

Eastern Partnership Countries' Elites Strategies for European Neighbourhood Policy: Theoretical Approach Revisited

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The article analyzes the strategies of the ruling elites of Eastern Partnership countries for participating in the European Neighbourhood Policy, and the influence of these strategies on policy outcomes. According to game theory, between 2007 and 2014 the ruling elites of the partnership countries, depending on the internal structural and institutional factors affecting those elites, used different strategies to maintain power in their cooperation with European Union institutions. In the case of authoritarian countries with presidential systems and a high level of political monopolism, cooperation is limited and benefits the partner country's ruling elite more than the EU. In the case of a hybrid regime, with a parliamentary system and a low level of political monopolism, cooperation is more extensive and equally beneficial for both the EU and the partner country. Therefore the neighbourhood policy, in particular conditions, could contribute to authoritarian consolidation, thus achieving the opposite of the intended objective. The article consists of a brief overview of the history of the European Neighbourhood Policy, an elaboration of the theoretical framework, and an initial comparative analysis of the cases of Moldova and Azerbaijan, based on the proposed framework.

Key words: European Union, European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, ruling elites, game theory, external influence

Introduction

The refusal of Viktor Yanukovich to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) in November 2013 triggered a major internal political crisis in Ukraine, which then resulted in a civil war and the most severe international tensions in the last 20 years. The choice made by Yanukovich not to upgrade Ukraine's relations with the EU within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to a new level became a clear and tragic illustration of how the degree of participation of partner countries (PC) in the ENP (or a sharp change) can affect their internal political development.

However, the Ukrainian example in this case is atypical, due to the very active role of civil society, which is not observed in other Eastern Partnership countries in similar political crises. Generally, the degree of participation in the ENP among post-Soviet countries can be represented as a continuum with two extremes. Closer to one extreme are countries which participate in the ENP very actively, and closer to the other extreme are countries with very limited participation.

As the neighbourhood policy is an instrument of bilateral cooperation, and since the agreements are signed between the EU and the government of a particular partner country, the ruling elite plays the most important and decisive role in the way the country's participa-

tion in the ENP progresses. Given that the main preference of the ruling elite, regardless of the political regime, is the preservation of power, and the ENP is aimed at the transformation of the political regimes of partner countries (and therefore at changing the elite) in the long-term, the question of why ruling elites in general agree to participate in the neighbourhood policy remains unclear. Why does the degree of participation of countries, and therefore the elites' strategies, vary widely? It seems logical to expect either complete refusal to participate in the ENP, or adaptation of any kind of unified model of participation that is similar for all states. An investigation of the European Commission's documents and study of the history of the cooperation between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries, however, reveals advanced variation in degrees of participation in the ENP. How can this be explained?

The existing literature dealing with the ENP evaluates the results of the neighbourhood policy either at the macro level of countries, discussing weak conditionality, or at the micro level of individual policies, noting their limited impact. The middle level of analysis associated with the elite remains underexplored. Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to offer a potentially plausible theoretical approach to the analysis of the behavior of ruling elites in terms of their participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as to make an initial comparative analysis of their strategies, taking into account several internal factors. Such an analysis will also help to understand how the ENP affects the internal political developments in partner countries, and to what extent the neighbourhood policy is successful in achieving its objectives. Consequently, this article is an attempt to set out the problem and to find a theoretical model to answer the question: "Why do the ruling elites in ENP partner countries use different strategies of participation in neighbourhood policy, even though they have the same preferences?" The answer to this question will, at the same time, clarify the more general problem of the ENP's influence on internal political developments in partner countries, which has been actively discussed in academic and political circles.

