Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

EXPLORING FACTORS INFLUENCING INDIVIDUAL GEOPOLITICAL PREFERENCES IN THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT COUNTRIES (GEORGIA, MOLDOVA, AND UKRAINE)

Ángel Luis Torres Adán

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November 2021

PhD Thesis

PhD in Politics, Policies and International Relations.

Department of Political Science and Public Law

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A mis padres; a Fátima y Rubén

A Inés y Santi

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Agradecimientos

Cuando llegué a Barcelona lo único que sabía era que iba a empezar una tesis. Ignoraba cómo iba a ser y cuántas cosas me iban a pasar mientras la escribía. Durante estos años muchas personas me han apoyado de una u otra manera; su apoyo merece, ya que no puedo pagarlo de otra forma, al menos mi reconocimiento expreso.

El comienzo fue duro, pero el apoyo de **Guillem Rico** y **Eva Anduiza** lo hizo más llevadero. Al primero he de agradecerle que me aceptara como doctorando en un momento en que mi futuro, reconozcámoslo, parecía poco prometedor. A Eva, que me facilitara el acceso a un contrato FPU, sin el cual no hubiera podido mantenerme durante cuatro años ni llevar a cabo el trabajo que una tesis requiere. Desde el principio igualmente, tuve la suerte de conocer a **Marina Pera**, la que sería mi compañera de despacho durante todo el periodo. El hecho de que nuestras peripecias predoctorales hayan corrido en paralelo y que vayamos a terminar la tesis casi al mismo tiempo ha conllevado que estuviéramos enfrentados simultáneamente a los mismos retos, que colaboráramos y nos ayudáramos en muchas ocasiones. *Gràcies*, Marina. Así mismo, **Ana Balkovic, Berta Barbet, Sofia Breitenstein, Carol Galais, Enrique Hernández, Dani Marinova**… —o sea el resto de los miembros del grupo DEC— también fueron y han seguido siendo un apoyo importante desde el inicio y hasta el final: gracias a ellos he podido disfrutar de seminarios, reuniones y *workshops* que, en definitiva, han supuesto una parte fundamental de mi formación como doctorando.

Sin embargo, pese a tantos y tan buenos apoyos, no fue hasta conseguir la FPU y, más concretamente, a partir de 2019 cuando realmente sentí que podría llegar a acabar la tesis. La convicción se fraguó gracias a una combinación de tres elementos: (1) haber acudido a las *ECPR Joint Sessions 2019* y haber conocido a personas como **Agustí Bosch** y **Pepe Real Dato:** ellos creyeron que lo que estaba haciendo era interesante y que mis ilusiones podían materializarse, (2) the advice of **Anastassia Obydenkova**, who, even if we only met for a short time and just once, managed to convince me of the feasibility of this dissertation, y (3), de nuevo, que Guillem Rico perseverara en los buenos consejos, guiándome y animándome con las partes más arduas de la tesis.

El resto del periodo de doctorado fue mejor. A finales de 2019 se incorporaron al despacho **Dani Balinhas** y **Juan Pérez Rajó**. Estos dos chavales me han dado la vida durante los dos últimos años: han logrado que las cosas, en el trabajo y fuera de él, sean más interesantes, divertidas y, sobre todo, *mais galegas*. As for other office colleagues, **Ahmed Kadiri**, even if he came to the UAB not so long ago, has also been a nice addition to the office, as he is always ready to chat a bit and de-stress from the routine. Furthermore, I also had the luck of meeting **Vladimir Bortun**, who is an amazing person and scholar and with whom I have had some of the more interesting conversations of this whole period.

La pandemia frustró la estancia de investigación que tenía prevista. No obstante, haciendo abstracción de los innumerables problemas personales y generales que ha causado, he de decir que el periodo de confinamiento fue extremadamente productivo y, por suerte, me sirvió para terminar de encarrilar una tesis que cada vez iba tomando más forma. Por añadidura —no hay mal que por bien no venga—, la cancelación de la estancia de investigación en Estados Unidos me permitió conocer a una de las personas que más me ha ayudado y enseñado en este último año: **Michael Gentile**. From the very beginning, even when deciding if conducting the research stay was possible, Michael has been incredibly helpful and getting to know him both academically and personally has convinced me that I did not only go to Strömstad to find an amazing and understanding research stay supervisor, but a friend for the years to come.

Además, durante todo el periodo de la tesis he tenido el apoyo de mi familia y amigos. Mis padres siempre han estado ahí cuando los necesitaba, y **Fátima y Rubén** han venido a visitarme a Cataluña más veces de las que puedo recordar. **Silvia** ha hecho que en Tarragona me sintiera en casa. **Cristina** —¡ya queda menos!— y **Xavi**, doctorandos que han sufrido de manera parecida lo mismo que yo, también han sido grandes ayudas: confío en haberles ayudado tanto como ellos me han ayudado a mí. Y otros muchos amigos y familiares han compartido ratos conmigo y me han escuchado durante este tiempo; por ejemplo —y que me perdonen los que dejo fuera—, **Rafa**, **Marco**, **Damas**, **Gilito, Amelia** y **Florin**, **Jan**, **Pirri**, **Nilda**…

Por último, ya lo he dicho al principio, cuando llegué a Barcelona sabía que venía a hacer una tesis en Ciencia Política en la UAB y poco más. Por supuesto, no tenía ni la más remota idea de que conocería a **Inés**, me casaría con ella y a estas alturas fuéramos a estar esperando un hijo. Inés ha sido la persona que más me ha acompañado, la que más ha sufrido las cosas malas y compartido las cosas buenas que me ha dado esta etapa de la vida. En definitiva, ella es responsable de que, finalmente y, a veces, contra todo pronóstico, esta tesis esté, por fin, terminada.

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on exploring the factors that influence individual geopolitical preferences in post-Soviet Europe, using the Association Agreement (AA) countries (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) as case studies. Individual geopolitical preferences, or the public's opinions regarding what international organisation their country should join, have been extremely relevant for the national politics of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. It can be argued that signing the AAs with the European Union (EU) positioned the three countries closer to the EU, moving them away from their prevailing Eastern frame of reference. The deteriorating relationship between the governments of the AA countries and the Russian government does not mean, however, that the population of the AA countries unanimously supports the idea of joining the EU and rejects the possibility of joining the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Instead, all the AA countries have sizeable parts of their populations that support joining the EAEU, or hold other kinds of ambivalent positions regarding the future geopolitical slant of their country.

What are the factors that influence individual geopolitical preferences in the AA countries? This dissertation seeks to answer this question by building on the literature on support for membership of international organisations, specific works on geopolitical preferences in the AA countries, and the use of survey-based empirical analyses. The process of answering the proposed research question has led to the development of four articles, which, together, make up this dissertation. The first article uses Moldova as a

case study, and tests the relationship between institutional trust, party cues, and individual geopolitical preferences. The second article focuses on Georgia, and explores the effects of linguistic and ideological factors on the existing ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences. The third article, based on data from Ukraine, provides an empirical test of the relationship between personal links with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and support for EU and NATO membership. Finally, the fourth article, which uses data from the three AA countries simultaneously, tests the influence of the winners and losers theory, values, future migration preferences, and political engagement over a recently developed extended categorisation of geopolitical preferences that includes citizens who reject joining both the EU and the EAEU (Isolationists) and others who support joining both organisations (Balancers). All in all, this dissertation serves as a test for several theories that are posed by the literature regarding the AA countries. Furthermore, its results serve both to corroborate previous theories and to support further research in an area where understanding the complex mechanisms that influence individual geopolitical preferences is a vital topic.

Resumen

Esta tesis, presentada como compilación de artículos, se centra en explorar diferentes factores que influyen en las preferencias geopolíticas individuales en los países de los Acuerdos de Asociación (AAs). Las preferencias geopolíticas individuales, entendidas como las preferencias de los ciudadanos respecto a qué organización internacional debería unirse su país, han sido extremadamente importantes para las vidas políticas nacionales de Georgia, Moldavia y Ucrania, los tres estados postsoviéticos que han firmado Acuerdos de Asociación con la UE. Precisamente, se puede entender la firma de tales AAs como un acto que certificó el alejamiento de los tres países objeto de esta tesis de su tradicional inclinación oriental y su acercamiento a la UE. El deterioro de las relaciones entre los gobiernos de los países firmantes de los AA y el gobierno ruso no significa, sin embargo, que su población apoye unánimemente la idea de unirse a la UE y rechace unirse a la Unión Euroasiática liderada por Rusia. Por el contrario, en todos los países firmantes de los AA hay notables porcentajes de población que apoyan unirse a la Unión Euroasiática u otro tipo de posiciones ambivalentes respecto a qué orientación geopolítica debería seguir su país en el futuro.

¿Qué factores condicionan las preferencias geopolíticas individuales en los países firmantes de los AA? La tesis busca responder a la pregunta utilizando (1) la literatura que estudia el apoyo a la entrada en organizaciones internacionales, (2) trabajos específicos sobre las preferencias geopolíticas en los países firmantes de los AAs y (3) análisis empíricos basados en encuestas. Dar respuesta a la pregunta de investigación principal de la tesis me ha llevado a redactar cuatro artículos, el conjunto de los cuales,

constituye el núcleo de este trabajo. El primer artículo se centra en Moldavia y se dedica a investigar la relación entre la confianza en las instituciones y las *party cues* y las preferencias geopolíticas. El segundo estudia los efectos de factores lingüísticos e ideológicos en la existencia de una brecha étnica en las preferencias geopolíticas en Georgia. El tercero, basado en datos de Ucrania, prueba la relación entre los vínculos personales con el Partido Comunista de la Unión Soviética y el apoyo a la Unión Europea y la OTAN. Por último, el cuarto artículo de la tesis, que utiliza datos de los tres países firmantes de AAs, investiga la influencia de factores pertenecientes a la teoría de los ganadores y perdedores, valores, preferencias de migración futura y el compromiso político sobre una categorización extendida de las preferencias geopolíticas. Esta nueva categorización incluye, además de las posiciones de apoyo a la UE y a la Unión Euroasiática, a los ciudadanos que rechazan la adhesión a ambas organizaciones internacionales (*Isolationists*) y a quienes apoyan unirse a las dos (*Balancers*).

En resumen, la tesis sirve para ratificar la validez de varias teorías desarrolladas por la literatura en el contexto de los países firmantes de los AAs. Además, los resultados valen tanto para corroborar estas teorías como para permitir el desarrollo de investigaciones futuras en un área en la que entender los complejos mecanismos que regulan las preferencias geopolíticas individuales resulta de vital importancia.

Resum

Aquesta tesi, presentada com a compilació d'articles, es centra en explorar diferents factors que influeixen en les preferències geopolítiques individuals als països dels Acords d'Associació (AAs). Les preferències geopolítiques individuals, enteses com les preferències dels ciutadans respecte a quina organització internacional hauria d'unir-se el seu país, han estat extremadament importants per a les vides polítiques nacionals de Geòrgia, Moldàvia i Ucraïna, els tres estats postsoviètics que han signat Acords d'Associació amb la UE. Precisament, es pot entendre la signatura de tals AAs com un acte que va certificar l'allunyament dels tres països objecte d'aquesta tesi de la seva tradicional inclinació oriental i el seu acostament a la UE. El deteriorament de les relacions entre els governs dels països signants dels AA i el govern rus no significa, no obstant, que la seva població secundi unànimement la idea d'unir-se a la UE i rebutgi unir-se a la Unió Euroasiàtica liderada per Rússia. Al contrari, en tots els països signants dels AA hi ha notables percentatges de població que secunden unir-se a la Unió Euroasiàtica o un altre tipus de posicions ambivalents respecte a quina orientació geopolítica hauria de seguir el seu país en el futur.

Quins factors condicionen les preferències geopolítiques individuals als països signants dels AA? La tesi busca respondre a la pregunta utilitzant (1) la literatura que estudia el suport a l'entrada en organitzacions internacionals, (2) treballs específics sobre les preferències geopolítiques als països signants dels AAs i (3) anàlisis empíriques basades en enquestes. Donar resposta a la pregunta de recerca principal de la tesi m'ha portat a redactar quatre articles, el conjunt dels quals, constitueix el nucli d'aquest treball. El

primer article es centra en Moldàvia i es dedica a investigar la relació entre la confiança en les institucions, les *party cues* i les preferències geopolítiques. El segon estudia els efectes de factors lingüístics i ideològics en l'existència d'una bretxa ètnica en les preferències geopolítiques a Geòrgia. El tercer, basat en dades d'Ucraïna, prova la relació entre els vincles personals amb el Partit Comunista de la Unió Soviètica i el suport a la Unió Europea i l'OTAN. Finalment, el quart article de la tesi, que utilitza dades dels tres països signants de AAs, investiga la influència de factors pertanyents a la teoria dels guanyadors i perdedors, valors, preferències de migració futura i el compromís polític sobre una categorització estesa de les preferències geopolítiques. Aquesta nova categorització inclou, a més de les posicions de suport a la UE i a la Unió Euroasiàtica, als ciutadans que rebutgen l'adhesió a totes dues organitzacions internacionals (*Isolationists*) i als qui secunden unir-se a les dues (*Balancers*).

En resum, la tesi serveix per a ratificar la validesa de diverses teories desenvolupades per la literatura en el context dels països signants dels AAs. A més, els resultats valen tant per a corroborar aquestes teories, com per a permetre el desenvolupament de recerques futures en una àrea en la qual entendre els complexos mecanismes que regulen les preferències geopolítiques individuals és de vital importància.

Introduction

> *"We need a Xerox," said Lev Lvovich gloomily. "It was only about a hundred years ago that you said that we needed a fax. That the West would come to our aid," replied Nikita Ivanich. "That's right, but the irony is that…" "The irony is that there isn't any West." "What do you mean there isn't any West!" snapped Lev Lvovich. "There's always a West." "But we don't know anything about it." "No, no, no. Excuse me! You and I know. It's just that they don't know anything about us." "And that's news to you?"*
>
> TATYANA TOLSTAYA, Ч – Cherv, *The Slynx*, New York Review Books, New York: 2007.

Ever since the beginning of the EU's expansion towards the East, Russia has aimed to counterbalance this international organisation's influence on its near neighbours. The creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) was one of several strategies developed by Moscow to try to offer an alternative international organisation for the former Soviet Republics to join (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018; Nizhnikau, 2016). During the decade of the 2010s, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (three of the former Soviet Republics that gained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union) tightened their links to the EU by signing the Association Agreements (AA). The AAs are comprehensive agreements that regulate the relationship between the EU and each of the AA countries, and encourage these countries to conduct political reforms in exchange for economic benefits. However, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine signing the AAs has

not been welcomed by Russia, and has contributed to creating a tense political climate in these three countries (Nizhnikau, 2016; Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018). Beyond competition at the international level, geopolitical preferences are one of the main cleavages at the national level in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, with political parties often declaring their positions on the pro-EU/pro-EAEU spectrum very early on in their electoral manifestoes (Chryssogelos, 2017; Danero Iglesias, 2015).

What are the principal determinants of individual geopolitical preferences in the Association Agreement (AA) countries? The main objective of this dissertation is to answer this question. I think it is important to continue to widen our knowledge on what drives individual geopolitical preferences both in the AA countries and, more broadly, in any environments in which two international organisations are seen as viable alternatives for a country to join. In order to answer the research question posed in this thesis, I use different theoretical frameworks and test them in three articles, one devoted to each of the AA countries (i.e. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and in a final, fourth article that focuses on all three countries simultaneously.

The study of geopolitical preferences in Post-Soviet Europe is a topic that has interested scholars from different fields ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Scholars from disciplines such as Political Science, International Relations, and Political Geography have used different methods and theories to explore the main determinants of individual geopolitical preferences in the area. This dissertation builds on works from these different disciplines and uses a quantitative approach to test some of the more relevant theories that explain geopolitical preferences. Using a quantitative approach helps complement and test the assumptions of some of the many qualitative studies that have already been developed in the area. Moreover, the use of survey data helps focus on the individual level, which is relevant for complementing the already existing literature that focuses on the national level or the national elites within each of the AA countries.

This introduction briefly explains the theoretical and contextual foundations of this dissertation, while extended explanations for the particular theoretical, methodological, and contextual basis of the four articles that compose the thesis can be found within each of the articles. As per the structure of this introduction, firstly, in section 1.1. (*Geopolitical*

Preferences: concept and competing terminology), I analyse the concept of geopolitical preferences and review the competing concepts that the different fields that study the issue have assigned it. Secondly, section 1.2 (*Individual geopolitical preferences in the Association Agreements countries: similarities and differences*) briefly explains the contextual characteristics of the AA countries and their relationship with the EU and the EAEU. Thirdly, in section 1.3 (*Main theories explaining individual geopolitical preferences*), I review some of the major approaches that explain individual geopolitical preferences in the post-Soviet area. This section serves as a summary of the main theories that I have used in the four articles that make up this work. Lastly, in section 1.4 (*Structure of the dissertation*), I review the structure of the dissertation and briefly explain the main arguments contained in the different articles.

Geopolitical preferences: the concept and competing terminology

In order to understand the objectives and research goals of this dissertation, it is key to clearly define its main concept. All through this thesis, following the working definition provided in the first article in this dissertation, and based on the works of Berlinschi (2019) and Minakov (2019), I consider geopolitical preferences as one component of foreign policy preferences, relating to preferences about which foreign actor (i.e., geopolitical bloc, international organisation, or another individual country) a country should be closer to.

One of the consequences of geopolitical preferences being studied by different fields (e.g., Political Science, International Relations, and Political Geography) is that the terminology used for referring to the same issue can vary. In this sense, the main object of this thesis has been referred to as support for international organisations (or support for the EU/EAEU, or support for EU/EAEU membership) (e.g. Ehin, 2001), foreign policy preferences (e.g. Beesley, 2020), or geopolitical preferences (e.g. Berlinschi, 2019). Throughout this dissertation, I use these terms interchangeably, but “geopolitical preferences” is the concept I favour most. I choose to use the term for two reasons. First, because it allows me to group together into a single concept support for the EU, support for the EAEU, and other ambivalent geopolitical orientations. Second, the concept

reflects the geopoliticised character of national politics in the AA countries better than the more general and vague foreign policy preferences concept.

Regardless of the concept used by the different branches of the literature, geopolitical preferences is by no means a new area of research. Very soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, researchers began to study the distribution and determinants of geopolitical orientations in the post-Soviet area. Understanding the geopolitical orientations of the newly independent post-Soviet countries became an important topic as, for the first time since the establishment of the Soviet Union (or the end of WWII), these countries and their societies were able, at least in theory, to decide if they wanted to remain linked to Russia or, conversely, to become aligned with the West. This conception of geopolitical preferences as a dichotomy between the East and the West (or the EU and Russia, or NATO and CIS, or the EU and the EAEU…) was the most common way of understanding geopolitical preferences until relatively recent times. However, the work of White, McAllister, and Feklyunina (2010) expanded this classification and created a more detailed categorisation of geopolitical preferences that divided these preferences into nine different groups based on the combinations of individual attitudes towards the EU, NATO, CIS, and Soviet nostalgia. More recent work by Buzogány (2019) also develops an extended categorisation of geopolitical preferences that builds on the previous categorisation by White et al. (2010) but condenses it into just four categories. These categories include those who support the EU and oppose the EAEU (Westernizers), those who support EAEU membership but reject EU membership (Easternizers), individuals who support both EU and EAEU membership (Balancers), and, lastly, those who oppose joining either the EU or the EAEU (Sovereignists).

Summarising, either categorised as a dichotomy or using more detailed categorisations, geopolitical preferences are a central issue in both national and international politics in post-Soviet Europe (Cadier, 2019). Giving due attention to the different ways of understanding geopolitical preferences, this dissertation uses both the dichotomy (in articles 1 to 3) and an extended categorisation (in article 4) based on Buzogány (2019). Using both categorisations allows this work to benefit from a more general viewpoint (with the dichotomy) or a more fine-grained approach (with the extended classification)

with which to tackle the complex issue of the determinants that influence individual geopolitical preferences.

Individual geopolitical preferences in the Association Agreements countries

When exploring factors that influence geopolitical preferences, the AA countries stand out as very suitable cases for study. This is because these countries are located, either physically (like Ukraine) or metaphorically (like Georgia, and Moldova), between the areas of influence of two competing geopolitical blocs: the EU and the EAEU. Being located here gives the countries (and, to a certain extent, their citizens) the theoretical possibility of joining either the EU or the EAEU. In essence, this possibility has been traditionally understood as a part of a broader disjunctive in which the post-Soviet countries need to decide whether to maintain their historical ties with Russia or, conversely, if they prefer to move towards further collaboration with the EU. This debate affects the political lives of the AA countries, as many of the actors (political parties, the media, etc.) boldly display their geopolitical preferences in their public spheres (Danero Iglesias, 2015; Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018**)**. All in all, these shared characteristics have led some authors to consider that these three countries share several historical and geopolitical characteristics that allow them to be considered a group of countries whose futures regarding their relationships with the EU and the EAEU are linked to some extent (Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018).

Throughout this section, I will briefly contextualise the political and geopolitical context in the three AA countries from the 1990s until 2019. Expanded context sections for each of the AA countries can be found in the four articles that make up this dissertation.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have been affected by historical processes in similar ways. The three countries were conquered by Russia during the Imperial period, all of them had successful independence movements during the Russian Civil War and, most importantly for this work, all of them ended up becoming Soviet Socialist Republics. Just like all the other Soviet Republics, the AA countries achieved their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, amidst notorious social turmoil (especially in Georgia and

Moldova). The early nineties were years marked by ethno-nationalistic struggles in the three AA countries, but it was in Georgia and Moldova where the conflict between ethnically different and mostly pro-Russian regions (i.e. Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and Transnistria in Moldova), and the newly independent states descended into full-scale wars (Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 2021).

Once the conflicts that exploded after independence were somewhat stabilised, the three AA countries experienced periods in which there was an increase in popular demand for substantial systemic change. This situation led to the colour revolutions that affected Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004 respectively. Moldova did not go through a colour revolution, and some authors define the elections of 2009 and the subsequent turmoil that led to the replacement of the Communist Party as an "aborted color revolution" (Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu, 2009: 140). These political changes confirmed that supposedly more liberal and pro-Western forces had replaced the old actors that were representative of the early post-Soviet period.

It was at around the beginning of the 2010s when national geopolitical direction became an increasingly important issue in the AA countries. Some authors speak of this period as one in which the national politics in the AA countries became geopoliticised, as the debate regarding the countries' geopolitical leanings became a central issue in the political debate (Cadier, 2019; Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018). In this sense, the EU establishing the Eastern Partnership (EaP) by 2009 was perceived by Russia as a potential new plan to extend the EU to the East after its recent expansions in 2004 and 2007 (Cadier, 2019). In establishing the EaP, which includes six post-Soviet countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine), the EU intended to increase its economic and political influence on its Eastern borders. Soon after the EaP was instituted, in 2010, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan established the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU), which did not include any of the AA countries as members (Zahorka and Sargsyan, 2014).

Both the EaP and possible EACU membership became relevant topics in the AA countries' political debate during the early 2010s, with pro-Russian actors criticising their countries' EaP membership and pushing for membership of the EACU. However, the mid-2010s was when this debate took on heightened importance. This is when Georgia,

Moldova, and Ukraine were the first countries in the EaP to fulfil the requirements that allowed them to sign more comprehensive AAs with the EU. Russia, for its part, continued to lead the process of integration of post-Soviet countries, progressively including them in the EACU. In this sense, the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Space in 2012 was a first step towards creating a Russian-led organisation that resembled the EU more closely, albeit it not being until the formal establishment of the EAEU in 2015 when two more or less comparable organisations started competing for influence over the AA countries (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018; Nizhnikau, 2016). Apart from this soft power strategy, Russia also deployed mechanisms of hard power to try to control its neighbouring countries. Some examples of the use of hard power are the Russo-Georgian war or, more recently, the ongoing conflict with Ukraine, which began, precisely, with the protests that followed the refusal of the Ukrainian government to sign the Association Agreement in November of 2013 (Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 2018).

This dissertation focuses on the 2012-2019 period, a timeframe in which the EAEU (or its predecessors) and the EU were perceived in the AA countries as competing geopolitical alternatives that the three countries could potentially join in the future. On the one hand, even if the requirements to obtain EU membership make it almost impossible for the AA countries to join the bloc in the near future (Iațco and Putina, 2020; Litra and Chkhikvadze, 2016), it is undeniable that EU membership is a goal for a good portion of the AA countries' societies and elites. On the other hand, joining the EAEU would require fewer economic and political reforms than those demanded by the EU (Dragneva, Delcour, and Jonavicius 2017; Libman and Obydenkova, 2018), but the percentage of citizens supporting this path is noticeably lower than those supporting EU membership in Georgia and Ukraine, and is on par with support for EU membership in Moldova. Apart from these alternatives, some results of this thesis show that notable percentages of the population of the AA countries support ambivalent geopolitical options, i.e. ones other than joining the EU and the EAEU (see article 4).

Main theories explaining individual geopolitical preferences

Shortly after the foundation of the EU, scholars started paying attention to citizens' attitudes towards these kinds of novel organisations. Within this broad field of attitudes

towards the EU, this dissertation focuses on the public's attitudes towards the EU in non-member countries that aspire to becoming members. This is what is commonly known as attitudes towards EU membership. The successive expansions of the EU over the decades since its foundation has led the literature on attitudes towards EU membership to be one of the most thoroughly researched and established subfields within European Politics. Many different approaches for understanding individual support or opposition to the EU have been developed over the decades. These theoretical explanations are very diverse and range from, for example, the utilitarian approach, which argues that individuals support or oppose the EU depending on whether they consider that membership will directly benefit them, to a very different explanation, the cue-taking heuristic, which assumes that the EU is a very complex organisation and, as such, individuals need to rely on third parties to develop an opinion on future membership to it (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016). In this thesis, I build on several of the theoretical approaches that have been employed in order to understand support for EU membership in general, as well as from some approaches that are specific to the post-Communist/post-Soviet context. Furthermore, I explore not only support for the EU, but also consider support for the EAEU, as this international organisation is the natural competitor of the EU in the AA countries. The theoretical approaches used in this thesis are briefly discussed in this section; however, more extended theoretical reviews of each of the approaches are available in the theoretical framework section of the articles that comprise the dissertation.

The four articles that make up this thesis should be understood as an extensive review and test of theories on support for international organisations in an area in which there are two more or less viable alternatives for the citizens to choose from. In this sense, a thesis divided into four articles, with a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches, allows me to test several very diverse factors that have already been proven to influence support for international organisations in member (or soon to be member) states. Overall, this dissertation aims to provide two main contributions: (1) to expand the current knowledge in the literature on support for international organisations by focusing on an area where the EU and the EAEU compete for influence, and (2) to identify determinants of individual geopolitical preferences across the three AA countries.

Firstly, since the establishment of the EU, the literature has proposed many different and complementary explanations for the determinants of support for international organisations. Most of these determinants have been studied in Western Europe and, consequently, focus exclusively on support for EU membership. Moreover, previous works have focused primarily on determinants of support for a single international organisation (mainly the EU) rather than on environments in which two different international organisations are seen as potential blocs that can be joined (Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018). Consequently, the second goal of this dissertation is to expand the knowledge on how citizens determine their geopolitical preferences in an area (i.e. the AA countries) where both the EU and the EAEU can be perceived as potential partners. Even if, as it has previously been mentioned, the possibility of joining these international organisations, especially the EU, is remote (Dragneva, Delcour, and Jonavicius 2017), understanding individual preferences for one international organisation or the other is an important question. It is even more crucial if we consider that geopolitical preferences in post-Soviet Europe tend to be important cleavages in the area's national political and social arenas (Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018). Consequently, the dissertation complements both the International Relations and Political Geography literature by focusing on how the citizens of the AA countries decide which of the available geopolitical orientations is better for themselves personally and for their countries. Firstly, the thesis builds on elements of the theoretical approaches that, mostly from the International Relations field, have extensively studied the public's foreign policy preferences and the influence of the national and international actors over them, both in other contexts (e.g. Baum and Potter, 2008; Guisinguer and Saunders, 2017) and in the AA countries (e.g. Siroky, Simmons, and Gvalia, 2017). Secondly, this dissertation also relies on the extensive contextual and practical knowledge related to the geopolitical orientation of the citizens of the AA countries developed in Political Geography works (e.g. Gentile, 2015; O'Loughlin and Toal, 2020; O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov, 2017). Combining the knowledge and methodologies of these two fields is a strategy that allows me to benefit from the advantages of both areas, something that is paramount when studying a topic as complex as individual geopolitical preferences. This is because geopolitical preferences can be influenced by the interplay of different (historical, ethnolinguistic, geographical, geopolitical, etc.) phenomena, all of which affect decisions

on whether to support EU/EAEU membership or hold more ambivalent positions in a contested region that is within the areas of influence of two international organisations, which is the case of the AA countries.

The second contribution of the thesis stems from the idea that the public in each of the AA countries faces similar challenges regarding their geopolitical orientations and, therefore, this work aspires to study phenomena that are common and relevant determinants of individual geopolitical preferences in the area. In essence, I aim to uncover mechanisms that can potentially be at play across the different AA countries. For example, the first article, although it only uses data for Moldova, focuses on the relationship between partisanship, institutional trust, and geopolitical preferences. Its results suggest an approach for understanding how the relationship between partisanship and institutional trust changes over time in an environment in which the party system is polarised regarding geopolitical orientations; this could lead to a better understanding of how national and international politics interact in the AA countries. Similarly, article two focuses on another important and common phenomenon that affects the three AA countries: the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences. Using Georgia as a case study, the idea of this article is to start determining some of the sources of the ethnic gap there; this could be useful in the other AA countries, since an ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences has been identified in all three. Furthermore, the third article studies another common characteristic of the AA countries: their shared Soviet past. The study of the influence of past links with the CPSU and current individual geopolitical preferences allows us to understand the influence of past and current phenomena in societies that share a common past. Nevertheless, the best example of the idea of this thesis being a thorough study of individual geopolitical preferences and determinants that are common to the three AA countries in this thesis is the fourth article, in which I use data from the three countries to test three different theoretical explanations for individual geopolitical preferences. The fourth article compares and contrasts Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in terms of the factors that influence individual geopolitical preferences in each country. Now I have presented the overall logic behind each of the articles that compose the dissertation, in the next few paragraphs I link the topic of the four articles with the previous works that

have tried to identify some of the most prominent determinants that influence individual geopolitical preferences.

The first article in this thesis builds on the *party cues and institutional performance* approaches for explaining support for international organisations. These two theoretical frameworks share a common point of departure: that international organisations are complex institutions and that citizens deciding whether their country should join one or not tend to rely on third parties to make this decision (Anderson, 1998; Hellström, 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Pannico 2017). In the case of institutional performance, previous works in other European regions have found that citizens tend to follow the geopolitical orientations of the actors that control the institutions that they trust (i.e. if a citizen trusts a national organisation, they will tend to agree with the geopolitical preferences of the people running it) (Anderson, 1998; Harteveld, Meer, and De Vries, 2013; Müller, 2011). The party cues approach is part of the broader cue-taking heuristic, which defends that all but the most informed citizens usually rely on cues from political and social actors to decide their geopolitical preferences (Baum and Potter, 2008; Hobolt, 2007; Pannico, 2017; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2020). In this sense, political parties have repeatedly been shown to be some of the most prominent cue-givers, which is why the first article in the dissertation focuses primarily on them.

The second article in the thesis revolves around the factors that influence the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences between ethnic minorities and the titular nationalities of the AA countries. The existence of this gap has been documented thoroughly in the AA countries, showing that ethnic minorities tend to be less in favour of joining the EU and more supportive of joining the EAEU than members of the titular nationality (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Ehin, 2001; Gentile, 2015; Müller, 2011, White, McAllister, and Feklyunina, 2010). The literature has taken an interest in the existence of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences, and has proposed several different explanations for this gap; the second article focuses on two of the suggested sources of this gap: *social factors* and *differences in ideology, values, and information*. On the one hand, the social factors approach posits that the linguistic differences that exist between members of ethnic minorities and members of the titular nationalities are the source of most of the social, political, and geopolitical differences between these groups (Kakhishvili, 2020;

Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). On the other hand, the alternative approach argues that there are differences in ideology, values, and information between the ethnic minorities and the titular nationalities, which generate differences in both political and geopolitical preferences (Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014).

Another of the main theoretical frameworks that have been suggested to explain current social and political attitudes in the post-Soviet world is that of the *historical legacies of Communism*. This theoretical approach, whose influence over individual geopolitical preferences is tested in the third article in this dissertation, argues that there are current social and political attitudes in the post-Communist countries that can be traced back to certain institutions and practices from the communist period (Libman and Obydenkova, 2021). In this third article, co-authored with Michael Gentile, we focus on the historical legacies left by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). This branch of the literature has proven that personal links with the CPSU still influence attitudes such as political involvement (Letki, 2004), entrepreneurship (Ivlevs, Nikolova and Popova, 2020), or likelihood of bribing a public official (Ivlevs and Hinks, 2018). In spite of the multiple processes in which having links to the CPSU has been proven to be relevant, very few works have focused on the role exercised by past personal or parental membership of the CPSU over geopolitical preferences. Consequently, the third article in the dissertation develops and tests several competing hypotheses regarding the possible influences that links with the CPSU might have over geopolitical preferences in post-Soviet Europe.

Lastly, the fourth article that makes up the thesis serves to test several theoretical approaches (*the winners and losers theory*, *liberal/authoritarian values*, *future migration preferences*, and *political engagement*) to understand individual geopolitical preferences beyond the EU/EAEU dichotomy. The study relies on a recently proposed categorisation that divides geopolitical preferences into four groups (Buzogány, 2019). This categorisation includes two ambivalent positions: *Balancers* (citizens that give support to their country becoming both a member of the EU and of the EAEU) and *Isolationists* (respondents that oppose their country becoming a member of either the EU or the EAEU). Using this new categorisation allows me to revisit one of the most popular theoretical approaches for understanding support for the EU: the winners and losers

theory. The winners and losers theory posits that there are citizens that manage to adapt better to a particular society (winners) while there are others (losers) who fail to adapt and, subsequently, do not benefit from some of the advantages that the society can offer them (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky 2002; Kriesi et al. 2008). The winners and losers theory has been tested in connection to geopolitical preferences in the post-Soviet world, and the results of several works show that winners tend to be more supportive of EU membership, while losers prefer their country to maintain close ties with Russia and the EAEU (Ehin, 2001; Gentile, 2015; Reznik and Reznik, 2017; Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019). Regarding authoritarian/liberal values, previous works have suggested that citizens that hold more authoritarian values tend to oppose EU membership, and favour maintaining and expanding ties with Russia and the EAEU (Müller, 2011; Reznik and Reznik, 2017). Lastly, when focusing on future migration preferences, the article builds on the previous work of Berlinschi (2019), which proves that migration has an influence over individual geopolitical preferences, showing that having lived in the West is positively linked with support for joining the EU. Finally, the article also relies on theoretical works that have proposed political engagement as one of the determinants of geopolitical preferences. Previous research shows that political engagement certainly plays a role, at least in terms of support for the EU, as more engaged individuals, due to having more interest in and being better informed about national and international politics, tend to be more open to the idea of joining an international organisation (Nelsen and Guth, 2000; Slomczynski and Shabad, 2003).

Overall, the variables studied in the four articles can be understood as parts of two sets of variables that can be compared between the three AA countries: a first group that covers *sociodemographic characteristics* and that derives mainly from the winners and losers theory, and a second group that focuses on determinants that are related to *national politics*. The motivation behind including sociodemographic characteristics (ethnicity and language proficiency, education level, perceived economic situation, etc.) is because this set of determinants is probably the most thoroughly researched group in connection to geopolitical preferences in post-Soviet Europe, since factors in this group have been studied in relation to geopolitical preferences for decades, especially after the development of the winners and losers theory (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky, 2002). In

this sense, early works about the AA countries studied the role of the transition towards the capitalist system, which was a period that generated societal differences in the countries that had become newly independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Brainerd, 1998; Kubicek, 2000). These differences contributed to create a group of successful citizens that were able to adapt to the new system and thus benefit from the possibilities that it offered (the winners) and another group that failed to do so (the losers) (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky, 2002). In their seminal work, Tucker et al. (2002) showed that being a winner was positively correlated with support for EU membership in post-Communist countries; several other works have confirmed this trend (Gentile, 2015; Reznik and Reznik, 2017; Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019).

