



Report on the findings of survey experiments assessing the effectiveness of the EU's communications

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1. Introduction¹

This report builds on the earlier work presented in the EU-STRAT Working Paper Series analysing the soft power of the European Union (EU) and Russia. In these papers, we explored the content of the official messages and communications of the EU and Russia, identified relevant actors transmitting the narratives of both parties, and analysed the topics and tone of the messages about the EU and Russia on the evening news programmes in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Taking the next step in assessing external actors' messages and communications, in this report we turn to citizens' preferences for international cooperation with Russia and the EU and research how framing such cooperation in terms of economic, security or values affects citizens' views.

The main lessons from the research mentioned above that inform our current study are:

- (1) the content of the EU messages is often event-driven, informative, technical and thematic, e.g. focusing on policy area or sector (economy), norms or values;
- (2) Russian official discourses differ from unofficial ones and emphasize economics as well as identity and sovereignty;

In terms of media coverage of the (official) messages from the EU or Russia, we have compared how these are presented in national news and found that:

- (1) the EU is discussed on the national TV in the news items about: security and economy (Belarus), reforms and economy (Moldova), and security and general international news about meetings and visits (Ukraine);
- (2) a large volume of news items does not have an evaluative tone; instead, most news items are balanced in discussing events involving the EU, its member states or Russia;
- (3) there are few human interest items presented on the news where the EU is mentioned;
- (4) there are more human interest stories mentioning Russia (although often negatively);
- (5) news items refer to both liberal and human rights values, and religious and patriotic values, in the context of the EU and Russia respectively.

Following up on this, we designed an original survey experiment that provides citizens with information about international cooperation framed in a way that is consistent with and builds on these insights. In this report we present the results from the survey experiments conducted in our three countries of interest. The survey experiments aimed to test how framing of international cooperation in different terms (i.e. as beneficial in terms of economy, security, or protection of common values, identities, and governance norms) affects public support for cooperation with these two international actors.

We begin with an introduction of relevant bodies of literature dealing with framing, determinants of public opinion on regional integration and empirical studies of the region in order to arrive at factors that may shape

¹ The Leiden team developed the study, designed the survey experiment, organized the pilot studies and coordinated the data collection in the three countries, entered and analysed the data, and wrote the paper. The local teams, IDIS, SYMPA, and UIPP, commented on the phrasing of the vignettes, translated the survey (to Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian respectively) and collected the data. The SYMPA team made also a substantial contribution to the phrasing of vignette frames in Russian in consultations during the pilot study in March 2017.

the foreign policy preferences of citizens in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries (section 2). Subsequently, we introduce the methodology and the design of the study (section 3). In the next section, we present the main descriptive findings and our preliminary analysis of the data (section 4). Finally, we discuss the potential implications of our findings and the challenges in researching citizen preferences on close cooperation with key neighbours in a contested region. We also reflect on the limitations of surveys in the context of regional instability and citizen' own uncertainty about the choices for cooperation in a contested neighbourhood (section 5).

2. Framing International Cooperation: Influence on Preferences and Beliefs?

The underlying theoretical assumption of our study is that individual preferences for international cooperation are not set in stone, but variable and to some extent open to influence through persuasion or manipulation. Preferences are often shaped in an incomplete information situation. Information and communication can increase or decrease the salience of a particular factor and bring to the fore specific (political) issues in one's thinking. In communication, the framing of a policy issue—by politicians or media—is a well-known factor influencing both policy decisions and public opinion (Boräng et al. 2014; Entman 1991, 1993).

Framing is often defined as highlighting some aspects of an issue or topic, thereby increasing their salience or, more broadly, highlighting some features of reality while omitting others (Entman 1993: 53). Even small changes in terms of framing—or how an issue is presented—can result in a change of preferences and adopted solutions (Tversky and Kahneman 1985). Research on frames (visual and verbal) shows that frames can influence how individuals perceive and understand an issue and the level of their support for a political object (Iyengar 1994; Nelson and Kinder 1996; Maier et al. 2012). Different frames can (dis)advantage particular actors and increase or decrease support for closer cooperation with them. Moreover, the framing of a situation has been shown to affect how individuals living in a particular historical or cultural context see it and value its outcomes (Koford 2003).

Based on the varied and important findings on the effects of framing in several fields of scholarship, we decided to investigate *how different framing of international cooperation might influence citizen preferences for cooperation with the EU and Russia*. Following Nelson et al. (1997: 568), we assume that frames can affect 'individual understanding and opinion concerning an issue by stressing specific elements or features of the broader controversy'.

In this research we opted for thematic frames that 'focus on political issues and events in a broader context and present collective, abstract, and general evidence' rather than episodic frames that focus the attention of an audience on a concrete event and provide human interest detail (Aarøe 2011: 209-210). This choice is determined by our previous findings, showing that in its official communications the EU targets general themes and policy areas and that the national evening news in the three countries mention the EU in general, formal terms, rather than using human interest stories (see Dimitrova et al. 2017 and Dimitrova et al. 2016). The results of the national TV monitoring showed that the news stories about international actors very rarely apply episodic

frames (Dimitrova et al. 2017). Therefore, to increase external validity, we used thematic frames despite their lower power to affect attitudes (Aarøe 2011).

To construct the frames, we selected and highlighted several different broad aspects of international cooperation relevant to judgements about the desirability of cooperation and integration with the EU or Russia. Despite the relative scarcity of studies in the field of international relations focusing on citizens, existing ones suggest that individuals shape their ideas and preferences about international actors by evaluating three characteristics of these actors: (1) goal compatibility; (2) relative power; and (3) relative cultural status (Herrmann et al. 1997; Alexander et al. 2005). A much richer literature on citizen preferences towards European integration emphasizes utility and identity as two separate sets of determinants of public opinion (Hobolt 2014; Hooghe and Marks 2008; Maier et al. 2012; McLaren 2002, 2006; Risse 2010). Political psychology studies add another factor playing a role in preference shaping, namely individual moral values (e.g. Rathbun et al. 2016). Taking into account both the earlier studies and the specific socio-political contexts of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, we developed vignettes highlighting six aspects of international cooperation: economy, security, shared identity, shared traditional values, shared liberal values, and governance norms (see Appendix A).

In line with utilitarian approaches, a positive evaluation of an actor in the international arena is formed by assessing whether an interaction can bring utility in terms of, for example, economic gains or security alliance. Earlier studies found that the economic utility of the EU can affect the preferences for cooperation or integration (Hooghe and Marks 2004). Accordingly, we expected that *a frame stressing the economy will affect the preference for cooperation with the EU*. This effect, however, may depend on whether people think the EU (or Russia) contribute to economic growth. For example, EU assistance has been a core theme in EU communications with Moldova and Ukraine, but not so much with Belarus.

Security is a highly salient issue in the EaP region. Both Ukraine and Moldova struggle with a conflict on their territory in which Russia is actively engaged (the Luhansk and Donetsk regions and Crimea in Ukraine, Transnistria in Moldova). In Belarus, security threats can be construed as coming from different directions or be more diffuse. On the one hand, Belarus belongs to a military alliance with Russia—the Collective Security Treaty Organization. On the other, perceptions of security threats in Belarus may have been negatively affected after Russia's breach of the territorial integrity of Georgia. Belarus's refusal to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia suggests an ambiguity in its position, while security concerns may have become even more pronounced following the annexation of Crimea (Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira 2014a: 572, 2014b). Therefore, we expect that *framing international cooperation in terms of security benefits can affect preferences for cooperation with Russia or the EU, possibly differently in our three countries*.

Identity or cultural proximity may affect citizen evaluation of cooperation as well. Common identity is frequently highlighted by pro-Russian elites and organizations to justify the need of cooperation with Russia. Russian narratives invoking identity emphasize shared history (for example, in the Soviet Union or historical roots in 'Kiev Rus'), shared language and religious affiliation with the Orthodox Church. Therefore, we expect that *framing international cooperation in terms of shared identity will affect positively the preference for cooperation with Russia*. This effect, however, will depend on the level of identification with Russia or with the EU/Europe.

A different way to assess cultural proximity is to look at the effect of general governance norms. The more similar the partner country is seen to be in terms of rules and norms of behavior, the more positively it will be evaluated (Herrmann et al. 1999: 555). Linking governance norms with the work of North, Wallis and Weingast (2009), we frame international cooperation as linked to either 1/formal and impersonal governance or 2/personalist governance represented by patron client relationships. According to North et al. (2009), open access orders are characterized by equal, formal, and impersonal access to institutions and services, while limited access orders are characterized by access based on personal, patron-client relationships. In the latter, patrons maintain personalized relations defined through informal rules and determine access to political, economic, and social resources, limiting it to those who are members of particular networks. We hypothesize that framing *international cooperation in terms of formal rules/universal access governance norms might increase support for the EU*. This is because the EU's messages emphasize formal rules and rule of law in governance and cooperation. Finally, drawing on political psychology, scholars have established that the values individuals hold influence their foreign policy preferences. A strand of studies in the field of international relations focuses on the effects of particular values on four broad foreign policy orientations—militant internationalism, cooperative internationalism, anti-communism, and isolationism—and on policies towards particular countries and specific issues (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987; Hurwitz and Peffley 1990; Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016). The results show that “the same fundamental values that shape our beliefs and behavior in our daily lives also predict our foreign policy preferences; people take foreign policy personally” (Rathbun et al. 2016: 135). Values pertaining to inter-personal and social relations play the biggest role in shaping foreign policy attitudes (Rathbun et al. 2016). In combination with empirical evidence that Russia emphasizes ‘traditional values’, we selected two sets of values to highlight in our vignettes, namely liberal and traditional values. The former ones are usually linked to the EU, while the latter ones to Russia. *Our expectation is that frames highlighting liberal values would increase support for the EU and/or decrease support for Russia. Conversely, frames highlighting traditional (family) values would increase support for cooperation with Russia and decrease support for the EU.*

3. Research Design

3.1 Experimental manipulations and the questionnaire

To test how different framing of international cooperation influences citizen preferences for cooperation with the EU and Russia, we employed an experimental design. Various experimental designs have been used by scholars of international relations in the last couple of decades (Mintz et al. 2011). In our study, we devised a paper-and-pencil survey experiment. The main purpose of survey experiments is to study “the underlying principles behind human judgements (or evaluations) of social objects” (Rossi and Anderson 1982). An advantage of survey experiments is the possibility to clarify causal relations between variables through experiments while embedding them into (large-N) surveys (Druckman et al. 2006; Sniderman and Grob 1996).

In experimental designs, participants of a study are assigned randomly to experimental and control conditions. In our study, the experimental conditions are the ones in which we manipulate the information about international cooperation. We do so by using vignettes—short texts that the respondents have to read before answering a battery of questions on their preferences related to international cooperation. Each vignette

embodies one of the six frames of international cooperation discussed above (economy, security, identity, shared liberal values, shared traditional values, and formal governance rules) and defines the objectives of foreign policy in light of this frame. The structure of the vignettes was kept as uniform as possible. With the exception of the vignette manipulating the governance norms,² each text consisted of five sentences constructed in the same way. Each vignette describes social and personal benefits that the relevant aspect of cooperation we aim to highlight can bring. Similarly, each vignette describes the losses for our chosen domain: security, values, economy etc. that might result from lack of cooperation. The vignettes do not focus, however, on a particular event or person, that is they are thematic and not episodic.

Our frames do not indicate that Russia or the EU stand for specific values or promote a specific basis for international cooperation. We rely on the pre-existing values and causal stories that people already have, and only aim to affect the relative salience of different aspects of international cooperation.

There were six vignettes manipulating the ideas about international cooperation. We assigned participants randomly to read one of the six vignettes (to one of six experimental conditions) or not to read any vignettes (control condition). In the experimental conditions, participants filled in a questionnaire about international cooperation after reading a vignette. In the control condition, they proceeded directly to the questionnaire. The control condition allows us to measure the baseline for preferences for cooperation with either Russia or the EU.

The outcome variable (support for cooperation with the EU or Russia) was measured with four questions:

1. Belarus/Ukraine/Moldova should cooperate closely with the European Union/Russia.
2. In general, I have a negative image of the European Union/Russia.
3. I think Belarus/Ukraine/Moldova would benefit from closer cooperation with the European Union/Russia.
4. I tend to trust the European Union/ Russia.

These questions correlate very strongly, therefore we created two indices that measure support for the EU and Russia and serve as our dependent variables. We also accounted for a possibility that participants do not think about cooperation with the EU and Russia in terms of zero-sum game and asked them to answer to what extent they agree that 'Belarus/Ukraine/Moldova can develop close cooperation with Russia and the European Union at the same time.'

² During a pilot study we discovered that the 'governance norms' vignette stressing the importance of formal rules and equal access to institutions and services needed clarification. We extended that vignette with two sentences illustrating how formal norms work in practice ('Funding should be distributed in a transparent and accountable manner following objective criteria, so that citizens can see where the money goes. One's personal or party connections/connections in the government should not matter.') The motivation behind this decision was that generally people are less familiar with the general principles in terms of which the formal rules are expressed, but the practicalities of the application of these rules resonate with people much better.

Answers were recorded on an 11-point scale from 0 (fully disagree) to 10 (fully agree) with 5 serving as a neutral point.³ We also collected some information on personal values and preferences, main demographic characteristics, and political interest and knowledge. We included a manipulation-check question to assess whether the vignette participants read was understood.