The empirical part of the analysis is based on two case studies that have much in common, but differ in certain characteristics. This approach makes it possible to isolate those factors that influence the variation of participation in the ENP. Thus, countries included in the Eastern Partnership, because of their common Soviet political legacy, have many similarities: similar political culture, a strong need to conduct reforms to be integrated into the global market system, ethnic diversity, and the necessity of creating national identities. However, ruling elites of Eastern Partnership countries, as is clear from the problem statement, participate in the ENP to varying degrees, despite the fact that they have similar preferences. In this regard, it is assumed that the variation in strategies of participation in the ENP used by the ruling elites, and this is the main argument of the article, depends on structural and institutional factors, which vary from country to country. These factors primarily include the nature of the political regime, the type of political system, and the level of political monopolism. Depending on these factors the ruling elites, to maintain power, adopt different strategies of participation in the ENP, more or less actively coordinating and implementing the specific objectives.

To demonstrate a causal link between a set of selected factors and the participation strategy used by the ruling elite of a particular country with the maximum reliability, cases representing two diametrically opposite examples of participation in the ENP were selected. Moldova is analyzed as a country which participates in the ENP actively, while Azerbaijan is analyzed as a country implementing a strategy of limited cooperation. The selection of cases is based on the analysis of official documents of the European Commission. A timeframe of 2007–2014 is used, since the unified documents and data are available for this period.

Rational choice institutionalism is used as a theoretical framework for the analysis. Since the agreements concluded within the ENP provide the elites of the partner countries with op-

tions concerning policy objectives and specific areas of cooperation, i.e. they are provided with a choice of strategy, the interaction between the European Commission and the ruling elites of partner countries could be described as the interaction of two rational players involved in a non-zero-sum game with incomplete information and with mixed strategies.

In what follows I provide a brief overview of the history of the neighborhood policy, to show why game theory can be successfully used in analysis of the ENP. A brief literature review and the construction of a theoretical framework precede the analysis of the two selected cases. Finally, the conclusions formulate and outline possible further steps to be taken, to study how the ENP affects the ruling elites in partner countries, and how it influences the internal political development in these states in general.

ENP: history and institutional design

The ENP presents itself as the only external dimension of the EU policy which is implemented on the supranational level by the European Commission. The ENP was launched in 2004 after the “big bang” enlargement to establish a security perimeter around the EU’s external borders and to avoid creating “new dividing lines” in Europe [Commission of the European Communities, 2003, p. 4]. The ENP is currently being implemented in 16 countries and territorial entities: seven Eastern Partnership countries (post-Soviet states) and nine countries of the Mediterranean Union (North African and Middle East countries). The Eastern Partnership comprises Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, while the Mediterranean Union consists of Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia and the Palestinian Authority.

Through the ENP, the EU intends to allocate money, create free-trade zones and provide consultative assistance to the partner countries according to the Action Plans negotiated by the parties on a bilateral basis. The main aim of the ENP is to stimulate the creation of stable and predictable political regimes. The ENP underwent several transformations and adaptations to the changing neighbourhood. The policy was initially created on the basis of the Enlargement policy. Reframing von Clausewitz’s aphorism, it could be said that the ENP is the continuation of Enlargement by other means – means which actually exclude membership. However, the ENP inherited its main procedures and assessment mechanisms on the basis of the Enlargement policy strategy.

The ENP is implemented on a bilateral basis and presupposes that the EU negotiates three-to-five-year Action Plans with each of the partner countries. After the negotiation of the Action Plan on a bilateral basis, the parties establish a collective body. Usually it is called a Co-operation Council, and includes different levels of representatives from both sides. This Council’s functions relate to the correction and implementation of the Action Plan. There is also a mechanism aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the ENP. The European Commission makes annual reports, and after the fulfilment of three-to-five-year Action Plan, also makes a general assessment by providing a Progress Report with recommendations on further developments. Although there are several EU institutions participating in the process of the ENP’s formulation and implementation, namely the European Commission, European Council, Council of Ministers and to some extent the European Parliament, it is possible to view the EU as the unified actor, as the short but stormy history of the ENP has not witnessed major clashes within the EU over the ENP.

