



Peace and Security in 2022

EU Association
Agreements with
Georgia, Moldova,
and Ukraine – The
roads to EU
membership

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS



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The paper provides the background to EU relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and analyses the most recent reforms achieved through the implementation of the association agreements in each country, up to the date of their applications for membership. Through an overview of the requirements for accession and of the EU's experiences with enlargement, and within the new context of the reframing of the EU's relations with its neighbourhood, the paper assesses the potential steps each of these countries could take to advance on their road to EU membership.

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Executive summary

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have been actively engaged on the path to economic integration and political association with the European Union (EU) since the signing of association agreements (AA) with the EU, including deep and comprehensive free trade area agreements (DCFTA), in 2014. These AAs have had a significant impact on trade flows and have fostered reform on fundamental values, including the stabilisation of democratic institutions and practices, judicial independence and the fight against corruption.

On 24 February 2022, following weeks of extreme tension and the recognition of the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as independent entities by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On 28 February 2022, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, submitted the country's application to become a member of the EU. Georgia and Moldova followed with their applications on 3 March 2022. On 10 and 11 March 2022, EU leaders held an informal meeting in Versailles. The European Council invited the European Commission to submit its opinions on Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine's applications. The Commission issued a questionnaire to each of the three countries. The completed questionnaires, together with information gathered from the association agreement governance structures, formed the basis of the Commission opinions issued on 17 June 2022. At the meeting of 23 and 24 June, the European Council, following the advice of the Commission, granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and stated its readiness to grant candidate status to Georgia, once the priorities specified in the Commission's opinion on Georgia's membership application have been addressed.

To join the EU, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine must comply with the steps outlined in Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which says that any European state that respects the democratic values and principles upon which the Union is built, can apply to become a member of the EU. The next steps will be the fulfilment of the conditions allowing accession negotiations to begin (Ukraine, Moldova), or to attain candidate status (Georgia). In this context, the AAs and their reforms, as defined in the association agendas, will continue to play a central role.

This paper provides the background to EU relations with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine and analyses the most recent reforms achieved through the implementation of the AAs in each country up to the date of their application for membership. It also covers areas identified where further improvement and alignment with the policies of the Union is needed. Through an overview of the requirements for accession, of the EU's experiences with enlargement, opinions issued by the Commission, and key developments in the implementation of the AAs over the past two years, the paper assesses the next steps for each country on their roads to EU membership.

The paper finds that, although the three Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries with agreed EU AAs have presented themselves as an 'Association trio', a point of differentiation has emerged. Their roads to EU membership will possibly follow different timelines. Furthermore, regardless of the scenarios ahead, the framework of the AAs can and should continue to frame relations between Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and the EU.

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Table of frequently used abbreviations and acronyms

| | |
|---------|--|
| AA | association agreement |
| CBC | cross-border cooperation |
| Council | Council of the European Union |
| CSDP | Common security and defence policy |
| CSP | civil society platform |
| DCFTA | deep and comprehensive free trade area |
| DG | Directorate-General |
| EaP | Eastern Partnership |
| EEA | European Economic Area |
| EEAS | European External Action Service |
| EFSD+ | European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus |
| ENI | European Neighbourhood Instrument |
| ENP | European Neighbourhood policy |
| EU | European Union |
| HR/VP | High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| MFA | macro-financial assistance |
| Moldova | Republic of Moldova |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NDICI | Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument |
| NGCA | non-government controlled areas |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| PAC | parliamentary association committee |
| SME | small and medium-sized enterprises |

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1. Introduction

1.1. EU relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in context

The European Union (EU) signed association agreements (AA), including deep and comprehensive free trade area agreements (DCFTA) with [Georgia](#), [Moldova](#) and [Ukraine](#) in 2014. These agreements set the foundation for political association and economic integration with the EU, and aim to foster positive developments in the fields of democracy and the rule of law, human rights, and economic development. The AAs are an outcome of the EU's [European Neighbourhood policy](#) (ENP), an important part of the EU's foreign policy, where Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova are three of 16 partner countries. The subsequent launch of the EU's [Eastern Partnership](#) (EaP) in 2009 – which includes Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) (see Section 2) – further extended cooperation and highlighted the importance of the region.

On 24 February 2022, [following weeks of extreme tension](#) and the recognition of the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts as independent entities by the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. On 28 February 2022, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the President of Ukraine, submitted the country's application for EU membership, in line with the goal of EU membership stated in the country's [Constitution](#). The [Constitution of Georgia](#) also mentions the goal of 'full integration' into the EU. Moldova, the [first former Soviet country to sign](#) a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU, submitted their application for EU membership on 3 March 2022. At the 10 and 11 March [informal meeting](#) of EU leaders in Versailles, the European Council invited the European Commission to submit its opinions on the Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine's](#) applications. The Commission [issued](#) a questionnaire to the three countries. The completed questionnaires, together with information gathered from the association agreement governance structures, formed the basis of the Commission's 17 June 2022 [opinions](#). The [European Council of 23 and 24 June](#) considered these opinions when it granted Ukraine and Moldova candidate status and stated its readiness to do the same for Georgia, once the priorities specified in the Commission's opinion on Georgia's membership application have been addressed.

This paper provides the background to EU relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. It analyses the most recent reforms achieved through the implementation of the AAs in each country, up to the date of their application for membership, as well as considering the areas where the need for further improvement and alignment with the policies of the Union by each country has been identified. By analysing the requirements for accession, the EU's experiences with enlargement, the European Commission's opinions, and key developments in the implementation of the AAs over the past two years – including EU institutions' views on progress made – the paper assesses the next steps on each country's road to EU membership.

Through this analysis and a comparison of the three countries' relative positions in their efforts to comply with the standards required to attain candidate status (and ultimately, EU membership), this paper finds that, although the three EaP countries holding AAs with the EU have presented themselves as an 'Association trio', a point of differentiation has emerged. The roads to EU membership for each country will follow different timelines, despite the EU's recognition of their 'European choice'. Furthermore, regardless of the scenarios ahead, the framework of the AAs will continue to guide EU relations with these countries. This is evidenced in the Council's conclusions to date (Section 4), Parliament's resolutions (Section 5), and the European Commission's opinions (Section 6).

1.2. Association agreements in the context of application for EU membership

The EU enlargement process involves established criteria and the conditionality that each candidate or potential candidate country must meet to become an EU member. The accession criteria, or [Copenhagen criteria](#), set the essential conditions all candidate countries must satisfy to become a Member State. In the context of accession to the EU, existing AAs can serve [as a basis](#) for the accession process. The key aims of the EU's Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) are consistent with the essential conditions for candidate countries to obtain EU membership:

- institutional stability, guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces;
- administrative and institutional capacity to effectively implement the *acquis* and ability to take on the obligations of membership.

Progress made by the three countries in the implementation of their respective AAs therefore serves as basis for subsequent steps towards EU membership. The European Commission's opinions of 17 June 2022 note that each of the countries have worked on the implementation of the AAs and their DCFTAs, which capture a significant amount of the EU *acquis*, since 2016. The Commission therefore considers that the countries have already aligned with substantial elements of the *acquis*.

The most recent joint European Commission/European External Action Service (EEAS) association implementation reports for each of the countries, note both progress and areas for improvement in the implementation of their reforms. For example, in the case of Ukraine, the [2020 association implementation report](#) concluded that the country had undergone a successful democratic transition and renewal of key institutions in 2019, and that it had advanced swiftly in implementing both its AA and the reforms demanded by its citizens in the earlier part of 2020. For Georgia, the [2021 report](#) stated that the country 'remained committed to the implementation, obligations and undertakings of the AA, despite COVID-19 related challenges'. The [2021 report](#) on Moldova found that the country was committed and actively contributed to the EaP and that progress had been made in a number of areas.

The AAs also introduced a preferential trade regime – the DCFTAs – that increased market access between the EU and the three countries, particularly focusing on better-matched regulations. The

Copenhagen (accession) criteria

'The European Council today agreed that the associated countries in Central and Eastern Europe that so desire shall become members of the European Union. Accession will take place as soon as an associated country is able to assume the obligations of membership **by satisfying the economic and political conditions required.**

Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

The Union's capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries.'

Source: [Presidency Conclusions](#), Copenhagen European Council, 21-22 June 1993

DCFTAs eliminate the majority of tariffs on trade in goods and reduce non-tariff barriers to trade in goods, services and investment. In 2020, the European Commission noted that one of the [top 10 achievements](#) of the EaP had been the increase in the number of companies from DCFTA countries exporting to the EU, which had increased by 26 % for Ukraine, 35 % for Georgia, and 40 % for Moldova since 2015.

At the Eastern Partnership Summit in December 2021, the EU [acknowledged](#) the trio of associated partners' initiative to enhance their cooperation with the EU. Following the summit, the leaders of Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) issued a [joint statement](#), where the countries' 'determination backed by the strong will of [their] peoples to work towards joining the European Union' was reiterated.

1.3. Overview of the EU enlargement process

As noted in the introduction to this study, Article 49 TEU states that:

Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant state shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members. The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account.

Article 2 TEU states:

The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

The European Council detailed further conditions in Copenhagen in 1993, today referred to as the 'Copenhagen criteria'.

