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# What Kinds of Messages Can Influence Citizen Support for Closer Cooperation with the European Union? Evidence from the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.

Dimiter Toshkov, Honorata Mazepus, and Antoaneta Dimitrova

## Abstract

This paper explores what factors might influence citizen preferences for closer cooperation with the EU and/or Russia in three countries from the EU's Eastern neighbourhood: Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The citizens in these countries have been exposed to competing narratives and policy frames, advanced by both the EU and Russia, about the purposes and effects of closer cooperation. We first develop theoretical ideas about the potential influence of framing on public attitudes towards international cooperation. We then study these ideas empirically using a survey experiment in which six different frames about international cooperation are embedded in short vignettes. The frames highlight themes such as economy, security, values or identity and were developed based on previous research on factors that influence preferences on international cooperation. The experiment was implemented among a diverse and relatively large sample of citizens in the three countries. Our main conclusions are that thematic neutral frames of international cooperation have only very limited potential to influence directly people's support for cooperation with the EU, but might be more potent in affecting the beliefs of people about the effects of cooperation with different partners on desired outcomes, such as economic benefits, security, and good governance. These beliefs as such are strong predictors of the preferences for international cooperation partners. In addition to the results from this experimental study, we present an analysis of the relationship between the preferred media source of news for people and their preferences for international cooperation partners. Furthermore, we explore the correlates of support for cooperation with the EU with an emphasis on the potential importance of media use. We find that there are no strong differences in average levels of support for the EU among people who use different media sources to get trustworthy news, with the possible exception of Belarus.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The European Union's policies towards its Eastern neighbours have evolved considerably in recent years since the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2015. The Association Agreements (AA) with Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, unique of their kind, are now in force. The adoption of the agreements has been accompanied with more upheaval and controversy<sup>2</sup> than any EU-led trade agreement in living memory. The effectiveness of the revised Neighbourhood policy and the impact of the AA will be determined, to a considerable extent, not only by the actual success or failure of these instruments, but by the ability of the EU to influence the perception and assessment of citizens of what they do. Furthermore, due to the contested geopolitics of the region and the many political and economic challenges states face, external actors and their policies have a disproportionately large impact on domestic developments. How their actions are perceived and whether they can influence citizens through the policies they communicate matters for regional and domestic political stability.

Communications about the ENP and the AAs with the EU differ considerably between the EU and its member states on the one hand and Russia on the other. Interpretations of events in Ukraine over the last few years in particular have not been so polarized since the end of the Cold War. Narratives about the *Maidan* movement or about the ongoing conflict in separatist regions are dramatically different if one refers to mass media in Europe or in Russia.

Analysts and commentators have revealed the existence of Russian outlets dedicated to influencing Internet debates, the infamous 'troll factories'. The EU has been developing a range of policy responses and measure, for example the setting up of the EastStrat Com unit within the European External Action Service (EEAS). After initially positive response to its activities, EastStratCom received additional funding in 2017. In addition, a working group of high level experts on fake news has started work in January 2018, under the auspices of the European Commission. While it is too early to assess the effect of expanding initiatives and increased attention for disinformation targeting the EU's Eastern neighbours, the approach taken in our experimental survey provides some insights on what kind of messages – or frames – can potentially influence citizen support for cooperation with the EU or/and Russia.

In investigating the messages that may have an impact on citizens' preferences for their countries' cooperation with external actors, we build on previous findings. Research in EU-STRAT focusing on various aspects of the EU's soft power found that EU communications have been quite event-driven, focussing on specific events and persons. In recent years EU communications have focussed on democracy, economy and reforms (Ukraine), economy and reforms (Moldova) and democratic principles and human rights (Belarus) (Dimitrova et al. 2016). The EU's messages were also quite differentiated per country, reflected a mix of conditions and requirements. With the exception of Belarus, EU messages conveyed the Union's role as a 'transformative power', aiming to induce reforms in partner states through conditionality (Grabbe 2015; Dimitrova et al. 2016). The EU's messages were also quite formal and impersonal in their style and phrasing. The last feature was particularly important for the research design we have applied to the experimental study we present here.

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<sup>1</sup> The authors would like to thank Joanna Szostek and Laure Delcour for their reviews of the paper and Matt Frear and the participants of the fifth Political Psychology Meeting in Amsterdam (26 October 2017) for their helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> Examples range from the *Maidan* movement in Ukraine to the referendum on the AA in the Netherlands.