Prior to 2007 the ENP was represented by a significant number of programmes from different levels, aimed at different targets, without coordination between each other. Since 2007, with the creation of the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument, the ENP took the

form of a unified policy with unified financial instruments. The European External Action Service, developed to promote unification and more effective elaboration and implementation of EU foreign policy, was established in 2011. The ENP was subordinated to the Service and became one of the main activity areas. Despite the grouping of countries into the Eastern Partnership and the Mediterranean Union, the Action Plans are still negotiated on a bilateral basis, which at the theoretical level allows the negotiations and the implementation of the policy to be described as a game between two rational players.

European Neighbourhood Policy in academic literature

Studies devoted to analyzing the strategies of the ruling elites of ENP partner countries are virtually non-existent. The role of the elites in the implementation of the ENP is mainly analyzed through the prism of the external influence of the EU. However, such an analysis is largely indirect. Thus, in his paper D. Silander concludes that the success or failure of the external influence of the EU depends on the “primary interests, methods implemented and channels of co-operation between external and internal actors” [Silander, 2005, p. 85]. In fact, he views elites as internal actors, but does not reveal their strategies with respect to the external influence.

Authors dealing with the concept of Europeanization, i.e. the spread of EU legislation and norms, have come closer to the analysis of the impact of the ENP on strategies of ruling elites in partner countries. T. Börzel and T. Risse in their analysis of the EU’s external influence proposed using a combination of two forms of explanatory logic: the logic of rational choice institutionalism, and the logic of sociological institutionalism [Börzel, Risse, 2003, 2011]. Although the authors touch upon the role of ruling elites, they consider them as objects rather than active subjects of the process, and do not analyze the problem of the EU’s influence within the ENP, with regard to internal structural and institutional factors.

Game theory, in turn, provides such an opportunity; however, it has not yet been used in the analysis of neighborhood policy. Examples of its use can be found only in studies of enlargement policy. But since the ENP has inherited many basic features of the latter, it makes sense to briefly consider here the papers, applying game theory to the enlargement process. Several studies on the subject consider negotiations on EU membership to be a bargaining game. B. Steunenberg and A. Dimitrova concluded that “regardless of domestic circumstances, the effects of conditionality vary in time, depending on how close a state may be to accession” [Steunenberg, Dimitrova, 2007, p. 14]. Empirical analysis conducted by the authors showed that the EU seeks to increase uncertainty about a country’s entry into the EU, to “prevent candidates from abandoning reform efforts” [Ibid., p. 1].

The work of K. Malinowski, who analyzed the negotiations between the EU and Norway, is a useful example of the application of game theory to the analysis of the interaction between the EU and a country in the context of enlargement policy. In fact, the author draws two main conclusions that are directly related to the subsequent analysis of the cases of Moldova and Azerbaijan. Firstly, he shows that the tools of game theory can be applied to a situation without direct confrontation. But more important is his conclusion that “even though the EU is the more powerful of the two parts, Norway dictates the way the relationship is evolving because of EU uncertainty” [Malinowski, 2011, p. 21]. Thus, the same uncertainty which, according to B. Steunenberg and A. Dimitrova, the EU should consistently reproduce to encourage countries to reform, may in fact have the opposite effect. It can lead to the EU partner beginning to determine the entire course of the interaction. Taking into account the lack of opportunity for Eastern Partnership countries to become members of the EU, and considering the EU’s interest in interaction with the partner countries because of security issues and the advantages

of free trade zones, the ruling elites of the partner countries chose a participation strategy allowing them to maximize their profits, that is, to strengthen their power. In some institutional and structural conditions, this strategy will involve active participation in the ENP which is also advantageous for the EU, but in others it will encourage a strategy of participation which will be as limited as possible, while allowing the partner countries to manipulate the EU, because the EU is still interested even in minimal cooperation.

Institutional and structural factors in the variation of participation in the ENP

If the EU can be represented as a single player with specific preferences and strategies, and considering the fact that the ENP provides partner countries with the opportunity to implement their own goals and choose their own strategies, cooperation within the ENP can be described as a parallel game. Both players (the EU and the partner country) make their moves simultaneously if the ruling elite of a partner country agrees in general to participate in the ENP, and taking into account the fact that Action Plans are drawn up on a bilateral basis. The game can therefore be represented by the traditional two-by-two matrix.

