



REDEMOS

RECONFIGURING EU DEMOCRACY
SUPPORT. TOWARDS A SUSTAINED
DEMOS IN THE EU'S EASTERN
NEIGHBOURHOOD

REDEMOS Report D4.3

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.19660913](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19660913)

Lessons learnt – political transition in the eastern neighbourhood

Madalina Dobrescu, NTNU

Tobias Schumacher, NTNU

December 2025



Funded by
the European Union

The REDEMOS project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101061738. The Associated Partner University of Surrey has received funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee under grant number 10040721. The Associated Partner University of St. Gallen has received funding from the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI). Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union, UKRI and SERI. Neither the European Union nor UKRI or SERI can be held responsible for them.

Table of contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
1 DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS, STASIS, REGRESSION AND AUTHORITARIANISATION IN THE EU'S EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD	3
2 SOCIAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS TO DEMOCRATISATION	5
3 CULTURAL DRIVERS AND BARRIERS TO DEMOCRATISATION	7
4 ECONOMIC DRIVERS AND BARRIERS TO DEMOCRATISATION.....	9
5 SEPARATISM AND TERRITORIAL DISPUTES AS FACTORS UNDERPINNING DEMOCRATISATION AND AUTHORITARIANISATION	11
6 LESSONS LEARNED AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	14
7 REFERENCES.....	20

1 Democratic progress, stasis, regression and authoritarianisation in the EU's eastern neighbourhood

The EU's eastern neighbourhood is characterised not by linear democratisation but by highly differentiated and dynamic regime trajectories, where democratic progress, stagnation, regression, and authoritarian consolidation coexist. This finding reflects broader debates in the comparative politics literature on the “grey zone” between democracy and autocracy, where hybrid regimes display both democratic and authoritarian features (Bolkvadze 2017; Procházka and Cabada, 2020). Developments across the six countries have been marked by heterogeneity rather than convergence. Two countries – Azerbaijan and Belarus – exhibit sustained authoritarian trajectories, characterised by the consolidation of executive power, systematic repression of opposition, and the erosion of political and civil rights. In contrast, Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine display trajectories of democratic progress, albeit fragile and uneven. Georgia occupies an intermediate position, marked by earlier progress followed by more recent democratic backsliding. These divergent pathways underscore the importance of domestic political configurations and external pressures in shaping regime outcomes, a point consistent with broader scholarship emphasising the interaction between internal and external drivers of democratization (Levitsky and Way 2012; Rød et al. 2020).

Despite this variation, the six countries share a set of structural challenges. First, none of the six countries has achieved a fully independent, transparent, and accountable judiciary. Weak rule of law institutions remain a central obstacle to democratic consolidation, reflecting entrenched patterns of elite control and political interference. Second, all countries have experienced, to varying degrees, restrictions on freedom of expression, often exacerbated by disinformation campaigns and external influence, particularly from Russia. Third, oligarchisation and corruption emerge as pervasive features across the region, shaping both democratic and authoritarian systems. Political power is frequently concentrated in personalised networks, enabling elites to maintain resilience despite economic or political crises. Within this structural context, the “virtuous triangle” between citizens, civil society, and political elites emerges as the key determinant of democratic outcomes. Democratisation is most likely to occur and be sustained when these three components align in support of reform. This finding resonates with classic theories of democratisation that emphasise elite - mass coalitions (Sato and Wahmann 2019), while also incorporating more recent insights on the role of organised civil society as an intermediary actor (Bernhard et al. 2020).

The six countries illustrate this dynamic in different ways. In Ukraine, democratic progress since 2014 has been driven by a combination of active civil society mobilisation, citizen demand for reform, and at least partial elite commitment to change. The Euromaidan uprising exemplifies how societal mobilisation can trigger political transformation, while subsequent reforms - particularly in anti-corruption and governance - reflect ongoing interaction between domestic actors and external support. However, persistent challenges, including resistance from entrenched interests and incomplete institutional reform, remain notable.

A similar, though more recent, alignment is observed in Armenia and Moldova. In Armenia, the 2018 Velvet Revolution marked a critical juncture in which civil society activism and popular mobilisation converged with elite change, opening a window for democratic reform. In Moldova, the election of reform-oriented leadership and strong societal support – augmented by diaspora engagement (Baltag et al. 2025) – has enabled progress in governance and anti-corruption efforts. In both cases, however, these gains remain fragile, given ongoing geopolitical pressures, institutional weaknesses, and internal divisions.

By contrast, the absence or breakdown of this “virtuous triangle” explains patterns of democratic stagnation or regression. In Georgia, civil society remains active and citizens continue to mobilise in defence of

democratic norms, yet the lack of consistent elite commitment has led to backsliding. This highlights the limits of societal pressure in the absence of political buy-in, reinforcing arguments in the literature about the necessity of elite cooperation for sustained democratisation (Higley and Gunther 1991).

The cases of Belarus and Azerbaijan further illustrate the constraints on democratisation in authoritarian contexts. In Belarus, the mass protests following the 2020 presidential election demonstrated the potential of citizen mobilisation and civil society coordination. However, the regime's capacity to deploy repression - supported by external actors - effectively dismantled these efforts. In Azerbaijan, where civil society has been progressively weakened and the regime maintains a degree of popular legitimacy, large-scale democratic mobilisation has not materialised. These cases underline the importance of state capacity and coercive power in shaping the limits of societal influence, a theme widely discussed in authoritarian resilience literature.

Another key dimension of processes of democratic progress, stasis, regression and authoritarianisation is the importance of external factors, particularly the role of geopolitics. Russia's influence, through military intervention, economic leverage, and disinformation, has significantly affected democratic trajectories across the eastern neighbourhood. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 represents a critical turning point, intensifying both authoritarian pressures and democratic mobilisation. At the same time, the EU and other Western actors have provided support for democratic reforms, particularly in countries pursuing closer integration. Domestic democratisation processes are thus situated within a broader competitive geopolitical environment, where alternative governance models coexist and compete.

In terms of policy relevance, these insights point to the need for tailored, regime-sensitive democracy support strategies. Rather than applying uniform approaches, external actors - particularly the EU - should consider each country's position on the autocracy - democracy continuum, as well as the direction and nature of regime change. This includes recognising whether a country is experiencing democratic progress, stagnation, or regression, and adjusting instruments accordingly. These conclusions reinforce broader calls in the literature for contextualised and adaptive democracy support, moving beyond one-size-fits-all models (Carothers 2009). In sum, democratic outcomes are contingent on the alignment between citizens, civil society, and political elites, as well as on structural constraints such as weak institutions, executive overreach, and external interference.

