Structure - Agency Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis of Post-Soviet States: The Cases of Armenia and Ukraine

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Abstract

This article explores the agency-structure problem in foreign policy analysis of former Soviet Union states, by examining the cases of Ukraine and Armenia. It applies a holistic model of foreign policy analysis that considers its structural, dispositional, and intentional dimensions and outlines a more dynamic structure- agency interplay. While the ideational incentives have been the core rationale behind Ukraine's and Armenia's drive towards Europe, the structural constraints, along with arbitrary decisions of the authoritarian incumbents would considerably obstruct countries' rapprochement with Europe. Thus, as the article concludes, along with structural constraints, stemming from Russian resistance to Europeanization, agency-level factors, such as the preferences and perceptions of Armenian and Ukrainian presidents have been critical to shaping countries' foreign policy outputs.

Keywords: structure, agency, European choice, Russia, Ukraine, Armenia.

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1. Introduction

The drive towards Europe has been an integral part of Ukrainian and Armenian foreign policy agendas since the collapse of the Soviet Union. While small Armenia gave in to Russia's pressure, by making a U-turn and joining the Eurasian Economic (Customs) Union (EAEU) in September 2013,

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Ukraine has showed strong resilience and persistence in asserting its European orientation vividly manifested in the 2014 Maidan Revolution.

Despite the thorny path, Ukraine stood up for its 'European choice' and ultimately signed the Association Agreement (AA) in June 2014, while Armenia, ended up with its edited and sacrificed version - Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU signed in 2016. Moreover, the 2018 "Velvet Revolution" has not led to foreign policy shifts and left Armenia's centrality in the Russia-led socio-political order intact.

This study explores the structure – agency interplay in determining the pro-European and pro-Russian foreign policy outputs of Ukraine and Armenia respectively**.** It examines the structural, ideational and intentional conditions and factors, underlying European and Eurasian foreign policy choices of the two post-Soviet countries. On the basis of these observations, this article seeks to address the following question: What are the core structure-induced and actor-driven factors influencing the foreign policy choices of Armenia and Ukraine?

While the geopolitical rivalry between the European Union and Russia over their common neighborhood has increasingly attracted academic and public attention, relatively little is known of agency-level factors behind contested neighbors' foreign policy choices.

While for neo-realists human agency was essentially irrelevant at the structural level of explanation, the collapse of the Cold War system seemed to depend very largely on active and calculating agents. Therefore, questions concerning the nature of agency and the meaning of structure and the relationship between them are now more relevant than ever in international relations theory (Hollis and Smith, 1994). That said, "despite the increasing external competition over the post-Soviet space, domestic actors remain the key agents to account for the pattern of change in the contested neighborhood" (Ademmer, Delcour and Wolczuk, 2016).

Walter Carlsnaes (1992) offers an instructive explanatory model that provides a practical solution on how to bridge the agency-structure problem in foreign policy analysis. He outlines a model consisting of three dimensions: a structural dimension (objective conditions and institutional setting), a dispositional dimension (perceptions and values), and an intentional

dimension (preference and choice). These dimensions are connected through causal relationships; that is, the structural dimension has causal effects on the dispositional dimension, and the dispositional dimension has causal effects on the intentional dimension (Carlsnaes, 1992; Aberg and Terzyan, 2018, pp. 153-154). However, this study does not fall to reductionism of causality of Carlsnaes model, but instead uses it as a heuristic device that disciplines the analysis of the study object.

This study is an in-depth case analysis, that uses policy analysis and process tracing to examine Armenia's and Ukraine's foreign policy dynamics. It builds its empirical argumentation by analyzing a broad variety of sources, including the newspaper articles, observations from political speeches, official documents and interviews.

The article will proceed as follows: First, the ideational/dispositional dimension of Armenia's and Ukraine's foreign policy choices will be discussed. The second section will address the core structural constraints on advancing their foreign policy agendas, focusing specifically on Russia -EU contestation in the shared neighborhood. The final section will examine the agency-level factors in determining countries' foreign policy outputs, focusing on the preferences and choices of Armenian and Ukrainian "indispensable actors." The conclusion discusses main findings.

2. The ideational dimension of foreign policy choices: Europe as a civilizational choice

The drive towards Europe has been a crucial part of both Ukrainian and Armenian political agendas since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The rapprochement towards Europe has been largely treated as a civilizational choice, and an essential opportunity for the two post-soviet countries to join the European family of democracies.

The outset of second Armenian President Robert Kocharyan's presidency (1998-2008), heralded a shift in the European dimension of Armenia's foreign policy. Foreign Minister Oskanian declared: "There were many questions about the choice of path to take…Armenia is Europe" (Oskanian, 2005).

