THE EU & THE EUROPEAN FRONTIER
WHAT RELATIONS MUST THE EUROPEAN UNION CREATE WITH THE ASSOCIATION TRIO?

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Executive summary:

Ukraine was invaded on the 24th of February 2022 and its membership application to the EU followed a few days after on the 28th. June 23rd Ukraine was given candidate member status, however not only a decision was made about Ukraine that day. The European Council also decided regarding two other membership applications that were made just days after the Ukrainian one. These being the applications from the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

This policy report revolves around these three nations and the EU’s policy regarding them, also known and organized under the name ‘Association Trio’. An organization the three nations decided to form in 2021 to help each other with their goals of integration into the EU.

These nations are now the frontline within Europe, facing the brunt of Russian assault. Russia wants to install its own sphere of influence in the region and Russia sees these three nations who are looking more and more west as a threat that must be dealt with. In Moldova, Russia plotted a coup and has been causing instability, both economically and politically. In Georgia Russia has been using disinformation and anti-Western narratives, together with other hybrid policies like borderization to turn the nation away from the West. Georgia is also the only nation that did not receive candidate status, because of political concerns within the EU about the state of Georgia’s democracy. Not to mention the fact that Russia has blatantly invaded Ukraine, killing tens of thousands in the process and destroying much of the eastern part of the nation with the goal of annexing and subduing the nation.

Therefore in this thesis, I shall try to answer a simple but very important question: What relations must the European Union create with the Association Trio? This is the core question that shall guide this policy report.

The policy analysis within this thesis makes use of the ends, ways and means method. The EU's policy is looked at through this framework. This analysis looks at these three elements of the Union's policy and then at the end it gives an analysis on the complementarity of these three parts of policy. If these are not compatible, then the policy is not effective or efficient.

There are several recommendations that this thesis brings forward regarding the EU's policy towards this group of nations:

- The EU’s relations with the three should not go through the Eastern Partnership anymore, but through the **Association Trio framework**.
- The EU should strive to make all three **member states** and should support them as such.
- **Ukraine must** first however **win** their war and push the Russians to the negotiation table, which the EU must aid them in.
- **After the war** Ukraine will still need **aid**, and the EU must give them this. The EU will need to take upon itself the role of rebuilding Ukraine, keeping the nation financially stable and giving it security guarantees.

- **Moldova** must be supported with **financial means**, but the EU must also help build up the **state’s capacities**. For example regarding policing. Moldova is currently under major hybrid threat from Russia, and the EU must support them as such.

- The EU must **support Georgia** in its **sovereignty**. The EU must also keep putting pressure on the Georgian government so that it keeps up with **reforms** and stays on the **same path** as Ukraine and Moldova regarding **EU membership**.

- The EU should also help build up **Georgian military capacity** for deterrence. Regarding **NATO membership** for the nation **caution** is advised, but if a diplomatic gap could be found it might be worth the risk.
Introduction:

At the time of writing this policy report it has been around fifteen months since the start of the conflict in Ukraine. On February 24th 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine, beginning the biggest conventional interstate conflict on the European continent since the Second World War.

In these past few months many a thing has happened. We have seen the victory of the Ukrainian forces at the gates of Kyiv, the defeat of the Russian army during the Kherson and Kharkiv counter-offensives, the final stand of the Ukrainian forces at Mariupol, the determined defence of Bakhmut (which still holds to this day), the horrendous Russian war crimes at places like Bucha and Irpin and so much more.

Vladimir Putin’s 10 day ‘Special Military Operation’ failed. Ukraine held and it held with unwavering determination.

One key player facilitating this has been the European Union (EU).

The EU and the self-proclaimed Geopolitical European Commission reacted with a ferocity not seen before in the slow and bureaucratic institutional body. The European Union and its member states have delivered €72 billion in aid to Ukraine since the start of this war until May 11th 2023, €15.3 billion of which in military support (European Council, 2023). This is no small amount considering that Ukraine’s GDP of 2022 was 144 billion euros (European Commission, 2023).

The EU has however done more than simply deliver aid. The EU currently hosts 4 million Ukrainian refugees (European Council, 2023), it has implemented 10 sanction packages against the Russian Federation with an eleventh on the way. The European Union has supported Ukraine through this entire conflict diplomatically and most importantly on the 23rd of June 2022 the EU granted Ukraine the status of Candidate Member (European Council, 2022). A clear path towards European integration.

However on the 23rd of June, the European Council did not simply decide on the membership application of Ukraine. It also made a decision regarding the applications of two other European nations. Those being the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

As Ukraine applied for membership mere days after the Russian invasion, it took the Republic of Moldova and Georgia mere days to apply for that same membership. These nations, who also had a long history with Russia, decided that they had to take this opportunity and linked their membership bid to that of Ukraine.

This thesis will discuss these three nations, more specifically it will discuss EU policy regarding these nations also known as the Association Trio. These nations are known as such as they agreed to cooperate with each other and with the EU regarding integration within the
The question that we will try to answer in this policy analysis goes as follows: **What relations must the European Union create with the Association Trio?**

This question may be simple, but it’s importance is unquestionable. With all three nations being at the forefront of Russian interference and aggression Europe must take this question seriously and act accordingly.

Within this paper I will be analysing the EU’s policy and I will give recommendations regarding what these relations should evolve into.

However before we begin I would like to explain the importance of looking at European policy regarding this group of nations called the Association Trio. Why these nations? What makes them so important and why should we look at them as a group? These are all very important questions that ask what the relevance is of the core question that this paper revolves around. And I will first seek to give a clear answer to this.

As mentioned above, these nations have joined each other in cooperation so that they may in the future integrate into the European Union (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2021). These nations started this initiative in 2021. As the name implies, these countries already had Association Agreements with the EU. They are the only three nations of the ones within the Eastern Partnership framework to have association agreements, having all made these agreements in 2014. We also have to point out the important role the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement had in the build up to the Maidan Revolution and the following annexation of Crimea and separatist rebellion in the Donbas.

As mentioned above, the nations are also part of the Eastern Partnership. The relation of the EU with these nations has also been looked at for a long time through the lens of this framework, however I believe that this is a fruitless endeavour. The Eastern Partnership should contain six member states: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. However Belarus has already dropped out because of tension with the EU and Armenia and Azerbaijan are hostile to each other. Armenia has also refused to sign an association agreement with the EU under Russian pressure. Russia is a very important security partner for Armenia so a European path for the nation does not seems likely. This framework does not work and the invasion of Ukraine has shown that the strategy surrounding the Eastern Partnership has also failed to deliver a stable and prosperous Eastern border without including the nations within the EU.

The three nations have close historical bonds with one another. All three are states that declared their independence from the Soviet Union. As former members of the Soviet Union the nations also have substantiable ethnic Russian minorities.
All three nations currently have some of their internationally agreed upon territory occupied by Russian forces, or by Russian backed separatists. In Moldova Transnistria is controlled by separatist rebels and a sizable Russian ‘peace keeping force’. In Georgia, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia are controlled by separatist rebels and Russian forces are stationed here in permanent military bases ever since the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and Ukraine, having been invaded by Russia in 2022, currently has lost control over parts of the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Luhansk oblasts and has fully lost control over the Crimean peninsula. However with the Ukrainian counteroffensive on the horizon this may change in the upcoming months.

It is also clear that the three nations are under threat of Russia. For the past year and a half most of our attention has been focussed on Ukraine. This is normal since there is a conventional conflict going on, with tens of thousands of deaths. However a more subtle threat is looming over and facing the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. Georgia has been plagued by Russian disinformation and influencing campaigns, trying for example to use its leading role in the Orthodox faith as a weapon to gain influence in the nation (Seskuria, 2021). Another method it uses to influence Georgia is Borderization. This concept will be further explained later in this policy report. Moldova, on the other hand, has been the victim of more serious threats by the Russian Federation. Early in the war one of the objectives of the Russian military seemed to form a land bridge to the breakaway region of Transnistria, as such strengthening its claim on the region. Although this has failed, Moldova has none the less been victim of other attacks on its sovereignty and threats to its national security. During the invasion of Ukraine it seemed several times that false flag operations were taking place in Transnistria, aimed at making it seem that Moldova had taken offensive actions against the region (Baumgardner, 2022). Another threat to its sovereignty came in the form of energy market manipulation by Gazprom, spiking prices in the country (Tanas & Polityuk, 2022). Worst of all, however, it seems that Russia had planned or perhaps is still planning a coup in the nation. Perhaps because of its more Western focussed government than in Georgia but Russia has been more aggressive in its methods regarding this nation.

These three nations have now all applied for membership of the European Union. The geopolitical situations that these nations find themselves in are similar in nature. They also applied almost at the same time. As such their membership applications have been treated as linked to one another. However, it must be also be said that although there are striking similarities between them, there are also concrete differences.

Moldova and Ukraine have received the status of candidate member, while Georgia has not. This it seems mainly because of fears in the EU of the state of democracy in Georgia (Liboreio, 2022). Although all three nations have been given conditions to fulfil and as the EU still seems to keep their applications linked, there has formed a gap here already. Another point of importance is the fact that Georgia and Ukraine have been given the prospect of NATO accession, while this may not directly involve the EU, it is still an important geopolitical fact
seeing as NATO and EU membership overlap heavily and that territorial security in Europe is guaranteed by NATO. Although the nations are similar they also are different. If we want to create a correct analysis of EU policy regarding this group of nations, these factors must also be taken into consideration.

There is however another reason, and perhaps a more fundamental one that we must look at the EU’s policy regarding these three states. And it is the following: The nations of Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova are frontier states. One could say that they are the European frontier. The region where Europe and Russia collide. Therefore it is of utmost importance that the EU’s policy towards this group of nations is well thought out. We will go further in on this conception later in this policy report.

These are the reasons why I believe it is important to research the core question of this policy analysis.