In order to test the survey design, we conducted three pilots, one in each of the countries of interest. The first two pilots took place in Belarus (Minsk) and Moldova (Yaloveni and Budesti) in March 2017. In total 37 pilot participants completed the questionnaire in Belarus and Moldova and discussed their ideas about the phrasing of the vignettes and the questions, the relevance of the issues, and raised any problems they encountered when filling in the survey. Based on the pilot experiences we adjusted translations, vignettes (made them shorter) and the questionnaire (rephrased several questions, including the manipulation check). There were no issues with the questionnaire in the third pilot session in Kyiv, so the data collected there (27 participants) was included in the analysis.

3.2 Sample

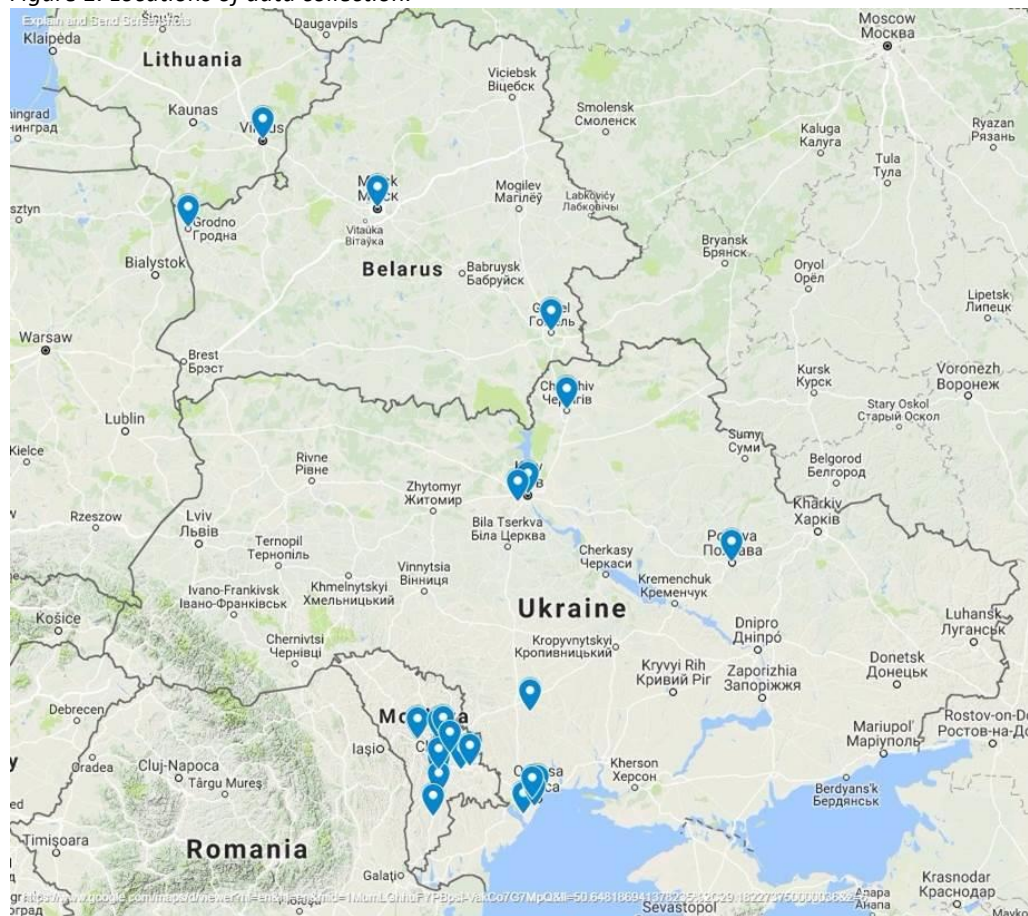
The survey and data collection were implemented with the help of partner institutions in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.⁴ Although our resources did not allow us to collect representative samples of participants, we aimed to diversify the respondents pool as much as possible by collecting data in different regions, as well as urban and rural locations. The Belarusian sample was collected in four cities (Minsk, Grodno, Gomel, and Vilnius⁵) and the surroundings of Minsk, the Moldovan sample was collected in seven regions (Chişinău, Ialoveni, Orhei, Comrat, Călăraşi, Cimişlia, and Anenii Noi), and the Ukrainian sample was collected mainly in five cities in the Odessa region, in the Kyiv region, and with added small samples in the Chernikhiv and Poltava regions.

³ We considered different rating scales, but settled on the 11-point scale with a neutral point in the middle after consulting literature on the reliability and validity of and preference for different scales, see Preston and Colman 2000.

⁴ SYMPA in Belarus, IDIS 'Viitorul' in Moldova, and UIPP in Ukraine.

⁵ In Vilnius we used a sample of Belarusian students and teaching and administrative staff based at the European Humanities University—a private, non-profit liberal arts university founded in Minsk, relocated to Vilnius in 2004.

Figure 1. Locations of data collection.



The survey was administered as a pen and paper questionnaire conducted with multiple groups.⁶ Participants were presented with an instruction and a consent form (printed out or read out to them) and took part in the survey after expressing consent.⁷

4. Data and Analysis

4.1 Sample distribution

To account for possible incomplete questionnaires, smaller effect sizes, and variability within the sample, we requested that the partners collect 180 responses per country (540, 77 per condition).⁸ Overall, we received

⁶ In Belarus, because of different restrictions, the questionnaires were partly administered on a one-to-one basis.

⁷ In accordance with EU-STRAT's ethics guidelines, participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary, that they could terminate their participation at any moment without consequences. They were told their personal data was not collected in a way that could identify them and all their data would be treated as confidential and used only for the purpose of research.

⁸ We performed statistical power analyses to determine the number of participants needed per condition. We used the test as an indication of the minimum number of participants. For 90 % power (Type II probability) and significance level of 0.05 (Type I error probability), to detect a difference of 1 on a scale, with a standard deviation of 1.5 (and a two-sided alternative hypothesis), we calculated that we would need around 50 observations per group. With our 7 conditions, this would result in 350 participants (around 120 per country).

even more, in total 579 completed survey questionnaires in the three countries (207 in Belarus, 183 in Moldova, and 189 in Ukraine). The recruitment of participants took place in localities of different size (capital cities, big cities, small towns) and in different parts of the countries. The median age of the sample is 37 years (first quintile at 27 and third quintile at 50). Women are 57 % of the sample. Five respondents have only primary education, 8 % have secondary, 14 % have professional or vocational diplomas, and the rest have higher education. In terms of occupation, 41 % work at state or public institutions, 38 % work at private companies and non-profit organizations or are self-employed, 4 % are unemployed, 6 % are students, and the remaining 9 % are pensioners. The sample is also quite diverse in terms of interest in politics, political knowledge, and media consumption.

4.2 Alertness check

To ensure that the participants do not fill in answers randomly, we flipped the evaluative direction of some questions that followed in succession: we asked respondents on their agreement with the statement ‘[My country] should cooperate closely with the EU’ and then right afterwards about agreement with the statement ‘In general, I have a negative image of the EU’ (and we did the same with the corresponding questions on Russia). Since it is highly unlikely that somebody who fully agrees that their country should cooperate with the EU also has a totally *negative* image of the EU (and vice versa), we can assume that respondents who gave such a pattern of responses have been filling in the questionnaire carelessly and, as a result, should be excluded from the sample. In total, 62 people failed at least one of the two alertness checks.

4.3 Manipulation check

To check whether the survey participants had read and comprehended the experimental vignettes, we asked them to identify the main theme of the short text they had to read from a list of six options (corresponding to the themes of our six vignettes). In total 297 participants, or 61 % of the total picked the correct option (after removing the inattentive respondents as identified above).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents per frame and result on the manipulation check

Frame	N wrong	N correct	% correct
Control	0	71	100 %
Economy	13	50	79 %
Governance	32	33	51 %
Identity	34	37	52 %
Lib. values	35	37	51 %
Security	36	34	49 %
Trad. values	37	35	49 %
TOTAL	187	297	61 %

The percentage of respondents able to identify what our frame was about is rather low given that the task was relatively simple and the vignette texts contained many words signalling the theme and main issue. Table 1 provides an overview of the distribution of correct answers per experimental condition. The main insight is that

many respondents identified ‘Economic benefits’ as the main issue of their vignette even if economic issues were not mentioned at all.⁹

To probe further the reasons why people did not answer correctly the manipulation check question we constructed a logistic regression model. Based on that, we can say that age and media consumption are negatively related with the chance of providing a correct answer, while political interest is positively related. The effect of media consumption on providing a correct answer was surprising and calls for reflection: the more media people said that they followed the less well they could answer. In addition to the surprising effect of media, we found that education and political knowledge did not seem to matter. The largest number of people failed the manipulation check in Moldova, but it is also the country with the highest average age of the respondents.

Most of the data presented below is limited to the subset of respondents who passed the manipulation check (as we have some degree of confidence that they comprehended the text of the vignettes). However, there is a methodological complication to that decision, as the EU support variable and European identity of the respondents seem to be correlated with whether they passed the manipulation check or not. If this is indeed a systematic effect, it might bias our results as the groups in the frame conditions would not be comparable to the control group (which did not have to pass a manipulation check since it did not receive a manipulation). But it is also possible that all frames increased EU support, which would result in the same correlation with passing the manipulation check in the data we observe. In any case, in the models below we include an individual-level control for age (unless otherwise indicated), to help in balancing the control and framed groups.

4.4 Support for the EU and Russia across the EaP countries

We start the presentation of the empirical findings with a discussion of support for close cooperation with the EU and Russia in each of the three EaP countries (see Figure 2). In all three countries we find very high support for close cooperation with the EU. Although our samples are not representative, they are diverse by design and we have tried to reach beyond the urban elites, so such high degrees of support are remarkable. The median values are 8 in Ukraine, 9 in Belarus, and 10 in Moldova. The means are about the same in Ukraine and Belarus about one point higher in Moldova. Support for close cooperation with Russia is much lower and more variable. The median is 3 in Ukraine, and 5 in Belarus and Moldova. Moldovans are actually on average slightly more supportive of cooperation with Russia than the Belarusians in our sample.

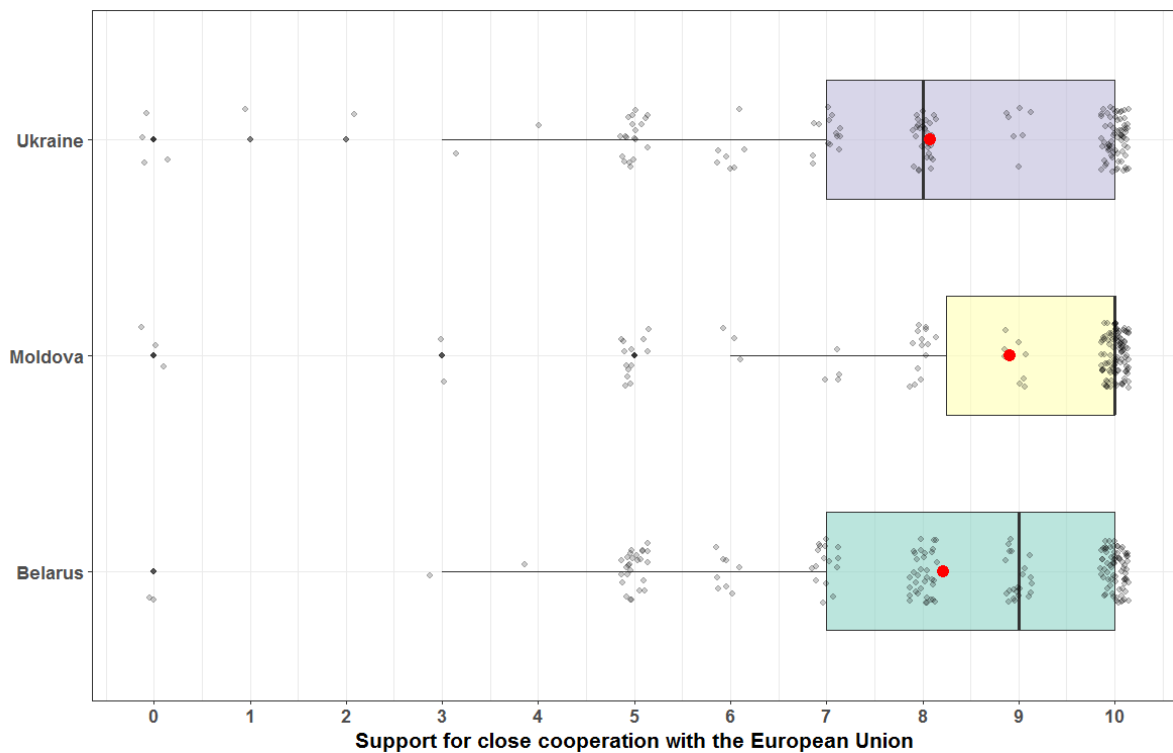
Furthermore, Moldovan and Belarussian participants exhibit a very strong belief that cooperation with both EU and Russia at the same time is needed and possible, with medians at 7.5 in Moldova and 7.0 in Belarus. Not surprisingly, Ukrainians are more sceptical about the possibility of close cooperation with both the EU and Russia, with a median of 5 and an even lower mean score on this variable. As support for the EU is so skewed

⁹ The prevailing focus on economic benefits can be explained with the possibility that people interpreted the question more broadly to refer to their opinions what international cooperation should be about rather than what was in the vignette. However, we do not find a positive correlation between a respondent’s judgment that ‘Cooperation should bring economic benefits to our people’ and misattributing the theme of the text to ‘Economic benefits’. A more trivial explanation about the choice of ‘Economic benefits’ would be that it was the topmost option provided in the questionnaire