2 Social drivers and barriers to democratisation

Civil society remains the most consistent driver of democratisation across the region, although its strength and effectiveness vary significantly. In Armenia and Georgia, civil society has historically played a transformative role, mobilising mass protests and fostering pro-democratic norms. In Ukraine, civil society has been revitalised by external threats, particularly following Russia's full-scale invasion, leading to unprecedented levels of civic engagement and societal cohesion. In Moldova, civil society functions both as a watchdog and as a partner in reform processes, often supported by a politically active diaspora. By contrast, in more authoritarian contexts such as Belarus and Azerbaijan, civil society has been severely repressed, frequently forced into exile, and thus operates with limited domestic impact.

At the same time, the eastern neighbourhood also presents significant barriers to democratisation, many of which are deeply rooted in social structures and political contexts. A key regional challenge is polarisation and social division, often structured around identity cleavages such as language, ethnicity, or geopolitical orientation rather than conventional policy differences. These divisions are exacerbated by external actors, particularly Russia, through disinformation and propaganda, which undermine trust in democratic institutions and deepen societal fragmentation.

Another major regional trend is migration and brain drain, which has both positive and negative effects. On one hand, large diasporas, especially in Moldova and Ukraine, can promote democratic values, influence elections, and support reform-oriented actors through remittances and transnational engagement. On the other hand, emigration often removes young, educated, and reform-minded individuals from domestic political life, weakening the internal drivers of democratisation. In some cases, remittances also reduce pressure on governments to implement reforms, acting as a "safety valve" for weak or corrupt regimes.

Country-specific barriers further illustrate the diversity of challenges. The Armenian case illustrates both the transformative potential and fragility of civil society - driven democratisation (Diamond 1999). The 2018 "Velvet Revolution" demonstrated how sustained civic engagement, built over years of activism, could successfully mobilise mass protest and bring about political change. Civil society organisations, alongside grassroots movements, played a crucial role in educating citizens, fostering mobilisation skills, and shaping democratic norms (Paturyan 2021). However, the post-revolutionary period exposed inherent vulnerabilities. The migration of activists into government positions weakened independent civil society capacity and contributed to internal fragmentation. More critically, the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict – particularly the 2020 war and the ensuing 2023 displacement crisis – generated profound societal trauma, polarisation, and distrust. Armenian society is now divided into competing camps with sharply antagonistic narratives, undermining social cohesion and complicating democratic consolidation. Thus, while civil society remains a key driver, its capacity to sustain reform is constrained by post-war trauma and deepening political divisions.

In Azerbaijan, by contrast, civil society operates under severe repression, rendering it more of a latent than active driver of democratization (Valiyev 2011). The entrenched authoritarian system under President Ilham Aliyev has systematically dismantled independent media, NGOs, and opposition structures. While some civil society actors and journalists continue their work in exile, their domestic reach and influence are limited. The paper identifies this weak "bridging" social capital as a fundamental barrier: while strong family and clan networks provide stability, they inhibit broader collective action and cross-cutting social mobilisation. This is compounded by political repression, economic patronage networks, and a degree of regime legitimacy reinforced by the military victory in Nagorno-Karabakh. The regime's ability to frame external conflict as a unifying national cause further suppresses dissent and reduces incentives for democratic reform. In this

context, civil society's role depends heavily on external support, and democratisation remains structurally constrained.

Belarus presents a case where civil society briefly emerged as a powerful democratic force before being decisively crushed (Way 2020). The 2020 presidential elections and subsequent protests revealed significant latent democratic potential, driven by an increasingly educated population, a dynamic tech sector, and innovative forms of digital mobilisation. Women played a particularly important role, both symbolically and organisationally, challenging entrenched gender norms in politics. However, the regime's brutal crackdown, supported by Russia, effectively dismantled domestic civil society and forced many activists into exile. This has created a disconnect between exiled opposition actors and the domestic population, whose capacity for mobilisation is now severely limited by fear, repression, and diminishing hope. At the same time, Belarusian society is increasingly polarised along political and geopolitical lines, with different segments consuming entirely different information ecosystems. This fragmentation, combined with large-scale emigration, poses significant challenges for any future democratisation process.

Georgia, long considered a relative success story in the EU's eastern neighbourhood (Mitchell 2006), is now experiencing democratic backsliding that threatens its previously robust civil society. While civic mobilisation remains strong – as demonstrated by large-scale protests against the 2024 “Foreign Agents Law” – the government's actions have significantly restricted the operational space for NGOs and independent actors. The sudden withdrawal of major international donors such as USAID has further weakened the sector. Structural barriers also persist, including low levels of institutional trust, entrenched clientelism, and weak bridging social capital. Although Georgians are willing to mobilise in defence of democratic norms, distrust towards institutions, including NGOs and media, limits the formation of sustained, organised pro-democratic movements. High levels of emigration exacerbate these challenges by draining the country of skilled and reform-oriented individuals, even as returning migrants may reintroduce democratic norms over time.

Moldova offers a more mixed but cautiously optimistic picture. Civil society plays a dual role as both a watchdog and a governance partner, contributing expertise and oversight in key reform areas such as anti-corruption and rule of law. The Moldovan diaspora is a particularly relevant democratisation driver (Baltag et al. 2025), actively participating in elections and supporting pro-European, reform-oriented democratic forces. However, this external actor also creates legitimacy challenges, as domestic opponents frame diaspora influence as undermining national sovereignty. Moldova's most significant barrier lies in its deep societal divisions, particularly along linguistic, ethnic, and geopolitical lines. These divisions are actively exploited by Russian influence operations, including disinformation and electoral interference. Oligarchic networks and corruption further weaken democratic institutions, while emigration continues to hollow out the domestic reform base. Thus, while Moldova demonstrates the significant impact of civil society and diaspora engagement, its democracy remains fragile and contested.