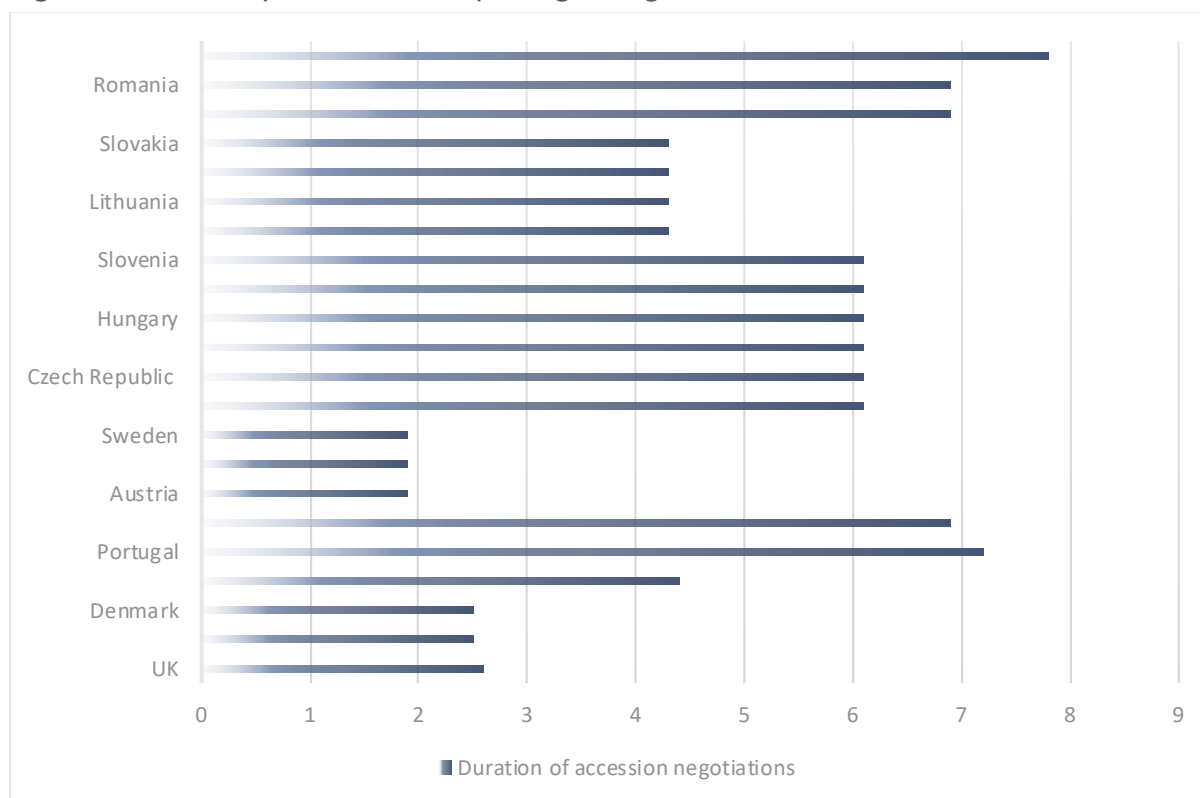
In December 2006, the European Council [agreed](#) that 'the enlargement strategy based on consolidation, conditionality and communication, combined with the EU's capacity to integrate new members, forms the basis for a renewed consensus on enlargement'.

The European Commission holds discussions with [each candidate](#) country to determine their ability to apply the EU *acquis*. Once the Council agrees with the Commission's assessment that a candidate country has implemented the necessary reforms, the candidate country is invited to open negotiations. During these negotiations, the country must demonstrate its ability to implement EU legislation and standards in all EU sectoral policies. To structure the negotiations, those policies are divided into 35 chapters, which are grouped in six clusters. One cluster relates to fundamentals (rule of law, economic criteria and public administration reform), its core value justifying that it is opened first and closed last.¹ One of the underlying principles of the negotiation process is that countries have to fully transpose and implement EU legislation by the date of accession – except for areas where a transition period is granted.

¹ This [indicates the importance](#) of this chapter for the whole integration process. Judicial independence and fundamental rights is one of the most challenging and complex chapters, and the dynamic and duration of the negotiation process in this area directly affects progress in other aspects of negotiations with the EU.

Throughout the history of the EU, the process of gaining membership to the Union has taken varying amounts of time for each case. The fastest countries to negotiate accession were Austria, Finland and Sweden. The process for Croatia, on the other hand, took close to eight years.

Figure 1 – Time elapsed between opening of negotiations and accession



Source: Authors' compilation based European Commission data, 2022.

The EU's [capacity](#) to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration. The EU reserves the right to decide when a negotiating country has met the criteria and when the EU is ready to accept a new member.

The [enlargement agenda](#) prior to the most recent applications covered four Western Balkan countries ([Albania](#), [Montenegro](#), [North Macedonia](#) and [Serbia](#)) and Turkey. The European Council has promised [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) and [Kosovo](#) a membership perspective, with the first applying in 2016 and the second having [announced](#) it will apply by the end of 2022. The first application from Western Balkan countries (North Macedonia) was submitted in 2004, and in this case additional conditions for membership were set out in the 'stabilisation and association process', mostly relating to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. Turkey was granted candidate country status in 1999, and negotiations for accession started in 2005 – these have, however, come to a [standstill](#).

The following sections of this paper provide an overview of: 1) Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine's relations with the EU within the ENP and EaP, and recent developments within these frameworks, namely the recently adopted common reform agenda and post-2020 priorities; 2) EU financial assistance to the countries and respective areas covered by these programmes up to the end of 2021; 3) latest developments in the implementation of the AAs as per the established monitoring and evaluation bodies; and 4) recent positions taken by the European Parliament. The last section of the paper analyses the roads ahead for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

2. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in EU neighbourhood relations

European Union relations with Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) are framed within the European Neighbourhood policy (ENP), which also forms the basis for EU financial support instruments (Section 3). The ENP's political priorities are further detailed and shared through sub-regional forums, such as the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

2.1. EU Neighbourhood policy

The ENP is an EU policy establishing a special relationship with 16 of the EU's closest neighbours. When it was set up, the countries belonging to the ENP had neither EU candidate status, nor were part of the European Economic Area (EEA). The ENP was launched in 2003 and developed in 2004, in the context of the EU enlargement of the time, which redefined the EU's eastern borders. It aimed to create a neighbourhood of stability, peace, and prosperity, by deepening political and economic ties with the countries involved and supporting their reforms in line with the EU's values of democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Figure 2 – European neighbourhoods



Source: [European Commission](#), 2021.

To take account of the many geopolitical changes, including the Arab Spring, the 2014 Russian military aggression against Ukraine (in the east and Crimea), the civil wars in Libya and Syria and the resulting refugee crisis, the European Commission and the EEAS issued a [joint communication](#) defining a revised ENP in 2015. The revised ENP introduced more flexibility in the EU's approach to partner countries, allowing the possibility to differentiate and intensify cooperation with certain partners, and recognising that not all countries have the same aspirations in their relations with the EU. It also seeks to reinforce partner countries' ownership, with increased focus on policy dialogue.

The European Commission and the EEAS are jointly responsible for managing the ENP and its related funding instruments. To this end, they promote both regional and bilateral political and policy dialogues. The Commission and the EEAS also prepare action plans or association agendas that contain agreed political and economic cooperation priorities, which are agreed between the EU and each partner country. These association agendas serve as basis for the multiannual planning of European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) funds on the EU side.

Four of the neighbourhood east countries have entered into negotiations, and three have concluded an AA with the EU, which is the closest form of cooperation beyond the enlargement policy framework. The adoption of these AAs, signed in 2014 by Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) – despite Russia's [opposition and threats](#) – were defining moments for these eastern European countries and former Soviet Union members. In 2013, the last-minute [refusal](#) by the Ukrainian President and his government to sign the AA with the EU for 'reasons of national security' sparked the Revolution of Dignity, leading to the President's ousting. Russia's 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and its occupation of territories in the east of Ukraine followed. Armenia also negotiated an AA with the EU, which was due to be signed in 2014. However, in September 2013, at the last hour, [Armenia bowed to pressure from Moscow](#), joining the Eurasian Customs Union, which is incompatible with the EU AA/DCFTA structures. Armenia's expectation of Russian protection in case of a conflict with Azerbaijan [played a key role](#) in this decision.

2.2. The Eastern Partnership

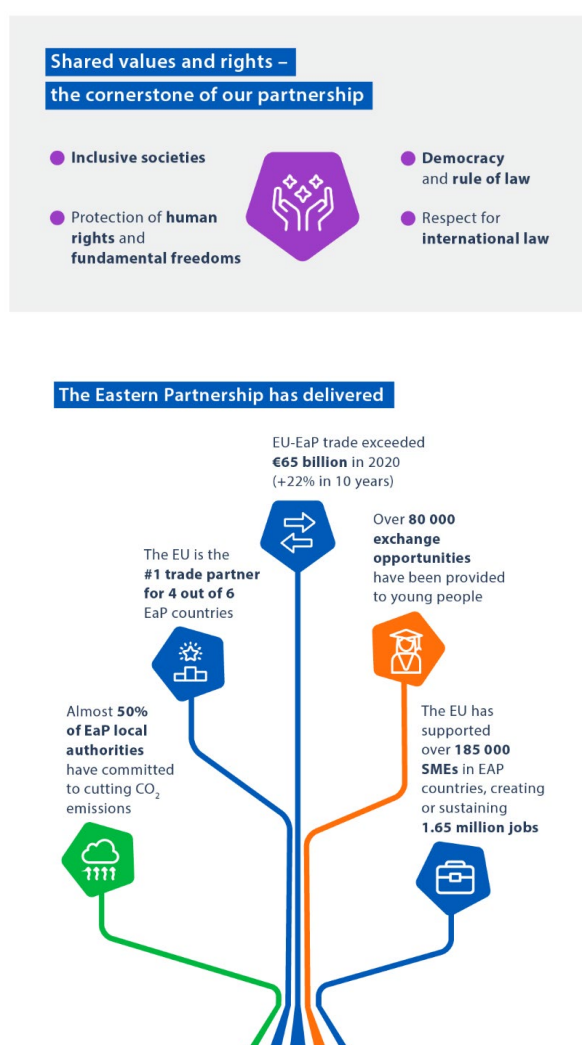
2.2.1. Background

Regional and sub-regional cooperation are core principles supported by the ENP. During the Prague Summit of May 2009, and in parallel to the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean, the EU and its Member States, as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus,² Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, jointly launched the [Eastern Partnership](#) (EaP).