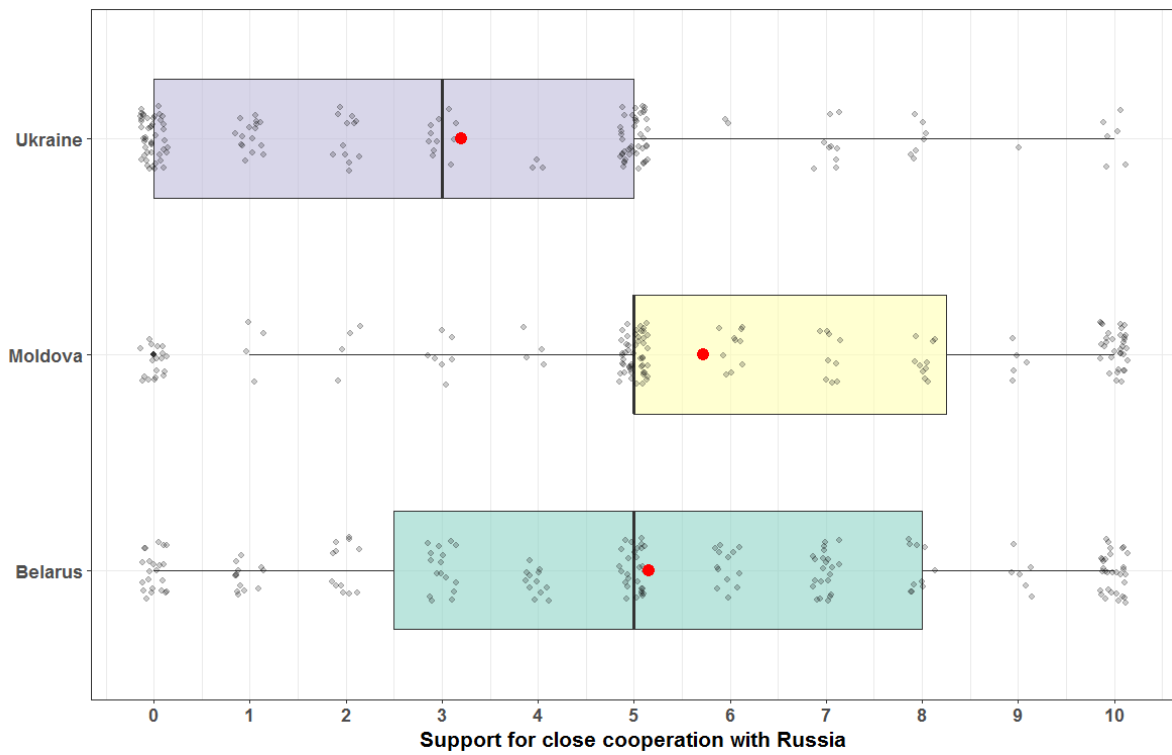
towards the top end of the scale, we also computed **net** support for close cooperation with the EU (which subtracts support for cooperation with Russia from the EU score) and an index of support for the EU and Russia constructed of four questions: (1) Belarus/Ukraine/Moldova should cooperate closely with the European Union/Russia; (2) In general, I have a negative image of the European Union/Russia; (3) I think Belarus/Ukraine/Moldova would benefit from closer cooperation with the European Union/Russia; (4) I tend to trust the European Union/ Russia. The index of support for the EU and Russia is presented in Figure 3. This index was used as a dependent variable in the analysis presented below.

Figure 2. A-D. Support for close cooperation with the EU, Russia, EU and Russia at the same time, and net EU support (EU support minus support for Russia), per country. Boxplots with overlaid clouds of observations (grey dots; jittered horizontally and vertically for visibility). Red dots are the means; vertical lines are the medians. Full sample (N=484).

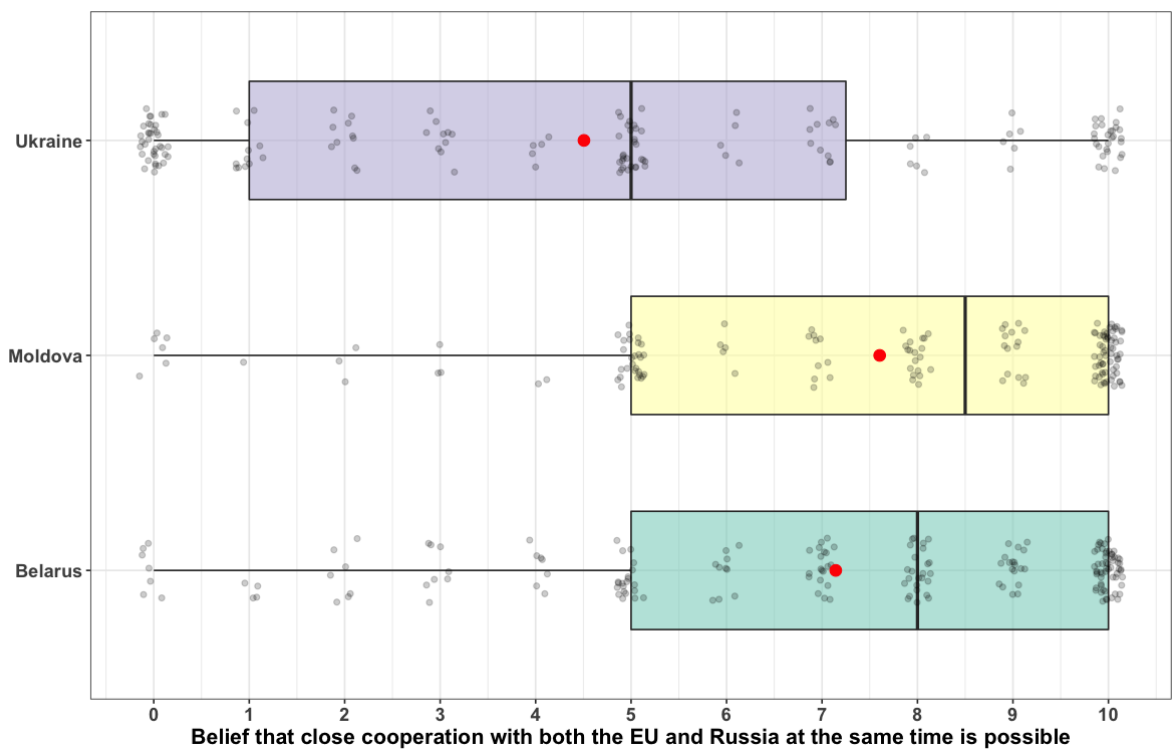
A.



B.



C.



D.

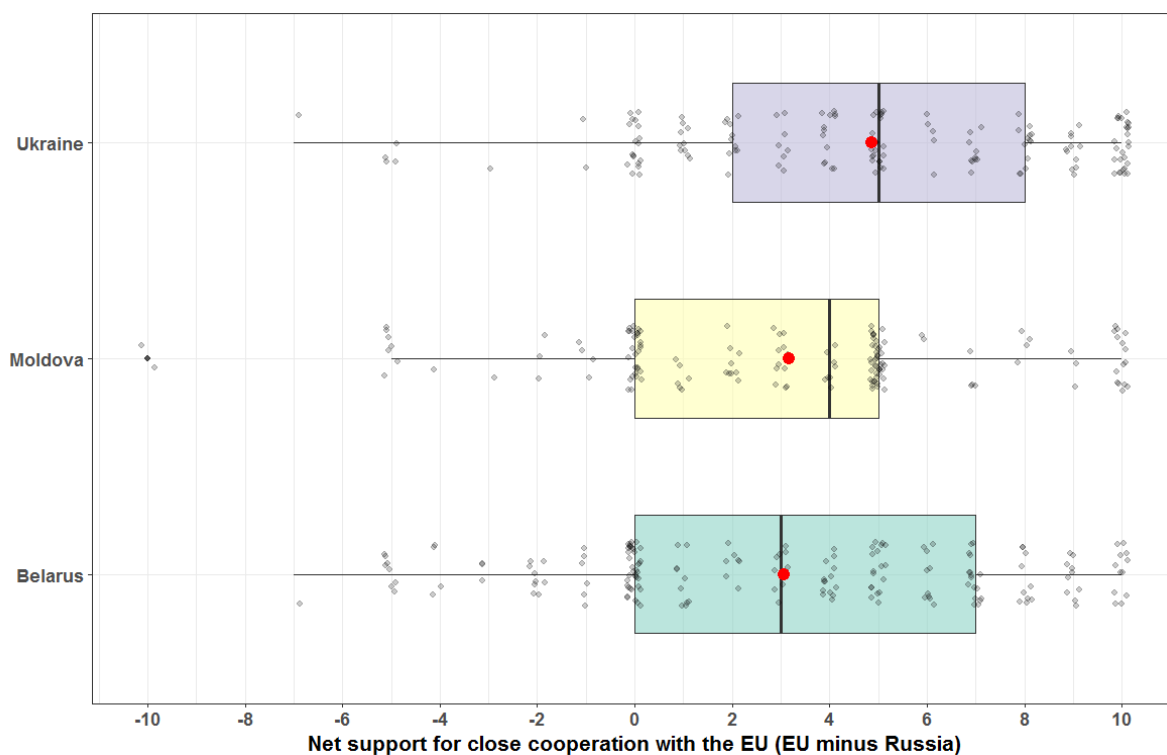
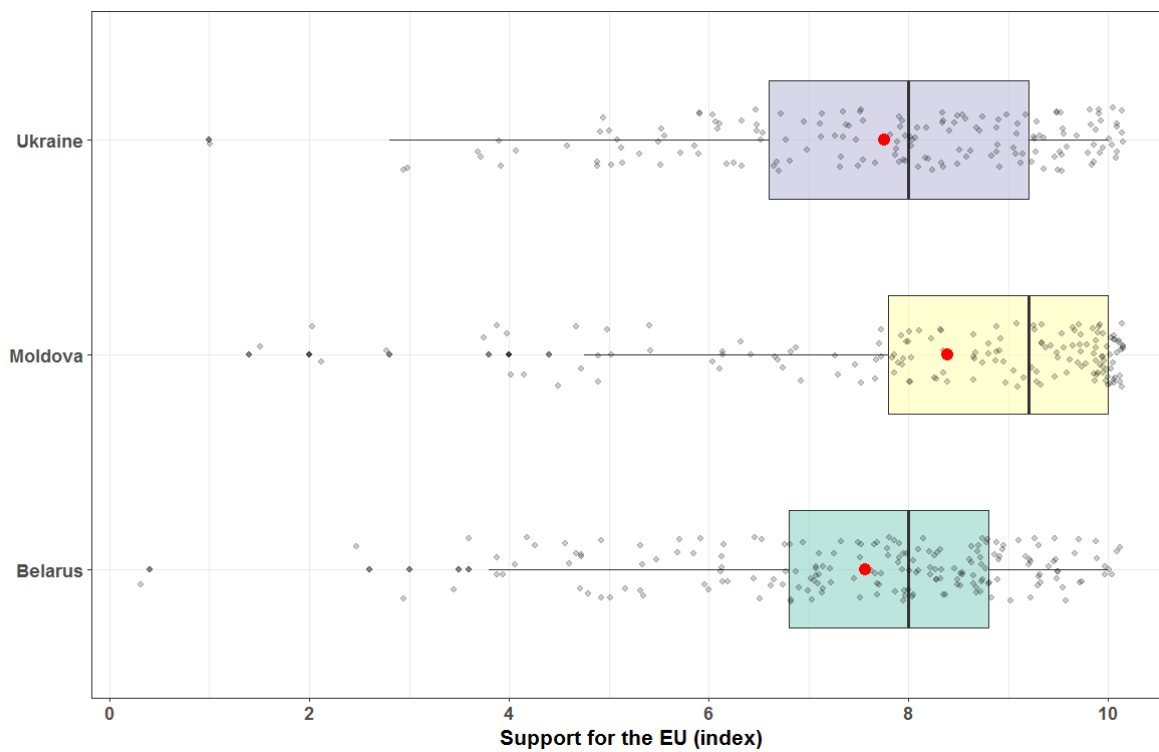
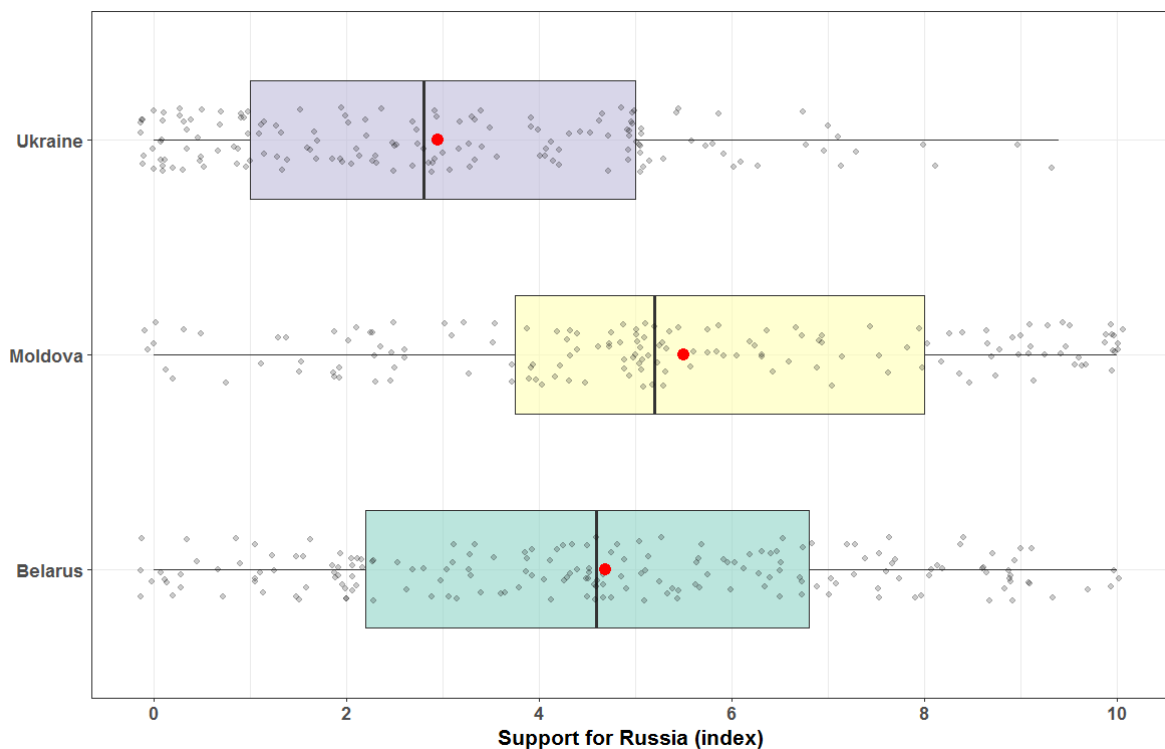


Figure 3. A-B. Index of support for the EU and Russia, per country. Red dots are the means; vertical lines are the medians. Full sample.