The Armenian leadership would invariably emphasize its unshakeable determination to overcome the severe consequences of Armenia's lengthy isolation from Europe, and thus achieve substantial progress on the approximation towards prosperous and democratic European community. Kocharyan announced: "Armenian society, which has deep European roots, was isolated from European political, economic and legal realm because of the ideological confrontation of the 20th century. Today our goal is to comply with EU standards" (Kocharyan 2011, p. 253). The 'European choice' would be associated with Armenia's commitment to the European values, such as rule of law, human rights, democracy, as well as social and economic development. Thus, Kocharyan confirmed that "Armenia perceives its future in its full-scale integration with the European family" (Kocharyan, 2004).

The analysis of Kocharyan's successor Serzh Sargsyan's (2008-2018) discourse reveals his consistency with his predecessor in terms of his treatment of European integration as Armenia's civilizational choice: "The people of Armenia have made their historic and irreversible choice. Our road to becoming closer to Europe has been unique in a natural way" (Sargsyan, 2011). It follows that Armenia's European aspirations stem from its culture, identity, and values, that make the country an indivisible part of Europe (Sargsyan, 2011).

The EU itself has been largely portrayed as normative actor and peace promoter, capable of extending the European values to its neighbourhood, thus transforming the latter into an area of security, prosperity, and stability (Sargsyan, 2009).Not surprisingly, the Armenian leadership would passionately welcome the inauguration of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009, due to its huge potential to foster fundamental reforms in the Eastern neighbourhood and to bring lasting peace to the region (Terzyan, 2017, pp. 194-197).

Thus, the EaP was deemed extremely conducive to breaking the logjam on the Armenian-Azerbaijani troubled relations and, particularly, on the long-standing Nagorno – Karabakh conflict settlement (Terzyan 2016, pp. 168-169). This conflict resolution would occur gradually, shifting into a higher gear due to successful implementation of the EaP provisions. In Sargsyan's words, the EU would significantly contribute to conflict resolution by

promoting democracy and laying ground for democratic interstate dialogue; advancing trust-building measures through people-to-people contact and joint undertakings, and most importantly, through intensifying its engagement with Azerbaijan and ensuring that the latter complies with the 'European rules' (Sargsyan, 2012).

Similarly, the Ukrainian leadership has largely treated the advancement towards Europe as Ukraine's ideational choice and foreign policy priority, leading the country down the path to democracy and prosperity. Essentially, the rapprochement with the European core has been inherently linked to Ukraine's fervent desire to distance itself from the sphere of the Russian influence, as the logic of moving away from Moscow – in civilizational, political and economic terms – was historically always popular in Ukraine (Kakachia, Lebanidze and Dubovyk, 2019, p. 457).

Clearly, the 2005 Orange Revolution presented huge opportunities for Ukraine's European integration, given its pro-Western President Viktor Yuschenko's emphasis on European/Euro-Atlantic foreign policy agenda. More specifically, Yuschenko would hail the EU membership as the best path to Ukraine's development, with the EU being framed as peace and democracy promoter (Yuschenko, 2005a). He would repeatedly stress the necessity of fundamental democratic reforms that would enable Ukraine to knock the door of European family of democracies (Yuschenko, 2005a).

Thus, Yushchenko vowed to make democratic reforms irreversible and prepare Ukraine for EU membership: "We welcome the EU's intention to develop a new strategy of relations with Ukraine. I am convinced that it should contain the prospect of membership" (Yuschenko, 2005a). Moreover, Yuschenko hailed the 'choice for Europe' as the main rationale behind the Orange Revolution, that consolidated Ukraine's independence and reaffirmed its vision of European and Euro-Atlantic integration (Yuschenko, 2005 b).

Nevertheless, the European aspirations of post-Orange Revolution Ukraine's government would inevitably run into Russian resistance. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the Kremlin has employed a series of tools to tighten its grip on Ukraine. Meanwhile, the concept of the "Russian world" would resonate with millions of Ukrainians, not least due to the Orthodox

Church, the role of which should not be underestimated (Kakachia, Lebanidze and Dubovyk, 2019, p. 457).

Not surprisingly, after the 2014 Maidan Revolution, President Petro Poroshenko brought up the issue of country's spiritual independence "to make independence irreversible, make Ukraine great and strong, without any prospect of returning to the Russian influence zone" (Poroshenko, 2018a). Poroshenko hailed December 15 - the date of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's vote on future relations with Moscow – as "the day of the final gaining of Ukrainian independence from Russia. And Ukraine will no longer drink, as Taras Shevchenko said, "Moscow's poison from the Moscow's bowl"(Poroshenko, 2018 b). Overall, Poroshenko's foreign policy concept was simple - "Away from Moscow! Europe now!" (Poroshenko, 2018b).