This thesis will consist of several parts. In the next part of this thesis the methodology of this policy brief will be discussed. In this thesis the ends-ways-means method will be used to analyse the EU’s policy and to give out recommendations. The part following this introduction will be a brief history of the three nations and their relations with the EU since the fall of the Soviet Union till the lead up to the war in Ukraine. After this will come the actual policy analysis and the results from it. The last big part of this policy analysis will be the recommendations. I will be giving out recommendations to what the EU’s relations with the Associated Trio should look like based on the analysis made of the current EU policy. Within these recommendations I will account for the fact that the situation in Ukraine -specifically with the upcoming counter-offensive- is very fluid. Below the recommendations the conclusion can be found. Hereupon follow the annex and bibliography.
Research Design:

In this part of the master thesis I will be clarifying the methodology of the policy analysis. I will also discuss what data will be used for the analysis. The methodology that will be used in this thesis is built upon two academic articles (Lykke, 1997 & Douglas, 1999).

Lykke (1997) describes in his article how strategy must be defined. Lykke defines it in three parts: these being ends, ways and means. Lykke believes that these three must fit each other so as to come to a good strategy. When these are incompatible, the strategy can be in danger. The ultimate goals are the ends put down by the national policy. The national policy contains all base elements of national power: the political, economic, socio-psychological and the military elements. These are often overlapping and can even be contradictory. There are rarely pure military or political objectives. National leaders for example can choose to deploy military means and methods to reach a primarily political or economic end. This can however lead to problems in his opinion.

Next to Lykke’s article, that lays the basis for the ends, ways and means method, Douglas’ (1999) article is an example of the method being used in practice. In his article he focusses on and analyses possible future enemy competitors.

As mentioned before the core question that this policy analysis will try to answer is as follows:

**What relations must the European Union create with the Association Trio?**

The relevance of this question has already been explained in the introduction of this thesis.

Within this policy analysis the European policy regarding the Associated Trio countries (Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova) will be analysed using the ends, ways and means method. We will look at European policy from the start of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, so from February 24th 2022, until the middle of May 2023.

The European policy will be divided in three parts, as mentioned before, and each of these parts will be analysed separately. Afterwards the compatibility of these three elements will be analysed.

First of all we have the *European ends*. These are defined as the goals that the state strives to achieve.

Secondly we have the *European methods*. These are the ways with which a state strives to achieve their goals.

Thirdly we have the *European means*. These are the means with which the state tries to achieve a goal.
Before the policy analysis starts, there will be a short summary of the history of the Associated Trio countries since the fall of the Soviet Union until the start of the war in Ukraine and their relations with the European Union. We shall not go further than the start of the war, since this period will be analysed within the policy analysis.

After this the ends, ways & means of the EU’s policy will be discussed. Then an analysis will follow where we will look at the compatibility of the three elements.

In the policy analysis of the EU we will take into account 4 dimensions. We will look at the political, economic, military and legal dimensions of the EU’s policy. The socio-psychological dimension put forward by Lykke (1997) will not be used in this policy analysis seeing as this is a complex dimension and this would take us too far for a master thesis. The legal dimension is on the other hand not one of the dimensions that was put forward by Lykke, but seeing as the legal dimension also plays an important role in the relationship between the EU and the Association Trio nations, we will analyse at it.

The last major part of this policy analysis will be the recommendations. After having analysed the EU’s policy regarding the Associated Trio I will propose recommendations on what kind of relation to create with the three European nations.

After the recommendations a brief conclusion will follow. In this part we will summarize the results of the recommendations.

For this policy analysis this paper will make use of official documents of the EU and the Associated Trio nations, scientific literature, articles and documents from think tanks, and to a lesser extent useful news sources.

Official sources give us a lot of useful information, but states can also lie about their goals or the size of their means. This is even more the case in this policy analysis because of the fog of war regarding Ukraine and the fact that Ukraine has an incentive to keep much information secret or to lie about certain things to secure an advantage on the battlefield. This is why it is also important to consult other sources. This will be done in this master thesis.
A short history:

Before we start with the actual policy analysis, we will first shortly sketch the history of the Associated Trio countries Ukraine, Georgia & the Republic of Moldova and their relations with the EU from their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 until the start to the invasion to Ukraine.

As mentioned above all three nations gained their independence during the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 90’s. The nations all declared their independence in 1991 and would later be recognized by the international community and become members of the United Nations.

In the Republic of Moldova and Georgia the transition from being a member of the Soviet Union to becoming an independent state was not without incident (Remler, 2022). Even before its declaration on the 27th of August 1991, in 1990 Transnistria declared its independence from Moldova following fears that Moldova would become part of Romania after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Up to 700 people were killed in fighting between Moldovan and Transnistrian forces following the breakaway region's unilateral declaration of independence (BBC News, 2023). Eventually in 1992 a ceasefire agreement was signed and enforced by Russian troops already stationed in the breakaway region.

Georgia on the other hand also had separatist forces to worry about (BBC News, 2023). In 1989 there were already demands for more autonomy in South Ossetia, leading to violent clashes between Georgians and Ossetians. Soviet (and later Russian) peacekeepers were deployed, but this did not stop the violence. In 1990-1991 further violence occurred between separatist and Georgian forces. 1991 would also be the year where the Georgian parliament declared secession after overwhelming support in a referendum. Fighting would also break out in Abkhazia in 1992 between governments troops and local separatist forces. Georgian troops would be driven out of almost all of the region in 1993, leading eventually to a ceasefire in 1994, paving the way for the deployment of a Russian peacekeeping force in the region. Both breakaway regions would become internationally unrecognized breakaway states, under Russian tutelage. South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia in 1992, while Abkhazia declared its independence in 1999.

The early 2000’s would be defined in the nations by revolutions, more commonly known now as the colour revolutions. Both Georgia and Ukraine would go through a colour revolution in this period (BBC News, 2005 & US Helsinki Commission, 2004) . Georgia would undergo the so called Rose Revolution in 2003. Tens of Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to protest against the flawed results of a parliamentary election. This would eventually lead to the president of the nation resigning and reform being pushed through.
Ukraine also underwent a colour revolution (BBC News, 2022). This one is better known as the Orange Revolution. This revolution was also defined by mass protests. A change of government was again achieved and a more pro-European government was put in place.

In 2006 two referenda were held in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Transnistria, both voting in favour of independence (BBC News, 2023). Transnistria also backed a plan to eventually become part of Russia.

In 2008 a major decision was made that would have major implications for the region (NATO, 2008). NATO promised to both Georgia and Ukraine that they could one day become members of the alliance. Although no date was set or timeline was given, this soured relations between NATO and Russia, but also between Russia and the two countries who wanted NATO membership. This decision by NATO would be a key reason for the escalation of conflict between Georgia and Russia later that same year.

2008 was a year once more marked by conflict in Georgia (BBC News, 2023). Tensions between Georgia and Russia escalated into a full-blown military conflict after Georgia tried to retake South Ossetia by force following lower-level clashes with Russian-backed rebels. Russian forces counter-attacked and pushed Georgian troops out of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The fighting lasted for 5 days, eventually ending in a French-brokered peace agreement. Russia subsequently recognized the two breakaway regions as independent states and said it would keep a military presence in both regions.

2014 saw another revolution take place (Ormiston, 2023). In February of 2014 the Maidan Revolution ousted the pro-Kremlin government in Ukraine following its refusal to sign the association agreement with the European Union that it had negotiated. The then president of Ukraine Yanukovych had refused to sign the agreement under pressure from Russia. This however lead to major protests, with Maidan Square as its centre. After months of protests, and at the end of them even open clashes with government forces opening fire on protestors, Yanukovych fled to Russia. A pro-European government took over. However, this would not be the end of unrest in Ukraine. In February and March of 2014 Russia would invade and annex Crimea after a referendum on the 16th of March, and in April the same year the situation once more escalated with Russian backed separatist forces revolting against Ukraine in the Donbas region. Eventually at the end of 2014 and early 2015 Russia and Ukraine would sign the Minsk Agreements, putting an end to the major fighting in the Donbas. Although fighting would continue on a lower level until the start of the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Eventually in 2014 Ukraine would sign the Association Agreement with the EU, which included a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Georgia and the Republic of Moldova would also sign such an agreement with the EU the same year. Russia in turn imposed import restrictions on Moldova’s agricultural produce (BBC, 2023).
The following years would see a few other major events. In 2014 Russia and Abkhazia signed a strategic partnership agreement, while in 2015 Russia would sign an alliance and integration agreement with South Ossetia which abolished border checkpoints. In 2015 Russian forces in South Ossetia would also move the border 1.5 km further into Georgia proper, as such threatening the main road linking the west and east of the country. In 2017 the region of South Ossetia held a referendum to change its name to the State of Alania, this part of a plan to join the Russian Federation. The referendum ended up in favour of the name change.

Further in 2019 the Ukrainian Parliament passed a constitutional amendment in which their EU and NATO aspirations were defined (RFE, 2019). Georgia also has a similar clause in their constitution, and on the other hand the Republic of Moldova decided when they became independent to unilaterally declare neutrality in their constitution.

In spring 2021 Russia began amassing troops near the Ukrainian border in what it said were training exercises (Reuters, 2022). In November of 2021 the number of troops was already estimated to be surpassing 100,000. On December 17th Russia presented security demands to NATO. These included the demand that NATO would pull back troops from Eastern Europe and the barring of Ukraine from ever joining. Tensions were rising. The United States warned that an invasion was coming.

On February 21st 2022 Putin ordered so called ‘peacekeeping’ forces into the two breakaway regions in Eastern Ukraine after recognizing them as independent states. On February 23rd the Russian-backed separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk asked Russia for help in repelling aggression from the Ukrainian army. In an address broadcast just before 6am Moscow time Putin authorized ‘special military operations’ in Ukraine. Missile and artillery attacks began, striking major Ukrainian cities and infrastructure including Kyiv. The war had begun.
Policy Analysis:

Within this part of the master thesis we will be executing the actual policy analysis. The EU’s policy regarding the Associated Trio members (The Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) will be analysed using the ends, ways & means method from the start of the war in Ukraine until the middle of May. After having looked at the ends ways and means of the EU’s policy we will be looking at the complementarity of these parts. We will take into account four dimensions of the EU’s policy, these being the political, military, economical and legal dimensions.