The inclusion of factors belonging to the national politics group responds to the idea that the national politics of the AA countries and geopolitical preferences in the area are linked. Consequently, this thesis needed to study factors such as institutional trust, political engagement, preferred type of government, and links to political parties (both currently active parties or, during the Soviet period, the CPSU). Focusing on this second group of potential determinants of individual geopolitical preferences allows me to test some theories that have been proven mostly in Western Europe or even in the AA countries, but that only consider individual support for EU membership (e.g. Müller, 2011). All in all, the combination of the two groups of determinants that measure phenomena that are common to the AA countries is expected to allow the thesis to carry out an in-depth analysis of the potential factors that can influence individual geopolitical preferences in the area. This combination should help to understand how new factors, as well as factors that have been proven to increase support for international organisations outside the AA countries might predict individual geopolitical preferences in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Structure of the dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation is made up of four research articles and a concluding chapter.

The first article tackles the relationship between national proxies and individual geopolitical preferences. Variables related to institutional trust and party cues are used to test to what extent national politics and individual politics are related. Furthermore, the fact that different Moldovan institutions have been controlled by actors with different foreign policy orientations makes it possible to test if the relationship between national politics and individual geopolitical preferences varies depending on who controls the national institutions. The article uses survey data from Moldova (2012-2019) and multilevel logistic regressions to test its different hypotheses.

The second article focuses on what has repeatedly been identified as one of the strongest predictors of individual geopolitical preferences in the AA countries: ethnicity. Specifically, the article tests the existence and possible sources of an ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in Georgia. It examines the influence of linguistic and ideological variables on this gap, expanding the current knowledge of the diverse origins of the differences in geopolitical preferences between titular nationalities and members of minorities in post-Soviet Europe. The analyses in this article rely on survey data from Georgia (2015-2019) and logistic regressions.

The third article, co-authored with Michael Gentile, revolves around the influence of historical legacies over individual geopolitical preferences in Ukraine. In this sense, the article focuses on the relationship between personal (individual and parental) links with the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and current pro-Western geopolitical preferences in Central-Eastern Ukraine. To test its hypotheses, the article relies on data from the cities of Dnipro and Kharkiv (2018) and Mariupol (2020) and uses logistic regressions.

The fourth article tests the influence on individual geopolitical preferences of being a winner/loser, and of political engagement, future migration preferences, and values. In addition, the article uses a recently developed four-category classification of geopolitical preferences that includes those who support joining only the EU (Westernizers), joining only the EAEU (Easternizers), joining both organisations (Balancers), and joining neither (Isolationists). It uses data from Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (2015-2019) and

multinomial logistic regression to test how variables related to different theoretical approaches affect individual geopolitical preferences across the AA countries.

Finally, the conclusions chapter summarises the main findings of the dissertation and discuss their relevance for the future study of individual geopolitical preferences in the AA countries in particular, and the post-Soviet area in general.

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ARTICLE 1: Institutional performance and party cues: their influence on individual geopolitical preferences. The case of Moldova (2012-2019)[1].

Introduction

Since the integration of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and Croatia in 2013, the EU has not expanded its frontiers further into the former Eastern bloc. The lack of new members does not mean, however, that the supranational organization has lost its interest in this region. With the signing of the Eastern Partnership (EaP[2]) initiative in 2009, the EU approached several of its Eastern neighbors in an attempt to improve cooperation with them. Among the countries included in the EaP, three have appeared most interested in the possibilities that the new agreement could offer: Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. In the last decade, these three countries have shown a renewed interest in the EU, an interest Russia has tried to quell by deploying both soft and hard power mechanisms. One of these mechanisms has been the development of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), an international organization inspired by and aiming to counterbalance the influence of the

1 This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor and Francis in *Problems of Post-Communism* on 27/08/2021.
Citation: Torres-Adán, Á. (2021). Institutional performance and party cues: their influence on individual geopolitical preferences. The case of Moldova (2012-2019). *Problems of Post-Communism*. DOI: 10.1080/10758216.2021.1963779.

2 The Eastern Partnership agreement comprises six countries in the post-Soviet region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine).

EU in the post-Soviet sphere (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018; Nizhnikau, 2016; Obydenkova and Libman, 2019).

Although ample research has examined the determinants of individual preferences for joining an international organization in both Western and Eastern Europe, much less work has been done in environments in which two international organizations compete. In order to broaden the knowledge in this area, this paper uses Moldova, the most divided country regarding geopolitical preferences in the EaP, as its case study. This article focuses on the importance of understanding the relationship between national proxies (particularly institutional trust and party cues) and support for competing international organizations in Moldova. Understanding these dynamics in countries that are included in the EaP could fill the existing gap between studies on support for international organizations and research focused on understanding relations between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in the post-Soviet context. In this sense, the importance that the Moldovan parties give to their foreign policy preferences makes the study of the relationship between national politics and individual geopolitical preferences[3] even more important (Association for Participatory Democracy, 2006-2019; Chryssogelos, 2017; Danero Iglesias, 2015). Moreover, when this parties control different institutions of the country, they tend to use these institutions to promote their foreign policy preferences, which suggests that institutional trust could also play a role in determining the individual geopolitical preferences of some Moldovans. Considering the complexity of the Moldovan political landscape, this article tests if assumptions derived from the literature on support for the EU work in new contexts. It also empirically tests several of the common claims of international relations researchers studying the effects of the relations between the EU and EAEU on the national politics of the EaP countries.

This study follows the literature on institutional performance and cue-taking approaches to understand support for international organizations. On the one hand, the institutional performance approach defends that individuals use their evaluations of their country's

3 Geopolitical preferences are often understood as a branch of foreign policy preferences that refers particularly to the (for this paper, individual) preferences regarding the issue of which foreign entity (i.e., geopolitical bloc, international organization, or another individual country) should a country be closer to (Berlinschi, 2019; Minakov, 2019). Across this paper, I use the terms geopolitical preferences and foreign policy preferences interchangeably.

institutions to decide whether they should support an international organization or not (Anderson, 1998; Harteveld et al., 2013; Müller, 2011). The cue-taking approach, on the other hand, argues that citizens often rely on cues (mainly from their preferred political party or media outlet) to decide whether they favor or oppose their country joining an international organization (Baum and Potter, 2008; Hobolt, 2007; Pannico, 2017; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2020). Both perspectives are based on the same premise that the evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of joining international organizations is often a complex issue that requires the use of proxies for at least those voters who are less informed about said issue (Anderson, 1998; Hellström, 2008; Hobolt, 2007; Pannico, 2017).

How do factors related to the institutional performance and cue-taking approaches influence public support for EU and EAEU membership? I argue that, in Moldova, factors related to these two approaches could be highly important in determining individual geopolitical preferences. This is because, as I have previously mentioned, the complexity of the decision on whether to join the EU and the EAEU would require at least some citizens to rely on national proxies to determine which is the best option. In a polarized environment such as Moldova, where the EU and the EAEU compete to exert their influence, using national proxies could intuitively not seem a very important mechanism as many citizens could already have clear geopolitical preferences that are difficult to change. However, the fact that levels of support for either geopolitical option change over time might indicate that variables belonging to the institutional performance and cue-taking approaches (together with ethnolinguistic, socioeconomic, and contextual factors) may influence preferences for the EAEU or the EU. In this sense, the results of this paper seem to confirm this idea, as the analysis shows that, regarding institutional performance, Moldovan citizens tend to align with the geopolitical preferences of those actors controlling the institutions that they trust. Similarly, when focusing on party cues, the results indicate that Moldovans tend to support the geopolitical preferences of their preferred political party.

I build on research exploring attitudes towards EU membership (and, less commonly, EAEU membership) in non-member countries, with the aim of testing the validity of the institutional performance and cue-taking approaches to understand geopolitical

preferences in new contexts (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Gentile, 2015; Kentmen, 2008; Müller, 2011; Spina, 2018; Taydas and Kentmen-Cin, 2017). Specifically, I test the impact of trust in national institutions, and party preferences on attitudes toward EU and EAEU membership in Moldova while controlling for key sociodemographic, ethnolinguistic, political engagement and trust in information sources factors. I use quantitative analysis based on multilevel logistic regressions of biannual survey data from Moldova (15 surveys fielded between 2012-2019) to test my expectation for this period. This allows for a better understanding of the main trends in the determinants of geopolitical preferences in Moldova since the EAEU was founded.

Results of the multilevel logistic regressions of pooled survey data and the individual logistic regressions performed on each individual survey show that institutional trust and party cues strongly correlate with individual geopolitical preferences. Firstly, the institutional trust index, the variable related to the institutional performance approach, shows a positive relationship with support for EU and negative for the EAEU. This is true until Igor Dodon became president in 2016, when the trend is reversed. The shift in the direction of the relationship is one of the main findings of this paper and suggests that the change of the method for electing a president (direct elections since 2016) has had an impact of the overall relationship between institutional trust and geopolitical preferences. Secondly, support for a pro-EU or pro-EAEU political party, the variable used to measure party cues, also works as expected, with voters of pro-EU parties being more supportive of joining the EU and voters of pro-EAEU parties being more likely to support EAEU membership.

The EU/EAEU competition influence in Moldovan politics

The competition between the EU and the EAEU in Moldova

International organizations have played a notable role as actors in the global scene since the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. Unlike those in some other regions of the world, the post-Soviet countries (and more specifically Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) are located in the intersection of two geopolitical blocs: the EU and the EAEU (Nizhnikau, 2016; Nitoiu, 2016; Nodia et al., 2017).

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the EU has expanded its Eastern borders. Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 and Croatia in 2013 were the last three former socialist countries to join the EU. However, the lack of new members in recent years does not represent a decline of the EU's interest in this area. The establishment of the EaP first, and subsequently of the Association Agreements (AA) as collaboration tools between the EU and some of the former Soviet Republics reflects this ongoing interest. Moreover, these agreements (primarily aimed to promote democratic values, economic, and political collaboration) are perceived as a vague promise[4] of future integration for these countries (Nizhnikau, 2016; Nodia et al., 2017). For some Moldovan citizens this agreement has, perhaps due to pro-EU elites and political parties' interests, generated unrealistic expectations regarding accession (Całus and Kosienkowski, 2018).

However, becoming a member of the EU is a demanding and complicated process for candidate countries. Those countries willing to join the EU have to undertake serious reforms complying with the current EU legislation in a wide array of fields, ranging from institutional reforms to climate change (Iatco and Putina, 2020; Litra and Chkhikvadze, 2016). Perhaps the most complicated issues to comply with are those related to economic and institutional reforms, which the post-Soviet countries are implementing at a somewhat erratic and inconsistent rate (Iatco and Putina, 2020, Litra and Chkhikvadze, 2016). To further complicate things, post-Soviet countries face an even more difficult process of accession than those of similar (economically, politically, etc.) countries in the Balkans. This is so as the barriers to be even considered as a candidate nowadays are stricter that those in place during the early 2000s (Litra and Chkhikvadze, 2016). Nonetheless, a part of the population (usually those who are younger, more educated, and wealthier) of countries willing to engage in the accession process often perceive that the benefits offered by the EU (full access to the common market, economic investment, etc.) outweigh the difficulties of said process (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Gentile, 2015; Müller, 2011).

4 The term "perceived as a vague promise" refers to the fact that the Association Agreements are not intended by the EU as an accession mechanism for the post-Soviet countries, which has been criticized by some authors as one of its main flaws regarding securing a more stable support towards the EU and its objectives and values in non-member countries (Börzel and Schimmelfennig, 2017).

The successive expansions of the EU into the former Eastern bloc have always been a point of contention with Russia (Nizhnikau, 2016, Nodia et al. 2017). One of Russia's strategies to counterbalance the growing influence of the EU in its former sphere of influence has been the establishment of different multilateral regional organizations that include former members of the Soviet Union (Vinokurov, 2017). The most developed one is the EAEU, a Russian-led alternative offering, in theory, a similarly beneficial alternative to the EU for the post-Soviet states to join. Libman and Obydenkova (2018) have also pointed to Russia selectively supporting neighboring authoritarian regimes in the area as a tool to prevent undesired Western-oriented advances among its near abroad. This mechanism would diminish the possibilities of these countries developing further ties with the EU, a situation that would eventually force them to see the EAEU as their only geopolitical choice (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018; Obydenkova and Libman, 2019).

Overall, the EAEU membership requirements are noticeably less strict than those proposed by the EU, which, theoretically, should make Moldova's EAEU accession easier to achieve than EU membership (Dragneva et al., 2017; Libman and Obydenkova, 2018; Obydenkova and Libman, 2019). It has often been argued that the EAEU, in essence, offers some economic and political benefits to its members in exchange for following the Russian guidance on foreign affairs (Dragneva et al., 2017). These benefits range from access to the common Eurasian market to the right to legally work in Russia (Knobel et al., 2019). Such benefits appeal to a certain part of the Moldovan population, especially to those that (thanks to the historical legacies, family ties, language, etc.) feel more attached to the former Soviet Union (Obydenkova and Libman, 2019).

As it has been pointed out, both the EU and the EAEU require Moldova to comply with a series of distinct requisites to benefit from their advantages. The debate on whether to join one organization or the other, since they are often understood as incompatible[5]

5 The fact that previous research shows that joining both the EU and the EAEU is, at least nowadays, extremely unlikely does not prevent a part of the Moldovan population from supporting joining these organizations. According to previous research, around 12% of Moldovans supported joining both the EU and the EAEU during the 2015-2019 period (Torres-Adán, 2021). This group, due to its ambivalent position, could be one of the sectors of the Moldovan society whose geopolitical preferences are more affected by national proxies.

(Cadier, 2019; Dragneva et al., 2017), is rooted in expectations of the benefits that joining either organization would have for Moldova. However, the perceptions of said benefits are heavily dependent on a series of individual and collective factors in which, I argue, institutional trust and cues could play a role.

The Moldovan party system and its polarization regarding geopolitical preferences

Moldovan national politics have been, since its independence, characterized by a high degree of issue-based polarization of its society and elites regarding the geopolitical orientation that the country should follow. The first half of the nineties was marked by a period of post-independence ethnolinguistic confrontations that led to the rise to power of the Popular Front, which favored the pan-Romanian ideals of unification between Moldova and Romania (Crowther, 1998; King 2013; March, 2006). These ethnolinguistic conflicts reached their peak with the Transnistrian War, which led to the creation of the *de facto* state of Transnistria and the subsequent frozen conflict that continues until today (Rogstad, 2018). In contrast, during the second part of the decade, the ethnolinguistic confrontation, and the hopes for unification with Romania decreased, this allowed the rise to power of the Agrarian Democratic Party, which intended a more balanced foreign policy (Crowther, 1998; Gorton and White, 2003; King, 2013). However, since the start of the 21st century, the Agrarian Democratic Party lost the power to the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (CPRM), and the ethnolinguistic and values-related confrontation between supporters of the European capitalist path and defenders of the socialist past regained importance **(**Całus and Kosienkowski, 2018). However, it would not be until the 2010s, when the CPRM abandoned its pro-EU path and became explicitly pro-EAEU when a clear division among the political parties regarding geopolitical preferences entered Moldovan national politics (Całus and Kosienkowski, 2018). The division regarding geopolitical preferences that, to a certain degree, affects the societies of all the countries that were part of the Soviet Union, is higher in Moldova than in any of the AA countries to which it is often compared (see Table 1) (Buzogány, 2019; Reznik and Reznik, 2017; Torres-Adán, 2021). Therefore, this fragmented environment provides the chance to test if variables related to national proxies work in this type of environment as they have been shown to do in Western European societies (Clarke et al., 2017; Hobolt,

2016). In this sense, this section serves as a summary of some of the main trends and events that have characterized Moldovan politics since the turn of the century.

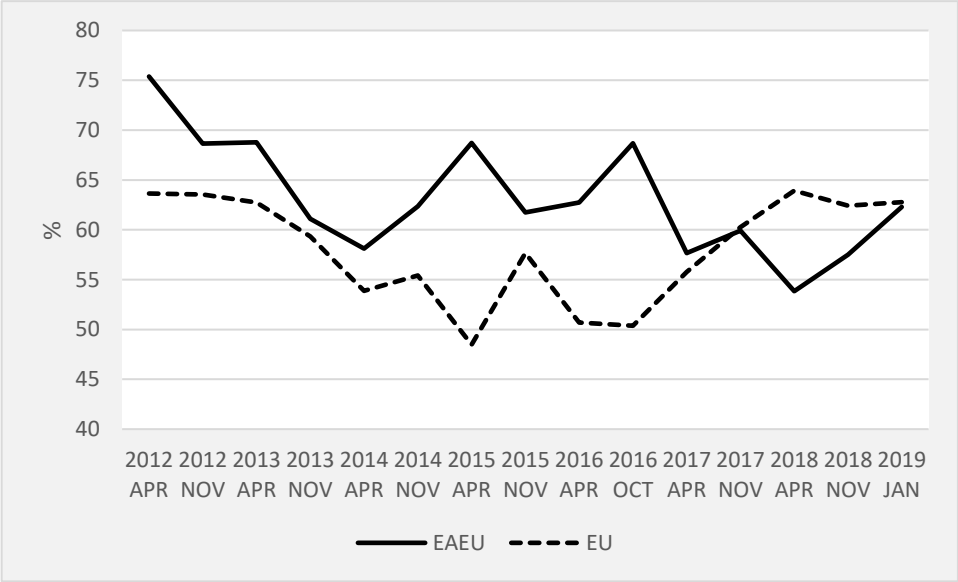
Table 1: Percentage of the population that would vote "yes" in a referendum for their country to become a member of the EU and the EAEU.

	Georgia	**Moldova**	**Ukraine**
Would vote "yes" to become a member of the **EU**	71%	47%	51%
Would vote "yes" to become a member of the **EAEU**	31%	45%	23%

Sources: **Georgia** The Caucasus Research Resource Centers (2017) "Knowledge and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia", **Moldova** Institute for Public Policy (2019) "Barometer of Public Opinion", and **Ukraine** Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (2019) "Geopolitical orientations of the residents of Ukraine".

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Moldova has experienced different phases regarding its government's attitude towards Russia and the EU. The country started the century with the pro-Russian CPRM in power. However, the strong cooperation between Russia and Moldova under CPRM rule degraded after some disagreements over the Transnistrian issue. Particularly after the failure of the Kozak memorandum (Rogstad, 2018). This Russian plan, presented in 2003 and intended to resolve the Transnistrian issue by transforming Moldova into a Federal State that would have effectively given Transnistria veto powers over some decisions of the Moldovan authorities (especially those regarding foreign policy), was deemed an unfair deal by the CPRM leaders and paved the way for the Moldovan government to look for a previously unthinkable approach to the EU (Quinlan, 2008; Rogstad, 2018). This marked the starting point of the EU accession as a geopolitical option gaining popular support among Moldovans.

Figure 1: Percentage of support for EU and EAEU membership in Moldova. Would answer "Yes" in an accession referendum.



Source: Institute for Public Policy (2012-2019) "Barometer of Public Opinion"

CPRM's rule lasted until 2009, when, after a series of protests and accusations of electoral fraud, an openly pro-EU coalition managed to secure a parliamentary majority and, thus, form a government. This and other subsequent pro-EU coalitions would manage to stay in power for most of the period until 2019. One of the priorities of the pro-EU coalitions in government was, logically, to strengthen ties with the EU (Chryssogelos, 2017). Consequently, the newly elected government facilitated the collaboration between Moldova and the EU, including the signature of the Association Agreement in 2014 (Cadier, 2019). The AA agreement allowed for increased collaboration between Moldova and the EU through extended benefits the former in exchange for political and economic reforms (Cadier, 2019; Nodia et al., 2017).

However, soon after the AA signature accomplishment, the pro-EU parties faced one of the biggest crises in post-Soviet Moldova: the "Theft of the Century." This financial scandal, discovered days before the 2014 November parliamentary elections, consisted of the extraction of funds disguised as loans that were never intended to be paid from three of the most important banks of Moldova (Avram, 2017). The massive financial scheme (around one billion US dollars) involved some of the most prominent members

of the pro-EU parties. It led to widespread protests that eroded the popularity of those parties and overall support for EU membership up until 2017 when support for the EU started to rise again (see Figure 1). In spite of these problems, a self-proclaimed pro-EU party (the Democratic Party[6]) managed to stay in power thanks to the votes of the Liberal Democratic Party and the CPRM deputies (Bolkvadze, 2019).

The decline in support for EU membership after the financial scandal favored two developments in Moldovan politics: the EAEU rising as the preferred geopolitical option for most Moldovan citizens and the rising of the Socialist Party as the biggest pro-Russian party. One of the consequences was the election of Igor Dodon, of the Socialist Party, as President of the Republic in 2016. Dodon made the rapprochement with Russia and the EAEU one of his priorities, a goal that would cause several conflicts with the pro-EU government. This election would, in essence, represent a change in the Moldovan balance of power between the pro-EU and pro-EAEU party blocs after seven years of mostly pro-EU governments and presidents.

National politics and geopolitical preferences

Approaches to understanding geopolitical preferences

When trying to understand the main factors that influence geopolitical preferences, the literature has developed four main approaches: utilitarian, identity, cue-taking and institutional performance (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016; Loveless and Rohrschneider, 2008). The utilitarian approach defends individuals deciding their geopolitical preferences based on their expected personal gains or losses derived from the accession to an international organization. The identity approach, on the other hand, focuses on the influence of ethnic or national identity on geopolitical preferences. Finally, the institutional performance and cue-taking approaches assert that individual geopolitical preferences are determined by the use of proxies, which are understood as information shortcuts that allow citizens to form opinions on complex issues (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016; Loveless and Rohrschneider, 2008). The institutional performance approach

6 The Democratic Party's (PDM) official position was clearly pro-EU during the studied period; however, its behaviour was somewhat ambiguous as it sometimes sided with the pro-EAEU parties. Consequently, as a robustness check, the main models of this paper were rest-estimated omitting the PDM. The results were not altered.

defends that some citizens use their evaluations of national institutions in order to decide if they support or oppose joining an international organization, with citizens that support national institutions more willing to support joining an international organization that is promoted by that institution (Anderson, 1998; Harteveld et al., 2013; Müller, 2011). The cue-taking approach argues that some citizens tend to rely on cues from different actors that they trust and that these cues are used as substitutes for more detailed knowledge regarding complex issues (Baum and Potter, 2008; Hobolt, 2007; Pannico, 2017; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2020). Therefore, both approaches arise from the same argument that the EU (and, I argue, the EAEU) are complex organizations that are difficult for most individuals to understand. This complexity pushes some citizens to rely on proxies (be they related to the performance of national institutions or cues) to define their views on these international organizations (Anderson, 1998; Hellström, 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Pannico, 2017). Studies on post-Soviet Europe have found that some of the most influential factors in geopolitical preferences in this area belong to the utilitarian and identity approaches (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Müller, 2011). However, works studying the influence of cue-taking and institutional performance approaches in the region are scarce, and their role remains largely untested in Moldova and its surroundings.

Institutional performance and geopolitical preferences

Difficulties in properly understanding the implications of joining an international organization can lead individuals to rely on proxies to decide whether membership in said organizations would be good or bad for themselves. This approach asserts that one way of citizens to determine their geopolitical preferences are evaluations of the performance of their own country's institutions (Anderson, 1998; Obydenkova and Arpino, 2018).

One of the main views of the institutional performance approach was developed by Anderson (1998) and attests that, if individuals consider that their national institutions are performing well and, thus, trust them, they should support EU membership. In fact, there is evidence that, in countries where EU membership is one of the main goals of the government and national institutions, citizens who show approval for said institutions are more likely to be supportive of their geopolitical goals (Anderson, 1998; Harteveld et al., 2013; Müller, 2011). In countries such as Moldova, where two international organizations compete, I expect that individual perceptions related to institutional performance will

depend on which political bloc has more influence in a particular domestic institution, be it pro-EU or pro-EAEU.

Trust in national institutions is one of the main variables used by the institutional performance approach to measure citizens' approval of their country's current situation, and it has been consistently proven relevant on determining individual support for the EU (Anderson, 1998; Harteveld et al., 2013). Institutional trust has also been found to correlate positively with support for the EU in Post-Soviet countries such as Georgia, which is in a similar geopolitical situation to that of Moldova (Müller, 2011).

This paper considers trust in three of the main institutions of Moldova: the Parliament, the Government, and the President. All these variables are combined into an institutional trust index. This index has been previously shown to be positively correlated to support for EU accession in Georgia[7] (Müller, 2011). However, a limitation of using a trust index to study the dichotomy between the EU and the EAEU appears when two parties with different geopolitical orientations exert influence over different institutions, which has happened in Moldova in recent years. In particular between the 2016 presidential elections and January of 2019 (when the studied period ends), the government was ruled by a generally pro-EU coalition while the presidency was held by Dodon, who is openly pro-EAEU. To try to overcome the limitations of using the trust index in this complex environment, I conduct an extra analysis in the results section in which trust in Parliament, trust in Government, and trust in President appear as individual variables. This strategy should help identify different trends in trust in the three institutions when parties with different foreign policy preferences exert influence over institutions.

Overall, following the results of Müller's (2011) analysis of Georgia, I expect that institutional trust will influence geopolitical preferences in Moldova. Authors that have explored this relationship previously often defend that, since some citizens perceive international organizations as complex entities, they sometimes have to rely on proxies

7 In the case of Georgia, Müller (2011) uses an institutional index that includes trust in the army, banks, educational system, healthcare system, court system, NGOs, Parliament, and the Executive government. However, to focus only in the effect of institutions that hold the power to control the foreign policy of the country, this paper will focus exclusively on trust for the Parliament, the Government, and the President.

to decide their geopolitical orientation and, thus tend to align with the foreign policy orientations of those who control the national institutions that they trust (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016; Müller, 2011). In the case of Moldova, since two competing groups of parties with opposing geopolitical orientations can control the institutions, I expect that citizens will tend to support the geopolitical option that the party that rules most institutions defends (which in Moldova was mostly pro-EU until 2016). However, the fact that, since the election of Igor Dodon as President of Moldova in 2016, Moldova has seen parties with distinct foreign policy preferences in charge of different institutions (e.g., the government being held by a pro-EU party and the presidency by a pro-EAEU president) adds complexity to the argument. Consequently, I also consider in my hypotheses that, during periods in which different institutions are controlled by competing actors, those who trust a particular institution will be supportive of the foreign policy orientations of that institution's ruler.

Hypothesis 1a: During periods in which all national institutions are controlled by political parties with the same geopolitical orientations, citizens with higher trust in national institutions (i.e., people that scored higher in the institutional trust index) will be more likely to support the geopolitical option defended by such institutions.

Hypothesis 1b: During periods in which different institutions are controlled by geopolitically opposed political parties, citizens with higher levels of trust in a particular institution will be more likely to align with the foreign policy preferences defended by that institution.

Finally, it is important to note that Moldova, as many of the former communist countries in Europe, displays low levels of individual institutional trust (Boda and Medve-Bálint, 2020). In this sense, Boda and Medve-Bálint (2020) attribute low and volatile levels of trust in Eastern Europe to a heavy politization and polarization of trust. Regarding Moldova, Marandici (2021) also points to oligarchs as actors and their actions (e.g., the Theft of the Century) as contributors to the public's general distrust of the national institutions. Apart from these factors, the perceptions of the performance of the different institutions have also been proven to play a role in determining level of trust in Eastern European countries (Boda and Medve-Bálint, 2014).

The situation regarding the institutional index in Moldova (shown on Table 2), seems to coincide with the patterns identified by Boda and Medve-Bálint (2020) and Marandici (2021), which, in the context of Moldovan politics, seems to indicate that the same mechanisms that cause the low levels of institutional trust should also work as proposed in Moldova. Overall, Table 2 shows that the percentages are low through the period and for all the variables, although a sharp decrease appears in the months right after the Theft of the Century (first survey of 2015) and just until the election of Igor Dodon as president (first survey of 2017).

Table 2: Distribution of the institutional performance variables in each survey.

	Trust Index (MEAN)	**Trust Parliament (High trust+ somewhat trust) %**	**Trust Government (High trust+ somewhat trust) %**	**Trust President (High trust+ somewhat trust) %**
Apr 2012	.34	27.2	31.75	40.1
Nov 2012	.26	19.19	22.71	21.24
Apr 2013	.19	13.41	15.04	14.68
Nov 2013	.22	15.36	17.66	18.05
Apr 2014	.27	22.3	27.76	25.18
Nov 2014	.30	25.19	28.98	25.09
Apr 2015	.17	11.63	13.08	11.41
Nov 2015	.12	6.05	7.37	5.25
Apr 2016	.10	6.64	7.55	5.88
Oct 2016	.12	6.65	9.99	4.29
Apr 2017	.30	17.6	20.76	44.26
Nov 2017	.24	11.59	16.41	36.57
May 2018	.31	21.25	26.88	38.76
Nov 2018	.25	13.9	19.94	38.57
Jan 2019	.23	12.52	16.61	33.16

The influence of political parties on individual geopolitical preferences in the polarized party system of Moldova

The role that cues play on shaping public opinion's geopolitical preferences has been thoroughly studied both in Western and Eastern Europe. As I have previously mentioned, within this approach, political parties, together with the media[8], are often described as the most prominent cue-givers (Pannico, 2017). The importance of party cues has been proven especially relevant in environments where the positions of the political parties regarding certain issues (such as the geopolitical orientation that the country should follow) are clearly stated and thus, easily identified by most citizens (Ray, 2003). Furthermore, some works highlight that a division among the elites regarding a particular issue increases the effects of party cues in shaping individual positions towards that issue (Guisinguer and Saunders, 2017). Therefore, understanding the role of political parties in shaping the public's geopolitical preferences acquires relevance in polarized polities (such as Moldova) where a particular issue (i.e., geopolitical preferences) is heavily politicized. Hobolt (2007: 176) demonstrates that party cues serve "as reliable substitutes for more detailed knowledge" on a certain political issue. The cue-taking phenomenon is usually more relevant for those citizens who already sympathize with a political party. Voters who trust a particular party tend to assume that, as they tend to agree with most of the proposals made by that political party, its views about the EU are also probably in line with their individual interests (Baum and Potter, 2008; Hobolt, 2007; Pannico, 2017; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2020).

It is hard to determine whether parties influence individuals or, on the contrary, parties shape their discourses in line with their perception of changes in public opinion's attitudes towards certain topics. Several authors have argued that this is indeed a reciprocal relationship in which political parties influence and are influenced by their potential voters on topics such as geopolitical preferences (Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Ilonszki, 2009; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Other authors, by contrast, have argued that parties do not usually adopt their voters' views on the EU, because individuals do not usually hold

8 The role of the media as cue givers deserves attention by itself in the post-Soviet world, however, the lack of variables that individually measure media consumption in some of the used surveys has restrained me for performing a proper media cues analysis. Nonetheless, a most trusted source of information variable is included as a control in this paper's models.

sufficiently structured positions regarding geopolitical preferences (Marks and Wilson, 2000). Similarly, Pannico (2017) shows that, overall, the necessity of cues to determine personal views on an issue depends on the individual level of knowledge related to that issue. The most complex issues, such as the decision regarding which international organization might be better for a country's future, usually require all but the most informed citizens to take cues from their preferred political party. Another line of research often shows that individuals who display high levels of partisanship tend to follow their preferred parties' geopolitical options, regardless of individual attributes that would predict otherwise (Loveless and Rohrschneider, 2008). Furthermore, recent research shows that citizens can quickly change their opinions on important topics if their preferred party switches its position regarding that issue (Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2020). Overall, the debate revolving around the question of which side (public opinion or political parties) influences the other has generally concluded that party cues follow (at least partially) a top-down direction in complex topics such as geopolitical preferences and other foreign policy issues (Guisinguer and Saunders, 2017; Pannico, 2017).

Note that the Moldovan situation (similar to that of Ukraine and Georgia) is more complex than the one in Western Europe since individuals and political parties can choose between two international organizations instead of one. Similar to the EU, the EAEU should also be considered a complex institution that is difficult for most individuals to evaluate directly. Hence, the role party cues play in shaping views towards the EAEU should follow a similar mechanism to that for the EU. This mechanism has already been tested in Georgia, where voters of parties that defend either joining the EU or the EAEU share their preferred party's position on this topic (Buzogány, 2019). As mentioned previously, political parties of Moldova often state their positions on European/Eurasian integration in the first sentences of their manifestoes and treat this issue as one of the most relevant (if not the most) in the Moldovan political debate (Association for Participatory Democracy, 2006-2019; Chryssogelos, 2017; Danero Iglesias, 2015). Consequently, Moldova displays a highly divided party system where two opposite groups of parties (pro-EAEU and pro-EU) try to persuade citizens to support them and their geopolitical views.

Summarizing, the polarization regarding geopolitical preferences in Moldova should increase the importance of party cues because these have been shown to be more consequential when the position of the political parties regarding integration in an international organization is clearly discernible by the individuals (Ray, 2003). Even more so when the political parties are divided regarding which organization should Moldova join in the future (Guisinguer and Saunders, 2017). Hence, I hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: Citizens who support a political party that promotes closer ties with the EU will show more support for integration in this organization, while those who support parties that seek to strengthen Moldova's collaboration with Russia and the EAEU will show more support for this geopolitical option.

Data, variables, and Multilevel logistic regression

Sample

I use data from the Barometer of Public Opinion (BOP), a series of biannual surveys conducted by the Institute for Public Policies (IPP) in the Republic of Moldova. The series has been conducted since 2001 and offers one of the most relevant and consistent sources of public opinion surveys available in the EaP countries. For each of the biannual BOPs, the IPP selects a representative sample of the Moldovan population through stratified two-stage random sampling, with districts and size of localities as stratification criteria. However, the IPP notes that its surveys often display an underrepresentation of males and young people (18-29), which they attribute to the high number of young Moldovan males that migrate (IPP, 2020). For each survey, the average sample comprises 1,143 respondents. I use 15 surveys from May 2012 to January 2019, for which there is a consistent presence of the two variables of interest. The total number of respondents for the 15 selected surveys is 16,946.

Dependent and independent variables

Dependent variables: support for the EU and the EAEU

The dependent variables are support for Moldova's integration into the EU and support for Moldova's integration into the EAEU. These variables are operationalized using two different questions that ask respondents how they would vote in a hypothetical

referendum regarding Moldova's accession to the EU and the EAEU[9]. Support for EU and EAEU membership are codified as dummies in which 1 represents respondents who would vote "yes," and 0 represents those who answered that they would vote "no". Listwise deletion was used to codify the two main dependent variables. Support for the EU in the pooled data set is 58.06% of the individuals in favor of accession. Support for the EAEU, codified following the same strategy, is 63.15%. The number of valid cases after the codification of the dependent variables is 13,277 for the EU and 13,089 for the EAEU.

Independent and Control Variables

The institutional trust index is and additive and continuous index that takes the average trust in three of the main political institutions of the country: the President, the Parliament, and the Government, each measured on a four-point scale. The resulting index ranges from 0 (lowest average level of trust) to 1 (highest trust level). To determine the reliability of the institutional trust index, I used Cronbach's alpha, which is based on inter-correlations of the factors that compose the index. The Cronbach's alpha for the institutional trust index is 0.83, higher than the commonly accepted reliability threshold of 0.7.

The geopolitical orientation of the party for which the respondent would vote in a hypothetical upcoming election is a categorical variable with three categories grouping pro-European parties, pro-Russian parties, and a baseline group who "would not vote" or are "undecided". The complete list of the political parties that fall into each category is reported in Appendix I.

Control variables include age, gender, place of residence (urban/rural), education level, socioeconomic level, ethnolinguistic identity, religious affiliation, interest in politics, perceptions on the direction of the country, and most trusted information source.

