

## Idiosyncrasies and ideologies in the evolution of EU relations with eastern partnership states

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### Abstract

*The Eastern Partnership as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy aims to include states' economic, cultural, and political cooperation. Over a decade, the ambitious objectives of the European Union's Eastern Partnership policies have brought sizeable benefits. Still, the program is not one of the EU's strategic successes, as its founding fathers claim. This research analyses each state of the Eastern Partnership to determine the evolution of their relations with the European Union. As the presence of idiosyncrasies demonstrates the need for a psychological approach to foreign policy decision-making, through a practical analysis, we have sought to identify discursive patterns that would mark the presence of certain types of idiosyncrasies and investigate their association with the undertaken decisions. At the same time, the findings provide empirical arguments regarding the importance of idiosyncrasies in decision-making and political outcomes between six countries from the Eastern Partnership and EU. It is by no means an exhaustive analysis but rather an attempt to outline some of the key issues which have been on the agenda of the EaP over the past decade.*

**Keywords:** leadership, Eastern Partnership, idiosyncrasies, cooperation

### Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) established by the European Union and the six Eastern partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are the most developed political initiative which is associated with a set of activities offering soft cooperation mechanisms, common values, and rules, mutual interests, and commitments, as well as shared ownership and responsibility. This idea combines political and diplomatic instruments, cultural and education, economic and

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financial, and stability in Eastern Europe's neighbouring states. According to Verheugen (2015, p. 23), following the end of the Cold War, the perception concerning the EU's enlargement was very diverse. Historians who study the European Community's growth show that this particular side of European policy has often triggered intense arguments at a European and interstate level (Ciot, 2015, p. 24). According to the European Commission (2009), the European Union is founded on a set of shared values and principles and on the premise that any European state that respects them may apply to become a member. Enlargement is, therefore, a key transformational force, inspiring democratic change, and economic liberalization among those who wish to join. It is at the heart of the EU's soft power to extend the zone of peace, stability, and prosperity on the continent. The appeal of the EU has been instrumental in the peaceful democratic transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, and it remains the driving force for the reforms in the Western Balkans and in Turkey. It's the EU's vital interest to export stability into the close neighbourhood rather than instability from there. After five rounds of enlargement, the original European Economic Community has grown from Six to Twenty-Eight members (before Brexit, now twenty-seven). Still, the process has not yet come to an end, as the goal of strategic importance for the European Union regarding reinforcing relationships with neighbouring border states continues until today.

From the perspective of the strategic interest for the Eastern Neighbourhood, the European Union proposed the Eastern Partnership (EAP) as a particular framework for cooperation with six partner states from Eastern Europe and South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Launched at the Summit from Prague on 7 May 2009, the Eastern Partnership is a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, aiming to expand prosperity and security in the EU's eastern neighbourhood standard set of values and gradual policy convergence.

Today, after 12 years, the future of Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a topical issue not only on the European Union political agenda and partner countries but also for representatives of civil society and think tanks, considering new political realities at regional and international level. To understand the transformations that are taking place at the international level and in the Eastern Partnership agenda, we need to understand the leaders' personalities and the factors that underlie the entire decision-making process. The present article reflects the relation between six Eastern Partnership states and the EU. In particular, the paper contains a brief review of the main types of idiosyncrasies acting in the decision-making process: cognitive idiosyncrasies, idiosyncrasies of social perception, motivational and emotional idiosyncrasies, and determine idiosyncrasies with related influence on the relations between the six Eastern Partnership countries.

This article is based on qualitative research. The investigated study period is 2019-2021, related to the tenth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership and future visions. It uses the poliheuristic theory as a basis, the methods of research are

discourse analysis and document analysis, and the interpretation of the data is qualitative. Through discourse analysis (political speeches, public speeches, media representations and interviews conducted during 2019-2021 and previously researches), we identified the main types of idiosyncrasies present in decision-making: cognitive idiosyncrasies, idiosyncrasies of social perception, motivational and emotional idiosyncrasies. We identified two types of idiosyncrasies (cognitive and motivational) in the political discourses with a related influence on the negotiation and decision-making process. We have sought to identify discursive patterns that would mark the presence of certain types of idiosyncrasies and investigate the association of their presence with the decisions undertaken. This research has started from the questions related to the identification of the specific idiosyncrasies that influence the decision-making process of six countries from the Eastern Partnership regarding the European path.

The goal and specific objectives determined the logical structure of the paper. The first section is dedicated to the literature review on Eastern Partnership and methodology of research used in the article. The second section focuses on the European Union's relationship with its neighbours. On the one hand, the closer cooperation between the European Union and its Eastern European partners is crucial for the European Union's external relations. On the other hand, the partner countries' economic and social development influence the economies in the European Union. Next section is a practical incursion in the theory of idiosyncrasies looking for the identification of the main types that impact the relations between states from Eastern Partnership and the EU. Data analysis is presented in the following section and the final remarks are in the conclusions.