A.



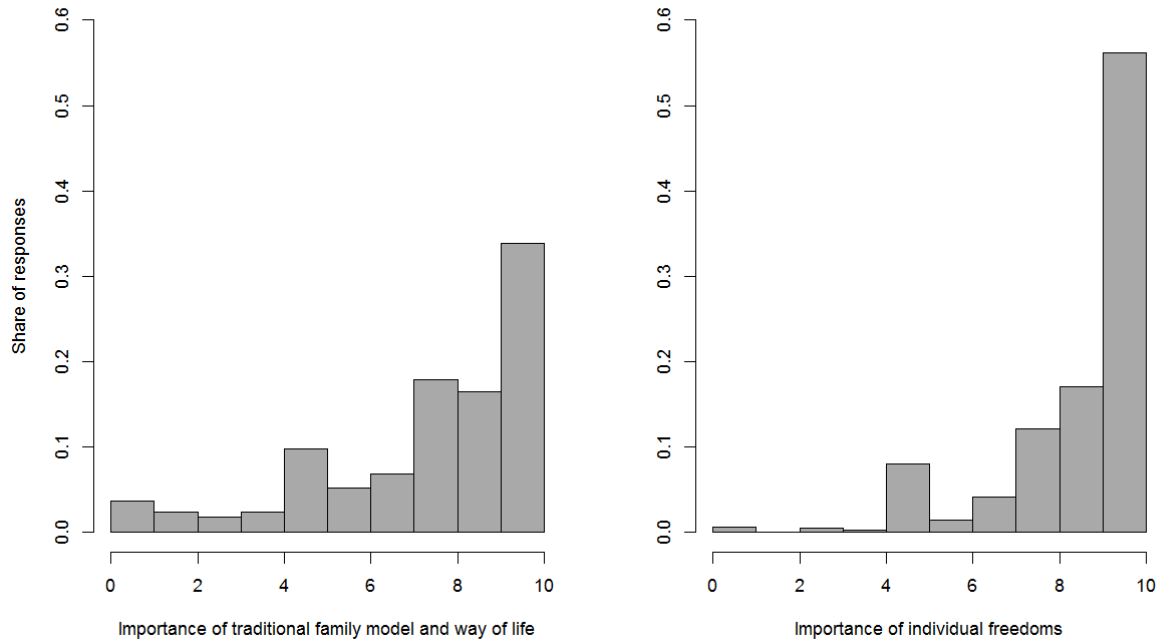
B.



Next to support for the EU, the sample is also skewed in terms of other variables (that are often covariates of support for the EU). For example, a large portion of the sample scores very high on the importance of individual freedoms and rights—one way in which we measured liberal values (see Figure 4, right panel).

Surprisingly, however, the scores on traditional values are also skewed towards the high end of the scale (see Figure 4, left panel). Therefore, our prediction that traditional values and liberal values would be negatively correlated did not materialize in our sample. Because of such imbalanced distribution of responses on the values variables, it is problematic to include them as moderators in our models of the effects of the frames. For this reason, we do not include them in the model presented below.

Figure 4. Distribution (relative shares of responses) of subjective importance of traditional values (left panel) and individual freedoms (right panel).



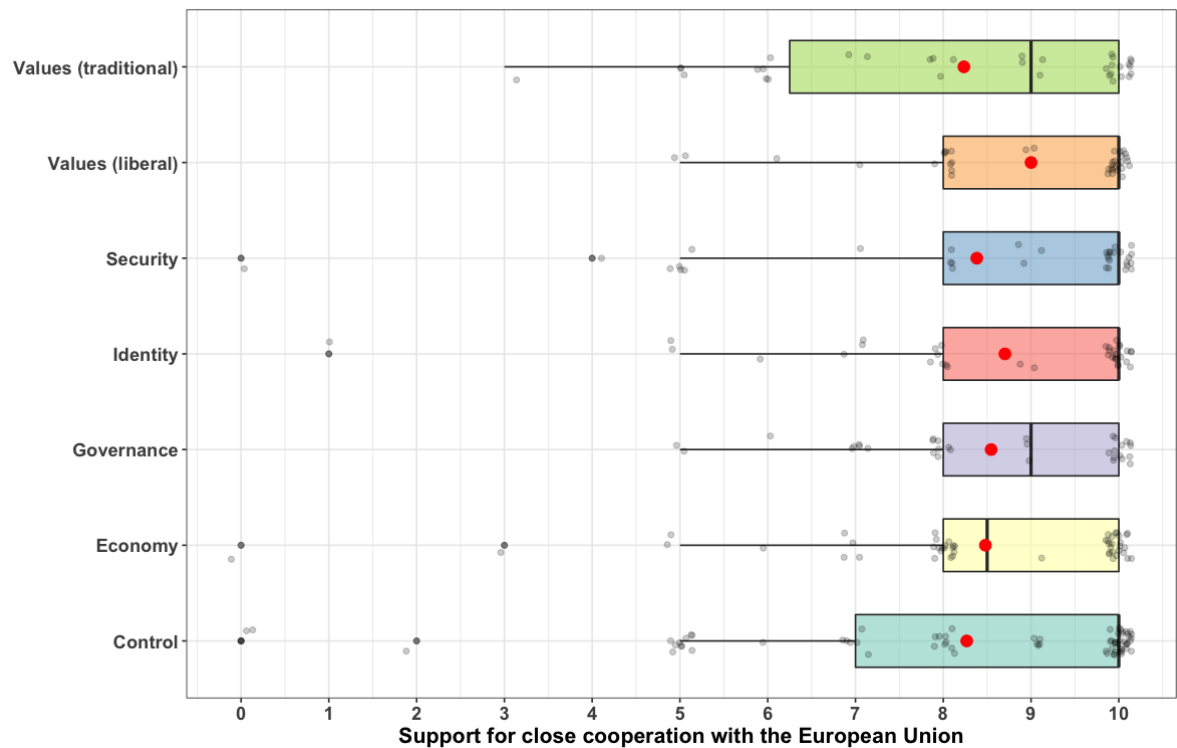
4.5 Support for the EU and Russia per frame

The main thrust of our experiment has been to find out whether and how cooperation preferences vary across the seven experimental conditions in our design (the six vignettes plus control). As discussed above, our prior knowledge about geopolitical and policy developments, as well as values and identity in these countries, led us to expect that frames related to the economy, governance, and liberal values might strengthen support for cooperation with the EU, while the frames related to traditional values, and identity might privilege cooperation with Russia. We expected varied results from security in the three countries.

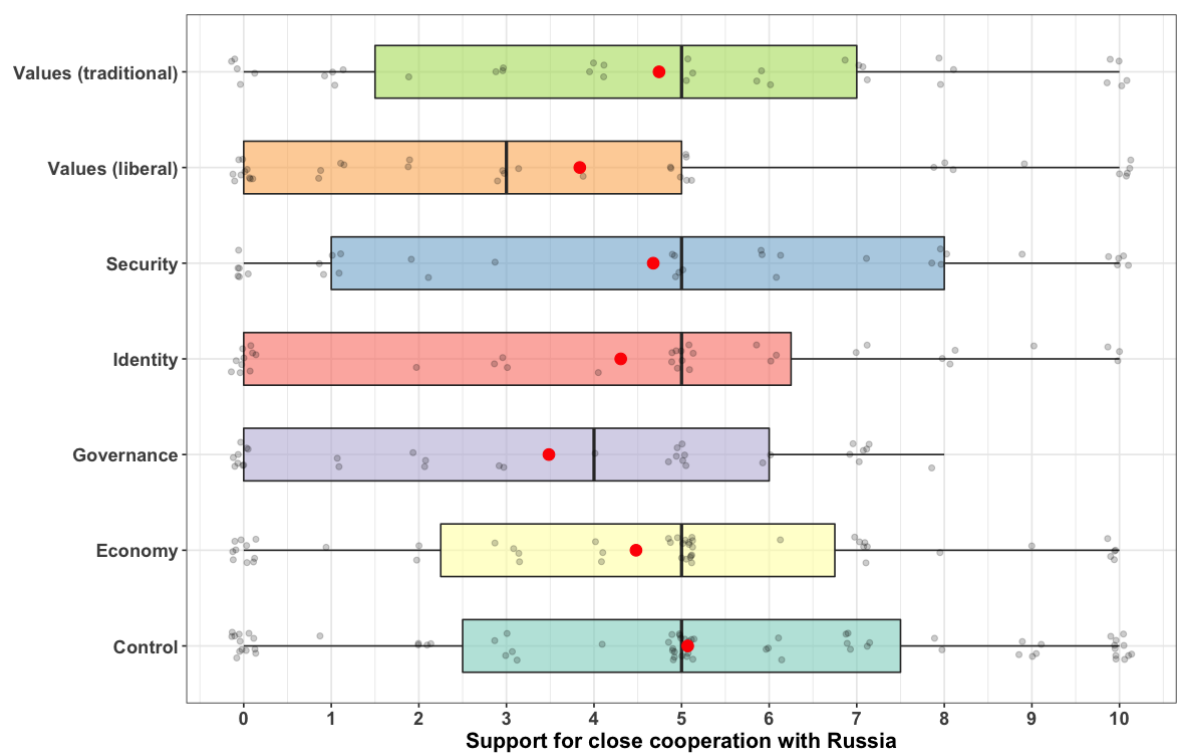
As Figure 5 shows, however, post exposure to the frames in the vignettes, the means of support for the EU do not differ much. The highest average is among respondents exposed to the liberal values frame, while the traditional values frame has higher dispersion than the rest, but the differences are not significant. Looking at cooperation with Russia, the respondents in the liberal values and governance frames have the lowest averages, which is in line with our expectations, but there is a great variation in responses within each of the conditions. Belief that cooperation with both EU and Russia is possible is highest among respondents exposed to the identity frame. Figure 6 shows the distribution of the index of support for the EU and Russia, across the frames. We use this index as our dependent variable in the models analysing the effects of the frames on the support for the EU and Russia presented in Table 2.

Figure 5. A-D. Support for the EU, Russia, cooperation with EU and Russia at the same time, and net EU support (EU support minus support for Russia), per frame. Boxplots with overlaid clouds of observations (grey dots; jittered horizontally and vertically for visibility). Red dots are the means; vertical lines are the medians. Full sample.

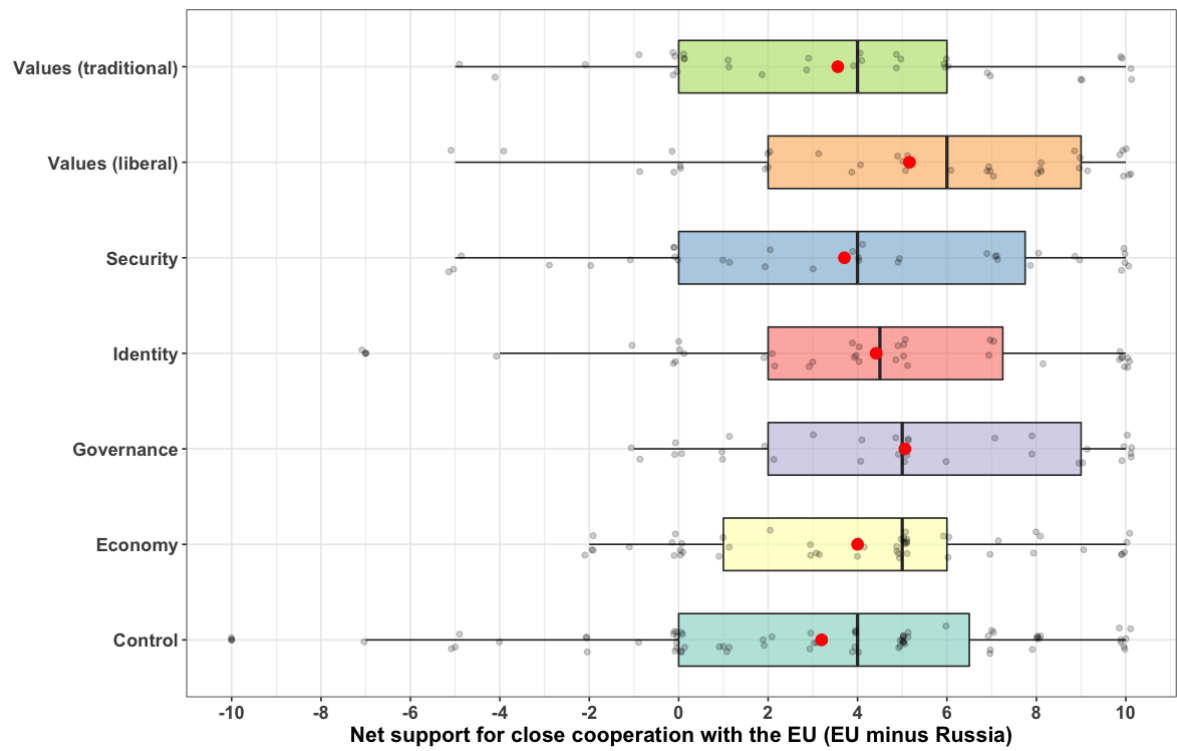
A.