The EU’s ends

We will first be looking at the EU’s goals.

The EU has 5 priorities in its general external action (EEAS, 2016).

- **The first priority is the Security of the Union.** More specifically to protect Europe and its citizens from dangers such as terrorism, hybrid threats, energy insecurity and economic volatility. The EU Global Strategy starts at home.

- **The second priority is state and societal resilience to the East and South of the European Union.** A stable neighbourhood is needed. If the neighbourhood is not stable, then the EU is not stable.

- **The third priority is an integrated approach to conflicts.** When violent conflicts erupt, the shared vital interests of the European Union are threatened. The EU must have a credible instrument for crisis management. The EU must act at all stages of the conflict cycle and it must act at different levels of governance. The EU also cannot solve these conflicts alone.

- **The fourth priority is cooperative regional orders.** In a world caught between global pressures and local pushback, regional dynamics come to the fore. Voluntary forms of regional governance offer states and peoples the opportunity to better manage security concerns, reap the economic gains of globalisation, express more fully cultures and identities, and project influence in world affairs. This is a fundamental rationale for the EU’s own peace and development in the 21st century, and this is why the EU will support cooperative regional orders worldwide.

- **The fifth priority is global governance for the 21st century.** The EU is committed to a global order based on international law, which ensures human rights, sustainable development and lasting access to the global commons. This commitment translates into an aspiration to transform rather than to simply preserve the existing system. Here
the clear goal is for strong multilateral institutions. If nations are imbedded in this order this will be good for all cooperation.

One thing we notice is that democratization is not among the key priorities for EU general external action. Although this concept played a big part in previous EU strategy, it is no longer considered as a key objective.

Next to the 5 priorities of external action of the EU, the institutional body has also defined priorities for its neighbourhood in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus (European Council, 2023). The EU defined these priorities when launching the Eastern Partnership.

The priorities are as follows:

- Security
- Stability and Prosperity
- Democracy and Rule of Law

The Eastern Partnership more broadly aims to strengthen and deepen the political and economic relations between the EU, its members states and the six Eastern European Partner Countries (although Belarus currently is not an active member). It also supports sustainable reform processes in member countries.

Regarding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and hybrid threats in both the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, the EU does not seem to have its ends defined.

The EU and its member states have strongly condemned the war of aggression and have demanded that Russia immediately cease its military actions and unconditionally withdraw all its forces from Ukraine (European Council, 2023). They also demanded that Ukraine’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence must be respected.

These demands however seem to be more like diplomatic and symbolic support to Ukraine than actual clear cut goals. It has been often said that Europe will support Ukraine no matter how long support will be necessary. This is however not a goal in and of itself.

As such the EU’s policy ends in regards to the Associated Trio nations are defined by the 5 general priorities put forward by the EEAS (2016) and the priorities defined in context of the Eastern Partnership (European Council, 2023).

The EU’s ways

We will now be looking at the EU’s methods used since the start of the invasion of Ukraine regarding policy towards the Associated Trio nations.
The response of the European Union to the invasion of Ukraine has been fiercer than anyone had expected. The EU is at the time of writing this thesis working on its 11th sanction package. The ten already existing sanction packages have had a major impact on Russia. We will not be discussing all aspects of the sanctions within this thesis, as they are too extensive in size and complexity, but the core elements of it will be pointed out here.

Restrictive measures have been applied to 1,473 individuals and 207 entities (European Commission, 2023 & European Council, 2023)). Individuals, such as high Russian government officials and oligarchs, have been hit by travel bans, asset freezes and prohibitions to provide funds. Entities have been hit by similar measures. €21.5 billion in individual assets have been frozen, and €300 billion of assets from the Russian Central Bank have been blocked. The EU’s trade with Russia has also been massively sanctioned. €43.9 billion in exported goods to Russia have been banned and €91.2 billion in imports. Goods that cannot be exported to Russia include cutting-edge technology, energy equipment, dual-use good (goods that could be used for both civil and military purposes), military equipment, transportation equipment, etc. Goods that cannot be imported include crude oil and refined petroleum products (with a few exceptions), coal, steel, etc. A price cap has also been put on oil by the EU in close cooperation with the Price Cap Coalition. The EU has also prohibited the provision of certain business-relevant services. The Russian transport sector has also been sanctioned, an example here being the closing of EU ports to the entire Russian merchant fleet (although there are exceptions here too). Another major part of the sanction regime is the SWIFT ban of ten Russian and four Belarusian banks, as such these banks cannot get foreign currency or transfer assets abroad. The National Central Bank of Russia has also heavily been sanctioned, as well as certain Russian media outlets. Next to Russia sanctions have also been aimed at Belarus and Iran. And it seems that the 11th sanction package will include the possibility to take measures against third countries who try to get these goods into Russia by other means.

As mentioned before in the introduction of this thesis, the EU and its member states have made around €72 billion available in support for Ukraine (European Council, 2023). €37.8 billion of which in economic assistance, €17 billion in support for refugees within the EU, €15.3 billion in military support and €1.99 billion in humanitarian aid. These are not small amounts. The EU will help Ukraine throughout 2023 financially with €18 billion. The EU also recently freed up another €2 billion through the European Peace Facility to deliver 1 million 155mm artillery shells over the next year as part of a three pronged approach. €1 billion will be used to reimburse nations who send over artillery ammunition from their stocks, €1 billion will be used for join ammunition procurement for Ukraine and the EU will also invest in the capacity of their military industrial complex (European Commission, 2023). For this last part another €500 million will be made available in the name of the Act in Support of Ammunition Production, also known as ASAP (If this thesis was an analysis of acronyms this would get a 10/10).
The EU has however not only sent financial aid to Ukraine. Moldova got €150 million in macro-financial assistance in 2022 and the European Parliament voted on the 9th of May 2023 to give Moldova €145 million in additional assistance (European Council, 2023 & European Parliament, 2023). Moldova also received €13 million in humanitarian assistance to help civilians affected by the war in Ukraine.

Militarily the EU has decided to start a military training mission for Ukraine (The Defense Post, 2023). The EU aims to train 30,000 Ukrainian troops. Next to this we also know that the NATO member states, including EU member states, are delivering military intelligence to Ukraine regarding the war in Ukraine (For example Russian troop positions). This intelligence has been key throughout the war. We can also not downplay the role European arms deliveries have had or will have on the conflict. At the end of April 2023 NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg said that more than 98% of promised combat vehicles during the war had arrived in Ukraine (Aljazeera, 2023). Stoltenberg continued that 9 new Ukrainian armoured brigades had been trained and equipped by NATO. These are estimated to contain about 30,000 troops. Ukraine has received about 1,550 armoured vehicles and 230 main battle tanks to form these units. A big portion of the armoured vehicles and a majority of the main battle tanks have been provided by the EU member states. Other recent examples of European contributions are the recent announcement of a new €2.7 billion German military aid package in early May 2023, the announcement from Macron that France would also send Stormshadow long range cruise missiles to Ukraine and the above mentioned promise of sending 1 million 155mm artillery shells to Ukraine in the coming year (DW, 2023 & Bisht, 2023).

The EU has however been careful with its deliveries of weapon systems to Ukraine. First it was decided that no offensive weapons would be delivered, then the EU wouldn’t deliver long range systems like HIMARS, then the Union didn’t want to deliver main battle tanks to Ukraine and after that it didn’t want to deliver fighter aircraft and definitely not western made fighter aircraft like the F-16. However the European Union crossed all these so called ‘red lines’ eventually, even the F-16 red line on May 19th got crossed just before the due date of this thesis.

As mentioned in the introduction about 4 million people from Ukraine benefit currently from the temporary protection mechanism as of data up to March 2023 (European Council, 2023). In March 2022 the EU activated the temporary protection directive – an emergency scheme used in exceptional circumstances of mass influx – to provide immediate and collective protection to displaced people and to reduce pressure on the national asylum systems of EU countries. This includes a residence permit, access to the labour market and housing, medical assistance and access to education for children. The Republic of Moldova activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to support Ukrainians arriving in their country. They were offered various kinds of assistance by member states of the EU. The EU also has decided to help Ukraine regarding the investigation and prosecution of war crimes. The EU Advisory Mission
for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine has also had its mandate adapted so it could give advice regarding investigation and prosecution alongside its other work.

The EU has also decided to allow temporary trade liberalisation and other trade concessions with regard to certain Ukrainian products (European Council, 2023). This means that import duties on Ukrainian exports would not be due. The electricity grids of Ukraine and Moldova were also successfully synchronised with the Continental European Grid in March 2022. Another important EU initiative were the EU-Ukraine solidarity lanes established in May 2022. These having the purpose of ensuring that Ukraine could export grain and other agricultural products, but also that it could import the goods it needs.

Another aspect of EU support for Ukraine and also the Republic of Moldova and Georgia has been diplomatic and political support. The EU and its member states have been very vocal in their support for Ukraine and for the self determination of the three nations in question. This diplomatic support however is not merely in words. The EU and its member states have for example supporting Ukraine during votes in the UN General Assembly, also lobbying with other countries to get them to vote with them. These votes may not have much actual physical impact so to say, however the symbolic value of these votes cannot be underestimated. Definitely not as they may have huge effects on Ukrainian and even Russian morale. The EU has also been supporting Ukraine in the UN Security Council, the G7, G20 and other international institutions. The EU has also expressed its support for President Zelensky’s 10-point peace plan. The EU firmly stands behind Ukraine diplomatically.

The European Digital Media Observatory is currently supporting European fact-checkers in the fight against disinformation concerning the situation in Ukraine (European University Institute, 2022). Disinformation and Russian-backed narratives are a major threat and a hybrid tool often used by Russia to influence public sentiment. Another action that fits in the category of fighting these things has already been mentioned, that being the sanctioning and banning of Russian media outlets.