## **1. The general framework for the development of the Eastern Partnership**

The European Union's (EU's) relationship with Eastern Europe and the Caucasus is turning. As Russia's increasingly assertive tactics have chipped away at the ties that bind the six Eastern Partnership countries to the European Union, we can notice that the geopolitical will of the new leaders differs from state to state and from one mechanism to another. Regarding the European mechanism, although the multilateral Eastern Partnership structure offered from the beginning an inclusive framework involving all six partner countries, we discuss bilateral criteria of geopolitical negotiation today - bilateral relations based on differentiation and the new standards of bilateral relations between the EU and the six countries on the eastern borders of the Union based on their differential policy.

Three countries, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have signed Association Agreements while still grappling with multiple geopolitical protracted conflicts within their territories. In recent years all these three states have become informal leaders of the Eastern Partnership by seeking more active cooperation with the European Union and advocates expanding its activities. Nevertheless, the further

success of the Eastern Partnership will depend on whether the EU succeeds in developing a practical approach that meets all partner countries' needs, expectations, and interests. Europe can be both geopolitical and committed to reforms—but to combine these two strands effectively, the EU must be more strategic and must deliver more tangible results (Youngs and Pishchikova, 2013).

On the other hand, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus have opted for a looser relationship within the framework of the multilateral Eastern Partnership. Focusing less on the technical implementation of EU standards and more on underlying political reform, geostrategically, the launch of the Eastern Partnership program for those states means the expanding the sphere of influence of the European Union in the areas under the persistent power of Russia. Still, the reforms in the three association countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus) continue to be slow and often stalled by vested interests. Being at the crossroads, these three states remain stuck in their historical ambitions intertwined with geopolitical and geostrategic visions of the new leadership. There are still plenty of challenges in these partner countries, and Russia's continuing pressure and propaganda war make it even more evident. Between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, within the strong influence of Iran, Russia, and Turkey, with increasing investments from China and closer neighbours, the European Union's strategy towards the Caucasus, a strategic region for European Union foreign policy, remains poorly developed. Armenia and Azerbaijan have just fought a war over Nagorno-Karabakh, while Belarus faces a sustained popular uprising against its autocratic leader. Moreover, compared with other members of the Eastern Partnership, Belarus appears to be at the back of the line in terms of progress.

Following Turkey's support for Azerbaijan in the recent war over Nagorno-Karabakh, it cannot be said about a reconciliation of diplomatic relations between Caucasian countries (Turkey-Armenia), and that is unlikely to change anytime soon. Especially at the time when the new American president Joe Biden declared formal recognition of the Armenian genocide<sup>1</sup>.

For now, the United States' new vision opens a rift between the new U.S. administration and Turkey with geostrategic, geoeconomics, and geopolitical influence in the zone. Turkey was always perceived as an indispensable Middle Eastern and Eurasian ally by the U.S. leadership and most of the intellectual community in Washington. Still, we can assume that it will remain the same in the future (Zarifan, 2013, p. 93). Beyond the historical, cultural, and religious implications, the historiography of the Armenian genocide and this era has grown vastly more sophisticated, mainly due to the similarities between the social and moral

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<sup>1</sup> The White House (2021), Briefing room: Statement by President Joe Biden on Armenian Remembrance Day (retrieved from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/24/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-armenian-remembrance-day/>).

values of the three entities (E.U., USA, and the Caucasus). If anyone can point a way forward, perhaps it can reconsolidate European values in this area.

The European Union acts as an honest broker for multilateral dialogue in the region and supports the region's development (Blidaru, 2020, p. 3). Flexibility and differentiation are insufficient to deal with the complex relations in the East. In this context, the European Union strategy is segmentation, understood as a division into reliable segments for cooperation, particularly at a strategic level. A multilateral track, that engages the entire East based on different cultural values and assumptions among the partner countries (Blidaru, 2020, p. 4).

In theory, the greater involvement of the European Union in its neighbourhood area can be classified as a positive and welcomed initiative because of its beneficial effects on the Union and its partners. Nevertheless, the reality surrounding the actual actions of the European Union, primarily through the European Neighbourhood Policy, is closely linked to the long history of ideological aspects relating to the old continent and the growing role of cultural values. These values regain their status and weight among European citizens.

The emergence of the European Union Eastern Partnership initiative was primarily determined by the fundamental changes in European Union external relations. Today, the Eastern Partnership is an international mechanism for consolidating shared cultural values from the western and eastern parts of the European Union - "worth" which requires mutual recognition and a legal mechanism for changing the leadership view on the European path (Korosteleva, 2017, p. 328).

In concordance with the European values, the EU has confirmed its solidarity with its partners in the Eastern Neighbourhood. As part of its global response to the coronavirus outbreak, the European Commission is standing by its Eastern partners. It has mobilized an emergency support package of almost €1.11 billion for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. Tailor-made COVID-19 response packages using a mix of existing funds and new funds are being mobilized in each of the six partner countries (European Commission, 2021). In the same vein, we must mention that before the pandemic crisis, the Eastern Partnership states benefited from financial and socio-cultural support through the numerous programs developed at the European Union level. Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), The European Interconnection Mechanism, Justice, Europe for Citizens are just a few of them. Romania as a member state has played a pivotal role in accessing such programs for the Eastern Partnership states, as these programs have often taken the form of cross-border programs between Romania-Moldova or Romania-Ukraine. This paper presents Romania as a key player in the relationship between the EU and the Eastern Partnership states, because the 10th anniversary of the EAP coincided with the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and because Romania is one of the EU states with the closest collaboration relations with the respective states.

