

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF
EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP:
THE CASE STUDY “COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN
GEORGIA”

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DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA”**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the European Union’s (EU) sustainable development initiatives in the context of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) from the soft power perspective. ENP and EaP are EU’s main initiatives for ensuring security and stability in the Eastern Neighbourhood. They have undergone several revisions due to the redefined security threats. This thesis argue, rural development also has a security facade. The security perspective of ENP and EaP is too broad that the importance of micro policies or sub-programmes in ensuring the EU influence in the security field is often undermined. Accordingly, the main argument of the thesis is that the objectives of the rural development programme, community-led

local development (CLLD) — also widely known as LEADER, complies with the evolving methods and security perspective of the revised ENP and EaP policies. Therefore, it can provide room for European influence in the rural development field. In the light of these arguments, the implementation in Georgia will be taken as a case study. The qualitative research will start with the review of the literature on soft power to create a theoretical foundation. In the following chapters, I will extensively analyze ENP and EaP policies' role in the EU soft power. Afterwards, a proper focus on LEADER approach will be provided. The last chapter will provide a discussion on LEADER implementation in Georgia in the context of the EU soft power use.

Keywords: community-led local development, LEADER, ENP, soft power, Georgia

ÖZ

AVRUPA KOMŞULUK POLİTİKASI VE DOĞU ORTAKLIĞI KAPSAMINDA SÜRDÜRÜLEBİLİR KALKINMA GİRİŞİMLERİ: VAKA ÇALIŞMASI “GÜRCİSTAN’DA LEADER UYGULAMASI”

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Bu tez Avrupa Birliği’nin (AB) sürdürülebilir kırsal kalkınma girişimlerini Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası (AKP) ve Doğu Ortaklığı (DO) politikaları kapsamında ve yumuşak güç perspektifinden incelemektedir. AKP ve DO, AB’nin Doğu’da güvenlik ve istikrarı sağlamada temel girişimleridir. Yeniden tanımlanan güvenlik tehditleri sonucunda AKP ve DO bazı revizyonlar geçirmiştir. Bu tez kırsal kalkınmanın da güvenlik yanı olduğunu iddia etmektedir. AKP ve DO’nun güvenlik perspektifinin çok geniş olması sebebiyle mikro politikalar ve uygulanan çeşitli alt programlar ile AB’nin güvenlik alanında yarattığı etki göz ardı edilmektedir. Bu doğrultuda, tezin ana argümanı şu şekildedir: kırsal kalkınma programı olan topluluk temelli kırsal kalkınmanın amaçları, (çoğunlukla LEADER olarak bilinen) revize edilen AKP ve DO

politikalarının evrilen güvenlik perspektifi ve metodları ile örtüşmektedir. Bundan dolayı, kırsal kalkınma alanında Avrupa etkisi için alan oluşturabilir. Bu argümanlar ışığında, Gürcistan’da LEADER uygulaması vaka çalışması olarak belirlenmiştir. Bu nitel araştırma, teorik çerçeve oluşturması için yumuşak güç literatür taraması ile başlamaktadır. İlerleyen bölümlerde, AKP, DO’nun AB yumuşak güç kullanımındaki rolü detaylıca verilmiştir. Sonraki kısımda, LEADER metodu ile ilgili kapsamlı bilgiler sunulmaktadır. Son bölümde, Gürcistan’daki LEADER uygulaması AB’nin yumuşak güç kapsamında tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Topluluk Temelli Kırsal Kalkınma, LEADER, Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası, Yumuşak Güç, Gürcistan

To my parents,
Nalan & Osman ÖNDER

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Association Agreement
AP	Action Plan
CLLD	Community-led Local Development
CPR	Common Provision Regulation
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Community
EAGGF	European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EC	Energy Community
ELARD	European LEADER Association for Rural Development
EMFF	European Maritime and Fisheries Fund
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPARD	European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ENRD	European Network for Rural Development
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union

EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission
EVRA	Estonian Voluntary Rescue Association
FLAG	Fisheries Local Action Group
GALAG	Georgian Association of Local Action Groups
GD	Georgian Dream
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development
LAG	Local Action Group
LDS	Local Development Strategies
	Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale
LEADER	(Links Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy)
MA	Managing Authority
MC	Mercy Corps
MEPA	Ministry of Environmental and Protection and Agriculture
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRN	National Rural Network
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PA	Paying Agency
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
RDS	Rural Development Strategy

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

ENP and EaP constitute much of the EU's foreign policy agenda. The main concern is to ensure the EU's security in its outer borders. As an alternative to the mainstream security notion heavily based on military terms, this thesis argues that challenges in the rural areas can also impede the security of the Eastern Neighbourhood. Rural areas are the places where the agricultural production starts and feed the massive populations living in the urban areas. The sustainability of the agricultural production, natural production practices, and food security are therefore significant for the national economies. Moreover, rural areas are the places that would suffer from the direct environmental challenges of the climate crisis. Therefore, the local communities tend to be more vulnerable especially in the former-Soviet region where the socialist regime caused serious environmental problems. In this sense, within the ENP and EaP framework a comprehensive security understanding covering the resilience of the remote areas in the partner states is significant and can contribute to the EU's security agenda in the Eastern Neighbourhood. To this end, the thesis aims to scrutinise the idea of sustainable development and security notion referring to the rural development initiative: LEADER strategy. Under the framework of the ENP and EaP, LEADER both plays role in sustaining security in the rural areas and enables the EU norms and values to spread in remote regions. Having shown a successful praxis of LEADER and

as an EaP partner state, LEADER implementation in Georgia is taken as a case to attempt to elaborate the idea of the LEADER's role in use of soft power.

As a result of the enlargement policies, the EU's borders extended to the South and the East where new member state's neighbours became the security concern for the EU. The launch of ENP in 2004 and EaP in 2009 provided a securitisation, modernisation and stabilisation projects in the new neighbours. The partners of ENP and EaP have been provided financial help and technical assistance in the light of the EU norms and values. This idea appears to be ambitious that the ENP and EaP policies aim to create an EU-like comfort zone beyond the direct control of the EU borders without a clear membership perspective. Therefore, both ENP and EaP are discussed widely in the soft power literature. The relations of the partner states with the EU, initialised by the Association Agreements (AAs) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements (DCFTAs), generates a framework within which EU norms and values such as the rule of law, democracy, human rights, civil society, good governance can be projected. The use of soft power based on these norms and values by the EU in former-Soviet Republics, particularly in Georgia is important that after the last enlargement, EU's borders came closer to a politically stressful region where economic problems are deep, ethnic and territorial clashes happen occasionally and democratic culture is weak. Also, the region is heavily influenced by the Russian Federation's foreign policy aspirations. It is expected that as a result of the projection of the EU norms and values, partner states might make political, economic and social progress, and in turn become more stable and secure. Once they internalise the EU standards, they are expected to align with the EU and serve for its security agenda.

In this sense, the international relations scholarship focuses mostly on the setbacks and success of the EU soft power tools referring to the notions of balance of power, stability and security. In general, scholars are doubtful about the role of the ENP and EaP initiatives in promoting the healthy political, economic, and social transitions in former-socialist states in ensuring the stability and the security of Eastern Europe, especially South Caucasus and Central Asia due to the domestic and external crisis happened in the last few decades. The thesis argues that the scholarship on ENP and EaP regarding soft power implies that they are massive political projects with high expectations. This is also evident in the literature that scholars tend to expect massive transitions from ENP and EaP in a short period of time. As such, ENP and EaP are often criticised for falling short of their promises in terms of their transformative power. More importantly, local success stories and sectoral EU policies in specific cases are often ignored in bulks of analysis. Micro policies precisely dealing with the partner states' local communities and regions can actually have more impact on promotion of democracy, security and stability. In turn, the EU influence can also reach the public and spread to the remote regions. This thesis argues, analysis of micro policies -specific to detailed themes and particular regions- might be more helpful to unveil the success and effectiveness of the EU soft power use.

To support this argument, this thesis reviews the literature in which new spheres of influence for the EU has become relevant as a result of new security threats. Since the launch of ENP and EaP, the EU's rhetoric and actions have evolved into a level where the EU has acknowledged the variety of security threats ranging from socio-economic

disparities to environmental problems and food security. The development of rural areas in Georgia is of great importance given that rural areas have the human and natural sources; however, lack of expertise, technology and entrepreneurship are impediments against unveiling their full potential. Furthermore, the implications of climate crisis, rising out-migration and environmental degradation problems increment in rural regions and pose a threat for Georgia's stability. Therefore, preparing the local communities for the upcoming shocks by initiating new rural development models that are in line with the needs and the potential of the rural communities is important for the stability of Georgia.

In the revised versions of ENP and EaP, the new security perspective covers sustainable development as a new sphere to cooperate with the partner states to ensure stability. Furthermore, the approaches to tackle the abovementioned threats have also evolved from a unilateral, top-down, state-centric view to a model in which various civic actors are actively engage in the decision-making processes in cooperation with governmental institutions to find solutions for endemic problems. This bottom-up approach enhances the local democracy and resilience-building rather than importing the solutions and the methods. This change deserves close attention because security and stability understanding in this context is beyond the hard security perspective. Also, the method that the EU uses is different in that the EU now shares its responsibility with the local stakeholders that are trained to operate at national and international levels to seek solutions.

LEADER is a neo-endogenous rural development method initiated in 1991 and mainstreamed in the EU as of 2007. Considering the evolution of security perspective and the methods used, this thesis tries to understand whether LEADER as a neo endogenous rural development model can be analysed in terms of soft power use. The LEADER approach is important in providing the tools and knowledge for the local communities to initiate local development projects with the EU funds. The Local Action Groups (LAGs) aims to enhance the autonomous, participatory, and democratic decision-making processes by bringing a variety of local actors to decide how to use the tangible and intangible assets on behalf of the whole community covered within the LAG borders. The scope of the regional development projects includes diversification of the economic activities. The projects include agricultural production, new initiatives in sustainable tourism, activities and investments for youth employment, alleviation of inequalities regarding women and ethnic minorities, protection of the environment. The projects in the short and long run are expected to increase the quality of life in remote regions, prevent the local communities from external shocks (economic, environmental). Rather than a central and state-centric understanding, LAGs are expected to find the best solutions generated by the native population only with temporary financial and technical support. The thesis assumes that this is an efficient way of contributing to a country's security and stability.

Georgia has almost a decade of LEADER implementation experience. Therefore, the country is ready to reveal palpable implications regarding the praxis. I have two years of travelling experience in remote regions in Georgia. Throughout this time, I also had the chance to pay four informal visits in the LAGs in Georgia (Kazbegi, Khulo,

Tetrtskaro, Akhalkalaki) in 2017. During these visits, I developed keen interest in LEADER strategy and started to work in Gdl Local Action Group as a Local Development Strategy Expert in Ankara. These experiences gave me insight into the LEADER strategy and inspired me to conduct this research.

This qualitative research, therefore, shall ask the following questions: To what extent the EU is aware of new security threats in the partner states and what kind of measures have been taken to tackle the latest security problems in the region? Can rural development initiatives be seen from the soft power perspective? To what extent the LEADER method complies with the security aspirations of ENP and EaP? Does it provide a new sphere for the EU to use soft power?

To answer these questions, the first chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis by referring to the soft power literature. It briefly elaborates the soft power, normative power and transformative power concepts in the EU context. Also, it elaborates the hard and soft security notions. The next chapter is about the ENP and EaP in terms of their importance, setbacks and the evolution of certain concepts and methods. The third chapter provides a ground of knowledge regarding the LEADER method and its main principles by referring to the literature. In the last chapter the EU-Georgia relations are given briefly, and the implementation of LEADER is analysed. Overall, giving the theoretical framework and the substance of LEADER scholarship with a focus on the ENP and EaP in the Georgian context is discussed to reconsider the relevance of LEADER with soft power use.

The methodology of the research is qualitative. The data is collected from secondary sources such as books, scientific journals, and relevant published and online works. Additionally, documents such as implementation reports, roadmaps, European Commission reports, communication reports, European and Ministerial Council Conclusions, strategy papers, the respective websites of the European Union and the Delegation to Georgia are used.

CHAPTER 2

THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON SOFT POWER

This chapter shall draw a theoretical framework for this thesis. The chapter gives a fundamental understanding of power and security and the relation between them. It highlights how the two notions have evolved in time concerning global changes. The literature review shall be helpful to analyse the LEADER method from the soft power perspective in the rural development sphere implemented within the ENP and EaP.

2.1. Power and Security

The meaning and scope of power changes depending on the context. Yet, it has been a concept that is widely used both defining the state and nature of human relations, interstate relations. In general terms, power is defined as the “ability to control people and events”¹ and, in the political context, it is defined as “the ability of states to use material resources to get others to do what they otherwise would not” (Barnett & Duvall, 2005).

Until the end of the Cold War, the bipolar world was shaped by the interplay between the survival of two superpowers (the United States and the Soviet Union) based on the

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-turkish/power> (accessed on March 25, 2021).

notion of a certain kind of power. During the Cold War era, “realists believe that the goal of power, the means of power, and the uses of power are central preoccupations of political activity”. Therefore, international relations is depicted as “power politics” (Jackson & Georg, 2013, p. 96). In this “narrow” realist view, power had been induced to “military” or “nuclear capabilities” of the states because then the most important threats are considered military (Jackson & Georg, 2013, p. 52). This hard power understanding was deeply interconnected with the security of the states in which, security was heavily sought in military terms. From high politics perspective, power is defined referring to the states’ military capability through direct use or display of force to generate outcomes it wants. Hard security is based on “a logic of buffer zones and margins of error, often expressed in terms of square miles of territory, and sometimes also in the quantities of destruction, damage and, even, loss of life that is acceptable” (Fatić, 2002, pp. 94-95). Although military capabilities’ role might not be ignored, the number and variety of security threats, namely “soft security threats”, due to the globalisation and interdependence have risen (Pursiainen, 2001, p. 3). More importantly, especially after the end of Cold War, besides military threats, new security threats are considered as problems for the global peace and the security of the states and individuals.

Buzan argues that security aims to manage the national and international “insecurity” notion which, “has many facets” (Buzan, 1984, p. 112). Scholars such as Buzan, de Wilde, and Wæver are considered as “wideners” of the security notion (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 2). They approach security from different perspectives in terms of political, economic, social and environmental dynamics and consider their effects on security. They point, in the political sphere, beyond the nation-states, “international regimes”

might be subject to insecurity when they are “existentially threatened by situations that undermine the rules, norms, and institutions that constitute those regimes”. In the economic sphere, the same situation can be relevant for the survival of “national economies” and “the global market”. In the societal sphere, “nations and religion” are the projection of collective identities and non-fissile parts of the states. From a conservative point of view, “challenges” and “changes” might be considered threats to collective identities (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 22). For example, Kugiel states that several EU member states opted for the “securitisation” of the national migration policies due to the mass migration waves (2017, p. 62). Lastly, Buzan et al. argue environmental sphere is more complicated than the aforementioned spheres. Stress on “the survival of individual species” and “the planetary climate and biosphere” might pose global “existential threats”(Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23). The traditional hard power and hard security approaches in international relations are contested by several other scholars that the new international political environment after the end of Cold War is based on pluralism. Problems are several and sometimes do not respect borders. Also, nation-states are not the only unit of analysis, several other actors play a role in international politics. Liberals argue that the cooperation among these political agents in response to complex problems makes the world more interdependent and brings more benefits and progress for all. They believe, “the use of force” costs too much, therefore shall be avoided (Jackson & Georg, 2013, p. 104).

2.2. Soft Power

When Joseph Nye coined the term soft power or co-optive power in the 1990s, the bipolar world was fading away but still, the United States prevailed its dominance in international politics and remained as the leading actor because “American democracy,

values and foreign policy interests were largely undisputed” as Longhurst et al. states (2019, 155). Nye defines power as “the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants” (2004, p. 2). Unlike “hard power” use through “inducements” or “threats”, “soft power” is an intermedium to generate the desired political outcomes relying on the use of the agent’s “intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority” (2004, p. 6). Soft power relies on three bases. These are the country’s “culture, political values and foreign policies” (2004, p. 11). Cultural values can be projected through a wide variety of spheres ranging from cinema and popular culture to exchange programs for students. Promotion of universal norms and values in terms of politics can also encourage the third parties to align with the country that uses these soft power tools. These assets creating a beacon for the recipients shall encourage them to admire the agent’s “values”, emulate “its examples” and, aspire “its level of prosperity and openness” (2004, p. 5). In other words, using these intangible sources coherently and presenting it in the actions and policies towards the other countries help countries to legitimize their power in international politics, and face “less resistance” (2004, p. 10) on the way to reach the political goals they aspire. Soft power admits the “multilateralism” and the plurality of the recipients, therefore, it promotes “common institution building” and gathers different agents around the orbit of the country that uses soft power (Longhurst et al., 2019, p. 155). Today, different countries and international institutions are deemed to be soft powers such as the European Union, the United States, Germany and Japan.

As an important international actor, the European Union’s actorness is conceptualised within similar theories. Ian Manners introduces the normative power theory to

understand the EU's role from a wider perspective. He responds to Duchêne's *civilian power Europe* and Bull's *military power Europe*. He argues that both Duchêne and Bull's theories are based on "the fixed nature of nation-state" (Manners, 2002, p. 238). Manners does not contradict Duchêne and Bull's ideas yet expand the state-centric understanding based on the military capabilities.² Rather than focusing on internal capabilities and "material gain", he analyses the EU's international role with respect to its normative role (Manners, 2002, p. 253). In his later article, Manners says, "simply by existing as different in a world of states and the relations between them, the European Union changes the normality of 'international relations'. In this respect the EU is a normative power: it changes the norms, standards and prescriptions of world politics away from the bounded expectations of state-centricity" (Manners, 2008, p. 45).

The EU's ideational role is constitutionalised in the *acquis communautaire*, which is built upon core norms that are "peace, liberty, rule of law, human rights, and democracy" (Manners, 2002, p. 242). They have been the main contributors of the EU's ascending "international identity" (Manners, 2002, p. 241). In addition to core norms, "social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, good governance" are the main pillars of the EU (Manners, 2002, p. 243). In the context of the post-Cold War period, these norms possessed and actions taken accordingly, presented a distinguished EU image in the eye of the Eastern European states. In other words, these were to shape the EU identity into a liberal and democratic model to

² EU is seen as a state-like political entity in both Duchêne and Bull's discussions, and protecting its status-quo is the main aim of their arguments. That happens either through civilian means as Duchên points or through military means as Bull points.

increase its legitimacy among the former-socialist republics (Manners, 2002, pp. 241-243). The argument is that the EU norms and values have credibility in the world and the EU has the legitimacy to define “the normal” (Manners, 2008, p. 45). In this sense, the EU is a distinct entity that does not only refer to certain values and norms to conduct relations with the third parties *ex parte* but also set conditions and expect the third parties to operate in accordance with the EU norms and values. According to Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, the “constitutionalization of European values” gives a new dimension to the EU foreign policy that it aspires to project its rules and policies to the third parties and to transform them. This “transformative power” gives the EU’s external policy agenda a wider perspective, which is particularly evident in the enlargement processes (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 791). Several enlargements have shown that “containment” is sometimes the EU’s way of conducting relations with its neighbours where Western Balkans, Central and Eastern European countries were expected to fulfill some requirements and show considerable progress in political, economic and social spheres (Zielonka, 2017, 145). All of these concepts say one thing in common that they all acknowledge the EU’s “presence” and “actorness” at least in the near neighbourhood (Hoffmann & Niemann, 2017, p. 32). Yet, they highlight, only if the EU’s norms, values and institutions are attractive enough, they can set the blueprints of the relations between the EU and the third parties. The multidimensional and complex problems in the former-Soviet Republics can be solved in EU way of acting and can create a safe environment for EU actors to take action to ensure the security and stability without facing resistance from these states and enhance alignment.