B.



C.



D.

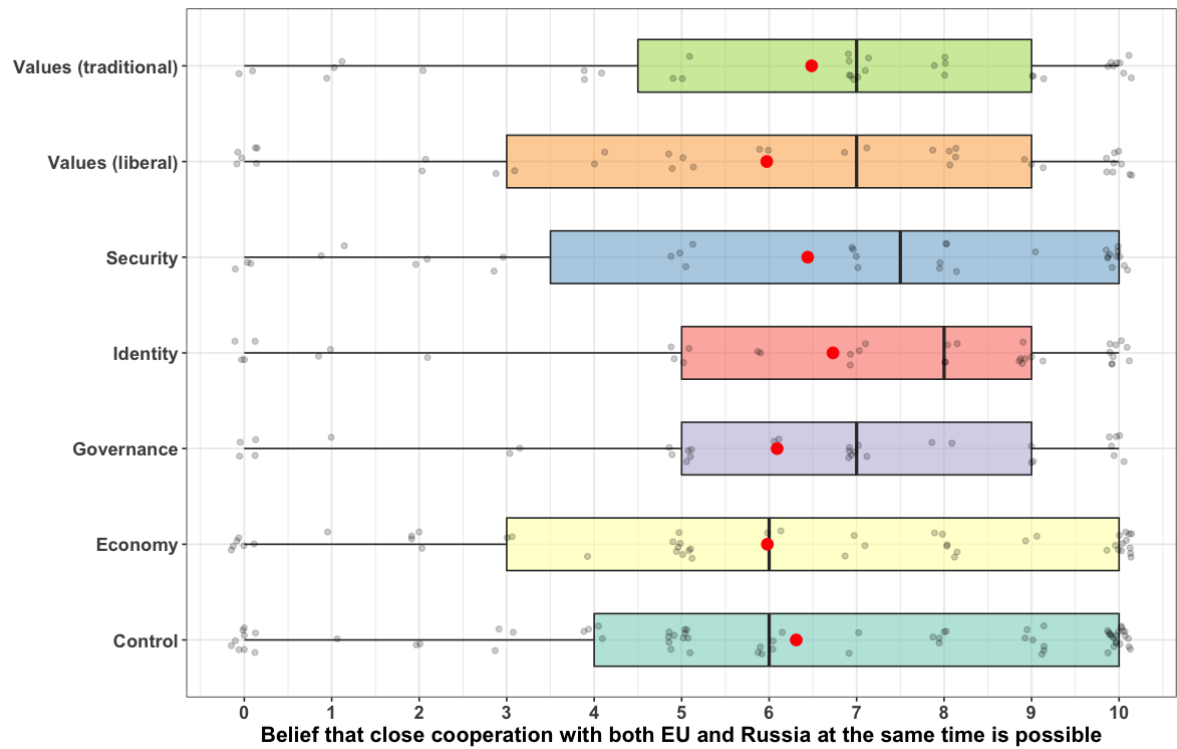
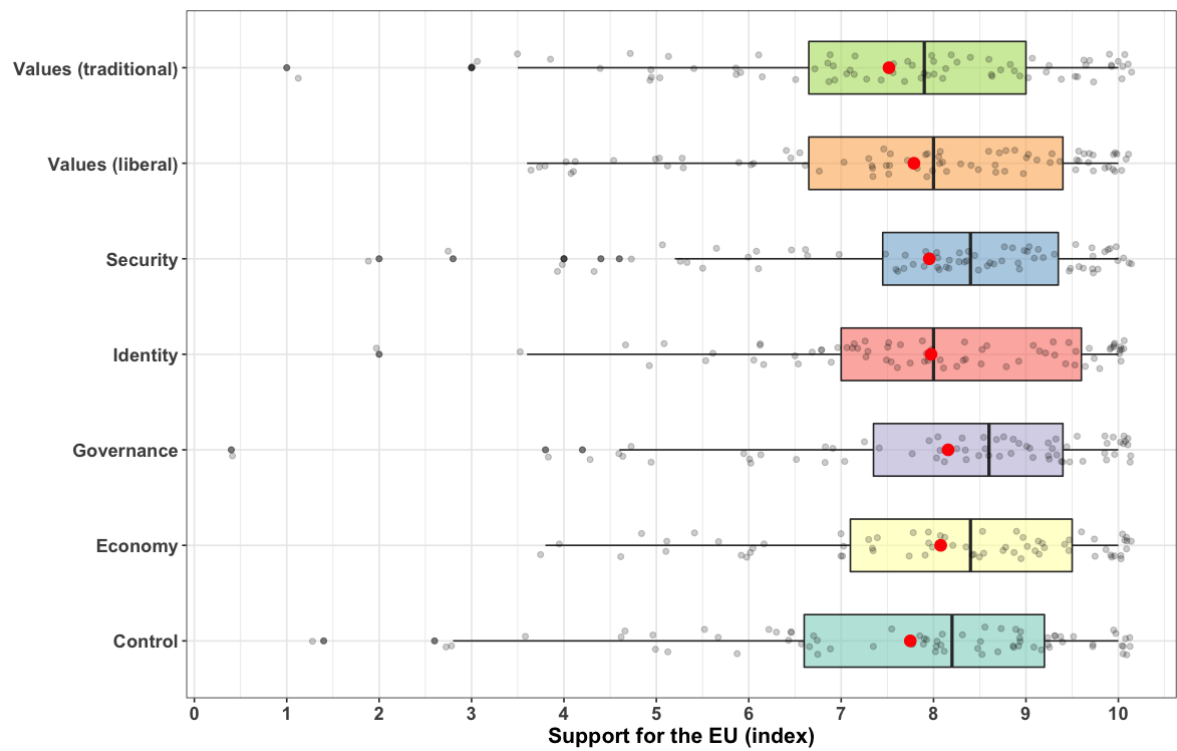


Figure 6. A-B. Index of support for the EU and Russia, per country. Red dots are the means. Full sample.

A.



B.

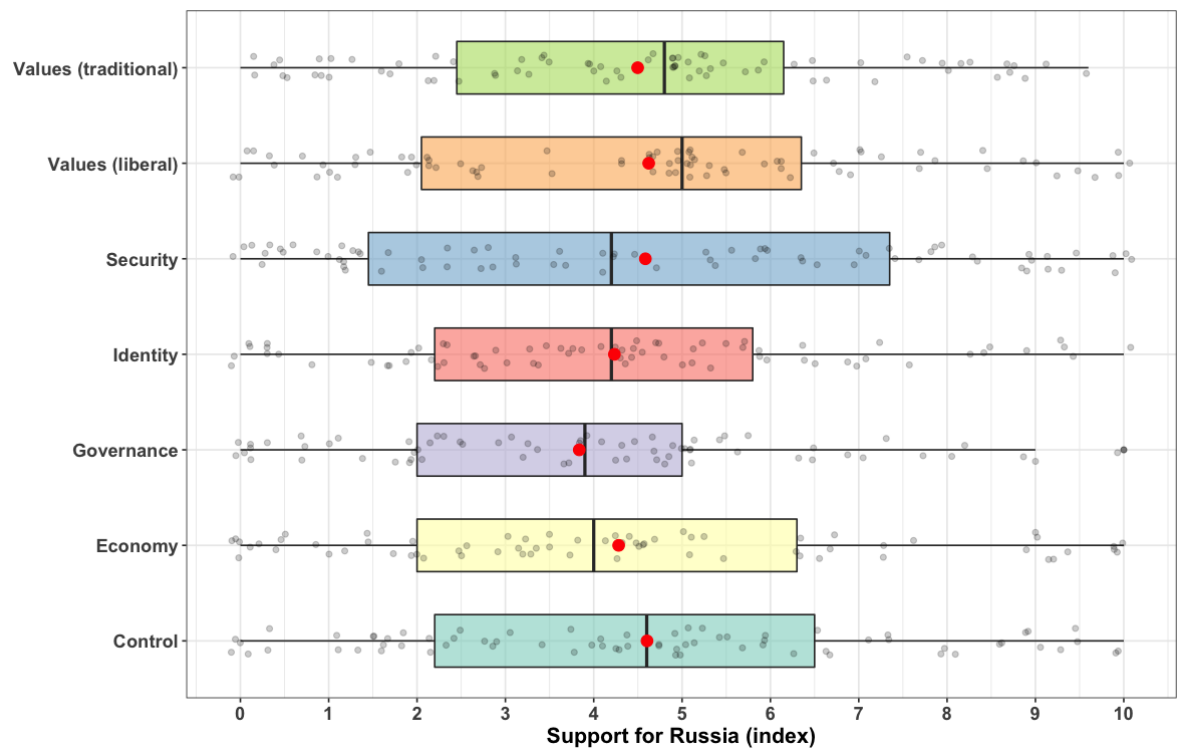


Table 2. The effects of frames on support for the EU and Russia, controlling for importance of traditional values and identity

	Support for the EU (N=227)			Support for Russia (N=227)		
	Coef.	St.error	Sign.	Coef.	St.error	Sign.
(Intercept)	5.09	0.50	***	6.50	0.83	***
Economy	0.20	0.29		-0.48	0.48	
Governance	0.36	0.32		-0.43	0.53	
Identity	0.21	0.31		0.00	0.51	
Lib. values	0.50	0.31		-0.29	0.51	
Security	0.25	0.31		0.08	0.52	
Trad. values	0.27	0.32		0.15	0.53	
Traditionalism	-0.08	0.04	*	0.14	0.06	*
European identity	0.35	0.04	***	-0.42	0.07	***
Moldova	0.99	0.27	***	-0.19	0.45	
Ukraine	0.19	0.20		-2.00	0.34	***
Age	0.01	0.01		0.01	0.01	
Adj. R2	0.29			0.29		

These results, as illustrated by the figures and Table 2, show that our frames did not have significant effects on the support for the EU and Russia. The best predictor of support for the EU was the extent of identification with Europe: if the respondents identified more as European, they were more supportive of the EU (positive effect) and less supportive of Russia (negative effect). We also found an effect of subscribing to traditional values: if respondents scored higher on traditional values, they were less supportive of the EU and more supportive of Russia.

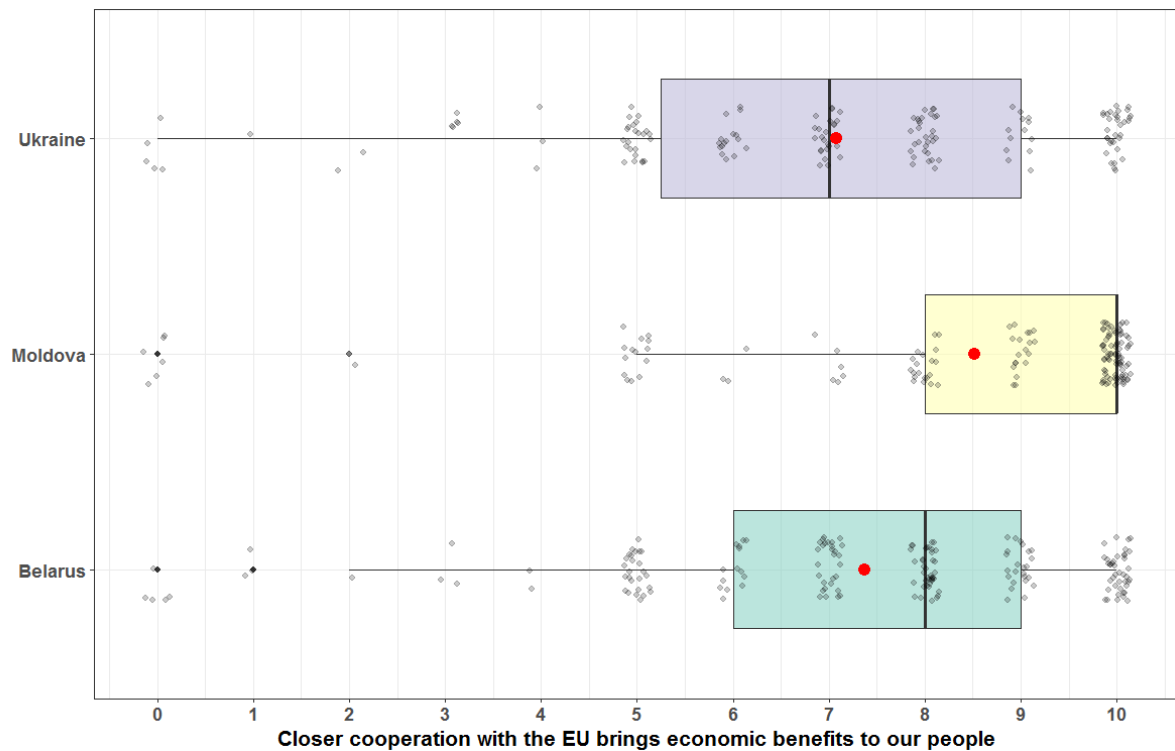
Importantly, the dynamics of citizen preferences and support for external actors differ significantly between Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. We find very big effects based on the country of the respondent, showing large country differences in our sample in terms of support for cooperation with either external actor. By comparison with respondents from Belarus, Moldovans were much more supportive of the EU, whereas Ukrainians were much less supportive of Russia.