In sum, in both countries the approximation towards Europe has been treated as an ideational choice, with the being EU framed as normative actor, peace and democracy promoter.

3. Structural constraints: Russian resistance to the "choice for Europe"

The core structural factors, obstructing the advancement of Armenia's and Ukraine's European foreign policy agendas have stemmed from Putin's Russia's adamant resistance to large-scale Europeanization in the sphere of its 'privileged interests'. Meanwhile, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine has plunged the EU-Russia relations in their common neighborhood into a volatile new phase, with all ensuing adverse effects on the 'shared neighbors'.

The root causes of the mounting confrontation date back to early 2000s- the early stage of Vladimir Putin's presidency, that marked a shift from 'liberal ideas' to geopolitical and particularly pragmatic geo-economic realism in the Russian leadership's foreign policy thinking (Thorun, 2009, p. 28). This shift significantly influenced Russian policy priorities towards newly independent CIS states, prompting the Kremlin to shield its 'near neighbourhood' from 'unwanted intrusions' amid the enlarging EU's deepening engagement with the region.

The setbacks endured in the EU-Russia relations over the last decade provoke an inquiry into the main rationale behind their conflictual visions of their common neighborhood.

Studies show that in early 2000s Russia would not fiercely resist to the EU's rapprochement with its near neighborhood, as it would do when it comes to NATO. Rather, Russia tended to indicate considerable interest in developing partnership with the EU, centering on but not limited to energy and trade (Delcour and Kostanyan, 2014. p. 2).

While the EU granted Russia the role of special 'strategic partner', Brussels and its institutions would be the 'unipole' with Russia envisaged as a recipient of norms, values and best practices promoted by the EU (Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2013, pp. 163-164). This was absolutely consistent with Russia's ambition to join the 'community of civilized states' and set up a comprehensive system of collective security in Europe as an antidote to dividing lines and polarization. Yet, Delcour and Kostanyan (2014) note that the partnership developed between the EU and Russia in the 2000s was underpinned by false premises and misperceptions (pp. 2-3). The EU would take for granted the assumption that Russia would unequivocally share its values by adopting the Western liberal standards of democracy and the market economy, and thus becoming a democratic and reliable partner. Meanwhile, the core assumption dominating the Kremlin's political thinking was that the EU's weak security actorness and its low profile in the post-Soviet space would impair its ability to compete with Russia in its neighborhood (Delcour and Kostanyan, 2014, pp. 2-3)

The first major setback in the EU-Russia relations was the introduction of the European Neighborhood Policy in 2004 – largely perceived as detrimental to Russian interests by Kremlin. Moreover, the fear of losing its influence in its 'backyard' amidst 'color revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine, along with the EU's alarming engagement with them, prompted Russia into taking preventive measures. Notably, given their 'anti-post-Soviet' nature, there has been a tendency to regard the post-soviet revolutions as major international setbacks to Putin's Russia (Finkel and Brudny, 2012, p. 15). Russia's efforts at keeping its 'near abroad' in the orbit of its authoritarian influence, did not resonate particularly with Georgian and Ukrainian societies, determined to overcome post-Soviet authoritarianism and stand up for their 'European choice' (Cameron and Orenstein, 2012).

The inauguration of the Eastern Partnership in 2008 reinforced Russia's worst fears about the EU's 'expansionist agenda' and put it in the same category as 'hostile' NATO in Russian political thinking. Essentially, by offering Eastern neighbors Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) and Association Agreements (AAs), the EU was deemed to be making significant strides in 'absorbing' them into its ranks.

In response to the EU's integration agenda, Russia resorted to alternative region building or region-spoiling measures with a view to securing regional hegemony (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2017, p. 195).Russia's mounting assertiveness has been vividly manifested in its intensifying efforts at promoting its preferred vision of order beyond its borders in the form of Eurasian Economic (Customs) Union launched in 2010.

As a long-term project aimed at regaining the Russian control over post-Soviet space, the Eurasian Union was bound to collide with the Eastern Partnership as the European and Russian visions for the 'shared' eastern neighborhood remain exclusionary (Korosteleva, 2016, p. 67). In effect, the growing antagonism between the European and Eurasian visions of the 'shared neighborhood' has been fraught with severe consequences for the common neighbors. More specifically, the ongoing crisis in Ukraine that has much to do with country's 'European choice' reveals a profound lack of understanding the region by both the EU and Russia (p. 67).