Briefly, the power concept intertwines with the security concepts. Their scope and definition evolve. After the end of the bipolar world, new security threats having social, economic and environmental dynamics became visible and started to pose threat on the security of the regimes. In terms of power, the notion of power was commonly associated with the military, hard, coercive power due to then military security threats. The power of the state was induced to the military capabilities of the states to create the outcome it aspires to achieve. Yet, in addition to material capabilities, Nye comes up with the soft power concept which focuses on the states' intangible sources to generate admiration and beacon upon the third states to encourage them to produce the results that the former desires. The EU's desire to expand its influence is strictly tied to its soft power due to EU's vision of spreading its way of thinking and acting to the third states. Normative and transformative power of the EU also shows that EU is seen from the outside as a legitimate international actor where its norms and values can have transformative effect in the third states. During the several enlargements of the EU, the partners states were expected to join the EU until they align their political and legislative standards with the EU. These enlargements became examples for the other states to align with the EU and pave the way for further EU influence in wider regions across the globe.

CHAPTER 3

THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

This chapter will discuss ENP and EaP with a focus on elements of soft power in the EU foreign policy. The discussion will involve criticism and success of these policies, along with a geographical focus on the use of these policies towards the former Soviet Republics, specifically in the Southern Caucasus. The success of these policies will be analysed within the context of soft power policies. Critical viewpoints against these policies and the subsequent revisions will also be examined in detail.

On 1 May 2004, the Accession treaty announcing the EU membership of ten new states (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and Slovenia) was declared, making this Europe's largest enlargement with a population of 100 million people residing in the EU borders³. This move also changed the administrative borders of the EU widely. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia on the South and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on the East constituted the outer circle of the EU borders.

³ https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history/2000-2009/2004_en (accessed on May 23, 2021).

The EU's new neighbours in the East were formerly part of the Soviet Union. With the Soviet disintegration in 1991, these republics became independent and since then have undergone complex political, economic and social transitions. Also, the political instability in the region caused by ethnic clashes, frozen conflicts, and political leaders' authoritarian tendencies exacerbated the political conditions.

Various regional and international actors became interested in the area due to security and economic reasons. Hydrocarbon sources around the Caspian Sea also added to the region's importance. Political and economic stability in the region has been among the top priorities of several international actors such as the EU, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United Nations. Regional actors such as Russia, Turkey and Iran, more recently China are also interested in the region due to their religious, historical, cultural ties, and/or their economic and political interests in the region. The aforementioned actors are influential through soft and/or hard power mechanisms.

3.1. European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

The EU's new neighbours after the largest enlargement in 2004 led to new security challenges, which in turn led to the adoption of new security perspectives in the EU foreign policy. As a result, ENP was born in 2004 as the foreign policy tool with the new neighbours in the South and in the East.

In addition to ENP, Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009 was formed to generate a particular foreign policy agenda towards the former Soviet republics beyond the

borders of Central and Eastern European states. The EU is one of the international actors that correlates its external policy in the former Soviet region upon the developments following the *de jure* end of socialism. After 11th September 2001, EU started to pursue a more ambitious external policy towards Southern Caucasus and later on Central Asia to increase the “European presence and visibility” as an international actor (Indeo, 2013, p. 96). The EU’s political, economic and social ambitions towards its neighbours in the South and in the East were reified through unified instruments: ENP and its Eastern European pillar: EaP.

Security is a core concern for both ENP and EaP. The EU desires to be “surrounded by stable, prosperous neighbours” (Ursache, 2013, p. 889). Both ENP and EaP are the main pillars of the European Security Strategy (*Communication from the Commission to the Council on the Commission Proposals for Action Plans Under the European Neighbourhood Policy*, 2004, p. 3). To sustain security, “the objective of the ENP is to share the benefits of the EU’s 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries in strengthening stability, security and well-being for all concerned. It is designed to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and its neighbours and to offer them the opportunity to participate in various EU activities, through greater political, security, economic and cultural co-operation” (*Communication from the Commission European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, 2004, p. 3).

Both ENP and EaP heat academic discussions in terms of their success and setbacks within wider discussions of the EU’s soft, normative and transformative power. The

EU cannot rely on “traditional hard power coercion” due to the lack of “unified military forces” (Scrinic, 2014, p. 222; Carp, 2020, p.112; Dimitrova et al., p. 9, 2016; Indeo, 2013, p. 94; Longhurst et al., 2019, p. 163). In the IR literature “soft power is considered important in defining the EU’s position as an international actor” (Carp, 2020, p. 111; Dimitrova et al., p. 6, 2016; Scrinic, 2014, p. 222). The EU shows its presence in international politics “in the field of trade and by spreading its brand of integration via enlargement, neighbourhood policies and various forms of association and partnerships with third countries” (Longhurst et al., 2019, p. 163). It is widely acknowledged that being an international actor in the Eastern European region is one of the main pillars of the EU’s foreign policy (Carbune, 2019, p. 250; Ciot & Damaschin, 2020, p. 130; Indeo, 2013, p. 93; Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 3; Scrinic, 2014, p. 222). The intensity of the cooperation between the EU and the EaP partner states is expected to reach a significant degree of integration (*Communication from the Commission European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, 2004, p. 8) in the mid/long-run with the soft, normative and transformative use of power by the EU.

Nielsen and Vilson argue, “milieu goals” are the intangible objectives a political actor values to shape/create the environment where it functions. In such an environment, milieu goals create a safer environment for the political actors where they can reach their political interest and benefit from the safer environment at the same time. In this sense, EU puts the promotion of democracy, human rights, international law, economic development and environmental protection at the centre of the *acquis communautaire* and promote them beyond its borders. That means, the EU believes these norms will constitute a safe and secure environment around its borders, and in turn will contribute in the security of the EU. This understanding constitutes an essential part of the EU

soft power. ENP and EaP partner states are conditioned to act in line with these norms in their relations with the EU (Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 3).

The conditionality principle plays a decisive role in conditioning the relations between the EU and partner states (Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 18). The reification of the policies is channeled with the Action Plans (APs) and the AAs between the EU and the partner states based on the milieu goals. AAs and APs identify the preconditions to make the approximation of the partner states to the EU constitution with the political and economic reforms in partner states (Petrova & Delcour, 2020, p. 351). These preconditions posed by the EU aim to encourage partner states to increase the quality of political, social and economic life within their borders. Secondly, the conditions of the access of partner states to the European market is specified by certain trade agreements called DCFTAs. DCFTAs pave the way for further economic integration by fostering the partner states to enter the EU's single market.

There are also important economic incentives through various financial instruments. Tangible benefits through financial instruments to the partner countries were provided first by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) between 2007-2013 (Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006, 2006, p. 2). ENPI committed €15.4 billion budget and further continued with "more flexible and effective" European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) between 2014-2020 and allocated another €15.4 billion (European Commission, 2004, p. 3; Regulation (Eu) No 232/2014, 2014, p. 27;

Kharlamova, 2015, p. 48)⁴. Further funding will be provided between 2021-2027 by Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument and is expected to allocate €86 billion to the partner states.⁵ Both ENPI and ENI have the condition that financial supports are provided to the partner states in parallel to their progress in EU-led reforms. Evaluation reports that reveal the progress of the partner countries are therefore prepared by the Commission periodically (Communication from the Commission to the Council, 2004, p. 4). Moreover, ENI also operates on the basis of “incentive-based approach”, which presents extra financial support to the partner states. Through the “Umbrella” programme, partner states were provided up to an additional 10 per cent of ENI budget allocated to them as long as they show considerable progress in the development of “deep and sustainable democracy”.⁶

3.2. Eastern Partnership

In the EU’s East, the ongoing frozen conflicts, “fragile regimes and weak economies” caused new security threats from “multiple perspectives” in the region and remained an obstacle to stability (Kharlamova, 2015, p. 48). Furthermore, Russia’s aggression towards Georgia in 2008 led to new concerns regarding the stability in the former Soviet region. After the 2004 enlargement, creating a circle of Eastern neighbours that are “stable, predictable and synergetic to the EU” become vital for EU due to the

⁴https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3A28020103_1#:~:text=The%20ENI%20budget%20for%202014%2D2020%20is%20%E2%82%AC15.433%20billion (accessed on May 23, 2021).

⁵<https://eufundingoverview.be/funding/neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument-ndici> (accessed on February 12, 2021).

⁶https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/8410/node/8410_en (accessed on February 12, 2021)

proximity of the region (Kharlamova, 2015, p. 48). As a result, a more specialised and unified policy instrument for the former-Soviet region was introduced in the Prague Summit on 7 May 2009 (Kharlamova, 2015, p. 616; Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 6). Six countries became partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The objectives of EaP constitute political aspirations with the “consolidation of the rule of democratic institutions and of civil society”, economic aspirations with the “preparation of free trade agreements”, “sectoral cooperation” and mobility aspiration with the “visa-free regimes” (Rouet, 2016, p. 6). Steps taken towards these areas are designed to “create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries”. To achieve the “macroeconomic aspirations” and the stability, “good governance, promoting regional development and social cohesion” eliminating inequalities in socio-economic conditions in the region were also introduced with various complementary instruments (Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, 2009, p. 6).

Rouet illustrates, in terms of financial support, between 2011-2013 ENI provided, € 182 million to Armenia € 75.5 million to Azerbaijan, € 41.5 million to Belarus, € 208 million to Georgia, € 308 million to Moldova, € 389 million to Ukraine, a total of approximately €2.5 billion (Kharlamova, 2015, p. 49; 2016, p. 6). This financial support in the region is expected to enhance “multilateral cooperation” between the EU and the partner countries. Based on knowledge and experience sharing, “transition, reform and modernisation” of the partner countries aimed to be accelerated. Namely,

“legislative and regulatory approximation” to the EU standards was expected to foster “democracy”, “strengthen stability and prosperity” in the partner states. Cooperation through commitment on the European/Western norms and values would “bring lasting and palpable benefits to citizens of all participating states” and foster rapprochement between partner countries and the EU in the mid/long-run (Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, 2009, p. 11).

The EU’s influence coexists with the interest of various other actors. The Chinese influence has been rising in the former-Soviet region particularly with the Belt and Road Initiative. More importantly, the balance of power between the EU and Russia has impact on the success of EaP. Russia still wants to keep the former Soviet region under its control as the successor of the Soviet Union. It does not celebrate an active EU nearby. Therefore, Russia carefully monitors the EU actions after the launch of EaP. When it is seen necessary, Russia does not hesitate to take military actions as it is seen in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and in Crimea.

In addition to using hard power, Russia makes use of soft power instruments through strong media campaigns. However, the Russian media is not impartial, it supports and justifies Russian interests. Unlike the EU, Russian soft power does not seek to promote norms and values such as human rights, democracy, rule of law, and political pluralism in the region. It can be argued that Russia is mostly interested in expanding its regional hegemony by supporting political leaders who usually tend to rely on “traditional hierarchies” (Longhurst et al., 2019, p. 166) namely authoritarianism, and who are ready to serve the Russian interests in the region. Russia’s foreign policy interests do not aim to promote healthy transformations in the region (Longhurst et al., 2019, p.

165). In the economic sphere, the foundation of the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEU) under the leadership of Russia in 2014 may imply that Russia has the aspiration to “re-integrate” the former-Soviet Republics (Longhurst et al., 2019, p. 155). However, unlike the EU’s conditionality, membership in EAEU does not ask for “any adherence to particular values” as Patalakh adds (2017, p. 153).

3.3. Success of ENP and EaP as Soft Power Instruments

The EU uses its soft power with the claim to foster healthy transitions in the former Soviet region. As the website of the European Union External Action Service says, in the last ten years, the EU has increased the number of bilateral agreements with the the partner states and made considerable changes in the citizens’ lives in the EaP partner states. According to the website:

1. In economic terms, trade volume between the EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus increased respectively 12 per cent, 28 per cent, and 16 per cent. The investments from the EU companies in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine expanded respectively 35 per cent, 40 per cent, and 26 per cent as of 2015.
2. Trans-European Transport Network pledges that the quality of transportation infrastructure will have increased with extra 4,800 km of roads and railways until 2030.
3. Visa-free travels are possible for the citizens of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia.
4. In terms of increasing the qualification of young people, researchers, and academics their access to “high-capacity broadband internet” is provided. ERASMUS+ programme funded the exchange of more than 80.000 students from EaP countries. The European School is founded in Georgia to provide high-quality education.
5. In order to mitigate the effects of climate change, 100.000 families are able to diminish their carbon footprint by using

renewable energy resources, on which the EU invested in the region.⁷

The results of the EU soft power reveal itself in specific cases. To illustrate, Dimitrova et al. argues that the Maidan movement has shown that most of the Ukrainian citizens' perception towards the EU was positive that "protests took place under the Ukrainian and the EU flags and stressed [the EU] norms and principles that were seen as worth fighting for". Russia's financial support to former Ukrainian president Yanukovich was considered as an attempt to impede the ongoing AA negotiations between the EU and Ukraine. The abolishment of the AA with the EU was not approved by the citizens because the EU is seen "as the vehicle for reform and improvement of governance in Ukraine" (Dimitrova et al., 2016, pp. 7–8). To illustrate further, the same article presents the findings of a survey showing that 53 per cent of the Ukrainians "have indicated that they see their future in Europe, beyond Russian principles, rules, influences, and ideologies" (Dimitrova et al., 2016, p. 13)⁸.

Ciot and Damaschin argue, the rapprochement between Ukraine and the EU has an important role in the EU's security strategy, therefore the EU takes the necessary financial and political measures towards "a stable, prosperous, and democratic" Ukraine by supporting its "independence, territorial integrity, and sovereignty, facilitating the bilateral and multilateral cooperation" (2020, p. 140). The EU is the biggest donor in Ukraine. In 2015, the EU has allocated €11 billion by different

⁷https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/62121/top-10-achievements-eastern-partnership-last-10-years_en (accessed on March 6, 2021).

⁸ According to the article, the research is conducted by Ilko Kucheriv Foundation for Democratic Initiatives and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology.

financial instruments (2020, p. 131). During the crisis, the EU's contribution to Ukraine's defense capability was an important investment. More importantly, during the 2014 crisis the EU did not only condemn Russia but also implied economic sanctions against the Russian government (Patalakh, 2017, p. 161). After all, the EU played a crucial role in changing the government with the "pro-European coalition" (Scrinic, 2014, p. 228).

The EU multilateral initiatives also bring the EaP countries closer to the EU. Čepėnaitė and Kavaliūnaitė argue, the launch of the Energy Community (EC) in 2005 shows a successful example of bringing third countries around the same interest under the *acquis communautaire* framework. In the EC, participant states put collective efforts to generate the blueprints to attract energy investments for sustain the energy supply. EC is important for the EU to project its soft power because the participant states worked in an environment where the EU methods guided the multilateral cooperation between the participant states, which in turn created safer and beneficial working environment for all (Čepėnaitė & Kavaliūnaitė, 2013, p. 35). It highlights the benefits of regional cooperation concerning energy security among the third countries. The result of the practised "solidarity, mutual trust and peace" among the participant states shows that, without a future membership perspective, the participant states are able to benefit from the EU internal energy market" (The European Parliament and the Council Decision 2006/500/Ec (Energy Community Treaty), 2011, Pp. 3–11). The EU Commission has the prospect of extending the respective model of cooperation.

The EU is considered as "a major agenda setter" in formation of norms and values with soft power strategies by using both material and "ideational" sources to present

merits for all the joining parties (Longhurst et al., 2019, p. 164). Across the world, the EU is a big part of various conflicts by providing “conflict resolution, mediation, transition to democracy” (Carp, 2020, p. 111). Alignment with the EU may mean different things to different countries. Be it driven by security concerns or economic interests, countries have a desire to be part of this “successful and exclusive club of states” (Longhurst et al., 2019, p. 164). Nye argues, after the Cold War, “the goal of joining the European Union became a magnet that meant the entire region of Eastern Europe oriented itself toward Brussels.” He points out that “the newly free countries adapted their domestic laws and policies to conform with the West European standards (Nye, 2004, p. 77).

Patalakh elaborates the ideational sources of the EU soft power based on “three so-called “power currencies” —benignity, brilliance and beauty”. “Brilliance” reveals itself in “high living standards, stable economy, successful and effective solution of internal problems etc.”, which in turn creates an admiration for the third parties to “come to agreements and abide by regulations” with the EU (Patalakh, 2017, p. 151). Patalakh refers to Social Progress Index, Human Development Index, Corruption Perception Index Environmental Performance Index, and Times Higher Education Index to show that in any case, the EU member states’ rankings are higher than that of the EaP partners’ (2017, p. 153). Next, Patalakh argues “benignity” as the EU’s “generous, kind, supportive behavior” towards the third countries creates “gratitude and sympathy” for the EU and results in the rising interest of partner states to cooperate with the EU. By Pre-accession Assistance Instrument and ENP, partner and candidate states’ “advancement of democracy and rule of law, public administration, justice and social sector reforms, empowerment of small and medium-sized enterprises and civil

society organizations” are supported. He argues these financial supports are not “simply a payment for loyalty, but a form of true benignity, soft power” (2017, p. 157). Lastly, Patalakh refers to the synergy that the EU creates through “beauty”. The EU promotes and sticks to the norms and values. This is celebrated by the partner states. They are “inspired”, and the EU becomes “attractive to align to”. “Beauty denotes the agent’s relationship with values and ideas: if the agent actively follows and promotes certain ideas that the subject considers as good, the latter gets inspired and, regards the agent as attractive to align to” (2017, p. 151). Concerning EaP partners, “alignment with the EU fulfils their aspirations to belong to the Western club of ‘civilized’ states, detaching them from their Communist past and contemporary Russia which they conceive of as outdated, underdeveloped” (2017, p. 155).

3.4. Criticisms of the ENP and the EaP

Several critics argue the impact of ENP and EaP is limited with regard to the promotion of the EU norms and values in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Carbune, 2019, p. 250; Indeo, 2013, p. 107; Jitaru, 2016, p. 11; López-Tamayo et al., 2018, p. 618; Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 5; Scrinic, 2014, p. 226). If not limited, the results pose “fragmented” picture (Jitaru, 2016, p. 11; Kharlamova, 2015, p. 52; Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 7). In terms of the EU’s policies, two criticisms are important. Firstly, coherence is the issue. The EU’s responses to political circumstances in the EU and abroad are expected to be coherent with the norms and values it tries to promote. In some political circumstances, there is a gap between the EU’s rhetoric and actions. The actions taken by the EU is in clash with the norms and values it promotes. The EU’s geopolitical

interests in the region might interplay with its normative role (Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 4). This inconsistency might hamper the EU's positive image in the globe. The recent international and external developments such as refugee crisis, xenophobic and populist stance of the member states prioritising their national interests by undermining the human rights and democracy cause lack of unity in Europe.

The second point is related to the design of the ENP and EaP instruments. The point is to what extent the EU understands the dynamics of its Eastern partners and designs the policies accordingly. Lack of membership perspective, ignorance of the political, social and economic diversity among the EaP partner states, state-centric view and limited focus on civil society, ineffective communication mechanisms are the problems regarding the weak points of the EU instruments. Additionally, the weak conflict-resolution capabilities of the EU are mentioned.

3.4.1 Lack of Unity

Some scholars criticise the EU because they argue in its external and internal politics, the EU presents a different picture than what is expected from the EU in terms of adherence to the universal values (Kugiel, 2017, p. 65; Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 17; Rouet, 2016, p. 5). Referring to political circumstances within the EU, Rouet questions “the limits of the EU's ability to continue to expand while preserving its objectives (peace, stability, internal prosperity)” (2016, p. 5). This implies that the EU is expected to promote international values coherently. The coherence problem becomes visible in the Union's foreign policy agenda, of which lacks the unity.

Russia's aggressive foreign policy agenda in the Eastern Europe is a threat on security and the stability of the region. When the EU is expected to show united reaction

towards Russia's aggressive actions, some member states prioritize their economic interests and/or act on behalf of their security concerns in their bilateral relations with Russia (Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 17). For example, whilst Abkhazia was invaded by Russia, "old EU members such as Germany, France and Italy did not show strong opposition towards Russia because they worry that would affect their economic and political relations with Russia". On the other hand, Eastern European member states are more prone to show a fierce reaction to Russia due to their antipathetic/unpleasant historical past with it (Indeo, 2013, p. 100).