9 The EAEU support question experienced a change during the studied period. From 2012 until April of 2016, the question referred to the Customs Union (the organization that preceded the EAEU); since October of 2016, however, the question has directly referred to the EAEU.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
EAEU Referendum	**13,089**	**.632**	**.482**	**0**	**1**
No	4,823	.369	.482		
Yes	8,266	.632	.482		
EU Referendum	**13,277**	**.580**	**.493**	**0**	**1**
No	5,569	.419	.493		
Yes	7,708	.580	.493		
Age	**16,946**	**49.40**	**17.59**	**18**	**99**
Sex	**16,946**	**.418**	**.493**	**0**	**1**
Female	9,855	.582	.493		
Male	7,091	.418	.493		
Type of Settlement	**16,946**	**.556**	**.497**	**0**	**1**
Urban	7,525	.444	.497		
Rural	9,421	.556	.497		
Education Level	**16,886**	**1.084**	**.672**	**0**	**2**
Low	3,169	.188	.390		
Medium	9,132	.541	.498		
High	4,585	.272	.445		
Socioeconomic Level	**16,103**	**.760**	**.798**	**0**	**2**
Low	7,522	.467	.499		
Medium	4,926	.306	.461		
High	3,655	.227	.419		
Ethnolinguistic	**16,934**	**1.620**	**1.130**	**1**	**4**
Moldovan / Romanian lang.	12,449	.735	.441		
Moldovan /Russian lang.	1,225	.072	.259		
Minority / Romanian lang.	522	.031	.172		
Minority/ Russian lang.	2,738	.162	.368		
Religious Affiliation	**16,946**	**.901**	**.298**	**0**	**1**
Else	1,673	.099	.298		
Metropolis of Moldova	15,273	.901	.298		
Interest in Politics	**16,582**	**.445**	**.283**	**0**	**1**
Institutional Trust index	**15,984**	**.226**	**.240**	**0**	**1**
Dodon term	**16,946**	**.335**	**.472**	**0**	**1**
No	11,276	.665	.472		
Yes	5,670	.335	.472		
Direction of the country	**15,736**	**.201**	**.400**	**0**	**1**
Bad Direction	12,582	.799	.400		
Good Direction	3,154	.201	.400		
Political Party	**15,947**	**1.024**	**.819**	**0**	**2**
Pro-EAEU	5,583	.350	.477		
Pro-EU	5,228	.328	.469		
Would not vote/DK	5,136	.322	.467		
Most trusted source of information	**16,604**	**.867**	**1.126**	**0**	**3**
TV/Radio/Press (Including online)	9,328	.562	.496		
Internet	2,599	.157	.363		
Social Interaction (Family, Friends, Rumors)	2,230	.134	.341		
None/DK	2,447	.147	.354		
Region	**16,946**	**.334**	**1.139**	**1**	**5**
Chisinau	3,979	.235	.424		
North	4,804	.283	.451		
Center	4,762	.281	.450		
South	2,654	.157	.363		
UTA Gagauzia	747	.044	.205		

Age is measured in years. Gender and type of settlement are coded as dummy variables where 1 represents male and rural settlement, respectively. Education and socioeconomic levels are coded into three levels already defined by the IPP (lower, medium, and higher), with the lower level being the baseline category. These variables control for factors belonging to the utilitarian approach as well as to the theory of winners and losers of the transition towards the capitalist system. Older, rural, poorer and less educated individuals have consistently been shown, both in Moldova and in countries with similar characteristics, to be less likely to be supportive of EU membership and more willing to strengthen ties with Russia and, thus, the EAEU (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Danero Iglesias, 2015; Ehin, 2001; Gentile, 2015).

The first of the identity-related variables is a categorical variable that divides respondents into four groups according to their ethnic group and the language in which they answered the survey interview. I combine both ethnicity and language following the work of Knott (2015), which highlights the importance of language and ethnicity in defining intra-ethnic group identification categories. Thus, the combination of ethnicity and language should potentially help to provide a more fine-grained vision of the different ethnolinguistic groups that inhabit Moldova. In this sense, previous empirical studies in Moldova have demonstrated that both ethnicity and language (as separate variables) influence geopolitical preferences (Berlinschi, 2019). Similarly, other works have pointed to language (i.e., the lack of knowledge of the Romanian language) as one of the limiting factors that prevents ethnic minorities in Moldova from being more supportive of EU accession (Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). Regarding the codification of the variable, one group comprises individuals who defined their ethnicity as Moldovan or Romanian and answered the survey in Romanian. This group is used as the base category in the analysis. Another group identifies Moldovans and Romanians that answered in Russian. Individuals who stated a different ethnicity from the Moldovan/Romanian majority and used Romanian to answer the interview compose the third group. The last group is composed of members of ethnic minorities who answered in Russian. Extant work along the identity approach shows that ethnic group membership is one of the major factors that influence attitudes towards the EU and the EAEU in the post-Soviet area. Ethnic Russians and members of ethnic minorities in countries such as Moldova tend to

show noticeably less support for the EU and consistently prefer the EAEU (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Danero Iglesias, 2015).

Religious affiliation categorizes respondents as 1 if they follow the majoritarian and Moscow-ruled Metropolis of Moldova branch of the Orthodox Church and 0 if followers of other churches or religions. Religious affiliation is often studied as an element of identity that could serve to weight the advantages or disadvantages of the EU with regard to moral values (Kentmen, 2008; Nelsen, Guth and Fraser, 2001). In addition, other authors have pointed out the role of the different Churches in former socialist countries as cue-givers (Spina, 2016). In Moldova, followers of the Metropolis of Moldova have been traditionally considered to favor stronger ties with Russia and the EAEU, while followers of the Bucharest-ruled Metropolis of Bessarabia and other minoritarian religious groups often show higher levels of support for EU membership (Curanović, 2019; Lutsevych, 2016).

Interest in politics is a five-point scale variable running from 0 (“no interest”) to 1. EAEU supporters have traditionally been portrayed as less educated and less politically sophisticated than their pro-EU counterparts. Hence, it can be expected that interest will be negatively correlated with support for the EAEU and positively with support for EU membership (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Spina, 2018). Perception of the direction of the country is a binary variable in which respondents who believe that the country is heading in a good direction are coded as 1, and individuals perceiving the opposite are coded as 0.

Lastly, most trusted source of information is a categorical variable with four categories that group Television/Radio/Press, Internet, social interaction (family, friends, rumors, etc.), and a reference category for those that do not trust any source of information or “don’t know.

Descriptive statistics of all the variables can be found in Table 3. The specific wording for the questions used for all the variables is available in Appendix II.

Method: Multilevel logistic regression

The nature of the data, with a binary dependent variable and observations nested in five regions and 15 biannual surveys, is suitable for analysis through a three-level (individuals nested on regions nested on survey waves) multilevel logistic regression analysis. This method accounts for the dependencies between observations that were collected within the same period and region (Khan and Shaw, 2011). Using multilevel logistic regression, I estimate three sequential models that combine the variables of the different approaches. This allows for an analysis of the entire 2012-2019 period, corresponding to the period in which the EU and the EAEU have coexisted. Nonetheless, to consider variations in the effects of the main variables over the period, individual logistic regressions (including a variable to test for regional fixed-effects) have also been conducted for each survey (see Figures 3 and 4). I have conducted all the analyses in this work using Stata 16.1.

Results: the relationship between national proxies and geopolitical preferences

Table 4 presents the results of the nested multilevel logit regressions for the support for EU accession and support for EAEU accession variables in Moldova for the period 2012–2019. In Figure 2, I show the predicted probabilities of the two main independent variables while holding other variables at their observed values.

Before running the main models, an empty model was used to determine the chances of supporting EU and EAEU membership that can be attributed to between-region and between-survey differences. After running the empty model, an intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of 26.7% for the EU and 23.9% for the EAEU is obtained. Out of these ICCs (that includes both regional and survey levels) a 24.5% can be attributed to the regional effects and an extra 2.2% to the survey level for the EU (21.6% and 2.3% respectively for the EAEU). ICC refers to the fraction of the total variation in the dependent variable that can be accounted for by between-region and between-survey variation; the remaining variation can be explained by within-region and within-survey differences. Such a low percentage in the survey level indicates that a large proportion of the variation in support for EU and EAEU membership in Moldova is explained by

regional and individual differences rather than by events that took place over the selected period.

Model 1 includes sociodemographic controls (age, gender, educational level, and sociodemographic level) as well as identity controls (respondent's ethnolinguistic belonging and whether the respondent follows the Metropolis of Moldova branch of the Orthodox Church or another religion). Hypotheses 1a and 1b (the hypotheses testing institutional performance) are tested in Model 2. This model adds interest in politics, perception of the direction in which the country is heading, the institutional trust index, a dummy variable that differentiates the period in which Dodon was president from the rest of the surveys, and an interaction between the dummy variable focusing on Dodon presidency and the institutional trust index. Finally, Hypothesis 2 (the hypothesis that focuses on party cues) is tested using Model 3, this article's full model, which adds a variable for the geopolitical orientation of the party for which the respondent would vote in hypothetical upcoming elections and the most trusted information source (the remaining control variable).

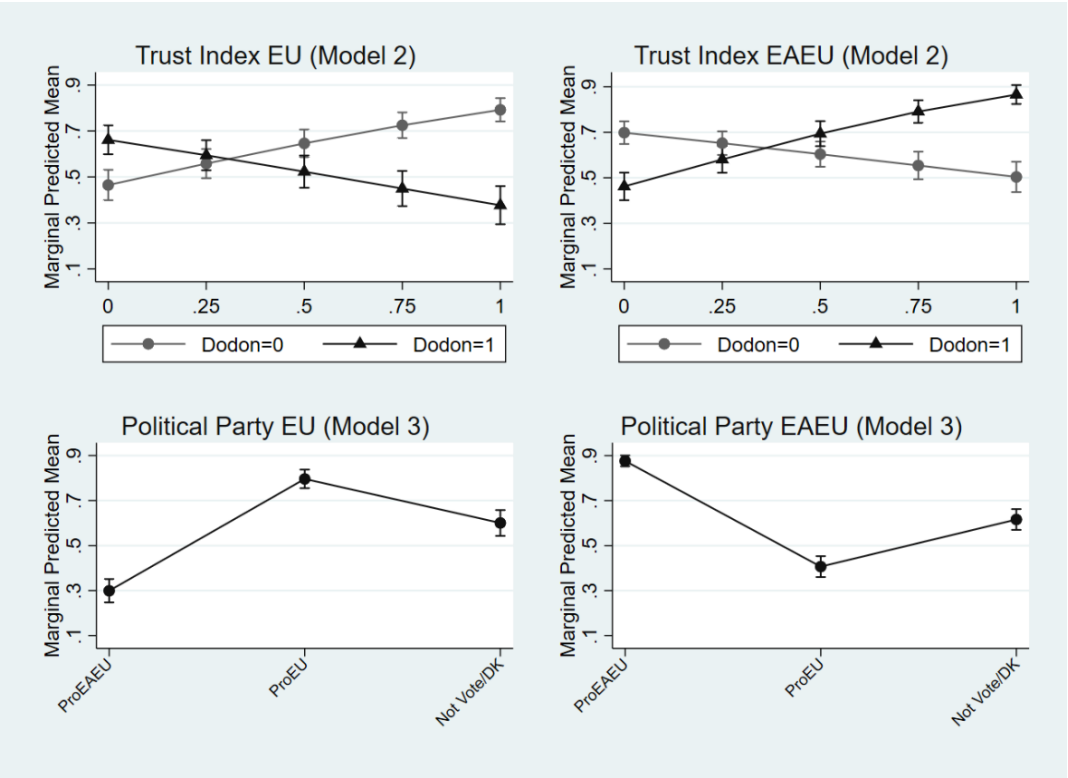
Model 1 shows that all controls work as predicted, with citizens with low education, low socioeconomic level, members of minorities or Russophone Moldovans, and members of the Moscow-led Metropolis on Moldova being more likely to support EAEU membership. The effects of each of these factors are reversed support for the EU. Regarding the ethnolinguistic variable, the one exerting the largest influence in the first model, results seem to confirm the pattern previously identified by the literature. Ethnic minorities tend to prefer joining the EAEU than the EU. However, it is important to note the role of language in combination with ethnic identity, as Moldovans who chose to complete the survey in Russian are more likely to support the EAEU and less likely to support the EU than those who answered in Romanian, while the opposite is true for ethnic minorities. Thus, results for this variable seem to support the theses of both Knott (2015) and Kosienkowski, and Schreiber (2014).

Table 4: Results of the Multilevel Logistic Regression for EU/EAEU support

	Model 1	***Model 1***	**Model 2**	***Model 2***	**Model 3**	***Model 3***
	EU	***EAEU***	**EU**	***EAEU***	**EU**	***EAEU***
Age	.002	*0*	.002	*0*	.001	*-.000*
	(.001)	*(.001)*	(.001)	*(.001)*	(.002)	*(.002)*
Male (ref. Female)	0	*.002*	.004	*.027*	.065	*.031*
	(.042)	*(.042)*	(.046)	*(.046)*	(.053)	*(.053)*
Rural (ref. Urban)	.135*	*-.006*	.097	*.022*	.069	*.043*
	(.053)	*(.054)*	(.058)	*(.058)*	(.066)	*(.067)*
Education (ref. Low)						
Medium Education	.172**	*-.013*	.177**	*.039*	.047	*.177**
	(.058)	*(.058)*	(.063)	*(.064)*	(.072)	*(.073)*
High Education	.728***	*-.618****	.681**	*-.491****	.407***	*-.139*
	(.07)	*(.068)*	(.077)	*(.075)*	(.089)	*(.087)*
Socioeconomic (ref. Low)						
Medium Socioeconomic	.174***	*-.217****	.148***	*-.168***	.128*	*-.150**
	(.051)	*(.051)*	(.055)	*(.055)*	(.064)	*(.064)*
High Socioeconomic	.394***	*-.4****	.336***	*-.344****	.194*	*-.180**
	(.064)	*(.062)*	(.069)	*(.068)*	(.080)	*(.078)*
Ethnolinguistic (ref. MD/ROM)						
Moldovan/Russian lang.	-1.431***	*1.696****	-1.376***	*1.573****	-.860***	*.948****
	(.081)	*(.097)*	(.09)	*(.104)*	(.106)	*(.121)*
Minority/Romanian lang.	-1.491***	*1.401****	-1.477***	*1.395****	0.963***	*.879****
	(.117)	*(.135)*	(.13)	*(.148)*	(.147)	*(.168)*
Minority/Russian lang.	-2.445***	*2.374****	-2.35***	*2.285****	-1.592***	*1.476****
	(.075)	*(.09)*	(.082)	*(.098)*	(.092)	*(.111)*
Metr. Of Moldova (ref. Else)	-.483***	*.661****	-.501***	*.64****	-.334***	*.467****
	(.075)	*(.072)*	(.082)	*(.078)*	(.095)	*(.091)*
Interest in Politics			.084	*-.402****	.083	*-.371****
			(.085)	*(.084)*	(.099)	*(.095)*
Good direction (ref. Bad)			.828***	*-.649****	.645***	*-.445****
			(.065)	*(.06)*	(.075)	*(.067)*
Trust Index			1.919***	*-1.018****	1.293***	*-.335**
			(.133)	*(.126)*	(.154)	*(.145)*
Dodon Term (ref. Else)			1.048***	*-1.231****	.928***	*-1.156****
			(.119)	*(.112)*	(.135)	*(.129)*
Dodon term # Trust Index			-3.419***	*3.43****	-1.989***	*2.132****
			(.221)	*(.215)*	(.257)	*(.249)*
Political Party (ref. Would not Vote/DK)						
ProEAEU political party					-1.515***	*1.682****
					(.063)	*(.073)*
ProEU political party					1.150***	*-1.007****
					(.071)	*(.063)*
Most trusted info source (ref. None/DK)						
Traditional media					.027	*-.005*
					(.084)	*(.084)*
Internet					-.011	*-.303***
					(.102)	*(.100)*
Social Interaction (Family, etc.)					-.119	*-.002*
					(.11)	*(.108)*
_cons	.603**	*-.109*	-.023	*.46**	.162	*.407**
	(.196)	*(.176)*	(.215)	*(.193)*	(.227)	*(.205)*
/var(_cons[region])	.109	*.072*	.123	*.08*	.084	*.046*
	(.08)	*(.055)*	(.089)	*(.061)*	(.069)	*(.040)*
/var(_cons[region>~)	.135***	*.124****	.125***	*.104****	.160***	*.127****
	(.033)	*(.031)*	(.033)	*(.027)*	(.041)	*(.034)*
Observations	**12599**	***12447***	**11224**	***11044***	**10593**	***10385***

*Standard errors are in parentheses, *** p<.001, ** p<.01, * p<.05*

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of the main variables.



Hypothesis 1a is confirmed by the results of Model 2, which show that higher levels of institutional trust are positively correlated with support for EU membership and negatively correlated with support for EAEU in the pre-Dodon period. A reversed relationship between institutional trust and geopolitical preferences can be found in the period in which Dodon is the President of Moldova. On the one hand, Figure 2 shows that, during the period in which all the institutions were controlled by mostly pro-EU actors, individuals who fully trusted the national institutions were 32% more likely to support EU membership (and 20% less likely to support EAEU membership) than respondents that showed no institutional trust. If we focus on the variation each time that the trust index increases by .25, the pre-Dodon period shows an average 8% increase of the probabilities of supporting EU membership, this becomes an average decrease of 7% per each .25 added to the trust index during the Dodon period. On the other hand, during the Dodon period, individuals that fully trusted the national institutions were 40% more likely to be in favor of joining the EAEU (and 28% less likely to support EU membership) than those who totally distrusted them. The average variation of the probabilities of supporting the EAEU for each .25 increase on the trust index, the results show an average

decrease of 5% for the pre-Dodon period and 10% average increase after Dodon was elected president in 2016.

Therefore, the results of the interaction demonstrate that, during the period in which the three institutions included in the index were largely controlled by the pro-EU bloc, individuals that fully trusted the national institutions were more supportive of joining the EU while this relationship was opposite for the EAEU. Furthermore, the relationship between the trust index and support for the EU/EAEU variables seems to be stronger during the Dodon period, which could be related to the fact that the 2016 elections were the first after a long hiatus in which Moldovans could directly elect their president, which could have led to a bigger relevance of this figure as a cue-giver.

Hypothesis 2, which focuses on the effect of party cues, is confirmed by the results of Model 3. Expressing likelihood to vote for a pro-EU party is positively correlated with support for EU membership, while stating a future vote for a pro-EAEU party is positively correlated with support for Moldova joining the EAEU. The predicted probabilities for the support for the EU variable show that the gap between those who would vote for a pro-EU party and those that would vote for a pro-EAEU party is around 50%. Regarding support for the EAEU, the difference in support for this geopolitical option between those who voted a pro-EAEU party and a pro-EU party is around 47%. Coefficients for both support for the EU and support for the EAEU are significant for the variable. Moreover, it is worth noting that, as can be seen both in the results of the multilevel regression and the predicted probabilities, party preference has one of the biggest effects on individual preferences, on par with the effects of the ethnolinguistic variable.

Further support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b can be found when models are fitted separately for each individual survey, which allows for effects to freely vary over time (see Figure 3). Results for the first period in which the three institutions were all controlled by pro-EU actors show that the institutional trust index was positively correlated with support for the EU and tended to be negatively correlated with support to the EAEU. However, as the interaction suggested, the Dodon presidency reversed the effects of this variable. Hypothesis 1b, which expects citizens to align with the geopolitical preferences of the institutions that they trust when these are controlled by parties with different foreign

policy preferences, is partially confirmed by the results. The coefficients regarding the individual institutions show that, in general, trust in the President is the major contributor to the results of the institutional trust index, especially during the Dodon term. Results for trust in Parliament and trust in Government tend to be negative for EAEU support and positive for EU support, albeit its significance is not particularly strong if we consider their confidence intervals. All in all, during the period in which Dodon is President, results are mostly in line with expectations for the EU and partially for the EAEU – with the only exception of trust in the Government. Likewise, Figure 4 shows the results of the separated logistic regressions for the party cues variable. These results confirm Hypothesis 2 as the results of the coefficients follow the same direction, albeit with some changes in the size of the effect, during the whole studied period.

Figure 3: Binomial logistic regression coefficients per survey (trust variables)

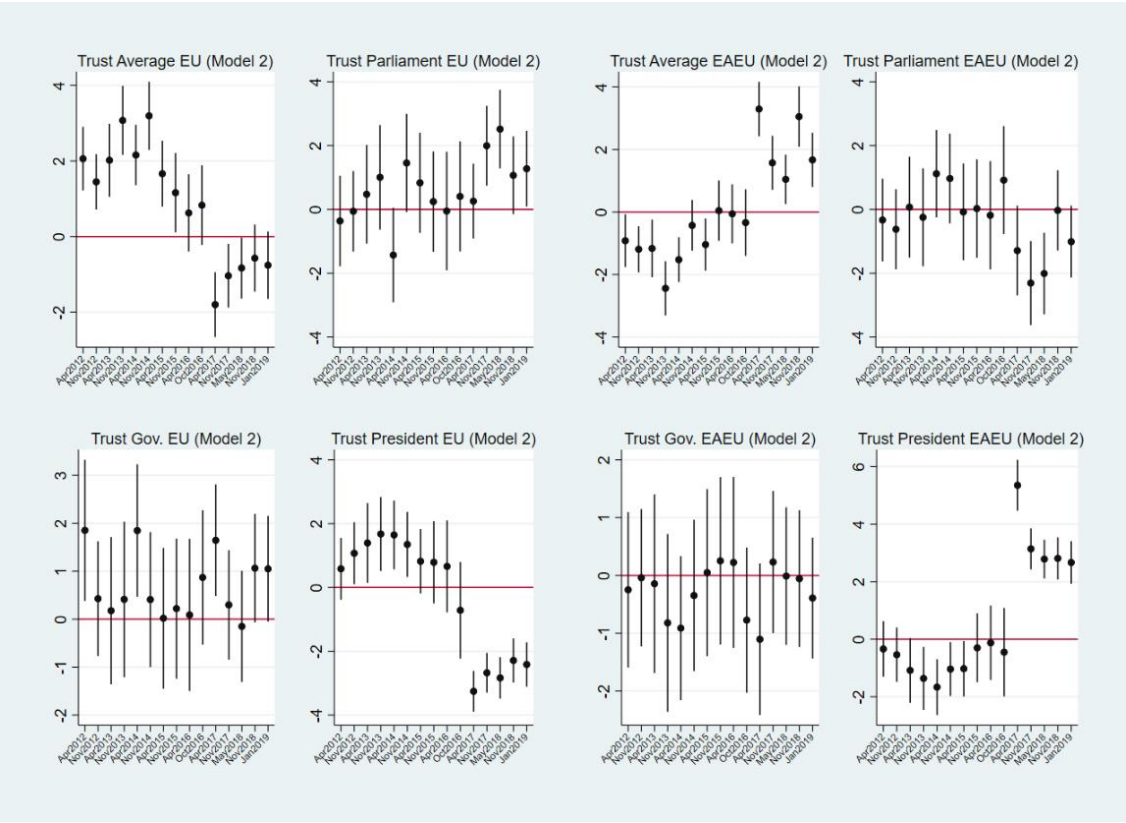


Figure 3 presents the logistic regressions coefficients for the trust variables in the EU and EAEU models. In the graphs, the different coefficients show changes in the logged-odds of support for EU membership when institutional trust increases in one unit, with 95% confidence intervals. Note that, as opposed to the results shown in Figure 2, this graph does not show changes in probabilities. Instead, it is used to show the differences in the size and direction of the results, which helps comparing the main trends across the studied period. Overall, the graphs show that an increase in the levels of institutional trust is positively correlated with support for the EU until the election of Dodon as president, when the relationship is reversed. Support for the EAEU follows a very similar but reversed pattern both in the pre and post-Dodon periods.

Figure 4: Binomial logistic regression coefficients per survey (party cues variable).

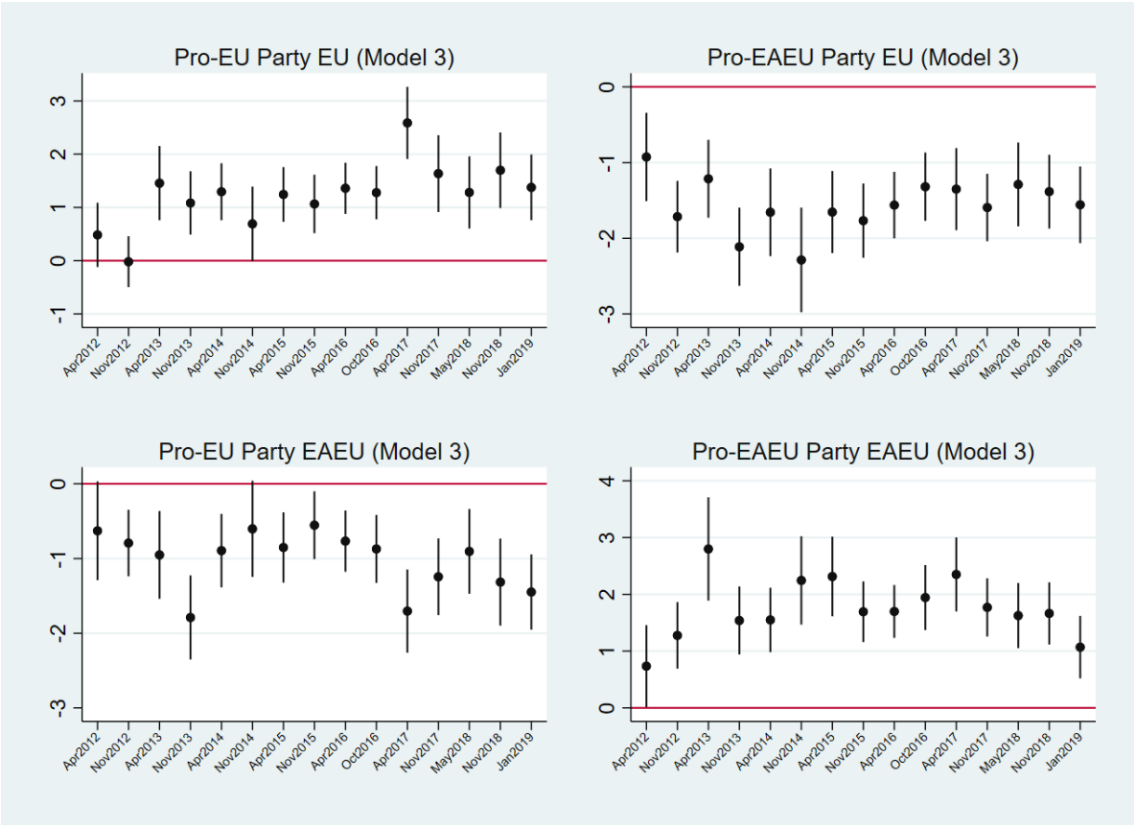


Figure 4 presents the logistic regressions coefficients for the party cues variable. In the graphs, the pro-EU and pro-EAEU categories are compared to the base category (Would not vote/DK). As opposed to the results shown in Figure 2, this figure does not focus on the probabilities. Instead, it is used to show the differences in the size and direction of the results, which helps comparing the main trends across the studied period. Overall, the results show that respondents that would vote for a political party are more likely to support the geopolitical option defended by it (and oppose the opposing option) than those respondents that fall into the reference category.

Conclusion

Summing up, this paper's findings support the expectation that national proxies are strongly correlated with individual geopolitical preferences in Moldova. Higher institutional trust appears to correlate positively with individual support for the EU and negatively with support for EAEU membership, albeit the influence of institutional trust is reversed after Dodon became President of Moldova. The reversion of the direction of the correlation suggests that, from the moment that Moldovans have been able to directly elect the president (the 2016 presidential elections), institutional trust has become more strongly correlated with individual foreign policy preferences. Party preferences, the other main variable and the one used to test the influence of party cues, also fulfills the expectations by showing that citizens tend to follow the geopolitical aspirations of their preferred political party. The analysis of the separate surveys provides further evidence in support of the notion that citizens who positively evaluate their country's institutions tend to support the geopolitical views that are predominant in those institutions (Anderson, 1998; Hobolt and De Vries, 2016; Loveless and Rohrschneider, 2008). The importance of these factors, along with the fact that geopolitical preferences vary remarkably during this period, suggest that national proxies could exert a significant influence on the individual geopolitical preferences of at least some Moldovans. This relationship has been often overlooked in the post-Soviet space, even if it has previously been proven to work in contexts in which the elites are divided regarding a foreign policy issue (Clarke et al., 2017; Guisinguer and Saunders, 2017; Hobolt, 2016). Hence, this article adds new evidence backing one of the main assumptions of the institutional performance and cue-taking approaches: that international organizations are often complex issues for some citizens to determine their position towards them without the use of proxies (Anderson, 1998; Hellström, 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Pannico, 2017). Overall, the major finding of this work is clear: Moldovans who are supportive of the national institutions or a political party with a clear geopolitical orientation tend to follow their geopolitical views. The multilevel analysis of the 2012-2019 period shows that this process works for the pro-EU parties and institutions, and the individual logistic regressions conducted for each separate survey show that periods in which the pro-EAEU bloc gained power in certain institutions display an inverted direction of the relationship

between the trust index and trust in president variables and support for the EU and the EAEU.

The empirical evidence of this study integrates with three fields of literature. Firstly, it contributes to testing the claims of the institutional performance and the cue-taking approaches to understand support for international organizations in a new context. The study of the effects of these approaches in Moldova helps to expand the current knowledge of the effects of said approaches in environments outside of the Western countries in which these theories have often been tested (Clarke et al., 2017; Guisinguer and Saunders, 2017; Hobolt, 2016; Pannico, 2017). Secondly, it serves to further expand the knowledge of the main factors that condition individual geopolitical preferences in the post-Soviet space. This is done by testing the institutional performance and cue-taking approaches in the area, something that had already been done in the case of Georgia (Buzogány, 2019; Müller, 2011) but remained largely untested in Moldova. Thirdly, it contributes to a better understanding of the effects of the EU-EAEU competition on the national politics of the EaP countries. The impact of this competition has been thoroughly studied regarding the national elites and institutions of these countries (Nitoiu, 2016; Nizhnikau, 2016; Nodia et al., 2017), but its effect on individuals has received much less attention. Overall, the Moldovan case presents itself as one of the most appropriate environments to explore these relationships and contribute to the literature, as it allowed us to study their premises in a country where neither the EU nor the EAEU have managed to sway a majority of the local population towards them. Moreover, the main findings of this paper benefit from the changes in the Moldovan political context to contribute to the literature by providing evidence of changes in the effects of institutional trust over foreign policy preferences when actors with distinct foreign policy preferences are in charge of different institutions.

In order to further expand this research, it would be useful to explore the causal dynamics of the studied variables over geopolitical preferences. Some authors have already determined that party cues work as predicted and that this relationship intensifies in polarized environments, with political parties primarily influencing individuals rather than the other way around (Clarke et al., 2017; Hobolt, 2016; Marks and Wilson, 2000; Pannico, 2017). Furthermore, this is especially true in in contexts in which the national

elites are divided on a foreign policy issue (Guisinguer and Saunders, 2017). Consequently, it could be useful to build on this research to continue disentangling the causal links between geopolitical preferences and the party cues and institutional performance variables in the Post-Soviet context. A more robust test of the direction of causality in Moldova, however, would require either panel or experimental data, which is one of the main limitations of this study. Likewise, further research could focus on other factors that could influence geopolitical preferences in the Moldovan context. Values, the role of media cues, influence of particular events, and individual approval of free market and democratic reforms are all factors that, most probably, play a role on individual geopolitical preferences in Moldova.

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Appendix I. List of the main political parties grouped by their geopolitical orientation (alphabetic order).

PRO EUROPEAN PARTIES	PRO RUSSIAN PARTIES
Alianța "Moldova Noastră"	*Partidul Comunist Reformator*
Blocul ACUM	*Partidul Comuniștilor din Republica Moldova*
Mișcarea Acțiunea Europeană,	*Partidul Nostru*
Mișcarea Populară Antimafie	*Partidul Popular Creștin Democrat*
Partidul Democrat din Moldova	*Partidul Regiunilor*
Partidul "Democrația Acasă"	*Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova*
Partidul European	*Partidul Șor*
Partidul Popular European	
Partidul Liberal	
Partidul Liberal Democrat din Moldova	
Partidul Național Liberal	
Partidul Social Democrat	
Partidul Social-Liberal	
Partidul Unității Naționale	

Source: Association for Participatory Democracy (ADEPT). Political Parties of the Republic of Moldova.

Appendix II. Question Wording of all variables.

Variable	Question Wording
EU support	If a referendum on Moldova's accession to the European Union was to be held next Sunday, would you vote for or against?
EAEU support	(From October 2016) If a referendum on Moldova's accession to the Eurasian Union (Russia/-Belarus-Kazakhstan) was to be held next Sunday, would you vote for or against? / (From April 2012) If a referendum on Moldova's accession to the Customs Union (Russia/-Belarus-Kazakhstan) was to be held next Sunday, would you vote for or against?
Age	How old are you?
Gender	Completed by the surveyor
Urban/Rural	Completed by the surveyor
Education Level	What was the last education level in which you graduated?
Socioeconomic Level	Based on multiple questions
Ethnicity + Language	What is your ethnicity? + Language in which the interview was conducted (completed by the surveyor)
Religious Affiliation	What is your religious affiliation?
Interest in Politics	To what extent are you interested in politics?
Direction of the Country	Do you think that things in the Republic of Moldova are going in a right or wrong direction?
Trust	How much do you trust the following institutions? (National Parliament/Government/President)
Political Party	If elections were to be held next Sunday for the Moldovan Parliament, which party would you vote for?
Most trusted information source	What information source do you trust the most?

ARTICLE 2: Studying the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in the Association Agreement countries. Evidence from Georgia (2015-2019)[1].

Introduction

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the literature has taken an interest in the role that minorities (ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.) play in the countries that succeeded it. During the pre-independence period, obvious differences in political behavior, that were somewhat controlled during the Soviet periods, appeared between minorities and titular nationalities[2] (Wheatley, 2009). These political differences developed into several ethnic conflicts throughout the nineties and, even though open violence has decreased in most post-Soviet European countries, they are still the source of political disagreements between minorities and titular nationalities in each area (O'Loughlin and Toal, 2019). One of the issues in which these differences are well documented is geopolitical preferences: minorities are more likely to hold positive views of Russia and the Soviet past, and consequently, of joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), while members of the titular nationalities are more in favor of becoming members of the European Union (EU). The presence of this ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences has been systematically explored in the post-Soviet European countries both theoretically and empirically

1 This article is currently under review in *Eurasian Geography and Economics*.

2 Although Abkhazians and Ossetians are also often considered titular nationalities of Georgia (Wheatley, 2009), the surveys used in this article contain almost no Ossetian or Abkhazian respondents. Thus, across this paper, when I refer to titular nationality, I refer exclusively to ethnic Georgians.

(Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Ehin, 2001; Gentile, 2015; Müller, 2011; White, McAllister, and Feklyunina, 2010). Moreover, several works have focused on reviewing the potential causes of these interethnic differences in geopolitical preferences (Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). Some of the factors that are often included among the possible causes are linguistic knowledge, ideological differences, differences in economic and education status, and perceptions of the Soviet past (Ehin, 2001; Gentile, 2015; Kakhishvili, 2020; Müller, 2011; Shulman, 2004; Wheatley, 2009). Even if these causes are generally accepted as the sources of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences, there have not been enough studies performed that empirically test the strength of these possible explanations, and whether some factors exert more influence than others over the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences.

Outside post-Soviet Europe, attitudes towards the EU held by members of (ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.) minorities have been recently explored in Western Europe, with results showing that, in general, minorities tend to be more supportive of the EU than the general population, at least in the member states (Dowley and Silver, 2011; Isani and Schlipphak, 2017). However, as already mentioned, results from the literature that focuses on post-Soviet Europe (even post-Soviet countries that are now members of the EU) have usually found the opposite results, with minorities opposing the EU and being more supportive of retaining and expanding ties with Russia and the EAEU (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; White, McAllister, and Feklyunina, 2010). This contradictory behavior of minorities in the majority of EU member countries and the post-Soviet countries (be they members or non-members) has its source in the complex ethnic landscape of the Soviet Union, which was inherited by its successor states. Overall, regardless of the direction of the differences, research in both Western and Eastern Europe has found that there is a minority-titular gap in support for the EU.