Not surprisingly, the 2014 Maidan Revolution in Ukraine has been viewed as a manifestation of "clash of civilizations" between Russia and Europe that heralded the end of the post-Cold war settlement and vanished the hopes of Euro-Russian integration (Shevtsova, 2014, p. 74). That said, instead of joining the Western civilization, Russia positioned itself as its 'Other' and embarked on creating the Eurasian Union and constructing a Eurasian identity (Stefansson, 2015, pp. 20-21). Clearly, the relationship between Russia and the West has reached its nadir since the end of the Cold War, and by December 2014 the concept of an iron curtain, separating East and West was again put in the spotlight, at least in some analyst circles. Interestingly, some Russian analysts claim that the West's lingering Cold War thinking that fed the "Western triumphalism," and resulted in NATO's and

EU's expansion, was the main cause of the crisis outbreak in Ukraine (Black and Johns, 2016, xvii).

Consistent with such contentions, Putin went as far as to accuse the USA, and to a lesser extent the EU of the devastation unleashed on Ukraine. In Putin's words, Washington's attempts at "remaking the whole world" around its own interests and imposing a "unilateral diktat" on the rest of the world, are bound to cause instability in different parts of the world (Putin, 2015).Thus, the crisis in Ukraine has been framed as an unsurprising consequence of the United States and NATO's expansionist and inherently anti-Russian policies. "… They continue their policy of expanding NATO. What for? If the Warsaw Bloc stopped its existence, the Soviet Union have collapsed …they offered the poor Soviet countries a false choice: either to be with the West or with the East. Sooner or later, this logic of confrontation was bound to spark off a grave geopolitical crisis. This is exactly what happened in Ukraine…" (Putin, 2015). Similarly, as noted earlier, the Kremlin has viewed the EU's growing engagement with its Eastern neighbors as detrimental to Russia's strategic interests in the sphere of its 'privileged interests'.

When viewed from Brussels, the Eastern Partnership has marked a new phase of the EU's 'constructive engagement' in its neighborhood, with the view to transforming it into an area of democracy, peace and prosperity (Haukkala, 2018, p. 84). Meanwhile, the Kremlin would treat the Eastern Partnership as European intrusion in its sphere of influence, as for Russia, converging with the acquis means a shift away from what ties EaP countries have with Moscow (Delcour and Kostanyan, 2014, p. 3).

It is for these reasons that Putin threw his back behind promoting the Eurasian Union, most vividly by forcing Armenia to join it. A glance at Armenia's perplexing U-turn on the eve of signing the Association Agreement are suggestive of the depth and scope of the coercive measures that Russia took to prevent the Association Agreements from taking effect.

It is worth noting that, prior to Armenia's move towards the EAEU, Russia played its energy card by increasing gas prices for Armenia by 50 percent in April 2013, thus alarming possible economic repercussions of Armenia's European aspirations. Ironically, the gas price went down as

Armenia decided to sign up to the EAEU. Armenia's energy minister, Armen Movsisyan stated outright that the 'Eurasian choice' would shield Armenia from unwanted gas price hikes (Terzyan, 2018a, p. 237). Similarly, there has been a tendency in President Sargsyan's discourse to emphasize the hypothetical economic and political hardships that Armenia would suffer in case of deviating from strategic partnership with Russia. Thus, he would repeatedly refer to highly undesirable 'hypothetical future' to legitimate Armenia's decision to join the EAEU (Terzyan, 2017, p. 191). More specifically, given Armenia's huge economic and energy dependence on Russia, he particularly noted that the choice of the EAEU would keep Armenia from unwelcome surprises and economic repercussions: "Our choice is not civilizational. It corresponds to the economic interests of our nation. We cannot sign the Free trade agreement [DCFTA] and increase gas price and electricity fee three times?" (Terzyan, 2018a, p. 238).

Clearly, Russia possesses a bunch of economic and political tools for further tightening its grip on Armenia and influencing its policy preferences. Not surprisingly, the domestic change has not led to foreign policy shifts. Rather, Pashinyan's government was quick to confirm its further commitment to the 'Eurasian choice' (Terzyan, 2019, p. 27).

While small Armenia gave in to Russia's pressure, by making a U-turn and joining the Eurasian Economic (Customs) Union (EAEU) in September 2013, Ukraine showed strong resilience and persistence in asserting its European orientation. The Ukrainian society stood up for its 'European choice' and deposed Yanukovich, refusing to sign the long-awaited Association Agreement with the EU. As a result, despite the thorny path, Ukraine ultimately signed the Association Agreement (AA) in June 2014, while Armenia, ended up with its edited and sacrificed version - Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU signed in 2016.