Nielsen and Vilson argue that the lack of unified EU foreign policy has also revealed itself after the massive amount of asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa, particularly due to the Syrian Civil War. In 2016, when the European Commission initiated a reform in the European Common Asylum System, member states have shown different responses to Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia's proposals and left the reform initiative without a conclusion. As a result, the frontline states of the EU faced security problems. Furthermore, the refugee crisis echoes in the populist, Islamophobic and xenophobic discourse of the political leaders and governments in Europe. The EU, rather than championing the rights of asylum seekers (as expected by the EU) worked mostly on securitization of its borders. The EU and its institutions could not fully adhere to its norms and values such as democracy and human rights. As a result, the positive EU image was hampered. Claiming that the EU is a champion of values and norms became harder (2013, pp. 61–66).

3.4.2 Problems in the Design of the Instruments

Membership is an important pillar of the EU. Although both ENP and EaP encourage strengthening cooperation between the partner states and the EU, it does not offer membership to the partner states. Membership perspective might give a constant motivation to candidate state to follow the constitutional requirements. Many EaP partners have a desire to start the accession process with the EU. Scrinic and Rouet argue that despite the progress of certain EaP partners, they are not offered membership as in the case of Western Balkan countries. This raise questions about double-standards in the EU (Rouet, 2016, p. 7; Scrinic, 2014, p. 227).

Furthermore, despite the post-Soviet region's diversity, the EU partnership perceives them as one unified bloc and recommend them to follow the similar paths for transition. As Nielsen and Vilson argue, the EU appears to be "placing its vision on a single recipe: exporting the *acquis communautaire*" without taking the the different expectations and capabilities of the partner states (2013, pp. 6-7). Moreover, in the EU partnership concept, EaP and ENP partners often perceived as the recipient and the EU as the law-maker (Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 5). Without developing specific policies for its partners EU policies would remain Euro-centric and top-down (Carbune, 2019, p. 251). Moreover, the universal approach towards Eastern partners results in diffusion of EU norms and values asymmetrically and presents fragmented success stories from the EaP partners. Namely, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine constitute one bloc with a

more considerable success in implementing reforms⁹. They are defined as “pro-European”, which means they are more open to communication and cooperation due to their like-mindedness (Juncos, 2017, p. 9; Scrinic, 2014, p. 221). On the other hand, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia have not shown much signs of improvement. Petrova and Delcour argue, these states tend to leave a limited space for the EU in their domestic politics. They try to “scale down the EU’s strategy of political norms promotion” (2020, p. 352). Patalakh argues, “Belarus and Azerbaijan remain highly authoritarian and have never expressed interest in concluding an EU Association Agreement” with the EU (Patalakh, 2017, p. 149).

Dimitrova et al. adds that the behaviour of the EaP partner countries’ political leaders towards the EU plays a decisive role in the nature of bilateral relations with the EU. The effectiveness of the EU’s soft power instruments depends also on the perception of the political leaders of the partner states of the EU (2016, p. 9). On the one hand, some political leaders’ proximity to European values and norms and the unpleasant historical experience with the Soviet Union might intensify the positive relations with the EU institutions and officials, such as the period of Mikhail Saakashvili, the ex-President of Georgia. Yet, this does not guarantee a successful transformation because as Scrinic claims, “the pseudo-European elites” might mimic the EU way of acting to benefit from the EU opportunities. Yet, unless the practice of the EU norms and values are internalised, the expected normative proximity to the Union can hardly happen

⁹ Bakradze and Darchiashvili points, in the recent years, the level of corruption has increased in Moldova and there is tension between pro-Europeans and pro-Russians (Bakradze and Darchiashvili, 2019, p. 122)

(Kharlamova, 2015, p. 51). A substantial monitoring system by the respective EU institutions are required to achieve the added-value of the EU programmes.

On the other hand, if political leaders keep the spirit of Soviet legacy “with tendencies to autocracy and a criminal past”, this might negatively affect the reform processes. These elites might also perceive the instruments inconsistent with what they call their conventional values and perceive them as an external intervention (Rouet, 2016, p. 7; Scrinic, 2014, p. 220). A progressive political leader has vital role in creating positive communication and develop effective cooperation. Officials from Belarus and Azerbaijan might be usually reluctant to have consultations in “anti-corruption, public administration and judicial reforms” (Petrova & Delcour, 2020, p. 352). The EU shall not enable these political elites to surpass the positive public opinion, if relevant.

Under these circumstances, in the early years, focusing too much on governments and leaving little room for civil society and grassroots movements are other limitations of ENP and EaP. Relying rarely on the bottom-up approaches, the EU could not make its influence to reach a wider target and show the EU standards. The state-centric view might ignore the diversity within the partner states and may not feed the alternative missions, which could be used effectively on behalf of the society in the EaP partners.

The dominance of top-down, state-centric views lead to problematic communication with the public. Dimitrova et al. argues that the soft power of the EU might diminish if the communication with the public in the partner states remain weak. Media is an important tool to expand the EU vision. However, most of the EU related news are induced to “specific events and visits of politicians or the EU officials, without sufficient explanation about the general context of the visit or the EU policy”

(Dimitrova et al., 2016, pp. 12–13). It shall be also noted that Russia’s anti-Western media is strong in Eastern Europe. Local people in former-Soviet states are exposed to Russia’s propaganda for defamation of the West and disinformation campaigns by different media tools (Darchiashvili & Bakradze, 2019, p. 125).

The EU forms its communication strategies around Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument and Support for Improvement in Governance and Management. Despite these initiatives, success stories of the EU programmes and projects in the East sometimes remain undiscovered by the public. The programmes lack “visibility”. With effective communication strategies, EU institutions can talk about the positive outcomes of the projects and to increase the participation of the public through information tools. As a result, the EU can achieve a broader admittance within the public (Kimber & Halliste, 2015, pp. 5-6). Soft power instruments become more efficient as long as they reach people. Unless they are explained well, the news of the positive outcomes might remain limited between the high officials and the EU. Without efficient information campaigns, the distance between the EU and citizens of partner states might remain untouched.

In terms of conflict resolution, four EaP partners have frozen conflicts in their territories: Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia, Crimea in Ukraine and Transnistria in Moldova. EaP partners often turn to EU when their territorial integrity is threatened by Russia. The security and stability of the Eastern Europe depends on the fair conclusion of these conflicts. Although the EU conducts diplomatic missions, and mediate the conflicts, EaP partners criticise the EU because they find these steps weak as they usually see the EU as the guarantor of their

security. According to the Commission, territorial integrity of EaP partners cannot be contested. Yet, “conflict management” through using coercive military means is not an EU way of responding to the clashes and also does not seem to be convergent with soft power concept (Nielsen & Vilson, 2013, p. 17).

Briefly, the shortcomings of the EU soft power have many facets. The following points shall be considered before taking criticisms for granted. Scholars highlighting the weaknesses of the EU’s soft power tend to compare the EU’s soft power with Russia’s soft power. However, Russia’s soft power obviously serves for Russia’s geopolitical interests, it is impartial and is often combined with hard power (Darchiashvili & Bakradze, 2019, p. 125). Also, expectations from the EU have always been high in international politics that EaP is expected to bring spectacular changes in partner countries in a short period of time. Although some success has been achieved, the group of EaP partners lays in a complex region with intense security concerns. Both scholars and the pro-European partners tend to overestimate the EU’s soft power by expecting the EU to guard them against Russia as Patalakh claims (2017, p. 150). However, rather than guarding partner states against Russia and driving progress, the EU is primarily keen on running programmes to achieve economic development and democracy.

Regarding the lack of unified foreign policy, it can be considered as the reflection of the democratic political environment in the EU institutions. “Multilayer decision making and multiple agencies and bodies involved in its external policies” bring diverse perspectives together. This is reflected in the EU foreign policy (Longhurst et al., 2019, p. 163).

In terms of membership, even though membership perspective is not given within the ENP framework, partner states' citizens can join various educations, trainings, and studies especially in terms of security issues. While working in the projects, they can work in the projects and gain new skills, extend their network and learn new working methods (Čepėnaitė & Kavaliūnaitė, 2013, p. 39).

3.5. Revisions on the ENP

To better conduct effective relations with the partner states, the EU might be for changes in its foreign policy tools and approaches necessary. Reflections and in turn, revisions on the EU foreign policy agenda show that the “EU is not a static entity”, it has “a continually dynamic structure” which adjusts its policies into the new challenges both resulting from inside and outside (Ciot & Damaschin, 2020, p. 130). The aims of the several revisions were “to boost EU credentials and legitimacy at home” and approaching the security domain with a comprehensive approach (Cianciara, 2017, p. 53). The revisions recreate strong emphasis on certain aspects and objectives, yet do not leave democratization and modernisation apart.

In 2004, when ENP was launched, stability and prosperity constituted the main pillars (Communication from the Commission European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, 2004, p. 2). This focus prevailed until the 2006 revision. In the 2011 ENP revision, the dominance of the “deep democracies” under the realm of “democratisation” and “sustainable economic growth” narratives were apparent (Carbune, 2019, p. 251; Cianciara, 2017, pp. 53-54). In 2011, Cianciara argues, that the political developments hampered the legitimacy of the EU, which urged the EU

policymakers to find alternative sources to shrink the legitimacy deficit. The EU policy-makers turn to the democracy element at that time because it implied the need for tight cooperation with diverse political actors representing the Union and the partner states, who had raised criticisms towards the EU. To alleviate the criticisms on the legitimacy deficit, the EU encouraged communication with these sceptic groups (2017, p. 50).

In the 2015 revision, the EU clearly acknowledged the diversity of the partner states' responses towards the EaP policies. The EU has witnessed that the objectives of ENP and EaP would resonate differently in different partner states depending on the partner state's perception of the relations with the EU. Namely, it admitted that not all the partner states were willing to follow the EU standards (Council of the European Union, 2015, p. 3).

In 2015, "stabilisation" (p. 2) in the Eastern neighbourhood based on the promotion of "good governance, democracy, rule of law and human rights" has become the new phenomena. "Economic development for stabilisation, security dimension, migration and mobility, regional cooperation" became the incentives for further cooperation with the partner states (Joint Communication to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, 2015). The incentives behind the focus on security and stabilisation were the reflections of the rising concerns due to "territorial annexations, hybrid wars, terrorism and huge flows of refugees and migrants" (Cianciara, 2017, p. 58).

Despite the fact that the EU for the first time acknowledged the complexity of the transition in 2013, the narrative shift from enhancing stability and democracy to stabilisation and democratization happened in the 2015 revision. Until 2015, the EU officials and foreign policy documents referred to blueprints to achieve democracy and stability finally. The perspective was linear, namely, EU presupposed that when democracy is achieved, stability would automatically be ensured. This preconceived idea shows that the EU tended to ignore the ups and downs in the transitions (Cianciara, 2017, pp. 54-59). With the change of this view, certain complex set of problems beyond military clashes such as “poverty, inequality, a perceived sense of injustice, corruption, weak economic and social development and lack of opportunity, particularly for young” have also been clearly pinpointed as obstacles to achieve stability in the Eastern partner states (European Commission, 2015, p. 3). In this complexity, the EU has admitted that democratisation would not necessarily pave the way for stabilisation. Moreover, taken the stabilisation for granted, the EU might even enhance authoritarian tendencies in the region, which is one of the repercussions of Soviet past (Rouet, 2016, p. 7). Tocci claims, authoritarian states might seem to be stable when they are immobile (2020, p. 181). Yet, stability does not always mean democracy and resilience. Authoritarian states in the EaP region might lack resilience even though they seem to be stable, which means when they face an unexpected problem their incapability reveals itself (Petrova & Delcour, 2020, p. 350).

Although the notion of resilience was mentioned in the EU foreign policy documents before, in the 2015 ENP revision, resilience building in the Eastern Europe became the new phenomena of the EU external actions (Joint Communication to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee and the

Committee of the Regions Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, 2015, p. 4). Resilience-building was further enhanced in European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016. In the EUGS, resilience was defined as “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises” (European External Action Service, 2016, p. 23). Being a resilient state was associated with substantial level of democracy and good governance. Later, the EUGS widened the notion of state-resilience by adding the notion of “societal resilience” into the security agenda (Carbune, 2019, p. 251; Juncos, 2017, p. 1; Tocci, 2020, p. 185).

In the course of time, the borders between the external and internal problems became slight due to the effects of the interdependencies of the globalisation. The EU admitted that the security nexus, therefore, became more complicated, uncertain, and unpredictable (Carbune, 2019, p. 251). It can be said that a wide range of environmental, societal problems besides the military clashes might pose threat to the security and stability in the lives of both the EU and the partner states’ citizens. The EU admitted that these problems required comprehensive and innovative solutions involving a broad range of governmental and civil actors and new perspectives.

Acknowledging complexity of security problems brought additional realisations. The 2016 EUGS encouraged the EU to form its foreign policy around principled pragmatism. Winn elaborates that the EU acknowledged that it can follow its geopolitical interest besides its normative missions beyond its borders. This approach created a relief for the EU in the sense that the EU accepts the limitations of its normative role in transforming the societies (Winn, 2019, p. 280). In other words, the

EU confronted with the limitations of its soft power objectives. The EU Commission acknowledged that:

1. Our partners have different aspirations: our relations should reflect this more fully;
2. The ENP should reflect EU interests and the interests of our partners;
3. Partnerships should be more focused on fewer priorities;
4. There should be greater involvement of Member States in the ENP;
5. Ownership by the partners should be enhanced (European Commission, 2015, p. 4).

It shall be noted that this shift towards resilience and pragmatism does not necessarily replace the democratization and stabilisation. Resilience-building and pragmatism rather complement the EU's vision regarding the Eastern Europe. "Supporting peace, democracy, human rights, and development remained core goals of the Union in its surrounding regions. But precisely to achieve such goals, the EU also had to pursue a resilience agenda given the inevitability of crises and shocks along the path of political, economic, societal, and institutional transformation. Developing the ability of preventing, responding and recovering – i.e., resilience – was considered critical to achieve the principled goals of peace, rights, and development" (Tocci, 2020, p. 180).

Resilience building means a more dynamic foreign policy understanding that the EU's soft power instruments are adjustable according to the partner states' specific problems (Jitaru, 2016, p. 16). The solution of complex problems requires multidimensional approaches and the involvement of diverse groups in the policy-making. Juncos explains that it means "joint approach" became a part of the ENP agenda as well (2017, p. 10). Since the EU realised its capabilities from a realist perspective, the shift from macro to micro level initiatives that grasp the day-to-day realities of the

respective targets became more important (Juncos, 2017, p. 6). Rather than trying to control the unpredictable, uncertain, complex macro policies, in some certain spheres micro initiatives fostering resilience became the new phenomena. Also, micro policies bring forward the capacities of the smaller communities in the partner states rather than highlighting the actions of the central mechanism. In other words, resilience building tends to shrink the interference of the big political actors with stick and carrot-like mechanisms. “Instead, adaptive and novel solutions” of the local communities and territorial approaches are celebrated” (Juncos, 2017, pp. 4-5). “The previous unilateral, rigid and technocratic approach” (Carbune, 2019, p. 251) in foreign policy formulation towards EaP partners is advanced to pluralistic understanding. Rather than relying on bilateral relations mostly with the governmental institutions, as of 2015, the EU clearly makes a commitment towards being in touch with a wide range of political actors such as local governments, civil society groups and the representatives of the private sector.

In the EUGS 2016, the foreword by Frederica Moghereini highlights societal resilience given that the communities of the EaP partners would be the most affected ones by a potential breakdown and directly affected by the policies that are made to tackle these shocks (2016, p. 3). Therefore, the EU proposes that in the effective policy formulation, proximity to the roots of the security problems is vital and it is possible with the proximity to the local communities. Therefore, active participation of individuals, communities and civil society groups in decision-making/ policy-making is of great importance. Tocci talks about the local communities as such, “these groups are small enough to be agile and responsive, but also large and varied enough to be representative” (Tocci, 2020, p. 191). The effective and direct communication with these groups might enrich the EU foreign policy agenda. In this way, the EU shall

share its responsibility with the local groups and shall not find solutions for disturbances that threaten the security in the region. In the light of this discussion, ENP can be seen as a long-run socialization project. The shift towards multilateralism and bottom-up approaches provides proximity to the local. The EU Commission claims “positive change can only be home-grown” (European Commission, 2016, p. 27). Societal-resilience can be relevant when the local communities embrace best fitting solutions for potential crisis for their acquainted environment in which they live.

The bottom-up approach enhances “people-to-people contacts” as well (Petrova & Delcour, 2020, p. 343). At this point, an effective communication strategy plays an important role to reach more individuals to inform them about the contributions of the EU-led projects, to help them to internalise the EU norms and values in time. The EU Action Plan on Strategic Communication and the foundation of East StratCom in 2015 was initiated to take action in the following areas:

1. Effective communication and promotion of EU policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood;
2. Strengthening the overall media environment in the Eastern Neighbourhood and in EU Member States, including support for media freedom and strengthening independent media;
3. Improved EU capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities by external actors.¹⁰

Proximity to the problems in the local context also requires to implement policies in certain sectors that face problems. Sustainable rural development is one of them. To illustrate, agricultural production is one of the main local economic activities in the rural areas in the EaP partner countries. The vulnerability of the local economies due

¹⁰ <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0415-strategic-communications-east-and-south> (accessed on April 8, 2021).

to the global challenges is an important security concern. The lack of infrastructure, irrigation problems and climate crisis might impede the agricultural production and threaten the food security. Such a risk might first affect the quality of life of the local communities and the respective nation gradually. As a result, the revised ENP document points out, “EU should continue to support sustainable and inclusive policies and investment in modernisation of the [agricultural] sector, and diversification to other income creating activities in rural areas where necessary. The EU will support a resource-efficient economy by addressing environmental challenges such as degradation of and competition for natural resources” (European Commission, 2015, p. 9). A comprehensive sustainable development model shall be at the junction of economic development and environmental protection, and social justice. It shall create new job opportunities, manage the resources efficiently. At the same time, it shall tackle poverty, exclusion/discrimination of certain groups and all kinds of inequality. It shall also fight with climate change, environmental stresses, and ensure water, energy and food security. Economic indicators might be more meaningful when an environment-friendly, equal and inclusive rise, and the merits of the growth are reflected upon the public and the environment. Ursache highlight that the milieu goals of ENP and EaP such as “human rights, strengthening the rule of law, extending democracy and reducing poverty” celebrate such a development model (Ursache, 2013, p. 891).

Sustainable rural development requires comprehensiveness: the involvement of various local, national and regional actors because the Brussels-made policies may not fully grasp the specificities of the problems in remote regional areas. The agricultural

programmes shall be made including the local perspectives. Ursache highlights the importance of continuous public information. When the local communities are involved in policy-making, the legitimacy of the policies and governments are high as she argues (Ursache, 2013, pp. 898-899).

In the context of societal resilience, participation in the policy formulation brings the importance of the capacity building at the public level to the front. Local habitants may lack certain set of skills and capabilities in communication and management. According to Juncos, capacity-building programmes are based on “knowledge transfers (through training, monitoring, mentoring and advising)”. In this interaction, the local actors shall reach a condition to gain the skills of which they turn into opportunities against the potential risks. Also, they gain the self-esteem to incarnate their wishes, protect and advocate their rights. In this sense, capacity-building initiatives contribute to the resilience of the individuals and local/rural communities (Juncos, 2017, pp. 9-10). Furthermore, capacity building programmes might help locals to internalise the EU norms and values while practicing them. They might even spread their knowledge and experience and help extension of EU norms to more people. This widens the EaP’s “soft security component by further engaging selected participants from this region in the processes related to sharing, congruence and development of their competences which are necessary for effective dealing with insecurities on a larger scale, and thus to pave a way for extension of the EU practices of sustainable development on regional level” (Čepėnaitė & Kavaliūnaitė, 2013, p. 30).