The main objectives of the European Union in implementing the ENP are to develop economic ties, promote political and economic modernization, and provide, through such measures, border security. These aims are defined by official EU documents [Commission of the European Communities, 2006; European Commission, 2011]. More importantly, similar goals of the ENP are outlined by researchers who analyze the neighbourhood policy from several different perspectives [Cremona, Meloni, 2007, p. 8; Börzel, van Hüllen, 2014; Tarasov, 2008, p. 21; Strezhneva, 2007]. The EU is trying to achieve these goals through a gradual transformation of political regimes, i.e. the main preference of the EU within the neighbourhood policy is the transformation of the political regime of the partner country. The ruling elites of these countries apparently want the same – to gain maximum benefit from the assistance programmes, modernize their economies and increase the level of government effectiveness, which is equally important for all types of regimes. However, their preference in this case is quite the opposite. They strive to maintain power, i.e. to preserve the existing political regime. Such an assumption might seem controversial, if considered by itself. Depending on the specific conditions and institutions, ruling elites may have other preferences. But in this case the assumption that the main desire of ruling elites is to preserve power, is not only dictated by the method used, but is also, as the political history of the post-Soviet space shows, fully justified from an empirical point of view.

Strategies of the partner countries' ruling elites will in this case be determined by internal institutional and structural factors. The main among them are: the type of existing political regime, the type of political system, and the level of political monopolism. If existing structural and institutional factors allow power to be preserved only by maintaining an authoritarian regime, the ruling elite will seek to limit participation in the ENP by only yielding economic benefits and increasing the effectiveness of a bureaucracy to strengthen legitimacy, if active participation and political reforms can lead to a loss of power. At the same time, if structural and institutional factors force a ruling elite to preserve power by maintaining or developing a competitive political system, participation in ENP will be more active, since many tools of the neighbourhood policy are directly aimed at the creation of this type of political system.

There is an alternative way to look at how ruling elites participate in the ENP. It involves consideration of national interest and ideological attitudes shared by the elites, i.e. the way the ENP is seen in the context of opportunities (or lack thereof) for potential membership in

the EU, rather than rational analysis of preferences in terms of political power, in the context of participation in the ENP. This approach is very promising, and although it can be used to answer the research question posed in this article, it still requires the use of a slightly different focus and method of data analysis. In this regard, the model described below is limited to the analysis of rational preferences of ruling elites in relation to the preservation of power, and presupposes the following relationship: the better the EU's goal of regime transformation by means of the ENP fits the aim of the partner country's ruling elite to preserve its power, the more actively a country participates in the ENP.

The theoretical and empirical part of the analysis includes two cases. The first describes a situation in which a country with an authoritarian, presidential political system and a high level of political monopolism takes the approach of limited participation in the neighbourhood policy. Let us assume that in these conditions, both for the EU and for the ruling elite of the partner country, two strategies are available: to change the existing political regime, or keep it unchanged. The EU prefers to transform the political regime in the direction of democratization. The main preference of the ruling elite of a partner country is the preservation of power. In a country with an authoritarian regime, a presidential system and a high level of political monopolism, it simultaneously means adaption of the strategy of limited participation in the ENP, which will minimize the impact of policies on internal political developments and prevent a power shift, thereby using the assistance within the ENP for the modernization of the economy and the system of public administration. Under the conditions of a competitive, parliamentary political system and low level of political monopolism, the strategy of active participation, on the contrary, allows the ruling elite to retain power. This strategy contributes to the creation of a level playing field for all political forces (so even if losing out in the short-term, the elites would go into opposition and then return to power); while in economic and administrative spheres it improves managerial efficiency, which strengthens legitimacy and support.

Although the players do not have full information about the specific goals of each other, they can share information about such goals by taking part in the Cooperation Councils, and reducing the level of uncertainty. Moreover, it may be decreased due to internal structural and institutional factors. The parliamentary political system and the low level of political monopolism (as opposed to the presidential system and a high level of monopolism) could reduce the level of uncertainty, putting the decision-making process under public control, and encouraging elites to make a choice towards more active participation in the ENP, which forces the EU to reduce the generated level of uncertainty. In this regard, it is assumed that the players use mixed rather than pure strategies.