As a matter of fact, unlike Ukrainians, the Armenian society has gone the extra mile to move its 'European choice' forward or to somehow oppose to country's integration into the Eurasian Union. Along with other factors, such as Russia's treatment as security ally in Armenian public consciousness, low awareness of the EU's policies across the country have adversely affected

public demand for EU approximation. The surveys conducted by Armenian civil society organizations suggest that the vast majority of the Armenian population, especially outside of capital Yerevan, has a poor understanding of the EU, compounded by misconceptions about European values, culture and lifestyle (EaP Civil Society Forum, 2020 a, p. 10). More precisely, it has not been uncommon to perceive the EU as purely 'LGBT - promoting community', that undermines traditional values and national identities in former Soviet Union countries (MAXCAP Policy Briefs, 2015). It follows, that to improve the effectiveness of its policies, it is essential for the EU to work more on enhancing the visibility of its initiatives in Armenia and other EaP countries, thus breaking down the widespread misconceptions.

On the contrary, the demand for EU membership has been on the rise in Ukraine and is over 55 percent at this point (Kyiv Post, 2019). Surveys show that over 70 percent of Ukrainians recognize fundamental European values, such as human rights, rule of law, individual freedoms, etc. (EU Neighbors, 2019) and view them as guiding principles for the Ukrainian state-building (Buhbe, 2017). Thus, the EU is largely perceived as the most desired partner, capable of transmitting a series of political values to Ukraine (Chaban and O'loughlin, 2018). Yet, studies show that the EU needs to step up in terms of enhancing the visibility of its policies in Ukraine too (EaP Civil Society Forum, 2020b, p. 10).

Indeed, the positive attitudes towards the EU per se are insufficient to accelerate the dynamics of approximation towards Europe in the face of the Kremlin's unrelenting efforts at halting Ukraine's march toward closer European and wider Euro-Atlantic integration in its tracks (Haukkala, 2018, p. 84). While Poroshenko's successor Volodymyr Zelensky's 'game-changing' agenda is expected to trickle down to the troubled relations with Russia, arguably any substantial new developments in the relationship will mostly depend on how ready Moscow is to deal with the new Ukrainian authorities (Dreyfus, 2019). Against this backdrop, the limited progress on the implementation of the "Minsk II" agreement[*] in 2019, provided grounds

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[*]The "Minsk II" agreement, signed in February 2015, was designed to put an end to the armed fighting, resolve the underlying political issues, and gradually restore Ukrainian government control of the country's eastern border.

for cautious optimism. Namely, two prisoner swaps, as well as the completion of de-mining and dismantling of fortifications within the Stanytsia Luhanska area seemed to move the needle on the devastating confrontation(European Commission, 2019, p. 8).Moreover, the first Normandy Four summit since 2016 was held in Paris on December 9, 2019. While the parties agreed to implement the ceasefire in full, the issues, such as the withdrawal of Russian-backed troops, elections in separatist-held regions and a special status for the Donbass region remain unresolved (European Parliament, 2020). The resumption of ceasefire violations with ensuing casualties prompted the five EU members of the UN Security Council – Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany and Poland to condemn Russia's violations of its Minsk agreement commitments (European Parliament, 2020). Yet, some see the dismissal of Vladislav Surkov –Ukraine adviser to Russian President – as a sign of change in Kremlin's approach to Ukraine (Vasilyeva, 2020). Among a bunch of uncertainties surrounding the future of Russo - Ukrainian relations, Ukraine's commitment to irreversibly depart from the sphere of the Russian influence seems certain.

To sum up, both Armenia's and Ukraine's choice for Europe' have run into Russian resistance and unrelenting efforts at keeping the countries in the orbit of its influence. A question remains as to whether along with the Kremlin-related structural constraints, the agency-level factors have played a role in shaping European and Eurasian foreign policy outputs of Ukraine and Armenia, respectively.

4. European and Eurasian choices of Ukraine and Armenia: structure or agency?

While structure-induced constraints influencing foreign policy making both in Armenia and Ukraine have been thoroughly studied, the actor-driven factors have remained largely overlooked.

Indeed, it is easy to fall prey to the reductionism of structural constraints and suggest that agency-level factors would not be instrumental in reshaping the EU-Russia contested neighborhood. By contrast, some observers contend that "despite the increasing external competition over the

post-Soviet space, domestic actors remain the key agents to account for the pattern of change in the contested neighborhood" (Ademmer, Delcour and Wolczuk, 2016).

This study further supports this assertion, by suggesting that agency-level factors have significantly impacted foreign policy choices of Armenia and Ukraine. This contention goes into the heart of "actor indispensability" and "operational code" frameworks that are deemed relevant to explaining Ukrainian and Armenian "indispensable actors'"- Viktor Yanukovich's and Robert Kocharyan's foreign policy choices. Both presidents used to enjoy unlimited power not least in foreign policy making.