To conclude, the EU foreign policy agenda included in the ENP and the EaP aims to make contributions in political, economic and social progress in the Eastern neighbourhood. Yet, they have been into several revisions due to the internal and external political events in and beyond the EU. Security threats are recently not induced to military threats from the hard security perspective. Complementarily, the recent soft security perspective underlines the potential impacts of the following complexities: Climate change, environmental degradation, food insecurity, socio-economic disparities, poverty, infringement of ethnic and religious rights, gender inequality, youth unemployment.

Having highlighted the societal resilience, the EU follows a more cohesive, bottom-up, pragmatic, multidimensional, multilateral, case-to-case-based approaches to foster economic and social progress. These strategies help the EU officials to approach the local communities that are subject to the soft power/resilience-building instruments at first hand. To achieve considerable results, the EU does not necessarily impose external reforms anymore. By accepting that partner states show fragmented accounts and tendencies towards the EU policies, the EU proposes country- and sector-specific instruments. Bilateral and multilateral relations present solutions fitting into the respondent state's necessities, capabilities and the nature of relations with the EU. To this end, interaction through new partnerships, international cooperation and networking are used to benefit from the diverse perspectives. In other words, the latest security problems are understood and are alleviated in the social, cultural and economic context of the respective communities. To make a better connection with

these groups, the EU plays a role in capacity-building based on bottom-up approach.
In this way, the EU pursues to solve the problems more effectively.

CHAPTER 4

LEADER APPROACH

LEADER or recently known as community-led local development (CLLD)¹¹, has aroused the interest of many academics from variety of disciplines. Besides having an economic perspective, LEADER method also has a social facet as well; due to its endogenous approach to rural development. After three decades of implementation, it has given the scholars and scientists the opportunity to discuss it in different contexts.

In order to better contextualize LEADER's implementation in Georgia as part of the EU's soft power within ENP and EaP, this chapter is designed to provide the relevant information referring to the literature. The chapter has a descriptive start to elaborate the method and present a historical account. It further continues with its seven working principles, the method's strength together with its limitations. Also, particular attention is given to its implementation in the former Soviet states.

¹¹ Since 2014, LEADER's scope has been extended to the broader term Community-Led Local Development (CLLD). Yet, the method will be mentioned as LEADER in the thesis (European Commission, 2014, p. 1).

4.1. History of LEADER

Since the 1950s, rural development programmes have undergone various changes. LEADER is the result of a new rural development paradigm that started as a response to top-down rural development approaches that prioritize economic growth¹². Transferring technology, infrastructure and investments to the rural areas has been seen as common ways to stimulate economic vitality in rural areas. These exogenous, central approaches have laid much of the responsibility/burden on the state through development interventions. Such exogenous interventions do often ignore the local region's social, cultural, political and economic dynamics. Since 1990s, these approaches have evolved into more endogenous, multilateral, and integrated ways of dealing with rural areas. With LEADER, the EU aims to understand, respects and accepts different dynamics of different rural areas.

Having started as a Community Initiative in 1991 and funded by Structural Funds, LEADER has gone through five implementation phases so far and mainstreamed as a result of its success in Europe. As Ray defines, LEADER, since 1991 “a child of the European Commission” has grown and gone through several iterations (2000, p. 166). LEADER is now considered as an essential part of the EU rural development paradigm with its principles. It is mainstreamed and became an integral part of the EU's rural development policy in its fourth programming period by 2007 (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2014, p. 6).

¹² The term comes from the French *Acronym for Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale*, which means Links Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2014, p. 5).

Abovementioned implementation phases are the following:

1. LEADER I (Community Initiative): 1991-1994 (covered 217 areas) (Pârjoleanu, 2015, p. 107)
2. LEADER II: 1994-1999 (covered around 900 LAGs)¹³
3. LEADER +: 2000-2006 (covered around 900 LAGs)¹⁴
4. LEADER: 2007-2013 (covered 2416 rural territories including Fisheries Local Action Groups-FLAGs)¹⁵
5. Community-led local development (CLLD): 2013-2020 (3070 LAGs)¹⁶

Within the EU, each member state is obliged to integrate the LEADER approach in their national Rural Development Plan (RDP). Since the enlargement policies, the method is implemented in candidate states, and in ENP partner states as well to reach proximity in the management of the rural areas. For example, since 2013, through ENPARD, LEADER has been implemented in Georgia. In candidate states, LEADER is implemented through Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD), such as in Serbia Turkey and Albania (Lukesch, 2018, p. 62).¹⁷¹⁸

¹³https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources/leader-historical-resources/leaderII_en (accessed on May 15, 2021)

¹⁴https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources/leader-historical-resources/leader-plus_en (accessed on May 15, 2021)

¹⁵ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/leader/en/leader_en.html (accessed on May 16, 2021)

¹⁶https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/community_en.pdf (accessed on May 14, 2021)

¹⁷https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/theory-action-first-turkish-local-action-groups-lags-start-transforming-their-rural_en (accessed on May 15, 2021)

¹⁸ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/leader-take-albania_en (accessed on May 20, 2021)

According to Common Provision Regulation (CPR) 1303/2013 article 33 paragraph 6, LEADER method is practiced through specific governance mechanisms, namely through LAGs in rural areas, fisheries and recently in urban locations covering territories ranging from 10.000 up to 150.000 inhabitants (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, 2013, p. 356). The legal status and form of the LAGs might change from country to country but they are often registered as a non-profit organisations.¹⁹ For example, LAGs in Poland are registered as non-profit associations and as civic associations in the Czech Republic (M.-C. Maurel, 2008, p. 523). According to CPR 1303/2013 article 34 paragraph 3, LAGs' main duties are:

1. Build the capacity of local actors, including potential beneficiaries, to develop and implement operations including by fostering their capacity to prepare and manage their projects;
2. Carry out specific evaluation activities linked to that strategy (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, 2013, p. 356).

LAGs' operation is based on seven specific elements of LEADER. They implement local development projects based on bottom-up and area-based approach; they support the local partnerships of public and private actors; they have an integrated and multi-sectoral strategy; they encourage innovation, networking and cooperation with other LAGs at intra-national and international level.

LAGs' duties and responsibilities are outlined in the CPR 1303/2013 article 34 paragraph 1, which is to design and implement the Local Development Strategies (LDSs). LDSs are the strategy documents that are prepared specifically for a particular

¹⁹https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/leader/leader/leader-tool-kit/the-leader-approach/why-is-leader-specific/en/bottom-up-approach_en.html (accessed on May 23, 2021).

region by the LAG in a participatory way. According to the same CPR article 33, an LDS shall contain the following elements coherently:

- a) The definition of the area and population covered by the strategy;
- b) An analysis of the development needs and potential of the area, including an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats;
- c) A description of the community involvement process in the development of the strategy;
- d) A description of the management and monitoring arrangements of the strategy, demonstrating the capacity of the local action group to implement the strategy and a description of specific arrangements for evaluation;
- e) The financial plan for the strategy, including the planned allocation from each of the ESI Funds concerned (Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, 2013, p. 356).

Action Plans (AP) prepared referring to the LDS shall aim to produce projects to increase the economic diversity and quality of life of the local inhabitants. Given that agriculture constitutes one of the main economic activities in much of the rural Europe and in LEADER partner states, agricultural projects might be mostly funded ones. Yet, to increase the quality of life in rural places, a wide spectrum of projects might become relevant such as: “nature-based tourism development, improved agri-food chains, agri-tourism, protection of biodiversity and the environment, fostering entrepreneurship and enhancing local knowledge” (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 4).

In the launch of pilot LAGs and in the preparation of the participatory LDSs beyond Europe, relevant EU institutions and international and/or local non-governmental organizations take part. By knowledge-sharing and capacity building programmes, pilot LAGs are assisted with European support. LAG members, national experts in the respective implementation states and the public are provided information regarding

participatory-decision making methods and equipped with the know-how in project management.

According to the CPR 1698/2005 article 7, the management of the implementation of LEADER depends on the states management preferences (COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1698/2005, 2005, p. 10). The model for coordination and responsibilities of the institutions can vary. Yet, there shall be three central official bodies responsible for the implementation process:

- a) The Managing Authority (MA) shall “be responsible for managing and implementing the programme in an efficient, effective and correct way” (Council Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, 2013, p. 496). It is in charge of “recording, maintaining, managing and reporting statistical information on the programme and its implementation required for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation”(Council Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, 2013, p. 529). Managing authorities are mostly the related ministries. They select LAGs and their LDS. The MA might deliver these tasks to “intermediate bodies including local authorities, regional development bodies or non-governmental organisations” but “shall retain full responsibility for the efficiency and correctness of management and implementation of those tasks” (Council Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, 2013, p. 530).
- b) The accredited paying agency (PA) is responsible for the management of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) subsidies. Before the payment is authorised, PA shall control whether the LAGs fulfil the financial procedures’ requirements while they use the funds allocated to them (Council Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, 2013, p. 520).
- c) The certifying body “shall be a public or private legal entity designated by the member state with a view to certifying the truthfulness, completeness and accuracy of the accounts of the accredited paying agency, taking account of the management and control systems set up” (Council Regulation (EC) No 1290/2005, 2005, p. 8).

According to the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia is the MA, Agricultural Project Management Agency is the PA and responsible for the operation of LEADER in Georgia (2019, p. 29).

LEADER is the fourth axis of EAFRD (COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1698/2005, 2005, p. 25). Different planning and implementation phases of LEADER reveals different funding structures. For example, CLLD differs from LEADER in terms of its broad financial capabilities. Unlike the former programmes, CLLD uses a variety of funds in addition to EAFRD: the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) because its scope is extended to the fisheries and to the urban areas. Multiple funds can be used at the same time in CLLD.²⁰

Until 2014, EAFRD and EMFF have been the main funding channels for LEADER's operation. Under the provision of Cohesion Policy, CLLD brought new funding options: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). According to Servillo & Bruijn, the orthodox mono-funding approach of LEADER has been replaced by CLLD, which has a multi funding system. They claim that multi funding feature of CLLD is more beneficial because CLLD has become more comprehensive that it extended the financial and regional scope of LAG areas. In other words, two new financial instruments have brought about "broader thematic

²⁰ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-toolkit/leaderclld-explained_en (accessed on May 26, 2021).

scope due to the eligibility of more thematic interventions under different funds, and thus potentially more integrated actions; and diversified area of intervention, which can go from urban neighbourhoods to remote mountain valleys” (Servillo & Bruijn, 2018, pp. 225–226). The establishment of Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) and the foundation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) are the result of such diversity (Pârjoleanu, 2015, pp. 107-108). As a result of the expanded financial and geographical capacity, the number of LAGs multiplied. By 2019, there are 3070 LAGs in the EU member states.²¹

Ondřej Konečný argues that the rise of the number of LAGs did not only happen due to the enlargement of the EU in 2004 with ten new member states and with Bulgarian and Romanian memberships in 2007; but also, the financial stability and security of LEADER enable this growth. He argues that the programme became “pan-European” in 2007-2013, saying that in all EU countries LEADER was implemented (Konečný, 2019, pp. 2–3).

4.2. Seven Working Principles of LEADER

Elsewhere in Europe and beyond, LAGs operate with the same method that has seven working principles. These are listed below:

1. Area-based local development strategies intended for well-identified subregional rural territories;
2. Local public-private partnerships (hereinafter local action groups);

²¹ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/lag-database_en (accessed on April 29, 2021).

3. Bottom-up approach with a decision-making power for local action groups concerning the elaboration and implementation of local development strategies;
4. Multi-sectoral design and implementation of the strategy based on the interaction between actors and projects of different sectors of the local economy;
5. Implementation of innovative approaches; (f) implementation of cooperation projects;
6. Networking of local partnerships (COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1698/2005, 2005, p. 25).

4.2.1 Bottom-up Approach

The bottom-up approach is considered as one of the main features of the LEADER method. It means that rather than being managed by a central authority, local actors shall take a role preparing the LDSs and in the selection of the regional development projects that are going to be implemented in their region. According to the ELARD report, the participatory nature of LEADER aims for “a genuine dialogue with and between” the local public and private actors, universities and experts, economic and social interest groups together with the disadvantaged groups and individuals (2017, p. 15). This inclusiveness shall give the LAGs a comprehensive understanding of the problems to find long-lasting effective solutions. Bottom-up approach may sometimes complement the central management systems.

4.2.2 Area-Based Approach

Another distinct feature of LEADER is area-based approach. LAGs are representatives of the specific regions, mainly the regions lying within the borders of one or two municipality. The area-based approach presupposes “a small, homogenous, socially cohesive territory, often characterised by common traditions, a local identity, a sense of belonging or common needs and expectations, as the target area for policy

implementation” (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2014, p. 8). Working on a particular area gives LAGs the chance to focus on specific problems, the area’s strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities together with the tangible/intangible sources that can be valorised.

4.2.3 Local Public-Private Partnership

LAGs are designed as a hub to bring together a variety of public and private partners such as entrepreneurs and their associations, local authorities, neighbourhood or rural associations, groups of citizens such as minorities, senior citizens, women/ men, youth etc., community and voluntary organizations that are operational in their defined area representing different socio-economic sectors. The aim is to create a stimulus between the local public and private actors to make them to realise that they can cooperate for their common interests and turn them into beneficial projects for the development of the LAG area. However, in this partnership, LAGs shall stick to their civic identity and maintain autonomy; therefore, the representatives of the public partners shall not transcend 50 per cent of the total public and private partner representatives in the LAGs (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2014, pp. 9-10).

4.2.4 Multisectoral Design

One of the main targets of the LAGs is to produce rural development projects that are coherent with their LDS and APs. In this respect, rather than prioritizing the development of specific sectors, LAG projects shall project various development objectives. For this, the perspectives of the various interest groups shall be included.

In this democratic way, APs can quest for “desired common goals” of the community. Yet, it shall be noted that different stakeholders may approach problems from different perspectives, define them differently and in turn come up with alternative solutions. On the one hand, this might be creative. On the other hand, it might complicate the problem solving due to the myriad of views and ideas (High & Nemes, 2007, pp. 104-105).

Multisectoral design requires inclusionary participation. Different interest groups should be applying for funds, have a democratic environment to discuss and present their ideas, and cooperate on behalf of the region. This endogenous approach “has the potential to challenge processes of exclusion if it empowers those without power” (Shucksmith, 2000, p. 210). In rural areas, capacities of the actors might be asymmetrical. LAGs shall tackle the causes of exclusion, if relevant.

Exclusion might happen for different reasons. First, as Oliver Müller, Ove Sutter and Sina Wohlgemuth argue, because “the European Commission only gives formalistic prescriptions for the composition of LAGs (e.g., a maximum quota of 49 per cent for interest groups) and does not prescribe how the enrollment of residents in the LEADER is to be practically achieved”. Müller, Sutter and Wohlgemuth argue that as a result of the lack of a clear blueprint for participation, the interest in participation might remain low and/or it might cause exclusion.

Second, the literature shows that the unbalanced power relations in the rural regions might cause problems in participation (Müller et al., 2020, p. 225). The local political

elites might be dominant (Furmankiewicz et al., 2010, p. 60). Some groups might have limited capacity. In any case, they are correlated with each other. This asymmetrical power relations might allow the strong stakeholders to interfere in and dominate the actions of the LAG at the expense of the participation of the handicapped groups and individuals.

In order to support inclusionary participation and increase the interest of stakeholders, capacity building is vital. Capacity building shall eliminate the inequalities in the knowledge and skills sharing. The respective target group with lower capacities shall be equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to write, implement and monitor the projects. As a further concern, Mark Shucksmith argues, capacity building programmes shall be precisely designed for the disadvantaged groups and individuals. If the capacity building programmes are held for the “community of place”, namely the community as a whole, it might feed the inequalities in terms of the capacity (Shucksmith, 2000, p. 214). He claims the idea of community of place presupposes the rural community as a stagnant homogenous entity by referring to the following definition: “A small, homogenous, socially cohesive territory, often characterised by common traditions, a local identity, a sense of belonging or common needs and expectations” (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2014, p. 8). However, local communities might include sub-communities (or just excluded groups such as minorities in extreme cases) with asymmetrical capacities. The concern is that when the homogeneity is taken for granted in the capacity-building programmes, “the pre-existing structures of inequality” in capacities might remain unshaken, and this might pave the way for the

relatively weak actors to remain underdeveloped in the long term. Funding opportunities that are constantly benefited by the stakeholders with strong capacities may lead to growth in certain sectors. This might deepen the gap within the communities. Also, LAGs themselves might tend to work with the local actors with strong capabilities and might neglect the disadvantaged/marginalised groups and or individuals. Therefore, Shucksmith questions, “whether ‘collective’ capacity-building through territorially-based endogenous development is compatible with building the capacities of excluded individuals and redistributing power towards the least powerful” (Shucksmith, 2000, pp. 208-209).

4.2.5 Innovation

Innovation is commented on largely in the rural development literature. Under the CPR 1303/2013 article 32 paragraph 2, the Commission highlights that “CLLD shall be designed taking into consideration local needs and potential, and shall include innovative features in the local context” (Commission Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, 2013, p. 355). The framework for the innovation is drawn as such:

- a) Can involve new products, services or ways of doing things in a local context;
- b) Often has a multiplier or snowball effect on the changes that the community wants to bring about;
- c) Can involve one or more small scale actions and prototypes or a larger scale flagship project that mobilises the community;
- d) Finds new ways of mobilising and using the existing resources and assets of the community;
- e) Builds collaboration between different actors and sectors;
- f) Can, but does not necessarily involve universities or sophisticated research and development;
- g) Can be a platform for social innovations which can then be scaled up and applied more widely through exchange, cooperation and networking (Soto & Ramsden, 2018, pp. 28-29).

It is seen that the Commission does not have the intention to clearly define what innovation means. Therefore, innovation is associated with the experimental facade of LEADER (Character & November, 2010, p. 4). LEADER is quoted widely as a “laboratory” for rural development in this sense (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008, pp. 278–279; Pârjoleanu, 2015, p. 112; Ray, 2000, p. 275). One of the reasons that because innovation is up to the local inhabitants’ creativity. It is open to local translations and practices according to what it means to the local inhabitants. Depending on the region’s needs, either scientific or social innovation or both of them are welcomed in LEADER. The flexibility to choose the strategy in order to implement the rural development projects is up to the LAG and the local residents. Be it scientific or social innovation, the respective local communities have the flexibility to realize the local missions with new ideas and approaches.

Furthermore, the literature shows, innovation is conceptualized differently. It is associated with “scientific knowledge” in national policy discourses (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008, p. 275). Rural communities also perceive innovation as something high-tech, expensive, situated in industrial/urban areas and difficult to achieve without the relevant infrastructure. Given that remote rural regions might have weaker linkages with research and development centers, local people tend to find the term “extremely off-putting, as it suggested high expectations of completely new and successful projects” (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2014, p. 12). They might find it “alien to rural experience”. It might be “regarded as an imported/adopted concept”(Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008, p. 282). As

a result, states and international organizations are entitled to conduct innovative projects.

As Lorna Dargan and Mark Shucksmith argue, because it is an alien notion in the rural areas, it is rarely discussed in rural areas and is not prioritised, even if the locals feel to do something new and different to solve their problems. In the implementation of new projects and generating new products, they tend to avoid using the term innovation and seldom express that their projects are actually innovative. As Darga and Shucksmith argue, local people find cultural and social innovation familiar with their experience instead of scientific innovation and use these terms. Moreover, social innovataion might be actually more grounded in rural areas due to the strong social ties. These ties might be more helpful for the establishment of small businesses (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008, pp. 283-285). Konečný, elaborates that social ties in rural areas prepare ground for social innovation because “smaller territories are easier to comprehend in depth and the necessary identification of local needs is subsequently more accurate” (Konečný, 2019, p. 13).