Throughout this paper, I examine the literature that explores different factors that influence lower support for the EU among minorities, as well as studies on post-Soviet Europe that focus on the causes of interethnic differences in support for international organizations. Two main theoretical explanations, proposed by Kosienkowski and Schreiber (2014) and Kakhishvili (2020), will be tested in this paper. These are: (1) social factors (in this case, proficiency in the Georgian, English, and Russian languages), and

(2) differences in ideology, values, and information (ideological factors, political knowledge and engagement, values, etc.). On the one hand, the social factors approach defends that differences in linguistic knowledge of the national language are one of the main sources of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in the AA countries. The linguistic barrier has been shown to decrease the influence exerted over minorities by the generally pro-EU cues emitted by the AA governments, which could increase the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences (Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). On the other hand, the ideology, values, and information approach argues that ethnic minorities in the AA countries tend to be ideologically more conservative and are usually less informed about national and international politics, a combination that makes them tend to be less supportive of the EU and more supportive of the EAEU, which they consider closer to their interests (Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014).

Why are minorities in the Association Agreement (AA) countries more inclined to support the EAEU and less supportive of joining the EU? This article aims to answer this broad question by following a twofold strategy and by using Georgia as a case study. First, I will identify the existence and size of the ethnic gap by using survey data from Georgia for the 2015-2019 period. Measuring the gap serves two purposes: (1) to corroborate the literature that shows that individuals who identify as ethnic minorities are less supportive of the EU and more supportive of the EAEU than members of the titular nationality, and (2) to determine if the two different ethnic groups that are defined as ethnic minorities in this paper (Armenians and Azerbaijanis) display similar ethnic gaps in their support for the two international organizations. Second, I conduct a first multivariate analysis that aims to explain the effectiveness of some of the proposed approaches that have been developed to explain the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences. Third, I run the models of the first analysis separately for Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and ethnic Georgians, to help better understand if the studied variables affect the groups differently. These two analytic strategies are intended to cover the different possible sources of the ethnic gap: that this gap is caused by interethnic differences in the distribution of the studied variables and/or by different effects of the variables over the geopolitical attitudes of the different ethnic groups.

The results of the paper indicate that, in spite of being often categorized as a single "ethnic minority" group when studying geopolitical preferences, the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences varies in size when comparing Armenians or conversely, Azerbaijanis with ethnic Georgians. Furthermore, the results of the first multivariate analysis indicate that the social factors approach (i.e. knowledge of Georgian, Russian, and English) explains the ethnic gap in support for the EU better than differences in ideology, values, and political information. When focusing on support for the EAEU, the main findings of the first analysis indicate that the second approach (differences in ideology, values, and information) is either as powerful (for Armenians), or more powerful (for Azerbaijanis) than the social factors approach. Lastly, the exploratory analysis that separates the sample into the three ethnic groups reveals that certain variables have different effects for each of the ethnic minorities and for Georgians when predicting support for EU and EAEU membership, which could thus contribute to the existence of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences.

The ethnic gap and geopolitical preferences in Georgia

When aiming to study the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in the AA countries, Georgia stands out as one of the most suitable environments to examine. Unlike in Moldova and Ukraine, Russians represent a very small percentage of the ethnic minorities in Georgia (Georgian Census, 2014). This relative lack of ethnic Russians could help better identify the causes of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences by limiting the statistical issues that studying ethnic Russians' support for Russia and the EAEU[3] often implies. This paper focuses on two of the ethnic minorities that live in Georgia: Armenians and Azerbaijanis. According to the 2014 Georgian Census, these two groups are the most sizable ethnic minorities in the territory that is effectively controlled by Tbilisi. Out of the total population of Georgia (excluding Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Azerbaijanis amount to 6.3%, while Armenians represent 4.5%.

Traditionally, both Armenians and Azerbaijanis have lived in the territory of Georgia, but it was during the Soviet period that these ethnic minorities enjoyed their highest levels of

3 Even though Armenia is a current member of the EAEU, its governments and, especially, its population, have a relatively positive relationship with the EU (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2020). Azerbaijan is neither a member of the EU nor of the EAEU.

integration in Georgian society, partly because the ethnic policies of the URSS helped these minorities achieve positions of power within the Georgian SSR. However, the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of ethno-nationalistic policies in most post-Soviet countries contributed to a worsening of interethnic relations in the then newly-independent Georgia (Sichinava, 2018). Soon after its independence, the Georgian government promoted the concept of ethnic citizenship, which was aimed at decreasing the influence of Russian culture and, in essence, at legitimating the very existence of an independent Georgian state (Kitiashvili et al., 2016; Shavtvaladze, 2018; Wheatley, 2009). During the nineties, the policies that were implemented to back ethnic citizenship (prohibition of ethnic parties, downgrading the status of the Russian language, etc.) caused the segregation of the ethnic minorities present in the Georgian territory (Shavtvaladze, 2018; Wheatley, 2009). Unable to communicate easily with ethnic Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis faced problems participating "in the [Georgian] political-linguistic space" (Broers, 2008: 278). In spite of these difficulties, the conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis with ethnic Georgians did not turn into a violent one, as did happen with Abkhazians and Ossetians in the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Kolossov and O'Loughlin, 2013; O'Loughlin and Toal, 2019). Nowadays, even after successive Georgian governments have tried to promote the integration of minorities into Georgian society (e.g. funding programs aimed at teaching the national language), there is still a noticeable gap in political and geopolitical attitudes between ethnic Georgians and the ethnic minorities residing in the country (Kitiashvili et al., 2016; Shavtvaladze, 2018).

Table 1. Mean support for EU/EAEU membership by ethnicity and t-test (2015-2019)

	Armenians			
	Total	**Armenians**	**Georgians**	**Difference**
EU	.73	.45	.80	-.35***
EAEU	.36	.53	.31	.22***
	Azerbaijanis			
	Total	**Azerbaijanis**	**Georgians**	**Difference**
EU	.75	.57	.80	-.22***
EAEU	.37	.61	.31	.30***

Regarding geopolitical preferences, it has been repeatedly observed that being a member of an ethnic minority in Georgia reduces one's chances of supporting the EU, and

increases one's chances of supporting the EAEU (Buzogány, 2019; Müller, 2011; Torres-Adán, 2021). This could be related to the AA countries' problems in integrating their ethnic minorities (Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014) and leads to this paper's preliminary analysis, which measures the extent of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in Georgia.

The results in Table 1 are in line with previous results in the literature, and confirm the existence of an ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in Georgia (Buzogány, 2019; Müller, 2011, Torres-Adán, 2021). On the one hand, when considering support for EU membership, the biggest gap exists between Armenians and ethnic Georgians. Similarly, Azerbaijanis are also less likely to support EU membership than ethnic Georgians. On the other hand, regarding support for the EAEU, the gap is larger when comparing Azerbaijanis to ethnic Georgians than between Armenians and ethnic Georgians. This preliminary analysis confirms that the extent of the ethnic gap varies for Armenians and Azerbaijanis; this fact confirms that the best analytical strategy is to treat these two groups separately instead of combining them into a single "ethnic minorities" category.

Theoretical framework

Social factors

The social factors approach for understanding the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences revolves around the idea that minorities face difficulties that can be attributed to their lower levels of knowledge of the national language of the former Soviet Socialists Republics (SSRs) where they reside.

During the Soviet period, ethnolinguistic minorities living outside their kin-SSR (if they had one) tended to use Russian as the interethnic communication language rather than learning the national language of the Republic in which they were living. While this was especially true for Russians, even minorities that did not speak Russian as their primary language used to rely on Russian as their *lingua franca* and, thus, paid less attention to learning the language of the SSR where they were residing (Gvalia et al., 2013; Knott, 2015; Wheatley, 2009). The lack of proficiency in the local language was not a significant problem for members of ethnolinguistic minorities during the Soviet period, as most of the population of the Soviet Union was expected to know and use Russian to

communicate both with the Russian elites and between ethnolinguistic groups. However, once the former SSRs became independent, their newly elected (and often nationalistic) governments usually enacted policies that downgraded the status of the Russian language, aiming to promote the local language (Kitiashvili et al., 2016; Shavtvaladze, 2018; Wheatley, 2009). This was devastating for most members of minority ethnolinguistic communities, as they began to experience problems accessing basic information about national and international affairs, finding jobs in the public sector, and communicating with the administration (Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). In Georgia, even though campaigns to persuade minorities to learn and use the local language have existed since the nineties, minorities still tend to lag behind members of the titular nationality regarding proficiency in Georgian (Dragojevic, Berglund, and Blauvelt, 2018; Kakhishvili, 2020). This lack of proficiency in the Georgian language still affects minorities when they try to access information or access the services provided by both the Georgian state or the EU. For example, a recent study shows that low proficiency in Georgian is the main barrier that minorities face when trying to access higher education (Kitiashvili et al., 2016).

In short, the social factors approach to understanding the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences focuses on the linguistic differences between ethnic minorities and the titular nationalities. In this sense, this approach defends that one of the main factors that contribute to the ethnic gap is the fact that minorities tend to be less proficient in the national language than the titular nationalities (Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). This is not only due to the national language not being the mother tongue for the members of ethnic minorities, but also due to the barriers that these minorities experience when trying to learn this language, and has led to social differences that often translate into political and geopolitical differences. Minorities might see the necessity of learning the national language as somehow diminishing the importance of their own language, leading them in turn to favor closeness with the EAEU, since they might well believe that the Russian-led organization would protect their linguistic interests better than the pro-EU governments of the AA countries.

Differences in ideology, values, and information

Authors often refer to differences in ideology and access to public information as two of the main sources of the ethnic gap in the post-Soviet countries. This approach highlights

the different perceptions of the Soviet political heritage held by members of the titular nationalities and members of minorities. On the one hand, minorities tend to hold ideological views that are closer to those promoted by the Soviet Union, i.e., that tend to be more left wing and opposed to the free market than the titular nationality (Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). On the other hand, minorities have often been described as more conservative than the titular nationalities in the AA countries. This could imply that ethnic minorities, together with certain sectors of the titular nationality, might be more willing to accept Russian cues that present the EU as a threat to the traditional values defended by Russia and the EAEU (Minesashvili, 2021; Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018; Siroky, Simmons, and Gvalia, 2017).

Regarding ideological differences, research has often identified ethnic minorities in the post-Soviet countries as being more attached to Soviet ideals; this translates into them showing less support for free market and holding more positive views of autocratic forms of government (Gentile, 2015; Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018). This trend is repeated for values, since the minorities in the AA countries, perhaps due to less exposure to direct cues from the EU, tend to be more conservative than the titular nationalities (Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). Another possible explanation is the fact that neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia have signed Association Agreements, which implies that, compared to Georgia, they have implemented fewer EU-required policies that are aimed towards the development of more tolerant and cosmopolitan societies. In this way, the lack of these measures could imply that ethnic minorities in Georgia do not perceive encouragement from the governments of their kin-States to modify their values in the same way that has happened with ethnic Georgians.

Another of the sources of the ethnic gap could arise from differences in political knowledge and interest in politics between members of the titular nationalities and members of ethnic minorities (Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). Traditionally, minorities have been less knowledgeable, interested and politically engaged than members of the titular nationalities. This behavior is often attributed, firstly, to the aforementioned linguistic barriers, but also to the lack of intermediaries (media, political parties, etc.) that offer information about Georgian politics in the minority languages (Bogishvili and Tsiklauri, 2017). Thus, the barriers that limit access to

information about both national politics and foreign policy limit the willingness and capacity of minorities to be knowledgeable about and interested in politics, and consequently, politically engaged. Besides their lower levels of access to information and knowledge about national politics, another of the main factors in the post-Soviet countries influencing their minorities' lower support for EU membership is limited access to information about the EU itself (Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). This information is often obtained through cues that originate in the minorities' kin-States (i.e. Azerbaijan or Armenia) or in Russia, and is often less positive towards the EU than the cues generated by the AA countries' governments and media (Nodia, 2014). Secondly, certain policies promoted by the titular elites during the nineties also contributed to lower levels of engagement, knowledge, and interest in politics among members of ethnic minorities. In this regard, the prohibition of ethnic parties by the Georgian government during the nineties is often cited as a turning point: a moment in which the differences between minorities and the titular nationality began to increase (Shavtvaladze, 2018; Wheatley, 2009). When the government banned ethnic parties, the minorities experienced a considerable loss of interest in Georgian politics, as their members felt that they now had few possibilities of being represented in the national institutions. Furthermore, the prohibition of ethnic parties also affected the minorities' levels of knowledge about Georgian politics, since they lost an intermediary that was able to translate and explain national politics to them, something that national parties often do not invest enough resources in today (Kakhishvili, 2020).

Overall, the ideology, values, and political information approach revolves around the idea that the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences is caused by the different political and social behaviors displayed by members of the titular nationality and the ethnic minorities.

Data and methods

Data

This paper uses survey data from Georgia[4] for the 2015-2019 period. The surveys used are from the Georgian Branch of the Caucasus Research Centre's "Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia" series. The number of observations per survey ranges

4 Excluding the areas controlled by the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

between 2,360 in 2015 and 2,745 in 2019, and the total N of the three combined surveys is 7,363. The "Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia" surveys are conducted bi-annually and are representative of urban and rural speakers of Georgian, and of the Armenian and Azerbaijani populations that reside in the regions of Samtkhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Kakheti. In addition, one of the strengths of these surveys is that the interviews are conducted in Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Georgian, which should limit the selection bias that interviews conducted exclusively in Georgian would have caused.

Dependent variables

The two dependent variables of this paper measure individual support for EU and EAEU membership respectively. They are coded as two binary variables in which respondents that would vote in favor of joining the EU/EAEU if a hypothetical referendum were to be held are coded as 1, and those who would vote against it or would not vote are coded as 0. This coding allows us to focus on the citizens that clearly support either joining the EU or the EAEU, while limiting the number of cases that would be lost if those that would not vote were not considered. The total number of respondents available after coding the variable is 5,823 for the support for EU membership variable and 5,712 for the EAEU variable. After coding the variables, this shows that 70.1% of the sample is in favor of EU membership, while 40.6% would vote for Georgia to become a member of the EAEU.

Independent variables

In this article, my main independent variable is self-reported ethnicity. Throughout this paper, I focus on only three of the ethnic groups that live in Georgia: Armenians (N=1,336), Azerbaijanis (N=1,529), and Georgians (N=4,359). Even if many other ethnic groups besides these three live in Georgia (Abkhazians, Greeks, Ossetians, etc.), the available surveys' lack of sufficient observations for any of the other ethnic groups prevents me from considering them in my analyses. In order to code ethnic identity, I created a categorical variable in which Georgians are coded as 1, Armenians as 2, and Azerbaijanis as 3.

Regarding the first group of variables (social factors) that might explain the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences, three variables are used. These three variables focus on self-

assessed linguistic skills in Georgian, English, and Russian. These three variables are codified as four-category variables in which 1 represents individuals with no basic knowledge of any of the three languages and 4 represents respondents that declare that they have advanced knowledge of all three languages (2 represents people that state a "beginner" level, and 3 those who declare an "intermediate" level).

Four variables are used to measure the impact of differences in ideology, values, and information**.** To measure traditionalism, I use one variable: a question about how important it is that a good citizen follow traditions. This factor is a four-category variable in which individuals are codified as 1 if they consider that to be a good citizen, it is not important to follow traditions, and those who consider that it is very important are codified as 4. To measure ideology, I use a variable that focuses preferences for a government that acts like a parent or a government that acts like an employee. This variable has been used in several previous works and its results show that those who prefer a government that acts like an employee tend to support the EU, while those who prefer a parent-style government are more likely to support closer ties with Russia and/or the EAEU (Müller, 2011; Siroky, Simmons, and Gvalia, 2017; Torres-Adán, 2021). The preferred type of government variable divides respondents into 3 groups: 1 groups together citizens that prefer a government that acts like a parent, while 3 represents those who prefer a government that behaves like an employee (2 groups together individuals that do not agree with either of the statements or do not know). I employ two variables to test political engagement and information. To measure political engagement, I use interest in international politics, which is coded as a 4-category variable that ranges from 1 (respondents with no interest in international politics) to 4 (individuals who are very interested in international politics). Information about international politics is measured by using a question that asks respondents if Georgia is a member of the Council of Europe. This dummy codifies those respondents who answered yes (correctly) as 1, while those who responded no or stated that they did not know are coded as 0.

Our control variables include age, sex, household income, education, and attendance of religious services. Age in measured in years. Sex is a dummy variable in which men are codified as 0 and women as 1. Household income divides the respondents into 8 groups according to the household income earned in the previous month (going from 0 Georgian

Laris, codified as 1, to over 1600 Georgian Laris, codified as 8). Education is a binary variable in which those who have completed higher education are codified as 1, while the rest of the respondents are codified as 0. Religious attendance, the last of the control variables, is a dummy variable in which 1 groups together those respondents that attend religious services once a week or more, while those that attend services less than once a week are coded as 0. I have selected religious attendance rather than religious affiliation because each of the ethnic groups follows a different religion or Church[5] and, thus, religious affiliation is highly correlated with ethnicity.

Methods

For the first analysis I follow a similar methodology to the one proposed by Howell and Day (2000) when they studied the gender gap for different political issues in the US. First, I regress the two variables that measure geopolitical preferences on the variable that categorizes the ethnic groups studied here. Once this first regression has been performed (Model 0), the variables belonging to the social factors approach (Model 1) and the ideological and values differences (Model 2) are added. The objective of adding variables subsequently is to reduce the coefficient of the ethnicity variable, in order to test which of the approaches is better able to explain the ethnic gap. Thus, as Howell and Day (2000: 865) remark, the objective of these models is "not to explain the variation in the [dependent variable] but to lower the unstandardized [ethnicity] coefficient". A final model (Model 3) includes the variables from both approaches. Furthermore, all models include fixed effects accounting for the three years of the surveys (2015, 2017, and 2019). Lastly, Models 1 to 3 include the control variables.

For the second part of the analysis, I conduct logistic regressions of the variables of support for EU membership and support for EAEU membership for both the ethnic minorities and the titular nationality. This strategy, previously used when studying different gaps in political behavior, aims to identify if some variables have different effects in members of ethnic minorities and members of the titular nationality (Feinstein, 2017; Isani and Schlipphak, 2017). The existence of a disparity in these effects could

5 While Azerbaijanis are mostly Muslim, most Armenians and Georgians, (with some exceptions, such as the Adjarian Georgians, who follow Islam), are Christians, belonging two different Churches (the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church) (Broers, 2008).

contribute to the existence of a gap. For the second part of the analysis, only Model 3 (the full model) is used, and it is again fitted with fixed effects that control for the effects of the different surveys. In addition to the logistic regressions, I conduct another analysis in which the ethnicity variable is interacted with all the variables in Model 3. This analysis serves to determine which of the differences between the titular nationality and ethnic minorities in the effect of the variables are statistically significant.

Overall, the two analyses in the paper are intended to uncover two kinds of differences that could contribute to the existence of an ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences. In this sense, the first analysis focuses on the existence of compositional effects. Therefore, the main objective of the first analysis is to test the influence of the differences in the distribution of the observations in the available variables between ethnic Georgians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis. In order to complement this strategy, the second analysis tests the differences in effects of the proposed variables, which could help us understand if the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences is also generated by differences between the titular nationality and the ethnic minorities regarding the size and direction of effects of the variables. Consequently, the combination of the two analyses should cover the two potential sources of the ethnic gap and contribute to an in-depth understanding of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences.

Results

Explaining the gap

Tables 2 (Armenians) and 3 (Azerbaijanis), show a summary of the logistic regressions of the first analysis. The complete logistic regression tables can be consulted in Appendix I. Furthermore, and to facilitate interpretation, Tables 2 and 3 include the predicted probabilities for all the models and analyses. In this subsection, comments on the results will focus on the data shown in the summary tables. The objective of this analysis is to study how much of the ethnic gap can be attributed to compositional effects, i.e. the effects that emerge from differences in the distribution of the observations of the variables in each of the ethnic groups (Howell and Day, 2000).

Firstly, the bivariate models (Model 0) show that, for both dependent variables in both the ethnic groups studied, ethnicity has the effect predicted in Table 1 and in previous

studies on Georgia (Buzogány, 2019; Müller, 2011; Torres-Adán, 2021): being Armenian or Azerbaijani is negatively correlated with support for the EU and positively correlated with support for the EAEU.

Regarding support for EU membership, the results show that, first, social factors (Model 1) are able to reduce the gap in predicted support for the EU between Armenians and Georgians by more than one third (35%). For Azerbaijanis, the inclusion of the controls and the linguistic variables reduces the gap to an insignificant level, which suggests that the variables included in Model 1 explain the existence of an ethnic gap between Azerbaijanis and Georgians regarding support for the EU. Second, the variables included in differences in ideology, values, and information model (Model 2) are, on the one hand, able to explain 11% of the gap in support for the EU between Armenians and Georgians. On the other hand, Model 2 reduces the logistic coefficient of the Azerbaijani variable by 29%. Finally, the results of the full model (Model 3) regarding support for the EU variable indicate that, for Azerbaijanis, the ethnic gap, as with Model 1, is reduced to an insignificant level. In the case of Armenians, the full model is able to explain 38% of the gap, which represents a slight improvement from the results of Model 1 and Model 2 used separately.

When focusing on support for EAEU membership, the social factors and control variables introduced in Model 1 are able to reduce the logistic coefficient of the ethnicity variable by 27% for Armenians and only by 9% for Azerbaijanis. The ideology and values variables added in Model 2 are also able to explain part of the ethnic gap. On the one hand, Model 2 is able to explain the same percentage of the gap between Armenians and Georgians as Model 1 (27%). On the other hand, for Azerbaijanis, Model 2 is able to reduce the logistic coefficient of the Azerbaijani variable by 14%, almost double the reduction as when using Model 1. Finally, the full model (Model 3), is able to reduce the logistic coefficient for both Armenian and Azerbaijanis. In the case of Armenians, Model 3 is able to reduce the logistic coefficient by 31%, while for Azerbaijanis this reduction is only 8%, which is less than that what is achieved by Models 1 and 2 separately.

Table 2: Summary of the results of the logistic regressions (Armenians)

		Predicted probabilities			% Reduction in logistic coefficients	
Model	**Variables**	**Armenians**	**Georgians**	**Gap (Arm-Ge**		**Significant**
Model 0	**Armenian**					
	EU	45	80	-35	Base Category	Yes***
	EAEU	53	31	22	Base Category	Yes***
Model 1	**Social factors + controls**					
	EU	53	76	-22	35	Yes***
	EAEU	49	33	16	27	Yes***
Model 2	**Ideology and values + controls**					
	EU	51	79	-28	11	Yes***
	EAEU	49	33	16	27	Yes***
Model 3	**Full**					
	EU	57	76	-19	38	Yes***
	EAEU	48	33	15	31	Yes***

Summarizing, the results of the first analysis prove that, when considering support for the EU and both Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the social factors approach is more powerful at explaining the ethnic gap than the differences in ideology, values, and information approach. The results of the first analysis are especially interesting in the case of the ethnic gap in support for the EU that exists between Azerbaijanis and Georgians, as the social factors variables included in Model 1 are able to explain it fully. In the case of Armenians, even if none of the models are able to reduce the ethnic variable to an insignificant level, when the effects of Model 1 over the Armenian identity category are compared to the effects of Model 2, the reduction in the logistic coefficient for the two dependent variables is more than double. Overall, the main finding of the EU models is that differences in the distribution of the observations in the linguistic variables are able to fully explain the gap for Azerbaijanis, while for Armenians these differences are also notably more powerful in explaining the ethnic gap than the differences in ideology, values, and information variables. These findings could indicate that, at least for Azerbaijanis, if the linguistic abilities of these minorities resembled those of Georgians, the ethnic gap in support for the EU would be greatly reduced.

Table 3: Summary of the results of the logistic regressions (Azerbaijanis)

		Predicted probabilities			% Reduction in logistic coefficients	
Model	**Variables**	**Azerbaijanis**	**Georgians**	**Gap (Aze-Ge)**		**Significant**
Model 0	**Azerbaijani**					
	EU	58	80	-22	Base Category	Yes***
	EAEU	61	31	30	Base Category	Yes***
Model 1	**Social factors + controls**					
	EU	Not-significant				No
	EAEU	60	33	27	9	Yes***
Model 2	**Ideology and values + controls**					
	EU	65	79	-14	29	Yes***
	EAEU	59	33	26	14	Yes***
Model 3	**Full**					
	EU	Not-significant				No
	EAEU	60	33	27	8	Yes***

Regarding the gap in support for the EAEU, the results indicate that the variables included in Model 2 are, for Armenians, equally powerful in explaining the gap as those in Model 1. The reduction in the case of Azerbaijanis is, however, almost double for Model 2 compared to Model 1. These results seem to indicate that, when focusing on the EAEU, the differences in ideological, values, and information factors between the ethnic minorities and ethnic Georgians cause the same ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences as the linguistic differences – or an even greater one. These findings would support the theses that there are significant differences in the distribution of the ideology, values, and information variables, and that these differences in the distribution are contributing to the gap. Moreover, none of the models is able to reduce the Azerbaijani or Armenian ethnic variable to an insignificant level paired with the generally lower reduction in the logistic coefficients seen for the EAEU variable, suggesting that the ethnic gap in support for the EAEU requires more attention.

Differences in the effects

The second analysis in this paper focuses on the different impact that the variables employed have over the geopolitical preferences of ethnic minorities and Georgians. Table A2.1 (in Appendix II) shows the full results of the logistic regression for the full model of the previous analysis (Model 3) when the sample is divided into the different ethnic groups. To facilitate interpretation, Tables 4 and 5 show the difference in predicted

probabilities between the maximum and the minimum values of a variable, with the results only being shown if they are significant ($p < 0.05$). Furthermore, I also conducted an extra analysis based on interactions between the ethnic variable and all the independent variables; this analysis serves to determine which of the differences between ethnic minorities and the titular nationality in the effects of the different variables are statistically significant. This is important, as the existence of differences between the titular nationality and ethnic minorities in the effects of a variable might contribute to the existence of an ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences. The graphs for the predicted probabilities of the interactions that are statistically significant are displayed in Figures 1 (for the EU variable) and 2 (for the EAEU variable).

Firstly, focusing on Armenians, the analysis of the results of the separate models for support for EU reveals that there are significant differences between this ethnicity and Georgians when considering age and knowledge of Russian. On the one hand, being older has a negative effect on support for the EU among Georgians, while the effects of age are not significant for Armenians. On the other hand, knowledge of Russian, counterintuitively, has a positive effect on support for the EU for Armenians, while its the effects are not significant among Georgians. The positive relationship between better knowledge of the Russian language and support for EU membership is probably related to the fact that, even if its weight has declined since the fall of the USSR, the Russian language might still have a certain role as *lingua franca* in modern Georgia. Consequently, being able to speak fluent Russian might contribute to members of the Armenian minority being better integrated in Georgian society.

Regarding the model of support for the EAEU, we also observe significant differences between Armenians and Georgians in several variables, namely age, knowledge of the Georgian language and political knowledge. In the case of age, we observe a similar but opposite effect to that shown by the results of the support for the EU model; in this model, being older is negatively associated with support for the EAEU among Armenians, while a positive effect is observed for Georgians. Knowledge of the Georgian language appears as negatively correlated with support for the EU, but only for ethnic Georgians, while for ethnic Armenians this relationship is not significant. When considering political knowledge, we observe that, for Armenians, correctly stating that Georgia is a member

of the Council of Europe is positively correlated with support for the EAEU, while this variable is non-significant for ethnic Georgians.

Table 4: Differences in predicted probabilities (Armenians and Georgians).

	ARM EU	**GEO EU**	**ARM EAEU**	**GEO EAEU**
Age (min to max)		-0.203 (0.036)		
Female vs Male		0.055 (0.015)		
HH Income (min to max)			-0.221 (0.102)	-0.177 (0.04)
Tertiary Edu vs Else		0.046 (0.016)		-0.054 (0.019)
Attends a religious service once a week or more vs Else				
Knowledge of Georgian (min to max)				
Knowledge of English (min to max)			-0.284 (0.083)	-0.08 (0.033)
Knowledge of Russian (min to max)	0.189 (0.073)		0.204 (0.072)	0.089 (0.033)
Importance of traditions (min to max)	0.223 (0.062)		0.133 (0.068)	0.078 (0.04)
Georgia is a member of the CoE vs Else	0.217 (0.043)	0.105 (0.014)	0.213 (0.041)	-0.048 (0.017)
Interest in Int. Politics (min to max)		0.110 (0.023)		-0.065 (0.028)
Government as employee vs Government as parent		0.041 (0.014)	-0.106 (0.045)	-0.08 (0.017)

The table shows the differences in predicted probabilities between the minimum and maximum values for a variable. Standard errors in parentheses. Only results that are significant (* $p < 0.05$) are shown.

Secondly, if we focus on the different effects between Azerbaijanis and Georgians regarding their support for the EU, we observe that household income is the only variable in which these different effects are significant. Having a higher income has a positive effect on support for the EU for Azerbaijanis; however, the effect of this variable for Georgians is non-significant. This is in line with some of the previous expectations of the literature, that assume that one of the main reasons for minorities being against joining the EU in the post-Soviet countries is that they might be less prepared to adapt to the potential opportunities that the EU could offer them (Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski

and Schreiber, 2014). This could in part be due to their generally worse economic situations in comparison to the titular nationalities.

Table 5: Differences in predicted probabilities (Azerbaijanis and Georgians).

	AZE EU	**GEO EU**	**AZE EAEU**	**GEO EAEU**
Age (min to max)	-0.203 (0.071)	-0.203 (0.036)		
Female vs Male		0.055 (0.015)		
HH Income (min to max)	0.327 (0.077)		0.210 (0.084)	-0.177 (0.04)
Tertiary Edu vs Else		0.046 (0.016)		-0.054 (0.019)
Attends a religious service once a week or more often vs Else				
Knowledge of Georgian (min to max)	0.296 (0.062)			
Knowledge of English (min to max)				-0.08 (0.033)
Knowledge of Russian (min to max)			0.136 (0.028)	0.089 (0.033)
Importance of traditions (min to max)				0.078 (0.04)
Georgia is a member of the CoE vs Else	0.076 (0.038)	0.105 (0.014)		-0.048 (0.017)
Interest in Int. Politics (min to max)	0.131 (0.052)	0.110 (0.023)		-0.065 (0.028)
Government as employee vs Government as parent		0.041 (0.014)		-0.08 (0.017)

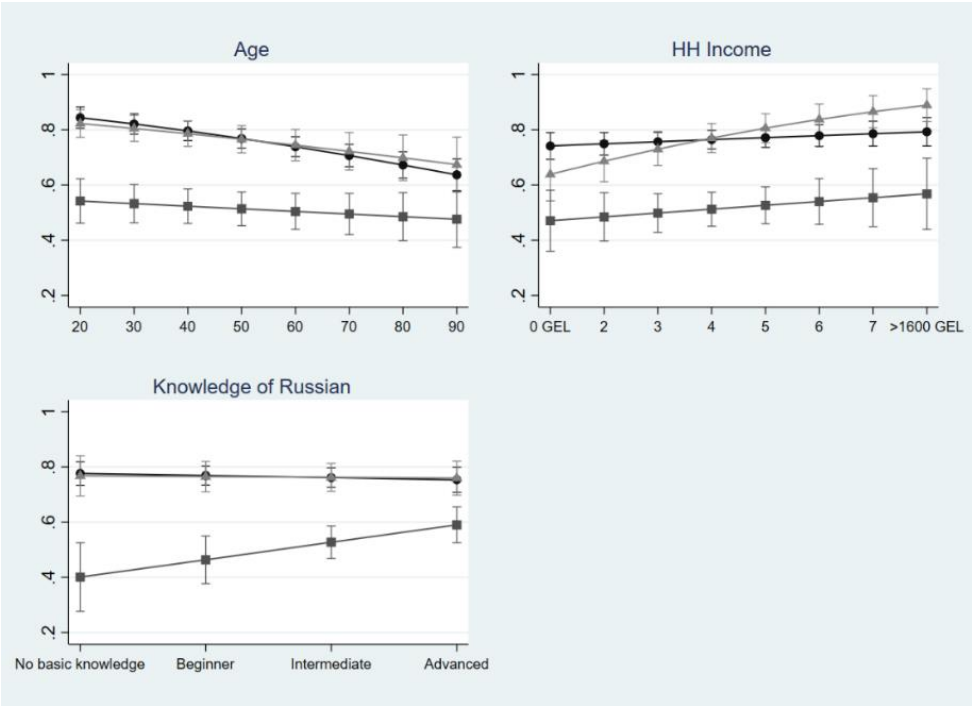
The table shows the differences in predicted probabilities between the minimum and maximum values for a variable. Standard errors in parentheses. Only results that are significant (* $p < 0.05$) are shown.

When we consider support for the EAEU, several variables appear as having different effects on support for joining it over the Azerbaijani and Georgian individuals. Again, household income appears as positively correlated with support for EAEU membership among Azerbaijanis; however, this variable is negatively associated with the EAEU dependent variable when only considering the Georgian population. The results for Georgians are in line with the previous literature. However, the effects for Azerbaijanis are surprising, as support for pro-Russian geopolitical alternatives has traditionally been associated with lower incomes (at least in the literature that focuses on post-Soviet populations in general and is not divided into different ethnic groups) (Buzogány, 2019;

Gentile, 2015; Torres-Adán, 2021). Another of the variables that presents significant differences between Azerbaijanis and Georgians is their level of knowledge of the Georgian language, as having a better knowledge of the Georgian language predicts higher support for the EAEU in the case of Azerbaijanis, but the opposite trend is found for Georgians. The third variable that affects Azerbaijanis and Georgians differently and is statistically significant is the importance of traditions, which is negatively associated with support for the EAEU in the case of Azerbaijanis, while it has a positive relationship with it in the case of the titular nationality. This result is in line with the previous literature that has identified that the more conservative elements of Georgian society tend to side with some of the ideas promoted by Russia on several social issues (Wheatley, 2020). The fourth and last of the variables that show significant differences is interest in politics, as while this variable is positively associated with support for the EAEU among Azerbaijanis, it goes in the opposite direction in the case of ethnic Georgians.

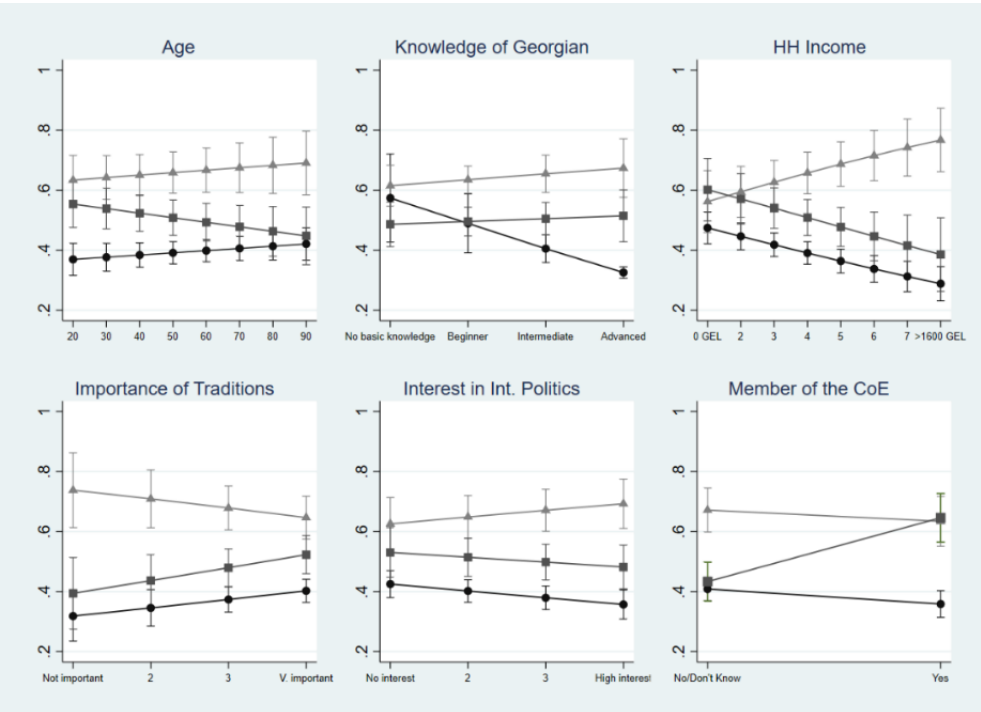
To sum up, the results of the second analysis in this work show that there are variables that affect geopolitical preferences (support for the EU and EAEU) differently (both in significance and in size), depending on ethnicity. In this sense, we see that the main differences in the impact of variables for Armenians compared to ethnic Georgians appear in variables about knowledge of Russian, age, and information. However, for Azerbaijanis, the differences in effects compared to ethnic Georgians appear in the household income, traditionalism, and political engagement variables.