At the regional level, the European Union supported the health sectors and the most vulnerable groups in society. As crisis management opportunities differ from region to region, creating more significant challenges for countries that are lacking financial liquidity, the European Union external response was to develop "TEAM EUROPE" and work closely with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and financing institutions from the EU Member States to provide individual financial support to each EaP's partner countries. Armenia received over €96 million for its immediate needs, Azerbaijan over €31 million, Belarus €74 million, Georgia over €183 million, Republic of Moldova almost €128 million, and Ukraine over €202 million (European Commission, 2021). According to Péter Stepper, the pandemic crisis affected global markets very similarly to the 2008 financial crisis. Still, geopolitically, COVID-19 will not change anything in the regions, but it can facilitate existing processes in every single EaP country. Therefore, the EU shall be extremely anxious to maintain good relations and remain a solid and credible partner of the eastern neighbour by supporting their economic recovery (Stepper, 2020).

Strengthening the Eastern Partnership and preserving an unwavering and long-term EU engagement in the Eastern neighbourhood are durable interests promoted by Romania as an EU member state and an important actor in the Eastern Neighbourhood policy. By ensuring the rotating presidency of the EU Council during the first half of 2019, Romania has sought to promote the Eastern Partnership as the most important platform for cooperation between the European Union and its Eastern partners to increase the visibility and benefits of the Eastern Partnership. Romanian Presidency convened a series of events dedicated to promoting tangible advancement in the sectoral cooperation to implement EaP's 2020 Agenda priority goals and mark the 10th anniversary of Eastern Partnership in the most suitable manner. Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meetings took place in the following domains of cooperation: Digital Economy (Bucharest, 28 February 2019), endorsing a declaration, which commits the six eastern partners to a roadmap on reaching a Regional Roaming Agreement among them and with the EU; Energy (Bucharest, 2 April 2019) discussion energy efficiency and energy interconnector projects; Transportation (Luxembourg, 6 June 2019), endorsing a Joint Declaration on expanding TEN-T networks and road safety. The Romanian presidency also organized the 6th Eastern Partnership Business Forum (Bucharest, 25 June 2019) and participated at the Eastern Partnership Youth Forum (Vilnius, 18-20 June 2019). In addition to the sectoral activities, the Romanian presidency took part in the anniversary events held in Brussels on 13-14 May 2019, jointly organized by the EEAS and the European Commission as high-level meetings: the annual Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers Meeting (13 May) and a High-level Conference (14 May). On this backdrop, a structured consultation process on the future of Eastern Partnership beyond 2020 was successfully launched (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Romania's position on the future of the Eastern Partnership after 2020 takes into account as crucial elements the need to ensure the continued long-term

participation of the European Union in the Eastern Neighbourhood countries; strengthening the Eastern Partnership as an initiative that provides stability, security, prosperity and sustainability in the region; the need to formulate a coherent and comprehensive strategy for the Eastern Partnership after 2020, which would include all relevant aspects: political, sectoral cooperation, security, strategic finance, and communications.

As the theoretical framework is based on the definition of the European Union as a normative power in the international arena, in the context of the Eastern Partnership, besides the global mechanism, we see the partner states' differences regarding their assumption of this normative power. At the time when we have conditions that aspire to a functioning internal market of the European Union, states such as Armenia, Belarus that together with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia formed the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), intend to foster closer economic cooperation among member states for the well-being of the people of the region. Despite numerous attempts and initiatives, the EEU's actions have hardly achieved any significant success because most of its goals have either been declarative or politically motivated and not taken seriously. The Russian domination, influence, control, and pressure may also be reasons for the lack of progress and success. Long, bitter historical memories and distrust among the member states also made the integration process difficult. Today the integration in the former USSR region seems to be in trouble. It may fail because of Russia's continuous conflict with Ukraine and distrust among the member states (Golam and Monowar, 2018, p. 163).

So far, the countries on the eastern borders of the Union have a relative opportunity to act more assertively in the consolidation of the European path through the Eastern Partnership project or to expect to achieve maximum benefits from Russia and EEU. Among the two potential directions that we have discussed and predicted, the first one seems to be more realistic considering the current situation of the EEU, the conditions in Russia, Russia's position in the region, and global involvement.

## **2. European Union and Eastern Partnership: a general overview**

In the last decade, there has been a major eastward shift in global economic power of unprecedented nature (Muravska and Berlin, 2016, p. 23): globalization – as the European Union enlargement requires a considerable increase in transnational and cross-border cooperation. It demands a collaborative network to operate as a shared resource in identifying common issues and priorities. Now that the European Union is understood as considering interdependent networks, governments must be able to manage growing global problems through differences and similitudes between cultural values of all member states. They must define initiatives and projects capable of responding to transformations in the international system and must develop instruments to facilitate multilateral action and enlarge the European

Union (Pop, 2015, pp. 132-133). In the twenty-first century, societies with different and complex cultural identities and beliefs are closely interacting. Understanding the challenges is essential and raises the importance of understanding the European cultural values and what they represent for the Eastern Partnership state members.