Let us assign a 5-point scale of preferences for each player, where "0" will mean the least desirable outcome for the player, and "5" the most desirable. Suppose that the "game" takes place between the EU and a partner country with an authoritarian regime, presidential system and high level of political monopolism. As a result, with respect to theorizing, the preferred outcome for each player is presented in a matrix in Table 1.

Table 1. Game matrix for a partner country with an authoritarian political regime, presidential political system and high level of political monopolism

	PC, transform the regime	PC, preserve power
EU, transform the regime	5; 0	1; 5
EU, preserve power	2.5; 1	2.5; 5

As the EU pursues two conflicting goals within the ENP, trying to ensure border security and simultaneously trying to transform the political regimes in neighboring countries, which can lead to destabilization and insecurity in the short term, it agrees to interact even when the current ruling elites preserve their power. Even though this is not the most preferable option for the EU.

After the calculation,¹ an equilibrium with a value of 2.5 is obtained for the EU and with a value of 5 for the partner country. Thus, in the case of implementing the ENP in a partner country with an authoritarian regime, presidential system and high level of political monopolism, the game is likely to be resolved in favor of the ruling elite of the partner country. In such a case, limited participation in the ENP can be expected. However, the benefits received by the ruling elite are more significant than the benefits received by the EU. Putting this conclusion in the context of the impact of the ENP on internal developments in the partner country, it can be said that neighbourhood policy actually reinforces the existing elite, and contributes to strengthening the authoritarian regime.

A situation where the second player is a country with a hybrid regime, parliamentary political system, and low level of political monopolism leads to different results. The matrix in this case takes the following form (Table 2).

Table 2. Game matrix for a partner country with hybrid political regime, parliamentary political system and low level of political monopolism

	PC, transform the regime	PC, preserve power
EU, transform the regime	5; 2.5	3; 2.5
EU, preserve power	0; 2.5	2.5; 5

After the calculation of the matrix, the equilibrium for the EU is equal to 5 points, and for the partner country is only 2.5 points. This means that if the country has a hybrid political regime, parliamentary political system and low level of political monopolism it could be expected that the elite of the country participates in the ENP more actively, to maintain its power. The benefits of cooperation in this case will be distributed between the EU and the ruling elite of the partner country more or less equally. In terms of external influence this means that the ENP will contribute to democratization and reach its target.

Moldova and Azerbaijan: between politics and economy

When constructing a theoretical model, I supposed that the involvement of ruling elites in the ENP depends on the political regime of the partner country, its political system, and the level of political monopolism, which define the strategy of the elites in maintaining their power. From this perspective, Moldova and Azerbaijan represent two opposite examples. The Freedom House rating for Moldova in 2014 was twice as high as that for Azerbaijan (3 points for Moldova, 6 for Azerbaijan²). After a long political crisis in 2000, a parliamentary system has been established in Moldova, while Azerbaijan is a presidential system with a high degree of concentration of power. The level of political monopolism in Moldova was also visibly lower. The effective number of parties, calculated on the basis of the distribution of seats in parliament

¹ For the calculation of bimatrix equilibrium the following online calculator was used: <http://math.se-mestr.ru/games/bimatrix.php>

² Source – Freedom House official website: <http://www.freedomhouse.org>

following the results of the parliamentary elections of 2012, is estimated at 2.74, according to the method of G. Golosov [Golosov, 2010]. In contrast, in Azerbaijan the effective number of parties after the last Azerbaijani elections in 2010 (independent candidates were excluded) is 1.07.³ Can all these factors explain the variation in the strategies of the ruling elites' participation in the ENP?

This article, as its main task is to find a possible theoretical approach to the problem, rather than its solution as such, is unlikely to give a definitive answer to this question. To do this, it would take a full-scale study. But the proposed theoretical model and the available official documents of the ENP, prepared, among others, by experts from the ENP partner countries, which will provide an opportunity to look at the situation from the Moldovan and Azerbaijani sides, still give the opportunity to conduct an initial analysis.