4.6 Beliefs about the EU and Russia and support for cooperation

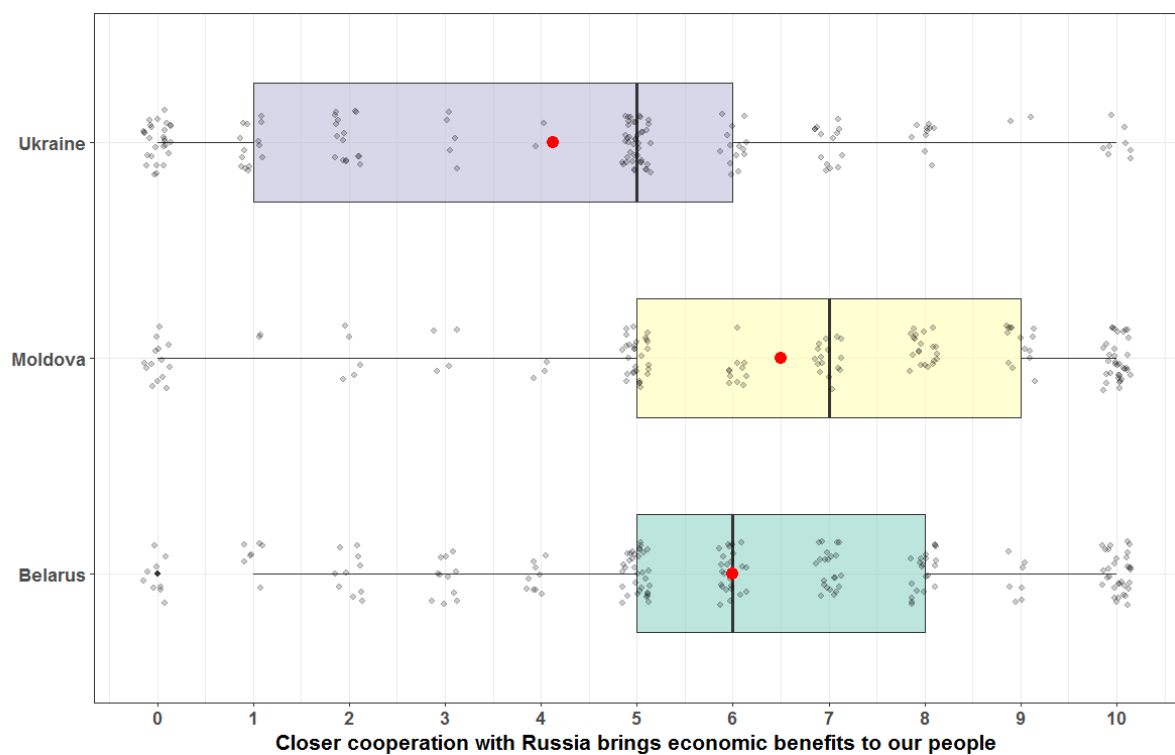
Our survey included a battery of questions on existing beliefs about the EU and Russia. Respondents were asked to state whether they believed that cooperation with the EU and Russia would bring benefits in terms of economy and security and to what extent the EU and Russia support specific types of values and governance rules. The distributions of the answers to this set of questions are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. A-J. Agreement with statements about the effects of closer cooperation with the EU and Russia on economic benefits, security, support for traditional and liberal values, and with the statement that they follow clear formal rules in their interactions with other states, per country. Boxplots with overlaid clouds of observations (grey dots; jittered horizontally and vertically for visibility). Red dots are the means; vertical lines are the medians. Full sample.

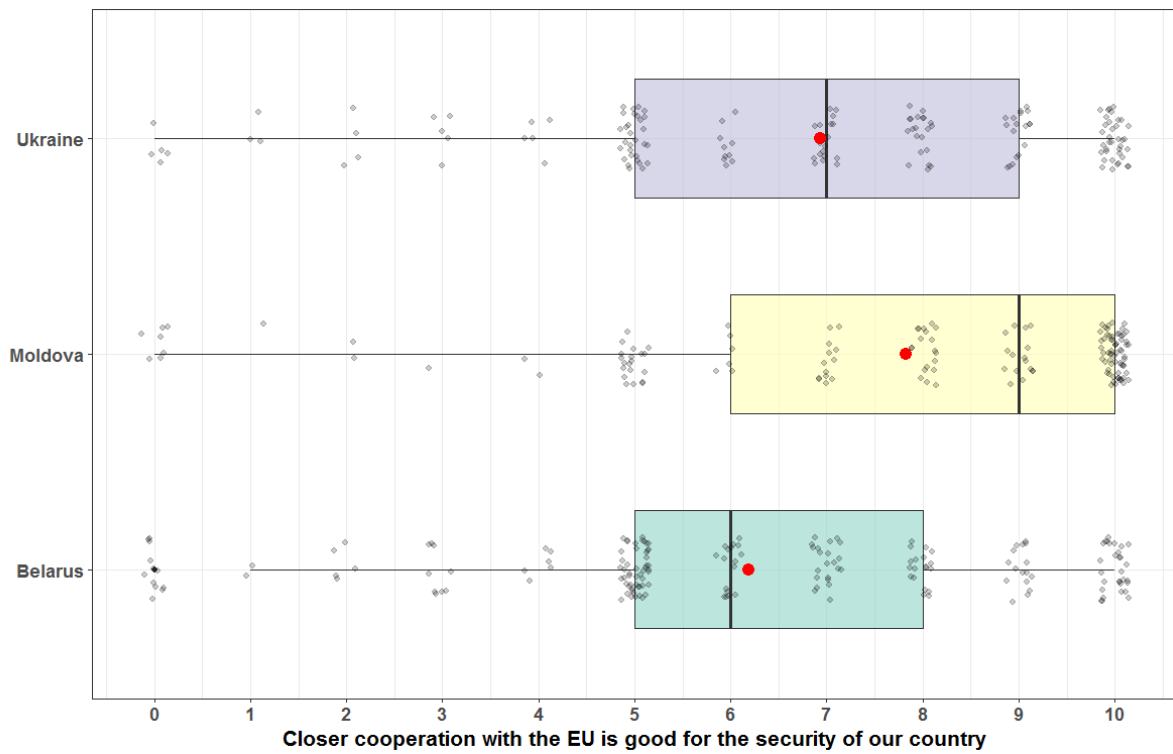
A.



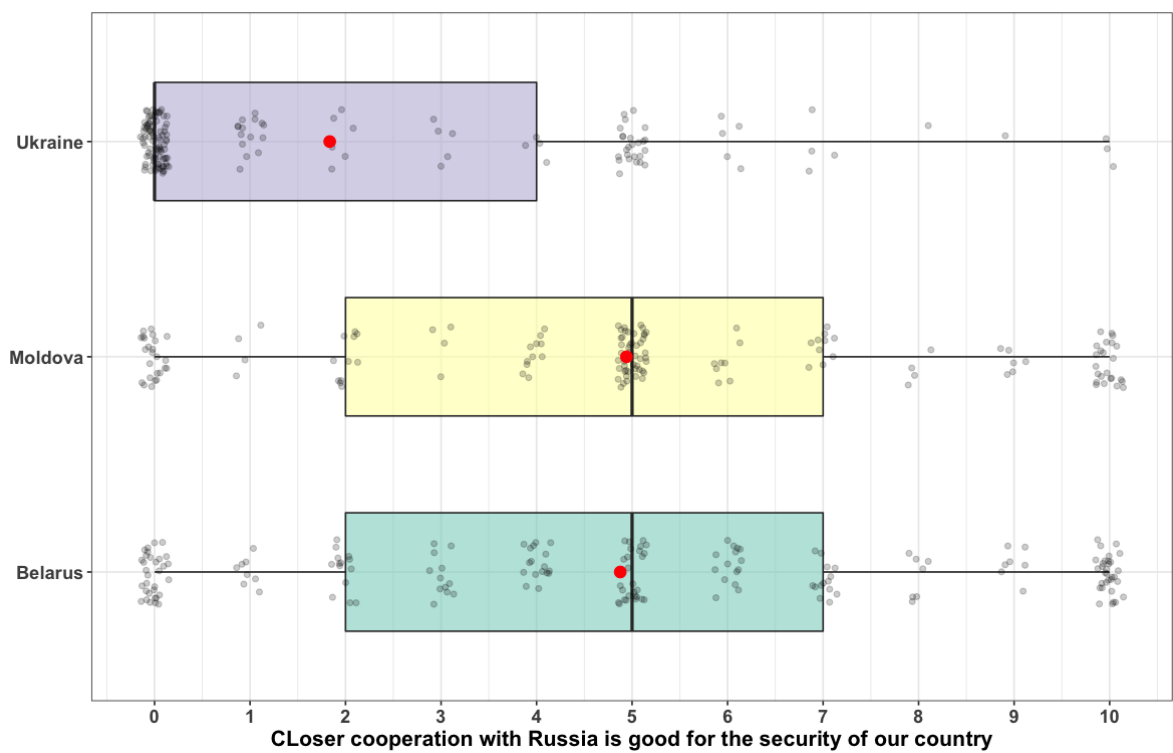
B.



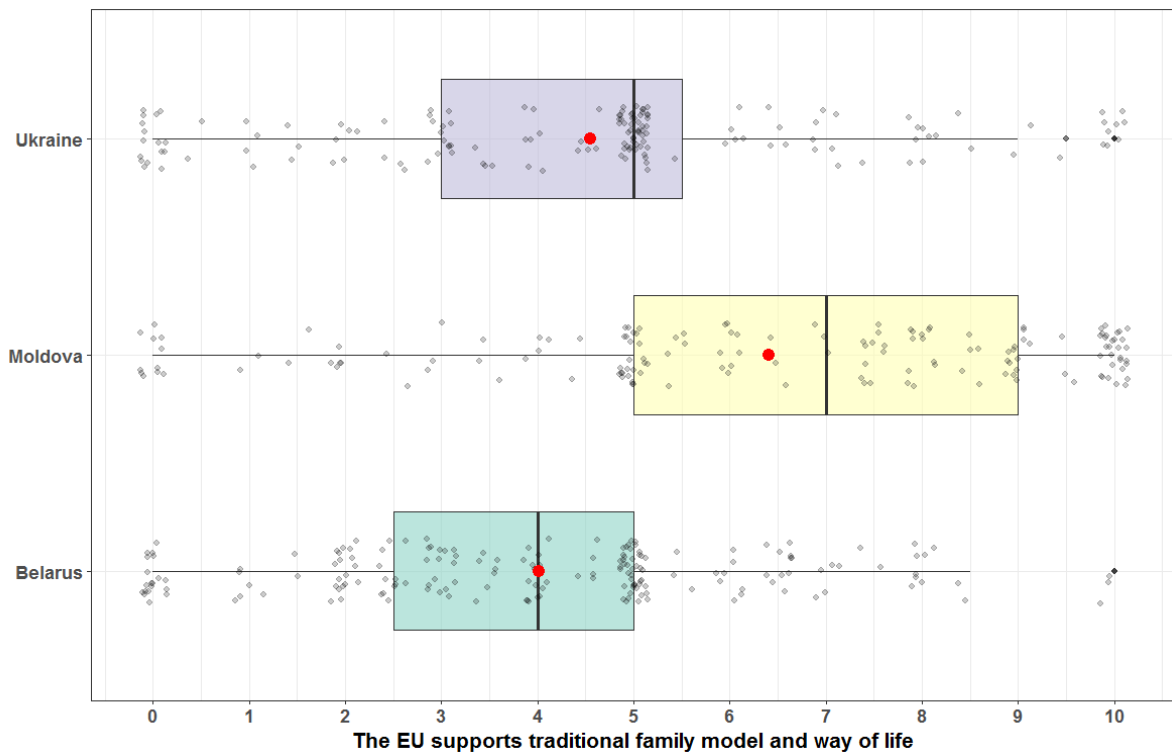
C.