The European Union's relationship with its neighborhood is based on soft power principles, covering the overall sphere of European Union's and partner countries' interests. Closer cooperation between the European Union and its Eastern European partners is crucial for the European Union's external relations; as the European Union has expanded, these countries have become more immediate neighbours. Their economic and social development influence the economies in the European Union. Structural policy weaknesses and different socio-economic realities in the Eastern Partnership countries notwithstanding, the significant challenge for the successful implementation of the Eastern Partnership comes from the Russian external policy related to its geopolitical role in its shared neighbourhood European Union (Muravska and Berlin, 2016, pp. 24-25).

The essence of the Eastern Partnership since its launch in 2009 has been the transfer and implementation of specific values, norms, and institutions as several or most of these issues have domestic and historical roots, but the need for the European Union to design a specific approach to its Eastern neighbours was first expressed in the discussions leading to the adoption of the EaP in March 2004 (Crombois, 2019, p.90). Russian anxiety about losing ground to Western influence in the post-Soviet space has a long historical tradition and is unlikely to go away in the foreseeable future (Sundbon and Kragm, 2018, p. 7). Seeing itself in emerging competition with the European Union in the common neighbourhood, neither the Russian Government nor the political class shows no interest in making the Eastern Partnership, as it is presently formulated, more effective and does not expect to see any direct benefits flow from this policy framework of the European Union. They rather expect and remind the Europeans not to cross the geopolitical and ideological red lines Moscow has laid down.

From Slavism through pan-Slavism and orthodox to communism, the ideological aspects of the states from the Eastern European part and the Caucasus states that was part of the prominent Russian Empire and after the Soviet Union bloc were dictated by the realization of the large scale Russian political scheme. This situation has endured since at least the turn of the century but became more urgent in the last decade. The reasons for this abound. One is the passive inertia that long ago took hold in post-Soviet regimes, and the other one is the local political elites' active resistance to change that has often been strong. Over the last dozen or so years, radical changes have taken place in many countries neighbouring the European Union.

The six Eastern Partnership member states are not an exception. From a sociological perspective, we can say that their ideological aspirations have changed with the leadership and political landscape. We can even see an easy transition from imperial ideology or unilateral perception to soft power in some states. This is

primarily due to European policy in recent years, an important EU policy representing a soft power instrument striving to bring democracy, stability, and prosperity to the partner countries.

The European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood is increasingly the venue for a tug-of-war for influence between the West – most notably the EU, NATO, and the US – and the Russian Federation. The clash between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 and Russia and Ukraine in March 2014 was only a symptom, albeit a significant one of this broader strategic jostling for position in and around the region. This phenomenon is pronounced in relation to the South Caucasus, a historical region that links the Caspian Basin to the Black Sea, which lies at the juncture between the greater Middle East, Turkey, Iran, and Russia and a vital crossroads from Central Asia to Europe, a bridgehead to control and pressure Iran, an alternative oil and gas transit route to European and global markets which avoids Russia, and a vital outpost for the war against terrorism (Akçokoca *et al.*, 2009, p. 11). Conflict within and between the countries of and neighbouring the South Caucasus have divided the region and impeded its social, political, and economic development and integration over the past two decades. This has contributed to a complex sphere of influence and power, yet volatile and constantly shifting, power configuration involving regional players like Turkey and Iran and global ones such as the European Union, the United States, Russia, and China (Ibid.).

There is no doubt that the Russia–Ukraine crisis broke out in March 2014 following the Euromaidan protests of the previous autumn, determining the Eastern European actors to adopt a more geopolitical and geostrategic approach. The positions of various member states make this clear. Moreover, the Ukrainian crisis and the subsequent annexation of Crimea had an essential effect on how Russian policy on the shared neighbourhood and ‘rolling back’ Russia's influence is understood.

The unilateral annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol was anything but a geopolitical intention for Russia. Since the Euromaidan protests, it has been the Kremlin's objective to draw Ukraine away from Western influence. The armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine fuelled by the high decision-making powers continues to take a high toll on civilians, national and international order. The build up of tens of thousands of Russian troops near the border and a recent uptick in fighting between pro-Moscow separatists and Ukrainian forces in Eastern Ukraine led Western countries to voice alarm and take concrete actions. In a broader context of international geopolitical and geostrategic events as a reprimand of Russian repressive actions in Ukraine, Romania's expulsion of a Russian official follows days after Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Bulgaria adopted similar measures.