The framework of the 'operational code' as a set of general philosophical and instrumental beliefs about fundamental political issues has been frequently employed to study individual dimensions of foreign policy behaviors (Dyson, 2009; Post, 2003). It is premised on the assumption that policy makers' beliefs and perceptions considerably influence the ways they choose and shift among different courses of action (Hermann, 2003). Two crucial conditions, which, if satisfied, can prompt to posit that an individual has been important to an outcome. The first condition is that of 'action dispensability'. If the actions of an individual are removed from the events to be explained, do the events still occur? Therefore, the actions of an individual are indispensable to the outcome as long as their removal would lead to considerable changes in the outcome. The second condition is that of 'actor dispensability'. Would any individual, confronting the same set of circumstances, have taken broadly the same actions? Again, this is a function of two factors. First, the degree to which the individual holds strong and distinctive beliefs and predispositions concerning the matter at hand. Second, the clarity of the situational imperatives is key (Dyson, 2009, pp. 15-16.).

The post-Soviet transition both in Armenia and Ukraine has been marked by the accumulation of strong presidential power at the expense of the two other branches of the government. Both countries would find themselves in a situation where the presidents had immense power to make strategic foreign policy choices single-handedly. The biggest challenge involves explaining how the perceptions and preferences of Kocharyan and Yanukovich influenced their foreign policy behaviors. Against this backdrop,

the 'authoritarian learning' is employed to account for some of their foreign policy decisions.

The 'authoritarian learning' literature is concerned with learning from both internal and external experience. In the analysis of the post-Soviet region, the literature has chiefly focused on the fostering and promotion by Russia of authoritarianism in other states (Ambrosio, 2016; Vanderhill, 2013). While authoritarian learning literature has not touched on individual learning, prospect theory puts attention on how decision makers formulate choices by using past reference points (Hall, 2017, p. 163), which makes prospect theory relevant to understanding Kocharyan's and Yanukovich's cases. Each individual weigh up gains and losses of a possible decision. Presumably, individuals with pronounced power motivation are likely to make decisions, including foreign policy ones, that would be conducive to maintaining their power (Hall, 2017, p. 163). Thus, it is assumed that the lessons Kocharyan and Yanukovich learned from their predecessors' declines, coupled with those learned from the steady survival of Russia-sponsored regimes, have considerably influenced the their 'choice for Russia'.

Despite his initial emphasis on the "European choice," in early 2000s in the wake of Russia's Putin-led engagement with its 'near neighborhood', Armenia plunged into the orbit of Russian influence. As noted earlier, the assertion, that in Armenia's hyper-presidential system, Kocharyan's personality and beliefs influenced Armenia's foreign policy outputs comes down to actor and action dispensability framework. Regarding the 'actor dispensability' in Kocharyan-led Armenian politics, it is worth noting that the post-Soviet transition led to the accumulation of presidential power at the expense of the parliament and the judiciary, neither of which had sufficient power to balance the presidential one or even properly perform their constitutional functions (Payasilyan, 2011, p. 110). The presidential power got immensely solidified after the assassinations of Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan and Head of Parliament Karen Demirchyan in 1999, especially as both limited Kocharyan's power and tended to explicitly disagree with him on many principal issues (Papazian, 2006, p. 235). The head of the 'Yerkrapah' union, Vazgen Sargsyan, was strongly supported by the

Armenian military forces and widely viewed as Armenia's most influential politician of the time (Terzyan, 2018a, pp. 243-244). Meanwhile, his assassination provided a fertile ground for immense consolidation of Kocharyan's power. Freedom House reports further suggest that Kocharyan used to exercise unlimited power over the country, with a strong tendency to curb political freedoms and dissent (Freedom House, 2005).

Essentially, the absence of checks and balances and lack of a viable opposition rendered Kocharyan the core policy-maker, i.e. an 'indispensable actor'. The consolidation of his power appeared to have strong impact on Armenia's foreign policy outputs by having the pro-Western agenda outweighed by the pro-Russian one (Aberg and Terzyan, 2018, pp. 161-162).

The critical unanswered question is why Russia's 'renewed' expansionist policy appealed to Kocharyan and prompted a foreign policy change. Particularly by contrast to Georgia, which was almost equally dependent on Russia, Armenia further jumped into the arms of Russia. This provokes an inquiry into the 'indispensable actor's' personality – his dispositions and beliefs.

Studies show, that as a typical autocrat, Kocharyan had a penchant for concentrating power in his hands and making decisions single-handedly (Derluguian and Hovhannisyan, 2018, pp. 455-456). He has been broadly regarded as a tough and unyielding politician in pursuit of his political goals (News.Bbc, 1998).In terms of political psychology, the above-mentioned could be interpreted as power motivation and a marked need for power. Received wisdom posits that individuals with high need for power tend to require greater personal control and involvement in policy and are more likely to insist that policy outputs match their personal preferences rather than represent consensual group decisions (Dyson, 2009, p. 30). Thus, they are reluctant to delegate power - inherently drawn to authoritarian governance. This seems to accurately capture Kocharyan's style of authoritarian governance (Payasilyan, 2011, pp. 205-206). Not surprisingly, Putin's plan on promoting authoritarianism in CIS countries significantly fit Kocharyan's ambitions (Secreiru, 2006).