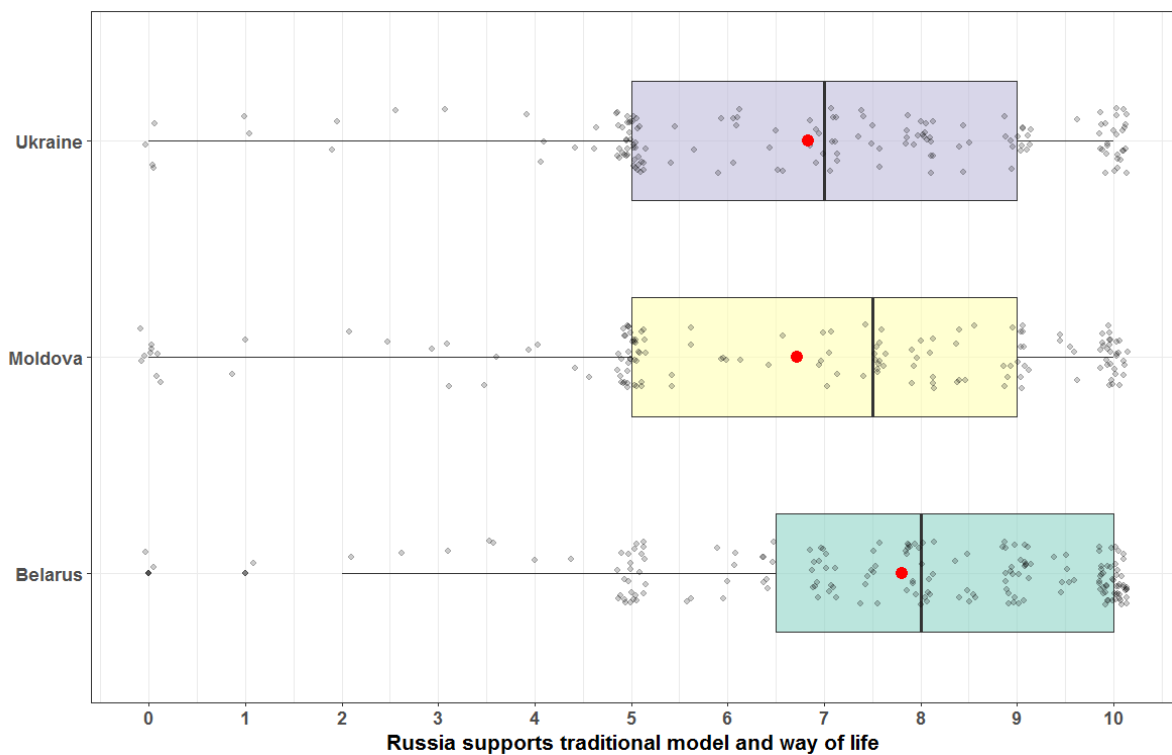
D.



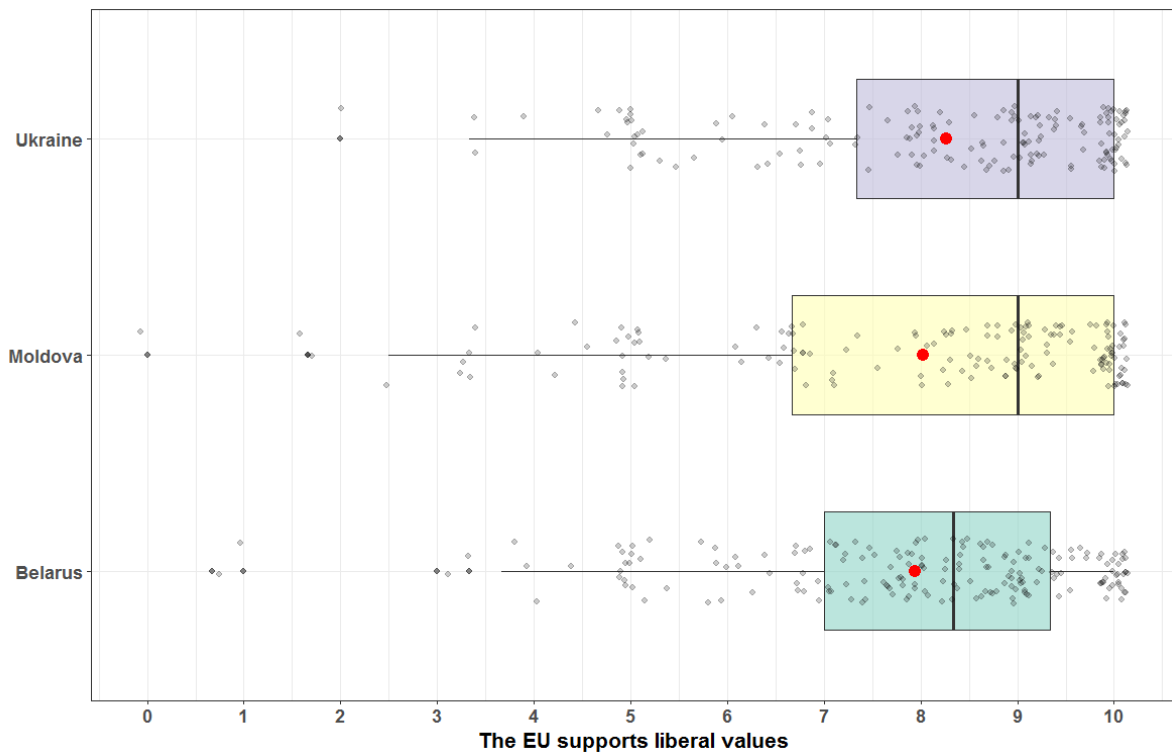
E.



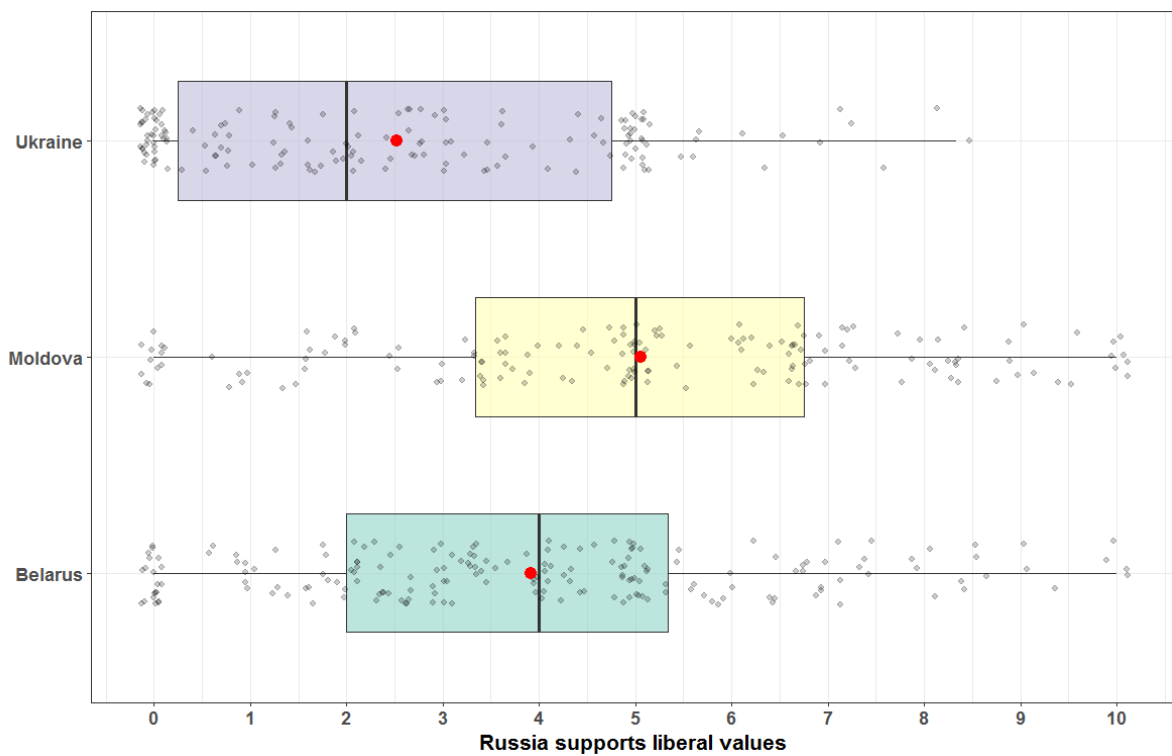
F.



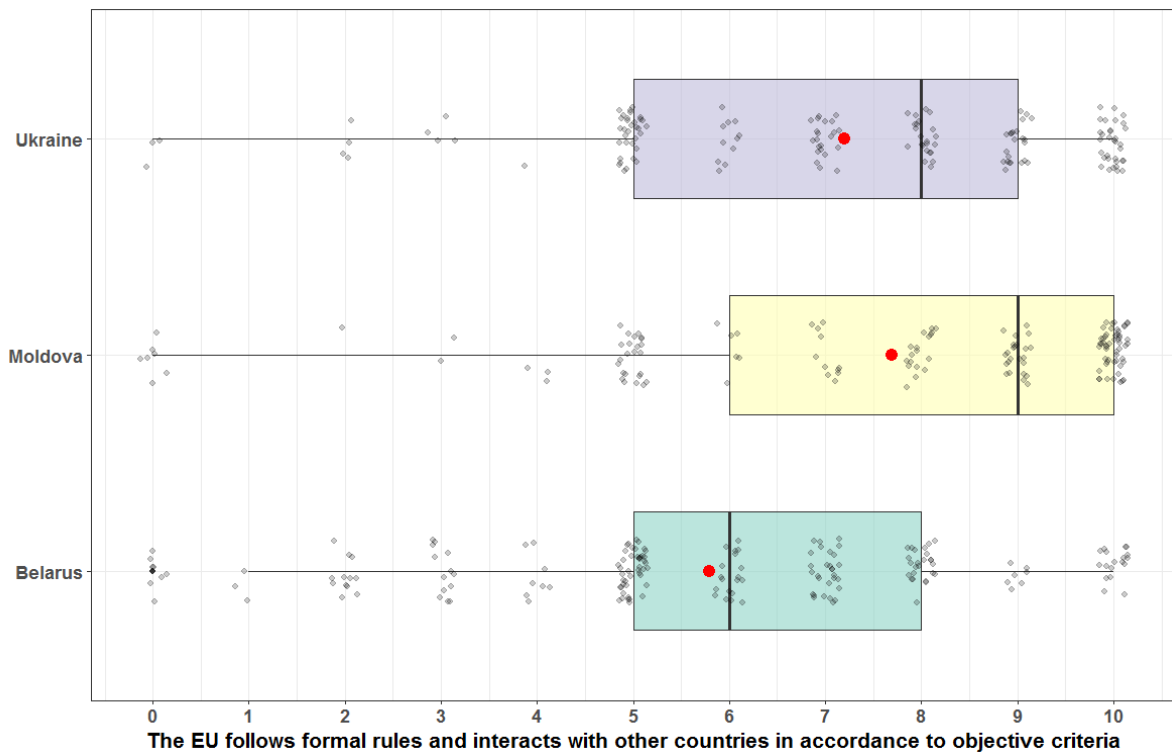
G.



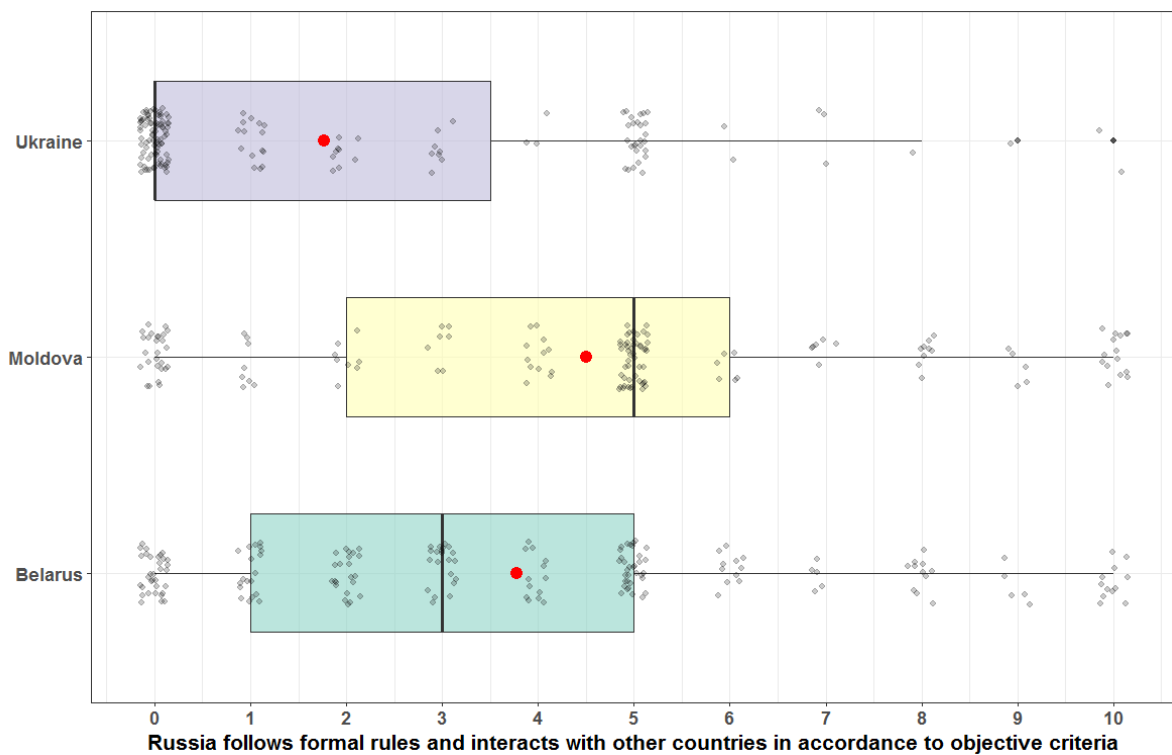
H.



I.



J.



These pre-existing respondent beliefs can potentially explain support for the EU and Russia beyond identity (which was found to have a large effect in the model presented above). We will explore further potential explanations in our further analyses of this data in future EU-STRAT research.

5. Discussion

In this report we presented the first findings as well as the logic and design of a survey experiment conducted to study the effects of information and frames on citizen preferences in favour of close cooperation with the EU and/or Russia. We presented the sample characteristics, descriptive statistics for the main variables, and preliminary analyses of the data. While our next working paper will focus on further analysis of the data collected in the survey and on integrating the results with previous findings on how the EU and Russia communicate and what messages reach the media, we would like to end the report with a short deliberation over the process of data collection and the challenges of exploring citizen preferences in the neighbourhood.