The EaP is a joint initiative that defines joint priorities, aligned with international commitments, the ENP, and national priorities. Ongoing sectoral policy dialogues feed into [partnership summits](#) and are held on a regular basis.

In this context, the fifth EaP summit, held in November 2017, was an important milestone. It featured the adoption of a common reform agenda – '[20 Deliverables for 2020](#)' – on which progress has been monitored on an annual basis. The European Commission's [2020 monitoring report](#) found substantial progress in all key areas and notably with regard to economic cooperation, connectivity and society.³

Figure 3 – The Eastern Partnership



Source: [The Eastern Partnership](#), Council of the EU, 2021.

² On 28 June 2021, Belarus **suspended its participation** in the EaP.

³ See A. Zygierewicz, [Association agreements between the EU and Ukraine: European Implementation Assessment \(update\)](#), EPRS, July 2020.

2.2.2. Post-2020 agenda

In 2019, consultations began on the EaP priorities for the post-2020 era. In this context, on 18 March 2020, the European Commission and High Representative issued a [joint communication](#): 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all'. This communication has equal standing with the 2015 renewed ENP joint communication, adding to without replacing it. It received support from the Council of the EU (Council [Conclusions](#) on the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020), on 11 May 2020.

Within this framework, the European Parliament also adopted a [resolution](#) (Section 4) on the future of the EaP on 19 June 2020. It called for reinforcement of the EaP dialogue and the continuation of the agreed reform processes in the partner countries. The resolution recognised that partner countries have different levels of EU aspiration, and that ties should be deepened with countries already engaged in AAs and DCFTAs. At the same time, it emphasised the importance of maintaining regional cohesion and the momentum of the EaP. In this resolution, the Parliament also recalled that 'maintaining a long-term European perspective for the interested countries in the EaP is a catalyst for democratisation and further reforms in the EaP countries'.

On 2 July 2021, the European Commission and the High Representative issued a joint [staff working document](#) (SWD), entitled 'Recovery, resilience and reform – post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities', building upon their 2020 joint communication by defining an EaP economic and investment plan with national flagships. This SWD document also includes the top targets envisioned for 2025, as well as a proposal on adapting the architecture of the EaP. The economic and investment plan outlined in this SWD envisages up to €2.3 billion from the EU budget towards grants and investment support instruments (blending and guarantees); with multiplier effects, this is estimated to lead to €17 billion invested on the ground in the EaP countries.

This economic and investment plan repackages funds committed through the existing and future ENI funds, notably Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe (Section 3). It looks to achieve even greater leverage by reinforcing the 'Team Europe' approaches where efforts are made to coordinate investments with those of EU Member States, their development agencies, private investors and any other relevant party. Compared to previous initiatives, this new economic and investment plan reinforces the focus on infrastructure investment and the digital transition. In terms of tools, when compared to more traditional blending instruments, it increases the use of guarantees. The new plan identified five [flagship initiatives](#) for each EaP partner country.

The economic investment plan was discussed and supported by EaP partners at the sixth EaP Summit held in Brussels on 15 December 2021. The Summit [declaration](#) further welcomed the EU assistance part of the Team Europe Covid-19 global response. It also welcomed the agreements with Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on their association with the 2021-2027 Horizon Europe research and innovation fund (see Section 3).

Post-2020 priorities

The annex to the Joint Declaration following the EaP Summit defines the priorities as:

- 'together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security;
- together for resilient, gender-equal, fair and inclusive societies;
- strategic communication;
- together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies;
- together for environmental and climate resilience;
- together for a resilient digital transformation;'

Source: Eastern Partnership Summit [Joint Declaration](#), 15 December 2021.

3. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as beneficiaries of EU financial assistance

3.1. The European Neighbourhood Instrument (2014-2020)

During 2014-2020, the EU provided financial assistance to 16 partner countries through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI).⁴ The ENI replaced the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) covering 2007-2013. The ENI envelope for 2014-2020 was €15.43 billion, [accounting for 24 %](#) of EU funding spent outside its territory.

The ENI funds reach beneficiaries through four main channels:

1. Bilateral programmes supporting bilateral action plans/association agendas. These absorbed around 85 % of the ENI. For Georgia, the European Commission programmed €724 million of ENI funds.⁵ This is in line with its [indicative allocation](#) for the country (€610 million to €746 million for 2014-2020). In comparison, the Commission [estimates](#) that Ukraine benefited from €1.565 billion in bilateral ENI funds over the same period. This is twice the allocation for Georgia in absolute figures, but for a population that is ten times greater. Moldova benefitted from €518.15 million of [grants in bilateral assistance](#) from the ENI during 2014-2020, a figure comparable to Georgia's allocation per capita.
2. Multi-country programmes support regional dialogue platform priorities like the EaP or the Union for the Mediterranean. Up to €906 million was [envisaged](#) for the eastern neighbourhood region, composed of six countries. In comparison, ENI regional south programming was €824 million over the same 2014-2020 period.
3. Some €656 million was [earmarked](#) for [cross-border cooperation](#) projects promoting sustainable development between Member States and partner countries that share a land or maritime border, including €25 million for the Black Sea region.
4. Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) have also benefited from €3.45 billion [programmed](#) at a neighbourhood-wide level that fed into the Neighbourhood Investment Platform (NIP – 60 %), into the Erasmus+ programme (35 %), and into institutional capacity-building programmes like the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX – 5 %).

3.2. Global Europe (2021-2027) – Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument

During 2021-2027, several external policy funds managed by the European Commission were merged into a single instrument: the Global Europe – Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), adopted by the Council and Parliament on 9 June 2021.⁶

⁴ [Regulation \(EU\) 232/2014](#) of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument.

⁵ T. Jansen, H. Ahamad Madatali, [Association agreement between the EU and Georgia](#), EPRS, European Parliament, February 2022.

⁶ [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/947](#) of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe.

The NDICI has an overall envelope of €79.5 billion, with €19.32 billion earmarked for the neighbourhood, compared to the €15.4 programmed under the ENI.⁷ The NDICI introduces a streamlined blending and guarantee mechanism, the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) with an External Action Guarantee that merges all previous external guarantee funds, including macro-financial assistance (MFA) loans to governments. This guarantee will also cover countries at the pre-accession stage.⁸

According to the European Commission and EEAS 2021-2027 [multiannual indicative programme](#) (MIP) for Ukraine, bilateral funds for Ukraine over the first four years (2021-2024) would total €640 million. Assuming appropriations remain the same, this would mean €1.12 billion in bilateral funds, out of the total €19.32 billion for the neighbourhood during 2021-2027, would go to Ukraine. However, these figures are likely to be revised in the context of the war against Ukraine and the country's EU candidate status. In a May 2022 [communication](#), the Commission started a reflection on new legal instrument (separate from the NDICI) and its guiding principles, branded 'RebuildUkraine', to manage the expected reconstruction support tools.

The 2021-2027 multiannual indicative programme for Georgia and Moldova has not been published at the time of writing, due to delays in bilateral negotiations on the association agendas. The Council confirmed the 2021-2027 EU-Georgia [association agenda](#) on 16 May 2022. For Moldova, the EU adopted its association agenda by a [Council Decision of 22 June 2022](#).

Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) will continue to benefit from regional east programmes within the framework of the EaP (along with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus).⁹ According to the EEAS and European Commission 2021-2027 [multiannual indicative programme for the eastern neighbourhood](#), these programmes will amount to €632.24 million for the first four years (2021-2024). Assuming appropriations would remain the same for the three remaining years this would mean a total regional envelope of €1,106 million for 2021-2027. This represents an increase compared to the €906 million provided for under the ENI for 2014-2020.

It should be noted that the eastern neighbourhood MIP now also includes an extra allocation of €929.88 million to support the deployment of budgetary guarantees in the eastern neighbourhood, through the EFSD+ or through MFA (previously, the NIP blending tool was programmed at neighbourhood-level and did not provide for the MFA). How much is earmarked for MFA is not specified, but the document notes that 'It will remain exceptional in nature and will be mobilised on a case-by-case basis to help countries dealing with serious balance-of-payments difficulties'.

3.3. Macro-financial assistance

Falling under the responsibility of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN), individual financing decisions on MFA are adopted through the ordinary legislative procedure, requiring the approval of both the Council and the European Parliament.

Macro-financial assistance is available for EU neighbourhood and enlargement countries in the form of loans or grants to their central banks, and can be used upon governments' discretion, for example as reserves, direct budget support or foreign exchange market intervention. It is only used in

⁷ B. Immenkamp, [A new neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument](#) – Global Europe, EPRS, European Parliament, July 2021.

⁸ V. Lilianova, [Understanding EU financing for external action](#), EPRS, European Parliament, February 2021.