4.2.6 Networking

LEADER encourages LAGs to cooperate with other development organizations at local, regional, and national levels. For this purpose, National Rural Networks (NRNs) of LAGs is established under the article 68 paragraph 1 of the CPR 1698/2005 on support for rural development by EAFRD (2005, p. 27). Networking is “a mean of transferring good practices, of disseminating innovation and building on the lessons learned from local rural development” (Turek Rahoveanu, 2012, p. 357). In this sense,

LAGs are expected to create a network of LAGs to benefit from each other's experience and knowledge. When LAGs come together, they might foster further cooperation in rural areas and disseminate their success and diminish the invisibility of less-favoured regions by putting collaborative effort.²² The network of LAGs might help LAGs to be actors at international level so that they can negotiate with policy-makers.

4.2.7 Inter-territorial and International Cooperation

At this level, LAGs and NRNs are expected to cooperate with international organizations. Also, different NRNs might come together and create a regional network as well. At regional level, for example, Balkan Rural Development Network brings LAGs from Western Balkan countries.²³ At EU level, since 2008 the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) is the institution for the networking of different stakeholders regarding rural development.²⁴ Including LAGs, ENRD brings the NRNs, RDP managing authorities and paying agencies, European organizations, agricultural advisory services, and agricultural and rural researchers. According to the ENRD report, it aims to:

- a) Increase the involvement of stakeholders in rural development;
- b) Improve the quality of Rural Development Programmes;
- c) Better inform on the benefits of Rural Development policy;

²² <https://grdn.ge/en/leaderlagsamagis/23> (accessed on May 12, 2021).

²³ <http://www.brdnetwork.org/brdn-history/> (accessed on May 12, 2021).

²⁴ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/about/brief_en (accessed on May 18, 2021).

d) Support the evaluation of Rural Development Programmes”

(2020, p. 5).

That LAGs function with the same method enables them to cooperate with another LAG in a different region. With cooperation, LAGs might discover new ideas and opportunities, gain new perspectives and broaden their horizons. “It allows local actors to experience similarities and differences in utterly new dimensions, it opens up people's minds, leads to knowledge exchange, pooling and transfer and provides new perspectives for solution-oriented strategies and concepts regardless of the great diversity of rural areas and governance contexts” Besides sharing best practices and knowledge among LAGs, cooperation also help LAGs to come together and become actors in the rural development domain by conducting lobbying (Ray, 2000, pp. 167-168).

4.3. The Strength of LEADER

LEADER goes beyond the traditional rural development understanding inducing economic activities only to agriculture in the rural areas. It has an approach where different sectors cooperate, initiate innovative business ideas by using not only the natural assets of the region but also the intangible ones such as social, cultural, and historical. The method provides flexibility to the local communities to prepare them for the new situations referring to their needs and particular/certain necessities of national and regional contexts.

Before discussing the strengths of LEADER, it is important to note that depending on the national context, political and economic dynamics of the country, LEADER’s

contribution, strong and weak sides might differ. Despite the diversity of its implementation in different regional and national contexts, it manifested positive outcomes in the rural regions.

In the academic literature, several scholars celebrate LEADER's contribution to rural development (Convery et al., 2010, p. 373; High & Nemes, 2007, p. 109; Konečný, 2019, p. 13; Semian & Nováček, 2017, p. 149; Thuesen, 2010, p. 34) . It is often described as “a holistic approach” to define rural obstacles (European Commission Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2014, p. 5). Intensifying the social capital, enhancing local democracy, building the capacity of the local people, encouraging local participatory decision-making processes, promoting social learning, and catalysing decentralisation of the local regions are the most relevant topics in the LEADER discussions.

The endogenous nature of LEADER might be significant to tackle the rigid top-down scientific approach to rural development programmes that have been implemented until the 1990s. The seven specific features of LEADER ensures that it treats less favoured rural areas and communities as unique. It tries to benefit the social and cultural patterns more fruitfully and efficiently. It provides a new way of thinking in the rural areas, a sustainable way of realising the local communities' potential by their own resources with additional funds.

Boukalova et al. argue that LAGs implementing LEADER approach have become more important “because they challenge the idea of implementing rural development

activities only through the experts endowed with the unmistakable rationality of scientific knowledge” (2016, p. 149). Top-down massive rural development programmes covering vast areas might damage the social and economic patterns in rural areas because they might not take specificities of rural regions into consideration or might disrupt them (High and Nemes, 2007, pp. 104–105). Top-down policies might not be able to zoom in the diversities. Activities that are “not embedded in the everyday life of the localities of concern” are not desired in LEADER (Boukalova et al., 2016, p. 149).

“Tailored to the particular economic and social circumstances of the relevant regions” (European Communities Commission, 1988, p. 7), LEADER strategy enables policy-makers to reveal the causes of intricate problems and the potential of the region. In the short term, LEADER aims to guide the local inhabitants and groups around the idea of valorising their local resources with local development projects. In the long-term, it quests for building the capacity of inhabitants to the extent where they are equipped with the capabilities, skills, knowledge required for project implementation, and more importantly self-esteem and voice to conduct further projects on their own.

LEADER strategy relies on a collection of principles allowing LAGs to be a hub for diverse stakeholders covering the local government, the local NGOs and local inhabitants. In other words, LAGs can be seen as the projection of their localities and find the best local solutions to the local problems of the areas by using the human resources of the area where they operate. In this sense, LEADER strategy encourage the local communities “to trust in their own possibilities and to enforce territorial self-

esteem” (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008, p. 286). The inhabitants’ willingness in collective action through either formal or informal civic actions shows that LEADER is related to the level of social capital. LAGs make use of cultural, historical and social ties.

LAGs stimulate the interest of the local people about the problems of the area and encourage them to participate regardless of their cultural, ethnic, sectoral and gender differences. Participation becomes productive “when it results in the creation of trust and confidence and makes the people believe in change” (Boukalova et al., 2016, p. 150). According to the Guidance for Local Actors on Community-Led Local development, inclusionary participation is the crucial element of LDSs (Soto & Ramsden, 2018, p. 34). Participation is expected to be complemented with the actions.

According to Semian and Nováček, inclusionary participation might enhance “regional consciousness, either by adopting an existing regional identity or constructing an entirely new one”. For example, it is seen that some Czech LAGs uses “history and historical and historicizing elements” to foster the sense of togetherness of the residents (Semian & Nováček, 2017, p. 309).

Briefly, efficient social networks with high capacities can initiate projects that can be funded by the LAGs. With these projects stakeholders can pave the way for new businesses and job opportunities. LAGs prioritize “awareness raising through training; participation and mobilization of the local population to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the area” (Pârjoleanu, 2015, p. 109). Capacity-building activities aim

to give self-confidence and regional consciousness to the local stakeholders, empower them so that they could make use of their potential. Capacity-building and participatory decision-making processes are important ingredients for the LAGs to realize their mission. When the civic participatory actions are consolidated, communities of rural places are expected to act autonomously against the abrupt situations that would affect their quality of life because they generate a perspective regarding their region's future with the LDSs. They can make contribution to the services of the relevant municipalities and share the burden of local and national governments. Ray argues, by owning the problems and solutions local communities might assume "greater control of development by reorienting development around local resources and by setting up structures to sustain the local development momentum" (2000, p. 166). Having gained a strong capacity to act, local civic and public actors can interact and coordinate with the central governments and get involved in policy-making procedures. The literature shows, due to their certain flexibility and autonomy, several scholars depict LAGs as "new forms of governance" in rural development. They argue that LAGs might play role in the decentralization of the rural areas by bearing responsibility in the local governance and democracy (Buller, 2000, p. 194; Lošťák & Hudečková, 2010, p. 252; Marquardt et al., 2012, p. 398; M. C. Maurel, 2008, p. 513; Ray, 2000, p. 166; Thuesen, 2010, p. 34). Such transitions can happen only if the LAGs operate in the way they are designed to. Only if harmonious and effective implementation of seven working principles of LEADER engrained, LAGs can play considerable role in increasing the quality of life.

4.4. The Limitations of LEADER

Despite the success stories, the method also reveals challenges and limitations in different contexts. The lack of experience, limited budget capabilities and their implications, problems regarding participation, implementer states' management models due to their political dynamics lead to the differences between the theory and practice in most of the cases are identified limitations.

Mostly mentioned as an endogenous rural development approach, LEADER is criticised for showing exogenous features. The reason why LEADER is associated with the endogenous approach is that it fosters participatory effect in terms of the design and implementation of the projects. Contrary to this idea, monitoring and evaluation of the programme are still operated by the pivotal actors at the formal institutional level as Boukalova et al. argue (2016, p. 151). Especially, evaluation of the programme is "held at arm's length from the delivery organizations" (Maurel, 2008, p. 517). The respective EU institutions' tendency towards top-down approach might undermine the peculiarities of the local dynamics. Considering this, as High and Nemes argue LEADER both constitutes endogenous and exogenous features (2007, pp. 107-109).

In most of Europe, LEADER has 30 years of experience. Since the EU enlargements, LEADER has now been being implemented beyond European borders. Due to its authentic and comprehensive approach in rural development, LEADER strategy might be seen as a challenging experience in candidate states and in ENP partner states. The EU requirements, procedures, potential bureaucratic obstacles and deadlines might

make the implementation difficult for the new implementers until they become conformant with the EU regulations, norms and values. Moreover, the idea of gathering various local communities, civil society, national and international institutions around a compact set of certain values/features guaranteeing participatory decision-making processes requires incremental patience, energy and willingness for a long while. LEADER is a social learning experience and it requires building trust among stakeholders. This may not be an easy task. Only after a considerable period of time, the trust among the locals would be created and be benefitted from the social capital it creates. Boukalova et al. claims approximately it takes a decade to feel the positive effects of such a social transformation (Boukalova et al., 2016, p. 157). The expectations of the local communities might be high. However, LAGs may not be able to create spectacular changes in everybody's life without creating synergy built on trust. Considering these points, LEADER implementation with a modest finance model might be welcomed with malaise by the novice implementer states and the local communities.

Several scholars discuss the limitations of participation referring to the extent and quality of it (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008, p. 287; Furmankiewicz et al., 2010, p. 54; Konečný, 2019, p. 13). Participation might not necessarily happen with an inclusionary view. Dargan and Shucksmith highlight the lack of social capital as one reason for inadequate participation. Local inhabitants may not have the enthusiasm to participate in joint initiatives and rather prefer working with a close circle of people and/or individually due to the deficit of trust in joint action, limited experience with bottom-up approaches (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008, p. 287; Konečný, 2019, p. 13).

The lack of proactiveness and independent thinking are further impediments for participation. Rather than making independent decisions, local communities might let a key actor to initiate projects (Marquardt et al., 2012, pp. 411-413). In the rural development context, this might enable local governments or notable political elites and business people to manipulate the LEADER experience. There might be cases that local governments might preclude the civic organizations to take action. One reason for that is they might perceive LAGs as a potential threat limiting their influence in the region. This might be likely when the local communities might see the LAGs as alternative for the local governmental bodies due to LAGs' contribution in their territory. In such a situation, local political elites might prefer dominating the decision-making and project selection processes because any successful project in which they take part would increase their credibility in the region. They might be too assertive to make use of LEADER funds on behalf of the legitimacy of local governmental institutions (Maurel, 2008, p. 528). As Buller indicates, to increase their influence at the LAGs, they might be eager to shape the LAG establishment process in the early stages. This might not be necessarily a threat for the LAGs as they are expected to function as autonomous organizations. However, when local governments are accorded with "the clientelist power relations", they might re-exert their control over the LEADER process (Dargan & Shucksmith, 2008, p. 287). Under this circumstances, the LAGs' visibility and credibility might be diminished. As Furmankiewicz shows in the Polish context, local Polish governments dominated the newly-founded LAGs in 2004-2007 period by financial interventions. This behaviour "resulted in severe inequalities in power that are both unjust and to the detriment of the promotion of

community participation and ultimately social inclusion”. They manipulated LEADER process and made use of LEADER LAG funds to invest for the upcoming local elections (Furmankiewicz et al., 2010, p. 60).

The design of LAG establishment might have a role in jeopardizing the civic/autonomous role of LAGs. The domination of the local authorities might start during the arrangement of the establishment of the LAGs. The EU institutions that are alien to the rural regions, usually let the MAs to make the initial arrangements with the local government representatives or mayors to establish the LAGs. Maurel says “in practice, operations to form LAGs have almost exclusively been led by local elected officials (mayors)”. This strategy might allow the persons who work closely with the local governmental bodies to secure any positions in the respective LAG as staff or as members of the Board. Moreover, this ring of people might become the main beneficiaries of the funds as stakeholders. She elaborates that “the circle of stakeholders involved is small, made up of a few groups around elected officials, who know and support each other. Most of them are mayors, who see themselves as entrepreneurs of local development determined to revive the economic and social base and encourage job creation”. In such cases, the participation of civic interest groups remains weak and ineffective. Inequalities shall be legitimized. She adds:

The low level of citizens’ participation, the formation of interest groups monopolising access to grants, and the action of consultancy offices and development agencies are worrying signs. The implementation of the LEADER approach has been entrusted to agriculture ministries still heavily influenced by previous interventionist practices and in the sway of powerful farm lobbies (Maurel, 2008, pp. 523–528).

Furthermore, Doris Marquardt et al. underlines the problematic LAG foundation processes. They argue “only selected public employees and individual business people were invited’ to join the LEADER training programs as animators”. Without “strict eligibility criteria” for the selection of local animators these interventions might impede the trust of local communities towards LAGs (2012, p. 403).

4.5. Implementation

As shown, mainstreaming LEADER as a rural development method in various regions reveal diversities. LEADER is perceived and implemented differently and produces different results due to the implementer states’ historical, political and economic conditions. Regarding implementation, the disparities between the EU member states are explained extensively in terms of the length of the EU membership, the level of experience with LEADER implementation, and the states’ previous regime experiences.²⁵ The applicability, effects and outcomes of LEADER in former socialist states are discussed widely in the context of the EU integration and “a process of Europeanization” (Kováč, 2000, p. 182).

Concerning the socialist past of new member states, EU-12, LEADER has been a different and challenging approach to rural development in the former socialist states due to the political, economic and social dynamics (Maurel, 2008, p. 513). To

²⁵ Within Germany such disparity also existed between the former eastern and western parts as Konečný argues. LAGs in the eastern part were far away from realising the creation of the added-value in the LAG area due to the socialist past. They were generally perceived as money sources for the project implementation rather than implementing beneficial projects for the region (Konečný, 2019, p. 4).

understand these disparities, one shall briefly elaborate on the political, economic and social struggles resulting from socialist legacy.

In terms of political transformation, despite the regime change most of the former-political elites retained their administrative positions. As Maurel argues, micro-regional managers in rural development have been the successors of past socialist political parties (Maurel, 2008, pp. 516-527). To some extent, corruption, nepotism, institutions without democratic practices, and political elites who are “incapable of designing a relevant strategy of rural development” survived for a while (Kováč, 2000, p. 186). This did not change much when it comes to the foundation of the LAGs and their Boards. Scrinic further explains, “The EaP states have many reminiscences of the Soviet past, common for the national elites, often with tendencies to autocracy and a criminal past represented by ascension of oligarchs and their accession to governance and, eventually the criminal control of such countries. The European norms are often taken over formally while in reality all the substantial reforms remain imitated by the pseudo-European elites” (Scrinic, 2014, p. 228).

Regarding civil society, there has been a problematic relationship between the third sector and the state. Local communities’ interest in local development was low due to the absence of trust in the administrative units and enmity towards the national institutions due to the long-lasting corrupt practices of political elites (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017b, p. 2). Secondly, the socialist regime had created lethargic citizens who are used to receive all kinds of services provided by the state. Also, they lack “leadership skills” because of relying on dominant central governing mechanisms constantly (Marquardt et al., 2012, p. 422). Furmankiewicz et al. says that “During the

Communist period only the Communist Party and Central Authority could make policy decisions and implement the delivery of these decisions. The result was that the population lacked the skills and organizational capacity necessary for voluntary co-operation and collective action” (2010, p. 54) In addition to the citizens’ behavior, the state’s perspective regarding civil society causes its weakness. The government's interference in voluntary organizations has impeded its development because civil society is understood as something against the state.

In terms of economics, high unemployment, out-migration and poverty have been common problems in former-socialist countries. The proportion of the rural population have been high. Many people have been living in rural areas. Agriculture as an economic activity through collective farms and monopolisation have dominated much of the rural regions and have been managed by the central governments. When the collective farms were outdated, the ineffective switch to free market and privatisation left these rural areas with the globalism’s effects alone. People in rural areas had to deal with the problems resulting from it.

These economic, political social struggles prepared an endemic habitat for LEADER implementation in the former-socialist states. Also, the EU accession had various economic, social and political impacts among old and new members. Regarding the particularities of implementation, Konečný refers to the differences between the EU-15²⁶ and the EU-12 (most of them have socialist experience) states as cases. With

²⁶ EU-15 states, namely old members, are EU members that joined the Union between 1993-1994: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. The UK withdrew from the EU in January 2020. EU-12 states, namely

novice financial sources, finite number of well-trained LAG staff and commencing the LEADER praxis late the EU-12 states face more difficulty than their EU-15 counterparts (Konečný, 2019, p. 10).

The apportioned budget for LEADER alters depending on the states' previous experience with LEADER and their economic capabilities. According to CPR article 17 paragraph 2 (COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1698/2005, 2005, p. 13), states are supposed to allocate at least 5 per cent of their total RDP to LEADER. The willingness of the states to allocate more than 5 per cent might vary. The EU-15 states having longer experience with LEADER are at an echelon where they have already passed through the procedural difficulties, became familiar with them and have benefitted from the added-value of the programme. Therefore, the EU-15 members have been retaining incremental financial room for LEADER praxis. Konečný illustrates that EU-15 states through their RDPs have allotted 1.5 times more budget than new members that became part of the EU in 2004 and 2007. Furthermore, members that joined the EU after 2003 have lower budget per local citizens living in the LAG area. Yet, as Konečný shows, the budget record of LEADER might occasionally remain low at the national or the EU level contrary to expectations. At national level, the portion of LEADER budget in Denmark and the Netherlands are barely 10 per cent of their RDPs even though LEADER plays an important role in rural development. At the EU level, in the initial stages, having extended the funding

new members, are those that joined the Union between 2004-2006: Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Resource:https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:EU_enlargements (accessed on May 27, 2021).

opportunities of LEADER I, LEADER II funding scheme allocated merely 1.7 per cent of the total EU money in the rural development domain (Konečný, 2019, p. 10). It shall be noted that the more budget allocated to LEADER might not guarantee a better practice of the method.

Konečný argues, the states might be prone to leave limited space to LEADER, prefer relying on orthodox methods through central governmental bodies (2019, pp. 8-12). This might also be relevant to socialist experience. The former Socialist experience might reveal itself in the management bodies' role in LEADER. While regional political authorities in Germany and France are at the centre of the management of LEADER and function more autonomously, in Hungary central institutions via ministries influence the LEADER management heavily.

It is vital that the LEADER method shall be internalised and the seven working principles shall be practiced in harmony in order to prevent such problems. Training of LAG members and the general public is vital. The approach's working principles shall be explained to the targeted audience consistently in the course of time. Otherwise, the process might be impeded by wrong actions and local people's trust, which is the stimulus for collective action, might be lost. If LAGs do not function in the way that LEADER designs, either they would be seen merely as "the provider of money for the implementation of projects" or the projects might be implemented only for "complying with expectations (at the risk of merely parroting the jargon of the European institutions that help to propagate the LEADER model)" without creating added-value (Boukalova et al., 2016, p. 157; Maurel, 2008, p. 527).

In conclusion, this chapter has given the history of LEADER, which started and mainstreamed in the EU and further implemented in the candidate states and in ENP partner states. The seven principles of the method provide a dynamic and democratic way of dealing with the development of the rural areas. Yet, the literature shows each feature might have implications. Further, the strength and limitations are elaborated. At the end, considering the implications, it is demonstrated that LEADER implementation reveals particularities in different political contexts. These insights are expected to be the basis of discussions in the following section.