Ukraine represents a unique case where external aggression has both hindered and, paradoxically, strengthened certain aspects of democratisation. Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion has necessarily suspended formal democratic processes such as elections, yet it has also triggered an unprecedented surge in civic engagement, solidarity, and national cohesion. Civil society has become highly mobilised, providing support for the war effort while continuing to advocate for transparency and reform. Decentralisation reforms implemented after 2014 have strengthened local governance and resilience, enabling communities to respond effectively to wartime challenges. At the same time, the long-term effects of war – trauma, displacement, demographic loss, and potential re-emergence of regional divisions – pose serious risks to democratic development (Limaj 2024). Emigration on a massive scale further compounds these challenges, raising questions about post-war reconstruction and political participation.

In conclusion, while democratisation remains possible and, in some cases, resilient in the eastern neighbourhood, it is increasingly constrained by a combination of internal divisions and external pressures. Civil society continues to be a key agent of change in the region, but its capacity must be reinforced.

3 Cultural drivers and barriers to democratisation

Democratisation in the EU's eastern neighbourhood is also shaped by political culture - the values, beliefs, and norms through which citizens understand and engage with politics. In this perspective, democracy requires more than formal rules; it depends on citizens' willingness to participate, trust institutions, and tolerate diversity. However, the relationship between culture and democracy remains contested. Some scholars argue that democratic values emerge are key to a stable democracy, while others stress the importance of elite behaviour and institutional design (Lipset 1959; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Boix and Stokes 2003). This debate is particularly relevant in the eastern neighbourhood, where formal democratic structures often coexist with weak societal support for democratic norms.

Religious institutions are especially influential because they operate at the intersection of identity, morality, and politics. In many eastern neighbourhood countries, churches are highly trusted actors that shape public discourse, influence legislation, and interact with political elites. As such, they can either promote democratic values or reinforce authoritarian tendencies, depending on context.

In Armenia, the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) has historically functioned as a pillar of national identity and social cohesion, particularly after independence and during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It helped stabilise society in times of crisis, reinforcing a shared cultural narrative. However, its close relationship with political elites has limited its democratic role. The Church has often legitimised ruling authorities and resisted liberal reforms, particularly on gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. Even after the 2018 Velvet Revolution, its opposition to the government has been driven more by political disagreements and institutional interests than by democratic principles. Overall, the AAC supports statehood but acts as a constraint on liberal democratic deepening.

Azerbaijan presents a contrasting model, where religion is subordinated to a strong authoritarian state. Although Islam is the dominant cultural identity, it is tightly controlled through a system of "official Islam" managed by state institutions. Religious actors are discouraged from political engagement, and those who challenge the regime face repression. As a result, religious institutions are largely passive and depoliticised, contributing neither to democratic mobilisation nor to overt ideological resistance. Their role is therefore indirect: by being controlled and neutralised, they help sustain the authoritarian status quo.

In Belarus, the Belarusian Orthodox Church operates within a cooperationist model with the state under Alexander Lukashenko. While formally autonomous, it enjoys privileges in exchange for political loyalty. The Church promotes values of stability, order, and tradition, aligning with the regime's ideological framework. Although individual clergy showed support for protests during the 2020 crisis, the institution as a whole remained cautious and largely silent. Thus, the Church contributes to authoritarian resilience, not through active repression but through normative reinforcement of regime legitimacy.

The Georgian Orthodox Church has played a dual role. In the early post-independence period, it was a key force for national unity and social stability, even mediating political crises under figures like Ilia II. However,

as democratic reforms advanced, the Church increasingly acted as a defender of traditional values against liberalisation. It has opposed anti-discrimination laws, LGBTQ+ rights, and other reforms, sometimes contributing to polarisation and even enabling radical mobilisation. Its privileged legal status and close ties with political elites give it significant influence over policymaking, allowing it to constrain liberal democratic reforms despite supporting state cohesion.

In Moldova, religion is deeply entangled with identity politics and geopolitical competition. The division between the Moldovan Orthodox Church (linked to Moscow) and the Bessarabian Church (linked to Romania) reflects broader societal cleavages. The Moldovan Orthodox Church, in particular, has played an active political role—endorsing candidates such as Igor Dodon and opposing pro-European reforms associated with figures like Maia Sandu. Rather than fostering unity, religious institutions often amplify divisions and resist liberal reforms, especially on issues like minority rights and European integration.

Ukraine represents the most pluralistic and dynamic case, with multiple competing religious institutions. This diversity has prevented the monopolisation of religious authority and created space for civic engagement. Religious actors played a crucial role in democratic movements such as the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan, providing moral legitimacy, organisational support, and physical protection for protesters. At the same time, divisions - particularly involving the Moscow-affiliated church - have introduced geopolitical tensions and competing narratives. Since 2014, and especially after 2022, these divisions have intensified, with religion becoming increasingly securitised. Despite these tensions, Ukraine demonstrates that religious pluralism can support democratic mobilisation, even in a highly contested environment.

Across all six eastern neighbourhood countries, religious institutions are neither inherently democratic nor authoritarian. Instead, their impact depends on three key factors:

1. Relationship with the state

- Where churches are closely aligned with political elites (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia), they tend to reinforce existing power structures.
- Where they are tightly controlled (Azerbaijan), they become politically irrelevant but stabilising.
- Where they are independent and pluralistic (Ukraine), they can support democratic mobilisation.

2. Degree of religious pluralism

- Monopolistic religious environments (Armenia, Georgia) enable churches to shape national identity in exclusive and conservative ways.
- Pluralistic environments (Ukraine) foster competition, tolerance, and civic engagement.

3. Interaction with geopolitics

- In Moldova and Ukraine, religion is deeply intertwined with external influence and geopolitical conflict, shaping both democratic and anti-democratic dynamics.
- In Azerbaijan and Belarus, geopolitical considerations reinforce state control over religion.

In conclusion, religious institutions act as powerful cultural intermediaries in democratisation processes. Their influence is not determined by doctrine alone, but by their institutional position, political alliances, and societal role. When independent, pluralistic, and embedded in civil society, they can promote democratic values and mobilisation. When co-opted by the state or aligned with elites, they tend to reinforce authoritarianism or resist liberal reform. Understanding democratisation in the eastern neighbourhood

therefore requires moving beyond abstract cultural explanations and focusing on the concrete interactions between religion, politics, and society.