⁹ Limited to civil society beneficiaries only since 2020, and the events that followed presidential elections in the country led to suspension of technical co-operation with Belarus authorities.

complement to International Monetary Fund (IMF) disbursement, and functions as an emergency mechanism to restore partner country balance sheets on an exceptional basis.

3.3.1. MFA packages disbursed to Ukraine

The [first MFA operation](#) (MFA I) for Ukraine was agreed in 2014 for loans of €610 million, which were fully disbursed by 2015. However, in 2014, in the context of grave tensions with Russia, a second MFA of €1 billion was approved and disbursed. To support Ukraine in this difficult context, a third MFA package worth €1.8 billion was decided in early 2015. This MFA III was for the first time conditional on reforms, defined in a memorandum of understanding (MoU). Ukraine had fulfilled 17 out of 21 of these MoU commitments by the end of period during which the assistance was available, in January 2018. It was therefore only possible to disburse €1.2 billion, and not the last tranche of €600 million. However, in 2018, the EU approved a new €1 billion programme, MFA IV, which was fully disbursed in 2018 and 2020. A fifth MFA intervention worth €1.2 billion was launched in 2020, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and fully disbursed by the end of 2021.

On 1 February 2022, in the context of geopolitical uncertainty caused by Russian military aggression, the European Commission [proposed](#) a sixth MFA programme for Ukraine of up to €1.2 billion. The proposal was accompanied by a Commission [staff working document](#) that gives an updated picture of Ukraine's macro-economic situation. On 11 February 2022, the Council [signalled its agreement](#) with the proposal and a [vote](#) in the European Parliament in plenary on 24 February finalised its adoption. The assistance package was fully [disbursed](#) by 20 May 2022.

3.3.2. MFA packages disbursed to Georgia

The first MFA operations for Georgia were agreed in 2008, in the context of Russia's military aggression against the country. The first MFA covered a total of €92 million, allocated in two phases, three quarters in grants and the rest in loans, with disbursements spread from 2009 to 2017. A new €45 million MFA package was agreed in 2017 (referred to as MFA III), with grant content limited to €10 million. Finally, in May 2020, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU [approved](#) a €3 billion MFA package for enlargement and neighbourhood countries to alleviate the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic (referred to as MFA-COVID-19). It envisaged an envelope of €150 million in MFA for Georgia.

On 22 September 2020, Georgia signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) with the EU on the use and conditions of this MFA. In this MoU, Georgia agreed to additional policy conditions in the fields of public procurement, the pension system, company law, the governance of state-owned enterprises, the judicial system, energy efficiency and the labour market, to release the payment of the second instalment of €75 million. The first instalment of €75 million was disbursed in November 2020, together with the final €25 million instalment of the MFA III.

At the end of August 2021, the Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili, announced his government's decision not to request the second tranche of the MFA-COVID-19. The official reason [given](#) for the government's decision was that: 'we [Georgia] started reducing our foreign debt this year; it is highly likely that we will no longer need to receive this amount'. This led to the European Commission cancelling the instalment. On 1 September 2021, a spokesperson at the EU Delegation in Tbilisi [stated](#):

The European Union takes note of the reasoning provided by the Georgian Government on their decision not to ask the rest of the EU macro-financial assistance. While we respect the decision of Georgian authorities, at the same time, we note that Georgia failed to sufficiently address the condition for this macro-financial assistance, and notably, to increase the independence, accountability and quality of the judicial system.

3.3.3. MFA packages disbursed to Moldova

Moldova's [first MFA package](#) was arranged on 20 October 2010, when the European Parliament and the Council agreed a decision on a €90 million MFA package, alongside a three-year International Monetary Fund programme. The assistance was provided in the form of a €90 million grant and was disbursed in three tranches between December 2010 and April 2012. In 2017, a new [MFA package](#) was adopted, with €100 million to be given as grants and medium-term loans, divided into three packages of €30 million. However, the third and final instalment was cancelled as the programme period had already ended in July 2020.

Lastly, the European Commission adopted a proposal in April 2020 for a €3 billion [MFA package](#) for ten enlargement and neighbourhood partners, to help them limit the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic. As part of this package, the EU agreed on a €100 million MFA programme for Moldova. The first instalment of €50 million was disbursed on 25 November 2020; the second and last instalment was disbursed on 8 October 2021. As a pre-requisite to receive each MFA instalment, Moldova and the EU signed Memoranda of Understanding, where Moldova agreed that the disbursement of the assistance was conditional upon the country reaching a satisfactory and stable financial track-record, as well as obtaining a positive European Commission assessment on the progress made on economic stabilisation and structural reforms.

3.4. Other EU support tools and programmes

As neighbourhood countries, Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) have benefited from associated member status regarding EU innovation and research funds. All three countries signed an agreement with the EU that gave access to the €95.5 billion Horizon Europe support programme for their scientific communities – all under the same conditions as for EU Member States. The funds are usually distributed based on calls for tender, where consortiums compete by presenting research projects. All three countries have already participated in several successful funding projects across a variety of innovative topics. Furthermore, Ukraine and Moldova are associate members of Creative Europe – the programme that supports the cultural and creative sectors.

Other EU funds, such as EU humanitarian aid, can and have been used by all three countries. Ukraine has relied on these funds for its eastern regions since the conflict started in 2014. According to European Commission [figures](#), between 2014 and 2021, the EU provided €1 billion worth of emergency and early recovery assistance to Ukraine. Over the same period, the Member States provided €268.9 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and the EU budget, €193.7 million. Georgia activated the mechanism for European humanitarian aid in 2008, following Russian military aggression against the country. Lastly, Moldova is making use of EU humanitarian aid since the [refugee influx](#) from Ukraine following the February 2022 Russian invasion.

This study does not seek to give a comprehensive picture of all support instruments; furthermore, many of the funds extended under these instruments are less significant in size than those detailed in the sections above. However, most importantly, they are not linked to the EaP or conditional on progress on the AA and the association agendas. In the current context, it is still worth mentioning Council [decisions](#) in 2022 (up until May) providing the Ukrainian armed forces with a total of €2 billion of support for military expenditure – a budget made possible under the recently created [European Peace Facility](#).¹⁰

¹⁰ B. Bilquin, [The European Peace Facility: A new tool in action](#), EPRS, European Parliament, February 2022; B. Bilquin, [Russia's war on Ukraine: The EU's financing of military assistance to Ukraine](#), EPRS, European Parliament, May 2022.

4. Implementation of the association agreements

4.1. Monitoring and evaluation bodies

The AA between the EU and Ukraine was signed in June 2014, applied provisionally from November 2014, and entered fully into force in January 2017. The AAs between the EU, the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) and Georgia, and between the EU and the EAEC and Moldova were signed on the same date and applied provisionally from September 2014, and subsequently entered fully into force in July 2016.

The EU monitors and evaluates the application of the AAs through structures set up in accordance with the provisions of the agreements. The institutional framework chapters of each of the AAs specify the establishment and functioning of four bodies per country: an association council, an association committee, a parliamentary association committee and a civil-society platform. Their roles are:

- The **Association Council**'s main role is to supervise and monitor the application and implementation of the AA, and to periodically review the AA in light of its objectives. The association council meets at the ministerial level, regularly, at least once a year. Additionally, the association council examines any major issues arising within the framework of the AA, as well as any other bilateral issues of mutual interest;
- The Association Committee's role is to assist the Association Council in the performance of its duties. In principle it should be composed of deputy ministers and senior civil servants from the EU and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine;
- The **Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC)** consists of representatives of the European Parliament and the parliaments of [Georgia](#), [Moldova](#) and [Ukraine](#). The PAC is a forum for members of the parliaments to meet and exchange views. Each PAC establishes its own rules of procedure;
- The **civil-society platform (CSP)** was established to promote regular meetings between representatives of civil societies of the parties to the AA. The CSP consists of civil-society representatives from the EU, including members of the European Economic and Social Committee and representatives of the civil community in [Georgia](#), [Moldova](#) and [Ukraine](#). Each CSP establishes its own rules of procedure.

In the case of Ukraine, bilateral summits are also organised based on Article 460.1 of the AA, which states that the highest level of political and policy dialogue between the parties shall be at summit level.

The EU's findings resulting from this monitoring and evaluation of the application and implementation of the association agreements are also reflected: a) in the EU Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on the EU's cooperation with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and b) in the association implementation reports prepared jointly by the European Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS).

The latest documents produced by these bodies with regard to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are presented (in chronological order) below.

4.1.1. Ukraine

The European Commission and the EEAS [published](#) their latest **association implementation report** in November 2020. The report noted that, prior to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Ukraine, the early months of the Parliament and Government elected in 2019 were characterised by rapid legislative activity – reflecting Ukrainian citizens' reform expectations. The current government's programme includes a section dedicated to the implementation of the AA, which is defined as a priority. Prior to the publication of the 2020 association implementation report, the Ukrainian Government had also engaged in renewed efforts to prioritise legislative reforms relating to AA commitments and the coordination of efforts. A new Electoral Code, harmonising rules applicable to all types of elections, was adopted in December 2019 – and amended further in July 2020 – to address technical shortcomings. Nationwide local elections took place in October 2020, in accordance with the new code. These were based on a new administrative structure resulting from decentralisation reform.