The EU's approach to communicating its policies in the region is changing, however, in response to the realisation that Russia is conducting large scale disinformation campaigns targeting states in the region (Galeotti 2016; Nimmo 2016; Pomeranzev and Weiss 2014). There are new campaigns and efforts to counteract disinformation campaigns from Russia. Social media campaigns have been run on Facebook in Moldova, for example the campaign entitled 'Red card for corruption'.<sup>3</sup> There has been a serious effort to make communications via social media more personal, less official and closer to citizen's life experiences and daily concerns.

At the same time, despite the increased scholarly attention for the spread of fake news or disinformation through social media, the impact of messages transmitted via social media is still unknown and can easily be overestimated. We should bear in mind that social media and Internet news are main source of news only for the younger citizens in in the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU. A substantial proportion of citizens, including middle generations, still get their news from television, public or private channels. The question remains what messages about the EU reach citizens in a politicized media landscape?

Previous research within EU-STRAT monitored TV news in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine and found a considerable differentiation in messages and coverage between Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine (Dimitrova et al. 2017). In Belarus, coverage of the EU consisted of negative, positive and balanced items, but coverage of Russia was predominantly positive. Russia received much more coverage when economic topics were mentioned than the EU did, while the EU was presented as an actor that struggles with multiculturalism and terrorism. In Ukraine, by contrast, Russia was covered mostly negatively, as could be expected. The EU received more balanced than positive coverage. When security was the theme of the news, Russia was covered more extensively in Moldova, yet this coverage was not positive, given that it focused on the frozen conflict in Transnistria (Dimitrova et al. 2017: 30-38).

This paper brings together these insights and findings and builds on them in order to explore what the citizens of the three countries make of the communications and messages that reach them. To do that we designed a survey experiment in which key themes of integration and geopolitics were highlighted as frames and presented to citizens. The experiment was embedded in a broader survey of peoples' beliefs and attitudes towards cooperation with external actors, the EU and Russia in particular. The frames were presented in short texts (vignettes) related to the themes of economy, security, governance, traditional and liberal values. The selection was motivated by existing studies and previous research that suggested that these matter to citizens and they are also contained in the documents and messages of the EU and Russia. Does appealing to these core aspects of cooperation or regional integration lead to citizens changing their minds about which power they would like their governments to cooperate with more closely?

In addition, we conducted an analysis of the relationship between the preferred media source of news for people in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine and their preferences for international cooperation partners. Furthermore, we explore the correlates of support for cooperation with the EU with an emphasis on the potential importance of media use, political knowledge, and interest in European politics.

The main conclusions from these three sets of results are the following. First, thematic, neutral frames of international cooperation have very limited potential to influence directly people's support for cooperation with

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://parc.md/en/campaign-red-card-for-corruption/>.

the EU. Second, peoples' beliefs about the benefits of cooperation with different partners and their ideas about what these partners stand for are highly predictive of support for cooperation with them. Third, some of the frames, in particular the ones related to the economy, security or values might have potential to influence these relevant beliefs and, as a result, indirectly affect the underlying preferences for cooperation. Fourth, we find no pronounced differences in levels of support for the EU among people who rely on different media sources to get news. The exception is Belarus, where citizens using social media and Internet sources, as well those using private rather than public media for news, are more likely to support closer cooperation with the EU. Finally, we find the strongest and most consistent associations between people's beliefs about the effects of cooperation on the economy, security, governance norms and values on one side and support for cooperation with the EU on the other. Once these beliefs are taken into account, even the sizeable differences in average support across Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine all but disappear.

## 2. Theoretical Background: Effects of Framing of Messages

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 framing, persuasion and information provision. 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 the 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; Druckman 2004). 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 important findings on the effects of framing in several fields of scholarship, we 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 was 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. 2016 and Dimitrova et al. 2017). 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 findings showing their lower power to affect attitudes (Aarøe 2011).<sup>4</sup>

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 (Alexander et al. 2005; Herrmann et al. 1997). A much richer literature on citizen preferences towards European integration emphasizes economic 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 that can play a role in preference shaping, namely individual moral and political values (e.g. Rathbun et al. 2016).

Taking into account these 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<sup>5</sup>. Following the theories of framing effects, we expected to influence the relative importance of these aspects of international cooperation (importance of considerations; see Slothuus 2008: 6-7) and as a result, the preference for cooperation with the EU or Russia.