4 Economic drivers and barriers to democratisation

The relationship between economic development and democratisation has long occupied a central place in political science, with classical modernisation theory – most notably Lipset’s (1959) “basic modernization hypothesis” – arguing that economic development creates the structural foundations for democratic governance. Over decades of empirical research, this relationship has been broadly confirmed, albeit with important qualifications. Scholars have consistently found a positive, though imperfect, association between economic development and democracy (Munck 2018; Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Yet, as subsequent work has clarified, it is not economic growth in itself that drives democratisation, but rather the social transformations it generates. Economic development reshapes class structures, strengthens the middle class, and facilitates the self-organisation of societal groups such as workers, youth, and women. These processes, in turn, increase demands for political participation, accountability, and representation.

At the same time, the literature emphasises that economic factors can also undermine democracy (Acemoglu and Robinson 2005). In particular, inequality and uneven development are widely associated with political polarisation and institutional fragility. Where economic gains are concentrated among narrow elites, democratic institutions tend to weaken rather than consolidate. The relationship between development and democracy is therefore complex and contingent, shaped by a wide range of intervening variables, including the structure of the economy, levels of education, patterns of trade integration, and the role of external actors. Certain structural features have especially strong effects. Resource wealth, particularly in oil- and gas-dependent economies such as Azerbaijan, often reinforces authoritarian rule by reducing governments’ reliance on taxation and enabling patronage-based systems of control. Conversely, integration into regional economic frameworks can promote democratisation by embedding norms of transparency, accountability, and rule of law. Other factors, such as foreign aid, have more ambiguous effects, depending on how they are distributed, absorbed, and linked to domestic reform processes.

The EU’s eastern neighbourhood presents a particularly revealing context in which to examine these dynamics, as it challenges some of the core assumptions of modernisation theory. Many post-Soviet states entered independence with relatively high levels of industrialisation, education, and human capital – conditions that would traditionally be seen as conducive to democratisation. Yet, rather than consolidating democratic systems, several of the six EN countries developed into hybrid regimes or reverted to authoritarian governance. This divergence underscores the limits of economic determinism and highlights the importance of political institutions, historical legacies, and geopolitical pressures. In the post-Soviet space, weak institutional frameworks, entrenched oligarchic structures, and the enduring influence of external powers – particularly Russia – have often offset or distorted the democratising effects of economic development.

Within this broader regional pattern, economic drivers and barriers to democratisation manifest differently across countries. In Armenia, for example, economic growth, foreign investment, and expanding trade – particularly with the EU – have created favourable conditions for democratic development. Strengthened property rights and a relatively robust legal framework further support this trajectory. However, these gains are counterbalanced by significant vulnerabilities, including heavy economic dependence on Russia, persistent inequality, and a large informal sector. These factors limit the state’s autonomy and constrain the consolidation of democratic institutions (Gevorgyan and Antonyan 2024).

Azerbaijan presents a contrasting case, illustrating the well-documented “resource curse” (Ross 2015). Despite sustained economic growth and improvements in infrastructure and connectivity, the country remains firmly authoritarian. The dominance of the hydrocarbon sector, combined with pervasive state control over the economy, weak legal protections, and high levels of corruption, has concentrated economic and political power in the hands of a narrow elite. Although expanding internet access and economic ties with the EU create some openings for societal change, these have not translated into meaningful political liberalisation.

In Belarus, the persistence of a highly centralised, state-controlled economic model constitutes a major barrier to democratisation. The dominance of state-owned enterprises, coupled with a repressive regulatory environment and weak property rights, limits the development of an independent private sector. At the same time, the events surrounding the 2020–2021 protests revealed the latent potential of private sector actors and a growing middle class as drivers of political change. Much of this potential, however, has been displaced abroad, as repression and sanctions have pushed entrepreneurs and professionals into exile. While these actors may play a role in a future democratic transition, current conditions within the country remain highly restrictive (Nikolayenko 2025), further reinforced by a deepening economic dependence on Russia.

Georgia occupies an intermediate position, having achieved significant progress in economic liberalisation, trade openness, and improvements to the business environment. These developments have supported income growth and poverty reduction, contributing to a more favourable context for democratisation. Nevertheless, this progress is increasingly threatened by political instability, controversial legislation affecting civil society, and persistent issues such as unemployment, low productivity, and corruption. Oligarchic influence and pressures on judicial independence further complicate the relationship between economic reform and democratic consolidation (Kapanadze 2026).

Moldova stands out as a case where economic integration with the EU has played a particularly strong democratising role. Through the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, the country has undertaken extensive regulatory reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, and market competition. Foreign aid and investment, largely originating from the EU, reinforce these trends, while the growing ICT sector provides new opportunities for economic diversification and civic engagement. However, Moldova remains highly vulnerable to external shocks, particularly those stemming from Russia’s war against Ukraine, and continues to struggle with systemic corruption and a weak business environment (Markevych and Marinkov 2024).

Ukraine represents perhaps the most dynamic and complex case in the region. Since the Euromaidan revolution, the country has pursued a path of economic and political reform closely tied to European integration. Efforts to reduce oligarchic influence, promote deregulation, and advance digitalisation have strengthened the foundations for democratisation. At the same time, the ongoing war with Russia has imposed severe economic and social costs, including widespread destruction, displacement, and rising inequality. While these conditions pose significant challenges, they have also accelerated certain reforms and opened new spaces for civic participation and institutional change (Rabinovych 2024).

At the regional level, the six eastern neighbourhood countries share several structural characteristics that both enable and constrain democratisation. Their strategic geographic position between Europe and Asia creates opportunities for trade and investment, while the gradual transition from command to market economies has expanded the role of private actors. Increasing digitalisation and the growth of the ICT sector further contribute to economic dynamism and, potentially, to greater political participation. At the same time, these positive trends are offset by persistent barriers. Geopolitical and geoeconomic competition

between the EU, Russia, and China fragments the region and limits the coherence of economic integration. Weak intra-regional cooperation, combined with high levels of emigration and brain drain, undermines long-term development prospects and reduces the capacity for endogenous democratic change.

Against this complex backdrop, economic factors must be understood as part of a broader constellation of influences shaping democratisation. Economic integration with the EU has emerged as a particularly important driver, especially in countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, where it has supported regulatory reform and strengthened institutional capacity. However, the effectiveness of such engagement depends on maintaining a careful balance between economic cooperation and democratic conditionality. Where this balance is absent, economic ties alone may reinforce existing power structures rather than transform them.

Ultimately, the central insight is that economic development does not automatically lead to democracy. Instead, its effects are mediated by institutional quality, social structures, and external pressures. In the EU's eastern neighbourhood, these mediating factors are especially pronounced, resulting in diverse and often contradictory outcomes.