Overall, the 2020 association implementation report concluded that Ukraine had undergone a successful democratic transition and renewal of key institutions in 2019, and that it had advanced swiftly in implementing both its AA and the reforms demanded by its citizens in the earlier part of 2020. Since then, the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic, combined with 'some abrupt changes to government and state agency personnel', had a significant impact on ongoing efforts and the pace of reforms. The report also noted that there was a tendency to resort to protectionist and non AA-compatible policies to address economic problems triggered by the pandemic. Furthermore, concerted effort would be needed in sectors such as energy and corporate governance of state-owned enterprises, along with additional critical reform in the area of judiciary, anti-corruption¹¹ measures and the rule of law more broadly.

The [seventh meeting](#) of the **EU-Ukraine Association Council** took place in Brussels on [11 February 2021](#), and was co-chaired by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), and Denys Shmyhal, Prime Minister of Ukraine. The participants discussed the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, with a focus on political reform, rule of law, economic cooperation, trade and developments related to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The participants in the council agreed on the need for Ukraine to step up its efforts on strengthening the rule of law and to ensure the independent and effective operation of its anti-corruption institutions, to secure broad public trust and support in the fight against fraud. The Association Council reiterated its strong condemnation of the violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Russian armed forces and reconfirmed its support for a peaceful and sustainable political solution. The need for full implementation of the Minsk Agreements by all sides was underlined and Russia's responsibility in this regard was stressed. The EU recalled that the scope and duration of economic sanctions against Russia remains linked to the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

The **23rd EU-Ukraine Summit** took place in Kyiv on [12 October 2021](#), with a [joint statement](#) adopted. Among the subjects discussed, the leaders acknowledged, as in the previous summit, the importance of further strengthening cooperation in countering hybrid threats and tackling disinformation. The EU stated it would continue to support Ukraine's resilience, including through the strengthening of independent media and the regulatory environment, as well as sharing best

¹¹ Corroborated by the Special Report 23/2021 from the European Court of Auditors: [Reducing grand corruption in Ukraine: several EU initiatives, but still insufficient results](#), September 2021.

practices on media freedom and literacy, strategic communications and supporting Ukrainian initiatives to tackle disinformation.

At the 2021 Summit, leaders underlined the important role played by civil society, youth and independent media in all areas of public and political life in the context of disinformation campaigns against the EU and Ukraine, including notably by Russia. The EU and Ukraine welcomed the first EU-Ukraine cyber dialogue, held on 3 June 2021, and stated their readiness to proceed with the next round of the dialogue in the second quarter of 2022. The importance of deepening interinstitutional cooperation on cybersecurity was also emphasised.

Ahead of the 2021 Summit, the Ukrainian [Reforms Delivery Office](#), an advisory body to Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers, coordinated by the Prime Minister of Ukraine, published an [article](#) summarising the main results achieved in 2021. The article noted substantial progress in areas such as continuous reform of the public administration; anti-corruption reform, including [restoration of the electronic asset declaration system](#); progress on approving bills on privatisation and corporate governance of state owned enterprises; [land reform](#), which introduced a national land market; and Ukraine's [participation](#) in the [European Green Deal](#).

The **13th** extraordinary informal meeting **of the EU-Ukraine PAC** was held on [24 March 2022](#). The PAC members exchanged views with European Commission, EEAS and Ukrainian Government representatives on Russia's aggression, Ukraine's European path, and accountability for war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law. Following the meeting, a joint EU-Ukraine PAC [statement](#) was adopted on behalf of the entire PAC, sending a strong message of unity and solidarity with Ukraine.

The **11th meeting of the EU-Ukraine CSP** took place in Brussels on [20 April 2022](#). At this meeting, CSP members condemned the unprovoked aggression initiated by Russia against Ukraine and called on the European community to ensure the investigation and prosecution of war crimes committed in Ukraine. Members gave a positive assessment of Ukraine's progress in fulfilling its obligations under the AA and emphasised that Ukraine is ready to join the EU. They appealed to EU bodies to 'speed up' the process of formalising Ukraine's membership of the EU and to assist in the implementation of sectoral reforms, while continuing to work towards Ukraine's integration into the EU single market under the AA.

The **14th meeting of the EU-Ukraine PAC** [was held](#) in Strasbourg on 8 and 9 June 2022. The PAC members exchanged views with representatives of the European Commission, EEAS, the Ukrainian Government and civil society on Ukraine's prospective candidate status, post-war reconstruction, EU support for Ukraine's economic resilience and export capacity, and humanitarian aid.

In April 2022, the EEAS [published](#) the **EU Annual Report on Human Rights in the World for 2021**, together with [country updates](#). Regarding Ukraine, the report found that the country continues to be characterised by a very vibrant civil society, which plays a key role in promoting reforms. While the Ukrainian media landscape remains one of the most diverse in the region, there are persistent concerns over the disproportionate ownership of media channels by oligarchs and the safety of journalists. The work of anti-corruption activists remained crucial, given the continued need to strengthen the rule of law and to step up anti-corruption efforts. Civil society continued to advocate comprehensive reform of the judiciary, including a reform of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine and played an important role in advocating for the adoption of key laws in the area of the judiciary.

The report also noted that rights of persons belonging to minorities in Ukraine are generally respected, although funding and administrative resources for the promotion and protection of their rights could be enhanced. The EU, including the EU Delegation to Ukraine, continued to issue statements condemning human rights violations in the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula and

non-government controlled areas. The EU Delegation actively employed social media tools to express concerns about the violation of human rights committed during the Covid-19 pandemic and to express their support for the authorities in their efforts to step up human rights-related initiatives. The EU Delegation to Ukraine and the EU Member States issued several public statements locally and/or joint statements on different human rights and fundamental freedoms-related issues, including in the G7 format.

4.1.2. Georgia

In February 2021, the European Commission and the EEAS [published](#) their latest **association implementation report** on Georgia. The report stated that Georgia 'remained committed to the implementation, obligations and undertakings of the AA, despite COVID-19 related challenges'. Alignment with the EU *acquis*, as well as with European human rights standards had broadly continued. Nevertheless, it was found that, moving ahead, a demonstrated reform commitment on democracy consolidation and reform of the judiciary would form a fundamental factor in further progress on Georgia's 'European path'.

The report also noted that, throughout the course of 2021, it would be important to implement the fourth wave of judicial reforms and to continue to uphold the highest standards of ethics and integrity in the judiciary. In this respect, the 2021 report noted that it would be important to bring the selection procedure for Supreme Court judges into line with European standards as soon as possible, and that no further Supreme Court judges should be appointed based on the legal framework existing at the time of publication of the 2021 association implementation report.

The report called on Georgia to proactively address the high number of unfounded asylum applications to EU Member States from Georgian citizens, in close cooperation with the Commission and EU Member States, to ensure the effective implementation of the Law on the Rules and Procedures for Georgian Citizens exiting and entering Georgia. Finally, the report stated it would be crucial to ensure an inclusive, green and sustainable recovery from the Covid-19 crisis and to make further progress on digitalisation and digital literacy.

In April 2022, the European Commission published the **EU Annual Report on Human Rights in the World for 2020**, together with [country updates](#). The report found that Georgia continued to fulfil its obligations under the AA in 2021. However, the country experienced shortcomings on a number of commitments, particularly in relation to the rule of law and good governance (detailed below). The report underlined the importance of the EU's regular political dialogue with Georgia. The EU also engaged in mediating the political crisis stemming from the 2020 parliamentary elections, through high-level mediation led by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel. These efforts resulted in the '19 April Agreement', containing a number of reform and other commitments by the signatories. In July 2021, the ruling party withdrew from the agreement, citing the biggest opposition party's failure to sign it (which it only did later) as a reason, and publicly stating its commitment to complete the reforms outlined in the agreement.

The report further noted that Georgia underwent examination in the framework of the third cycle of the [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) on 26 January 2021 – a United Nations Human Rights Council monitoring exercise. There was general support for Georgia's progress in promoting human rights. Challenges identified included violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, a lack of judicial independence, human rights of persons belonging to minorities and the situation in the breakaway regions. The [investigation](#) into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russia and its proxies during the August 2008 war in Georgia, ordered by the International Criminal Court, is ongoing.

The sixth meeting of the **Association Council** to review the state of EU-Georgia bilateral relations was held on [16 March 2021](#). The Association Council took note of the [2021 Association Implementation Report](#) on Georgia and assessed the state of EU-Georgia relations since its last [meeting](#) in March 2019. The report noted that the elections of 31 October and 21 November 2020 were competitive and that fundamental freedoms had been respected.

South Ossetia and Abkhazia – The EU and Georgian separatist territories

South Ossetia and Abkhazia have resisted Georgian government control ever since the country's independence. In 2008, conflicts between Georgian and South Ossetian forces escalated to a war, in which Russia intervened on the side of the separatists. The EU does not recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, and it has repeatedly declared its support for the territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders.

Source: M. Russell, [Georgia's bumpy road to democracy](#), EPRS, 2021.

The Association Council [welcomed](#) Georgia's progress on its European path, including in the challenging Covid-19 context. However, it drew attention to the worsening political polarisation in Georgia. The Association Council agreed that it would be vital for all actors to continue working through EU-supported mediation to find a resolution to Georgia's political crisis. Further work needed to strengthen democratic institutions, consolidate pluralistic democracy and advance reforms, was also highlighted.

Concerning the rule of law, the Association Council further welcomed the progress made in implementing reforms, despite recognising that work is to be continued, in particular regarding strengthening the independence and accountability of the judiciary and bringing the appointment process for Supreme Court judges into line with European standards. Equally, the progress made in the implementation of Georgia's human rights strategy and its action plan, as well as the important work of the Human Rights Protection Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was welcomed. The EU expressed its continued commitment to assist Georgia with these aspects.