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities, second analysis, EU variable.



Armenians (Squares), Azerbaijanis (Triangles) and Georgians (Dots). Only interactions that are significant (* $p < 0.05$) are shown.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities, second analysis, EAEU variable.



Armenians (Squares), Azerbaijanis (Triangles) and Georgians (Dots). Only those interactions that are significant (* $p < 0.05$) are shown.

Consequently, the differences between ethnic minorities and the titular nationality can be understood as another factor that contributes to the existence of an ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in Georgia. The results of this section indicate that there are more variables that show significant differences between the minorities and ethnic Georgians when focusing on the EAEU rather than on the model using support for the EU as a dependent variable. On the one hand, the results support the idea that there are not many differences between Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the effects of variables regarding support for the EU, indicating that the impact of the difference in effects over the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences is smaller for this dependent variable. On the other hand, the opposite is true for the EAEU, as there are many more factors that impact ethnic minorities and the titular nationality differently if they are considered.

Furthermore, as in the first analysis, one of the most interesting findings of these models lies in the notable differences regarding the factors that influence geopolitical preferences displayed by Armenians and Azerbaijanis when compared to ethnic Georgians. This finding serves to underline the necessity of continuing to develop an understanding of the differences in geopolitical preferences between and within ethnic minorities in the post-Soviet area, as it is not accurate to consider all ethnic minorities as part of a monolithic group in terms of geopolitical preferences. This is true even if the outcome is the same (i.e. minorities tend to prefer joining the EAEU and are more likely to oppose joining the EU), since the origins of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences depend on the ethnic minority that we are considering.

Conclusions

In short, this paper serves two purposes. The first is to measure the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences. This confirms the theory (i.e. that this gap exists), and helps understand the different gaps that exist between Armenians, Azerbaijanis and ethnic Georgians. The second part, divided into two analyses, explores the determinants that drive the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences.

This paper's first analysis helps understand that the differences in the distribution of the linguistic variables related to the social factors approach play a bigger role in explaining the gap in support for the EU than the ideology, values, and information approach.

However, these first models are only able to fully explain the gap in the case of the differences in support for EU membership between Azerbaijanis and Georgians. This suggests that more factors need to be studied in order to explain the gap in the rest of cases. Moreover, the models of the first analysis are much more useful when explaining the gap in support for EU membership than for the gap in support for EAEU membership. However, the results for the EAEU seem to indicate that, in the case of an ethnic gap in support for EAEU membership, the ideology, values, and information approach is more powerful than the linguistic variables.

In the second analysis, I divide the sample into groups depending on the respondents' ethnicity. This analysis serves to understand how the variables employed affect each of the groups differently. The results indicate that, while the main differences between Georgians and Armenians appear in the linguistic, age, and information variables, the differences in effects between ethnic Georgians and Azerbaijanis are related to household income, language, traditionalism, and political engagement. The differences in the effects of the variables are another of the important contributors to the existence and size of the ethnic gap, and the main findings in this regard indicate not only that some of the variables affect each ethnic minorities and the titular nationality differently, but also that there are some factors that impact Azerbaijanis and Armenians in different ways. These results seem to indicate that the differences in the effects of the variables over support for EU membership between the titular nationality and the minorities occur in notably fewer variables than in the case of support for EAEU membership. Consequently, the results of the second analysis highlight the fact that the sources of the ethnic gap in support for EAEU membership arise from more complex phenomena than in the case of support for the EU.

Why are minorities in the Association Agreement (AA) countries more inclined to support the EAEU and less supportive of joining the EU? This article aimed to start answering a question that, most definitely, due to its academic and social interest, requires further research to expand current knowledge to other contexts and calls for the use of new theoretical approaches. The results indicate that the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in the AA countries is a complex phenomenon that does not affect each ethnic group identically. In this sense, this work contributes both to the broad literature on

geopolitical preferences in the post-Soviet states (e.g. Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Gentile, 2015; Torres-Adán, 2021; White, McAllister, and Feklyunina, 2010) and to the specific literature focusing on the sources of the observed differences in geopolitical preferences between ethnic minorities and the titular nationalities of the Association Agreement countries (e.g. Kakhishvili, 2020; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014).

In this sense, future research could focus on the role of the cues emitted by the kin-states, individual perceptions of the Soviet past, and perceptions of discrimination among the members of minorities. Likewise, an in-depth study of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences in the rest of the Association Agreement countries (i.e. Moldova and Ukraine) would help us expand our knowledge of the different factors that contribute to the ethnic gap. Finally, and considering the different ethnic gaps found in this work between Azerbaijanis and Armenians and the titular nationality, another possible line of research could explore the presence and sources of ethnic gaps in geopolitical preferences between different ethnic minorities.

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Appendix I

Table A1.1. Results of the logistic regressions.

	Model 0 EU	**Model 0 EAEU**	**Model 1 EU**	**Model 1 EAEU**	**Model 2 EU**	**Model 2 EAEU**	**Model 3 EU**	**Model 3 EAEU**
Armenian (ref. Georgian)	-1.571***	0.930***	-1.023***	0.673***	-1.395***	0.675***	-0.974***	0.641***
	(0.0771)	(0.0742)	(0.129)	(0.123)	(0.0944)	(0.0888)	(0.136)	(0.128)
Azerbaijanis (ref. Georgian)	-1.063***	1.247***	-0.171	1.132***	-0.751***	1.076***	-0.221	1.142***
	(0.0777)	(0.0753)	(0.144)	(0.135)	(0.0918)	(0.0860)	(0.148)	(0.137)
2017 (ref. 2015)	0.170*	0.246***	0.228**	0.287***	0.217*	0.257***	0.228**	0.257***
	(0.0780)	(0.0715)	(0.0861)	(0.0769)	(0.0878)	(0.0778)	(0.0883)	(0.0782)
2019 (ref. 2015)	0.0787	-0.101	0.0901	-0.00877	0.152	-0.0334	0.170*	-0.0141
	(0.0730)	(0.0693)	(0.0821)	(0.0764)	(0.0843)	(0.0772)	(0.0849)	(0.0778)
Age			-0.0120***	0.00113	-0.0135***	0.00486**	-0.0130***	0.00150
			(0.00209)	(0.00191)	(0.00200)	(0.00180)	(0.00217)	(0.00196)
Female (ref. Male)			0.114	-0.0857	0.194**	-0.220***	0.203**	-0.145*
			(0.0712)	(0.0647)	(0.0720)	(0.0648)	(0.0738)	(0.0664)
HH Income			0.106***	-0.0996***	0.106***	-0.0877***	0.0965***	-0.0864***
			(0.0259)	(0.0232)	(0.0265)	(0.0232)	(0.0269)	(0.0236)
Tertiary Edu. (ref. Else)			0.431***	-0.297***	0.408***	-0.213**	0.342***	-0.236**
			(0.0935)	(0.0809)	(0.0906)	(0.0774)	(0.0963)	(0.0824)
Attends to rel. services once a week or more often (ref. Else)			-0.0394	0.145	-0.0688	0.157	-0.0684	0.164
			(0.0995)	(0.0886)	(0.101)	(0.0891)	(0.102)	(0.0895)
Knowledge of Georgian			0.315***	0.000753			0.266***	0.0251
			(0.0578)	(0.0544)			(0.0597)	(0.0557)
Knowledge of English			0.0307	-0.234***			-0.0159	-0.206***
			(0.0556)	(0.0489)			(0.0577)	(0.0499)
Knowledge of Russian			0.0546	0.164***			0.00959	0.181***
			(0.0439)	(0.0406)			(0.0455)	(0.0417)
Importance of traditions					0.143**	0.0929	0.133*	0.0711
					(0.0539)	(0.0500)	(0.0545)	(0.0506)
Georgia is a member of the CoE (ref. Else)					0.725***	-0.0967	0.701***	-0.0820
					(0.0801)	(0.0686)	(0.0808)	(0.0692)
Interest in int. Politics					0.217***	-0.0707*	0.197***	-0.0772*
					(0.0373)	(0.0336)	(0.0379)	(0.0342)
Government as an employee					0.104**	-0.210***	0.101**	-0.219***
					(0.0384)	(0.0343)	(0.0387)	(0.0346)
_cons	1.284***	-0.836***	-0.126	-0.467	-0.184	-0.251	-1.093**	-0.318
	(0.0587)	(0.0547)	(0.282)	(0.263)	(0.280)	(0.256)	(0.357)	(0.329)
N	5705	5597	4931	4833	4865	4769	4852	4754
pseudo R squared	0.073	0.052	0.109	0.069	0.129	0.071	0.132	0.077

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Appendix II

Table A2.1: Logistic Regressions of the EU/EAEU variables (separated models for Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians).

	ARM EU	**AZE EU**	**GEO EU**	**ARM EAEU**	**AZE EAEU**	**GEO EAEU**
Age	-0.00427	-0.0134**	-0.0175***	-0.00689	0.00384	0.00342
	(0.00444)	(0.00473)	(0.00305)	(0.00432)	(0.00446)	(0.00264)
Female (ref. Male)	0.00931	0.0936	0.365***	0.156	-0.294	-0.141
	(0.162)	(0.168)	(0.0979)	(0.160)	(0.159)	(0.0856)
HH Income	0.0625	0.241***	0.0451	-0.141*	0.142*	-0.124***
	(0.0674)	(0.0654)	(0.0336)	(0.0673)	(0.0609)	(0.0288)
Tertiary Edu. (ref. Else)	0.448	0.508	0.320**	0.120	-0.0478	-0.268**
	(0.258)	(0.273)	(0.115)	(0.260)	(0.243)	(0.0968)
Attends to rel service once a week or more often (ref. Else)	0.183	-0.285	-0.187	0.0770	-0.166	0.188
	(0.228)	(0.357)	(0.121)	(0.226)	(0.339)	(0.104)
Knowledge of Georgian	0.0488	0.501***	0.224	0.0425	0.0902	-0.361**
	(0.102)	(0.120)	(0.126)	(0.102)	(0.109)	(0.113)
Knowledge of English	-0.145	-0.222	0.0323	-0.443**	-0.246	-0.136*
	(0.144)	(0.181)	(0.0711)	(0.153)	(0.163)	(0.0590)
Knowledge of Russian	0.281*	-0.0178	-0.0472	0.301**	0.205*	0.148**
	(0.112)	(0.0996)	(0.0601)	(0.111)	(0.0944)	(0.0529)
Importance of traditions	0.345**	-0.0626	0.159*	0.195	-0.151	0.135
	(0.106)	(0.116)	(0.0807)	(0.102)	(0.114)	(0.0735)
Georgia is a member of the CoE (ref. Else)	0.931***	0.364*	0.754***	0.956***	-0.175	-0.233**
	(0.192)	(0.183)	(0.106)	(0.200)	(0.174)	(0.0855)
Interest in int. Politics	0.0682	0.208*	0.251***	-0.0734	0.105	-0.105*
	(0.0797)	(0.0841)	(0.0530)	(0.0784)	(0.0807)	(0.0455)
Government as an employee	0.00593	0.0531	0.140**	-0.232*	-0.257**	-0.194***
	(0.0998)	(0.0894)	(0.0493)	(0.0992)	(0.0844)	(0.0425)
2017	0.499*	-0.0353	0.242*	0.977***	0.511**	0.106
	(0.218)	(0.197)	(0.114)	(0.214)	(0.186)	(0.0978)
2019	0.540**	-0.507*	0.289**	0.719***	0.0627	-0.107
	(0.203)	(0.201)	(0.111)	(0.198)	(0.193)	(0.0985)
_cons	-2.978***	-0.668	-0.825	-0.508	0.288	1.135*
	(0.656)	(0.698)	(0.594)	(0.628)	(0.676)	(0.532)
N	789	794	3269	810	832	3112
pseudo R squared	0.066	0.103	0.073	0.066	0.042	0.047

Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

ARTICLE 3: A least expected ally? Past-communists and Ukraine's "European Choice"[1]

Introduction

Much scholarship in the social sciences uses the "post-Soviet" or "post-socialist" qualifier when referring to the former state socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). While some may do so out of theoretically hollow routine, for most this habit signals the probable presence and relevance of a now relatively distant past under Communist Party rule, and indeed, studies of Communist (-era) legacies on current social, economic and political circumstances constitute a distinguished tradition in the literature. However, such legacy effects are notoriously difficult to pin down and demonstrate empirically (Kotkin and Beissinger 2014), and there are relatively few studies that are able to support legacy arguments based on observable patterns of causality. These studies have shown, *inter alia*, that former members of CEE Communist parties were more likely to start private businesses after the fall of the *ancien regime* (though not necessarily successful ones) (Ivlevs et al. 2020), that long-lasting exposure to Communism in the past increases support for parties that favour redistributive policies (Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln 2007; Dinas and Northmore-Ball 2020), and that regions targeted for heavy industrial development under communism experienced the formation of local conditions that make the subsequent introduction of democracy and democratic decision-making more difficult (Lankina and Libman 2019).

1 This article, **co-authored with Michael Gentile**, is currently under review in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies.*

Communist regimes defined themselves as the antithesis of Capitalism, presenting themselves as the ideological pinnacle of social progress. For the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the socialist mode of production deserved being emulated by –or imposed on– other countries, despite the obvious limitations of Soviet-style economics (see Kornai 1992 for details). In characteristically totalitarian manner, the blame for such failures was typically shifted on to domestic counter-revolutionary forces (real or imaginary) and to malevolent Western states (Yablokov 2018). Conspiracy theories and outright disinformation, as well as other so-called "active measures" (Rid 2020), were used extensively in order to achieve this result. Ultimately, Soviet propaganda produced a polarized geopolitical narrative of the world, contrasting Soviet "best practices" against the misery, corruption and moral bankruptcy of the West. Accordingly, it aimed to discourage any sympathy for the latter, while producing unrealistic expectations about the future Soviet land of (equally shared) milk and honey. And Communists, both leaders and rank-and-file, were the ideological vanguard charged with leading the working classes masses to this future of peace, work and joy. In this vein, devout former Communists would be expected to look back at the fall of the Soviet Union with regret or nostalgia, while feeling resentment towards the market economy and any geopolitical reorientation towards the heir(s) of the Cold War Capitalist nemesis.

Needless to say, the CPSU's storyline failed to convince everyone, and over time it lost its purchase among the wider society. With this in mind, it is plausible that at least some former party members will have lost their faith in Communist geopolitical narratives, opening two additional possibilities: that the views of Communist (former) party members may have converged with those prevalent within society at large, or given their presumable deeper understanding of the system and of its failures, that former Communists may have become even more critical. Indeed, the little literature there is on the role of former Communists in CEE societies shows that Communist elites were strikingly adaptive (Libman and Obydenkova 2021: 32-34), while, as a group, former Communist party members did not behave like Communists after Communism (Ivlevs, Nikolova and Popova 2020).

There is a floating assumption among CEE societies that people associated with the past regime are largely unable or unwilling to adapt to the post-1989/91 conditions, and that

their geopolitical and foreign policy orientations are towards Moscow and away from the West. In some cases, Communist successor parties did little to alter this impression. In Ukraine, for example, the current Communist Party, which enjoyed very much support during the 1990s (the Party's presidential candidate Petro Symonenko reached the second round of the 1999 elections, raking in almost 40% of the votes), is highly ideologically conservative, with its geopolitical orientation very much "Eurasian." Leaving Symonenko's crumbling anachronistic political edifice aside, our paper asks whether people with past individual ties to the CPSU really are as anti-Western as is frequently assumed. Our analysis will be informed by results obtained from public opinion surveys conducted in three major cities in the eastern half of Ukraine – Kharkiv, Dnipro and Mariupol – in which tensions run high regarding Ukraine's "European Choice" (originally formulated in Verkhovna Rada 2002). Different aspects of pro-Western orientation will be discussed by focusing on EU and NATO preferences, opinions on whether the Soviet period was positive for Ukraine and, for the case of Mariupol only, opinions on the legitimacy of the illegal 11 May 2014 referendum on the independence of the "Donetsk People's Republic," the neo-Soviet separatist statelet engineered by Russia that year against a background of civil unrest associated with the Euromaidan revolution in Kyiv.

Our main finding is that people with individual ties to the CPSU are *more*, not less, pro-Western. This rather counter-intuitive insight is significant on two accounts. First, it complements – and to some extent challenges – the literature on the (individual or macro-level) effects of CPSU membership in post-Communist societies (Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova, 2016a; Letki, 2004; Libman and Obydenkova, 2021). Second, it makes a more general contribution to the literature on political and geopolitical attitudes in CEE, and especially in the former Soviet Union, where Russia's presence is more conspicuous and contested. In doing so, it shows how Soviet politics still influence post-Soviet politics, not least when it comes to the issue of EU support and integration. Here, our results allow us to develop Loveless and Rohrschneider's (2011) argument that individual support for the EU in post-Communist countries is influenced more by values and politics than by economics.

We now proceed by reviewing the extant literature on the associations between Communist Party (CP) membership and (geo)political attitudes, allowing us to distil our main research question and a set of two competing hypotheses. We then present the three Ukrainian case study cities, followed a data and methods section, which also motivates the choice of variables studied in the empirical analysis. This allows us to move on to the results section, starting from a descriptive stage and ending in a multivariate setting. Informed by the findings of our paper, the final section discusses its main conclusions and their significance in the light of the literature.

CP links and current (geo)political attitudes

The literature on historical legacies studies "the persistence of institutions, policies, values, and practices which connect past and present phenomena" (Libman and Obydenkova, 2021: 18). A historical legacy argument presupposes the existence of a significant disruptive event, and is thus not applicable to societies with gradually evolving systems (Kotkin and Beissinger, 2014). Such disruptive events, which may be viewed as "critical junctures" (Capoccia 2015) or "macrohistorical ruptures" (Kotkin and Beissinger, 2014: 8), include a wide range of major events, from severe economic depressions (e.g. the Greek crisis of 2011), through coups (e.g. the recent Myanmar military coup), revolutionary regime change (e.g. the Tunisian Jasmine revolution in 2011), to decolonization. Beyond doubt, one of the 20th century's most important macrohistorical ruptures is the sudden collapse of the Communist regimes in the Soviet Union (1991) and its satellite states. The events had epochal consequences for the political landscapes (democratization, sometimes), economies (economic depression) and geopolitical characteristics of the region's newly (or truly) independent states. As such, the collapse of the socialist regimes provides a unique window of opportunity to study the influence of the historical legacies of the Communist system for the societies of the successor states (Kotkin and Beissinger, 2014; Libman and Obydenkova, 2021).

CP members, and people who grew up in families with communists, are a "living" (if shrinking, for obvious demographic reasons) legacy of the Communist period. This group has attracted the interest of scholars from the very early years of transition, when there was a debate between proponents of the political capitalism thesis, which purported that Communists would "monetize" their political assets (e.g. by seizing control over former

state property) (Staniszkis 1990), and those who placed greater emphasis on cultural capital as the main driver of individual success post-1989 (Eyal et al. 1998). More recently, several authors have focused on the role that links to the former Communist parties have on current political and economic practices and attitudes in post-Communist societies. These links matter, as Communist parties had a monopoly on power in the countries they ruled (Letki, 2004; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2020), and, as such, these parties acted as spaces where individuals could participate within set boundaries in politics, and where they could develop their social networks (Letki, 2004). Moreover, CPs functioned as *sui generis* elitist organizations: it was a privilege to join (unwelcome for some, e.g. Soviet composer Dmitriy Shostakovich, see Fairclough 2019), and offered several social and economic advantages to their members (Rona-Tas and Guseva, 2001; Ivlevs, Nikolova, and Popova, 2020; Libman and Obydenkova, 2021), the most notable of which possibly being the opportunity to travel, including to the West. In Estonia, for example, by 1991 27% of Communists had visited the West and 54% the other socialist countries, as opposed to only 10% and 28%, respectively, among non-Communists (Titma, Tooding and Tuma 2004: 96). This means that Communists have a history of greater exposure to the West than do non-Communists; they were thus better equipped to assess the differences in living standards between the two sides of the iron curtain, and by extension perhaps also the relative merit of the Soviet command economy under the patronage of the CP.

In the remainder of this section, we first review the main findings of the literature, focusing on the correlation of past CP membership with current political and economic circumstances, after which we turn our attention to the main legacy effects that have been theorized as underlying these relations.

First, from a macro perspective, the successive works by Libman and Obydenkova (e.g., 2015, 2020, 2021) uncovered a relationship between CPSU membership in particular regions and their post-Soviet political and economic trajectories. Specifically, Libman and Obydenkova's work on the historical legacies of Communism in post-Soviet Russia shows that higher regional percentages of CPSU members during the later years of Soviet power predict lower levels of democratic development (Libman and Obydenkova, 2015), higher corruption (Obydenkova and Libman, 2015; Libman and Obydenkova, 2021),

lower levels of regional inequality (Libman and Obydenkova, 2019), and stronger negative attitudes towards migrants (Libman and Obydenkova, 2020).

Second, at the individual level, multiple authors have focused on the nexus between past links with the CPSU and current economic and political conditions and attitudes. Both Gerber (2000) and Rona-Tas and Guseva (2001), for example, identify a link between former CPSU membership and higher salaries in early post-Soviet Russia. However, they differ in their interpretation of the causal links between variables: for Gerber (2000), the higher salaries among former Communist party members can be traced back to the (unmeasurable) individual psychological characteristics that favored their admission to the party in the first place (ambition, assertiveness, etc.); Rona-Tas and Guseva (2001), on the other hand, dispute Gerber's (2000) on methodological grounds while countering that the more plausible explanation lies in former Communists' formal and informal institutional advantages inherited from the Soviet period, echoing the political capitalism interpretation (Staniszkis 1990). Recently, Ivlevs and colleagues explored the socioeconomic consequences of individual links with CPs in a study including multiple countries. Ivlevs and Hinks (2018) show that individual links with the CPSU strongly predict willingness to bribe public officials, supporting Libman and Obydenkova's (2021) findings at the regional level. Ivlevs, Nikolova and Popova (2020) show that Communist Party links are positively correlated with entrepreneurship. With regard to the far less-explored connections with political behaviour, Letki (2004) reveals that past membership in a CP is positively correlated with political engagement, which the author attributes to "the skills and general interest in politics learned [especially by Communist party members] under non-democratic regimes" (Letki, 2004: 675).

So far, we may recognize two main arguments linking CP membership with current behaviors and attitudes: (1) CPs as promoters of clientelism and corrupt practice, and (2) CPs as generators and consolidators of social elites. These arguments refer to competing sets of results with their associated inferences about plausible causality.

The "factory of corruption and clientelism" argument is supported by works that show that individual links to Communist parties, and regional percentages of Communist party membership, are negatively correlated to democratic, cosmopolitan, and free market

outcomes. These works often point to the economy of favours and corruption among (and between) CP members to argue that past CP membership is associated with these behaviours today via a relatively straightforward continuity effect (Libman and Obydenkova 2015, Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova 2016b: 11, Ivlevs and Hinks 2018). In this literature, the CPs are seen primarily as clientelist organizations whose members profited from the social and economic opportunities that came with CP membership.

The "social elite mill" argument rests on findings that show that individual links to CPs increase political engagement. For this reason, former party members are potentially among the driving forces of the democratization processes in post-Communist Europe. Seen through this lens, the limited space for political participation that was available to CP members under Communism had a positive impact on this groups's future participation in democratic processes (Letki, 2004), while also giving it a political headstart in the society that emerged from the rubble of the multiple crises generated by the great post-1989 macrohistorical rupture.

Summing up, our brief review of the literature shows that the individual trajectories of former CP members do not fit in a single theoretical mould. On the one hand, the literature indicates that, as a group, they tend to perform somewhat better economically than the population at large, despite earlier indications to the contrary (based on countries which have chosen clean break strategies, see Eyal et al. 1998). On the other, little is known (but much is assumed) about the group's ideological commitment post-1989, and on the extent to which this commitment may influence the current political and geopolitical attitudes. Even less is known for one of the contexts where the issue arguably matters the most: Ukraine. On this basis, we re-iterate our research question, which is:

How do past members of the Communist Party, or people or who grew up with at least one parent in the Party, assess Ukraine's pivot to the West?

Based on the literature reviewed above, we find support for a main hypothesis (H1) and a counter-hypothesis (H2). H1 is that those with links to the CPSU are more likely to be against a Ukrainian EU or NATO accession, to have good perceptions of the Soviet past, and to perceive the 11 May 2014 illegal referendum on the independence of the DPR as legitimate. H2, on the other hand, is that the opposite is the case. Both hypotheses are in

contrast with the null hypothesis (H0) that a Communist Party background (individual or among parents) does not influence (geo)political preferences.

Case studies, data and methods

Case study sites

Located in the eastern central part of the country, Dnipro (pop. ca. 1 million) and Kharkiv (pop. ca. 1.4 million) rank among Ukraine's largest and most significant and diversified industrial and cultural centres. Both hosted unique strategic industries linked to the Soviet military-industrial complex and to nuclear power generation. These industries remain vital for the cities today, including the nuclear turbine-producing Turboatom in Kharkiv and Pivdenmash (Yuzhmash) in Dnipro, which is able to produce, among other things, intercontinental ballistic missiles and rocket engines. Both cities thus host(ed) a highly skilled elite of engineers and specialists. When the Euromaidan revolution unfolded in Kyiv, protests erupted in both cities, but they were particularly dangerous in Kharkiv, where a serious Russian-led attempt at creating a "Kharkov People's Republic" was crushed by Ukrainian special forces. In Dnipro, on the other hand, the protests rapidly dissolved, and the city even started earning the reputation for Ukrainian civic nationalism, "a space in which identification with Ukraine was formulated in political, not language- or ethnicity-based, categories" (Portnov 2015: 729). Nevertheless, according to a recent study (Gentile 2020), this label, while being more appropriate for Dnipro than for Kharkiv, is misleading: both cities host significant non-pro-Western contingents, if not outright pro-Russian.[2]

Mariupol is a mid-sized port city (pop. ca. 450,000) in the southeastern corner of Ukraine. The city's economy is dominated by two large steelworks (Ilich and Azovstal, both belonging to the Metinvest corporation headed by oligarch Rinat Akhmetov), making the city's prospects far more dependent on the success or failure of one sector than in the case in our two other case studies. Unlike Kharkiv and Dnipro, Mariupol was temporarily controlled by the DPR during the late spring months of 2014, and on the 11th of May the latter managed to organize a pseudo-referendum on the DPR's independence, achieving stratospheric levels of approval. Nevertheless, the DPR forces in Mariupol were soon defeated and forced to retreat. Since then, the city has been located near the military

2 For details on how the post-Euromaidan conflict played out in Kharkiv and Dnipro, see Nitsova (2021).

frontline, and it has been subject to multiple rocket attacks, most notably on 24 January 2015. Despite this, a majority of its population holds views that are incompatible with Kyiv's European vision for Ukraine.

Data

We use survey data collected in Dnipro and Kharkiv in 2018, and in Mariupol in 2020 (n=1254, 1258 and 1251, respectively, aged 18+). The data were collected through personal interviews and anonymized by the Kyiv-based Center for Social Indicators (CSI), which shares its resources (i.e. people and equipment) with the reputed Kyiv International Institute of Sociology polling agency. The survey instrument and data collection method were approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (decisions 55423 and 173602). The main themes covered by the surveys relate to Ukraine's current political and geopolitical situation. The Dnipro and Kharkiv databases are almost identical, whereas the Mariupol database, while similar in its overall structure, includes a somewhat different set of opinion questions. Despite these differences, the variables used in this study are identical across all three databases, both in terms of question wording and available answering options. The sampling method is described in greater detail in Gentile (2020). For our purposes here, it suffices to note that the sample relies on a household-based sampling frame, and that only one person was selected within each household (using a modified version of the Kish (1949) table). While aiming to maximize representativeness vis-à-vis the adult population of the three cities, such a strategy inevitably leads to an over-representation of women and of the elderly, who are more likely to live alone in Ukraine, in addition to being more easily approachable (cf. Nemeth 2004). For this reason, we report our results both unweighted and weighted (in accordance with the cities' known age-sex composition statistics). The response rates are of 28% in Dnipro, 36% in Kharkiv and 30% in Mariupol, and these figures take into account all forms of nonresponse.

Methods

We report separate logistic regressions for each city, facilitating comparison (see Appendix I). However, as Mood (2010) explains "it is problematic to compare LnOR or OR across samples, across groups within samples, or over time—even when we use models with the same independent variables". To overcome this problem, and following

Mood (2010), we calculate the Average Marginal Effects (AMEs) for the logistic models, which allow a more straightforward interpretation.

Our dependent variables – support for hypothetical EU/NATO accession, belief that the Soviet period was positive for Ukraine, and disagreement with the statement that the 11 May 2014 DPR referendum was legitimate – approach our underlying research question from different angles. The first variable dichotomizes the answers to the question "Do you think it would be good for Ukraine to join the EU and/or NATO?" Here, following previous coding by other authors (e.g. Ehin 2001, Kentmen 2008, Berlinschi 2019), support for either organization, or both, is coded as 1, and the rest, including don't know (DK) answers, as 0 (the logic for coding DKs as 0 is that they indicate a lack of explicit support). The "Soviet period was positive" and the "disagree that the DPR referendum was legitimate" variables both dichotomize answers on a four-option symmetric Likert scale (completely agree, rather agree, rather disagree and completely disagree). The neutral category was intentionally omitted because it is not practically distinguishable from a DK answer.

For the Soviet period variable, we distinguish between confident agreement (completely agree = 1) and the rest of the answers rather than drawing the line at the natural cutting point between agreement and disagreement. This is because we want to single out those with unambiguously pro-Soviet views, as it is otherwise quite common among Ukrainians to see at least some value in the Soviet past (the country industrialized, all-encompassing schooling was introduced, etc.), a position which is not necessarily at odds with having a Western geopolitical orientation today.

For the referendum variable, we code any level of *dis*agreement as 1, otherwise 0. To simplify the interpretation, we consider answers that disagree with the referendum statement as equivalent to agreeing with the statement that the DPR referendum was *il*legitimate.

Our key independent variables are parental CP membership, split into two dichotomous variables (one for each parent), and personal past membership in the CP. The two variables are tested in separate models because separating the two variables in different

models allows us to include two extra control variables in the parental communism models, while leaving them out of the individual CPSU membership model, where including them arguably makes less sense. [3]

Based on the extant research on the determinants of foreign policy and geopolitical preferences in Ukraine, our models include demographic, socioeconomic and sociocultural controls.

Our demographic variables comprise age in three groups (18-39, 40-59 and 60+) and sex (male =1). Both variables are standard controls in survey-based research on geopolitical and foreign policy preferences, and several studies show lower support for a Western geopolitical orientation among older age cohorts (O'Loughlin 2001, Munro 2007, Armandon 2013).

Our socioeconomic variables are education (completed higher education =1), material standard of living (good or excellent on a five-step Likert scale = 1, otherwise 0), and occupational status (managers and professionals =1, otherwise 0). Socioeconomic status is known to correlate with pro-Western preferences not only in Ukraine (Munro 2007, Torres-Adán 2021a), but also in e.g. Russia (O'Loughlin and Talbot 2005) and Moldova (Torres-Adán 2021b). We also control for the respondents' parents' higher education in order to target potential social class reproduction effects.

The sociocultural controls include language usually spoken at home and the two supranational identifications as "Soviet" or "European," respectively. For the language usually spoken at home (or with friends and family for single-person households), "mostly Russian" is coded as 1, while the "else" category (0) includes not only Ukrainian but also both Russian and Ukrainian as well as Surzhyk and any other language. Soviet and European identification were measured using the answers to the questions "Do you feel Ukrainian/Russian/Soviet/European?", which were dichotomized at their natural cutting points on a four-step Likert scale (Clearly not, rather not, rather yes, clearly yes).

3 In any case, the two variables have been tested in the same model and the main results of this paper hold both for parental and individual CPSU membership with the exception of effect of the individual CPSU membership over the EU/NATO support, which keeps the same direction but loses significance. These extra tables are not included here, as they would occupy much space, but they are available upon request.

The "feel Russian" and "feel Ukrainian" variables were tested, but for parsimony they were excluded from the models, as they are mostly nonsignificant when combined with the "feel Soviet" and "feel European" variables. Many studies on foreign policy and geopolitical preferences in Ukraine find a rather strong effect of language and self-reported national identification (e.g. Pirie 1996, Kulyk 2011, Pop-Eleches and Robertson 2018), with Russian(s) typically being associated with weaker pro-Western (or pro-Ukraine) policy preferences.[4] In fact, supranational identifications, which are more seldom controlled for, appear to "cannibalize" on the effects of national identity (Gentile 2020), while economic considerations such as regional trade patterns encourage pragmatic preferences among both Russians and Ukrainians (Beesley 2020).

Finally, we control for self-reported knowledge of the English language, as this offers an indication of the respondents' potential direct exposure to the West, including its information spaces. Indeed, a recent study based on a nationwide convenience (Facebook) sample finds that knowledge of at least some English is associated with greater EU support, although direct exposure to EU countries was found to be more important (Kovalska 2021). It is also plausible that an expected future English-language premium on the labour market, might mean that those who do speak the language will also have greater appreciation of the opportunities presented by Ukraine's "European Choice," particularly as a result of increased trade with the West. However, this premium has yet to jump from the world of expectations to that of the observable outcomes (Fabo 2020).

Results

We report our results in two stages. In the first stage we present the univariate descriptive statistics for our dependent variables (support for EU and/or NATO accession, belief that the Soviet period was "definitely positive" for Ukraine, and belief that the DPR referendum was illegitimate[5]), followed by a bivariate crosstabulation against the independent variables (parental CPSU membership and individual CPSU membership). In the second stage, we verify our findings in a multivariate setting by reporting the

4 It is worth noting that there is an important literature that challenges essentializing notions of Ukraine's linguistic communities, and in particular of the Russophone group, which is very diverse and for which linguistic identities are not at all clear-cut, especially since the Euromaidan (see e.g. Kulyk 2019, Aliyev 2019).

5 In fact the dependent variables is "disagreement with the statement that the DPR referendum was legitimate," which is the same as saying that it was illegitimate.

differences in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values of the independent variables.

Table 1. Unweighted and weighted (by age and sex) distribution of the dependent variables in the three case study cities.

	Unweighted (%)	**Weighted (%)**
Dnipro		
Supports either EU or NATO accession, or both (n=1252)	43.2	45.2
Believes that Soviet period was clearly positive for Ukraine (n=1258)	32.6	30.2
Kharkiv		
Supports either EU or NATO accession, or both (n=1253)	28.5	30.9
Believes that Soviet period was clearly positive for Ukraine (n=1252)	33.2	29.3
Mariupol		
Supports either EU or NATO accession, or both (n=1248)	20	24
Believes that Soviet period was clearly positive for Ukraine (n=1251)	49.4	41.7
Believes that DPR referendum was illegitimate (n=1251)	27.1	28

Source: author's survey material.