Although these measures have all had impact and importance, the arguably biggest method used by the European Union in their policy has been giving all three of these nations the perspective of EU membership. Ukraine presented its application for EU membership on the 28th of February 2022, Moldova and Georgia presented it a few days later on the 3rd of March (European Commission, 2023). Eventually on the 23rd of June 2022 the European Council granted Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia the perspective to become a member of the European Union. The European Council also granted Ukraine and Moldova candidate status, and for Georgia the candidate status would be granted once the set of priorities were met. In the conclusions of the European Council meeting of the 23rd of June, it could be read that the EU was ready to grant the status of candidate country to Georgia once the priorities specified in the Commission’s opinion on Georgia’s application would be addressed (European Council,
The Commission was also invited to report to the Council on the fulfilment of the conditions specified in the Commission’s opinions on the respective membership applications. The Council would decide on further steps once all these conditions would be met. This mainly regarding the opening of further talks, but in the case of Georgia this was in regards to giving out the status of candidate country. The European Commission is set to give a review of this kind in late 2023. Georgia was not given candidate member status mainly for fears of the democratic status and democratic backsliding in the country and the EU wanting to see reform in this regard in the nation, as mentioned before above.

Although these nations have only been given the status of candidate member in 2022 (or in Georgia’s case a perspective of membership), it is not the case that these nations start at zero. As pointed out before, all three nations signed association agreements including deep and comprehensive free trade areas. As such the nations have already since 2014 been implementing the Acquis Communautaire and have been reforming their nations both economically and politically. As such the nations have already been slowly integrating with the European Union for years. This in the framework of the Eastern Partnership. However, although Georgia has implemented the Acquis Communautaire the most, it still failed to gain the candidate member status because of fears regarding the political situation in Georgia. Fears only strengthened by the recent turmoil surrounding a ‘foreign agents’ law in Georgia, which it eventually dropped and questions regarding the imprisonment of one of Georgia’s previous presidents (Megrelidze, 2023 & Law, 2023). The framework of the association agreements however provides a guiding line for the three nations to implement reform and to integrate them further with the Union before actual membership.

The EU’s means

Here we will discuss the means that the EU possesses. The EU is a Union of 27 member states. The EU is not a monolithic body, but a coming together of European nations. The EU’s main institutional bodies consist of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and the European Council hosting the leaders of the member states. EU foreign policy, which is the most important for this thesis, lies mainly in the hand of the European Council and Council of Ministers, and decisions need to be made by unanimity. It must also be remembered that member states can act on their own as well as within the EU body. The EU population equalled an estimated 446.7 million in 2022 (Eurostat, 2023).

First we will discuss the European Union’s economy. The EU operating as a single market made up of 27 countries had a GDP of €14.5 trillion in 2021 (EU, 2021). The EU accounted for about 14% of the world’s trade in Goods regarding exports, second to only China. However, although the EU boasts a massive economy it must be noted that the Eu’s budget of 2022 equalled only
€170 billion, a bit more than 1% of GDP. Most of the budget of the EU lies with the member states. The runup to the war in Ukraine and the war itself have had a strong impact on the EU’s economy. The invasion and the weaponization of energy by Russia made inflation spike to levels not seen in the 21st century. In 2022 annual inflation more than tripled and reached the highest level ever measured at 9.2% (Eurostat, 2023). The war did not only make prices spike but also increased uncertainty in the Union’s market. At the time of writing however the price of gas is the lowest in 1.5 years at €32 per megawatt hour (Grommen & Verhaeghe, 2023). The winter of 2022-2023 was mild and now that we have entered the time of year where gas storages need to be refilled, we find them already quite packed. The EU GDP growth has also been revised up to 1.0% in 2023 from 0.8% in earlier projections (European Commission, 2023). It must however be pointed out that certain nations have been hit harder economically because of the war than others. Nations in Eastern Europe were more reliant on energy from Russia and therefore were hit harder, leading to more inflation and the economic issues linked to it.

We will now discuss the European Union’s military potential. The total Defence Expenditure of the 26 European Defence Agency members in 2021 was €214 billion (European Defence Agency, 2021). Equalling 1.5% of GDP. €52 Billion was used to acquire new equipment and to invest in Research and Development. The EU itself does not have a standing military. This is still the job of the member states. Following an estimate by the World Bank (2023) the total amount of armed forces personnel in the European Union in 2019 amounted to 1,910,000 troops. We will not be doing an overview of specific military capabilities such as the amount of main battle tanks or naval vessels in this thesis as that would take us too far and because there are no clear estimates. We will however point out that France is the sole nuclear power within the EU, and that it has a few hundred nuclear warheads. European defence is however complicated because of the duplication in force structure. Because there are 27 separate militaries within the European Union, each military has a logistical branch, an information gathering branch, a separate training branch, etc. Because of this fault within the EU’s military structure, even though our defence budget can be ranked amongst the highest in the world, the efficiency that we get out of our spending is low. This also has an effect on the purchasing and maintaining of expensive strategically necessary equipment like tanker aircraft. Because of our fractured budgets, the EU lacks these capabilities and has to often rely on the US to supply these capabilities. Some improvements however can be noted. In 2021 member states allocated €7.9 billion to European collaborative defence equipment procurement projects (European Defence Agency, 2021). European collaborative defence R&T expenditure also reached €248 million in 2021. We also see European cooperation on research and development of costly, but highly important new systems such as generation 6 fighter aircraft. Here for example we see Germany, France and Spain cooperating for the creation of a so called Future Combat Air System and Italy is cooperating with the UK and Japan to produce one as well under the name of Global Combat Air Programme (Machi, 2022 & Chuter, 2022). The EU
also possesses a legal obligation on the EU and its member states to assist each other in case of armed aggression, this being article 42(7) in the Treaty of the European Union (EEAS, 2022). It must also be noted that the EU has increased its defence investment and readiness since the invasion of Ukraine. One of the key examples being the €100 billion pledge from Scholtz for the German military (DW, 2022).

Another important means that must be pointed out, and is highly linked to the previous part about the EU’s military capacity, is the fact that 22 of the 27 EU member states are members of the NATO alliance, with Sweden still trying to join at the time of writing this thesis. The member states who are not part of NATO have all declared their non-alignment with military alliances. This brings much of the EU (and all member states close to the Russian border and the Ukrainian border) into an alliance with the United States of America, Canada, Turkey, Norway, Iceland, Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia. The alliance with the USA specifically is a huge boost to the EU’s security as the US possesses the strongest military in the world, boasting a military budget of 796 billion dollar in 2022 (US Department of Defense, 2022) and providing Europe with a nuclear umbrella, together with France. The core of the NATO alliance is article 5, which is also a mutual assistance clause. The NATO alliance also works closely with other friendly nations around the world like Japan and South Korea, leading to cooperation amongst these nations. Ever since the invasion of Ukraine, NATO has once more found purpose. An increase of NATO high readiness forces to 300,000 was announced during the NATO Summit in Madrid in June 2022 (NATO, 2022). The troops assigned to this role are mostly European troops. NATO members have also pledged to up their defence budgets and investment. Although only 7 of the alliance’s 30 countries (before Finland joined as NATO now has 31 members) made the 2% of GDP defence budget mark in 2022, many pledges have now been made to reach this goal.

Another means that the EU possesses is its strong international diplomatic position. The EU is represented in the G7 and G20. Although it does not sit directly on the UN security council, France does. European nations also have a high amount of influence in other multilateral institutions like the IMF or the World Bank, with relatively high voting power. The EU also has soft power in the international community and uses its influence to pose itself as a mediator and a leader in diplomatic affairs, although not necessarily always with success. Political will is also a means that is of great importance. The amount of political will to support Ukraine for example has been on a level that was not expected before the war broke out. The amount of sanctions, the decision of the EU institutions to give military aid to a nation at war for the first time in its history, the not backing down faced with energy blackmail, etc. The EU has shown that the will is there. However, we also see that the Union (and the other Western allies as well) have had issues with crossing so called ‘red lines’ of military aid. The political will eventually was found to send Leopard II tanks and even the US gave into European pressure surrounding the F-16. The time it has taken though and the limited and slow delivery of some key systems
however also shows that the EU is careful not to be seen as too escalatory, and that it in this regard does not have enough political will to send equipment fast and in high quantity from the start (also not wanting to completely disrupt their own stockpiles and readiness). This rule however does not apply to the entire Union, we have seen the Baltic states and Poland for example send over huge quantities of their stock, sometimes sending all of their stock regarding certain weapon systems.

A means that has already been discussed partly under the guise of ways is the close trade and diplomatic relationship between the EU and the Associated Trio nations (EEAS, 2022; EEAS, 2021 & EEAS, 2022). As mentioned before, the EU has Association agreements with all three nations, including deep and comprehensive free trade areas. This relationship itself means that the three nations have been slowly integrating into the EU and its market. The EU also has a diplomatic relationship with the nations through the Eastern Partnership, however this forum has seen troubles in the latest years. In 2021 however with the creation of the Associated Trio, a new relationship with the nations commenced. With the three nations vowing to take, and to help each other take, the path of European integration and to work together with the EU regarding this. The EU is the largest trading partner with Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia and the EU is very important for the nations regarding investment and access to for example finance. The EU has also given visa free travel to the nations’ citizens. The EU also delivers yearly grant assistance to the nations and has financially aided the nations in times of Covid-19. The EU also supports the sovereignty of the three nations and their territorial integrity. The EU regarding Georgia has for example the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia (EUSR), an EU monitoring mission (EUMM) and supplies €12.75 million to Georgia to help strengthen the Georgian Defence Forces. What we also see is that Transnistria has reoriented its exports from the Russian Federation to the European Union (Deen & Zweers, 2022). In 2021, exports to the EU accounted for 54% of Transnistria’s exports. The EU has also been in discussion with Abkhazia regarding the extending of the deep and comprehensive free trade area to the region (Crisis Group, 2018).

Compatibility of the three parts of the European Union’s policy

We have now looked at the ends, ways and means of the European Union’s policy. In this part we will look at the compatibility of these three elements to see if the EU’s policy is effective or not.