Some of the subjects already addressed at the previous meeting, in 2019, were recalled: such as the advantages brought by the short-term visa free travel to Schengen countries. The EU encouraged Georgia to enhance cooperation with EU Member States to counter irregular migration and organised crime. Both sides welcomed a renewed working arrangement signed between Georgia and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (formerly Frontex), as well as Georgia's acquisition of observer status in the European Migration Network.

On the international front, the Association Council reiterated Georgia's strategic role in the field of energy, transport and connectivity and increasingly as a transportation and logistics hub in the region. It also underlined Georgia's key role as a partner for European energy security and stressed the country's transit role for Caspian hydrocarbon resources to reach European markets, notably via the southern gas corridor and through the Black Sea. The EU also confirmed its firm support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. The critical importance of the Geneva International Discussions for addressing and resolving the challenges stemming from the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia was stressed. Concern was expressed about the signing of a programme on the creation of a 'common socio-economic space' between Russia and the Russian occupied Georgian region of Abkhazia, leading to de facto Russian annexation. Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity were emphasised in this context.

On [30 June 2021](#), the seventh meeting of the CSP took place in Tbilisi, Georgia, by videoconference. The members discussed the state of play on implementation of the AA. Government officials and parliament representatives debated the results and state of implementation of the 19 April 2021 [agreement between political forces in Georgia](#) and on the impact of Covid-19 on progress in

implementing the AA. The meeting also considered the state of the judicial reform process and health matters, including mental health, and health services for the most vulnerable, in connection with the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

The European Parliament and the Parliament of Georgia held the tenth meeting of their PAC in Brussels on [10 February 2022](#). Following the meeting, the chair of the Delegation for Relations with the South Caucasus, Marina Kaljurand (S&D, Estonia), [issued a statement](#), noting that support for EU integration remains 'very high' in Georgia, both among the population and across party lines. The EU welcomed Georgia's commitment to harmonise legislation with the EU *acquis*, in line with the AA, yet noted a number of areas that could be improved, such as the accountability of law enforcement agencies, judicial independence, and combating discrimination against vulnerable groups and minorities.

During this meeting, the EU raised concerns over shortcomings during the 2020 legislative elections and 2021 municipal elections, as listed in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) [reports](#). Other concerns raised include continued appointment of Supreme Court judges without alignment to EU standards; reform of the Common Courts; abolition of the State Inspector's Service; and the slow progress on constitutional reform. The polarisation of the political and media landscapes was identified as a major challenge to Georgia's democratic development.

4.1.3. Moldova

The European Commission and the EEAS published the latest [association implementation report](#) for Moldova in October 2021. Both presidential and early parliamentary elections took place during the reporting period. According to the OSCE/ODIHR [preliminary findings and conclusions](#), the elections were well administered, competitive, and fundamental freedoms were respected. During the reporting period, reforms of the justice sector stagnated overall, but there was some progress with the adoption by Parliament of the new 2021-2024 [strategy for ensuring the independence and integrity of the justice sector](#) on 26 November 2020.

The report noted that, following the strong progress achieved in the second half of 2019, the EU expected urgent and serious action from the Moldovan authorities on continuing its long-awaited judicial reform, to regain public trust in the judiciary and public administration, and to improve the country's business and investment climate. However, in spite of some progress in several areas, the second half of 2020 saw concern increase regarding: (i) backsliding on rule of law standards and in the justice sector; (ii) a lack of progress and negative developments in the fight against corruption and money laundering; (iii) a lack of progress in the investigation of the 2014 banking fraud; and (iv) the appointment of four lay members to the Superior Council of Magistracy, contrary to European standards and [Venice Commission recommendations](#).

Nonetheless, through the clear outcome of the early parliamentary elections, the people of Moldova demonstrated their commitment to democracy and the rule of law, giving a clear and strong mandate to the Party of Action and Solidarity to start implementing President Maia Sandu's ambitious agenda on countering corruption, improving the justice system and fighting poverty.

The eighth meeting of the EU-Moldova CSP took place in Chisinau on [28 October 2021](#). The CSP members welcomed the results of the snap parliamentary elections held in July 2021, which gave Moldova an important opportunity to further strengthen its political and economic integration with the EU and to speed up implementation of the AA and DCFTA.

The CSP members took note of the association implementation report for Moldova published in October 2021 by the European Commission and EEAS. They agreed that pro-reform forces should

use the favourable momentum to pursue the ambitious agenda on combatting corruption and reducing the role of oligarchs in policy-making, and to continue with judicial and administrative reform and the fight against poverty.

The sixth meeting of the EU-Moldova Association Council was held in Brussels on [28 October 2021](#). The parties welcomed the resumption of the high-level dialogue format and noted the importance of the follow-up to its outcomes. The Council acknowledged Moldova's European aspirations and European choice. It reaffirmed the EU and Moldova's joint commitment to strengthen political association and deepen economic integration by working in close partnership on the basis of mutual commitment to reform and to the common values of democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, enshrined in the AA.

The Association Council meeting took place against the backdrop of an [acute gas supply crisis](#) in Moldova, following Gazprom's failure to extend Moldova's long-term gas contract in September 2021. The EU has supported Moldova throughout this period, notably through the provision of expert advice to develop options and scenarios regarding the diversification of energy supplies and routes. A [high-level energy dialogue](#) between European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson and Prime Minister Natalia Gavriluța was launched and in this context, a senior officials' meeting took place in tandem with the Association Council, to discuss the situation and the EU's immediate and medium-term support to Moldova. The EU noted its readiness to support Moldova (and Ukraine) with expertise to ensure full respect of EU and international standards and commitments.

The 11th meeting of the EU-Moldova PAC took place in Strasbourg on [6 and 7 April 2022](#). Members of the PAC sent a strong signal of solidarity and support to Moldova, as the country has been greatly affected by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine. The PAC adopted a statement and recommendations commending the solidarity shown by Moldovan authorities and citizens towards Ukrainian refugees. It welcomed Moldova's EU membership application and called on the EU institutions to grant the country EU candidate status, in line with Article 49 TEU and 'on the basis of merit'. It also called for the country to be integrated into the EU single market in the meantime. The support for a comprehensive, peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, notwithstanding the issues in the '5+2' negotiation format, was also underlined.

The pro-Russian territory of Transnistria

Transnistria, along with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, is a post-Soviet 'frozen conflict'. In the spring of 1992, a two-month civil war broke out between Moldova and its pro-Russian territory of Transnistria. However, there has been no renewal of armed conflict since the ceasefire agreement of 1992. The EU is one of two observers to the OSCE-mediated '5+2' negotiations on Transnistria. The EU does not recognise Transnistria as an independent state, and it has repeatedly declared its support for Moldova's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.

Source: T. German and A. Tyushka, [Security challenges at the EU's eastern border: which role for CSDP](#), Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament, 2022.

In April 2022, the EEAS published the EU Annual Report on Human Rights in the World for 2021, together with [country updates](#). In the case of Moldova the [report](#) found that, in 2021, the country continued to implement the AA, including its commitments in the areas of human rights and democracy. Parliamentary elections were held in July 2021 and were assessed positively by the international elections observation missions as generally competitive and well managed, despite some shortcomings. While progress in some areas was notable, further efforts are needed to strengthen the rule of law and the fight against corruption, to thoroughly reform the media

environment, and to improve detention conditions. The human rights situation in the Transnistrian region, which is not under the control of the central government in Chisinau, remains concerning.

The report noted that the EU actively supported the development of media skills, especially for the investigative journalism sector throughout 2021, as well as improving media literacy for the public. The EU action in 2021 also sought to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, by advocating for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence, finally ratified by the Parliament in October 2021. The application, for the first time, of the double gender quota during the parliamentary elections also led to the highest representation of women in the Moldovan Parliament so far (40 women out of 101 members).

5. European Parliament positions

This section covers resolutions on implementation of the association agreements. It also looks at resolutions made in the current context of threats linked to Russia. It then moves to resolutions covering topics specific to each country and finally recaps recent Parliament positions on the EU accession of the three countries.

5.1. Implementation of the association agreements

Since the entry into force of the three AAs, the European Parliament has closely scrutinised and supported their implementation. To this end, Parliament has issued two resolutions on the state of the implementation of the agreement with Ukraine ([December 2018](#), [February 2021](#)), two on the agreement with Georgia ([October 2018](#), [September 2020](#)) and three in the case of Moldova ([November 2018](#), [October 2020](#), [May 2022](#)).

In these resolutions, the Parliament takes stock and welcomes the ambitious reform programmes that the countries have put in place on their path to economic integration and political association with the EU. They also provided an occasion for the Parliament to express its support regarding the generally improved standards in local and national elections that took place in the three countries. Progress on fundamental values has been a core concern for Members of the European Parliament throughout their resolutions. Members have consistently insisted on the need for further reform of the judicial system in Ukraine and the de-oligarchisation of its economy and media landscape. They have voiced concerns over Georgia's backsliding on media freedom and political polarisation, and insisted on the need to reform the judiciary and to ensure the protection of minorities. Regarding Moldova, Members have expressed continued concern about corruption and critical deficiencies in the justice sector.

Security and territorial integrity have also taken an important place in these resolutions. The Parliament has systematically spoken out against Russian aggression taking place in Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#). It has repeatedly condemned Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol and the de facto occupation of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The Parliament also condemned cyber-attacks against Georgian institutions and media outlets, widely attributed to Russian actors. Additionally, it denounced the Russian Federation's illegal occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali and South Ossetia. Lastly, the Parliament also condemned Russian aggressions against Moldova.