CHAPTER 5

LEADER IN GEORGIA

This chapter draws attention on a particular EaP partner, Georgia, and on a particular sector, rural development. LEADER method as a rural development initiative in Georgia will be used as a case to analyse the EU's soft power use in Georgia. Firstly, the EU-Georgia relations will be elaborated, taking the independence of the latter as a starting point. Secondly, the implementation of LEADER by Georgian LAGs and the developments regarding rural development in Georgia will be discussed within the framework of soft power literature.

5.1. The EU-Georgia Relations

The historical context of EU-Georgia relations needs to be given to make a fruitful analysis regarding the LEADER initiative in Georgia within EaP soft power literature. EU-Georgia relations are affected by several internal and external pressures. Externally, relations with Russia have been tense since the independence of Georgia due to Russia's aggressive foreign policy in its near neighbourhood. The political deadlock between the two parties remained unresolved since the Russian invasion in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In domestic politics, the political, economic, and social problems caused by the Soviet legacy together with the elected governments' political inabilities and ambivalences have posed various challenge. Moreover, Georgia is

ethnically very diverse: Samtskhe-Javakheti is mostly populated by ethnic Armenians, Kvemo Kartli is mostly populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis. Adjara is home to Muslims who are ethnically Georgians. Besides the occasional ethnic unrests²⁷, the border disputes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia²⁸ are among the well-known frozen conflicts in Eurasia. The country witnessed the South Caucasus's first coloured revolution, Rose Revolution, which resulted in the resignation of the president Eduard Shevardnadze. According to the Freedom House's freedom index, Georgia scores 61 out of 100 and remains partly free²⁹. The implications of these events are reflected into the EU-Georgia relations.

When the EU established a regional representation office in Georgia in 1995, the EU's relations with Georgia officially starts on the immediate aftermath of the independence of the republic in 1991. Georgia has always been a significant ally for the EU as an immediate neighbour of Russia and as a littoral state in Black Sea³⁰. Lying on the East-West energy corridor, the security of Georgia means the security of EU's energy supply and diversification of the energy sources and routes. Moreover, as a relatively more successful partner state among others, the EU expects that a successful Georgian

²⁷ One might argue, ethnic unrests may happen as a result of legal and de facto discrimination but the abovementioned regions are mostly handicapped due to economic problems arising from unemployment, poverty, and lack of infrastructure and state services.

²⁸ Adjara, South Ossetia and Abkhazia had autonomous status during Soviet period.

²⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/freedom-world/2020> (accessed on May 13, 2021).

³⁰ Among Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine, the length of Georgia's coast is 322 km. (Stanchev et al., 2011, p. 29)

example might be inspirational for the other partners (Popjanevski & Chochia, 2016, p. 199).

The EU's relations with Georgia have been based on the 2016 Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and 2014 Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). Both aims to integrate Georgia's economy into the EU single market, to support civil society, to enhance sustainable development, to generate job opportunities, to enrich good governance and democratic institution-building.

From the Georgian political perspective, the EU and NATO membership underpins the Georgian foreign policy agenda. Georgia's pro-western orientation and its aspiration to be part of Western structures, through the EU and NATO membership, are self-evident. Most of the Georgian public champion the idea. Darchiashvili and Bakradze states more than half of the Georgians are for the EU membership, which is one of the highest positive public opinions among other partner states' citizens (Darchiashvili & Bakradze, 2019, p. 131). Fix, Gawrich et al. argues the public opinion in Georgia finds the alignment with the West necessary for the democratization and the security of the country due to Russian threat (Fix et al., 2019, pp. 8–11).

The Western-oriented foreign policy tendency in Georgia can be explained by identity politics. Georgian foreign policy is often "elite-driven" (Kakachia & Minesashvili 2015, p. 173). They argue, political elites might find the alignment with the West due to the financial merits. Yet, "consistency of a stated goal, foreign policy orientation, behavior or ideology in the context of congruence with public opinion can suggest

such continuity” (2015, p. 173). Therefore, beyond the merits of cooperation with the West, a certain level of association with the Western, particularly European, culture among the public and the political elites play an important role in positive attitude towards the West. Many Georgians believe, Georgian identity trace back to Greek and Byzantine identity. Also, they emphasize Orthodox Christian identity as a reaction to the contestation of Islamic powers, particularly the Persian and Ottoman threat, which would later become the Communist threat by the Soviet regime. In these conditions, the Christian European civilization has been seen as the saviour of the nation and lately has become an ideal for the democratic nation-building process. The public opinion is for the idea that “Georgian and Western societies share common ideas and that Georgia's democratic development is only possible through pro-western foreign policy” (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, pp. 173–178). Also, the anti-Russian sentiments among the elites and the public has reached high levels especially after the 2008 War. Russia is seen as a national security threat in Georgia.

Since Georgia’s independence, pro-Western sentiments exist in foreign policy agenda. The ratification of Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) signed in 1999 marks the beginning of EU’s initial steps regarding economic and democratic development in Georgia. It highlights the merits of the EU-Georgia cooperation in expanding sectors and Georgia’s increasing links with the outside world after the Soviet oppression (European Council, 1999, p. 4). The 1999 PCA shows that the economic auspices coming from the EU has multiplied provided through various programmes (Alexianu, 2012, p. 899).

After the 2002 Rose Revolution, Mikhail Saakashvili government's democratisation campaign, a Western-oriented state-building by fighting corruption and adhering to the principle of rule of law are clear signs of aspirations towards the West. In this period, the Office of State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, and European Union Integration Commission are established to reach an efficient level of political dialogue with the EU. As an emblematic step, the EU flags were raised in the governmental buildings as of 2002. The corrupt police were replaced by the modern forces to build the public trust in armed forces (Popjanevski & Chochia, 2016, p. 201). In this period, Georgia celebrated pluralism, a vivid civil society due to the ruling elites' progressive identity. In 2004, Georgia became a party to ENP and accordingly adopted an AP in 2006, which paved the way for closer relations with the EU in economic and political domains. Alexianu argues, the ENP initiative also became a driving factor for realising the democratisation campaign by enhancing the political and economic reforms in institutionalised forms (2012, p. 901).

In the Saakashvili period, the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, too, had implications for the EU-Georgia relations. The Russian aggression in Abkhazia and South Ossetia makes Georgia a challenging partner. Today, Russia invades 20 per cent of the Georgian territory (Vilkė & Šarkutė, 2018). The EU perceives the 2008 War as an imperiling factor for the stability and security of the Georgia and in turn for the security of the South Caucasus. This concern marked the launch of EaP in 2009. In the same year, Georgia joined it. The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is rather the main instrument of the conflict settlement in Georgia. It ensures "humanitarian

assistance and judicial reforms in order to ease the implementation of future European decisions and civilian mission” (Popescu, 2011, p. 192). The establishment of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) in 2008 is important that before it the EU was not an official party in the peace processes. According to the Council Joint Action article 3, the EUMM’s missions are promoting stability, confidence building, and the retreat of Russian army from the former Abkhaz and South Ossetian territories under its supervision (2008/736/CFSP, 2008, p. 26).

As a response to the Russian invasion, EaP was expected to have greater role in the conflict on behalf of Georgia. It is no surprise that so far, the Georgian governments have welcomed strong EU visibility in the invaded territories and the first-hand EU presence during the negotiation process out (Alexianu, 2012, p. 900; Fix et al., 2019, pp. 11–13). Even though “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of partners” are mentioned in the EaP, Georgian politicians criticize the EU for not bearing the conflict enormously against Russian aggressive foreign policy. They claim, it could provide more than financial support in the for the reconstruction of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the aftermath of the war (Alexianu, 2012, p. 900; European Commission, 2015, p. 2). Similarly, Dekanozishvili argues that the EU does not show clear signals to Russia due to Ukrainian and Georgian territorial disputes beyond using economic sanctions and condemnation (2020, p. 296). On the other hand, Darchiashvili and Bakradze argue, the Abkhazian conflict is beyond the praxis of EaP (Darchiashvili & Bakradze, 2019, p. 296). Fix, Gawrich et. al add that although EaP is accepted as a response to the Russian aggression it lacks the conflict resolution mechanisms in its design (Fix et

al., 2019, pp. 11–13). The EU rather opts for using soft power mechanisms in the conflict.

The Russian Georgian conflict is mostly perceived as a conflict “based on the process of Europeanization”. The EU takes action in the field of “humanitarian aid”. The point is that the financial aids are still based on the conditionality principle that projects and activities are operated in compliance with the European norms and values referring to the instruments of ENP (Popescu, 2011, p. 190) Projects are for increasing the quality of life of internally displaced persons³¹ and refugees from Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Alexianu, 2012, p. 899; Popescu, 2011, p. 190). After the Russian invasion, the EU together with 65 countries held a donor campaign and allocated \$4.55 billion (Darchiashvili & Bakradze, 2019, p. 13). Similar conference was also held in 2008 with €125 million donations. Within the ENP framework, financial assistance is provided by ENPI in Georgia and allocated €120 million between 2007-2010, and €80.30 million between 2011-2013 (Alexianu, 2012, pp. 901–902). “In 2018, much like in 2017, Georgia remained the leading recipient of EU funding and became a pilot country as part of the EU strategy for Security Sector Reform” (The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2020, p. 27).

After Saakashvili period, the Georgian Dream (GD), ruled the country. It was a coalition under the leadership of businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili. The coalition

³¹ According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee’s report, since 2008, a total number of 212.000 internally displaced persons (IDP) are registered. Among them, 12.300 IDPs are from South Ossetia and the remaining IDPs are from Abkhazia (2009, p. 6).

government aimed to normalize the relations with Russia while the EU and NATO membership perspective prevailed as the main priorities in the foreign policy of GD coalition. Visa liberalisation dialogue that started in 2012 was concluded at that time. Since 2013, with the visa-free travel regime in the Schengen area, Georgian citizens enjoy higher level of mobility in Europe and interaction with European people (Council of the European Union, 2014, p. 1; Council of the European Union, 2016, p. 4). Afterwards, AA and DCFTA were signed in 2014. For the implementation of the AA, National Action Plan was adopted. Georgia joined the Energy Community in 2014.

Despite these achievements, to fully benefit from the merits of AA, Georgia is encouraged to implement the rules and EU standards in a coherent way. Most of the governments appear to fall short of ambitious ENP and EaP objectives. The rising central control of the governmental institutions after the elections, especially of “the judicial system” together with the drastic reforms that are not internalized by the bureaucrats, and bad conditions in prisons hampered the positive EU-Georgia relations during the Saakashvili period (Popjanevski & Chochia, 2016, pp. 202–203). Regarding GD coalition, it consisted politicians with different political backgrounds, yet, mostly who are for Western-oriented foreign policy (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015, p. 175). The then President Margvelashvili enjoyed public support at home and abroad with his deliberate choice of working with the colleagues with pro-Western viewpoints. However, “the government’s overwhelming focus on political retribution, while neglecting urgently needed reform efforts in other spheres did little to foster the economic growth that the new leadership had promised”. After a while, the departure

of the pro-Western bureaucrats from the coalition hampered the success towards the EU integration (Popjanevski & Chochia, 2016, pp. 204–208).

On the other hand, according to the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum’s Eastern Partnership Index (EPI), Georgia has the highest score in “sustainable democratic development and European integration” by 2018 (2020, p. 22) among other partners. As the indicators of Eastern Partnership Civil Society shows, by 2018 Georgia became the most active partner state in joining “intergovernmental cooperation and engagement in EaP multilateral events and panels” (2020, p. 18). Georgian citizens, business people, civil society groups are recently able to join more educational and scientific projects in Europe. Georgia has “the highest rate of cultural exchange with the EU” (2020, p. 36). The participation in capacity-building events are also welcomed by the young Georgians through exchange programmes such as Erasmus+ (2020, p. 37). With the help of these interactions, 49 per cent of the Georgians have a positive image of EU (2020, p. 38).

5.2. The European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD)

Georgia has ten administrative regions: Autonomous Republic of Adjara, Guria, Imereti, Kakheti, Mtskheta-Mitianeti, Racha-Lechkumi, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Shida Kartli³². According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the population of Georgia is 3.728.600 and 40.9 per cent

³² http://www.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=227 (accessed on June 2, 2021).

of the citizens (1.512.900 persons) live in rural areas (“Number of Population as of January 1 2021,” 2021, p. 1). In 2001, while 48.2 per cent of the total population lives in rural areas, in 2021, this has dropped to 40.6 per cent (“Agriculture of Georgia 2020,” 2021, p. 17). It is foreseen that by 2050 rural population in Georgia will decrease up to 27 per cent. Internal migration from rural areas to the big cities and their peripheries is a big threat for the local economies (“Number of Population as of January 1 2021,” 2021, p. 2)³³. “Over many years of neoliberal politics, investments were concentrated on Tbilisi, the country’s capital, while the development of the infrastructure, the economy and the agricultural sector in rural regions stagnated” (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 1). According to the Agriculture Rural Development Strategy of Georgia, people in rural places earn less in comparison to big cities and generate less added-value (2018, p. 5). According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, 43.4 per cent of the total territory of Georgia is agricultural land, 48.8 percent of it arable. Two third of the people living in rural areas generate income from their agricultural businesses. The share of agriculture, forestry and fishing is 8.4 per cent of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (“Agriculture of Georgia 2020,” 2021, p. 17). 23.1 per cent of people in rural areas face “absolute poverty” in Georgia. Georgian rural areas suffer from the lack of recent technology, information, and expertise in the agricultural field. Halting infrastructure, gender inequality, environmental problems, deficit in financial sources and investments deepen the economic hurdles. Notwithstanding, the rural communities are usually not aware of their regions’ potential. The local population is mostly not good at examining the problems and

³³ As of 2021, 1.202.700 persons live in Tbilisi (“Number of Population as of January 1 2021,” 2021, p. 2).

initiating projects due to deficit in expertise, business ideas and social, technical skills. Additionally, Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia underlines that Georgia might face further environmental problems due to the negative impacts of climate change. Introduction of innovative methods in agriculture and irrigation are needed (2019, pp. 16–17).

On the other hand, the same strategy paper tells that pristine condition of nature and biodiversity are fruitful for agricultural initiatives. Human resources are pertinent in rural regions. Georgia is a country rich in natural, cultural and historical sources with economic opportunities in addition to agriculture (2019, pp. 23-26). Considering the high percentage of agricultural land and poverty in rural areas, sustainable development models have potential in the Georgia's local economy. Solutions require sustainable and effective methods to build resilient local communities. When the social and cultural capital of the rural communities generating high level of interaction between different actors, active knowledge- and -skill sharing happen, the rural development models can enhance resilient rural economies and contribute in the development of vulnerable regions.

Under the light of this information, the EU-Georgia cooperation comprises technical and financial assistance in the field of agriculture and sustainable rural development. Sustainable economic development is one of the main policy areas of both ENP and EaP and became a particular space for cooperation in agriculture and rural development between the EU and the partner states (Fix et al., 2019, p. 2). According to the Association Agreement article 332, the framework for agriculture and rural

development in Georgia is drawn. It aims “progressive convergence of policies and legislation” of Georgia with the EU’s. According to article 333, the AA covers the following cooperation fields:

- a) Facilitating the mutual understanding of agricultural and rural development policies;
- b) Enhancing the administrative capacities at central and local level to plan, evaluate, implement and enforce policies in accordance with EU regulations and best practices;
- c) Promoting the modernisation and the sustainability of the agricultural production;
- d) Sharing knowledge and best practices of rural development policies to promote economic well-being for rural communities;
- e) Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and the efficiency and transparency for all stakeholders in the markets;
- f) Promoting quality policies and their control mechanisms, including geographical indications and organic farming;
- g) Wine production and agro tourism;
- h) Disseminating knowledge and promoting extension services to agricultural producers, and
- i) Striving for the harmonisation of issues dealt within the framework of international organisations of which both Parties are members (2014, p. 117).

ENPARD in Georgia is the official programme of the ENP that aims to unveil the potential of the rural areas’ economic power and well-being of the local communities.

ENPARD is launched in 2013 within the respective DCFTA. Agriculture is indicated as one of the main priorities, in which the security of the food, sustainability of quality food production and employment generation are underlined in the rural context.

Considering the changing nature of security threats, in line with the 2015 ENP, ENPARD assures the “food security, environmental protection, economic development, establishment of high quality of life and state security” to build resilient regions as the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) of Georgia points out (2019, p. 4). By eliminating the economic problems and

unemployment (especially youth and women) ENPARD is designed to sustain stability in Georgia from the soft security perspective.

As shown in the following table, ENPARD has 4 programming periods:³⁴

1. ENPARD I, 2014-2017 (€ 52 million)
2. ENPARD II, 2016-2019 (€ 50 million)
3. ENPARD III, 2018-2021 (€ 77.5 million)
4. ENPARD IV, 2021-2025 (€ 55 million)

According to Rural Development Strategy 2017-2020 (RDS), the launch of ENPARD is important because it was not until 2017 that Georgian state prepared a national RDS (2018, p. 3). With 2017-2020 RDS, an Action Plan in 2017 was created, “which is a step forward in the process of Georgia's rapprochement with the European Union” (*Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia 2021-2027*, 2019, p. 20).

According to the 2017-2020 RDS, it has three policy priorities:

- a) Economy and competitiveness
- b) Social conditions and lifestyles
- c) Environmental protection and the sustainable management of natural resources (2018, p. 3).

Another contribution of ENPARD was to start the implementation of LEADER approach during the second phase and mainstream it in various Georgian administrative territories in the following years. During ENPARD II, LEADER

³⁴ <https://eu4georgia.ge/enpard/> (accessed on June 3, 2021).

approach was implemented in Georgia for the first time and recently became a common rural development strategy (Fernandez Portillo et al., 2019, p. 4). It started with the finance of three pilot LAGs in Lagodekhi, Borjomi and Kazbegi municipalities in 2016 (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 1). Afterwards, the establishment of LAGs was extended to Alkhalkalaki, Dedoplistskaro and Tetrtskaro municipalities in 2016, in Keda and Khulo municipalities in 2017, in Tsalka, Akhmeta, Tskaltubo and Mestia municipalities in 2019.³⁵ In the autonomous Adjarian region, Local Groups of Active Citizens operates rural development projects with the LEADER method to increase the quality of life in Adjara (*Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia 2021-2027*, 2019, p. 22; Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 4).

According to European LEADER Association for Rural Development's (ELARD), report, LEADER praxis in Georgia has positive outcomes and makes contribution to development in rural areas in Georgia³⁶. LAGs are seen as notable organizations by the local institutions and the local communities (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 6). They

³⁵ Respective LAG's websites:

Lagodekhi:<https://grdn.ge/en/lagodekhi/58>
Borjomi:<http://borjomilag.ge/>
Kazbegi:<http://www.kazbegilag.ge/en>
Alkhalkalaki:<https://akhalkalakilag.ge/>
Tetrtskaro:<https://tetrtskarolag.ge/>
Keda:<http://www.kedalag.ge/>
Dedoplistskaro:<http://dedoplistskarolag.ge/?fbclid=IwAR2n92WyVfSMH33bV17ntiDzTszVbNuvncLJ19ROdBmgLHbZWA4nOnzTTg>
Khulo:<http://www.khulolag.ge/>
Tsalka:<https://tsalkalag.ge/en/>
Tskaltubo:<https://www.tskaltubolag.ge/en>
Akhmeta:<http://www.akhmetalag.ge/> (accessed on June 3, 2021).

³⁶ Having founded in Belgium in 1999, ELARD operates as an umbrella non-profit organization for the LAGs and the national rural networks from EU and non-EU countries (European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), 2019, p. 2).

are recognised as “local drivers for change and development”. Between 2016 and 2019, LAGs funded 307 local development projects created above 300 jobs. The projects costed 3,443,849 Euros (European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), 2019, p. 18).