Having (had) communist parents predicts individual pro-Western inclinations

Table 1 reports the shares univariate frequencies in our dependent variables, both unweighted and weighted by age and sex, for each city. Overall, it is clear that the three cities' residents do not hold particularly "pro-West" views, with the partial exception of Dnipro, where almost half of the population would like to see Ukraine join the EU, NATO or both organizations (the original variable – before dichotomization – shows that the EU is by far the most popular of the two). Of the three cities, Mariupol is the one where Ukraine's "European Choice" seems to be facing its greatest challenge, particularly when considering that only a minority of little more than one quarter considers the DPR referendum as being illegitimate. We also note that the weighted statistics differ somewhat, particularly in the case of Mariupol, suggesting the necessity to conduct the analysis in both weighted and unweighted modes. In the remainder of the main text, we report our unweighted results because they are similar in substance to the weighted one, which are instead reported in Appendix 2.

Table 2. Distribution of the dependent variables by parental communism status.

	Parental communism status	n	Ukraine should become a member of the EU/NATO (% yes in each group)	Considers the Soviet period as "definitely positive" for Ukraine (% in each group)	Disagree that the DPR Referendum was legitimate (% in each group)
Dnipro	No communist parents/DK	980	41.3	32.8	n.a.
	Communist mother	20	40	35	
	Communist father	104	50	40.4	
	Both parents communists	133	53.4	28.6	
	Total (incl. refusals)	1258	43.3	33	
Kharkiv	No communist parents/DK	1068	25.1	33.4	n.a.
	Communist mother	22	72.7	31.8	
	Communist father	82	53.7	41.5	
	Both parents communists	64	37.5	20.3	
	Total (incl. refusals)	1254	28.5	33.2	
Mariupol	No communist parents/DK	940	15.2	51.9	24.2
	Communist mother	39	30.9	40.5	35.7
	Communist father	100	19	50.9	28.4
	Both parents communists	145	46.5	36.1	40.3
	Total (incl. refusals)	1251	19.8	49.5	26.9

Source: author's survey material.

Table 2 disaggregates the information contained in the previous table by parental communism status, and a clear pattern emerges: respondents whose both parents were CPSU members are more likely to support Ukraine's EU and/or NATO accession in all three cities. In most cases, a single communist parent appears to be enough too. A similar but weaker pattern exists for the (definitely positive) opinions on the Soviet past, which are generally more frequent among those who do not have a parental communist background than among those with "double-communist" backgrounds. In this case, having only one communist parent shows little association with the dependent variable.

Perhaps the most counterintuitive result in Table 2 is that having (had) CPSU member parents – even just one – is associated with belief in the lack of legitimacy of the DPR referendum. This is even more striking, considering that the DPR seeks to invoke legitimacy by relying on a pastiche of Soviet discourses, narratives, and heraldry, spicing them with a good dose of "White" Russian imperialism. A Soviet-era communist should, in theory, be attracted to this, but of course, having communist parents is not the same as having yourself been a member of the CPSU. We must therefore turn to Table 3, where

individual CPSU membership is brought into the picture, while those who were not of potentially communist age in 1991 must be temporarily dropped from the analysis.

Table 3. Distribution of the dependent variables by individual former Communist Party membership status (excludes those aged 21 and under in 1991).

	Respondent CPSU membership	Do you think that Ukraine should become a member of NATO/the EU? (% in each group)	Considers the Soviet period as "definitely positive" for Ukraine (% in each group)	Disagree that the DPR Referendum was legitimate (% in each group)
Dnipro 2018 (n=718)	Not member	34.2	43.4	n.a.
	CPSU member	45.2	53.2	
	Total	36.2	45.1	
Kharkiv 2018 (n=717)	Not member	17.4	43.9	n.a.
	CPSU member	34.2	31.6	
	Total	19.2	42.5	
Mariupol 2020 (n=789)	Not member	12.1	66.9	22.4
	CPSU member	16	49.7	24.8
	Total	12.9	63.2	22.9

Former CPSU members, it appears, also favour Ukrainian EU and/or NATO membership more than do non-members, with the difference being strongest in Kharkiv. In Dnipro, almost half of the former CPSU members have such pro-Western preferences, which is more than the average for the city including the younger (more pro-European) cohorts. Former CPSU members also see less value in the Soviet period in Kharkiv and Mariupol, but not in Dnipro. Perhaps this is explained by the fact that Dnipro(petrovsk) was a highly prioritized, and thus privileged, city during the years of Soviet power (Zhuk 2010), and living standards were certainly higher than those in Kharkiv or Mariupol, especially for CPSU members.

Summing up, our initial descriptive tour indicates that, in line with some of the premises of the historical legacies literature (e.g. that past CPSU membership stimulated political engagement post-1989, Letki 2004) but contrary to recent developments studying the macro-effects of CPSU party membership (e.g., Libman and Obydenkova 2021), individual or parental affiliation to the CPSU is positively correlated with pro-Western attitudes. We now need to check whether these results are able to persist after relevant controls have been added.

Tables 4-6 show the differences in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum of the independent variables in the models based on parental CPSU membership. Three variables consistently predict support for EU and/or NATO

accession, or lack thereof (Table 4): parental communism, and our two "feeling European and Soviet" controls, confirming our descriptive findings. The European and Soviet controls are powerful predictors, but they are also rather obvious, so we shall hereafter place them aside. In addition, we may note that knowledge of the English language is positively associated with EU/NATO support, whereas Russian spoken at home exerts an influence in the opposition direction, but not all of the latter associations are statistically significant. In Kharkiv, higher education and a good standard of living also predict a pro-West geopolitical orientation, suggesting a social status effect which is perhaps self-interested (why change the status quo, which is the European Choice?), and which signals that the country's geopolitical orientation is more socially divisive in this city (cf. Gentile 2020).

As for the case of EU/NATO support, having communist parents reduces the probability of having a clearly positive opinion of the Soviet past (Table 5), but this time only in Dnipro and Mariupol. Instead, a clear age effect emerges, especially in Mariupol, where the gap in living standards and, especially, security between the heydays of Soviet Communism and today is likely (and rightly) perceived as largest, particularly among the oldest cohorts who must rely on meagre pensions for their survival.

Table 4. Average marginal effects for the parental CPSU membership model: EU/NATO preferences.

Predictor	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Unweighted		Unweighted		Unweighted	
	Change	p value	Change	p value	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	-0.041	0.250	-0.046	0.135	0.025	0.372
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	-0.047	0.244	-0.061	0.085	-0.007	0.802
Male	0.002	0.935	0.028	0.245	0.015	0.435
Higher education (ref: other)	-0.003	0.934	0.091	0.001	-0.008	0.711
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.063	0.114	0.226	0.000	0.012	0.675
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	-0.009	0.776	-0.051	0.046	0.009	0.717
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.060	0.060	-0.114	0.006	-0.130	0.000
English language - can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.055	0.210	0.104	0.012	0.061	0.070
Higher education (**mother**)(ref: other)	0.064	0.121	0.062	0.058	-0.034	0.224
Higher education (**father**)(ref: other)	-0.010	0.804	-0.099	0.001	0.134	0.001
Communist parent(s)(ref: no communist parents)	**0.132**	**0.000**	**0.193**	**0.000**	**0.128**	**0.000**
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.312	0.000	0.258	0.000	0.267	0.000
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.203	0.000	-0.086	0.002	-0.220	0.000

Source: author's survey. The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for the dichotomous variables. For variables with several categories, the table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between each of the categories and the reference category.

Table 5. Average marginal effects for the parental CPSU membership model: Perceptions of the Soviet period.

Predictor	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Unweighted		Unweighted		Unweighted	
	Change	p value	Change	p value	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	0.083	0.015	0.101	0.005	0.316	0.000
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	0.287	0.000	0.100	0.008	0.400	0.000
Male	0.013	0.628	-0.030	0.263	0.011	0.684
Higher education (ref: other)	-0.024	0.410	0.018	0.537	-0.013	0.699
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	-0.089	0.024	-0.141	0.000	0.017	0.701
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.021	0.466	0.015	0.606	-0.015	0.682
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.028	0.345	-0.036	0.395	0.073	0.049
English language - can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	-0.026	0.556	-0.010	0.837	0.019	0.728
Higher education (**mother**)(ref: other)	-0.017	0.668	-0.190	0.000	-0.036	0.516
Higher education (**father**)(ref: other)	0.062	0.117	-0.020	0.575	0.068	0.169
Communist parent(s)(ref: no communist parents)	**-0.042**	**0.166**	**-0.021**	**0.576**	**-0.143**	**0.000**
Feels European (ref: does not)	-0.064	0.035	-0.192	0.000	-0.073	0.075
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	0.232	0.000	0.169	0.000	0.294	0.000

Source: author's survey. The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for the dichotomous variables. For variables with several categories, the table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between each of the categories and the reference category.

Table 6. Average marginal effects for the parental CPSU membership model: DPR Referendum.

Predictor	Mariupol	
	Unweighted	
	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	0.083	0.013
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	0.099	0.005
Male	-0.012	0.629
Higher education (ref: other)	0.012	0.689
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.109	0.014
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.034	0.315
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.010	0.776
English language - can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.076	0.114
Higher education (**mother**)(ref: other)	-0.018	0.669
Higher education (**father**)(ref: other)	0.098	0.052
Communist parent(s)(ref: no communist parents)	**0.071**	**0.025**
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.129	0.001
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.214	0.000

Source: author's survey. The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for the dichotomous variables. For variables with several categories, the table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between each of the categories and the reference category.

Finally, Table 6 shows that parental communism predicts individual belief that the DPR referendum of 11 May 2014 was illegitimate. The effect is not strong, but it is nevertheless considerable and statistically significant. It is worth noting that while the "feel" variables and material standard of living behave as one would expect, age does not: after controlling for socioeconomic status and supranational identification, it appears that the older generations were less supportive of the DPR project than the younger ones, which contradicts the popular opinions circulating in Ukraine. Of course, older age correlates with (lower) social status and, in particular, with "Soviet" identification, but not completely, and all models have passed the multicollinearity test (VIF values) with good margin.

Summing up, the findings presented so far support our second hypothesis (H_2), i.e., that having links to the CPSU is associated with pro-Western rather than with anti-Western geopolitical inclinations. All three indicators point in the same direction. However, having grown up with CPSU member parents is not enough to fully address our research question. For this reason, we now turn to our results based on individual past CPSU membership.

Having been a CPSU member predicts individual pro-Western inclinations

Tables 7 to 9 indicate that parental and individual CPSU membership behave in similar ways (as do the controls). Former communists are (1) more likely to be in favour of Ukraine acceding to the EU or NATO (Table 7) and (2) less likely to think that the Soviet period was positive for Ukraine (except in Dnipro, Table 8. Moreover, there appear to be no significant differences in geopolitical attitudes between non-communists of potential communist age and those whose younger age precluded CPSU membership, except in Kharkiv, where the latter group is more impressed by the Soviet period than are the city's Soviet-grown non-communists.

These findings complement the ones revealed by the parental communism models, allowing us to conclude that CPSU links consistently predict pro-Western geopolitical orientations, thus confirming H_2. Of course, our findings do not allow generalization beyond the cases of the cities that they describe, but they are nevertheless largely

consistent across three very diverse local contexts while being located within the single Ukrainian national context: Dnipro is the former elite industrial city, as well as a source of many of the USSR's and independent Ukraine's political elites. Kharkiv is also industrial, but with a much more limited "eliteness" when compared to Dnipro; instead, it is an established hub of Ukrainian national culture. Finally, Mariupol is characterized by its heavy industrial heritage of ferrous metallurgy.

Table 7. Average marginal effects for the individual CPSU membership model: EU/NATO preferences.

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Unweighted		Unweighted		Unweighted	
	Change	p value	Change	p value	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	-0.078	0.119	-0.037	0.384	0.068	0.009
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	-0.111	0.087	-0.063	0.264	0.044	0.268
Male	-0.006	0.836	0.022	0.366	0.010	0.631
Higher education (ref: other)	0.014	0.625	0.085	0.001	0.019	0.404
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.078	0.054	0.243	0.000	0.023	0.463
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.001	0.983	-0.056	0.031	0.017	0.508
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.053	0.102	-0.116	0.007	-0.160	0.000
English language - can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.062	0.156	0.095	0.023	0.103	0.006
Party membership: Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	-0.047	0.317	0.018	0.691	0.057	0.132
Party membership: CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.105**	**0.023**	**0.110**	**0.042**	**0.076**	**0.024**
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.324	0.000	0.286	0.000	0.267	0.000
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.203	0.000	-0.061	0.034	-0.225	0.000

Source: author's survey. The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for the dichotomous variables. For variables with several categories, the table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between each of the categories and the reference category.

Table 8. Average marginal effects for the individual CPSU membership model: Perceptions of the Soviet period.

Predictor	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Unweighted		Unweighted		Unweighted	
	Change	p value	Change	p value	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	0.082	0.060	0.166	0.000	0.273	0.000
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	0.279	0.000	0.223	0.000	0.344	0.000
Male	0.013	0.614	-0.032	0.237	0.017	0.544
Higher education (ref: other)	-0.017	0.536	-0.053	0.058	-0.015	0.649
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	-0.092	0.018	-0.194	0.000	0.010	0.819
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.026	0.367	0.015	0.617	-0.009	0.797
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.026	0.366	-0.063	0.163	0.060	0.098
English language -can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	-0.032	0.473	-0.027	0.570	0.008	0.879
Party membership: Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	0.013	0.784	0.096	0.026	-0.078	0.114
Party membership: CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.037**	**0.353**	**-0.094**	**0.021**	**-0.200**	**0.000**
Feels European (ref: does not)	-0.063	0.040	-0.214	0.000	-0.087	0.032
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	0.237	0.000	0.202	0.000	0.301	0.000

Source: author's survey. The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for the dichotomous variables. For variables with several categories, the table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between each of the categories and the reference category.

Table 9. Average marginal effects for the individual CPSU membership model: Disagree that the DPR Referendum was legitimate.

Predictor	Mariupol Unweighted	
	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	0.115	0.000
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	0.175	0.000
Male	-0.013	0.607
Higher education (ref: other)	0.028	0.366
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.118	0.008
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.041	0.223
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.018	0.594
English language -can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.101	0.038
Party membership: Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	0.106	0.040
Party membership: CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.047**	**0.215**
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.132	0.001
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.213	0.000

Source: author's survey. The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for the dichotomous variables. For variables with several categories, the table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between each of the categories and the reference category.

Concluding discussion

The results of our analysis add on to the relatively scarce literature on individual effects of historical legacies, and particularly to the literature on individual CPSU membership and political attitudes (Letki, 2004). Broadly speaking, we find an intriguing and somewhat counterintuitive legacy effect on geopolitical and political attitudes, and these are attitudes that matter for the future orientation of Ukraine and for the overall stability of the region. Specifically, we show that, in our three case study cities, individuals who were members of the CPSU, as well as the sons and daughters of former CPSU members, tend to exhibit stronger pro-Western geopolitical inclinations than their neighbours without communist links. Individual communist links, in other words, increase our research population's probability of supporting Kyiv's European Choice, rather than the alternatives preferred by Moscow, which focuses on Ukraine *not* integrating with the West (political apathy is acceptable for this purpose, but cynicism or explicit "pro-Eurasian" stances would be preferable). *Why* communist links predict pro-West stances is an entirely different matter which would require additional research, and identifying causality paths (for they are surely multiple) would require intense qualitative, experimental, and possibly longitudinal data.

We should recall that our results exist against the background of a majority that cannot be characterized as being explicitly pro-West, including people with both agnostic and explicitly pro-Russian views (Torres-Adán 2021a). And we should also recall that the three case study cities do not represent the whole of Ukraine, where pro-West were generally more firmly established following the Euromaidan revolution, but a sample of strategically and economically important cities in the country's eastern half.

Focusing on individuals rather than on the macro-level allows us to paint a somewhat different picture to that of Libman and Obydenkova (2021), especially if pro-Western attitudes are interpreted as a sign of support for democracy – a connection that is likely but hardly watertight. Being a former party member (or the son/daughter of one) is not associated with negative or retrograde positions (e.g., being against democratization, being more prone to corruption, and more anti-immigration); instead it can have a certain "Westernizing" effect today, even when the share of Communists in a region predicts lower levels of democracy and/or higher corruption (Libman and Obydenkova 2015, 2021). How can the contrast between our findings and those of Libman and Obydenkova (2015, 2019, 2020, 2021) be explained? There are at least three plausible answers to this question. Firstly, it could be that our implicit equiparation of pro-Western attitudes with support for democratic values does not necessarily hold in all contexts. Secondly, the Russian (where Libman and Obydenkova have conducted most of their work) and Ukrainian contexts might differ in ways that only a comparative (individual and macro-effects) study can unveil. Lastly, these results could indicate that, while on an individual level former communists and their offspring are more pro-West than the average, a higher share of communists at the regional level would reduce regional levels of democracy and/or increase corruption because of the intervening effect of regional clientelistic networks based on past CPSU membership.

To conclude, our paper generates new questions that need an answer. One such question concerns the ideological differences between the various Communist Parties that emerged across post-Soviet Europe after the collapse of the USSR and the dissolution of the CPSU. If individuals who were members of the CPSU tend to be more pro-West nowadays, then why are post-independence Communist Parties often among the most vociferous anti-West actors in the political environments of post-Soviet Europe? Was there a replacement

of the members of the CP's with new members, or do the CP's simply unite the remaining "true believers"? These questions require future in-depth studies that are, ultimately, of great importance to the understanding of political processes in the former Soviet Union, including of the effect that historical legacies have on geopolitical orientations, democratization and, alas, on autocratization. After all, who would have expected that *past*-Communists could have emerged as potential travel mates along Ukraine's tortuous path towards European integration, as allies of the country's European Choice?

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Appendix I

Table A1.1. Results of the logistic regression for the parental CPSU membership model: EU/NATO preferences.

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Unweighted	**Weighted**	**Unweighted**	**Weighted**	**Unweighted**	**Weighted**
Age						
40-59 (ref: 18-39)	-0.208	-0.154	-0.300	-0.610**	0.243	0.280
	(0.180)	(0.205)	(0.198)	(0.220)	(0.277)	(0.328)
60+ **(**ref: 18-39)	-0.235	-0.221	-0.402	-0.833***	-0.0750	-0.0317
	(0.200)	(0.228)	(0.230)	(0.252)	(0.297)	(0.351)
Sex						
Male	0.0118	-0.0194	0.186	0.146	0.158	0.198
	(0.143)	(0.165)	(0.159)	(0.184)	(0.200)	(0.228)
Education						
Higher Education (ref: other)	-0.0129	-0.104	0.607***	0.603**	-0.0856	-0.111
	(0.156)	(0.188)	(0.175)	(0.214)	(0.232)	(0.276)
Financial situation						
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.317	0.400	1.280***	1.208***	0.125	0.0133
	(0.198)	(0.219)	(0.186)	(0.226)	(0.293)	(0.332)
Occupation						
Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	-0.0442	0.0356	-0.356	-0.338	0.0913	0.144
	(0.155)	(0.182)	(0.183)	(0.204)	(0.249)	(0.292)
Most used language at home						
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.305	-0.271	-0.712**	-0.528	-1.145***	-1.071***
	(0.161)	(0.187)	(0.240)	(0.289)	(0.232)	(0.258)
English language						
Can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.274	0.312	0.648**	0.622*	0.563*	0.615
	(0.215)	(0.239)	(0.241)	(0.299)	(0.282)	(0.320)
Parents Education						
Higher education (mother) (ref: other)	0.319	0.240	0.410	0.191	-0.375	-0.491
	(0.203)	(0.227)	(0.210)	(0.270)	(0.329)	(0.353)
Higher education (father) (ref: other)	-0.0497	-0.0562	-0.700**	-0.533*	1.142***	1.178***
	(0.201)	(0.218)	(0.214)	(0.269)	(0.306)	(0.336)
Communist parent(s) (ref: no communist parents)	**0.665*** **	**0.522***	**1.148*** **	**1.407*** **	**1.157*** **	**1.371*** **
	(0.175)	**(0.205)**	**(0.225)**	**(0.289)**	**(0.223)**	**(0.249)**
Geopolitical identities						
Feels European (ref: does not)	1.431***	1.442***	1.435***	1.267***	1.969***	1.782***
	(0.159)	(0.181)	(0.178)	(0.224)	(0.222)	(0.278)
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.988***	-1.015***	-0.585**	-0.435	-1.782***	-1.796***
	(0.157)	(0.178)	(0.194)	(0.251)	(0.235)	(0.283)
Constant	-0.166	-0.117	-0.960***	-0.877**	-0.666*	-0.755*
	(0.220)	(0.262)	(0.285)	(0.323)	(0.298)	(0.338)
N	1084	1084	1143	1143	1095	1095
pseudo R^2	0.159	0.161	0.235	0.216	0.350	0.339

Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A1.2. Results of the logistic regression for the parental CPSU membership model: Perceptions of the Soviet period.

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Unweighted	**Weighted**	**Unweighted**	**Weighted**	**Unweighted**	**Weighted**
Age						
40-59 (ref: 18-39)	0.534*	0.452	0.569**	0.611**	1.622***	1.522***
	(0.228)	(0.256)	(0.204)	(0.234)	(0.290)	(0.308)
60+ **(**ref: 18-39)	1.543***	1.478***	0.564**	0.630**	2.013***	1.856***
	(0.231)	(0.253)	(0.212)	(0.241)	(0.293)	(0.310)
Sex						
Male	0.0753	0.0858	-0.167	-0.0438	0.0595	0.000245
	(0.155)	(0.176)	(0.149)	(0.175)	(0.147)	(0.164)
Education						
Higher Education (ref: other)	-0.142	-0.184	0.102	0.0577	-0.0694	-0.184
	(0.172)	(0.199)	(0.166)	(0.183)	(0.179)	(0.200)
Financial situation						
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	-0.544*	-0.409	-0.836***	-0.973***	0.0905	0.389
	(0.253)	(0.280)	(0.240)	(0.267)	(0.237)	(0.306)
Occupation						
Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.124	0.0276	0.0862	0.0341	-0.0803	-0.109
	(0.170)	(0.190)	(0.167)	(0.193)	(0.195)	(0.221)
Most used language at home						
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.162	-0.155	-0.198	-0.0967	0.379*	0.210
	(0.171)	(0.199)	(0.230)	(0.253)	(0.190)	(0.231)
English language						
Can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	-0.155	-0.104	-0.0545	-0.0568	0.101	0.463
	(0.266)	(0.292)	(0.266)	(0.292)	(0.293)	(0.339)
Parents Education						
Higher education (mother) (ref: other)	-0.103	0.0244	-1.072***	-0.692**	-0.189	-0.159
	(0.241)	(0.283)	(0.220)	(0.250)	(0.288)	(0.305)
Higher education (father) (ref: other)	0.362	0.236	-0.113	-0.238	0.370	0.361
	(0.231)	(0.268)	(0.202)	(0.234)	(0.280)	(0.304)
Communist parent(s) (ref: no communist parents)	**-0.251**	**-0.140**	**-0.118**	**-0.0857**	**-0.732*** **	**-0.776*** **
	(0.185)	**(0.213)**	**(0.214)**	**(0.248)**	**(0.166)**	**(0.198)**
Geopolitical identities						
Feels European (ref: does not)	-0.383*	-0.534**	-1.154***	-1.045***	-0.376	-0.579*
	(0.185)	(0.203)	(0.219)	(0.250)	(0.207)	(0.235)
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	1.222***	1.221***	0.897***	1.081***	1.391***	1.541***
	(0.159)	(0.180)	(0.163)	(0.189)	(0.195)	(0.237)
Constant	-1.917***	-1.764***	-0.722**	-1.020**	-2.689***	-2.490***
	(0.262)	(0.310)	(0.276)	(0.311)	(0.332)	(0.344)
N	1088	1088	1143	1143	1098	1098
pseudo R^2	0.190	0.186	0.175	0.181	0.196	0.244

Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A1.3. Results of the logistic regression for the parental CPSU membership model: DPR Referendum.

	Mariupol	
	Unweighted	**Weighted**
Age		
40-59 (ref: 18-39)	0.560*	0.631*
	(0.239)	(0.253)
60+ **(**ref: 18-39)	0.655**	0.814**
	(0.254)	(0.265)
Sex		
Male	-0.0748	-0.0845
	(0.155)	(0.180)
Education		
Higher Education (ref: other)	0.0730	0.157
	(0.181)	(0.214)
Financial situation		
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.592**	0.709**
	(0.221)	(0.258)
Occupation		
Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.198	0.149
	(0.192)	(0.222)
Most used language at home		
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.0567	0.179
	(0.197)	(0.217)
English language		
Can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.419	0.461
	(0.247)	(0.270)
Parents Education		
Higher education (mother) (ref: other)	-0.112	-0.0824
	(0.268)	(0.311)
Higher education (father) (ref: other)	0.534*	0.598
	(0.253)	(0.308)
Communist parent(s) (ref: no communist parents)	**0.408***	**0.487****
	(0.175)	**(0.187)**
Geopolitical identities		
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.691***	0.709**
	(0.191)	(0.217)
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-1.124***	-1.219***
	(0.195)	(0.215)
Constant	-1.258***	-1.594***
	(0.265)	(0.277)
N	1098	1098
pseudo R^2	0.103	0.121

Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A1.4. Results of the logistic regression for the individual CPSU membership model: EU/NATO preferences.

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Unweighted	**Weighted**	**Unweighted**	**Weighted**	**Unweighted**	**Weighted**
Age						
40-59 (ref: 18-39)	-0.381	-0.344	-0.233	-0.460	0.680*	0.729*
	(0.240)	(0.272)	(0.260)	(0.304)	(0.287)	(0.324)
60+ (ref: 18-39)	-0.546	-0.530	-0.403	-0.728	0.458	0.597
	(0.313)	(0.355)	(0.354)	(0.408)	(0.430)	(0.461)
Sex						
Male	-0.0300	-0.0466	0.144	0.140	0.0939	0.0744
	(0.145)	(0.165)	(0.158)	(0.185)	(0.194)	(0.220)
Education						
Higher Education (ref: other)	0.0726	-0.0579	0.552***	0.532**	0.183	0.194
	(0.148)	(0.177)	(0.167)	(0.194)	(0.217)	(0.247)
Financial situation						
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.385	0.467*	1.314***	1.186***	0.214	0.0293
	(0.196)	(0.220)	(0.182)	(0.221)	(0.282)	(0.319)
Occupation						
Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.00325	0.0595	-0.379*	-0.323	0.160	0.172
	(0.155)	(0.181)	(0.181)	(0.207)	(0.237)	(0.272)
Most used language at home						
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.265	-0.246	-0.694**	-0.658*	-1.305***	-1.400***
	(0.161)	(0.187)	(0.240)	(0.283)	(0.219)	(0.258)
English language						
Can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.308	0.351	0.577*	0.502	0.845**	0.852**
	(0.214)	(0.239)	(0.238)	(0.292)	(0.269)	(0.293)
Party Membership						
Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	**-0.248**	**-0.253**	**0.117**	**0.148**	**0.547**	**0.659**
	(0.255)	**(0.285)**	**(0.290)**	**(0.354)**	**(0.349)**	**(0.348)**
CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.537***	**0.446**	**0.670***	**0.607**	**0.710***	**0.800****
	(0.237)	**(0.275)**	**(0.308)**	**(0.416)**	**(0.296)**	**(0.311)**
Geopolitical identities						
Feels European (ref: does not)	1.472***	1.461***	1.524***	1.363***	1.862***	1.628***
	(0.159)	(0.181)	(0.178)	(0.222)	(0.214)	(0.262)
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.984***	-1.002***	-0.399*	-0.174	-1.713***	-1.722***
	(0.158)	(0.179)	(0.189)	(0.239)	(0.231)	(0.280)
Constant	0.153	0.191	-1.054**	-0.943*	-0.931*	-0.886
	(0.332)	(0.388)	(0.393)	(0.465)	(0.452)	(0.475)
N	1073	1073	1126	1126	1090	1090
pseudo R^2	0.154	0.158	0.202	0.186	0.309	0.285

Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A1.5. Results of the logistic regression for the individual CPSU membership model: Perceptions of the Soviet period.

	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Unweighted	**Weighted**	**Unweighted**	**Weighted**	**Unweighted**	**Weighted**
Age						
40-59 (ref: 18-39)	0.521	0.322	0.950***	0.962**	1.381***	1.284***
	(0.292)	(0.331)	(0.258)	(0.301)	(0.304)	(0.328)
60+ **(**ref: 18-39)	1.504***	1.255**	1.229***	1.185**	1.722***	1.527***
	(0.353)	(0.395)	(0.320)	(0.371)	(0.369)	(0.396)
Sex						
Male	0.0800	0.0690	-0.177	-0.0264	0.0897	0.0589
	(0.158)	(0.180)	(0.150)	(0.176)	(0.148)	(0.166)
Education						
Higher Education (ref: other)	-0.101	-0.142	-0.293	-0.270	-0.0800	-0.212
	(0.163)	(0.190)	(0.155)	(0.180)	(0.175)	(0.205)
Financial situation						
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	-0.570*	-0.409	-1.181***	-1.213***	0.0542	0.355
	(0.253)	(0.276)	(0.253)	(0.275)	(0.238)	(0.313)
Occupation						
Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.155	0.0682	0.0831	0.0180	-0.0509	-0.102
	(0.171)	(0.189)	(0.166)	(0.194)	(0.197)	(0.228)
Most used language at home						
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.156	-0.164	-0.340	-0.230	0.319	0.201
	(0.171)	(0.199)	(0.239)	(0.265)	(0.191)	(0.226)
English language						
Can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	-0.191	-0.157	-0.150	-0.0884	0.0437	0.404
	(0.269)	(0.292)	(0.267)	(0.296)	(0.288)	(0.341)
Party Membership						
Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.0769**	**-0.0316**	**0.551***	**0.511**	**-0.411**	**-0.484**
	(0.282)	**(0.316)**	**(0.262)**	**(0.314)**	**(0.248)**	**(0.268)**
CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.218**	**0.493**	**-0.606***	**-0.575**	**-1.022*****	**-1.045*****
	(0.230)	**(0.259)**	**(0.284)**	**(0.322)**	**(0.193)**	**(0.225)**
Geopolitical identities						
Feels European (ref: does not)	-0.376*	-0.575**	-1.309***	-1.167***	-0.455*	-0.658**
	(0.186)	(0.201)	(0.230)	(0.268)	(0.209)	(0.242)
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	1.253***	1.244***	1.052***	1.253***	1.439***	1.553***
	(0.160)	(0.179)	(0.165)	(0.202)	(0.198)	(0.240)
Constant	-1.973***	-1.655***	-1.344***	-1.586***	-2.301***	-2.074***
	(0.381)	(0.448)	(0.377)	(0.444)	(0.415)	(0.422)
N	1077	1077	1126	1126	1093	1093
pseudo R^2	0.195	0.195	0.164	0.176	0.204	0.248

Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table A1.6. Results of the logistic regression for the individual CPSU membership model: DPR Referendum.

	Mariupol	
	Unweighted	**Weighted**
Age		
40-59 (ref: 18-39)	0.879***	0.840**
	(0.253)	(0.280)
60+ (ref: 18-39)	1.239***	1.153**
	(0.362)	(0.389)
Sex		
Male	-0.0796	-0.107
	(0.155)	(0.179)
Education		
Higher Education (ref: other)	0.162	0.284
	(0.176)	(0.204)
Financial situation		
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.632**	0.718**
	(0.221)	(0.255)
Occupation		
Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.240	0.193
	(0.191)	(0.216)
Most used language at home		
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.105	0.0407
	(0.194)	(0.218)
English language		
Can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.546*	0.606*
	(0.241)	(0.272)
Party Membership		
Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.607***	**0.352**
	(0.282)	**(0.312)**
CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.289**	**0.222**
	(0.224)	**(0.237)**
Geopolitical identities		
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.699***	0.690**
	(0.190)	(0.222)
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-1.111***	-1.203***
	(0.196)	(0.217)
Constant	-1.780***	-1.747***
	(0.388)	(0.430)
N	1093	1093
pseudo R^2	0.098	0.109

Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Appendix II. Weighted AMEs.

Table A2.1. Average marginal effects for the parental CPSU membership model: EU/NATO preferences. WEIGHTED.

Predictor	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Weighted		Weighted		Weighted	
	Change	p value	Change	p value	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	-0.031	0.455	-0.103	0.006	0.032	0.385
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	-0.044	0.338	-0.136	0.001	-0.003	0.928
Male	-0.004	0.906	0.023	0.429	0.022	0.386
Higher education (ref: other)	-0.021	0.578	0.096	0.005	-0.012	0.683
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.081	0.073	0.222	0.000	0.002	0.968
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.007	0.845	-0.053	0.089	0.016	0.627
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.054	0.150	-0.089	0.081	-0.138	0.000
English language -can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.062	0.198	0.106	0.051	0.076	0.079
Higher education (**mother**)(ref: other)	0.048	0.295	0.031	0.483	-0.052	0.136
Higher education (**father**)(ref: other)	-0.011	0.795	-0.082	0.040	0.156	0.002
Communist parent(s)(ref: no communist parents)	**0.104**	**0.010**	**0.254**	**0.000**	**0.178**	**0.000**
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.315	0.000	0.235	0.000	0.258	0.000
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.210	0.000	-0.068	0.077	-0.234	0.000

Table A2.2. Average marginal effects for the parental CPSU membership model: Perceptions of the Soviet period. WEIGHTED.

Predictor	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Weighted		Weighted		Weighted	
	Change	p value	Change	p value	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	0.071	0.069	0.103	0.009	0.284	0.000
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	0.277	0.000	0.106	0.010	0.354	0.000
Male	0.014	0.627	-0.007	0.803	0.000	0.999
Higher education (ref: other)	-0.030	0.353	0.010	0.752	-0.032	0.360
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	-0.065	0.129	-0.150	0.000	0.066	0.200
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.005	0.885	0.006	0.860	-0.019	0.623
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.026	0.441	-0.016	0.705	0.036	0.363
English language -can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	-0.017	0.720	-0.009	0.845	0.077	0.156
Higher education (**mother**)(ref: other)	0.004	0.931	-0.115	0.004	-0.028	0.604
Higher education (**father**)(ref: other)	0.039	0.380	-0.039	0.307	0.061	0.227
Communist parent(s)(ref: no communist parents)	**-0.023**	**0.507**	**-0.014**	**0.727**	**-0.135**	**0.000**
Feels European (ref: does not)	-0.086	0.007	-0.162	0.000	-0.103	0.015
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	0.228	0.000	0.198	0.000	0.307	0.000

Table A2.3. AMEs Parental membership. DPR Referendum. WEIGHTED.

Predictor	Mariupol	
	Weighted	
	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	0.096	0.010
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	0.128	0.001
Male	-0.014	0.637
Higher education (ref: other)	0.027	0.470
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.132	0.012
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.025	0.509
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	0.029	0.399
English language -can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.083	0.110
Higher education (**mother**)(ref: other)	-0.014	0.788
Higher education (**father**)(ref: other)	0.110	0.074
Communist parent(s)(ref: no communist parents)	**0.086**	**0.012**
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.132	0.002
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.221	0.000

Table A2.4. Average marginal effects for the individual CPSU membership model: EU/NATO preferences. WEIGHTED.

Predictor	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Weighted		Weighted		Weighted	
	Change	p value	Change	p value	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	-0.070	0.212	-0.081	0.142	0.087	0.015
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	-0.108	0.141	-0.122	0.079	0.070	0.181
Male	-0.009	0.777	0.023	0.452	0.009	0.736
Higher education (ref: other)	-0.011	0.742	0.088	0.006	0.024	0.438
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.095	0.037	0.228	0.000	0.004	0.927
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.012	0.742	-0.052	0.108	0.022	0.533
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.049	0.190	-0.117	0.028	-0.202	0.000
English language -can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.071	0.148	0.088	0.104	0.120	0.009
Party membership: Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	-0.049	0.363	0.024	0.678	0.079	0.062
Party membership: CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.087**	**0.103**	**0.106**	**0.171**	**0.099**	**0.017**
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.321	0.000	0.266	0.000	0.253	0.000
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.208	0.000	-0.029	0.464	-0.243	0.000

Table A2.5. Average marginal effects for the individual CPSU membership model: Perceptions of the Soviet period. WEIGHTED.