But Russia's actions have instead contributed to pushing the country even further away from its sphere of influence and straining relations with two other states: Moldova and Georgia (Crombois, 2019). Russia's intentions in Ukraine have shown that the geopolitical factor in international relations has strengthened. Still,

the ideological approach built over time in the six former communist states has begun to crumble, especially in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, which ambivalently perceive the realization of the EU's soft power (Piskorska, 2018, pp. 12-13). Or make them opted for a looser relationship within the framework of the multilateral Eastern Partnership and turn, again, toward Russia (the case of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus). According to Hilz *et al.* (2020, p. 1) the enlargement of the European Union has brought new dimensions to the forefront of European foreign policy and confronted European decision-makers with an unprecedented challenge. A series of complex balances had to resolve to overcome the substantive disparities in foreign policy visions and the diverse strategic culture of the enlarged community. Furthermore, the fall of communism and the European Union membership of Central and East European countries removed significant barriers for political dialogue with former Soviet republics. And, over the decade, the Eastern Neighbourhood has assumed growing geopolitical and geostrategic importance and has become a contested sphere of influence between Russia and the West.

### **3. Idiosyncrasies in the European Union's path**

If we look at the international arena, using the poliheuristic theory, it defines the main challenges and current opportunities for a more robust multilateral dialogue under the Eastern Partnership with a view of the recent geopolitical and geostrategic landscape changes in the six East European states. The leaders' decisions are influenced by many factors. The psychological elements influence foreign policy decision-making (Ciot, 2016, p. 44). In this chapter, we will analyse each member state of the Eastern Partnership to determine the evolution of their relations with the European Union, identify the types of idiosyncrasies that influence the decision-making process in each partner state and foresee the impact that Eastern Partnership states' behaviour will have on this new International System. We will use the poliheuristic theory introduced by Alex Mintz in 2010, developed by Milton Friedman and Herbert Simon later. The poliheuristic theory is an analytic procedure that can be applied to all levels of analysis in foreign policy decision-making: the leader, the group, and the coalition. As a bridge between rational and cognitive decision models, the poliheuristic theory is uniquely positioned to contribute to progress in the study of world politics (Mintz *et al.*, 2010).

It is said that the role of leadership increases when issues involve high-risk situations and decreases in a low-risk situation. The poliheuristic theory explained how domestic politics, leaders' idiosyncrasies, ideologies, and perceptions played their part in Eastern Partnership countries' foreign policy decision-making and EU relations. Moreover, the role of European cultural values and the assumption of the European path by the partner states from the Eastern Neighborhood and South and Central Caucasus has changed with the change of geostrategic and geopolitical situation at both international and regional levels.

Although part of the EU's political culture is its conviction on the rightfulness of its actions and the ability to impose its objectives onto other players, it has not so far found its implementation in all countries of the Eastern Partnership. The six countries of the Eastern Partnership were effectively divided into smaller groups of associated states (Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova), members of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (Belarus and Armenia), and Azerbaijan pursuing its path of unique relations with the European Union (and Russia as well). This multispeed character of the Eastern Partnership and principle of differentiation is due to each country's internal political landscape. Still, we can see that the Eastern leadership is currently changing, emphasizing the European path (Havlicek, 2018, p. 8).

Idiosyncrasies bring into the foreign policy decision-making process the personal mixture of internal and external factors that may influence an action. By examining the official discourses of the Eastern Partnership states' representants, the information presented in the mass-media and previous studies, in the period 2019-2021, we briefly analyzed the main types of idiosyncrasies acting in decision-making: cognitive idiosyncrasies, idiosyncrasies of social perception, motivational and emotional idiosyncrasies and identified two types of idiosyncrasies (cognitive and motivational) with related influence on the negotiation and decision-making process. We have proposed a synthetic form for each of the two types of idiosyncrasies identified to provide an overview:

Cognitive idiosyncrasies are systematic deviations from normative models that prescribe rational behavior, as articulated in game theory and other normative principles (Ciot, 2018, p. 6). When talking about leadership style in the decision-making process, it is essential to keep in mind that leadership, in general, plays a significant role in formulating foreign policy. We have identified that the first three countries in Eastern Neighborhood can be described as countries that prescribe rational behavior and fall into the typology of cognitive idiosyncrasy. According to Ciot (2018, p. 7), we can find different cognitive idiosyncrasies in the decision-making process. On the one hand, based on the prospective theory and the cybernetic model, cognitive idiosyncrasies could be classified as idiosyncrasies of framing, anchoring, availability, and evaluation. On the other hand, the information processing theory offers another three types of idiosyncrasies: utility, perceptual frames, and perception of the task. In the table below, we summarize the cognitive idiosyncrasies that occur during the official speeches of the leaders from Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia.