Beyond its economic perspective, the thesis shall analyse the social impact of LEADER in Georgia in the soft power context. Accordingly, as ELARD report regarding Georgian case says, “success of this community initiative should not to be assessed in terms of project impact alone; the institutional and administrative processes and procedures should also be taken into account, as the implementation of the LEADER approach in pilot regions of Georgia has contributed to the establishment of good practice in the area of approximation to European Union rural development programmes, which paves the way for the strengthening of future cooperation” (European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), 2019, p. 27). The previous chapters have shown the shifts in approach of the ENP and EaP strategies. The recent revisions consider the potential impact of the socio-economic initiatives precisely designed for particular areas with particular methods. The multilateral communication, bottom-up approach, proximity to the local populations’ endemic problems and increasing the local populations’ capacity in order to better prepare them for the recent security challenges. Rather than dictating massive projects, the EU has been on the way to project its security and stability perspective in new sectors. The tools of soft power have been used. In this way, the EU norms and values are diffused in the remote places in Georgia with LEADER programme in rural development context.

First of all, LEADER strategy increases the multilateral dialogue and knowledge-sharing between the EU and the central and regional Georgian institutions. In the initial establishment phase of the LAGs, later in the foundation of the national rural network, Georgian Association of Local Action Groups (GALAG) in Georgia, expert teams from the EU-led international organisations (the EU Delegation to Georgia, the European LEADER Association for Rural Development, Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme and NGOs such as Mercy Corps, People in Need, CARE, and Caritas) provided technical assistance to the Georgian LAGs. In all of the Georgian LAGs, the LDSs were prepared as a result of the long-term field works by the EU-led civil society groups and the local Georgians together (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 6). The EU capacity-building trainings for the local communities, members of the LAGs, Georgian NGOs and the officials of the Georgian governmental institutions shared the European experience with the Georgians. Trainings, seminars, conferences were designed to align the “Georgia’s rural development policy with the relevant EU policies, sectoral integration into the EU and access to relevant structural funds” (*Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia 2021-2027*, 2019, p. 29). The point is that LAGs are designed to continue operating after the LEADER funds comes to an end, the local communities are supposed to create funds with new projects and business ideas. Therefore, “the focus is on the best ways to make LAGs more professional and sustainable, by enhancing their knowledge and capacity, and providing them with the tools to allow them to operate independently after the project’s completion” as ELARD report states (European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), 2019, p. 4). Unless innovative future business plans owned by a conscious,

pro-active local community are ensured, LAGs can not keep functioning once the EU funds are cut. Therefore, creating a local population equipped with skills and capabilities to generate projects is of great importance. In this view, LEADER method actually desires to increase the capacity of the local habitants and in turn promote resilient rural communities that can better cope with the upcoming threats.

Before the Lagodekhi LAG was founded, LAG members and the Board has difficulty in choosing the main thematic objectives during the preparation of their LDS. A software training organised by the EU experts was provided to enable the LAG members to overcome the upcoming complex decision-making processes.³⁷ Equipped with a new hard skill, LAG members' confidence for the upcoming complex decision-making situations was increased. The members and staff of the Lagodekhi LAG was also trained by the Mercy Corps (MC) upon the LAG establishment. Animation projects in the villages of Borjomi aimed to increase the interest and involvement of the local people in LAG projects (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 6). In the success of LAG projects, involvement of variety of local actors, perspectives and contribution are of great importance. This can also increase the regional identity of the people. The participants who are involved in the initiation of the LAGs and upcoming projects might feel more committed to their realities by taking action. Akhalkalaki is a region mostly populated by the ethnic Armenians. LAG in Akhalkalaki identified with the help of the local stakeholders that the locals in Akhalkalaki face problems in education

³⁷ Super Decisions 2.6: A software that is used to make Analytic Network Process -ANP analysis for making the best choice in complex situations.

and employment due to the language barrier³⁸. To this view, they designed a language course for the minorities to develop their Georgian and English proficiency. They also provided vocational courses such as accounting and painting. According to Fischer and Oedl-Wieser, the courses played role in the social and economic integration of the ethnic minorities with the wider Georgian society (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 6).

The EU institutions also provided technical assistance in the establishment of GALAG. GALAG has the leading role in the share and flow of local knowledge to find solutions for the region-based problems. It facilitates the communication between the Georgian LAGs and “European Commission working groups and actively participates in dialogue with European Parliament members, European Economic and Social Committee, Committee of Regions, European Rural Parliament, European Countryside Movement” (European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), 2018, pp. 21–22). It has an intermediary role to make the Georgian LAGs to reach new and innovative ideas from abroad and to help the Georgian LAGs to find channels to cooperate with new actors. Therefore, it has an important mission amid the Georgian LAGs and the outside world. At the initial stage of its establishment, ELARD examined the national networks of other partner states to find the best model for the launch and operation of GALAG. Six international experts worked to find the best setup that reflects “the Georgian reality” (European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), 2019, p. 29). That shows that, ELARD did not opt for importing a standard EU model but an authentic respecting the Georgian peculiarities.

³⁸ “The majority of the population there are ethnic Armenians (93.8%), 5.7% are ethnic Georgians, and 0.5% belong to other ethnic groups: Russians, Greeks, etc.” (Oedl-Wieser et al., 2017a, p. 6).

This can be the reflection of the case-specific working method as reflected in the 2015 ENP revision.

With the international cooperation, a networking initiative between the Borjomi LAG and Estonian Voluntary Rescue Association (EVRA) was realized in 2019 with €222.000 budget. The Borjomi LAG identified that the firefighters in Borjomi lacks the necessary apparatus and training to protect the region from fires rapidly. In the joint project with EVRA, firefighters from Estonia shared the skills and knowledge with the firefighters in Borjomi. Firefighters in Borjomi are also funded for the supplement of equipment they needed (European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD), 2019, p. 21).

Besides technical assistance, the EU-led institutions regarding rural development do monitoring and evaluation. In 2017, a team from ELARD analysed the LDSs of the Lagodekhi, Kazbegi and Borjomi LAGs. They found out that the respective LDSs were prepared presenting a detailed information about their regions, a comprehensive Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat (SWOT) analysis, potential projects, activities and a realistic financial plan. The LDSs example implies that, when the seven working principles are used well, the local communities are able to identify the endemic obstacles, required solutions and techniques because they gain an inclusionary, participatory, multidimensional perspective (*Report "Results of the Reviews of the Local Development Strategies in Borjomi, Kazbegi and Lagodekhi Area"*, 2017, pp. 29-32).

The LEADER projects are modest in budget, provide services and materials to smaller rural communities. Yet, the projects have advantages because they precisely pinpoint

the problems of the rural communities from a wide range of perspectives. Stakeholders from civil society and business who have modest amount of economic potential might cooperate around an innovative business idea. They can have the sufficient amount of money with the additional LAG funds to imply their projects to create income and new job opportunities in their regions. Moreover, rather than the Georgian state implementing centralized projects, the local communities can better initiate projects specific to their regions due to LEADER's area-based approach. The extensive role given to civil society in LEADER enables different view and ideas become relevant in the policy-making. Considering the multifarious impacts of the environmental problems, regions might require flexibility and autonomy from the centre. The LAG funds can be impactful to provide the basic services of the municipalities and share their burden. These contributions can promote a positive EU image in the remote regions in Georgia, where the EU would reach with difficulty.

In conclusion, the chapter shows the European support is seen important by the political elites and the Georgian public. Since the independence, Georgian governments celebrate cooperation and presence of the EU in Georgia not only for balancing the aggressive Russian foreign policy but also, they feel cultural affiliation with Europe. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the rural regions of Georgia have been puzzled with problematic planning and the limited economic resources. Thus, the EU puts considerable effort in rising the quality of life in rural areas through EaP. ENPARD programme contributes to the stability in Georgia supporting endogenous approaches in the design of the rural development projects. Georgia is depicted as a country with high level of potential in rural development. Yet, the low level of human and financial resources impedes the realization of its potential.

Therefore, with the LEADER implementation in various regions, the EU follows a bottom-up approach based on multilateral relations with various grassroots actors and respects the local dynamics and knowledge. Rather than, importing an alien experience, Georgian local communities have the chance to benefit from the EU funds, preserve their local identity, and have the autonomy to decide what to do for their region. Yet, the LEADER's seven working principles help the local communities to practice the EU methods. In a sense, the EU initiates a chance to use its soft power tools in remote regions beyond its borders, makes contribution to the resilience, stabilisation and democratization of the rural places of Georgia.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

By examining the implementation of LEADER method in Georgia, this thesis analysed the use of EU soft power in a new sector: rural development. As the literature on soft power has shown in the first chapter, security threats such as environmental problems, climate change, migration, socio-economic disparities are beyond the traditional security concept. Some of these threats do not respect the borders of the nation-states. Some pose threat directly to local communities. Causes and results are intertwined. They make the security puzzle more complex and multidimensional.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, former-Soviet Republics with limited political and economic capacities are affected by complex economic, political, social and environmental problems. Due to the enlargement policy, the EU has extended its borders towards the East, security and stability are primary concerns in the politics. Russia is seen as one of the main security threats due to its invasion, annexation in the Eastern Europe. From the soft security point of view, threats in the former-Soviet region are rather complex, multidimensional and require more than military action.

After the biggest EU enlargement in 2004, ensuring a stable and secure neighbourhood both in the South and East of the Union became a concern. The ENP and EaP were designed respectively in 2004 and 2009, to create a safer political environment in the

outer circle of the EU borders. Bypassing the membership option, the aim of the programmes is to increase the political and economic cooperation between the partner states and the EU. Bilateral and multilateral relations based on AAs and DCFTAs aim to advance the healthy transition of the partner states into a democratic system where the practice of the EU norms and values such as rule of law, democracy, good governance, media freedom, strong civil society creates an EU-like environment beyond the borders of the Union. Based on these principles, the economies of the partner states could develop where the economic standards could create ties with the EU single market. Considering these points, ENP and EaP aim to have normative and transformative effects in the partner states as well. Therefore, they are discussed in the soft power context. The arguments' common point is that, the EU by projecting its norms and values onto the partner states quests for promoting the EU standards to create a common ground for cooperation.

Both ENP and EaP underwent changes due to the changing nature of relations with the partner states. The unilateral approach evolves into bilateralism and multilateralism where the contacts are not only limited to the states but also civil society, regional national organisations are included. With the bottom-up approach the EU policy-making in the partner states is fed by the participation of the local communities. With enabling the local communities to have a role in defining their problems and policy-making, the EU aims to proximate to the causes of the endemic obstacles. This is especially important for the solution of the new security threats. New sectors and micro initiatives increase the preciseness of the solutions. As such a new sector: the programmes regarding sustainable development, particularly agriculture, became

important for the EU because the rural societies generate income from agriculture in Georgia. More importantly, the supply chain starts in the rural areas with the agricultural production. From the soft security view, any threat on agriculture can be seen as a security problem. The EU does not only eliminate security problems but also shrink the likelihood of their repetition. The societal resilience building supposes that the by increasing the skills, capabilities and knowledge of the local communities they can have the tools to tackle with the future turmoil. At the local level, a socially resilient community is supposed to manage bringing different working groups together and make use of indogenous capital of the respective region to respond to the problems. Such an ideal is in line with the prospects of the latest rural development programme: community-led local development or recently known as the LEADER.

In the third chapter, the LEADER strategy, its limitations and importance are elaborated. Having launched in the 90s, it became a mainstream approach in much of the Europe due to its effective, flexible and innovative way of dealing with the obstacles in rural regions. As a response to pivotal approaches, seven specific features of LEADER are designed to establish LAGs that are civic platforms for diverse collection of stakeholders. LAGs create a democratic, participative platform for stakeholders to generate innovative ideas, design and implement local development projects in compliance with the needs of the rural communities. LAGs also cooperate with other LAGs at the national and international level, therefore, share the experience and knowledge of rural communities in wider contexts. They make sure that with the animation/capacity building projects as well as small projects, local communities' needs are met. Despite perceived as an economic initiative, LEADEE is a social

programme. It aims to create resilient local communities providing the tools and skills to generate projects even after the EU funds are cut. From a wider perspective, LAGs contribute to decentralization and local democracy.

In the fourth chapter I discussed LEADER's implementation in Georgia. To do so, a brief history of EU-Georgia relations is given to inform the readers about the context in which LEADER is implemented. As an EaP partner neighbouring Russia and being home to the EU energy routes, Georgia's security is essential for the security of the EU. Therefore, the EU pays a close attention to improve its relations with Georgia. The EU has provided the biggest financial support for the development of Georgia in various sectors since the country's independence. One of these initiatives is rural development programs starting with the launch of ENPARD. Due to the fact that most of the Georgian population lives in the rural areas and generate income from agricultural activities, the sustainability of the local economies under environmental and socio-economic stress is a precondition for the security in Georgia. Rural areas in Georgia have potential to flourish. However, the lack of knowledge, technology and infrastructure impedes the development process. In order to improve the country's rural potential, the LEADER strategy offers a new perspective within the ENPARD framework. The establishment of the LAGs are expected to decrease the technological gap, provides finances for the local development projects, increase the capacity and interest of the local communities in innovation. In the short-run, LAGs aim to bring investment to the rural areas by facilitating cooperation between the interest groups from civil society, private sector and the local public institutions. In the long-run, as the local development projects are realized and create added-value, the local

communities shall empower themselves with the help of autonomous working ability and the future perspective. With the help of LEADER, rural communities in Georgia and the EU have the possibility to make contacts in rural development sphere. From the Georgian perspective, the local communities benefit from the EU funds on behalf of their regions. They also learn and practice the EU standards. In the design of the LAGs working principles, the EU norms and values are embedded. The bottom-up approach, multisectoral design creates ground for enhancement of the local democracy. With networking, and international cooperation LAGs practice the autonomous action.

From various perspectives, the thesis shows that the EU uses its soft power through ENP and EaP in the former-socialist region. The recent security perspectives in ENP and EaP revisions shows that the EU acknowledges the limitations of its actions and impacts. The revisions show, to solve the complex security problems, variety of actors shall be touched. The thesis argues, rather than holistic political projects, which are monitored by Russia carefully, micro-policies in specific spheres might be more helpful to sustain the resilience in the partner states. The respective LEADER praxis in Georgia is taken as an example given that LAGs tackle with the endemic problems that create stress on the local communities. LAGs provide the technical and financial assistance for the diversification of economic activities, generating job opportunities, building infrastructure, environmental protection, bringing the expertise to the remote rural regions. The thesis argues, these initiatives are necessary steps for the resilience-building, which is underlined in the ENP and EaP revisions. LAG projects identify various problems stressing the local community and provide solutions by and for the

local communities. In doing so, the thesis aims to understand the LEADER implementation in Georgia from the soft power perspective within the EaP framework. It is claimed that the seven working principles of LEADER method are in compliance with the EU norms and values that are referred in EaP objectives. The EU's evolving understanding of security is projected the local development projects created by the LAGs in Georgia. Besides its economic facade, LEADER method can contribute to the EU soft power in Georgia by introducing the EU standards into the local communities and enabling them to practice democracy at first hand. By approaching the rural regions in the partner states with micro policies such as LEADER, the EU does not only influence the partner states but also create a positive image in the remote places otherwise it could have not reached.

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APPENDICES

AVRUPA KOMŞULUK POLİTİKASI VE DOĞU ORTAKLIĞI KAPSAMINDA SÜRDÜRÜLEBİLİR KALKINMA GİRİŞİMLERİ: VAKA ÇALIŞMASI “GÜRCİSTAN’DA LEADER UYGULAMASI”

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKE ÖZET

Bu tez Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası (AKP) ve Doğu Ortaklığı (DO) kapsamında, Avrupa Birliği (AB) kırsal kalkınma girişimlerinin Avrupa yumuşak gücüne olan etkisini vaka analizi yaparak değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Vaka analizinin temel konusu, bir kırsal ve bölgesel kalkınma modeli olan LEADER uygulamasının, Gürcistan özelinde değerlendirilmesidir. AKP ve DO’nun güvenlik perspektifinin yalnız geleneksel güvenlik bağlamında değerlendirilmemesi gerektiği, küreselleşme ile ortaya çıkan yumuşak güvenlik sorunlarının da AB’nin doğu ve güney sınırlarında güvenlik sorunları yaratabileceği, tezin savunduğu noktalardan biridir. Öte yandan, AKP ve DO’nun bütüncül yaklaşımının, AB’nin doğu sınırının ötesindeki endemik sorunları anlamakta yetersiz kalabileceğidir. Tezin ana argümanı ise, tek bir politika ile yönetilemeyecek kadar karmaşık yapıda olan DO ortaklık ülkelerinin güvenlik ihtiyacının, gelişen yeni güvenlik tehditleri karşısında daha da karmaşık bir hale gelebileceğidir. Tezin ana argümanı, yeni güvenlik tehditleri ve gerektirdikleri yeni

çözüm yöntemleri nedeniyle, AKP ve DO özelinde gerçekleşen bir dizi revizyonun bu değişimi yakalamaya çalıştığı ve AB'nin doğu sınırlarının ötesindeki güvenliğini daha küçük ve sektörel girişimlerle sağlamaya çalışmasının daha verimli olacağıdır. Bu sektörel girişimler sonucunda (kırsal kalkınma gibi), küreselleşme, çevresel sorunlar ve iklim değişikliği gibi etkileri yıkıcı olabilecek ve direkt olarak yereli etkileyecek sorunların önüne geçilmesi AB'nin doğu sınırlarındaki güvenliğine katkı sağlayabilir. Bu sektördeki programların, Doğu sınırının ötesindeki güvenliği ve istikrarı verimli şekilde sağlayabileceği ve böylelikle AB'nin yumuşak güç politikasının daha yerel gruplara ulaşabileceği de tezin argümanları arasındadır. Bu argümanları desteklemek için tez birbirini izleyen dört ana başlıkta belirtilen konulara değinerek kalitatif bir araştırmanın sonuçlarını paylaşmaktadır. İlk kısımda teze teorik bir çerçeve çizilebilir maksadıyla, yumuşak güvenlik ve yumuşak güç kavramları üzerinde durulmaktadır. İkinci kısım, AKP ve DO'yu çeşitli yönleriyle ele alınarak, yumuşak gücü kullanmadaki rolleri, bu rollerin kısıtlılığı üzerine eleştiriler ile bu eleştirilerin sonucu gelen revizyonlar üzerine yoğunlaşmıştır. Üçüncü kısımda, LEADER metodu kapsamlı bir şekilde ele alınmış, tarihsel süreci, metoda özgü yedi çalışma prensibi, metodun güçlü yönleri ile kısıtlamaları ve uygulaması üzerinde detaylıca durulmuştur. Dördüncü ve son kısım, Gürcistan'daki LEADER uygulaması ve AB Gürcistan ilişkileri üzerinde yoğunlaşmıştır.

Yumuşak güvenlik ve yumuşak güç kavramları yakından incelendiğine birbirleriyle ilişkili oldukları gözlemlenebilir. Yumuşak güvenlik kavramı, geleneksel güvenlik tehditlerinin ötesine geçerek güvenlik tehditlerinin çeşitliliği ve çok boyutluluğuna dikkat çeker. Yüksek siyasi söylemin bir parçası olarak güvenlik unsurlarının

devletlerin askeri güç kapasiteleri ve kabiliyetleriyle iç içe geçmiş olduğunun altını çizer. Güncel uluslararası siyasette, güvenlik sorunlarının kaynağının devletlerin askeri çatışmaları üzerinden çıktığını reddetmemekle beraber, küreselleşme ile artan bağımlılık, iç içe geçmişlik ve küresel çevresel sorunlar ile (artan iklim krizi, çevre kirliliği, gıda güvenliği) sosyoekonomik eşitsizliklerin de dünya üzerindeki güvenlik ve istikrara zararları olacağını kabul etmeye başlamıştır. Nye'in yumuşak güç konsepti de benzer bir şey söyleyerek siyasi gücün tanımını genişletmiştir. Nye, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin (ABD) yükselen bir güç olarak öne çıkmasının, ABD'nin askeri ve siyasi gücünün ötesinde üçüncü bir güç boyutundan kaynaklandığını öne sürmüştür. Yumuşak güç, herhangi bir baskı ya da tehdit olmadan karşı tarafın, yaratılan cazibe, minnet ve özenme gibi güdülerle yumuşak gücü kullanan tarafın istediğini istemesini sağlamaktır. Bu bağlamda, AB de yumuşak güce sahiptir. Bunun sebebi, sunduğu başarılı örgütlenme yapısı, yüksek kurumsallığı, ekonomik ve sosyal refahı yaşayan bir devlet üstü kurum olarak etrafındaki ülkelerin üzerinde siyasi bir etki alanına sahip olmasıdır. Pek çok devlet, bu barış ve refaha sahip yapının bir parçası olmak ya da onunla beraber hareket etmek niyetindeyse AB'nin sahip olduğu yumuşak gücün sayesinde. Yumuşak güç de yumuşak güvenlik kavramı gibi kapsayıcı bir bakış açısına sahiptir. Ülkeler sahip oldukları pek çok özendirici öge ile çekim kuvveti yaratarak yumuşak güç kullanımına gidebilirler.