The 'success stories' of the Russian-supported incumbents in Central Asian countries and Belarus and, by contrast, the mounting challenges facing

the political elites in other CIS Western-oriented democratizing countries, such as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, have reportedly contributed to Kocharyan's choice of the Russian 'package'. This comes down to the 'authoritarian learning' from international examples, with lesson-drawing, emulation and adaptability (Hall, 2017, p. 162).

Arguably, Kocharyan drew a range of lessons from the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine. First, the perception, that the Russian-supported regimes, such as ones in Belarus and Kazakhstan had better chances to withstand 'colour revolutions' got reinforced. During the Georgian political crisis in November 2003, predating the revolution, Armenia decided to accept the Kremlin's offer of intensifying military partnership and thus signed a series of military agreements with Russia (Secrieru, 2006).

In further deepening partnership with Russia and letting the latter tighten its economic and political grip on Armenia, Kocharyan reportedly believed that the label of 'Russia's ally' would be beneficial to his regime's survival. Thus, the dispositional factors, coupled with intentional ones considerably influenced the 'choice for Russia'.

The second lesson learned by Kocharyan was that to avoid the destinies of former Georgian and Ukrainian presidents, opposition movements and media freedom needed to get restricted.

Using his hyper-presidential power, Kocharyan resorted to coercing the opposition and launched an extensive crackdown on independent media. As a result, Armenia smoothly plunged into authoritarianism, with centralization of power, weak opposition and censored media[*] (Refworld, 2004). Not surprisingly, Freedom House reports would point to downward democratic trends in Armenia, including but not limited to political repression, weak rule of law and undemocratic governance (Freedom House, 2005).

As for the Ukrainian case, it is noteworthy, that the 2005 Orange Revolution that brought pro-Western Victor Yuschenko to power would spark optimistic commentaries about Ukraine's profound advancement towards Europe. Nevertheless, Yuschenko's 'European agenda 'confronted a series of challenges, ranging from oligarchic influence to mounting Russian

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[*]The sole opposition TV station A1+ was shut down in 2002.

resistance. Remarkably, some observers trace certain domestic and foreign policy setbacks to Yuschenko's personality, positing that "Yushchenko paid the price for being a democratic president… He was not a strong, charismatic man with a strategic vision, and thus failed to pass the test on calculating in global political terms and leading his country in the very difficult time of transformation and crisis" (Piekto,2016). Ironically, his term in office paved the way for his old rival Victor Yanukovych, notorious for his autocratic tendencies. Yuschenko would warn that a presidential victory by either of his two rivals would send Ukraine back into the orbit of the Russian authoritarian influence: "There is a danger of authoritarianism because we have two leaders, Tymoshenko and Yanukovych, who represent the best Moscow project, which takes away freedom, democracy, and 'Ukrainianhood' (Yuschenko, 2010). He concluded that the choice was very simple –"either this pro-Kremlin couple and pro-Kremlin policy wins, or the pro-European policy does" (Yuschenko, 2010).

Contrary to Yuschenko's 'European agenda', Yanukovych, supported by many Russian-speaking Ukrainians in country's east, would be quick to pledge Ukraine's allegiance to Russia. Clearly, Yanukovich's 'authoritarian project' would be incompatible with the fulfillment of the 'European agenda'. Therefore, when the moment for signing the Association Agreement came, his reservations, coupled with Russian pressure and blackmail, brought the deal to a halt. Hence, the case of Yanukovich's presidency is exemplary in showing how domestic political elites are powerful enough to shape, change or even obstruct the process of Ukraine's advancement towards Europe. Ultimately, it comes down to the interests, perceptions, and preferences of powerful local actors, given that domestic agency still plays a key role in managing the process of approximation to Europe (Kakachia, Lebanidze and Dubovyk, 2019, p. 454). The government of Viktor Yanukovich was quite telling in this regard. On the one hand, the European choice remained a top formal priority. On the other hand, the real life in Ukraine was increasingly incongruent with European values (p. 454).

Consistent with the Armenian President Robert Kocharyan's foreign policy decisions, the 'authoritarian learning' framework seems relevant to accounting for Yanukovich's pro-Russian foreign policy choice. Essentially,

along with his efforts at appeasing his Russian-speaking electorate, Yanukovich opted for Russia, as the latter would provide better chances at sustaining the stability of his authoritarian regime. Meanwhile, stepping down the path to fundamental Europeanization would positively correlate with democratic reforms across the country, with all repercussions for his power reproduction.