Predictor	Dnipro		Kharkiv		Mariupol	
	Weighted		Weighted		Weighted	
	Change	p value	Change	p value	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	0.051	0.320	0.161	0.001	0.240	0.000
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	0.231	0.002	0.205	0.001	0.290	0.000
Male	0.011	0.702	-0.004	0.880	0.010	0.721
Higher education (ref: other)	-0.023	0.453	-0.045	0.135	-0.036	0.305
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	-0.064	0.123	-0.181	0.000	0.060	0.256
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.011	0.718	0.003	0.926	-0.017	0.656
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	-0.027	0.415	-0.039	0.395	0.035	0.373
English language -can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	-0.025	0.585	-0.015	0.763	0.067	0.222
Party membership: Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	-0.005	0.921	0.082	0.083	-0.086	0.089
Party membership: CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.085**	**0.070**	**-0.080**	**0.055**	**-0.186**	**0.000**
Feels European (ref: does not)	-0.091	0.003	-0.178	0.000	-0.115	0.007
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	0.230	0.000	0.232	0.000	0.307	0.000

Table A2.6. Average marginal effects for the individual CPSU membership model. DPR Referendum. WEIGHTED.

Predictor	Mariupol	
	Weighted	
	Change	p value
Age 40-59 (ref. 18-39)	0.124	0.001
Age 60+ (ref: 18-39)	0.180	0.001
Male	0.056	0.218
Higher education (ref: other)	-0.018	0.548
Good/excellent material standard of living (ref: other)	0.050	0.172
Occupation Professional, manager or supervisor (ref: else)	0.136	0.010
Russian language mostly spoken at home (ref: other)	0.034	0.382
English language -can at least communicate (ref: cannot)	0.007	0.851
Age Three Categories	0.114	0.040
Party membership: Not old enough (ref: old enough, not member)	0.060	0.261
Party membership: CPSU member (ref: old enough, not member)	**0.037**	**0.359**
Feels European (ref: does not)	0.130	0.004
Feels Soviet (ref: does not)	-0.222	0.000

ARTICLE 4: Still winners and losers? Studying public opinion's geopolitical preferences in the Association Agreement countries (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine)[1]

Introduction

The establishment of the Eastern Partnership agreement[2] (EaP) in 2009 was an initiative undertaken by the EU to improve its ties with its Eastern neighbours. However, this programme was understood by Russia as a geopolitical strategy aimed to pull post-Soviet countries towards the EU's sphere of influence. Whether or not this was the EU's true objective meant little since Russia understood and framed this programme as a geopolitical instrument (Cadier, 2019). Understanding the EaP and its successors, the Association Agreements[3] (AA), as instruments inspired by geopolitics led Russia to use different strategies to counterbalance the growing influence of the EU on its near abroad; one of these strategies was the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Ademmer, Delcour and Wolczuk, 2016; Suslov, 2018). The founding of the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU), first, and its later evolution into the EAEU has been the most

1 This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor and Francis in *Post-Soviet Affairs* on 05/07/2021.
Citation: Torres-Adán, Á. (2021). Still winners and losers? Studying public opinion's geopolitical preferences in the Association Agreement countries (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine). *Post- Soviet Affairs*, vol. 37 (4), 362-382. DOI: 10.1080/1060586X.2021.1924041.

2 The countries that are part of the EaP are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

3 Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are the only three of the EaP countries that signed AAs. In the case of Ukraine, the rejection of the signature of the AA marked the beginning of the Euromaidan protests and the subsequent conflict with Russia.

ambitious Russian soft-power strategy to mimic the EU and present an alternative international organization to appeal to the countries that form part of the EaP and the AA (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018). Therefore, the existence of two competing blocs that are interested in the post-Soviet countries make the EaP countries, and especially the AA countries, a perfect environment for studying individual geopolitical preferences. However, reducing individual geopolitical preferences to a simple dichotomy (i.e., dividing citizens into two groups, one group that supports EU membership and the other the EAEU) does not capture the broad range of positions that exists in these countries. Consequently, this study uses a more detailed classification of geopolitical preferences, based on previous work by Spina (2018), Buzogány (2019), and White, McAllister, and Feklyunina (2010). This new classification departs from the traditional dichotomy, yielding a four-fold schema of geopolitical preferences: Balancers (those who approve of maintaining equal ties with both the EU and the EAEU), Westernizers (those who support joining the EU but not the EAEU), Easternizers (those who support joining the EAEU but not the EU), and Isolationists (those who oppose joining both the EU and the EAEU). Once these new groups are included in the picture, their relevance becomes clear. A simple analysis of the distribution of geopolitical preferences reveals that the combined percentages of Balancers and Isolationists is, at least in Moldova and Georgia, enough to tilt the balance if hypothetical referendums about accession to the EU and the EAEU were to take place. Furthermore, this categorization helps portray the landscape of geopolitical preferences in the AA countries more accurately, by showing that these societies are not as polarized regarding geopolitical preferences as they might appear when focusing exclusively on the EU/EAEU dichotomy.

The main purpose of this paper is to assess the factors that influence the public's geopolitical preferences in the AA countries. Specifically, I test one of the most well-established theories of support for international organizations in post-Communist Europe: the winners and losers theory. This theory claims that, on the one hand, some individuals possess features (better economic situations, higher education levels, etc.) that increase their chances of success in a particular society and are thus referred to as winners (Kriesi et al., 2008; Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky, 2002). Losers, on the other hand, are presented as individuals who possess characteristics that hinder their chances of being successful. The literature has found that, in the post-Communist countries, winners and losers tend

to differ in their geopolitical preferences —with winners tending to support EU membership (Kubicek, 2000; Herzog and Tucker, 2010; Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky, 2002). In addition to the winners and losers theory, this paper explores the impact of political engagement, future migration preferences, and political values, the relevance of which has been suggested in previous studies that have tackled geopolitical preferences in the area (Berlinschi, 2019; Müller, 2011; Reznik and Reznik, 2017; Slomzynski and Shabad, 2003). This is carried out by studying the three AA countries together. This kind of quantitative comparative study is needed in this area and could contribute to the existing literature that already compares these three countries from a qualitative and analytical perspective (Delcour, 2018; Nilsson and Silander, 2016; Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2017).

To summarize, with this paper I aim to answer two questions: (1) Do the AA countries (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) follow similar patterns regarding the factors that influence geopolitical preferences? (2) Can the winners and losers theory explain geopolitical preferences in addition to the traditional dichotomy between the EU and the EAEU? To answer these questions, I use survey data from Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine for the years between 2015 and 2019.

Results from multinomial logistic regression analyses show that the winners and losers theory works as expected and to a similar degree in the three countries when predicting support for the EU and the EAEU. Isolationists, like Easternizers, appear to be losers. However, the winners and losers theory does not seem to easily explain common trends in support for the Balancer option. Political engagement, by contrast, is able to explain support for both Balancers and Isolationists, with those expressing a strong interest in politics being more likely to be Balancers and less likely to be Isolationists. Furthermore, preferring liberal values has a positive effect on being a Westernizer and a negative effect on being a Balancer.

Theory and Hypotheses

The public's geopolitical preferences in the AA countries

Scholars have often grouped Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine together when speaking about the consequences of geopolitical clashes between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet region (Delcour, 2018; Nilsson and Silander, 2016; Nodia, Cenuşă, and Minakov, 2017), since these three countries share several features. They were all part of the Soviet Union, and this common past means that their histories, values, and a part of their current political lives are linked to the USSR (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018; Suslov, 2018). They also share the fact that they signed the EaP agreements promoted by the EU and implemented the reforms required of them faster than the other post-Soviet participants, which led to them eventually signing the more comprehensive Association Agreement (AA) between 2016 and 2017 (Barakhvostov and Rusakovich, 2017; Cadier, 2019). Therefore, they are viewed as being closer to the EU than the other (non-Baltic) post-Soviet countries, even if they have sizeable minorities and a part of the titular nationalities[4] that reject EU membership and support closer ties to Russia (Herbut and Kunert-Milcarz, 2017; Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014; Lutz, 2017). Another important feature they have in common is the fact that the three countries have pro-Russian *de facto* states within their territories; this has caused conflicts (armed or diplomatic) with Russia over the last few decades (Nilsson and Silander, 2016; Dunn and Bobick, 2014).

Although it is true that the three countries do present differences, Nodia, Cenuşă, and Minakov argue that these countries share a "commonality of fate" (2017: 1) regarding their position between two opposing geopolitical blocs. This commonality of fate allows scholars to group together Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine and study them as parts of the same geopolitical region. Studying them together in our case allows us to identify common and divergent trends that they have, which should help us better understand how similar these countries are (in this case) regarding individual geopolitical preferences.

4 Titular nationality is an ethnolinguistic concept that serves to define the ethnic groups that constituted a majority (or the group after which the republic was named) in a particular Soviet Republic (Dave, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 1996). In this paper, titular nationalities refer to Georgians in Georgia, Moldovans in Moldova, and Ukrainians in Ukraine.

This understanding is key in a region where the geopoliticization of relevant parts of national politics has become increasingly important over the last 15 years (Cadier, 2019).

Well before the formal establishment of the EAEU, rather than focusing only on the Western European option, some of the literature that covered geopolitical preferences in the AA countries had already noted the complex character of those preferences (O'Loughlin, Toal, and Chamberlain-Creangă, 2014; White, McAllister, and Feklyunina, 2010). However, focusing just on this dichotomy can lead to an underestimation of the percentage and importance of citizens who do not support either or who express support for both of the two main options (Spina, 2018). Buzogány (2019), building on an extremely detailed categorization of nine different geopolitical preference groups proposed by White, McAllister, and Feklyunina (2010), acknowledged the rising complexity regarding geopolitical preferences and divided Georgian citizens into four groups depending on their preferences. Across this paper, I use Buzogány's (2019) categorization, which allows for a closer analysis that acknowledges the existence of citizens whose geopolitical preferences cannot be easily categorized if only two groups are considered. The four categories of geopolitical preferences are Balancers, Westernizers, Easternizers, and Sovereignists (which I will refer to as Isolationists because we actually ignore the reasons they oppose joining the EU and the EAEU). These groups include those citizens who support equal relations with the EU and the EAEU[5] (Balancers), those who prefer EU membership (Westernizers), those who prefer EAEU membership (Easternizers), and those who consider that remaining unconnected to any of the two blocs is the best option for their country (Isolationists). In addition, I consider

5 The Balancer category is understood in this paper as more of an ideal aspiration of individuals who would like to see a perfect environment in which their country is equally connected to both the EU and the EAEU; however, the legal and political feasibility of this option is uncertain. In this sense, some authors have pointed out that, before the creation of the EAEU, several of the presidents of future country members presented it as a way to increase the probability of a future united Europe based on the union of the EU and the EAEU (Minakov, 2017). Nonetheless, developments after the foundation of the EAEU and successive conflicts that eroded mutual trust between Brussels and Moscow make this scenario highly unlikely. For example, an in-depth study of this topic conducted by Drageva, Delcour, and Jonavicius (2017) concluded that the compatibility between the EAEU and the EU is constrained by (1) the highly asymmetrical Russian-controlled nature of the EAEU and (2) legal compatibility issues that could arise if the legislation of the two international organizations were applied in the same territory.

a fifth, residual category grouping those respondents who said that they don't know or who did not answer the EU and EAEU questions (DK/DA)[6].

When analysing the levels of support for the different geopolitical options, several of the tendencies that the literature on geopolitics and international relations has reported for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are easily identifiable (see Table 1).[7] Once respondents in these countries are divided into five geopolitical groups, the preferred option in Georgia and Ukraine is, by far, to join the EU. In Moldova, however, the percentages of Westernizers and Easternizers are much more balanced, a trend that makes this country the most geopolitically polarized.

When it comes to more ambivalent preferences, a noticeable number of people in Moldova, and even more in Georgia, favour joining or maintaining close bonds with the two organizations. This high percentage of Balancers could indicate that these citizens are reluctant to keep advancing towards the EU, which could harm their countries' relations with Russia and, ultimately, have a negative impact on their lives (Ademmer and Delcour, 2016; Buzogány, 2019; Nodia, Cenuşă, and Minakov, 2017). Ukraine displays a different outcome regarding Balancers, even if their numbers prior to 2013 were similar to those in Georgia and Moldova (Reznik and Reznik, 2017). Reznik and Reznik (2017) argue that this decrease is attributable to the polarization that was generated after the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian conflicts concerning the signing of the AA agreements. Isolationists make up the smallest groups in Georgia and Moldova, a situation that may derive from the understanding that remaining unattached to any bloc is both unlikely and probably less profitable for smaller countries, as they could benefit from the economic advantages derived from joining an international organization. However, Ukraine shows a much higher percentage of Isolationists, which, if we follow the logic of Reznik and Reznik (2017), could be a direct consequence of people being weary of having to choose between the EU and the EAEU, and who instead favour turning their backs on the two competing geopolitical blocs. The size of the DK/DA group is

6 Considering the heterogeneous nature of the DK/DA category, this paper will not include this category in its hypotheses nor in the theory section. Moreover, excluding this category does not significantly alter the main results of this paper.

7 More detailed tables for each country and survey can be found in Appendix I.

rather similar across the three countries, even if – and possibly a consequence of higher polarization – the lowest number of undecided individuals appears in Moldova.

Table 1. Geopolitical preferences 2015-2019 (% of total respondents).

	GE	MD	UA
Balancers	19.38	11.71	4.06
Westernizers	37.18	33.41	47.26
Easternizers	12.71	37.47	15.96
Isolationists	13.07	5.91	19.58
DK/DA	17.67	11.49	13.14

Source: GE (Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia, 2015-2019), MD (Barometer of Public Opinion of the Republic of Moldova, 2015-2019), UA (KIIS Omnibus, 2015-2019)

As shown in Table 1, a framework that provides four geopolitical options allows for a more detailed analysis of the current situation regarding the individual geopolitical preferences in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Moreover, if both Balancers and Isolationists were considered as a single group, they would represent 32.5%, 17.6%, and 23.64% of Georgian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian respondents, respectively. These high percentages, enough in all three countries except Ukraine to tilt the balance towards either the EU or the EAEU, help illustrate how the dichotomous division of geopolitical preferences disregards a large group of the total populations of the AA countries.

Winners, losers, and their geopolitical preferences

Winners and losers in post-Communist Europe

The development of the *winners and losers* account of differences in post-Communist societies can be traced back to the 1990s. Shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars started to theorize that some groups were better prepared to cope with the transformations that followed the fall of the USSR. On the one hand, those that would later be called winners had characteristics that allowed them to adapt more easily to the new circumstances, while, on the other hand, the losers would fail to adapt and would suffer the shock of the system changing (Brainerd, 1998; Kubicek, 2000). Consequently, the transitional period is often pointed to as the beginning of the divergent positions (political, social, economic, on geopolitical preferences, etc.) that are commonplace in post-Soviet societies nowadays (Nikitina, 2012). However, even after the transitional period ended, and probably now caused by other processes such as globalization (Kriesi

et al., 2008), many authors agree that the social division between winners and losers is still a cause of divergent political and geopolitical preferences in the societies of post-Soviet countries (Herzog and Tucker, 2010; Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2014).

In the AA countries, winners have usually been characterized as younger, better educated, wealthier, having Internet access, and as members of the titular nationalities (Kubicek, 2000; Pop-Eleches, 2008). Firstly, being younger favours adapting to changes (including geopolitical changes), since these individuals often lack the attachment to the former systems that older people have (Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln, 2005; Brainerd, 1998; Kubicek, 2000). Secondly, education and wealth could favour adapting to changing environments and might increase the odds of being supportive of joining the EU, as these individuals could see the potential individual benefits to be derived from the hypothetical membership[8] (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016). Thirdly, those who remain unable or unwilling to use the Internet are often considered losers, as they are not able to benefit from the advantages (more information on current developments, exposure to other sets of values, etc.) that this technology provides (Pop-Eleches, 2008). Lastly, most if not all the authors who have empirically studied geopolitical preferences in post-Soviet countries have found that, even before the establishment of the EAEU (or even the ECU), ethnic minorities in these countries were less inclined to support EU membership[9] (Berlinschi, 2019; Buzogány, 2019; Ehin, 2001; Gentile, 2015; Reznik and Reznik, 2017). The main reason behind the prominent role of ethnic identity has to do with the difficulties of the integration process felt by Russians and other minorities living in the countries that came into being after the break-up of the USSR. Consequently, minorities often show a higher

8 Aside from the purely utilitarian reasons, several authors have argued that the fact that education is positively correlated to support for EU accession could also be related to the fact that individuals who are more educated are also more cosmopolitan and share certain EU values (Ehin, 2001; Hakhverdian et al., 2013; Müller, 2011). These new values and a world vision could make it easier for the better-educated individuals to counterbalance some of the conceptions inherited through the historical legacies of the Soviet era.

9 This does not apply to people stating that they are Romanians in Moldova since this group is consistently characterized by a pro-EU position that differentiates them from ethnic minorities both in Moldova and in the rest of the AA countries (Berlinschi, 2019; King, 2013). In this sense, Romanians in Moldova are not an ethnic group *per se*, since it is commonplace for Moldovans to identify themselves as Romanians if they see Moldovans and Romanians as a single ethnic group. In fact, most people that consider themselves Romanians think that the Moldovans and Romanians were artificially separated by the Moldovanist policies promoted by the URSS (for more information see King, 2013 and Knott, 2015) Consequently, the arguments and expectations referring to ethnic minorities across this paper do not consider Romanians as a traditional ethnic minority but as a subgroup of the majoritarian Moldovan ethnicity.

degree of attachment to Russia and to the geopolitical alternative of belonging to its bloc. The reasons for this are often attributed to the inability of the former Soviet Republics to fully integrate minorities since they become independent, which, in turn, made these individuals losers (Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014; Kubicek, 2000; Reznik and Reznik, 2017).

The beginning of the Twenty-first century saw a new development in the winners and losers theory. Departing from the arguments used by the earliest version of the theory (i.e. that winners tend to support the EU, while losers are more supportive of maintaining links with Russia and, thus, with the EAEU), this more recent literature focused on analysing winners and losers by using individuals' *perceptions* of their economic situation as an additional factor to define their status. Following criticism of the excessive rigidity of the premises of the previous approach, this stream allowed researchers to place individuals on "a continuum of winners and losers [based on] individual self-assessments" (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky, 2002: 559). In a seminal paper, Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky (2002) showed that the perception of being a winner, at least during the transition towards the capitalist system, was positively correlated with support for EU integration in the post-Communist countries that were then preparing referendums to join it. Additionally, more recent works confirm that this relationship extends beyond the transitional period (Herzog and Tucker, 2010). Thus, this approach has proven itself to be useful outside the transitional period, demonstrating that, regardless of the reasons for the differences between winners and losers, this status continues to affect geopolitical preferences in post-Soviet Europe, with winners consistently preferring the EU, and losers supporting closer ties with the EAEU (Berlinschi, 2019; Gentile, 2015).

Winner or loser status and geopolitical preferences in the AA countries

Being a winner or a loser has been proven to be a relevant predictor of geopolitical preferences when focusing strictly on the EU–EAEU dichotomy. Previous research has found that winner status consistently predicts support for the EU (Herzog and Tucker, 2010; Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky, 2002), while being a loser increases the likelihood of preferring the EAEU (Gentile, 2015). Therefore, my first hypotheses expect winners (i.e. individuals who are more highly educated, have better perceived economic status, more

frequent Internet use, and membership in the titular nationality) to support the EU, and losers to support the EAEU, throughout the three AA countries.

Hypothesis 1a: Winners will be more likely to be Westernizers than losers.

Hypothesis 1b: Losers will be more likely to be Easternizers than winners.

However, the extended categorization of geopolitical preferences complicates the application of the extant theories to explain citizens' geopolitical preferences in post-Soviet countries. Consequently, this subsection will explore where Balancers and Isolationists fit into the winner and losers scheme.

When it comes to Isolationists and Balancers, Buzogány (2019) found that higher educational levels were positively correlated to the Balancer option, at least in Georgia. This probably derives from a combination of purely utilitarian reasons and a more cosmopolitan mentality. Individuals with higher educational levels are likely to find more employment-related opportunities in both organizations (Gabel, 1998; Tucker, Pacek and Berinsky 2002), while a cosmopolitan mentality could help these citizens to better understand the EU's ideals and values without becoming totally detached from Soviet legacies (Hakhverdian et al., 2013; Müller, 2011). Likewise, Buzogány (2019) showed that expecting that one's own salary would increase after joining the EU negatively affected the chances of being an Isolationist. Similarly, the economic situation would also be expected to correlate positively with support for this geopolitical option. Because Isolationists oppose joining either of the two geopolitical blocs, the expectation is that they will be attracted neither by the economic possibilities that both the EU and the EAEU could offer them nor by the set of values and worldviews that either organization promotes. Therefore, I expect the features associated with being a winner to negatively affect the chances of being an Isolationist.

Following Buzogány's (2019) theses, I expect members of minorities to strongly prefer any of the geopolitical options except that of exclusively joining the EU. This is because they are more likely to see any option as more desirable than solely joining the Western bloc, with the concomitant risk of being neglected by their countries where they reside thereafter (Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014). This would lead members of ethnic

minorities to choose any geopolitical group except the Westernizers if they want to prevent their country from drifting away from the Russian influence that has often been perceived as protecting the (primarily Russian or Russophone) minorities in its near abroad.

Overall, I expect being a winner (i.e., an individual with higher education levels, better perceived economic status, frequent Internet use, and membership of the titular nationality) to be inversely correlated with support for the Isolationist option and positively correlated with the Balancer option.

Hypothesis 1c: Winners will be more likely than losers to be Balancers.

Hypothesis 1d: Losers will be more likely than winners to be Isolationists.

Beyond winners and losers: potential factors that influence Balancers and Isolationists

One of the potential problems of applying the winners and losers theory in this context is that it was not originally devised for the geopolitical alternatives available in the AA countries. This requires us to consider other factors that could potentially explain support for these options. To do so, in this section I explore three complementary mechanisms that could influence geopolitical preferences (focusing mostly on Balancers and Isolationists) in the AA countries: political engagement, authoritarian/liberal values, and migration preferences.

Political engagement

The role of political engagement as a possible factor that influences geopolitical preferences has, to the best of my knowledge, been little examined in the AA countries. However, it usually emerges as a notable factor that influences individual support for the EU in countries in both Western and post-Communist Europe (Nelsen, Guth, and Fraser, 2001; Slomczynski and Shabad, 2003**)**. In this regard, results often show that individuals who are politically engaged tend to be supportive of EU integration. Several works have pointed to less apathy and greater willingness to receive information related to the EU and its possible benefits as the main causes for this relationship (Nelsen and Guth, 2000; Slomczynski and Shabad, 2003).

One of the variables traditionally used when measuring political engagement is interest in politics (Agh, 1999; Nelsen, Guth, and Fraser, 2001; Slomzynski and Shabad, 2003). I expect interest in politics to be an important factor in influencing support for the Balancer and Isolationist groups. Specifically, I expect that those who are highly interested will be more likely to be Balancers because this option requires at least some degree of attention to international developments in order to understand the positive impact that either of the organizations could make in the country's affairs. Those with less interest in politics, by contrast, are expected to be Isolationists. This is because less politically engaged individuals usually do not have strong preferences and, thus, prefer to maintain the *status quo* (Nelsen and Guth, 2000).

Hypothesis 2a: Less politically engaged individuals will be more likely to be Isolationists than those who are more politically engaged.

Hypothesis 2b: Politically engaged individuals will be more likely to be Balancers than those who are less politically engaged.

Authoritarian/Liberal values

Political values have often been identified as one of the most influential factors that influence geopolitical preferences in the former Communist European countries. In this sense, Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2006) have highlighted the importance of understanding the differences between Eastern and Western Europe regarding the factors that influence geopolitical preferences, pointing towards values as much more important determinants of geopolitical preferences in the former Communist countries than in countries in Western Europe. Furthermore, one of the most significant differences between the EU and the EAEU involves the kinds of values that each international organization promotes: the EU is usually associated with liberal values and the EAEU with authoritarian values (Izotov and Obydenkova, 2020; Libman and Obydenkova, 2018). In the AA countries, the influence of values on geopolitical preferences has been tested in regard to support for the EU and the EAEU in Ukraine (Reznik and Reznik, 2017), and support for the EU in Georgia (Müller, 2011). These two examples suggest a positive effect of authoritarian views on support for the EAEU (Reznik and Reznik, 2017) and a positive effect of liberal values on support for the EU (Müller, 2011).

Hypothesis 3a: Individuals who support liberal values will be more likely to be Westernizers than those who support authoritarian values.

Hypothesis 3b: Individuals who support authoritarian values will be more likely to be Easternizers than those who support liberal values.

This paper's approach to values aims for a better understanding of the influences of being liberal or authoritarian on support for both the Balancer and Isolationist categories. However, this variable is expected to have a particular influence on Balancers since supporting the EU (even together with the EAEU) should require support for some liberal values *beyond* the *parental* values that are usually promoted by Russia and the EAEU (Libman and Obydenkova, 2018).

Hypothesis 3c: Individuals who support liberal values will be more likely to be Balancers than individuals who support authoritarian values.

Migration preferences

The seminal work of Berlinschi (2019) on the impact of migration preferences and geopolitical preferences in Moldova shows that having previously lived in a Western country has a well-known positive effect on support for the EU, while having previously lived in Russia does not have any obvious effect on support for the EAEU. Unlike Berlinschi (2019), here I examine *preferred* migration destinations rather than retrospective experiences. Such future migration preferences could serve to test whether individuals who perceive better potential economic gains in either the EU or the EAEU and are thus willing to migrate to either group of countries, tend to support further ties with these organizations. However, it should be noted that the interpretation of the outcomes of this variable calls for careful treatment, since deciding where to migrate is usually influenced by quite another set of individual characteristics such as values and previous social networks (Berlinschi, 2019). My main expectations regarding future migration preferences assume that, since Balancers are theoretically more willing to benefit from the potential gains of either bloc, wanting to migrate to both the EU and the EAEU will be positively correlated with this geopolitical option.

Hypothesis 4a: Individuals who want to migrate to an EU country will be more likely to be Westernizers than those who do not want to migrate.

Hypothesis 4b: Respondents who want to migrate to a CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) country will be more likely to be Easternizers than those who do not want to migrate.

Hypothesis 4c: Individuals who want to migrate to either EU or CIS countries will favour the Balancer option more than those who do not want to migrate.

Data and methods

Data

This paper draws on nationally representative surveys collected between 2015 and 2019 in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The three surveys from Georgia belong to the "Knowledge of and attitudes toward the EU in Georgia" series, which is fielded every two years by the Georgian branch of the Caucasus Research Resource Centers. For Moldova, I use data from seven surveys of the "Barometer of Public Opinion of the Republic of Moldova" series, which is fielded by the Chisinau-based Institute for Public Policy twice a year. The nine surveys for Ukraine come from the quarterly fielded "Omnibus" series collected by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. The exact dates of the surveys and the descriptive statistics of the dependent variables can be found in the tables in Appendix I.

Dependent Variable

Geopolitical preferences are operationalized as a categorical variable with five categories: Balancer, Westernizer, Easternizer, Isolationist, and DK/DA. This variable is constructed as a combination of two questions that tackle the respondents' geopolitical preferences. These are: "Would you vote for or against EU membership?" and "Would you vote for or against EAEU membership?". The Balancer category groups together those who support joining both geopolitical blocs. Westernizers are those who support the EU but do not support the EAEU. Easternizers are those who support the EAEU but do not support the EU. Isolationists are those who do not explicitly support (answering "no" or

"would not participate") neither the EU or the EAEU. Finally, a residual category group is made up of those who "don't know" or who choose not to answer the two questions (DK/DA).

Independent Variables

Educational level is codified as a dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent has completed tertiary education and 0 otherwise. Economic situation is based on questions that ask whether or not the respondent's household income allows the family to buy certain items. It is measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (those who have problems buying even basic items) to 1 (those who can afford anything they want). Use of the Internet is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent uses the Internet at least once a week and 0 if less frequently or not at all. Ethnic identity identifies each of the different major ethnic groups in each of the AA countries[10].

Interest in politics, available for Georgia and Moldova, is measured on a 5-point scale (Moldova) or 4-point scale (Georgia)[11] ranging from 0 (lowest interest) to 1 (highest interest). The future migration preferences variable, available in Georgia and Moldova, distinguishes between those willing to migrate to a CIS country, those willing to migrate to an EU country, and those not willing to migrate at all (the reference category). Lastly, the authoritarian/liberal values variable, available only for Georgia, identifies respondents who prefer a government that behaves as a parent, those who prefer it to act as an employee, and those who agree with neither option (reference). All models include controls for age (in years), sex (1=male, 0=female), and employment status (1=employed at the time of the survey, 0=unemployed at the time of the survey).

Methods

Given the nature of the dependent variable (a categorical variable with five different outcomes), I use multinomial logistic regression. The winners and losers variables

10 These groups are (ordered according to their size in the sample): Georgians, Azerbaijanis, and Armenians in Georgia; Moldovans, Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauzes, Romanians, and Bulgarians in Moldova; and Ukrainians, Russians, both Ukrainian and Russian, and Belarusians in Ukraine.

11 In the case of the Georgian surveys, interest in politics is measured using two different questions, one referring to interest in national politics and the other addressing interest in international politics. For this paper, I decided to use the one that refers to international politics. In any case, the coefficient of correlation between the two variables is 0.89.

(education, economic situation, frequency of Internet use, and ethnic identity) are included in a first model available for each of the three AA countries. For Georgia and Moldova, the variables related to political engagement, future migration preferences, and values (only for Georgia) are added to an extended model. All models include fixed effects for survey data to account for variations that occurred during the period examined.

To ease interpretation, I present the results of the regressions as the difference in the predicted probabilities when a variable changes across categories (sex, education, and Internet use) or from the lowest to the highest value (economic situation, interest in politics, and parental government). In the case of age, the 5th percentile is compared with the 95th percentile. For ethnic identity and migration preferences, predicted probabilities are shown for each category as compared to the reference category (titular nationality and unwillingness to migrate, respectively). Differences in predicted probabilities are calculated using the mchange command included in the SPost13 package after having conducted the multinomial logit regressions using the mlogit command in Stata 16 (Scott and Freese, 2014). The predicted probabilities are computed while holding the rest of the variables at their observed values.

Results

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the results of the basic model, respectively, for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Tables 5 and 6 show the results of the extended models for Georgia and Moldova.

Basic Model

Educational level works as predicted by the literature for the Easternizer and Westernizer groups in the three AA countries: tertiary education is positively correlated with support for the Westernizer option, while the opposite is true for Easternizers. When focusing on Balancers, the only country that shows a significant relationship between education and this geopolitical option is Georgia, where tertiary education is positively correlated with being a Balancer. Support for the Isolationist option, conversely, appears to be negatively correlated with tertiary education in both Georgia and Ukraine, while results for Moldova are not statistically significant.

Table 2: Georgia Basic Model

N: 6940	**Pseudo R2: 0.1065**				
	Balancer	**Westernizer**	**Easternizer**	**Isolationist**	**DK/DA**
Age (5% to 95%)	-0.010	-0.051**	0.061***	0.037*	-0.037*
	0.567	0.009	0.000	0.011	0.021
Male vs Female	0.022	0.003	0.026**	-0.012	-0.038***
	0.010	0.011	0.008	0.008	0.000
Worker vs Non-Worker	0.001	0.012	0.010	-0.005	-0.017
	0.011	0.012	0.010	0.010	0.011
Edu (Tertiary vs Else)	0.034**	0.088***	-0.044***	-0.022*	-0.056***
	0.013	0.013	0.010	0.011	0.011
Ec. Situation (0 to 1)	-0.017	0.035	-0.011	-0.006	-0.002
	0.019	0.022	0.016	0.016	0.018
Internet (Everyday + at least once a week vs Else)	0.011	0.073***	-0.033***	0.002	-0.052***
	0.012	0.014	0.010	0.010	0.011
Azerbaijani vs Georgian	0.104***	-0.398***	0.033**	0.066***	0.194***
	0.014	0.013	0.011	0.011	0.014
Armenian vs Georgian	0.115***	-0.469***	0.019	0.183***	0.152***
	0.018	0.020	0.015	0.015	0.016

The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for gender, employment status, education, and frequency of Internet use. For economic situation, cell entries show the change in the predicted probabilities when the variables increase from their minimum to their maximum value. Ethnic identity shows the difference in predicted probabilities between a particular minority and the titular nationality. Standard errors are shown below the probabilities. *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$.

The results regarding individuals' perceived economic situations are in line with those of educational levels in regard to Westernizers and Easternizers. These groups seem to conform to the traditional notion that those in a better economic situation should prefer the EU, while those facing deprivations will tend to opt for the EAEU. Whereas the economic situation does not affect the likelihood of being a Balancer in any of the three AA countries, a better economic situation is inversely associated with being an Isolationist, albeit with the effect not being statistically significant in Georgia.

Table 3: Moldova Basic Model

N: 7466	**Pseudo R2: 0.0943**				
	Balancer	**Westernizer**	**Easternizer**	**Isolationist**	**DK / DA**
Age (5% to 95%)	0.017	0.009	-0.004	-0.023*	0.000
	0.015	0.020	0.020	0.011	0.014
Male vs Female	0.025***	-0.013	0.013	0.003	-0.029***
	0.008	0.010	0.011	0.006	0.007
Worker vs Non-Worker	-0.003	0.009	0.003	-0.007	-0.002
	0.008	0.011	0.012	0.006	0.009
Edu (Tertiary vs Else)	-0.008	0.081***	-0.084***	0.005	0.005
	0.011	0.015	0.014	0.008	0.011
Ec. Situation (0 to 1)	0.002	0.106***	-0.136***	0.014	0.014
	0.019	0.027	0.024	0.015	0.020
Internet (Everyday + at least once a week vs Else)	0.016	0.088***	-0.042***	-0.014*	-0.047***
	0.009	0.013	0.013	0.007	0.009
Romanian vs Moldovan	-0.094***	0.501***	-0.277***	-0.052***	-0.077***
	0.014	0.024	0.012	0.006	0.017
Russian vs Moldovan	-0.036*	-0.336***	0.422***	0.024	-0.074***
	0.016	0.012	0.024	0.015	0.012
Ukrainian vs Moldovan	-0.041**	-0.310***	0.394***	0.008	-0.051***
	0.014	0.013	0.021	0.012	0.013
Gagauz vs Moldovan	-0.043*	-0.350***	0.431***	0.040*	-0.078***
	0.017	0.012	0.026	0.017	0.014
Bulgarian vs Moldovan	-0.076***	-0.309***	0.403***	0.027	-0.046
	0.019	0.023	0.039	0.023	0.024

The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for gender, employment status, education, and frequency of Internet use. For economic situation, cell entries show the change in the predicted probabilities when the variables increase from their minimum to their maximum value. Ethnic identity shows the difference in predicted probabilities between a particular minority and the titular nationality. Standard errors are shown below the probabilities. *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$.

The frequency of Internet use follows the same pattern as the previous two variables. The results show that frequent Internet users are more likely to support the EU and less likely to support the EAEU. This is true for all three countries except for Easternizers in Ukraine, where the effect is not statistically different from zero. Internet use is negatively correlated with Isolationist preferences in both Moldova and Ukraine but not significantly associated with being a Balancer in any of the three countries.