Our country teams and the team designing the survey became acutely aware of many challenges that researchers face when investigating ideas about international collaboration in countries targeted by competitive and often adversarial international actors. We experienced difficulties related to studying specifically the preferences and beliefs of the public, rather than the elites. These challenges, some of them practical in nature and others resulting from the geopolitical and socio-economic situation in the region, have an impact on the results and what we can ultimately learn about citizen preferences in an uncertain environment.

Participant recruitment was a major issue, which all teams struggled with and which impacted the nature of our sample and results. The reasons for this were twofold. First, the lack of compensation for participants' time made it very difficult to attract the right number of participants of different points of views. By using personal networks as a starting point for recruitment, we did not manage to attract enough participants sceptical about cooperation with the EU and more favourable to closer ties with Russia. This problem was hard to tackle despite the considerable effort to diversify locations and thereby, samples. Second, the fact that our partner institutions from the EaP countries are known or seen to be (mostly) pro-European probably also affected the sampling and responses. An observer effect might have influenced our respondents and played a role in their answers to the survey: participants of the study knew or could have easily deduced the pro-European orientation of the local investigators from the think tanks and were informed that the research was conducted by an EU funded consortium. This information might have been interpreted as a cue that there is an expectation of providing answers more in favour of the EU. The experience with the pilots and data collection process showed us that citizens of the EaP countries do have very strong opinions about both the EU and Russia, but were very sensitive to perceived pro-European allegiance of the investigators in the field, adjusting their responses to what they think is expected from them. Despite our preventive measures to minimize this effect, we do not think we managed to eliminate it. For this reason, alternative ways of recruitment (for example, with payment for participants or with the use of survey agencies) should be considered in the future research to access a more representative pool of respondents.

In general, we found that citizens care about their countries' cooperation with EU and Russia and are well aware of the pitfalls and challenges of their location and current geopolitical tensions affecting their country. Many respondents indicated they would prefer cooperation with both the EU and Russia. This is not, however, a preference for abandoning liberal values, European identities or search for good governance. The citizens of the EaP countries that we have reached would choose closer ties with the EU, just as many elites do, or are balanced in their preferences for partners for cooperation.

During the pilot studies, we were left with the impression that many citizens felt rather disempowered. On several occasions participants expressed surprise that they were asked to comment on the future of cooperation and the choices of their governments. The older participants in particular appeared to have difficulty understanding the choices they were asked to comment upon. This may have been a consequence of age and education level, but also can be seen as a characteristic of a generation that grew up during Soviet rule. The communist authorities actively discouraged political pluralism and punished citizens for taking political stands that were in conflict with the communist party line. In other words, there was only one correct answer to any political question—the answer expected by the state authorities. The impact of figures of authority and observers on the survey answer of such participants may be disproportionately large even today. This may be an important observation to take into account in assessing not only this experiment's findings but also other surveys from the region.

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Appendix A: Vignettes

C1 (no vignette: control condition)

Please answer the questions in line with your views, opinions, and preferences. Thank you for your participation.

Intro C2-C7: Please read the text below and answer the questions attached after it in line with your views, opinions, and preferences. Thank you for your participation.

C2 (economy frame)

Economic interests are the basis of international cooperation. Cooperation between countries should bring economic benefits to citizens. Belarus should closely cooperate with those countries that bring investments and increase the prosperity of ordinary people. Working closer together with other countries improves people's lives and contributes to building a prosperous future for society and our children in particular. If countries do not cooperate, ordinary people's lives are negatively affected: they miss out on good opportunities to develop and improve their own material situation.

C3 (security frame)

Security interests are the basis of international cooperation. Cooperation between countries should bring security benefits to citizens. Belarus should closely cooperate with those countries that contribute to ordinary people's security and safety. Working closer together with other countries improves people's lives and contributes to building a secure future for society and our children in particular. If countries do not cooperate, ordinary people's lives are negatively affected by the uncertainty and unstable situation, which they find themselves in.

C4 (identity frame)

Shared identity—common history, language, or religion—is the basis of international cooperation. Cooperation between countries should be based on shared identity, for example on historical origins, language or religion. Belarus should closely cooperate with those countries, where ordinary people have similar identity to us, i.e. they are similar to us. Working closer together with other countries requires being a part of the same broader community, based on shared history, language, or religion, which will be preserved for our children. If countries with shared identity do not cooperate, ordinary people's lives are negatively affected, because they miss the connection with people who share history, language, or religion.

C5 (traditional values frame)

Shared values are the basis of international cooperation. Cooperation between countries should be based on shared traditional values. Belarus should closely cooperate with those countries, where ordinary people preserve the traditional family model and follow the traditional way of life. Working closer together with other

countries requires that our societies share the traditional values that can be passed on to our children. If countries with shared values do not cooperate, ordinary people's lives are negatively affected, because traditional values and traditional way of life are being lost.

C6 (liberal values frame)

Shared values are the basis of international cooperation. Cooperation between countries should be based on shared liberal values: individual rights and freedoms, tolerance, and freedom to choose your way of life. Belarus should closely cooperate with those countries, in which individual rights and freedoms are respected, people are tolerant, and they can choose their way of life. Working closer together with other countries requires that our societies share the liberal values that can be passed on to our children. If countries with shared values do not cooperate, ordinary people's lives are negatively affected, because individual rights and freedoms are not respected, people become less tolerant, and cannot choose their way of life.

C7 (formal norms of governance)

Shared norms of governance are the basis of international cooperation. Cooperation between countries should be based on similar norms of governance. Belarus should cooperate with those countries that follow clear formal rules when investing and providing funding to people or regions. The funding should be distributed in a transparent and accountable manner following objective criteria, so that citizens can see where the money goes. One's personal or party connections/connections in the government should not matter. Working closer together with other countries requires following formal rules and norms, so that our children's (personal and professional) life opportunities will not depend on personal connections. If countries with shared norms of governance do not cooperate, ordinary people's lives are negatively affected: they cannot influence public policy and lose the opportunity to participate in addressing societal problems that affect their lives.

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. Below there are several statements concerning international cooperation. Please indicate to what extent you agree with the statements, **by circling** a number from 0 to 10 in the table below, with '0' being full disagreement, '5' being neutral, and '10' being full agreement:

		Fully disagree				Neutral				Fully agree			
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1	BEL/MLD/UA should cooperate closely with the European Union.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2	In general, I have a negative image of the European Union.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3	I think BEL/MLD/UA would benefit from closer cooperation with the European Union.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4	I tend to trust the European Union.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
5	I tend to trust European businesses.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
6	BEL/MLD/UA should cooperate closely with Russia.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
7	In general, I have a negative image of Russia.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
8	I think BEL/MLD/UA would benefit from closer cooperation with Russia.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
9	I tend to trust Russia.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
10	I tend to trust Russian businesses.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	BEL/MLD/UA can develop close cooperation with Russia and the European Union at the same time.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

1A. In the text you just read on the first page, what was the main issue related to international cooperation? Please choose and circle **only one** answer:

1. Economic benefits for our citizens
2. Security of our country
3. Liberal values and freedoms
4. Traditional values
5. Identity: common history, language, or religion
6. The rules and norms of governance and following of the laws

2. Now think about what you personally find important. Please indicate how important these are for you by **circling** a number from 0 to 10 in the table below, with '0' being completely unimportant and '10' being extremely important:

		Completely unimportant					Extremely important					
1	Traditional family model	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Traditional way of life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	Individual freedoms and rights	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Tolerance	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Free choice of a way of life	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. Please indicate your age: ____ years old

4. Please indicate your sex (male or female): ☐ Male ☐ Female

5. Below there are several statements concerning communities that you might or might not identify yourself with. You can identify with **more than one**. Please indicate to what extent you agree with each statement by circling a number from 0 to 10 in the table below, with '0' being full disagreement, '5' being neutral, and '10' being full agreement.

		Fully disagree				Neutral				Fully agree			
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1	I consider myself BEL/MLD/UA	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
1A	I consider myself Ukrainian.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2	I consider myself Russian.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2A	I consider myself Romanian.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3	I consider myself European.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4	Other (please write which one)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Now think about these religious groups:

		Fully disagree				Neutral				Fully agree			
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
5	I consider myself belonging to the Orthodox faith. Please indicate your patriarchate: _____	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
6	I consider myself a catholic	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
6A	I consider myself a protestant.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
7	Other (please write which one)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

6. In different countries relations in business and government can work in different ways. Individuals can follow different rules and norms of governance. Please indicate to what extent you agree with each statement, by **circling** a number from 0 to 10 in the table below, with '0' being full disagreement, '5' being neutral, and '10' being full agreement.

		Fully disagree				Neutral				Fully agree			
1	I prefer to conduct work or business through personal contacts. It matters whom I know to get things done.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2	I prefer to conduct work and business through impersonal and impartial institutions, where the rules are the same for everyone. It should not matter who I am and whom I know.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3	In my opinion, institutions should be impartial and treat everybody in the same way.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4	In my country you cannot achieve anything in work and business without personal connections.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
5	In my country institutions do not treat everybody the same.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

7. Now think what your country should prioritize when choosing partners for close cooperation. Consider what factors are more important than others for BEL/MLD/UA. Please indicate how important in your opinion the factors listed below are, by circling a number from 0 to 10 in the table below, with ‘0’ being completely unimportant and ‘10’ being extremely important:

		Completely unimportant									Extremely important	
1	Cooperation should bring economic benefits to our people	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Cooperation should enhance security of our country	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	Cooperation should strengthen shared values	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Cooperation should be based on shared identity (common history, language, or religion)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Cooperation should be based on shared rules and norms of governance	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8. Please think about the European Union and indicate to what extent you agree with the statements below, by circling a number from 0 to 10 in the table below, with '0' being full disagreement, '5' being neutral, and '10' being full agreement.

		Fully disagree				Neutral				Fully agree		
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Closer cooperation with the European Union brings economic benefits to our people	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Closer cooperation with the European Union is good for the security of our country	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2A	Closer cooperation with the European Union strengthens the European identity of our country	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	The European Union follows clear formal rules and interacts with other countries in accordance with objective criteria.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	The European Union supports the traditional family model.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	The European Union supports the traditional way of life.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	The European Union supports individual freedoms and rights.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	The European Union supports tolerance.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	The European Union supports freedom to choose one's way of life.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

9. Now please think about Russia and indicate to what extent you agree with the statements below. Please do that by circling a number from 0 to 10 in the table below, with '0' being full disagreement, '5' being neutral, and '10' being full agreement.

		Fully disagree				Neutral				Fully agree		
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Closer cooperation with Russia brings economic benefits to our people.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Closer cooperation with Russia is good for the security of our country.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3	Russia is a country that follows clear formal rules and interacts with other countries in accordance with objective criteria.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4	Russia supports the traditional family model.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5	Russia supports the traditional way of life.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6	Russia supports individual freedoms and rights.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	Russia supports tolerance.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8	Russia supports freedom to choose one's way of life.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

10. Are you a citizen of BEL/MLD/UA?

- ☐ Yes, I am a citizen only of BEL/MLD/UA
- ☐ No, I am a citizen of (write the name of the country) _____
- ☐ Yes, I am a citizen of BEL/MLD/UA and also a citizen of (write the name of the country) _____

11. Below there are several statements concerning your interest in politics and the use of media. Please indicate how often you engage in the following activities. Please do that by circling a number from 0 to 2 in the table below, with '0' being never, '1' being occasionally, and '2' being frequently.

	Never	Occasionally	Frequently
When I get together with friends or relatives, I discuss...			
1 National political matters	0	1	2
2 Local problems	0	1	2
3 European political matters	0	1	2
4 Russian political matters	0	1	2
4A Romanian political matters	0	1	2
	Never	Occasionally	Frequently
To get trustworthy information about political developments I...			
5 Watch public TV	0	1	2
6 Watch private/independent TV channels	0	1	2
7 Listen to public radio stations	0	1	2
8 Listen to private/independent radio stations	0	1	2
9 Read state printed press	0	1	2
10 Read private/independent printed press	0	1	2
11 Use the Internet news sites	0	1	2
12 Use social networks and social media	0	1	2

12. How many countries are there in the European Union (write down the number)? _____

13. Do you know if BEL/MLD/UA is a member of the Eurasian Union?

- ☐ Yes, BEL/MLD/UA is a member
- ☐ No, BEL/MLD/UA is not a member
- ☐ Don't know

14. In what city are the headquarters of the European Union? _____

15. Please indicate what highest educational degree you have completed:

- ☐ Primary education
- ☐ Secondary education
- ☐ Professional/vocational diploma
- ☐ Higher education

16. Where do you work? (If you work in several places, please mark all suitable options)

- ☐ State/public institution or state enterprise
- ☐ Private company or factory
- ☐ Private non-profit organisation
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Pensioner

17. What is your mother tongue? _____

18. What language do you usually use at home? _____



The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment

Against the background of the war in Ukraine and the rising tensions with Russia, a reassessment of the European Neighborhood Policy has become both more urgent and more challenging. Adopting an inside-out perspective on the challenges of transformation the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and the European Union face, the research project EU-STRAT seeks to understand varieties of social orders in EaP countries and to explain the propensity of domestic actors to engage in change. EU-STRAT also investigates how bilateral, regional and global interdependencies shape domestic actors' preferences and scope of action. Featuring an eleven-partner consortium of academic, policy, and management excellence, EU-STRAT creates new and strengthens existing links within and between the academic and the policy world on matters relating to current and future relations with EaP countries.