In this context, it is also relevant to mention the [July 2021](#) resolution on EU-NATO cooperation in the context of transatlantic relations. Here, the Parliament emphasised the important role that the EU can play in supporting NATO's open door policy by maintaining close political and operational synergies with its aspirant countries, including Ukraine and Georgia. The Parliament called on the EU and NATO to leverage and expand current engagements to counter Russia's direct and indirect aggressions and activities against Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#).

5.1.1. Ukraine

Among a number of resolutions covering Ukraine over the past two years, Parliament adopted a resolution on Russia, the case of Alexei Navalny, the military build-up on Ukraine's border and Russian attacks in Czechia on [29 April 2021](#). It stated that, in case of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, EU energy imports from Russia should be halted immediately, Russia should be excluded from the SWIFT payment system, and key oligarchs and their families' assets in the EU should be frozen and visas cancelled. The Parliament also added a general demand to reduce EU dependence on Russian

energy, to halt Nord Stream 2 and to stop construction of Rosatom nuclear power plants. These points were part of an EU approach that hoped to deter Russia through clarity about the cost of war.

On [16 December 2021](#), the Parliament again adopted a resolution on the situation at the Ukrainian border and in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine. Russia had started dispatching large numbers of [troops](#) to the eastern border of Ukraine and inside occupied Crimea. The resolution made similar demands and warnings to Russia as the preceding one, adding a call for the EU to enhance energy cooperation with Ukraine. It also noted the importance of a credible EU accession perspective for Ukraine in this specific context.

On 24 February 2022, Parliament's leaders [released a statement](#) following the news of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. The Conference of Presidents condemned the Russian invasion as unprovoked, unjustified and illegal. The Parliament stated its support for an unprecedented European and international response, including new and severe sanctions ensuring that the Kremlin be held accountable for its actions. An extraordinary [plenary debate](#) was organised on 1 March 2022, with the participation of President Zelenskyy via videoconference. On [19 May 2022](#), a resolution was adopted to fight against impunity for war crimes in Ukraine.

5.1.2. Georgia

In its resolutions concerning the AA implementation in Georgia ([October 2018](#), [September 2020](#)), as well as the resolution related to e NATO cooperation of [July 2021](#), the Parliament condemned the occupation of parts of Georgia's territory and Russia's 'borderisation' activities, and affirmed its firm support for Georgia's chosen path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. It acknowledged the progress made in implementing comprehensive reforms, which have made Georgia a key EU partner in the region. Parliament also underlined that enhanced cooperation and EU assistance are conditional on continued reform progress – in particular, on democracy and the rule of law, including checks and balances in the institutions, judicial independence and electoral reform.

5.1.3. Moldova

On [5 May 2022](#), Parliament adopted a resolution on the state of play of EU-Moldova cooperation. Mainly concerning the influence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on Moldova, it notes that managing the almost 100 000 refugees who have found shelter in and transited through Moldova constitutes an increasing financial burden for the Moldovan state. A state which already finds itself in a precarious financial situation due to the pandemic induced economic slowdown and the increase in gas prices triggered artificially by Gazprom. In response to this situation, the Parliament called for further increases in financial and technical assistance for Moldova, including through a new MFA proposal made up of grants rather than loans. The Parliament also underlines that, the longer the conflict continues, the more humanitarian, security and socio-economic assistance the Republic of Moldova will require. Parliament therefore

Parliament's view on Moldova

'Underlines the fact, without seeking to prejudge the content of the Commission's opinion, that the Moldovan authorities are undoubtedly on the right track by adopting key reforms, notably on democracy, the rule of law and human rights, which will ensure that the country complies with the Copenhagen criteria that accession countries must fulfil, and which are aimed at implementing the AA/DCFTA in full; encourages the Moldovan authorities to continue on its path of reforms that will improve the lives of its citizens and bring the country closer to European standards.'

Source: European Parliament resolution on the state of play of EU-Moldova cooperation, [5 May 2022](#).

expresses its conviction that the EU must demonstrate solidarity with the people of Moldova and provide determined support for the country's efforts to cope with the consequences.

Regarding the [May 2022](#) resolution on the implementation of the Association Agreement with Moldova, the Parliament particularly welcomed the 'unprecedented ambitious reform agenda of the government of Natalia Gavrilița and the initial progress already achieved in its implementation, in particular on the fight against corruption, growing transparency in public governance, the advancement of reforms in the field of the rule of law and digitalisation, improving the living standards of the most vulnerable population groups and improving the business climate in the country.' Parliament further details the areas where further progress is expected on all of the above-mentioned points.

5.2. Applications for EU membership

The European Parliament has long been a supporter of the three applicant countries on their chosen 'European path' and the progress they make that should lead to their political integration into the EU. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine dramatically accelerated this process. As mentioned above, Ukraine formally applied to become an EU Member State on 28 February 2022, with Georgia and Moldova submitting their application one week later, on 3 March 2022. The European Council launched the accession process by activating the first step in the Article 49 TEU process, when the leaders, gathered in Versailles on 10 and 11 March 2022, invited the European Commission to submit its opinions on Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine's](#) applications.

Article 49 TEU establishes that all steps of the accession process depend on unanimous decisions in the European Council. Nevertheless, the Parliament also has to consent through a majority vote. The Parliament plans to play a key role in supporting the process and has already issued a number of statements in that sense.

In its [1 March 2022](#) resolution on the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Parliament, for the first time, called 'for the EU institutions to work towards granting EU candidate status to Ukraine, in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and on the basis of merit, and, in the meantime, to continue to work towards its integration into the EU single market along the lines of the Association Agreement'. This call was renewed in further Parliament resolutions, such as the Parliament's resolution of [19 May 2022](#) on the social and economic consequences for the EU of the Russian war in Ukraine and in its recommendation of [8 June 2022](#) on the EU's Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

For Moldova, the Parliament's resolution of [5 May 2022](#) on the state of play of EU-Moldova cooperation welcomed 'Moldova's submission of its application for EU membership on 3 March 2022'. It also called 'on the EU institutions to grant EU candidate status to the Republic of Moldova, in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and on the basis of merit'. In the meantime, it called for the continuation of 'work towards its integration in the EU single market and to enhancing sectoral cooperation' and called on the European Commission to complete its assessment swiftly and to provide Moldova with full assistance during this process.

However, the Parliament was more reserved in its resolution of [9 June 2022](#) on violations of media freedom and the safety of journalists in Georgia, using the formulation of 'working towards' granting candidate status. The resolution called 'on the Georgian authorities to resolutely uphold the highest standards of democracy, the rule of law, judicial independence, fair trials and fundamental freedoms, including in the area of media freedom, and thereby unambiguously demonstrate their political determination to actualise the ambitious European aspirations of the people of Georgia'. It also expressed 'its belief that the legitimate aspirations of the people of Georgia deserve to be

fulfilled and therefore calls for the EU institutions to work towards granting EU candidate status to Georgia ... on the condition that the Georgian authorities fulfil all criteria'.

The above positions were reiterated in a [joint statement](#) by the leaders of the political groups in the European Parliament, addressed to the Heads of State or Government at the European Council meeting on 23 and 24 June 2022:

We strongly appeal to you to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and as the start to a merit-based process, and to work towards granting the same status to Georgia, fulfilling the legitimate aspirations of the Georgian people.

6. Outlook – The roads to EU membership

6.1. Think-tank perspectives on the applications

Following the applications for EU membership submitted by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the debate on EU enlargement policy and the costs and benefits the EU should consider when appraising these applications, was considerable among think-tanks. The main questions on the table included: 'how close are they to complying with the Copenhagen criteria on political and economic conditions?', and 'is the EU ready and able to integrate them?' This section gives a non-exhaustive summary of think-tank replies to those questions.

How close are Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to complying with the Copenhagen criteria on political and economic conditions?

Carnegie Europe [notes](#) the Russian invasion of Ukraine illustrates what is at stake in the contest between democratic and autocratic governance. The EU's decision and view on its future borders send a strong geopolitical signal.

The **Centre for European Policy Studies** (CEPS) issued an opinion on each of the three candidates' alignment with the Copenhagen criteria and was rather confident about Moldova and Ukraine's capacity to obtain candidate status. For Georgia, it [noted](#) that progress on the implementation of the economic parts of its AA and DCFTA with the EU has been impressive, but that the country has, (as confirmed by the expert analysis of the recent study published by [EPRS](#)) 'backslid with respect to the basic democratic principles and key political commitments it made as part of the AA'.

The broad political and economic conditions defined in the Copenhagen criteria in principle would leave room for appreciation by the Commission in its opinions, and for the European Council in its decisions on the candidature. There are however precedents in the detailed assessments within the Commission's opinions on previous applicants' requests, notably in the Western Balkans, that will be watched closely by the countries concerned. As such, the Commission's insistence on the 'credibility' and 'merit based' enlargement process is understandable in this context. The subject of enlargement is highly sensitive for the politicians and populations of the countries concerned, where arguments over differences in historical context, geographical realities, and geopolitical circumstances would not necessarily dissipate perceptions of unequal treatment.

Is the EU ready and able to integrate them?

The **European Policy Centre** [noted](#) that a Union with more than 30 Member States would imply a further revision of the EU's internal structures, resuscitating the debate about options for differentiated integration in the EU legal order.