First we will look at the sanction policy regarding the Russian Federation. The EU has an economy of €14.5 trillion and is an important financial centre (SWIFT for example is based in the EU). Therefore it has the means to put out sanctions that hurt. The sanction policy has had
major impacts on the Russian economy. The Russian GDP is expected to drop in the worst-case scenario by 2.5% in a forecast by the OECD (European Council, 2023). Although this may not seem like a massive hit, it is quite significant. Normally during war time the economy of a nation at war should grow, this because of increased demand by the government and other state measures. The Russian economy however declined by 2.1% in 2022 and is expected to decline even further. The sanctions have also had a major impact on Russia’s revenues, this more specifically regarding gas and oil. The EU has banned many oil products from the Russian Federation and the diversification away from Russian gas has also seen Russia lose a big chunk of its energy market. As such the sanctions have put the Russian budget under strain, as energy export was a major part of it. Russia was able to cope with these issues during 2022, a period of significantly high energy prices, but now that price caps, diversification and calming of the markets are happening the Russian budget will come under even more strain. The freezing of assets has also had a major impact on the Russian war effort and its budgetary power. Having frozen €300 billion of the Russian war chest means that the ability of the Russian Federation to keep this war going has been severely limited. The Russian government must already run a deficit because of the war; and the freezing of these assets has made it impossible for them to keep it going indefinitely. This has also been helped by the fact that it basically has become impossible for the Russian government to take loans in the financial markets because of those same sanctions. The Russian Central bank and the government are currently taking all measures they can to keep the Russian economy afloat, however these measures cannot work indefinitely. The Rubel has been artificially been kept high so as to make sure it doesn’t crash. The efforts of the Russian government to ban the pulling out of the stock market is also merely an artificial band aid, which does not solve the underlying problem at hand. The tension on the Russian economy is real and although it must be said that the Russian economy has not collapsed as some analysts expected, the Russian economy is severely under strain. On top of this, the export ban by the European Union of dual use goods, military goods, transport goods, energy goods, etc. has made it difficult for the Russian military industrial complex to keep its production rates steady, this definitely of more modern equipment. We should not expect the Russian military industrial base to collapse anytime soon, but the strain on it is there. We see for example that they now build main battle tanks with worse optics, communication devices and sometimes even reactive armour. Although the war machine will keep turning, and although some parts still get in (for example through the purchasing of washing machines), the quality and quantity at which the Russians can reinforce and reequip their troops at the front has been limited. And this is a positive.

A negative however of the sanction regime is that the circumventing of the sanctions is a major issue at the moment. Third nations close to Russia buy for example double use goods from the EU to then sell it on to Russia. Russia is also known to operate a shadow fleet of naval vessels to circumvent the sanctions. Iran and North Korea have also been aiding Russia with weapon and ammunition deliveries. A well-known here being the Shahed drone, but the amount of
artillery ammunition delivered by these nations might have a bigger impact on the conflict. Recent reports by the US on the possibility of future weapon deliveries from China to Russia are also worrying, but as of now it seems unlikely that the PRC would take such a turn in policy.

Now how does the sanction regime do, regarding the goals set by the European Union?

I believe that this is in line with the goals of the European Union. Firstly it sets a precedent that the invasion of a sovereign nation and the breaking of international law will be met with a major response. It sends a message to never try such a manoeuvre. It also shows the credibility of the rules based order. You can’t break the rules without consequences. The EU also coordinated these sanctions with the international community, as such using multilateral institutions like the G7. The approach the EU has used has also been an integrated one. The sanctions have not been one dimensional, they have looked at many avenues to hit the Russian government and state where it hurts. However, more importantly this aids the goal of the safety of the Union and stability and resilience in the east. The sanctions have hit the Russian war economy, they have significantly lowered Russian revenue and they have put a strain on the Russian government’s war chest and budget. The sanctions have weakened the regime in the Kremlin, and the effects will keep putting a strain on the nation long term. Although this will not stop the war itself in its tracks, it has lowered the capacity to keep this war going with quality equipment and long term. It has also weakened the potential of a successful Russian incursion into another one of its neighbours in the future and it has given the Russian Federation a clear message that this kind of aggressive attack on another nation’s sovereignty will not be tolerated. This will increase the stability and resilience in the east, protecting the sovereignty and democracy in the nations in the region, and it will also help protect the European Union itself as stopping Russia in Ukraine means that it cannot further destabilize the region or even eventually confront the EU itself.

Next we will look at the aid given to all three Associated Trio nations. Ukraine has been a major recipient of financial support, however Georgia and the Republic of Moldova have also received funds from the EU in the framework on the Eastern Partnership and macro-financial aid. This aid achieves the EU’s goal to have a resilient Eastern flank and to sustain stability and prosperity in the region. Moldova for example has been the victim of Russian hybrid attacks. One of their tactics has been destabilizing the economy through for example the artificial spiking of energy prices, as mentioned above. EU macro-financial aid means that not only will prosperity remain in the region, but also that Russia’s attacks on the democracy, rule of law and sovereignty in the nation get repelled. In Georgia the aid also makes it so that an economic downturn cannot be used by political actors to justify a democratic backslide. The same can be said in Ukraine. Aid given to Ukraine aids the democratic government and their fight for independence and sovereignty. Returning to the last point of the previous paragraph, stopping the Russian war machine in Ukraine and helping Ukraine in gaining victory will support safety in the Union as well.
The military support to Ukraine can be said to reach this same objective (Oryx Blog, 2023). Russian visually confirmed losses are as of May 1st at 1925 tanks, 3989 vehicles, 239 command posts, 686 artillery pieces, 194 MLRS systems, 80 aircraft, 84 helicopters and 219 drones. Ukrainian losses are significantly lower at 493 tanks, 1431 vehicles, 12 command posts, 285 artillery pieces, 45 MLRS systems, 66 aircraft, 29 helicopters and 105 drones visually confirmed lost. Although these estimates aren’t perfect, it gives us a good base on which to work. It must also be noted that not all this equipment is destroyed equipment. Ukraine for example has captured hundreds of these Russian tanks, armoured personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles during its counteroffensive operations and during Russian retreats, for example around Kyiv. It must also be pointed out that the equipment lost on the Russian side has not simply been T-62 or T-55 tanks. The Russian army has lost hundreds of T-80 and dozens of its T-90 tanks. It seems that the Russians also do not want to risk having its most modern T-14 Armata take part in combat, as they fear the destruction of such a system could have a bad effect on morale. The EU has helped reequip Ukrainian forces and even equipping 9 new brigades mainly equipped with NATO weaponry. NATO weapons like the Javelin and ammunition sent from European storages has also helped Ukraine in destroying the combat potential of the Russian Federation. Casualty numbers are harder to come by, as they are for military and political reasons kept secret or exaggerated. However I will draw on the estimates in the leaked US documents earlier in 2023 to give us a base line on casualties in the war (Arkin, 2023). I shall only using US documents that have been shared by the general media. The estimates the US brought forward in January 2023 were 189,500-223,000 Russians killed or injured in combat: and 124,000-131,000 Ukrainians killed or injured. If the Russian army is stopped in Ukraine, it cannot then move on to its next target and eventually even threaten the EU. The threat of the Russian army has also decreased dramatically because of the loss in equipment. It will take the Russian Federation years, probably decades to rebuild its army to once more be a sizable threat. The current professional Russian army has been made mostly combat ineffective, definitely its more elite units who have been used for the most difficult missions like the VDV, Naval Infantry and Special Forces. Adding to this the fact that hundreds of thousands of military aged Russian young men left the nation in fear of mobilization it is easy to say that the conventional threat that the Russian army poses has been significantly weakened. And this with not a single drop of EU blood spilled, to put it in a grim way.

There are currently also no long term plans regarding military aid to Ukraine. Of course the EU has promised support ‘for as long as necessary’, but these are words, not plans. The only medium term plans currently on the table are mostly plans for 2023-2024. We need long term plans. Ukraine will need help from the EU long after the war will be over, and the EU should start its planning now so as to be able to deliver this aid. We must also take into account attrition and repair. Another important point that must be discussed, is that although the EU’s contribution in military equipment is sizable, the US’s military support still far outweighs that of the EU and its member states. This is not a sustainable situation. US aid at this moment is
indispensable for Ukraine, should it fall off it would be a huge issue since the amount of military support from its European allies is not enough. The US however has other interests in the world that it cares for. For Europe this is an incredibly important conflict, that threatens the EU’s vital interests. However, this is not really the case for the US. Although the conflict is also of great importance for the US, it is not in its backyard and as such the US does not have the same commitment and relation to it as the Europeans do. The US also has other theatres it find increasingly important and over time it will most likely start shifting focus away from Ukraine to other parts of the world. As such there is a danger here that the EU will not be able to efficiently achieve their ends, since the EU does not currently have the military means and the means of political will to take one this role. Another possible issue is the fact that military aid has been constantly facing red lines and has only slowly and in small scale been going over them. The means that is most important here is political will. As mentioned above in the part about means, political will has been high in terms that the EU has taken big steps, which nobody expected it to take. The plan to deliver one million 155mm artillery shells is another good example of this, going as far as joint procurement. The EU has however been facing so called ‘red lines’ in regards to military aid. Not wanting to escalate the conflict, the EU has been careful in sending particular systems. The EU should take its time to work out the practicalities of deliveries and take the time to get all allies and the general public on one line before sending systems and the EU should also not get lost in emotional rhetoric. Russia is also still a huge nuclear power, so the EU must also retain a level of caution. However, Ukraine is fighting this war for its survival. The slower systems are delivered, the more time Russian units have to dig in and the more stress is put upon the Ukrainian military and its ability to wage war. A Russian defeat is in line with the EU’s goals of the international rule based order, stability in the east, safety of the Union, etc. Sending over material at such a slow pace is not efficient. The weeks long pondering for example regarding the Leopard II meant time lost and the fact that Ukrainian pilots were not placed into training for F-16’s in the past year and will now mostly have to start from scratch to learn the jets, is not effective policy. There is also the fact that the West in general sends this equipment only slowly after it has been announced. The aid Ukraine has received from the EU is significant, and promises for more equipment keep being made. However, although the EU and its member states have now sent a decent amount of tanks to Ukraine it could still be more. Not sending over all tanks is understandable, this in regards to force readiness and the like, however our main threat to European security is the Russian Federation and therefore the quantity that Ukraine is receiving is insufficient to achieve the EU’s ends. The slow trickling in of systems when the EU decides to send them is also an issue, time is lost for Ukraine. Time it does not have. This is mainly a question of political will, which although higher than expected, still seems to be lacking. The Western policy of not getting boots on the ground in Ukraine though is a good policy. Crossing this line would be against the safety of the Union.
EU policy regarding refugees and other affairs such as tariffs/electricity and the solidarity lanes have also added to the resilience and stability and prosperity of the eastern flank. It also has shown that the EU is capable of an integrated approach. The EU has an enormous market and can therefore use their economic power and capital to give support. The tariffs decision has however had some negative impact on the safety of the union and its internal unity (Gongadze, 2023). In April 2023 Poland, shortly followed by Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, decided to unilaterally ban Ukrainian agricultural products. The argument being that it was a threat to the farmers in the nations and the like, threatening the citizens of the European Union. And although this is an understandable concern, the response of these nations to go against EU law and to unilaterally ban goods was also a threat to the functioning, unity, stability and the credibility of the European Union. The EU must prevent these internal rifts from happening. This issue also caused losses to Ukraine’s economy and its stability. If the EU is not careful with such matter, these could cause a rift between the EU and Ukraine in the long term, something which would benefit neither.