Table 4: Ukraine Basic Model

N: 16417	**Pseudo R2: 0.0467**				
	Balancer	**Westernizer**	**Easternizer**	**Isolationist**	**DK/DA**
Age (5% to 95%)	-0.015*	-0.075***	0.093***	-0.015	0.012
	0.006	0.016	0.012	0.013	0.011
Male vs Female	0.001	0.073***	-0.014*	-0.019**	-0.042***
	0.003	0.008	0.006	0.006	0.005
Worker vs Non-Worker	0.002	-0.028***	0.011	0.023***	-0.008
	0.003	0.009	0.007	0.007	0.006
Edu (Tertiary vs Else)	0.005	0.077***	-0.022***	-0.026***	-0.033***
	0.004	0.009	0.006	0.007	0.006
Ec. Situation (0 to 1)	-0.003	0.185***	-0.084***	-0.063***	-0.034*
	0.009	0.022	0.014	0.016	0.014
Internet (Yes vs Else)	0.006	0.048***	0.011	-0.023**	-0.041***
	0.004	0.010	0.007	0.008	0.007
Russian vs Ukrainian	-0.004	-0.314***	0.321***	0.026*	-0.029**
	0.007	0.013	0.016	0.014	0.010
Both Ukrainian and Russian vs Ukrainian	-0.002	-0.279***	0.212***	0.079***	-0.010
	0.009	0.019	0.021	0.020	0.015
Belarussian vs Ukrainian	0.004	-0.323***	0.173**	0.111	0.035
	0.031	0.054	0.059	0.061	0.048

The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for gender, employment status, education, and frequency of Internet use. For economic situation, cell entries show the change in the predicted probabilities when the variables increase from their minimum to their maximum value. Ethnic identity shows the difference in predicted probabilities between a particular minority and the titular nationality. Standard errors are shown below the probabilities. *** $p \leq 0.001$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$.

The results regarding the influence of ethnic identity for both Westernizers and Easternizers are in the expected direction in the three countries. Members of minorities, except Armenians in Georgia, are, in the three countries, more likely to prefer the Easternizer option than members of the titular nationality, who are more likely than the former to favour the Westernizer option. However, as advanced (see footnote 9), the results for Romanians in Moldova are the opposite of those of the other ethnic minorities; that is, being a Romanian increases a respondent's chances of supporting the EU and reduces their chances of supporting the EAEU. Furthermore, ethnic minorities are more likely to support the Isolationist path than members of the titular nationalities. This holds true for Gagauzes in Moldova, Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia, and for all minorities but Belarusians in Ukraine. Being a member of any ethnic minority also

correlates positively with being a Balancer in Georgia, while the opposite is true in Moldova; the results for Ukraine are not statistically significant.

Overall, the results of the first model appear to confirm the hypotheses that winners will be more supportive of the Westernizer path than losers (Hypothesis 1a), and that losers will prefer the Easternizer option more than winners (Hypothesis 1b). Regarding the hypothesis that expects winners to be more likely to be Balancers than losers (Hypothesis 1c), the results show that this is confirmed only for educational winners in Georgia and for members of the titular nationality in Moldova. Hypothesis 1d, which expects losers to be more supportive of the Isolationist option, is confirmed for educational losers (in Georgia and Ukraine), Internet losers (in Moldova and Ukraine), and members of minorities (in the three AA countries).

Extended Model

Interest in politics, the measure of political engagement, appears to be positively correlated with support for the EU in both Georgia and Moldova. Its influence on support for the EAEU is, by contrast, negative and significant in Georgia, while in Moldova its results show a positive but not significant relationship. Higher interest in politics increases the likelihood of being a Balancer and decreases the likelihood of being an Isolationist in both countries. The results of this variable thus confirm the expectations of both Hypothesis 2a (which expects politically engaged citizens to be more in favour of the Balancer option than those who are not engaged) and Hypothesis 2b (which expects disengaged citizens to be supportive of the Isolationist path).

Regarding the authoritarian/liberal values variable, available only for Georgia, the results show how preferring a government that acts as an employee has a positive effect on the chances of being a Westernizer. The opposite is true for Balancers, who are more likely to hold authoritarian values. No significant effects are found for either the Easternizer or the Isolationist positions. The results for the values variable are able to confirm only Hypothesis 3a, which expects citizens who prefer liberal values to be Westernizers. Interestingly, the results show that individuals who prefer a government that behaves as a parent are more likely to be Balancers, which is the opposite of what Hypothesis 3c expected.

Table 5: Georgia Extended Model

N: 6862	**Pseudo R2: 0.1273**				
	Balancer	**Westernizer**	**Easternizer**	**Isolationist**	**DK/DA**
Age (5% to 95%)	0.010	-0.067***	0.070***	0.029	-0.041**
	0.018	0.020	0.015	0.015	0.016
Male vs Female	0.010	-0.017	0.026**	-0.003	-0.017
	0.010	0.011	0.009	0.009	0.009
Worker vs Non-Worker	0.002	0.009	0.012	-0.006	-0.016
	0.011	0.011	0.010	0.010	0.010
Edu (Tertiary vs Else)	0.037**	0.053***	-0.036***	-0.017	-0.037**
	0.013	0.012	0.010	0.011	0.012
Ec. Situation (0 to 1)	-0.014	0.039	-0.013	-0.012	0.000
	0.019	0.021	0.016	0.016	0.018
Internet (Everyday + at least once a week vs Else)	0.006	0.048***	-0.027**	0.009	-0.036***
	0.012	0.013	0.010	0.010	0.011
Azerbaijani vs Georgian	0.109***	-0.349***	0.015	0.063***	0.161***
	0.015	0.014	0.011	0.012	0.013
Armenian vs Georgian	0.106***	-0.426***	-0.005	0.180***	0.145***
	0.015	0.012	0.011	0.015	0.014
Interest in pol. (0 to 1)	0.041**	0.156***	-0.032***	-0.057***	-0.107***
	0.015	0.017	0.012	0.012	0.013
Willing to CIS country vs Not willing to migrate	0.106***	-0.228***	0.168***	-0.030*	-0.016
	0.024	0.025	0.025	0.015	0.017
Willing to EU vs Not willing to migrate	0.093***	0.082***	-0.056***	-0.054***	-0.066***
	0.020	0.019	0.013	0.014	0.016
Government as employee vs Government as parent	-0.034***	0.095***	-0.014	-0.012	-0.034***
	0.011	0.011	0.009	0.009	0.010

The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for gender, employment status, education, frequency of Internet use, and parental government. For economic situation and interest in politics, cell entries show the change in the predicted probabilities when the variables increase from their minimum to their maximum value. Ethnic identity shows the difference in predicted probabilities between a particular minority and the titular nationality. Future migration preferences shows the difference in predicted probabilities between those wanting to migrate and those who are not willing to do so. Standard errors are shown below the probabilities. *** p ≤0.001, ** p ≤0.01, * p ≤0.05.

Table 6: Moldova Extended Model

N: 7353	**Pseudo R2: 0.1248**				
	Balancer	**Westernizer**	**Easternizer**	**Isolationist**	**DK / DA**
Age (5% to 95%)	0.014	0.010	-0.019	-0.023*	0.017
	0.015	0.020	0.020	0.011	0.014
Male vs Female	0.023**	-0.019	0.009	0.005	-0.018*
	0.008	0.010	0.010	0.006	0.007
Worker vs Non-Worker	-0.002	0.010	0.000	-0.009	0.002
	0.009	0.011	0.012	0.006	0.009
Tertiary vs Else	-0.009	0.056***	-0.071***	0.012	0.013
	0.011	0.015	0.014	0.009	0.012
Ec. Situation (0 to 1)	-0.003	0.099***	-0.130***	0.014	0.020
	0.019	0.026	0.024	0.015	0.020
Internet (Everyday + at least once a week vs Else)	0.012	0.077***	-0.040**	-0.014	-0.036***
	0.010	0.013	0.013	0.007	0.010
Romanian vs Moldovan	-0.090***	0.470***	-0.271***	-0.051***	-0.058**
	0.015	0.028	0.017	0.007	0.021
Russian vs Moldovan	-0.016	-0.315***	0.369***	0.028	-0.066***
	0.018	0.015	0.025	0.016	0.014
Ukrainian vs Moldovan	-0.031*	-0.293***	0.354***	0.010	-0.041**
	0.015	0.015	0.021	0.012	0.014
Gagauz vs Moldovan	-0.023	-0.333***	0.389***	0.044*	-0.077***
	0.020	0.015	0.027	0.018	0.014
Bulgarian vs Moldovan	-0.067**	-0.283***	0.366***	0.022	-0.038
	0.022	0.027	0.039	0.023	0.025
Interest in pol. (0 to 1)	0.031*	0.136***	0.014	-0.031***	-0.150***
	0.014	0.018	0.018	0.009	0.012
Willing to CIS country vs Not willing to migrate	-0.025	-0.259***	0.348***	0.019	-0.083***
	0.018	0.017	0.027	0.016	0.013
Willing to EU vs Not willing to migrate	0.060***	0.207***	-0.252***	-0.007	-0.007
	0.017	0.020	0.016	0.010	0.014

The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for gender, employment status, education, and frequency of Internet use. For economic situation and interest in politics, cell entries show the change in the predicted probabilities when the variables increase from their minimum to their maximum value. Ethnic identity shows the difference in predicted probabilities between a particular minority and the titular nationality. Future migration preferences shows the difference in predicted probabilities between those wanting to migrate and those who are not willing to do so. Standard errors are shown below the probabilities. *** p ≤0.001, ** p ≤0.01, * p ≤0.05.

Future migration preferences show the expected results for Westernizers and Easternizers in Georgia and Moldova: wanting to migrate to a CIS country is positively related to support for the EAEU and negatively to support for the EU and wanting to migrate to an EU country is positively correlated with being a Westernizer and negatively with being an Easternizer. The intention to migrate to a CIS country increases Balancer preferences and decreases Isolationism in Georgia but not in Moldova. However, the intention to migrate to an EU country is positively correlated with support for the Balancer option in both countries and negatively correlated with an Isolationist stance in Georgia. The results of this variable seem to support the claims of Hypothesis 4a (which expects citizens who are willing to migrate to an EU country to support the Westernizer option more than those who are not willing to migrate) and Hypothesis 4b (which expects respondents willing to migrate to a CIS country to be Easternizers). Hypothesis 4c, expecting citizens willing to migrate to either the EU or a CIS country to be more supportive of the Balancer option than those not willing to migrate, is confirmed in Georgia and partially confirmed (only for those willing to migrate to the EU) in Moldova.

To check the robustness of the results, the models were replicated separately for each individual survey. This also facilitates searching for differences in effects over time. As shown in Tables 10-12 in Appendix II, the results indicate that the effects for the winners and losers variables mostly hold for Westernizers and Easternizers in the three AA countries. In general, and despite three exceptions that can be found in the tables in Appendix II, the results of the robustness check appear to confirm the main results of the models, as there were no obvious systematic changes during the period studied.

Balancers and Isolationists in the AA countries: similarities and differences

Overall, the results of the present study provide evidence that the variables of education level, economic situation, and Internet use consistently predict winners' support of the EU and losers' support of the EAEU. Isolationists are usually found to be losers; this holds true for education level (in Georgia and Ukraine), economic situation (in Ukraine), and frequency of Internet use (Moldova and Ukraine). Conversely, none of these factors, with the exception of tertiary education in Georgia, was found to be systematically associated with support for Balancer preferences in any of the AA countries.

Within the winners and losers variables, the ethnic identity variable consistently – if we exclude Romanians in Moldova – explains the higher likelihood of people holding the titular nationality to be Westernizers. Likewise, the results show that all the ethnic minorities, except for Armenians in Georgia, tend to be Easternizers. The results for Balancers are mixed, as being a member of an ethnic minority increases the likelihood of being a Balancer in Georgia, while the opposite is the case in Moldova. On the one hand, in Georgia, this trend is probably linked to the fact that Georgians are the most pro-EU ethnic group in Georgia; this could cause the two minorities -Armenian and Azerbaijani-, with neighbouring states where their ethnic groups are a majority, to perceive that joining the EU would limit their ability to remain linked to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Indeed, the governments of Armenia (a current EAEU member) and Azerbaijan have limited interest in joining the EU when compared to governments in the AA countries (Spina, 2018; Van Gils, 2018). This lack of interest shown by Armenia and Azerbaijan would make Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia more supportive of any geopolitical option except the one that exclusively favours joining the EU. On the other hand, the fact that minorities in Moldova oppose even the Balancer option is probably a consequence of the more polarized character of geopolitical preferences of Moldovan society (Kosienkowski and Schreiber, 2014), where the ethnic minorities tend to reject any kind of links with the EU, including the Balancer compromise solution. The relationship between ethnic identity and the Isolationist option is more homogeneous in the three AA countries. The results show that all ethnic minorities, except the Romanian subgroup in Moldova, are more likely to support the Isolationist option than members of the titular nationality. However, results for Moldova should be taken with a pinch of salt as they are statistically significant only for the Gagauz minority.

Future migration preferences and, especially, political engagement, appear to be two variables that are able to explain support for all four geopolitical groups in Georgia and Moldova, the two countries for which these variables were available. Political engagement, as measured by interest in politics, has an almost identical influence over geopolitical preferences in Moldova and Georgia; higher interest increases support for the Balancer and Westernizer options and decreases the probabilities of being an Easternizer (in Georgia) or an Isolationist (in both countries). Future migration preferences have the expected results for the Easternizer and Westernizer groups, with

citizens willing to migrate to an EU country being more likely to support joining the EU, and citizens willing to migrate to a CIS country being more inclined to support joining the EAEU. Balancers show a similar pattern in both Moldova and Georgia, with intention to migrate to an EU country increasing the likelihood of supporting this option.

Conclusion

The exhaustive categorization of geopolitical preferences used in this paper allows for a more realistic distribution of citizens' geopolitical preferences in the AA countries, since it considers two geopolitical options that are often neglected by the various disciplines that cover this topic (Buzogány, 2019; Spina, 2018; White, McAllister, and Feklyunina, 2010). This classification adds Balancers (those who support joining both the EU and the EAEU) and Isolationists (individuals who do not support membership of either the EU or the EAEU) to the common dichotomy that divides post-Soviet societies into Westernizers (individuals wanting their country to join the EU) and Easternizers (those in favour of EAEU membership). After reviewing the percentages of Balancers and Isolationists in the three AA countries, the importance of these geopolitical groups becomes clear. Thus, the goal of this work -exploring the determinants of falling into the Balancer and Isolationist categories- is important as it serves both (1) to understand the factors that influence supporting these groups and (2) because it recognizes that the societies of the AA countries are more diverse in terms of geopolitical preferences if options beyond the EU/EAEU dichotomy are considered. In this sense, to the best of my knowledge, this paper is the first to comparatively test different factors (winner/loser status, political engagement, liberal/authoritarian values, and future migration preferences) that could influence the extended classification of geopolitical preferences simultaneously in the three AA countries.

The results have shown that, in line with previous findings, losers (individuals with fewer chances of success in a particular society, characterized this paper as people with lower education levels, poorer economic situations, membership in ethnic minorities, and little or no Internet use) tend to be more supportive of the EAEU path, while winners prefer the EU. The three AA countries share the common trend that losers are more likely to be Isolationists or Easternizers. The influence of the examined variables is less clear for Balancers. When considering the likelihood of being a Balancer, almost no influence was

found of the variables regarding frequency of Internet use, economic situation, and education. Members of minorities, by contrast, are more likely to be Balancers in Georgia, but the opposite is true in Moldova. Political engagement demonstrates almost identical patterns in Moldova and Georgia, with higher interest in politics increasing the chances of belonging to the Balancer and Westernizer groups while reducing those of being an Isolationist or, only in Georgia, an Easternizer. Future migration preferences show very similar effects on Easternizers and Westernizers and notable similarities regarding Balancers. Individuals who want to move to an EU country are more likely to be Balancers and Westernizers, while ones who want to migrate to a CIS country have higher chances of being Easternizers or Isolationists. However, the influence of future migration preferences on Isolationists is significant exclusively in Georgia. Values emerge as a significant predictor only for Balancers and Westernizers, revealing that preferring liberal values has a positive effect on being a Westernizer and a negative one on being a Balancer.

These empirical findings thus indicate that the determinants that influence being a Westernizer or an Easternizer follow extremely similar patterns in the three AA countries. In addition, the three countries also show relatively homogeneous patterns regarding factors that influence Isolationists. However, determinants influencing the Balancer option seem to demonstrate a less consistent pattern between the countries with regard to winner/loser status, but the effects are more consistent when political engagement and migration preferences are considered.

Further research on this topic could focus on new potential factors that influence geopolitical preferences in both the AA and other post-Soviet countries. Another potentially interesting research area that could arise from this paper is the analysis of the differences in support of the four geopolitical options in the AA countries and the factors influencing these variations over time. Lastly, further research should focus on contextual differences. The fact that the AA countries, apart from sharing a “commonality of fate” (Nodia, Cenuşă, and Minakov, 2017: 1), display different trends for some geopolitical options is, most certainly, related to historical, cultural, and economic factors. Exploring these contextual factors could potentially help expand the current knowledge on

geopolitical preferences and their determinants in the countries that were formed when the Soviet Union collapsed.

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Appendix I

Table 7: Georgia DV distribution per survey (2015-2019).

	Balancers	Westernizers	Easternizers	Isolationists	DK/DA
2015	18.15	37.55	12.53	13.66	18.11
2017	20.22	35.85	15.27	10.11	18.55
2019	19.76	37.95	10.72	15.02	16.55

Table 8: Moldova DV distribution per survey (2015-2019).

	Balancers	Westernizers	Easternizers	Isolationists	DK/DA
20151	9.59	30.23	48.76	2.95	8.48
20162	12.51	27.20	42.75	4.93	12.61
20171	9.10	37.60	40.76	5.85	6.69
20172	11.03	36.45	34.49	5.98	12.06
20181	13.97	40.44	30.51	6.89	8.18
20182	10.73	32.01	28.58	7.96	20.72
20191	15.70	30.90	31.32	7.81	14.27

Table 9: Ukraine DV distribution per survey (2015-2019)

	Balancers	Westernizers	Easternizers	Isolationists	DK/DA
20152	3.51	45.67	16.25	22.45	12.13
20153	1.59	43.90	18.80	22.64	13.06
20154	2.13	49.52	15.85	19.59	12.91
20161	1.44	47.56	18.42	18.68	13.90
20163	5.35	44.39	13.76	21.61	14.88
20164	4.27	46.83	17.52	19.65	11.73
20173	5.45	52.46	11.16	16.50	14.43
20174	4.66	48.90	14.87	21.73	9.84
20191	8.21	46.21	16.94	13.25	15.38

Appendix II

Table 10: Robustness check Georgia

Tertiary Edu GE (Model 1)						Economic Situation GE (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**		**BA**	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
2015	0.059	0.107	-0.052		-0.104	**2015**					
2017	0.073	0.050	-0.048	-0.047		**2017**					
2019		0.092				**2019**					
Internet GE (Model 1)						Azerbaijani vs Georgian GE (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**		**BA**	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
2015		0.083			-0.055	**2015**	0.169	-0.331	-0.067	0.044	0.185
2017		0.080	-0.052			**2017**	0.060	-0.405	0.078	0.064	0.204
2019	0.050	0.063			-0.076	**2019**	0.072	-0.472	0.096	0.090	0.214
Interest GE (Model 2)						Migrate CIS GE (Model 2)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**		**BA**	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
2015	0.081	0.116			-0.164	**2015**		-0.233	0.211		
2017	0.128	0.163		-0.066	-0.193	**2017**	0.116	-0.223	0.153		
2019	-0.061	0.170	-0.038	-0.086		**2019**	0.175	-0.257	0.133		
Migrate EU GE (Model 2)						Gov. parent / Gov. employee (Model 2)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**		**BA**	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
2015		0.125	-0.079		-0.070	**2015**	-0.058	0.124			-0.078
2017	0.141		-0.066	-0.061	-0.067	**2017**		0.064	-0.038		
2019	0.098	0.073		-0.076	-0.066	**2019**	-0.057	0.091			

The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for education, and frequency of Internet use. For economic situation and interest in politics, cell entries show the change in the predicted probabilities when the variables increase from their minimum to their maximum value. Ethnic identity shows the difference in predicted probabilities between a particular minority and the titular nationality. Future migration preferences shows the difference in predicted probabilities between those wanting to migrate and those who are not willing to do so. Only results that are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$) are shown.

Table 11: Robustness check Moldova

Tertiary Edu MD (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20151	-0.043	0.098	-0.098		
20162		0.171	-0.092		
20171		0.146	-0.141		
20172		0.089			-0.080
20181					
20182					
20191			-0.077		0.071

Economic Situation MD (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20151					-0.072
20162				0.136	
20171		0.145			
20172			-0.146		
20181			-0.210	-0.053	
20182	-0.075				
20191			-0.167		

Internet MD (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20151		0.137	-0.123		
20162				-0.041	
20171					
20172		0.098			-0.061
20181		0.077			
20182		0.104			-0.132
20191		0.104			-0.096

Ukrainians vs Moldovans MD (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20151	-0.059	-0.319	0.401		
20162		-0.220	0.275		
20171		-0.295	0.346		
20172		-0.358	0.383		
20181		-0.354	0.476		-0.058
20182		-0.322	0.356		-0.101
20191		-0.296	0.462		-0.116

Interest MD (Model 2)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20151					-0.110
20162		0.210		-0.063	-0.137
20171				-0.059	-0.066
20172		0.115			-0.111
20181					-0.116
20182	0.132	0.180			-0.234
20191		0.163			-0.116

Migrate CIS MD (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20151	-0.059	-0.279	0.362		
20162		-0.283	0.325		-0.092
20171		-0.238	0.260		
20172		-0.363	0.336		-0.118
20181		-0.265	0.440		-0.086
20182		-0.216	0.326		-0.166
20191	-0.107	-0.234	0.330		

Migrate EU MD (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20151			-0.184		
20162	0.216		-0.208		-0.072
20171		0.308	-0.334		
20172	0.127	0.182	-0.279		
20181	0.121	0.181	-0.249		
20182		0.196	-0.166		
20191		0.248	-0.221		

The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for education, and frequency of Internet use. For economic situation and interest in politics, cell entries show the change in the predicted probabilities when the variables increase from their minimum to their maximum value. Ethnic identity shows the difference in predicted probabilities between a particular minority and the titular nationality. Future migration preferences shows the difference in predicted probabilities between those wanting to migrate and those who are not willing to do so. Only results that are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$) are shown.

Table 12: Robustness check Ukraine

Tertiary Edu UA (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20152		0.104	-0.057		
20153		0.097			-0.048
20154		0.068			
20161		0.074	-0.049		-0.040
20163		0.113			-0.074
20164					
20173		0.058		-0.067	
20174					
20191		0.093		-0.042	

Economic Situation UA (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20152			-0.088		-0.074
20153		0.197	-0.121		-0.079
20154		0.237	-0.127	-0.125	
20161		0.119		-0.110	
20163				-0.170	
20164		0.179		-0.193	
20173					
20174		0.157	-0.171	0.134	-0.097
20191		0.222	-0.191		

Internet UA (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20152		0.090			-0.039
20153					
20154	0.016				-0.071
20161					
20163					
20164					
20173				-0.048	
20174	0.028	0.106		-0.103	-0.069
20191		0.074			-0.094

Russian vs Ukrainian UA (Model 1)					
	BA	**WE**	**EA**	**IS**	**DK/DA**
20152		-0.340	0.316		
20153		-0.361	0.418		-0.059
20154		-0.379	0.371		-0.057
20161		-0.445	0.504		
20163		-0.300	0.183		
20164		-0.164	0.202		
20173		-0.273	0.223	0.109	-0.064
20174		-0.276	0.333		
20191	-0.051	-0.167	0.176		

The table shows the difference in predicted probabilities between the maximum and minimum values for education, and frequency of Internet use. For economic situation, cell entries show the change in the predicted probabilities when the variables increase from their minimum to their maximum value. Ethnic identity shows the difference in predicted probabilities between a particular minority and the titular nationality. Only results that are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.05$) are shown.

Conclusions

The social and political debate regarding which international organisation the AA countries should join remains a very divisive topic in the societies of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (Cadier, 2019; Nodia, Cenușă, and Minakov, 2018). In spite of the importance of the topic, there are still unresolved questions that require further study regarding what drives the geopolitical preferences of the citizens of the AA countries. With this dissertation, I have empirically tested the validity of different theoretical explanations for the mechanisms that allow individuals in the AA countries to decide which of the several geopolitical orientations available is best for them and their countries. Furthermore, the dissertation also studies the different factors that shape attitudes towards the competing international organisations in those environments.

In this conclusions section, I first summarise the main findings of the dissertation. Secondly, I present some of the principal limitations that I have encountered in the process of writing this work, and possible ways of overcoming them in the future. Finally, in the concluding remarks subsection, I discuss the main contributions of this work to the literature and the (scholarly, but also social) importance of continuing to research geopolitical preferences and the factors that influence them in the AA countries and beyond.

Summary of the main findings

The first article in this thesis studies the relationship between institutional trust, party cues, and individual geopolitical preferences. The analysis of survey data from Moldova points to citizens tending to support the geopolitical preferences of those ruling the institutions that

they trust most, with individuals tending to align with the geopolitical orientation of their preferred political party. Moreover, the fact that this article uses data from the 2012-2019 period allows it to prove that the relationship between party cues and geopolitical preferences has remained constant for the studied period, while the influence of institutional trust depends on the geopolitical orientation of the party in control of the different institutions. Overall, the article proves that the theories regarding institutional trust and party cues and their influence over support for international organisations that have been studied in Western Europe also work in the post-Soviet space. These findings, thus, provide support to the idea that even in younger (and arguably weaker) party systems, cues exert an important influence over citizens' foreign policy preferences.

The second article studies a phenomenon that has been observed throughout the AA countries: the fact that ethnic minorities tend to be more supportive of the EAEU and less supportive of joining the EU than the titular nationalities (Berlinschi, 2019; Ehin, 2001; Gentile, 2015; Müller, 2011; White, McAllister, and Feklyunina, 2010). The main finding of this article is that the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences has different sources (i.e. linguistic and ideological) and sizes among the different ethnic minorities. This finding is particularly relevant because it highlights the importance of considering the particularities of each ethnic group when speaking about differences regarding geopolitical preferences. That is, considering all minorities as a single entity that is “more pro-Russian than the titular nationality” prevents us from understanding that the causes and sizes of the ethnic gap can differ between ethnic groups. The second relevant finding in the second article has to do with the origins of the ethnic gap in geopolitical preferences. In this sense, the results of the analyses show that, while for EU membership, differences in linguistic knowledge explain the ethnic gap better than predictors related to ideology, values, and information; the opposite is true for support for EAEU membership.

The third article explores the relationship between links with the CPSU and support for EU/NATO membership. The main finding of this article is that having individual or parental links with the CPSU is positively correlated with support for EU/NATO membership. These results highlight the importance of taking into account historical legacies for understanding current individual geopolitical preferences in the AA countries. Furthermore, the article also shows that historical legacies can work in counterintuitive ways and, consequently, that

exploring the causal mechanism and historical evolution of these historical legacies is vital for properly understanding current attitudes in post-Soviet societies.

Lastly, the fourth article in the thesis deals with a recently developed categorisation of geopolitical preferences that divides these preferences into four groups instead of two (Buzogány, 2019). This fourth article looks beyond the classic dichotomy (Westernizers and Easternizers), and includes respondents that oppose joining either the EU or the EAEU (Isolationists), and those who support joining both organisations (Balancers). The results show that winners tend to be Westernizers while losers are more likely to be Easternizers or Isolationists. Secondly, respondents that are more politically engaged tend to be Balancers and Westernizers, while those who are disengaged support the Isolationist path more. Thirdly, future migration preferences also play a role in geopolitical preferences: the results of the article show that people who want to migrate to an EU country tend to be Balancers and Westernizers while those who intend to migrate to a CIS country are more likely to be Easternizers. Lastly, the analyses show that preferring liberal values has a positive effect on being a Westernizer and a negative effect on being a Balancer. Overall, the main objective of the fourth article has to do with understanding some of the determinants that influence a more complex set of ambivalent geopolitical preferences (i.e. Isolationists and Balancers), one that goes beyond the traditional EU/EAEU dichotomy, and thus serves to paint a more realistic and more nuanced picture of the societies in the AA countries.

Current limitations and future challenges

One of the main problems that I have encountered while writing this dissertation has been the lack of compatibility between different surveys. The fact that there are surveys fielded in the three AA countries that are openly available (i.e. the CRRC's survey series in Georgia, the IPP's surveys in Moldova, and the KIIS surveys in Ukraine) has made it possible to carry out the analyses that support this dissertation. However, the main limitations have to do with the difficulties comparing the surveys fielded by the different agencies in the three countries studied. Even if I have managed to use survey data from the three countries simultaneously in the fourth article, the research questions posed in the other articles that compose this thesis have forced me to focus on only one country at a time.

Considering this key limitation, future projects that study geopolitical preferences in the AA countries should focus on collecting survey data that is easily comparable in the three countries. Having data that is comparable in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine would serve two purposes: firstly, it would allow theories to be tested simultaneously in the three countries; secondly, it would make it possible to determine to what extent the AA countries constitute a single group or are, conversely, less similar than indicated in most of the literature in recent decades. One of the possible ways of improving comparability is to encourage cooperation between the different survey agencies that operate in the AA countries, as these agencies could work together to design surveys that consistently use the same variables, greatly facilitating the development of future research in the area.

Apart from limitations regarding the comparability of the surveys, some of the research questions that arise from the findings in the different articles of this dissertation require other types of data in order to be answered. The scarcity of longitudinal and experimental data in the area has limited the research questions that this dissertation could answer. Consequently, future projects that would like to continue exploring determinants of geopolitical preferences in the area should consider this limitation and try to prevent it by employing a mixed methodology that combines the quantitative analysis of survey data (both cross sectional and longitudinal), experimental methods, and qualitative analyses. Only by using several methodologies will future research be able to answer the questions that arise from this research by, for example, disentangling the causal mechanisms that affect the relationship between partisanship and individual geopolitical preferences. One possibility of overcoming the lack of longitudinal and experimental data is to emphasise how important studying the political attitudes of the public in the AA countries is for the stability of Europe.

Concluding remarks

I find it important to conclude this work by highlighting the complexity of geopolitical preferences themselves. It used to be common that the literature, with some exceptions (e.g. Buzogány, 2019; Kakhishvili, 2021; Spina, 2018; White, McAllister, and Feklyunina, 2010), understood geopolitical preferences in post-Soviet Europe as nothing more than a dichotomous choice between the West and the East. While this dichotomous classification has the benefit of adapting particularly nicely to the political landscape of the AA countries, which is usually structured into (more or less explicitly) pro-EAEU and a pro-EU blocs, the

existence of geopolitical preferences that go beyond the Cold War logic in the AA countries cannot be denied. Therefore, if we want to properly understand the factors that influence geopolitical preferences, we have to first identify the wide range of geopolitical options displayed by citizens of the AA countries. Only then will we be able to consider the myriad factors that influence individuals' geopolitical preferences, and not only those of the citizens that support either the EU or the EAEU.

Regarding the contributions made by this thesis, I find it useful to highlight the two main contributions that I hope to have made: (1) to expand the current knowledge in the literature about support for international organisations by focusing on an area were the EU and the EAEU compete for influence, and (2) to identify determinants of individual geopolitical preferences that are potentially applicable to the three AA countries. In this regard, I think that the four articles that make up the dissertation fulfil the objective of these two proposed contributions.

Regarding the first contribution of the thesis, this work has served to expand the knowledge on the broader "support for international organisations" field. The main findings in this regard (see articles one and two) have to do with the fact that variables affecting support for the EU and the EAEU, when they are understood as a dichotomy, usually follow opposing relationships. This is because variables that positively affect support for the EU tend to be negatively correlated with support for the EAEU and vice versa. These results are probably at least partially due to the fact that several actors (political parties, the media, the Church, etc.) promote the idea that the EU and the EAEU are on opposite sides of a (geopolitical, cultural, moral, etc.) spectrum. In this way, citizens of the AA countries understand geopolitical orientations in a similar way, at least to a certain extent. However, the relatively symmetrical patterns regarding the relationship between different variables and support for EU and EAEU membership become less clear once an extended classification of geopolitical preferences is considered. In this sense, the fourth article in the dissertation serves to prove that, while most of the studied variables indeed tend to be in a relationship of opposition for Easternizers and Westernizers, people who hold ambivalent positions (i.e. Isolationists and Balancers) follow different logics in each of the AA countries, ones that are not always in opposition to each other. Overall, the main findings of the thesis regarding support for international organisations in environments in which there are multiple viable options is that,

at least in the AA countries, there are more or less clear opposite effects in the variables that affect support for EU and EAEU membership. Nonetheless, when more ambivalent positions are considered, it seems that the determinants of these positions can be more influenced by the particularities of each of the national contexts.

Regarding the second contribution of the thesis, the identification of determinants of individual geopolitical preferences that are useful for the three AA countries, the area-focused character of each of the articles has allowed me to test determinants that are common to the three AA countries, avoiding phenomena that are particular to each of the countries and, thus, difficult to compare. Consequently, the contribution made by each of the articles arises from the identification of determinants that might be common to the three AA countries. Taking advantage of a thesis that focuses exclusively on individual geopolitical preferences has allowed me to test a range of variables that, while already proven in the context of member or potential member countries, still required testing in the AA countries. This is, for example, the case of political engagement, a variable that had been previously tested in countries that were members or soon to be members of the EU (Nelsen and Guth, 2000; Slomczynski and Shabad, 2003), and also seems to be positively correlated with support for the EU and negatively for the EAEU in the cases of Georgia and Moldova. Likewise, another of the theoretical and practical contributions of the dissertation regarding variables of interest regards links with the CPSU and current individual geopolitical preferences. While this issue has been thoroughly studied elsewhere (although with a focus on issues such as corruption and tolerance) using regional percentages of members of the CPSU (see, for example, Libman and Obydenkova, 2021), the effects of individual links with the Communist Party on current geopolitical orientations had remained, to the best of my knowledge, untested. Therefore, the results of the third article in the thesis (co-authored with Michael Gentile), even though they only focus on three Ukrainian cities and use support for pro-West orientations as a dependent variable, begin to tackle the study of an area of the historical legacies left by the Communist period, one that seems to still exert its influence in the AA countries.

Overall, one of this dissertation's main contributions is to test determinants of geopolitical preferences that are potentially common to the three AA countries, serving to improve the current knowledge regarding factors that influence individual geopolitical preferences in

post-Soviet Europe. Summarising, the determinants of individual geopolitical preferences that this dissertation has studied can be grouped into two categories. A first set of factors focuses on *sociodemographic characteristics*, and is closely related to the winners and losers theory, which argues that some characteristics make individuals more prone to success in a society, while others are detrimental to this success (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky 2002; Kriesi et al. 2008). Some of the factors that belong to this first group include, to name a few, ethnicity, language proficiency and use, education level, and perceived economic situation. A second set includes factors related to *national politics*, such as institutional trust, political engagement, preferred type of government, and links to political parties (both current political parties and links with the CPSU). In general, the results found in the different articles that make up the dissertation show that both groups of factors influence individual geopolitical preferences in the AA countries. Consequently, the simultaneous influence of this heterogeneous array of determinants highlights the complexity of the process of choosing a geopolitical orientation.

What are the main determinants of individual geopolitical preferences in the Association Agreement (AA) countries? From historical legacies to institutional trust, this thesis has proven that the process of deciding whether a country should join the EU or the EAEU (or both, or neither) arises from very different sources. In this sense, the four articles that make up this thesis have served to expand the current knowledge on individual determinants of geopolitical preferences in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. However, far from being a complete answer to the research question posed, this work highlights the importance of further research being carried out on this topic. This is because the ever-changing political and geopolitical environment in a region in which the interests of the EU and Russia are competing could influence how individuals determine their geopolitical preferences. Consequently, I hope that this work contributes to keeping the scholarly interest in the topic and region alive, as I am convinced that understanding how the citizens of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine decide their preferred geopolitical paths is important, since the geopolitical paths that the citizens (and governments) of the AA countries choose could impact not only the future of these countries but also on that of the whole European continent. In this sense, combining different methodologies and an interdisciplinary approach is the only way to continue answering the question of geopolitical preferences,

which is arguably one of the most polarising issues in the political and everyday lives of the AA countries.

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Al imprimir la tesis
me acuerdo de Jan van Eyck:
también yo la he hecho
lo mejor que he podido.
Barcelona, noviembre de 2021