5 Separatism and territorial disputes as factors underpinning democratisation and authoritarianisation

In many post-Soviet contexts, conflict resolution and democratic development are not mutually reinforcing, as commonly assumed, but they often compete. When states face persistent external pressure -particularly from Russia – state survival and territorial integrity tend to take precedence over democratic consolidation. This dynamic leads to centralisation of power, weakened institutions, and the instrumental use of security narratives by political elites to justify democratic backsliding. The paper's core argument is thus that democratisation in the region cannot be understood without treating geopolitics, especially external intervention, as a structural factor rather than a secondary influence.

The case of Armenia illustrates how protracted conflict embeds a long-term trade-off between security and democracy. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has shaped Armenia's political trajectory since independence, intertwining national identity, state-building, and democratisation. Initially, the independence movement framed the conflict in terms of human rights and democratic aspirations, but over time security concerns came to dominate political priorities. This shift was reinforced by the unresolved nature of the conflict, which redirected economic and human resources toward defense, limited foreign investment, and constrained regional integration. Armenia's dependence on Russia for security further restricted its foreign policy autonomy and reform trajectory (Zolyan 2026). Domestically, political elites frequently used the conflict to consolidate power, portraying the opposition as a threat to national unity. The Armenian case demonstrates how unresolved conflict not only diverts resources but also shapes political discourse, institutional development, and collective identity in ways that constrain democratisation.

Azerbaijan presents a contrasting trajectory, where conflict has reinforced authoritarian consolidation. Following a period of instability in the early 1990s, the leadership prioritized state stability and economic development, particularly through energy revenues. Stability was framed as a prerequisite for progress, and democratic demands were often portrayed as destabilizing. This narrative justified restrictions on political freedoms and enabled the concentration of power. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict further strengthened this

model by allowing the government to centralise control over security and negotiations while limiting political pluralism. Even after regaining territorial control in the 2020 war with Armenia and subsequent developments in 2023, democratisation has not advanced (Dobrescu and Schumacher 2024). Instead, military success has reinforced regime legitimacy and reduced incentives for reform. The Azerbaijani case shows how both conflict and its resolution can be instrumentalised to sustain authoritarian governance.

In Georgia, separatist conflicts have undermined both statehood and democratisation by weakening institutions and fostering long-term instability. The early post-independence period was marked by civil war, territorial fragmentation, and economic collapse, leaving the state highly vulnerable. Russia played a significant role by supporting separatist regions and maintaining influence over Georgia's security environment. These conflicts diverted attention from governance reforms and contributed to corruption, state capture, and weak institutional development. Although Georgia has made notable democratic progress since the 2003 Rose Revolution, unresolved territorial conflicts and ongoing Russian influence continue to constrain its sovereignty and democratic consolidation. The persistence of "frozen conflicts" has reinforced centralisation tendencies and hindered inclusive governance, illustrating how incomplete statehood limits democratic development (Coppeters and Legvold 2005).

Moldova represents an intermediate case, where separatism has complicated but not entirely derailed democratisation. The Transnistrian conflict, sustained by Russian military presence and political influence, has limited state sovereignty and created ongoing vulnerabilities (Lutterjohann 2023). Russia has used both military and economic tools to influence Moldova's political trajectory, including attempts to impose federalisation models – such as the Kozak Memorandum of 2003 – that would weaken central authority. Despite these pressures, Moldova has made progress in democratic reforms, particularly in recent years under a pro-European government, led by President Maia Sandu. European integration has provided an important external anchor for reforms, strengthening institutions and resilience against hybrid interference. However, persistent external pressure, economic challenges, and political fragmentation continue to constrain democratic consolidation. Moldova's experience shows that while democratisation is possible under conditions of conflict, it remains fragile and highly dependent on both domestic and external factors.

Ukraine demonstrates a more complex relationship between conflict and democratisation (Tyushka 2026). While separatism and territorial disputes have posed severe challenges, particularly following Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Donbas, they have not prevented democratic progress. The paper thus emphasises that separatism in Ukraine cannot be understood without accounting for Russia's direct role in destabilisation. Institutional solutions alone proved insufficient when faced with external interference. Despite these challenges, Ukraine has pursued significant reforms, including decentralisation, anti-corruption measures, and the strengthening of democratic institutions. Even after the full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukraine has maintained a commitment to democratic governance, although wartime conditions have temporarily constrained political processes. This case highlights that democratisation can continue under conflict, but only with strong institutional resilience, active civil society, and clear political commitment.

Across all cases, several common patterns can be observed. First, separatism and territorial disputes divert economic, human, and institutional resources away from development and reform toward security and defense. Second, political elites often instrumentalise conflict to justify restrictions on democratic freedoms and consolidate power. Third, external actors – particularly Russia – play a decisive role in sustaining conflicts and shaping domestic political trajectories. Rather than initiating all separatist movements, Russia often exploits existing divisions to maintain influence, using tools such as military presence, economic coercion, and hybrid interference. This creates a structural environment in which democratisation and state-building become competing rather than complementary processes.

At the same time, there is considerable variation across countries. In Azerbaijan, conflict has reinforced authoritarianism; in Ukraine and Moldova, democratic development has continued despite external pressure; in Armenia and Georgia, democratisation has been constrained by security dependence and unresolved conflicts. These differences underline the importance of domestic political will, institutional capacity, and external alignment in shaping outcomes.

Conventional approaches to democratisation – focused primarily on internal reforms – are insufficient in conflict-affected contexts. Institutional reforms alone are vulnerable to external interference and cannot be sustained without addressing geopolitical constraints. Democratisation and conflict resolution should therefore be understood as interdependent processes. Effective democratic development requires not only internal institutional strengthening but also the reduction of external destabilising pressures. Conversely, sustainable conflict resolution depends on the existence of legitimate, accountable, and inclusive political institutions.

In sum, separatism functions as both a security challenge and a structural constraint on democratisation in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. It reshapes state priorities, political incentives, and institutional development in ways that often hinder democratic progress. Understanding this dynamic requires integrating domestic and geopolitical factors into a single analytical framework, recognising that democratisation in contested states is shaped by the constant interaction between internal governance and external power politics.

