers before they escalate. The focus has been more on crisis management and post-conflict recovery rather than on implementing strategies designed to anticipate and prevent conflicts. This gap underscores a need for a more integrated approach that includes early warning systems, preventive diplomacy, and targeted interventions aimed at reducing the likelihood of conflicts before they materialise.

In conclusion, the EU must redefine its conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies by adopting a more comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of conflicts and fosters long-term stability. It is crucial for the EU to be more proactive in preventing conflicts, rather than merely reacting to them after they arise. This involves not only responding to immediate crises but also implementing preventive measures and building resilient governance structures in conflict-prone regions. A strategic shift towards early intervention and sustained engagement is necessary to effectively manage and resolve conflicts within the Eastern Partnership countries.



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The present thesis - ***EU Policy in Eastern Partnership Countries: A Comprehensive Analysis of Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Strategies*** written by **Liana Grigoryan** and supervised by Arusyak Aleksanyan, Yerevan State University (YSU) - was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in the Caucasus (CES), coordinated by Yerevan State University.

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