Given that the Action Plan is a document worked out on a bilateral basis, I suggest that it describes the balance of goals and strategies for each side. In such a case, the Progress Report should confirm this assumption, showing the degree of commitment of each party to agreed goals and particular strategies. Comparing the Annual Action Plans of Moldova and Azerbaijan from 2007, one can notice a striking difference in goals. The Action Plan for Azerbaijan has only two goals: a programme to support energy reform, and to support institutional and regulatory reform. Fourteen of the nineteen million euros were allocated for energy programme. Support for institutional and legal reforms "emphasizes the importance of the Support for socio-economic reform... fight against poverty and administrative capacity building" [European Commission, 2007a, p. 10]. In this case, after the results of the game the EU receives a minimum of potential benefits, ensuring energy security by cooperation with Azerbaijan without attempting to transform the country's existing political regime. At the same time, Azerbaijan's ruling elite receives the maximum amount of benefits by retaining power and strengthening its economy (through reform of the energy sector) and political system (through better management).

The annual Action Plan for Moldova has more objectives, which are set out in a more detailed way. For example, it stipulates the allocation of funds for the reform of the social sector, increasing the efficiency of border control, and monitoring of the border between Moldova and Ukraine; technical assistance in the implementation of the Action Plan; and for the support of civil society development in Transnistria [European Commission, 2007b]. This looks like a set of goals more favorable for the EU. Most of them are related to the harmonization of Moldovan legislation with the legal system of the European Union (*acquis communautaire*), which in the long run reduces, for the EU, the cost of access to the Moldovan market.

Turning attention to the National Indicative Programmes of 2007–2011 for both countries, similar differences can be seen, confirming the earlier-proposed theoretical assumptions. However, a set of priorities and goals of a lower order, standardized both for Moldova and Azerbaijan, include: supporting the development of democracy and quality of governance, support for socio-economic reforms, combating poverty and improving government effectiveness, support for legislative and economic reforms in transport, energy and environmental protection. The devil is in the details. The National Indicative Programme for Azerbaijan, in its "political" part, mainly focuses on achieving formal indicators of democratization, such as the holding of elections ("Improved quality of electoral processes" [European Commission 2007c, p. 10]). While the document for Moldova includes the more meaningful purpose of supporting civil society. For example, among the expected results it highlights "Increased public awareness of decision-making structures and procedures and improved capacity of civil society organizations including consumer NGOs" [European Commission 2007d, p. 6].

³ Effective numbers of parties were calculated using the following online electoral calculator: <http://smacker.heliohost.org/elcalc.html>

This once again demonstrates that Azerbaijan's ruling elite, within the authoritarian regime with strong presidential power and a high level of political monopolism, in order to retain power was able to shift the balance of the ENP towards its interests, by limiting the scope of cooperation to only the economic sphere, and simply using the formal indicators for achieving political goals. Such purposes actually strengthen the regime, increasing the effectiveness of the public authorities, resulting in an increase in legitimacy and support for the regime.

At the same time, the Moldovan ruling elite, operating in conditions of a low level of political monopolism, hybrid political regime and parliamentary system, negotiated goals that were advantageous for the EU to a greater extent than in the case of Azerbaijan. The parliamentary system and the low level of political monopolism could ensure a greater commitment to the purposes, and facilitate more active participation in the ENP, because communication, which is ensured by the greater transparency of the political system of Moldova (as compared to Azerbaijan), contributed to the exchange of information between players, which makes the game more cooperative.

Similar conclusions can be made after analyzing the Eastern Partnership Roadmaps prepared for the Vilnius Summit in 2013 by experts from the partner countries. Each roadmap includes country-specific priorities, which will be paid attention to during the next phase of implementation of the ENP, and also includes a standardized assessment of progress. The assessment presented in these roadmaps is the best confirmation of the theoretical expectations formulated earlier. In fact, it reflects the established equilibrium.