Hall (2017) has provided insights into Yanukovich's authoritarian learning that played a part in determining his pro-Russian choice. He specifically focuses on domestic learning in 'authoritarian learning'. Referring to the Orange Revolution, some lessons learnt by Yanukovych could be explored. First and foremost, he learnt the importance of controlling young people and placing them in regime-controlled organizations. This would curb youth activism and, most importantly, prevent the latter from pushing for democratic reforms in line with European democracies (Hall, 2017, pp 163-165). This lesson prompted Yanukovich to launch a crackdown on civil society and NGOs that had played a critical role in the Orange Revolution. More specifically, Yanukovich used legislation and the Security Service of Ukraine to curtail their activities (Gressel, 2019). Among other measures stemming from Yankovich's learnt lessons was using the financial backing of oligarchs to buy the allegiance of politicians, and thus consolidating his power (Hall, 2017, p. 168). All these lessons reportedly contributed to Yanukovich's decision to opt for centrality in the Russia-led socio-political order. While the implementation of the Association Agreement and DCFTA would inevitably lead to significant democratic reforms across the country and potentially challenge his immense power, it would be way easier to stay in office within the Russian-dominated Eurasian Union. Not only would not the latter promote democratic reforms, but it would ardently help reinforce the power base of the authoritarian rulers, as it tends to do in Kremlin-loyal regimes

Thus, I argue that the agency-level factors under both Kocharyan's and Yanukovich's administrations were critical to their foreign policy strategic choices.

While the Ukrainian society reversed Yanukovich's arbitrary decision by deposing him, and thus confirming the 'choice for Europe', Kocharyan's

'choice for Russia' left small and less resilient Armenia's centrality in the Russia-centered space intact.

Nevertheless, along with the above-mentioned dispositional factors it is impossible to downgrade the importance of the intentional dimension of Armenia's 'choice for Russia'. The latter has been largely treated as a strategic security ally in Armenian political thinking and public consciousness, that would create a critical bulwark against neighboring Azerbaijan's and Turkey's hostilities (Terzyan, 2018b, pp. 159-160).

In sum, despite the growing emphasis on the structural constraints underlying foreign policy behaviors of Eastern Partnership countries, the case studies of Ukraine and Armenia indicate the relevance of agency-level factors in shaping their foreign policy outputs.

5. Conclusion

This article contributes to existing literature on the structure-agency interplay in foreign policy analysis, by examining the cases of Ukraine and Armenia. Based on the previous discussion, there are three main concluding observations to make regarding structure-induced and actor-driven foreign policy outputs of the two post-soviet countries.

First, and in terms of the ideational rationale behind the foreign policy choices, the drive towards Europe has been an integral part of Ukrainian and Armenian political agendas since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Both in Armenian and Ukrainian discourses approximation towards Europe has been treated as an ideational choice, with the EU framed as normative actor, peace and democracy promoter.

Second, in terms of structural constraints to advancing their foreign policy agendas, both Armenia's and Ukraine's 'choices for Europe' have run into Russian resistance and unrelenting efforts at keeping the countries in the orbit of its influence. While small Armenia gave in to the Kremlin's pressure, by making a U-turn and joining the Eurasian Economic (Customs) Union in September 2013, Ukraine showed strong resilience and persistence in asserting its European orientation vividly manifested in the 2014 Maidan Revolution. Unlike Ukrainians, the Armenian society has not appeared to

oppose to country's integration into the Russian-led Eurasian Union. Along with other factors, such as Russia's treatment as security ally in Armenian public consciousness, low awareness of the EU's policies across the country have adversely affected public demand for EU approximation. Not surprisingly, domestic change in Armenia has not led to foreign policy shifts.

Third observation relates to the relevance of agency-level factors, as Viktor Yanukovich's and Robert Kocharyan's presidencies are exemplary in showing how the perceptions and preferences of presidents shaped the two post-Soviet states' foreign policy outputs. The 'authoritarian learning' framework is employed to account for Ukrainian and Armenian presidents' Kocharyan's and Victor Yanukovich's pro-Russian foreign policy choices. Arguably, both presidents opted for Russia, as the latter would provide better chances at sustaining the stability of their authoritarian regimes. Meanwhile, stepping down the path to fundamental Europeanization would positively correlate with democratic reforms across these countries, with all repercussions for their authoritarian rule. While the Ukrainian society reversed Yanukovich's arbitrary decision by deposing him, and thus confirming the 'choice for Europe', Kocharyan's 'choice for Russia' left small and less resilient Armenia's centrality in the Russia-led socio-political order intact.

It is essential for future studies to avoid reductionism to structural constraints and pay closer attention to agency-level factors in explaining the two states' foreign policy choices.

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