**Table 1. The Cognitive idiosyncrasies in the three Eastern Partnership countries (Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia)**

Theory	Example
	<p data-bbox="522 369 851 396">Shaping a positive framework:</p> <p data-bbox="522 429 1121 1033">“When I said I want to become the president of European integration, I was thinking about the normality that citizens yearn for. Citizens in Moldova want to live in a liberal state where nobody is persecuted because of their political beliefs, where nobody loses their job because they refuse to betray their values and campaign for a politician they do not support, where businesspeople are neither harassed nor fleeced by state institutions. We all want to live in a country where mayors are not politically instrumentalized and punished by the government by withholding financial support for their municipalities. Normality also implies a decent income for citizens to lead dignified lives and enjoy decent wages and pensions. We all want state institutions that serve citizens rather than take their money in the interest of corrupt groups, precipitating crisis after crisis. I had in mind this when I spoke about wanting to be the president of European integration.” (Deutsche Welle: <i>Moldova's Maia Sandu: 'I want to be the president of European, 30 December 2020</i>)<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p data-bbox="522 1075 1121 1252">“The European Union is our key partner in restoring sovereignty and territorial integrity and supporting reforms and there is a progress in Ukraine's integration into the European Union.” (<i>Interview of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the Slovak economic media outlet Hospodárske noviny, 23 September 2020</i>).</p> <p data-bbox="522 1294 1121 1557">“Our ambition and our perspectives are apparent and are shared by the whole population. We are getting closer to the EU, and today the challenge is to keep that going, to do it in all ways possible. It's not only legislation. It means entry into all European programs where we can be part of Europe, part of those sectors of Europe (education, culture, transport, etc.).” (<i>Georgian President Salomé Zourabichvili: Georgia must continue 'rapprochement' with EU, France 24, 2 October 2019</i>).</p>

<sup>2</sup> Deutsche Welle (2020), retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/en/moldovas-maia-sandu-i-want-to-be-the-president-of-european-integration/a-56089364>.

Prospective theory and the cybernetic model	Anchoring/ Availability	<p>It is present in the form of the perseverance of achieving the objectives assumed and alignment to the EU norms:</p> <p>“Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova have publicly stated that they aim to become EU members and have signed association agreements with the bloc. On 17 May 2021, during a foreign minister meeting from these three countries in Kyiv, the Associated Trio was officially created. According to the Ukrainian prime minister, the associated trio has formalized their higher EU ambition. This trio is the message that there is no alternative to European integration for our three partner countries. There is also no alternative for Europe because they must perceive these three countries as a serious project to ensure peace and prosperity in Europe” (<i>Dmytro Kuleba on Twitter, 2021</i>).</p>
Information processing theory	Utility	<p>It appears when the benefits are seen by both sides, Eastern Partnership countries, and the EU:</p> <p>“Ukraine wants full integration into the EU. We are a European country, and we can give a lot to Europe working together. A lot on the European continent depends on the situation in Ukraine, so it would be logical if Ukraine became a full member of the European Union. We want to get a clear membership perspective for Ukraine from the EU. It is important for Ukrainians that the European Union recognizes and supports our aspirations.” (<i>Interview of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the Slovak economic media outlet Hospodárske noviny, 23 September 2020</i>)</p> <p>On 19 April, Georgia's political leaders signed a major political agreement following weeks of mediation by the European Union. "We, the President of Georgia and the President of the European Council, want to express our deep satisfaction in seeing this deal agreed and signed by the ruling and opposition parties. This agreement puts an end to a crisis that could have disrupted the democratic advancement achieved over the past decades and weakened Georgia's progress along its European path. Through dialogue, leadership and compromise, Georgian political leaders put differences aside for the greater good of the country. This was done in a truly European spirit reviving Georgia's image as a democratic anchor in the region. The political crisis is over, constructive political engagement needs to be</p>

sustained. We call on each and every one to live up to their commitments. This agreement is a win for Georgia, its people and the European Union." (The President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel Georgia's future is European, Euronews-19 May 2021<sup>3</sup>)

"Moldova would love to join the European Union. There is a high consensus behind that." (Moldova's foreign minister, Nicu Popescu: We want to move as quickly as possible on EU accession, By Alexandra Brzozowski, Euroactiv, 17 July 2019).

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Perceptual frames

According to Ciot (2018, p. 12), perceptual frameworks are divided into three categories: relationships, emotional-intellectual and compromise-win. Each of these characterizes the relation of three countries from the Eastern Partnership and EU. Moreover, the leaders are demonstrating flexibility, partnership orientation, and professionalism.

Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia seem to be engaged in their success and actively seek advanced integration. Against the background of its deep structural problems stemming from its regimes and ruling elites and complicated domestic transformations into fully-fledged liberal democracies, along with Georgia and Moldova, Ukraine has become an informal leader of the Eastern Partnership. For the Ukrainian state, the Eastern Partnership Acord is divided into two periods: the pre-Euromaidan period and the post-Euromaidan period, with the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union and the election of the new European leadership (Bazhenova and Stepniewski, 2020, p. 115). According to Volodymyr Zelensky, the President of Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership is helpful for Ukraine if it leads the Ukrainian state closer to membership in the European Union and the European initiative to build the EU community with partners who share European values and principle will continue. The newly elected president Maia Sandu who declared for the European development vector, provided certain optimism for Moldova and its foreign partners. And finally, Georgia, affirms Havlicek (2018, p.8) is one of the beneficiaries and one of the leaders of the Eastern Partnership showcases more ambition and puts excellent effort