AB'nin dış politika ekseninde şekillenen AKP ve DO'nun temel amaçları, AB'nin genişleme politikası sonucu AB'nin güney ve doğu sınırlarının bir dizi sorunlu bölgeye yaklaşmasından dolayı doğabilecek yeni güvenlik sorunlarını dolaylı yoldan önlemektir. Güney'de ve Doğu'da AB'nin güvenliğini tehdit edebilecek durumların

azaltılması için, AB sınırlarının dışında ortaklığa dahil olan ülkelerle bir AB ortaklık alanı kurarak, AB ekseninde bir siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyal etki alanı oluşturmaktır. Üyelik vizyonu içermeyen bu ortaklık, 2004'ten itibaren Güney'den Fas, Cezayir, Tunus, Libya, Mısır, İsrail, Filistin, Ürdün, Lübnan ve Suriye ile, 2009'dan itibaren Doğu'dan Ukrayna, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaycan Gürcistan ve Ermenistan ile imzalanan Ortaklık Anlaşması ile Derin ve Kapsamlı Serbest Ticaret Anlaşmalarına istinaden oluşturulmuştur. Bu anlaşmalara binaen Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından hazırlanan Eylem Plan'ı ile ortaklık ilişkisi kurulan ülkelerin modernleşmesi, demokratikleşmesi amaçlanmakta, AB ile bu ülkeler arasındaki ekonomik bağların kuvvetlendirilmesi hedeflenmektedir. Bunu yaparken AB'nin ilişkilerini şartlılık ilkesi üzerine kurması uluslararası ilişkiler disiplinde AKP ve DO'nun AB yumuşak güç kapsamında tartışılması hususunu doğurmuştur. AB'nin ortaklığa dahil olan ülkelerle olan ikili ilişkilerini hukukun üstünlüğü, demokrasi, insan hakları, iyi yönetim gibi norm ve değerlerin üzerine kurması, ortaklığın sunduğu refah ve ekonomik gelişmeyi ortaklık ülkelerine sunmak için ön koşuldur. Belirlenen şartları yerine getiren ortaklık ülkeleri Eylem Plan'ları doğrultusunda AB'nin sunduğu siyasi, ekonomik ve kültürel girişimlerden faydalanırlar. Bu girişimlerin pozitif etkilerinden faydalanmak zaman içerisinde ortaklık ülkelerine AB'nin yanında olma, AB gibi olma dürtülerini kazandırır. Böyle hareket eden devletler, AB ile aynı dili konuştukları bu yeni siyasi ortamlar sayesinde, AB'nin etki alanını genişletmesine ve yaratılmış bu tanıdıklık ortamında daha kolay ve güvenli olabilmesi için daha az efor sarf etmesini gerektiren adımlar atmasına yardımcı olurlar. Bütün bu pozitif yönlerin yanında, AB'nin yumuşak güç kullanımında ne kadar başarılı uzmanlar tarafından sıkça tartışılmaktadır. AB'nin bütüncül ve başarılı imajının zaman zaman Birlik içerisindeki

devletlerin ikili ilişkilerinde izledikleri her şeyden önce devletlerinin çıkarları üzerine kurulu dış politika hamleleriyle zarar uğradığını belirtmektedirler. Örnek olarak, bazı üye devletlerin Rusya ile olan pragmatik ekonomik ilişkileri ve AB üye devletlerinin Magrib ve Orta Doğu'dan gelen göç dalgasına karşı tutundukları tavır verilmektedir. Bu görüşler, AB'nin savunduğu norm ve değerleri daimî şekilde uyum içerisinde uygulaması gerektiğini söylemektedir. Örneğin, insan hakları konusunda oldukça hassas olan ve bu alanda ileride olduğu öne sürülen AB'nin, üye ülkelerin sığınmacılara karşı izlediği populist politikaların AB'nin pozitif imajına zarar vereceğini söylemektedirler. Bunun yanında AKP ve DO'nun dizaynında, AB'nin merkeziyetçi, devlet merkezli, bütünsel, Avrupa-merkezci ve tavandan tabana yaklaşıma sahip bir tavırda olduğunu söyleyerek AB'yi eleştiren düşünürler de vardır. DO özelinde konuşmak gerekirse, AB'nin Güney Kafkasya ve Doğu Avrupa'da istikrarı sağlarken çoğunlukla devlet makamlarıyla beraber politikalar üretmesi, verimsiz iletişim stratejileri sonucu tabana yaklaşmaması, bütün DO ortaklık ülkelerini aynı dinamikler çerçevesinde değerlendirmeye çalışarak temel politikalarını istikrar, demokratikleşme ve güvenlik üzerine kurması en çok tartışılan problemlerdir. Bu eleştiriler sonucu AKP ve DO bir dizi değişikliğe gitmiştir. Bu revizyonlarda iki önemli noktaya değinmek gerekir. Birincisi, AB etki gücünün sınırları olduğunu kabul ederek daha gerçekçi ve pragmatik bir dış politika izleme yönünde karar almıştır. İkinci değişiklik ise, salt olarak demokratikleştirme ve modernleştirmenin yanında farklı güvenlik noktalarını (gelir adaletsizliği, yoksulluk, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği, sağlıklı gıdaya erişim, genç işsizlik) da göz önünde bulundurarak, toplumsal direncin artırılması yönünde adımlar atılması gerektiği belirtilmiştir. Bu anlayış ile, DO ortaklık ülkeleri toplumlarının, kapasitelerinin geliştirilerek, çok taraflı ilişkilerle, sivil

toplumun daha çok dahil olduđu, tabandan tavana bir yaklaşımla, etkin iletişim mekanizmalarının da kullanılarak karar verme ve politika üretme süreçlerine dahil olduđu programlar önemsenmeye başlanmıştır. Tezin argümanlarından birisi de bu bilgiler ışığında, AB'nin ortaklık ülkelerindeki güvenlik sorunlarına daha kapsamlı fakat küçük ölçekli programlarla katkıda bulunarak, AB yumuşak gücünün daha uzak ve yerel gruplara ulaşabildiğini kanıtlamaktır.

Bahsi geçen argümanlar bu tezi, LEADER metodu hakkında detaylı şekilde konuşmaya götürmüştür. 1991'den beri farklı isimlerle AB kırsalında uygulanan LEADER yöntemi, 2007'de tüm üye ülkelerin kırsal kalkınma politikalarının ayrılmaz bir parçası olmuştur. Başarılı olması sebebiyle, aday ülkelerde, potansiyel aday ülkelerde ve ENP ortaklık ülkelerinde de uygulaması yapılan bu metot, AB ötesindeki devletlerin kırsal ve bölgesel kalkınma programlarının AB standartlarına uyum sağlaması hususunda atılmış bir adımdır. Seçilen çeşitli dezavantajlı bölgelerde kurulan Yerel Eylem Grupları'nın LEADER metoduna özgü yedi çalışma prensibi ile YEG'lerin buldukları bölgede, kamu-özel ortaklıkları kurarak, sadece kuruldukları bölgeyi kapsayan, tabandan tavana yapılanarak ve çok sektörlü bir anlayışı benimseyerek, yenilikçi yöntemlerle kırsal kalkınma projeleri üretmesini hedeflemektedir. Aynı zamanda YEG'ler, ülke içerisinde ve uluslararası alanda ağ oluşturarak ve iş birliği yaparak bölgesel deneyimlerini ve bilgilerini diğer YEG'lerle paylaşmak durumundadırlar. YEG'ler kurulma aşamasında oluşturulan Yerel Kalkınma Stratejisi ve Eylem Planı'na göre, proje dönemi boyunca sağlanan AB fonları ile ekonomik gelir kaynaklarının çeşitlendirilmesi, çevre koruma, sivil toplumun güçlendirilmesi gibi alanlarda proje ve faaliyetler yürüterek bölgedeki

halkın yaşam koşullarının iyileştirilmesi ve refahın artmasını hedeflemektedirler. Kısa vadede amaçlanan bu olsa da uzun vadede YEG'ler bir sosyalleşme projesi olarak düşünülebilir. Asıl amaç, pilot bölgelerde başlayan LEADER uygulamalarının AB fonları kesildikten sonra kendi projelerini üretecek finansmanı sağlamaktır. Bu noktada, YEG'lerin ekonomik sürdürülebilirliği, proje dönemi boyunca, gerekli enerjiyi sarf ederek paydaşları arasında güven ilişkisi kurmalarına ve buldukları bölgedeki paydaşları bölgenin ortak çıkarı etrafında harekete geçirerek bölgenin öz kaynaklarının kullanılmasına katkı sunmalarına bağlıdır. Diğer bir deyişle, YEG'lerin uzun vadede amaçları, bölge halkının kapasitesini geliştirmek, yerel topluluklara gelecek perspektifi ve ortak payda etrafında beraber hareket etme kabiliyeti kazandırmaktır. Bu bakış açısı ile YEG'lerin kapsadığı yerel toplulukların, özerk, yerel demokrasiye katkı sunan ve ademi merkezîyetçi şekilde projeler ürettiği göz önüne alındığında, LEADER uygulamasının AB'nin yumuşak güvenlik sorunlarıyla başa çıkabilmek için AKP ve DO revizyonlarında bahsi geçen metot ve amaçlar ile benzerlikler gösterdiği görülmektedir. Bunlardan en önemlisi yerel toplulukların dirençlerinin kapasite geliştirme faaliyetleri çerçevesinde artırılması, tabandan tavana yaklaşım anlayışının belirlenerek, yerel topluluklara ve sivil topluma politika yapımında daha çok yer verilmesi, bütün bunlar yapılırken de ortaklık ülkesinin kendi iç dinamiklerine karışılmamasıdır. Bu bağlamda AB, AKP ve DO revizyonlarında bahsi geçen dayanıklılık inşasını gerçekleştirmeye daha yakın bir yeredir. Tezin tartıştığı ana noktalardan biri de DO ortaklık ülkelerinde, kırsaldan başlayacak şekilde güvenliği ve istikrarı daha küçük ölçekli fakat daha kapsayıcı projelerle sağlamak, AB'nin yumuşak gücünü kullanabilmesi için ortam yaratmasıdır. Öncelikle yerel toplulukların AB'nin finanse ettiği bir projenin bölgelerine katkı sunduğuna şahit

olmaları yerel toplulukların gözündeki pozitif AB imajını güçlendirecektir. Yeni yöntem, kabiliyet ve bilgilerle donatılmış yerel toplulukların kazandığı öz güven ve bilinç, onları göz önündeki başarılı AB deneyimine ulaşmaya teşvik edecektir. Bunun da AB norm ve değerleriyle gerçekleşeceği bilinci, toplulukların kendilerini AB'ye yakın hissetmeleri ve potansiyel iş birliklerine açık olmaları demektir.

Bütün bu fikirler ışığında, Gürcistan'da LEADER uygulaması örneği üzerinden, LEADER'ın, AB'nin yumuşak güç kullanımı üzerinden değerlendirilip değerlendirilemeyeceği üzerine bir analiz yapılmaktadır. 1991'de Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla bağımsızlığını ilan eden Gürcistan'ın, AB ile olan ilişkilerinin başlaması ve AB ekseninde şekillenmesi uzun zaman almamıştır. Hem AB hem de Gürcistan için karşı taraf ile olan pozitif ilişkiler büyük önem taşımaktadır. AB üyeliği ve Kuzey Atlantik Antlaşması Örgütü (NATO) üyeliği, Gürcistan'ın temel dış politika objektifleri arasında yer almaktadır. Şimdiye kadarki hükümetlerin çoğunluğu, özellikle Saakashvili dönemi, AB ile yakınlaşmayı hedeflemiştir. Böylece yanı başlarındaki Rusya tehdidini karşı güvenliği sağlamayı, AB yakınlaşmasının avantajlarından faydalanmayı hedeflemişlerdir. Ulusal çıkarların ötesinde, AB'ye olan pozitif bakış açısının temelinde Gürcistan tarafının izlediği kimlik siyaseti de yatmaktadır. Yapılan araştırmalar neticesinde, Gürcü halkının çoğunluğunun kültürel ve tarihsel olarak kendini Avrupalılıkla özdeşleştirdiği ve AB ile olan yakınlaşmayı desteklediği görülmektedir. Bu pozitif siyasi ortamın, diğer iş birliklerine de yansımaları beklenmektedir. Gürcistan'ın yaşadığı sosyal, ekonomik ve siyasi sorunların pek çoğu sosyalizm geçmişinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Spesifik olarak, kırsal bölgelerin yeterli insan gücü ve doğal kaynakları olmasına rağmen, altyapıdaki yetersizlikler, yoksulluk,

bilgi eksikliği, teknolojik altyapının zayıf olması, finansal zorluklar, genç işsizlik, kırdan kente göç, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği gibi sebeplerle Gürcistan'da kırsal bölgeler ve topluluklar stres altındadır. Bu sorunlar sebebiyle, başta tarım olmak üzere üretimin azalması, yerelden başlayacak şekilde ülke çapına yayılabilecek bir dizi ekonomik, siyasi ve sosyal sorunları beraberinde getirme ihtimali bulunmaktadır. Bu sebeplerden ötürü, AB DO aracılığı ile Gürcistan'da sürdürülebilir kalkınma hedeflerini gerçekleştirerek Gürcistan'daki istikrar ve güvenliğe farklı alanlardan katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu girişimlerden bir tanesi, tezin de konusu olan LEADER uygulamasının 2016'da üç pilot bölgede (Lagodeki, Borjomi, Kazbegi) uygulanmasıdır. Sonrasında, kırsal alanlara sunduğu katkılar göz önünde bulundurularak 2017'de Akhalkalaki, Dedoplistskaro ve Tetrtskaro ilçelerinde de YEG'lerin kurulmasına karar verilmiştir. 2019'da, Tsalka, Akhmeta, Tskaltubo and Mestia ilçelerinde de YEG'lerin kurulmasıyla Gürcistan'daki YEG sayısı 12'ye çıkmıştır. YEG'lerin yarattığı projelerin iktisadi katkılarını tartışmaktansa, bu tez yarattığı sosyal etkiyi göz önünde bulundurmayı amaçlamaktadır. Uzmanlar, LEADER uygulamasının Gürcistan'da halihazırda kırsal kalkınmanın bir parçası haline geldiğini, YEG'lerin buldukları bölgede pozitif değişime aracı olduklarını ileri sürmektedirler. Örneğin Akhalkalaki bölgesinde yaşayan nüfusun çoğunluğunu etnik Ermeniler oluşturmaktadır. Ekonomik olarak dezavantajlı bir bölge olan Akhalkalaki'de yaşayan nüfus Gürcüce'yi iyi konuşamadığı için iş bulmakta zorlanmaktadır. Akhalkalaki YEG, bu bölgede yaşayan insanların iş bulabilme imkanını artırmak için İngilizce ve Gürcüce dersleri organize etmiştir. Bu ve benzeri projelerin nicelik olarak değerlendirilmesinden ziyade, nitelikleri üzerinde durulması, LEADER uygulamasının yarattığı gerçek katkıyı görmek açısından önemlidir. Tez,

LEADER uygulamasının bir yandan Gürcistan kırsalında iyileşmeler sağladığını söylerken, bir yandan da AB'ye yumuşak gücünü kullanmak için yeni hareket alanı oluşturabileceğini göstermektedir. Öncelikle, AB kurumlarının başarılı kırsal kalkınma projelerindeki rolü yumuşak güç bakımından önemlidir. YEG'ler kurulmadan önce, ilgili AB kurumlarından uzmanlar ve akademisyenler, Gürcistan'da YEG'lerin kurulacağı bölgelerde eğitimler ve çalıştaylar düzenleyerek hem Gürcü kurumlarındaki çalışanların hem de yerel halkın kapasitelerini geliştirecek adımlar atmışlardır. AB'den iyi örneklerin, gerekli bilgi ve deneyim paylaşımlarının yanı sıra, proje yönetimi konusunda çalıştaylar düzenlenerek YEG'de görev alacak ekiplerin bilinçlenmesi sağlanmıştır. Kuruluş aşamasında, YEG'lerin Yerel Kalkınma Stratejileri'ni (YKS) ve Eylem Planları'nı (EP) bölgeyi yansıtacak şekilde hazırlamalarında AB'nin sunduğu teknik desteğin rolü büyüktür. Bu eğitimler sırasında, hem AB tarafının hem de Gürcü tarafının birbirleriyle direkt temaslarda bulunmaları, AKP ve DO'da bahsi geçen, toplum düzeyinde etkileşimin gerçekleşmesi için kırsal kalkınma alanında önemli bir adım olmuştur. Yine AB teknik desteği sayesinde kurulan, Gürcistan Yerel Eylem Grupları Birliği'nin sayesinde Gürcistan'daki YEG'ler Avrupa'daki diğer YEG'ler ile bir araya gelerek, bilgi ve deneyim paylaşımı yapabilme şansı yakalamışlardır. Bu paylaşımlar sonucu, ortak projeler yapılmış ve taraflar arasında gerçekleşen karşılıklı ziyaretler sonucu AB YEG'leri ve Gürcü YEG'leri arasındaki etkileşim artmıştır. Hem LEADER'ın yedi çalışma prensibi hem de bahsi geçen karşılıklı etkileşimler sonucu AB norm ve değerleri ile çalışmayı içselleştiren YEG bölgesi sakinlerinin sadece kırsal kalkınma değil diğer sosyal ve siyasi alanlarda AB standartlarına yakın hareket etmesinin beklenmesi şaşırtıcı değildir. Daha bilinçli hale gelen bölge sakinlerinin politika

yapımında söz sahibi olması ve bunu yaparken AB ile uyum içerisinde politikalar üretmeleri içten bile değildir.

Sonuç olarak, AKP ve DO'nun AB sınırları ötesinde AB norm ve değerleri ile uyumlu ortaklık ülkeleri yaratarak AB etrafında güvenli bir bölge oluşturmak istemesi, AB yumuşak güç kullanımı ile yakından ilgilidir. Tezde, AKP ve DO'da meydana gelen revizyonlar ışığında, AB'nin genişleyen ve detaylandırılan güvenlik perspektifine atıfta bulunularak, kırsal kalkınma, gıda güvenliği, sürdürülebilir tarım ve çevre koruma gibi objektiflerin de dolaylı yoldan AB'nin yumuşak gücünü kullanabileceği alanlar olarak görülebileceğini öne sürmüştür. Alışılmışın dışında, büyük coğrafi bölgeleri kapsayan ve tek elden yürütülen politikaların yerine, LEADER gibi daha küçük ölçekli, yerelden beslenen ve yine yereli besleyen mikro projelerin de AB yumuşak gücüne etkisi olduğu açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu kapsamda, tezin mikro bir girişim olarak betimlediği, kırsal kalkınmada olumlu etkisini kanıtlamış LEADER uygulamasının da ortaklık ülkelerinde, tez özelinde Gürcistan'da, AB yumuşak gücüne olumlu etkileri olduğu açıklanmıştır.

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