The anti-disinformation measures taken by the EU have also shown its integrated approach. This is also very important for the resilience in the east and the development of democracy and stability in the region. All three nations are currently going through tense periods and are under direct or hybrid threat of Russia. Therefore the combatting of these issues are very important. The EU seems to lack the means here to truly fight disinformation.

The diplomatic and political support that Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia have received are also of great importance. This support underlines and supports the democratic reform in the nations and the EU’s political victories in multilateral organisations connect with the EU’s ends regarding multilateralism and cooperative regional orders (this last one regarding the Eastern Partnership and the Association Trio initiatives). The EU’s diplomatic capital plays an important role here. The EU’s Eastern Partnership initiative however has seen one member leave and two of its members fight one another. The three remaining nations decided as well to form their own club of nations in cooperation with the EU. The Eastern Partnership also did not fulfil its intended goals. War has returned to Europe, in Ukraine but also around Nagorno-Karabakh and democratically the region has not seen major improvements under the Eastern Partnership framework.

Membership perspective is the biggest tool that the European Union has to offer. Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova have received candidate status, while Georgia has received European perspective and the possibility to join if it works on its goals given to it by the European Commission. The other two nations have also received goals to achieve and must achieve these for further talks to ensue. The previous talked about utilised ways have the possibility to ensure security and resilience in the east, however it is only European Union membership that can give a sustainable peace to these three nations. The other ways can also of course have effect, as mentioned before. However although for example a defeat and stop of
Russian forces in Ukraine or the battle against disinformation might bring more security to the three nations and the wider region, this may not be the case anymore 5 or 10 years later. Although it would be expected that Russia would not undertake such violent measures once more, we cannot be sure and seeing the case of nobody expecting the full scale invasion of Ukraine, we cannot take the possibility lightly. The perspective of EU membership also brings with it a push for reform. The nations all want to join the EU, with both Georgia and Ukraine having this in their constitution and Moldova’s President Sandu recently asking for the accession talks to begin shortly (Jack, 2023). EU membership perspective is the most powerful reforming tool the EU has and this has the possibility of strengthening democracy and the rule of law in all three nations. In the case of Georgia, some might argue that this is not the case as there have been signs of democratic backsliding, however the Georgian population has shown massive support for the move during several protests and as such the prospect of EU membership is pushing the nation towards reform anyway. The EU will also itself be safer if these nations join the block. Because if these nations are left alone another conflict might spark, leading to world tension and possible escalation. Risk of escalation in conflict with a Great Power in it can never be ignored. The goal of cooperative regional order here is also fulfilled to some extent as the three nations have formed the Association Trio so as to work together regarding EU integration and to work together with the EU as a group. The nations have also already integrated partly with the EU through their association agreements. The nations therefore do not need to start at zero regarding economic and political reform. These agreements also serve as a tool through which the nations can already integrate into the EU before becoming actual members and the nations can already reap some of the benefits of integration into the EU markets making the process of joining the EU more bearable. Although the EU has already given two of the nations candidate member status, the Union is not in favour of any fast track procedures. The EU wants to go through the entire process and focusses on the fact that the system is performance based and that goals must be met according to the Copenhagen Criteria and the goals set by the European Commission. Again, the EU and the Associated Trio already had extensive ties even before the applications for membership, so the decision to give them candidate status is not as such that controversial. This approach is good and it encourages concrete reform to take place. This will strengthen the democracy and rule of law of the nations and their stability in the long term. As mentioned before, EU membership perspective is the most transformative power the EU possesses. Some questions however have been asked regarding the so called fourth Copenhagen Criteria regarding the fact that the EU must be ready for expansion. This question was again put forward regarding Ukraine’s possible admission and the impact this would have on the agricultural system of the EU. This question is not without reason. The joining of three more states into the EU would bring the EU to 30 member states and the addition of Ukraine alone would add more than 40 million citizens to the Union. As such questions can be asked regarding the goal of the safety of the Union. However these fears are often overstated. First of all it can be arranged for example
that Ukraine could integrate slowly and under conditions into the agricultural system. Secondly, the fear that three extra voices would cause a shut down on the working of the institutions is wrong. The EU currently has 27 member states with different strategic goals and cultures, however the institutions work, although sometimes with difficulty, but they work. The addition of three voices into this system will not destroy it. The new viewpoints and the experience from these nations will actually be very enriching for the European Union and will improve its working. It also will remain possible to reform the EU after these nations have become EU members.
Recommendations:

We have now discussed the ends, ways and means of the European policy and we have analysed the compatibility of these three elements. Now we return to the core question that this thesis revolves around, that being: **What relations must the European Union create with the Association Trio?** We will now move on to the recommendation part of this policy analysis.

First I will be recommending a new conceptualization and a new framework regarding the Association Trio. The European Union (and broader the West) is in confrontation with the Russian Federation. One may very well wonder when this confrontation truly started. Did it start in 2008 during the Russo-Georgian war? Did it start in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea? Or has the Russian Federation been in confrontation with us since 1991 and did the Cold War confrontation never truly end? These is a very interesting question and definitely worth further research, but it is clear now, in 2023, that we are in a confrontation with Russia.

A confrontation is not merely the stand-off between two armies with the threat of industrial and nuclear warfare. A confrontation is not simply crisis – war – peace, a confrontation can escalate into conflict and then return to the confrontation all the same (Smith, 2019). Not even conventional warfare is necessary as an escalation. Hybrid methods like putting unidentified units in a region and having it annexed through a referendum or blowing up a major gas pipeline are also possible escalations. There are many possible layers of escalation.

Russia is currently in a struggle for a sphere of influence in the eastern border region of the European Union (Biscop, 2023). It has as good as occupied Belarus and has been fighting for influence in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Russia has also been using the breakaway regions as a means to influence the nations in question. The three nations, also making up the Association Trio, are the frontier states of Europe and its Union. They are the place where the EU and Russia clash. They are the European frontier.

Russia wants a sphere of influence of its own. The EU tried in their policy regarding the Eastern Partnership to keep the region as a buffer zone, with which both Russia and the EU could have relations with. Russia however wants exclusivity. As such Russia invaded Ukraine on the 24th of February. Many reasons have been thrown about regarding why Russia invaded. With the Russian line being ‘demilitarization and denazification’ Ukraine and the idea that Ukraine is a people linked to Russia and that Ukraine as a sovereign state doesn't exist. The main reason however comes down to exclusivity and the idea that Ukraine belongs to Russia. With Ukraine leaning more and more to the West, with possible NATO membership leaving NATO on Russia’s doorstep and integration into the EU through the association agreements, Russia decided to intervene with the clear goal of regime change and annexation. Similarly Russia has been trying to get Moldova and Georgia into its sphere of influence. The news about a Russian plan
for a coup in Moldova reinforces this, together with false flag operations within Transnistria. Moldova has a neutrality clause in its constitution, however the leaning West of the Moldovan government cannot be allowed in the eyes of the Kremlin. And the Kremlin will do what is necessary to achieve this, be it through a coup or through energy coercion. Georgia has also been the victim of Russian meddling. The obvious one here is the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 where possible NATO membership of Georgia played a key role. Russia has however also been using the border between Georgia and the breakaway regions as a weapon to influence Georgia and its policy. As mentioned in the short history, Russia moved the border 1.5 km closer to a very important infrastructure connection of Georgia. Russia has also used citizenship and ethnicity as a justification for their attacks on the sovereignty of these nations. Handing out passports to citizens in breakaway regions, thus making them protected by Russia; claiming persecution of Russian ethnic groups and recently in Ukraine a law that stated that all those who do not transfer their citizenship to Russian could be deported (RFE, 2023).

It is in the vital interest of the EU to keep the sovereignty of these nations intact. It is in the interest of the EU to keep the rules based international order strong. There is also the moral question, and the question whether the EU can be a credible bastion of democracy and peace if it lets a revisionist power do as it pleases and to let it dictate the will of the Kremlin to its surrounding states. The credibility of the EU abroad and internally is on the line. An unstable border is also not a good thing for the EU. This merely causes the possibility of escalation, threatens the economic stability of the European economic system, threatening our way of life and causes mass migration. This could also destabilise the EU internally and cause rifts in its society. However the main interest of the EU in this conflict is the threat this poses directly to the security of the Union and its citizens. Many in the West believe that the war in Ukraine is not a direct threat to the vital interests of the Union. However I believe otherwise as this conflict threatens the security of the Union itself, which makes this conflict of vital interest to us. As mentioned before, the war in Ukraine is part of a broader confrontation between the EU and Russia. Russia is a revisionist power and wishes to enforce a sphere of influence around itself. I believe however that it is quite wishful thinking that if these three nations were to fall to Russian influence that that would be it for the Russians and for Putin. Russia has been fighting a ‘hybrid war’ with the West for over a decade now. Influencing elections, spreading disinformation, encouraging unrest, etc. Russia wants to weaken the West and the European Union, it wants to divide it. The recent Russian reforms in for example education, where education is being militarized, also give us a view into what the Russian Federation is preparing for (Troianovski, 2022). If Russia would be able to achieve their sphere of influence and then if Europe would be divided, the possibility of a Russian attack is there. The Baltic states have quite a large Russian minority. The same tactics Russia used in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 could be used here. Let us also not forget that in the Russian propaganda and state proclamations Russia is already at ‘war’ with NATO. These claims of course are rubbish, however they set the tone and that tone is dangerous. Now of course this is illogical in our
eyes. Russia taking on NATO or even the EU would not end well. However, should Russia get the idea that it was now or never and that at that moment limited great power war was possible, and in the situation where the sphere of influence has already been established, are we sure that the Kremlin would not take the opportunity?