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<sup>3</sup> retrieved from <https://www.euronews.com/2021/05/19/georgia-s-future-is-european-view>

	towards its European integration, even with its problems with the rule of law and limited freedom of media.
Perception of task	Similar perceptions on the future objectives (common perceptions of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia regarding the future of Eastern Partnership and European path). “On 17 May 2021, during a foreign minister meeting from these three countries in Kyiv, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia created the Associated Trio. The Ukrainian prime minister mentioned that the associated trio had formalized their higher EU ambition. This trio is the message that there is no alternative to European integration for our three partner countries.” (Dmytro Kuleba on Twitter, 2021)

Source: Authors’ representation

The motivational idiosyncrasies arise from the activation of specific needs and goals. According to the same author (Ciot, 2018, p. 9), here we can talk about a change in the goals that influence reasoning, behavior, and results and set four motivational goals: self-realization, closure, coherence, cooperation, and responsibility, each of them characterized by a different type of idiosyncrasies. Idiosyncrasies as egocentrism and self-serving, bittersweet effect, need for closure, future interactions, social value orientation, common guidelines, and responsibility compose the motivational idiosyncrasies scale. Table no 2 presents a synthesis of the motivational idiosyncrasies identified by the authors in the official discourses of three other leaders from the Eastern Partnership countries: Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.

**Table 2. The motivational idiosyncrasies in the three Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia)**

Nature of motivational idiosyncrasies	Example
Self-realization	Egocentrism and self-serving The three other partner countries have their limitations in relations with the European Union given by their (geo) political choices (Havlicek, 2018, p. 8). Belarus and Azerbaijan right now appear to have severe issues with democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, or civil society under pressure from the state authorities. Also, Belarus's leadership seems to have stagnated in its principles and ideologies, and the desire of the entire people weighs less than the political pride and regulations of the old regime. The Ukrainian

president affirmed that such a crisis has an impact not only on the countries neighboring with Belarus. The events there already have consequences for Europe (Hospodárske noviny, 2020). But president Lukashenko continues to dismiss criticism from the West and countries in the shared neighborhood and continues to make his dictatorial policy according to his last public intervention (*Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko: a tirade against what he described as "ill-wishers."* CNBC, 2021). The frozen conflict developed during many years in these countries makes unrealistic any endeavor to promote European integration and European cultural values.

According to researcher Hasmik Grigoryan (2020, pp. 140-141), the Eastern Partnership became strategically crucial for Armenia as it gave a chance for alternatives and diversification of its partners in the West. Yet, due to deviations from the democratic path, Armenian authorities, at times, also backed off on co-operation. The 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia showed there is a desire in the country for democracy. Despite these changes, Armenia's foreign policy has not changed, making it challenging to observe tangible results in the advancement of the EU-Armenian relations; currently, the country is going through turbulent post-revolutionary developments and transition of power to the new government.

Based on all of this, some EU member states feel tired of the complicated situation in Eastern Europe, including the Russian aggression in the shared neighborhood and troublesome domestic problems in most partner countries. Therefore, the East European states are between explicitly recognizing the European perspective and recognizing specific Russian interests in Eastern Europe. But most importantly, the Eastern Partnership states are at the crossroads between defining their European path and geopolitical and geostrategic instability.

Closure, consistency, and balance	Coherence and equilibrium	This idiosyncratic need is manifested in the leadership of all three countries, but the need for closure is not clearly presented and defined. Moreover, we cannot observe a viable coherence
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and equilibrium between EU and these three countries.

Belarus and Armenia have joined the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. Starting from 2011, President Lukashenko declared that he has no interest in linking the country closer to the European Union. However, the emerging civil society in Belarus has a different view (Wieck and Malerius, 2011, p. 5).

The latest events (the divert of flight and the arrest of Belarusian journalists) and the introduction of new European sanctions support the decisions of the Minsk leader. At the same time, Azerbaijan, rich in fossil fuels, seeks to maintain equal distance from Russia and the US while enhancing its relations with Turkey.

Cooperation	Future interactions	<p>The engagement of the EU in terms of supporting the countries from the European Eastern Partnership was obvious during the COVID-19 crisis with the mobilization of emergency support packages for all six countries. Discussing the second group of countries from the Eastern Partnership, Armenia received over €96 million to support immediate and short-term need, Azerbaijan over €31 million and Belarus over €74 million also to support immediate and short-term needs. However, besides current economic implications, we cannot discuss future concrete actions, social value orientation, or the same common guidelines.</p> <p>According to research developed by the Polish Institute of International Affairs from the Belarusian perspective, the Eastern Partnership has not proved to be a tool for extending multilateral cooperation between countries covered by this initiative. Moreover, this format does not have any added value for the Belarusian authorities and does not contribute to developing their relations with the EU. Because of its dependence on Russia in the field of security and economy, a challenge for Armenia is to expand its collaboration with the EU so that it does not deteriorate its relations with Russia. And finally, Azerbaijan is not interested in deepening the cooperation with the EU because it does not opt to join regional integration projects (including the EEU). Collaboration with the EU</p>
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would not strengthen Azerbaijan in the event of Russian aggression. From its perspective, the EU has insufficient hard-security capabilities and cannot get involved in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. (The Polish Institute of International Affairs: The Eastern Partnership Vision after 2020, 2019, p. 24-28).