One of the [arguments](#) made by **Bruegel**, is that the current EU is different from the Union of the 1990s, when the accession process concerned 11 central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU from 2004. Added diversity has made for heterogeneous opinions when decisions have to be taken. 'Even if EU countries could agree on a declaration to welcome the three new applicants ... their actual EU accession would still be very distant, as it has been for the Western Balkan countries.' Furthermore, the EU's place in defending the global order and democracy is also addressed.

Following the European Commission's recommendations of 17 June 2022, the **Centre for European Policy Studies** [interpreted](#) the Commission opinions on the membership applications, and argued that the Commission's recognition of a 'European perspective' and immediate 'candidate' status for Ukraine and Moldova was necessary. It also noted that the recommendation that a 'European perspective' for Georgia be granted, but that 'candidate' status should be deferred

until a list of conditions is met, is appropriate. Furthermore, CEPS argued that – despite the early stages of the accessions – growing relative legitimisation of the foreign policy perspectives of the EU's newer members could clearly be observed. No longer [seen as part of the problem](#) in impeding an EU-Russia rapprochement, these countries are currently playing a major role in [shaping the EU's priorities](#).

While CEPS leaves the possibility of accession to the countries in question, the **German Marshall Fund** (GMF) on the other hand lays agency with the EU, as it argues that [victory for Ukraine will also be defined by EU enlargement](#). Being less averse to the technical implications of these accessions, GMF states that the request for a fast track to membership was genuine and justified – despite having been excluded as a possibility by the EU – and it did not call for disrespect or avoidance of the existing process.

Nevertheless, the Copenhagen criteria remain a central concern. Alongside the comments of CEPS on the criteria, Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) raises [questions](#) on the possibility of the three countries' compliance with these in such a short time frame. CFR argues that Ukraine's 'leapfrogging' over other countries also aiming for a European future may cause some unease and possible frustration. However, widespread feelings of solidarity with the Ukrainian people could justify the choices made. At the same time, CFR underlines that, in most Member States, it is widely understood that Ukraine's road remains long and fraught.

6.2. Commission opinions on the applications

Possible scenarios following Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia's candidature submissions (in order of most negative to most positive) are: a) rejection by the European Council, as was the case for Morocco;¹² (b) a long delay in reply, as was the case for Bosnia and Herzegovina; (c) recognition by the European Council of the EU perspective of the countries, but no candidate status granted before certain reforms; and (d) candidate status granted, but with a list of reforms to undertake before negotiations can be opened.

The 17 June 2022 fast-tracked European Commission [opinions, confirmed](#) by the European Council a week later, paved the way for the last two of the above scenarios. For the Commission, all three countries, Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#), have a valid EU perspective, but only two – Ukraine and Moldova – were recommended for immediate candidate status, with a list of reforms to undertake before negotiations are opened. For all three countries, the Commission stated that the accession process remains based on established criteria and conditions. This allows any country in the process to progress based on its own merits, but also means that steps towards EU membership can be reversed if the underlying conditions are no longer met.

The Commission [recommended that Ukraine](#) be granted candidate status, on the understanding that a number of steps are taken before negotiations can be started. These steps broadly concern:

- integrity in the appointment of judges;
- strengthening the fight against corruption;
- law enforcement reform;
- limiting the excessive influence of oligarchs in economic, political, and public life;
- ensuring media freedom; and

¹² Morocco's 1987 application was rejected by the Council due to the argument that the country is not a European State.

- › finalising the reform of the legal framework for national minorities.

For [Georgia](#), the Commission recommended that the country should be provided with a perspective to become a member of the European Union, and be granted candidate status, once a number of priorities are addressed:

- › the issue of political polarisation, namely ensuring cooperation across political parties (19 April agreement);
- › guaranteeing the full functioning of state institutions;
- › adopting and implementing a transparent and effective judicial reform strategy and action plan post-2021;
- › strengthening the independence of its Anti-Corruption Agency;
- › implementing the commitment to 'de-oligarchisation';
- › strengthening the fight against organised crime;
- › ensuring a free media environment;
- › ensuring the protection of human rights of vulnerable groups;
- › enhancing the involvement of civil society in decision-making processes;
- › adopting legislation so that Georgian courts proactively take account of European Court of Human Rights judgments in their deliberations;
- › ensuring that an independent person is given preference in the process of nominating a new Public Defender (Ombudsperson) and that this process is conducted in a transparent manner.

Lastly, the Commission recommended that [Moldova](#) should be provided with a perspective to become a member of the EU, and candidate status, on the understanding that the following steps are taken:

- › completing essential steps of the recently launched comprehensive justice system reform across all institutions in the justice and prosecution chains;
- › addressing shortcomings identified by OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe;
- › delivering on the commitment to fight corruption at all levels;
- › implementing the commitment to 'de-oligarchisation';
- › strengthening the fight against organised crime;
- › increasing the capacity to deliver on reforms and provide quality public services;
- › completing public financial management reform;
- › strengthening the protection of human rights, particularly of vulnerable groups, and sustaining its commitments to enhance gender equality and fight violence against women.

For all three countries, the Commission will monitor progress in fulfilling these steps and report on them by the end of 2022. It should be noted that the priorities listed by the Commission in its recommendations, to be addressed by the countries, are fully aligned with the EU's findings as a result of monitoring and evaluating the application and implementation of the association agreements, and notably in the association agendas.

6.3. Future of the association agreements

If Russia's war on Ukraine precipitated the submission of candidatures, the AAs have given the applications credibility. Through the AAs and their DCFTAs with the EU, Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#) committed to reforms and alignment, estimated to [cover 70 % of the EU *acquis*](#). Nevertheless, as the AAs are based on shared values and aim at market integration, it could also be argued that they cover the Copenhagen criteria in their totality. One manifest way to estimate Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia's progress on the Copenhagen criteria is therefore to return to the assessments of progress on AA implementation. On 15 June 2022, the Commission [confirmed](#) that it also used information from the AA dialogues (including the joint Commission-EEAS annual implementation reports, detailed in Section 4 of this study), in addition to the completed country questionnaires, for the preparation of its opinions.

Despite that, the EU institutions' AAs annual implementation reports (from Parliament or the Commission and EEAS) focus greatly on areas with outstanding issues by nature (judicial independence, influence of oligarchs, corruption), they first and foremost provide the Commission and the Council with a track-record of past and ongoing reform.

In the framework of this paper, it should be noted that the actions the countries are asked to undertake – for the future attainment of candidate status or for the opening of accession negotiations – can largely be drawn from the AAs and notably the association agendas for 2021-2027 (See Section 3.2).

In [March 2022](#), the European Policy Centre found that 'the dynamic nature of the agreement, combined with its open-ended accession perspective, implies that both the EU and Ukraine can reorient it to new and more ambitious forms of political association and economic integration and accommodate it to a pre-accession context on the basis of a staged approach'.

View from the Parliament

'...Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have opened a new chapter in their European integration, which should be characterised by reinforced efforts to implement the relevant AAs/DCFTAs and a more strategic EU approach to supporting these countries;'

Source: European Parliament resolution on the state of play of EU-Moldova cooperation, [5 May 2022](#).

7. Conclusion

Since 2014, the EU's AAs with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova have created a framework conducive to ambitious reforms that have encouraged these countries on their way to economic integration and political association. The monitoring mechanisms within these AAs provide a **record of accomplishment of achievements and outstanding issues on these reforms**. The association agendas and the EaP post-2020 agenda have fixed shared priorities for future political and economic changes.

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022 has dramatically changed and accelerated the move from an objective of 'political association' to 'political integration'. The **AAs have had a key role in allowing this rapid evolution**. This paper confirms that the fast-tracked assessments of the candidatures of the three countries were based not only on their replies to the questionnaires but also on the track record of their AA implementation.

The framework of the AAs can also **remain viable until the countries' potential change of status to EU Member States**. The Parliament has made [calls](#) in this direction and the recommended actions in the Commission [opinions](#) on the three applications are aligned with those under the association agendas.

The timeline from now on is uncertain, but for reference, previous accessions (time between becoming a candidate and becoming a Member State) took six years for most of the central and eastern European Member States in the 2004 and 2008 enlargements, and eight in the case of Croatia. Moreover, Georgia, Moldova and [Ukraine](#), moving away from the idea of a trio taken together, **will likely cover different paths at different speeds**. The European Council [conclusions](#) of 23-24 June 2022 noted that 'the progress of **each** country towards the European Union **will depend on its own merit** in meeting the Copenhagen criteria' (authors' emphasis).

It has been argued that the conditions applied to each new candidate have become [increasingly stricter](#) over the EU's successive enlargements, and the possible accession of these countries will be largely dependent on continued political commitment from all parties, in following up on the reform agendas linked to the June 2022 Council [conclusions](#), the AAs and the association agendas.

Recent developments will also shed light on all aspects of credibility and merit of the EU enlargement process. In this respect, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, suggested an alternative approach in his 18 May [speech](#) suggesting that the accession process should be made 'faster, gradual and reversible' and that the EU should begin to build 'a European geopolitical community' that covers a wider area and does not preclude membership in the future. France has followed with the idea of a '[European political community](#)' that could cooperate on security, energy, transport, infrastructure, and trade while Western Balkan and eastern European countries work through the long process to achieve EU membership.

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The paper provides the background to EU relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and analyses the most recent reforms achieved through the implementation of the association agreements in each country, up to the date of their applications for membership. Through an overview of the requirements for accession and of the EU's experiences with enlargement, and within the new context of the reframing of the EU's relations with its neighbourhood, the paper assesses the potential steps each of these countries could take to advance on their roads to EU membership.

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