6 Lessons Learned and Policy Recommendations

The EU's eastern neighbourhood presents a complex and uneven landscape of democratisation, characterised by divergence rather than convergence. Across Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, democratic trajectories range from gradual progress to entrenched authoritarianism. Drawing on the preceding analysis, this section reflects on the key lessons regarding the drivers and barriers shaping democratisation in the region, emphasising the interplay between domestic structures, societal dynamics, economic conditions, cultural factors, and geopolitical constraints.

A first central lesson is that democratisation is neither linear nor inevitable. Instead, it is contingent on the interaction of multiple internal and external factors. The concept of a “virtuous triangle” between citizens, civil society, and political elites emerges as a crucial insight. Where these three actors align in support of reform—as seen in Ukraine after 2014 or Armenia following the 2018 Velvet Revolution—democratic progress becomes possible. Civil society mobilisation can articulate public demand for change, while reform-oriented elites can translate these demands into institutional transformation. However, this alignment is fragile. Where elite commitment is inconsistent or absent, as in Georgia's recent backsliding, societal pressure alone is insufficient to sustain democratic development. Conversely, in authoritarian contexts such as Belarus and Azerbaijan, even strong societal mobilisation can be neutralised by coercive state capacity and elite cohesion.

A second key insight concerns the central role of civil society as a driver of democratisation, albeit one constrained by context. Across the region, civil society has acted as a catalyst for political change, from mass protests in Armenia and Ukraine to watchdog functions in Moldova. However, its effectiveness depends on political space and institutional conditions. In highly repressive regimes, civil society is either co-opted or forced into exile, limiting its domestic impact. Moreover, even in more open contexts, civil society faces structural challenges, including fragmentation, resource constraints, and declining trust. The Armenian case illustrates how the transition of activists into government can weaken independent civic capacity, while Belarus demonstrates how repression can dismantle even highly mobilised societies. Thus, civil society is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democratisation; its impact depends on its interaction with both elites and institutions.

At the societal level, polarisation and social fragmentation represent major barriers to democratisation. In many eastern neighbourhood countries, divisions are not primarily ideological but identity-based, shaped by language, ethnicity, or geopolitical orientation. These cleavages are often exacerbated by external actors, particularly through disinformation and hybrid interference. Such fragmentation undermines trust in institutions, weakens collective action, and creates opportunities for political elites to manipulate divisions for their own benefit. Migration further complicates this picture. While diasporas can serve as important sources of democratic norms, financial support, and electoral influence - as in Moldova and Ukraine - large-scale emigration also depletes domestic reform capacity by removing young and educated citizens. In this sense, migration operates as both a driver and a barrier, reflecting the broader ambivalence of social factors in the region.

Cultural dimensions, particularly the role of religion, add another layer of complexity. Religious institutions are influential actors that can either support or constrain democratisation depending on their relationship with the state and society. Where churches are closely aligned with political elites, as in Armenia, Belarus, and Georgia, they tend to reinforce existing power structures and resist liberal reforms. In contrast, pluralistic religious environments, such as in Ukraine, can foster civic engagement and support democratic mobilisation.

The key lesson here is that cultural factors do not operate independently; their impact is mediated by institutional arrangements and political incentives. Religion is neither inherently democratic nor authoritarian but becomes so through its interaction with power structures.

Economic factors further highlight the conditional nature of democratisation. While economic development can create favourable conditions by strengthening the middle class and enabling societal organisation, it does not automatically lead to democratic outcomes. The eastern neighbourhood provides clear evidence of this limitation. Despite relatively high levels of education and industrialisation, several countries have developed hybrid or authoritarian regimes. Structural features such as resource dependence, oligarchic control, and weak institutions often distort the relationship between economic development and democracy. Azerbaijan exemplifies how resource wealth can sustain authoritarianism, while Moldova and Ukraine demonstrate how economic integration with the EU can support reform. However, even in these cases, corruption, inequality, and external vulnerabilities continue to constrain democratic consolidation. The broader lesson is that economic drivers are mediated by governance structures and external alignments, rather than acting as independent forces.

Perhaps the most decisive factor shaping democratisation in the region is geopolitics, particularly the role of Russia and the persistence of territorial conflicts. Unlike classical models of democratisation, which emphasise domestic reforms, the eastern neighbourhood illustrates how external pressures can fundamentally reshape political trajectories. Conflict and insecurity often prioritise state survival over democratic governance, leading to centralisation of power and the erosion of institutional checks and balances. Political elites frequently instrumentalise security threats to justify restrictions on freedoms and consolidate authority. The cases of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan show how unresolved conflicts can entrench authoritarian or hybrid systems, while Belarus highlights the role of external support in sustaining repression.

At the same time, Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, Moldova demonstrate that democratisation can persist even under conditions of external pressure, provided there is strong societal mobilisation, institutional resilience, and clear political commitment. This suggests that while geopolitics imposes structural constraints, it does not fully determine outcomes. Instead, it interacts with domestic factors, amplifying existing strengths or weaknesses. A critical implication is that democratisation and conflict resolution are deeply interconnected. Sustainable democratic development requires not only internal reforms but also a reduction in external destabilising pressures.

Finally, these findings carry important implications for external actors, particularly the EU. A key lesson is the need for differentiated and context-sensitive approaches to democracy support. The diversity of trajectories across the eastern neighbourhood makes one-size-fits-all strategies ineffective. Instead, policies must be tailored to each country's position on the democracy–autocracy spectrum, as well as to the specific drivers and barriers present. Supporting civil society, strengthening institutions, and promoting economic integration remain essential, but these efforts must be complemented by a more strategic engagement with geopolitical realities. In conflict-affected contexts, democracy support cannot be separated from security considerations.

In conclusion, democratisation in the EU's eastern neighbourhood is shaped by a complex interplay of domestic and external factors. The alignment between citizens, civil society, and elites stands out as a key driver, while structural barriers such as weak institutions, social fragmentation, economic inequality, and geopolitical pressures constrain progress. The region demonstrates that democratisation is not a linear

process but a contested and reversible one, requiring sustained commitment, adaptive strategies, and a nuanced understanding of context.