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*Source:* Authors' representation

#### **4. Discussions and findings**

The EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, launched in 2009, signalled the commitment of the governments of the six Eastern European partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine) to respect the values of democracy and human rights and to align with EU standards of good governance and the rule of law. From the beginning of the Eastern Partnership initiative, the respective national governments in the Eastern Partnership countries expressed apparent differences in aspirations concerning closer integration with the EU. While some aspired to membership, others saw a turn to the west as a challenge to long-lasting ties with Russia, and others wanted to pursue a more multipolar approach (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2016). Using the qualitative research method, discourse analysis as a method of data analysis (political speeches, public speeches, media representations and interviews) and the interpretation method as interpretive research, this paper has sought to identify discursive patterns that would mark the presence of certain types of idiosyncrasies and investigate the association of their presence with the decisions undertaken. Also, through discourse analysis, we have sought to observe the six-countries perception regarding the future of the Eastern Partnership and European aspiration.

By examining the discourses of the leadership from the Eastern Partnership countries, we have drawn some conclusions related to the influence of the idiosyncrasies on the negotiation and decision-making process and their European path's aspiration. Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova have publicly stated that they aim to become EU members and have signed association agreements with the bloc. On 17 May 2021, during a foreign minister meeting from these three countries in Kyiv, the Associated Trio was officially created. According to the Ukrainian prime minister, the associated trio has formalized their higher EU ambition. This trio is the message that there is no alternative to European integration for our three partner countries. There is also no alternative for Europe because they must perceive these three countries as a serious project to ensure peace and prosperity in Europe (Dmytro Kuleba on Twitter, 2021). Cognitive idiosyncrasies are systematic deviations from normative models that prescribe rational behaviour, as articulated in game theory and other normative principles. Considering this, we have identified that these three

countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood can be described as countries that prescribe rational behaviour and fall into the typology of cognitive idiosyncrasy.

The other three countries within the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) have no such plans. Belarus and Armenia have joined the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. Start from 2011, President Lukashenko declared that he has no interest in linking the country closer to the European Union. The emerging civil society in Belarus has a different view (Wieck and Malerius, 2011, p. 5). The latest events (the divert of the flight and the arrest of Belarusian journalists) and the introduction of new European sanctions support the decisions of the Minsk leader. At the same time, Azerbaijan, rich in fossil fuels, seeks to maintain equal distance from Russia and the US while enhancing its relations with Turkey.

According to previous research, motivational idiosyncrasies arise from the activation of specific needs and objectives. Currently, EU communication policy faces many barriers in states like Belarus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia. These states are currently trying to make their own geopolitical and geostrategic path between the EU and Eurasian Economic Union. Although Eastern leadership remains passive in European regulations and continues to align more and more with Russia's policies, the countries prefer developing bilateral relations with the EU within the EaP framework. Here we can discuss idiosyncratic motivation, split between two blocks and two cultural aspirations. On the one hand, the lack of emotional idiosyncrasies and social perception in the decision-making process regarding the future European path indicates that leaders in the decision-making process are based on previous experiences and concrete facts, not being guided by their own emotions, public opinion, domestic and international events. On the other hand, the lack of social perception influences the leaders' decisions and policy outcomes.

## Conclusions

According to Ciot (2015, p. 210), today's Europe feels strong enough to secure its decisions through a case-by-case coalition. European leadership would come at a price that neither the political class nor the public seems willing to pay. This is probably why today's leadership, especially the Eastern leadership, needs to be more rational. The main idea of this paper was to analyse each member state of the Eastern Partnership to determine the evolution of their relations with the European Union, explore the main types of idiosyncrasies acting in the decision-making process: cognitive idiosyncrasies, idiosyncrasies of social perception, motivational and emotional idiosyncrasies, and determining idiosyncrasies with related influence on the relations between the six Eastern Partnership countries and EU.

As an added value, this paper looked into the European's leaders' social perception of European values to attempt to find a pragmatic way forward to deliver tangible results for European citizens and determine ways in which the Eastern Partnership could be adapted to fend off regional challenges and take advantage of

rising opportunities in the coming decade, and found that currently, we have the six countries of the Eastern Partnership effectively divided into smaller groups of associated states (Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova), members of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (Belarus and Armenia). Azerbaijan is pursuing its unique relations with the EU (and Russia as well) with two or more different perceptions about European integration and the ideological importance of cultural values.

The EaP is one of the most researched topics in the current EU's foreign policy. Still, through this analysis, we validated the hypothesis that the six states in the Eastern Neighbourhood of Europe differ in terms of their future European aspirations and decision-making process. We identified two types of idiosyncrasies (cognitive and motivational) that directly affect leaders' decisions and political outcomes and conclude that the presence of idiosyncrasies demonstrates the need for a psychological approach to foreign policy decision-making.

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