As such the EU must not let it get that far. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia falling can be stepping blocks to a greater and much bigger threat to the EU. Therefore it must now be dealt with in the Associated Trio nations and most importantly in Ukraine. As such we come to the conclusion that these nations are the European frontier. Here the EU must halt Russia from gaining an exclusive sphere of influence and protect the sovereignty in the nations, and Russia on the other hand wants the nations to listen only to Moscow.

The first thing the EU must do is to stop looking at its relations with the three nations in question through the Eastern Partnership framework. This project has ultimately failed its purpose and is not fit for purpose anymore, as mentioned already above. The EU must look at this group of nations specifically as they are in a particular situation. Therefore the Association Trio forum is the best way for the EU to organize its relations with the nations in question.

Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia must all receive membership of the European Union. This is the core of what should guide EU relations with these nations during the following years. I do not support the idea put forward by some of fast track membership. EU membership perspective is the strongest reformatory tool the EU possesses. It is imperative for the security and stability of the Union that only stable and democratic nations join the block. The procedures must be gone through, although there must be a sense of urgency attached to it nonetheless. There is once more war in Europe, this is not the time to keep these nations on hold for a decade. If the nations follow through with their reforms and have fulfilled the goals asked from them, then they should be admitted. The reason why I believe that membership should be given to all these nations is simple. EU membership is key in guaranteeing long term peace and stability in these nations. Without EU membership, even if other measures are taken, long term stability (both security wise and economy wise) is not guaranteed. EU membership will stop Russia's ability to directly interfere with these nations' sovereignty. It will also add experience, new viewpoints and in the case of Ukraine the second largest European nation with a huge population, agricultural and industrial potential and a huge experienced army to the EU. Georgia's position in the Black Sea can also not be underestimated. It would give the EU a corridor to Asia, and make Russia's aggressive posturing in the Black Sea less viable. However, it will be impossible for Ukraine to join the EU without the war ending. Even a frozen conflict situation would be detrimental for Ukraine's ability to join the EU. Therefore, the war in Ukraine must first be won and Putin must be pushed to the negotiating table.
It must also be said than anything other than EU membership as of now would be a huge blow to the three nations in question. This (or the procedure lasting to long) might lead to public disillusionment and it might cause a rift with the EU, which then may be exploited by Russia.

The war in Ukraine must end first of all for stability and peace in the region to return in the short term, so that the rebuilding process can begin and so that Ukraine may be able to join the EU guaranteeing long term stability in the region. An ending of the war where it ends in frozen conflict and things get set in stone on the battlefield is not wanted. This would make it almost impossible for Ukraine to join the EU and it would cause a situation where stability would be very low and it would be possible for Russia to reform its forces and to assault the nation once more in the future. Therefore Ukraine must push Russia and Putin to the negotiation table. To do this an advantageous condition on the ground must be created so that the political objectives can be achieved diplomatically. To achieve an advantageous condition they must influence the people and the leaders. Ukraine already has major support from its population in Ukraine and in the territories occupied by Russia since the start of the conflict. Ukraine must however also influence the people and leaders of the other side of the conflict if it wants to achieve the condition. Specifically president of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin must be influenced as he is the centre of power. Ukraine must go after military objectives with the thought in mind that they need to influence the Kremlin to come to the negotiating table to Ukraine’s advantage. The EU must help Ukraine in achieving this.

The central pieces in this are the Donbas and more importantly Crimea. Crimea, which was annexed is incredibly important for the Russian Federation, both strategically and especially symbolically. The peninsula also hold hundreds of thousands of Russian which migrated to the region after the annexation, making it even more important (Khotin, Khalilov & Coalson, 2018). The clearest way for Ukraine to push the Russians to the negotiation table is by threatening Crimea directly. Having only recently annexed the Donbas region, and the seemingly higher tolerance for losing recently conquered territory, makes it so that a major offensive in this direction might have a lesser effect. A major push towards the heartland of the previous rebel occupied area might however also have major effects on Russia's willingness to come to the table. The EU nor the broader West can dictate what offensive action Ukraine should take, the main goal however should be to force the Russians to sit at the table with them, when Ukraine holds the cards. We must also point out that 'Threatening Crimea' is easier said than done, since Ukraine would have to push through Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts and several lines of defensive fortifications.

It is the role of the EU to support Ukraine in these efforts. The EU must do so in several ways. Firstly the EU and its member states must keep up their intelligence sharing efforts. These have been vital in the war so far and will definitely play a very important role in the coming (or active depending on who you ask) counter offensive. Definitely if the frontline were to get closer to Crimea, European nations could send out better intel since the front will be closer to
the intelligence gathering platforms like NATO aircraft flying in the Black Sea. Another very important factor is equipment. Originally this part was supposed to be a recommendation to the EU that fighter jets and long range weapon systems should be delivered to Ukraine and training should start as fast as possible, however with the recent announcement regarding the Stormshadow cruise missile with a range of hundreds of kilometres - making putting all occupied areas of Ukraine within striking distance - and the decision from the White House to no longer ban the export of F-16's to Ukraine and with training programs being organized, all already mentioned above, this recommendation is no longer necessary. These pieces of equipment will have an important effect on the war effort. Even though F-16 will only be delivered within months from now (if we are optimistic), the war is unlikely to end in that time period so these will most likely be able to have an impact. Another very important matter regarding the F-16 is that it makes it possible for Ukraine to also use NATO air launched munitions. This is one of the strong points for NATO and if the fighters are in Ukraine, these could easily be delivered. Therefore the capability of the Ukrainian forces will increase. The EU must however make sure that these systems are offered in high enough quantity. Ukraine is at a major aerial disadvantage, so an effort must be made to help them make up for that. The logistical and support side of the question must also not be forgotten. The EU must make sure that these systems can be used to the utmost of their capability. This fits into another general recommendation: the EU must not be stingy with the delivery of equipment and ammunition. The decision to send 1 million artillery shells to Ukraine is already a major step in the right direction, however the EU must send over more quantity regarding equipment. Ukraine lacks heavy armoured vehicles and main battle tanks and if we want Ukraine to push Russia to the negotiation table it must also be able to push on the frontline and armour is as such of incredible importance. The EU must not be scared to lose some of its readiness. The main threat of Europe is the fighting in Ukraine and by sending this equipment there, that threat will be weakened and in the future Russia will not be able to declare a victory in Ukraine and then move on to the next target. Even though the current amount of equipment donated is sizable, it is not enough to make a full on Ukrainian push possible. Not even taking into account the attrition rates which the EU donated equipment will take, which will have to be replenished. Therefore Europe must stop being stingy. This correlates with the next point: The EU needs to prepare itself to take over the role of main military provider from the US. The US's attention is now mainly focussed on Ukraine, but the nation is also focussed on other strategic theatres and goals. Attention will probably also waiver stronger than here in Europe, simply because of the fact that this is a conflict on the border of Europe, not the US. It is our backyard and we must be able to help and sustain the fight in Ukraine and the continued support of Ukraine even after the war, as Ukraine will have to permanently maintain a sizable deterrence to Russia. If the Union cannot even help a nation protecting itself in our neighbourhood, then the EU's strategic autonomy is pathetically low. The EU must therefore also plan long term. This is another matter that is very important. Long term planning will give the EU goals to
reach and will guide the military industrial base and give them certainty. Ukraine will also be given certainty to what it will receive and what it can expect. It is possible that in the next NATO Summit in Vilnius this will be discussed, we shall see. Hopefully this will be the case. Next to military aid, the financial aid must also continue together with the aid towards refugees. The €18 billion package for 2023 is already a good policy in this regard, this must continue in the years to come. The EU must also keep caring for Ukrainian refugees and help them integrate into our societies. The anti-immigration line may be used by Russian disinformation campaigns so we must be watchful in this regard and counter these narratives. Russian disinformation in general must be better dealt with. The EU is not active enough in this regard and does not possess the necessary means to combat these efforts, like fact checking in all nations, clear communication from EU institutions regarding disinformation and debunking it, etc. The EU must put more effort into these things and also, it must help the Moldovan and Georgian governments where ever it can in this regard as they are under constant threat of these kinds of campaigns, as Russia tries to keep them away from the EU.

When the war ends, even if it ends in a peace deal, Ukraine will not be able to join the EU immediately. The nation will have come out of a war and still will need to go through reforms most likely. The nation will need to be rebuilt. First of all Ukraine, in whatever peace deal is decided upon, will need security guarantees. Otherwise the threat will be too great. This as a measure to make sure that it is not attacked just before joining the EU as well. The EU and its allies must supply these guarantees, perhaps together with a third party. A US security guarantee would be best, together with nations from the European Union. As such this would integrate Ukraine into the Western security structure already and give it security during its transitional period. As mentioned already, after the war the nation of Ukraine will need to be rebuilt. This will mainly fall upon the European Union. The EU must provide a Marshall plan like effort to help rebuild Ukraine. This will have an impact on Ukraine and its relations with Europe for decades to come, so a grand enough plan must be enacted. Half measures will not cut it, we are talking about an economy destroyed by the flames of war, the eastern part of the nation lies in ruins. The sights of Bakhmut and Mariupol remind us of images from the First and Second World Wars, total annihilation. The EU also has the financial and economic capacity to support such an effort, and it must make use of this advantage to its fullest extent. Further financial aid will also probably be needed after the war, this must also be provided as getting Ukraine to become a stable economy again will have a major impact on its democratic and European integrated future.