A coherent synthesis of policy recommendations across WP4 points toward a **holistic, context-sensitive EU strategy** for democratisation in the eastern neighbourhood, one that recognises the interaction between social, cultural, economic, and geopolitical factors rather than treating them in isolation:

1. At the **core of the strategy** is the need to move beyond technocratic democracy promotion and instead **strengthen the societal foundations of democracy**.
2. Across the region, civil society emerges as the most consistent driver of democratic change, yet its capacity is uneven and often constrained. The EU should therefore both **expand and diversify its support base**, reaching beyond established NGOs to include grassroots, local, and non-elite actors.
3. This must be complemented by **stronger support for independent media and media literacy**, which are essential for countering disinformation and rebuilding trust in public institutions.
4. At the same time, democracy support cannot rely solely on incentives: **sustained conditional pressure on authoritarian regimes** remains necessary to preserve civic space where it still exists or to prevent its further erosion.
5. Addressing structural challenges such as **brain drain** is equally critical, requiring targeted economic and professional opportunities that retain and attract reform-oriented citizens.
6. Importantly, democratic engagement must be **reframed to resonate beyond urban, pro-European elites**, linking democratic governance to tangible socio-economic concerns.
7. The EU should prioritise **institutional separation between religious organisations and the state**, as close alignment tends to reinforce existing power structures rather than democratic pluralism.
8. At the same time, **supporting religious pluralism and equal treatment of denominations** can prevent monopolisation of moral authority and foster more inclusive political cultures. Engagement with religious actors should shift away from reinforcing institutional privilege toward **promoting democratic norms**, including non-discrimination, civic peace, and political participation.
9. A particularly promising avenue lies in **strengthening interfaces between civil society and faith-based actors**, encouraging interpretations of religious identity that align with human rights and democratic values.
10. EU policy should focus less on economic growth per se and more on **ensuring that economic change translates into inclusive and accountable governance**. This implies maintaining **democratic conditionality alongside deepening economic ties**, particularly in countries pursuing closer integration.
11. At the regional level, the EU must recognise **long-term fragmentation as a structural condition**, while still promoting **trade integration, SME development, and cross-border cooperation** to build interdependence and resilience. Investment in **human capital** is especially important, both to counter brain drain and to strengthen domestic constituencies for reform.
12. The EU should **align democracy support with security and resilience-building**, including strengthening defence capacities, countering disinformation, and supporting civic education in conflict-affected contexts.
13. In sum, an effective EU strategy must be **integrated, differentiated, and politically grounded**. Democratisation in the eastern neighbourhood depends on the alignment of societal actors, institutional frameworks, economic structures, and geopolitical conditions. Policies that address only one dimension are unlikely to succeed. Instead, the EU should pursue a **multi-level approach** that simultaneously strengthens civil society, promotes inclusive economic development, supports

cultural pluralism, and addresses security constraints, while tailoring its instruments to the specific trajectories and vulnerabilities of each country:

Social strategies:

In **Armenia**, the EU should:

- Rebuild and diversify civil society capacity by supporting actors outside government and mitigating the “brain drain” of activists into state institutions.
- Address post-conflict polarisation and trauma, including support for dialogue initiatives and social cohesion programmes following the Nagorno-Karabakh crises.
- Strengthen links between civil society and local governance, ensuring that reform is not concentrated at the central level.

In **Azerbaijan**, the EU should:

- Focus on protecting and sustaining civil society in exile, including independent media, journalists, and NGOs operating abroad.
- Promote incremental openings by linking EU engagement—especially in energy and trade—to measurable improvements in civic space and human rights.
- Support informal and low-visibility civic initiatives, including educational, cultural, and digital platforms that can gradually rebuild “bridging” social capital.
- Encourage private sector diversification, which may over time create alternative power bases less dependent on state patronage.

In **Belarus**, the EU should:

- Maintain pressure on the regime through sanctions, while avoiding measures that disproportionately harm society.
- Substantially increase support for exiled civil society and opposition networks, ensuring they remain connected to domestic audiences.
- Invest in independent media and digital communication channels that can bypass state control and counter disinformation.
- Prepare for future transition scenarios, including support for institutional reform planning and capacity-building among exiled actors.

In **Georgia**, the EU should:

- Intensify support for civil society and independent media, particularly in response to legal and financial restrictions.
- Apply targeted conditionality linking EU cooperation and financial assistance to democratic standards, especially rule of law and civic freedoms.
- Strengthen public trust in democratic institutions, including programmes that address disinformation and polarisation.
- Support grassroots and regional actors, not just established NGOs, to broaden the social base of democratic engagement.

In **Moldova**, the EU should:

- Deepen support for civil society as both watchdog and governance partner, particularly in anti-corruption and judicial reform.
- Leverage diaspora engagement constructively, while addressing domestic legitimacy concerns through inclusive political communication.
- Counter disinformation and external interference, especially in elections, through media support and civic education.
- Strengthen state capacity and reduce oligarchic influence, ensuring reforms translate into tangible improvements for citizens.

In **Ukraine**, the EU should:

- Sustain large-scale financial and institutional support, tied to continued progress in rule of law, anti-corruption, and governance reform.
- Support civil society's dual role in wartime (humanitarian, defence support) and long-term democratic oversight.
- Invest in decentralisation and local governance, which have proven critical for resilience.
- Prepare for post-war reconstruction, ensuring inclusive participation, transparency, and reintegration of displaced populations.

Cultural strategies:

- In **Armenia** and **Georgia**, reforms should focus on reducing the political influence of dominant churches while maintaining dialogue and gradual change.
- In **Moldova** and **Ukraine**, the priority is to manage religious pluralism in ways that reduce geopolitical polarisation while preserving freedom and diversity.
- In more authoritarian contexts such as **Azerbaijan** and **Belarus**, the emphasis shifts toward protecting limited spaces for religious and civic autonomy and avoiding further politicisation or repression.

Economic strategies:

- In **Ukraine** and **Moldova**, sustained financial support tied to rule-of-law and anti-corruption reforms can reinforce positive trajectories.
- In **Georgia**, economic engagement must be balanced with democratic safeguards to counter backsliding.
- In **Armenia**, reducing dependence on Russia through diversification and EU cooperation is key.
- In **Azerbaijan**, broadening engagement beyond the energy sector may gradually empower alternative economic actors, while in **Belarus**, supporting exiled economic and civic actors alongside sanctions remains the most viable approach under current conditions.

Statehood and security-related strategies:

- In **Moldova** and **Ukraine**, reducing external interference - particularly from Russia - is a precondition for sustainable democratisation, requiring both diplomatic engagement and institutional strengthening.
- Post-conflict scenarios, especially in **Ukraine**, will demand innovative governance solutions for reintegration, combining flexibility with adherence to democratic standards.