Table 3. Implementation of the goals of the ENP, Azerbaijan (assessment of May 2012 – October 2013)

Does the government engage with civil society on policymaking?	No
Is policymaking participatory, e.g. public consultations on draft legislation?	No
Does the government actively engage in trialogue with EU and civil society?	No
Is the process of drafting agreements between Azerbaijan and the EU transparent, with public consultations?	No
Does the EU delegation actively engage in trialogue with government and civil society?	Partially
Does the EU delegation promote trialogue with government and civil society?	Yes

Source: [Ibadoglu et al., 2013, p. 1].

Table 4. Implementation of the goals of the ENP, Moldova (assessment of May 2012 – October 2013)

Does the government engage with civil society on policymaking?	Yes
Is policymaking participatory, e.g. public consultations on draft legislation?	Partially
Does the government actively engage in trialogue with EU and civil society?	Partially
Is the process of drafting agreements between Azerbaijan and the EU transparent, with public consultations?	No
Does the EU delegation actively engage in trialogue with government and civil society?	Partially
Does the EU delegation promote trialogue with government and civil society?	Yes

Source: [Litra, 2013, p. 1].

Tables 3 and 4 show the attainment of objectives for each partner country under consideration. A comparison of the tables demonstrates that Moldova participates in the ENP more actively, and the benefits of the EU in this case are much more significant than in the case of Azerbaijan, where the ruling elites follow the strategy of limited participation. This variation can be effectively explained by the structural and institutional factors identified in this article.

Conclusion

This article is an attempt to explain the variation in the degree of participation in the ENP, using game theory with the examples of two countries, taken from different poles of the continuum of participation in the ENP: Moldova and Azerbaijan. Based on the fact that the European Union can be represented as a single player, and given that the neighborhood policy provides the partner countries with a choice of objectives and strategies of cooperation, I assumed that it can be represented as a parallel non-zero sum game with incomplete information, in which the players can use mixed strategies.

I also assumed that the difference in the degree of partner countries' participation in the ENP can be explained by a combination of several internal conditions (factors) in which the country's ruling elite operates, namely by the nature of the political regime, type of political system, and level of political monopolism. I constructed theoretical models, which would explain the games between players operating in different structural and institutional conditions.

Firstly, it is a game between the EU and the ruling elite operating in the context of an authoritarian political regime with a presidential system and a high level of political monopolism. Secondly, it is a game between the EU and the ruling elite operating under a hybrid political regime, parliamentary system and low level of political monopolism. In each game the players have their own preferences: either to retain power or to transform the existing regime. The ruling elites seek to preserve their power, but depending on the internal structural and institutional conditions, they use different strategies of participation within the ENP. Since the players have an opportunity to interact within the Cooperation Councils, in reality they tend to use mixed strategies.

Theoretical analysis of the games shows that ruling elites within an authoritarian regime use the strategy of limited participation in the ENP to preserve their power while simultaneously maximizing profits from cooperation with the EU. Moreover, using this strategy, the ruling elites gain from cooperation within the framework of the ENP more than the EU does, which means that, in fact, the ENP unintendedly facilitates the consolidation of the authoritarian regime, rather than democratization. In the case of a ruling elite operating under a hybrid regime, they seek to expand cooperation, because it is the very strategy which will allow them to retain power. At the same time the EU is closer to attaining its preference for transforming the political regime into a democratic one.

Provisional application of these theoretical models to the analysis of the ENP documents relating to Moldova and Azerbaijan has shown that the structural and institutional factors in which the ruling elites operate, in fact may explain the variation in the degree of participation of partner countries in the ENP. The findings of the analysis also demonstrate the ambiguity of the EU's external influence on partner countries. Under certain conditions the ENP may lead to the results opposite to those which it was designed for, i.e. not to democratization, but to strengthening of authoritarian regimes. Although the ENP is not the only decisive factor, such a conclusion, however, requires further detailed study of the specific mechanism of interaction between the EU and each partner within the Cooperation Councils.

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