The last several paragraphs have been aimed at Ukraine. As this is the most pressing and biggest matter on the table, I have discussed it first. The EU must however not forget that the Republic of Moldova and Georgia are also under constant hybrid threats.

Regarding Moldova, the EU must continue to support Moldova financially and increase the support if needed. Moldova is known to be the poorest country in Europe and as the neighbour
of Ukraine it has also had to take in many refugees. The nation has also been the victim of Russian energy manipulation and the weaponization of economic trade. Moldova has seen economic troubles rise, including inflation, and Russia is using this to increase unrest. Even going as far as trying to overthrow the central government of Moldova. Macro-financial aid has already been pledged, but if the economic situation of the Republic of Moldova demands it, or the government has issues with supporting the populace, more aid must arrive. The EU must also aid in the gathering of intelligence regarding Russian forces in Moldova and what their proxies are up to. The European Union should also help the nation in building up its policing capacity, so that it can deal with these kinds of hybrid attacks. It can do this through training missions, financial aid, donations, or the EU can help with the organization of the force itself and help by giving advice. The connection of the electricity grid to Moldova has also been a good thing, limiting the effects of Russian manipulation and the war in Ukraine on Moldova's economy and society. The EU should continue these kinds of projects and should help Moldova in continuing to decouple its economy from Russia. Again, the fight against disinformation in this nation is also of high importance and the EU should play a more active role in it. Setting up advisory bodies, websites in Romanian, organize public campaigns, etc. Those are all options that could be used. Moldova itself does not need security guarantees. This for a simple reason: Ukraine is its security guarantee. As long as Odessa is not reached by Russian forces, Moldova cannot be attacked by a major Russian force. There is a Russian garrison in Transnistria and there is the local militia, however the region is cut off from reinforcements from the Russian army and it would make Transnistria a possible target for Ukrainian attack. Moldova has already received the candidate member status, and is steadily achieving its goals set up by the Commission. The EU however must be wary of the situation in Moldova, as there is still a pro-Russian flank on the political spectrum with backing from Russia and with seats in Parliament. Therefore the focus here must be more on policing and intelligence gathering. Georgia has been the nation the least threatened of the three in recent years, however this does not mean much. Georgia has been under hybrid threat and conventional threat by Russia since its inception. The 2008 Russo-Georgian, that lasted 5 days, being the epitome of this dynamic. Georgia has been the victim of Kremlin influencing operations for years. Russia for example uses the Orthodox faith as a tool to gain influence in the region and to turn it against the ‘decadent West’, and it uses disinformation to make it seem like the West has abandoned Georgia (all already mentioned above). Another tool however that Russia has used to shift Georgia’s foreign policy agenda is its borderization policy (Seskuria, 2021). This entails the expansion of already illegally occupied zones by pushing the so-called Administrative Border Line further into Georgian territory. This kind of policy is a major threat to Georgian sovereignty and security. Georgia is also in a situation where it is holding a lot of immigrants from Russia who fled due to the war and out of fear of mobilisation, this is another destabilizing factor (Boffey, 2022). It must also be pointed out that there are fears within the EU regarding Georgian democratic backsliding and the state of democracy in the nation. The
two most important acts signifying possible democratic decline are the way in which a former president has been jailed and is treated badly and the other is the recent foreign agents law, looking very much like a law passed by the Kremlin years ago which eventually ended up used against opposing views from the one held by the government. As such the EU must also pay attention to the situation in Georgia. One major advantage the EU has, is that the Georgian people stand in support of EU membership and its western outlook. It is also enshrined within the Georgian constitution. Georgia has also been hit economically because of the war in Ukraine, therefore the EU must keep up its aid and must monitor the economic situation in the nation closely. This could be used by Russian misinformation to keep the people divided. It would also do the EU good to not show off things such as equality between man and women and LGBTQ+ rights as something ‘European’. These are general rights that are human rights, showing them off in the simple terms of ‘European values’ may be used by the Russian propaganda to stoke division in the nation. Local NGO’s here also have an important role to play. It is not an imposition of ‘western values’. The EU must also keep showing its commitment to the European future of the nation and must keep up the pressure on the government to continue reforming, as to keep the public sentiment going that supports Union membership while the government seems to be reluctant. Here the diplomatic channels are very important. The inclusion of Georgia in the EU institutions as observers for example could also further enshrine the nation’s democratic future. Borderization is also a threat to Georgia and its sovereignty. Here the EU can aid the Georgians by starting a civilian observing mission or expanding the mission of current civilian mission within the nation. However, the EU must take the risks here seriously. This is a breach of sovereignty and may be used by Russia in the worst case as in the build up to a conflict, alongside with its other tactics justifying war. Therefore the EU must fully diplomatically support Georgia in this matter. The last point also points out that the sovereignty of the nation is under threat if the nation stands alone. Therefore it is of importance that the EU does not let Georgia detach from Moldova and Ukraine in the integration process as this may mean Georgia falling on a side-track and it missing its chance at membership.

Georgia has also since 2008 been given the prospect of NATO membership, without a defined date. In the case of Ukraine, not much attention was given to its own demand for NATO membership in this thesis, however Ukraine will need security guarantees after the end of the war and as such will already be integrated in the West’s security structure and it will be able to bridge the gap between the end of the war and EU membership. Georgia on the other hand will not have security guarantees until it becomes an EU member. The period in between will be, therefore, not be without fears of Russian interference. It is therefore important that Georgia’s EU membership prospect stays on track and that it doesn’t fall on a side track. As Russia may be able to regroup after the war in a few years and then try something new. There is however the question that must be asked regarding Georgia’s geographical position. Georgia does not share any of its border with any EU member state and there is the Black Sea between
the EU and Georgia. And isolation is never a positive regarding security. The addition of Georgia to the EU however will be a positive regarding the Union's position in the Black Sea, it will be beneficial to the security of the EU's energy infrastructure in the region and it will also give the EU a corridor into Asia and a foothold in the region. Georgia is also not undefended. Georgia has a standing army of around 37,000 active personnel, however it also boasts 30,000 reservists and a 2022 established 100,000 strong territorial reserve in response to the invasion of Ukraine (GFP, 2023). Georgian forces have also been a major contribution in NATO missions, contributing significantly (Zabakhidze, 2020). Therefore we must not assume that the Georgian army is in the same state as in 2008, same as how the Ukrainian army of 2022 did not at all resemble the army of 2014 as both underwent major reconstructions and modernization. Therefore the idea that a Russian incursion would be able to quickly suppress the nation is untrue. This added upon with the fact that Russia would have a border with EU in its east, therefore should Georgia become an EU member, the idea that a quick assault on Georgia would be possible is not true, not even mentioning the fact that if the EU would be attacked the US would most likely not sit still. The EU should support Georgia in the build-up of strategic military equipment reserves, storage, training of reserves and strengthen Georgia's military readiness as a further deterrence to Russia. However, the EU should watch out so that there is clarity in any situation as Russia could try to blur what is happening in the nation and stage unrest and revolt and then move in. Here the EU's intelligence and democratic resilience and counter disinformation and police efforts once more show their importance. However, this all would be in the case of Georgia already having EU membership. As said before the EU must keep pace with Georgian admission to the EU so as to keep it safe in that in-between time. Then we come to the question of NATO membership. I will not discuss this in great detail, as this thesis focusses on EU policy. NATO membership would however make logistic support to Georgia easier as the alliance has a border with the nation through Turkey. However NATO membership was once a reason for Russian incursion, so caution is advised. EU membership is generally less controversial, and is easier to sell. Although if NATO membership would become diplomatically possible and a gap were found, then it would be advisable that the EU and its member states diplomatically support this in happening.

Russia also sees the leaning west of the three nations as a major security threat as a consolidated Western-style democratic system, in Georgia for example, would represent a visible contrast to the Russian regime. However difficult, and in Georgia with hesitation from the government, reform is happening in all three nations. Even Ukraine, under the threat of conventional war has been undergoing reform regarding the judiciary, corruption, the power of oligarchs, etc. with results to show for it (Dorontseva, 2023).
Conclusion:

We now come to the conclusion of this thesis. At the start of this policy analysis we asked ourselves the question: What relations must the European Union create with the Association Trio? In the recommendations I gave an answer to this question. The EU’s relation should firstly not go through the Eastern Partnership anymore, as it is defunct, but it should make use of the Association Trio framework. The EU should strive to make all three nations member states and should support them as such. Ukraine must however first win their war and push the Russians to the negotiation table, and the EU must aid them in this undertaking. The EU must also take care of Ukraine after the war, this regarding security guarantees, the rebuilding of the nation and the like. The EU must take the wheel in this regard, the US will not lead the effort forever. The European Union must also continue to support Moldova. The nation is experiencing hardship and hybrid threats from the Russian Federation. Therefore the EU must support the nation financially and help it in building up its state capacities. Georgia lastly must also remain firmly on the EU’s radar. The nation has been under threat of hybrid action like Russia’s borderization policy for years upon years. The EU must support Georgia in its efforts to protect its sovereignty. The EU must also keep putting pressure and giving attention to the Georgian government so that it keeps up with the reforms and stays on the same path as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova so that its membership application does not get side-tracked. This would only cause trouble for both parties as Russia may see an opportunity. Fears about Georgia’s geographic positioning are also overstated, with a capable Georgian military and there also being geopolitical positives to the story. The EU should however support Georgian military capacity build up as a deterrence. When it comes to NATO membership caution is advised, however if a diplomatic gap could be found then it might be a risk worth taking. Russia sees the building of consolidated, free democratic systems in its border region as threats to its own system. All three Associated Trio nations are currently undertaking reform at a high pace, even Ukraine under the huge pressure of war. It shows that these nations and their peoples are serious in their call for European integration and Europe should welcome them not only with open arms, but with a thank you as well. Since the EU is also sure to gain much from these nations, be that military experience because of the war, new viewpoints, or an engaged society and political population ready to come and contribute to the European Project. A project that has brought peace to this continent and now has the ability to do the same once more.
Annex:
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