- In **Armenia**, the EU should support peace agreements and regional normalisation as part of a broader reform trajectory.
- In **Georgia**, civil society should be combined with targeted conditionality to counter democratic backsliding. In **Azerbaijan**, engagement should remain pragmatic but conditional, encouraging incremental improvements in rule of law and human rights.

7 References

- Acemoglu, D. and J. Robinson. 2005. *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Baltag, D., A. Pocumbian, O. Chirița, V. Căpățici. 2025. Democracy Building in Moldova: Diaspora's Vision for Moldova's Resilient Future. Noroc Olanda.
- Bernhard, M., A. Hicken, C. Reenock et al. 2020. 'Parties, Civil Society, and the Deterrence of Democratic Defection'. *Studies in Comparative International Development* 55, 1–26.
- Bogaards, M. 2019. 'Case-based research on democratization'. *Democratization*, 26(1): 61–77.
- Boix, Carles, and Susan C. Stokes. 2003. 'Endogenous democratization'. *World Politics* 55(4): 517-549.
- Bolkvadze, K.. 2017. 'Governing the Grey Zone: Why Hybrid Regimes in Europe's Eastern Neighbourhood Pursue Partial Governance Reforms'. Doctoral Dissertation in Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg.
- Carothers, T. 2009. 'Democracy Assistance: Political vs. Developmental?'. *Journal of Democracy*, 20(1): 5-19.
- Coppieters, B. and R. Legvold. 2005. *Statehood and Security. Georgia after the Rose Revolution*, Boston: MIT Press.
- Dobrescu, M. and T. Schumacher. 2024. 'Azerbaijan'. In: M. Dobrescu and R. Weilandt, eds. *Democratic progress, stasis, regression and authoritarianisation in the EU's eastern neighbourhood*. REDEMOS Working Paper D4.1., 37-50.
- Diamond, L. 1999. *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gevorgyan, V. and Y. Antonyan. (2024). *Armenia after 2018. Social and Political Transformations*. Lausanne et al. : Peter Lang.
- Graziano P, Quaranta M. 2024. 'Studying Democracy in Europe: Conceptualization, Measurement and Indices'. *Government and Opposition*, 59(2): 605-631.
- Higley J. and R. Gunther, eds. 1991. *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
- Inglehart, Ronald, and Christian Welzel. 2005. 'Exploring the Unknown: Predicting the Responses of Publics Not yet Surveyed'. *International Review of Sociology* 15 (1): 173–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03906700500038611>.
- Kapanadze, Z. 2026. 'Oligarchs and Regional Political Machines: Patronage and Elections in the Republic of Georgia'. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2026.2613862>
- Levitsky S. and L.A. Way. 'Linkage, Leverage, and Democratization in the Americas'. In: *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Problems of International Politics. Cambridge University Press; 2010:130-180.



- Limaj, E. et al. 2024. 'The Trauma of War: Implications for Future Generations in Ukraine. Comparison with the Eastern European Countries That Were at War at the End of the 20th Century.' *International Journal of Environmental Studies* 81(1): 111–24
- Lipset, S.M. 1959. 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy.' *American Political Science Review* 53(1): 69–105.
- Lutterjohann, N. 2023. 'The depth of the deadlock? Underlying themes in the Georgian-Abkhaz and Moldovan-Transnistrian Post-Soviet conflicts'. *National Identities*, 25(1): 53–74.
- Markevych, M. and M. Marinkov. 2024. *Corruption and Economic Growth in Moldova: A Reexamination*. IMF Selected Issues Papers.
- Mitchell, L.A. 2006. 'Democracy in Georgia Since the Rose Revolution'. *Orbis*, 50(4): 669-676.
- Munck, G.L., and J. Verkuilen. 2002. 'Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy. Evaluating Alternative Indices'. *Comparative Political Studies* 35 (1): 5–34.
- Munck, G.L. 2018. 'Modernization Theory as a Case of Failed Knowledge Production'. *Annals of Comparative Democratization* 16(3): 37-41.
- Nikolayenko, O. 2025. 'Belarus – Civil Resistance and State Repression in an Autocracy'. In: Crăciun, C., Rammelt, H.P. (eds) *Power and Protest in Central and Eastern Europe*. Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Paturyan, Y.J. 2021. 'Armenian Civil Society', in *Armenia's Velvet Revolution: Authoritarian Decline and Civil Resistance in a Multipolar World*, by L. Broers and A. Ohanyan, London: I.B. Tauris.
- Przeworski, A. and F. Limongi. 1997. 'Modernization. Theories and Facts'. *World Politics* 49(2): 155-183.
- Procházka, D. and L. Cabada. 2020. 'Exploring the "Grey Zone": The theory and reality of hybrid regimes" in post-communist countries. *Comparative Politics*, 13(1): 4-22.
- Rabinovych, M. 2024. 'EU-Ukraine "deep" trade agenda: the effectiveness and impact perspectives'. *International Politics* 61: 1078-1096.
- Ross, M.L., 2015. 'What have we learned about the resource curse?'. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18(1): 239-259.
- Rød, E.G., C.H. Knutsen, and H. Hegre. 2020. 'The determinants of democracy: a sensitivity analysis'. *Public Choice* 185: 87–111.
- Sato, Y. and M. Wahman. 2019. 'Elite coordination and popular protest: the joint effect on democratic change'. *Democratization*, 26(8): 1419–1438.
- Tyushka, A. 2026. 'Values, wallets, and walls: Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the EU's shifting democracy promotion and protection relationalities in its Eastern neighbourhood.' *European Politics and Society*, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2026.2623162>
- Valiyev, A. 2011. 'Social Capital in Azerbaijan: Does It Help to Build Democracy?', *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 31.
- Way, L.A. 2020. 'How a Dictator Became Vulnerable', *Journal of Democracy* 31(4): 17–27.
- Zolyan, Mikayel. 2026. 'Russia Won't Give Up Its Influence in Armenia Without a Fight.' *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. Washington D.C.



**REDEMOS: REconfiguring EU DEMOcracy Support.
Towards a sustained demos in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood**

REDEMOS- 101061738
HORIZON-CL2-2021-DEMOCRACY-01-04

Dr Mădălina Dobrescu, NTNU
info@redemos.eu

 redemos.eu  [@REDEMOS_eu](https://twitter.com/REDEMOS_eu)  [REDEMOS Horizon Europe Project](https://www.linkedin.com/company/redemos/)