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 Eastern Partnership (EaP) region. Both Ukraine and Moldova struggle with a conflict on their territory in which Russia is actively engaged (the Luhansk and Donetsk regions 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 and Ukraine. Belarus's refusal to recognize the independence

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<sup>4</sup> Thematic frames are believed to have weaker effects because they affect emotions differently. As they carry abstract information and are impersonal, thematic frames do not provide receivers with a specific person to direct their emotional reaction at (Aarøe 2011: 210). This is different than in the case of episodic, human interest frames. Because thematic frames do not direct emotions at a particular person depicted in the frame, they should generally elicit less strong emotions than episodic frames and lead to weaker reactions (see Aarøe 2011 and Gross 2008). They may, however, be better at capturing responses to a particular policy, rather than to persons and their personal stories.

<sup>5</sup> The texts of the six vignettes (frames) are available in the Supplementary Material (Part I) at the end of this paper.

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*. Moreover, we expect that the effect of the security frame will depend on whether people think that the EU (vs. Russia) is good for the security of their country.

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 behaviour, 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. Our governance frame contrasts the use of formal rules with the use of personal connections and suggest that international cooperation should be based on clear, formal rules. Therefore, our expectation was also that this frame *might decrease support for Russia*, which represents a model of governance based on personal connections and (more) informal rules.

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 behaviour 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. We expect this effect to be dependent on the values that a person holds.*

### **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 regarding 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 addressing governance norms which was phrased slightly differently, each text consisted of five sentences following identical logic and argumentation. Each vignette describes the societal and personal benefits that the relevant aspect of cooperation could bring. Next, each vignette describes the (potential) losses in case of lack of cooperation in the selected domain: security, values, economy etc. The vignettes do not focus, however, on a particular event or person, as 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 relevant relational beliefs 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). The control condition allows us to measure the baseline for preferences for cooperation with either Russia or the EU. 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.

To get the information on our outcome variable—support for cooperation with the EU—we measured the degree of agreement with the statement “Belarus/Ukraine/Moldova should cooperate closely with the European Union.” We asked the same question about Russia and accounted for a possibility that participants do not think about

cooperation with the EU and Russia in terms of zero-sum game. Therefore, we also 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*.’ Answers were recorded on an 11-point scale from 0 (fully disagree) to 10 (fully agree) with 5 serving as a neutral point. We also collected some information on personal values and preferences, key demographic characteristics, and political interest and knowledge. We included a manipulation-check question to assess whether the vignette participants read was understood.<sup>6</sup> In the Supplementary Material section at the end of the paper we provide more information about our sample, manipulation check, and participants’ alertness.

The distribution of support for close cooperation with the EU was very skewed in our sample, with most frequent answers occurring on the far positive end of the scale. This created methodological complications for the analysis, as modelling highly skewed variables with standard statistical methods can lead to misleading inferences. Therefore, we analyse the *relative* support for close cooperation with the EU, after we subtract support for close cooperation with Russia from support for close cooperation with the EU. This relative, net measure of the underlying preferences has more variation and is less skewed. It might also capture better the underlying theoretical construct of interest – preferences for cooperation partners. In some of the analyses, we further transform the resulting variable into an ordered categorical one with seven categories in order to improve coverage of some of the categories and smooth the distribution of responses.

### 3.2. Sample

Overall, we received 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. Median age is 37 years (1<sup>st</sup> quintile at 27 and 3<sup>rd</sup> quintile at 50). Women make up 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.

We provide additional information about the sample and explore issues with the alertness and comprehension of the vignettes by the participants (manipulation check) in the Supplementary Material at the end of the paper.

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<sup>6</sup> 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 the 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 Ukraine (Kyiv), so the data collected there (27 participants) was included in the analysis.

## 4. Empirical Analysis

Turning towards the presentation of the results from the experiment, we proceed in three steps. First, we focus on the link between the experimental frames and the beliefs of the participants about what international cooperation should be about. Second, we discuss the effect of the frames on the relevant relational beliefs about international relations. Third, we analyse the effect of the frames on the preferences for cooperation partners (relative support for close cooperation with the EU), as conditioned by the relevant relational beliefs. Subsequently, we explore the effect of media use on the support for cooperation with the EU. Finally, we model the support for close cooperation with the EU in a series of regressions that include a set of theoretically relevant explanatory variables.

### 4.1. *What should international cooperation be about?*

According to our theoretical expectations, the vignettes should have influenced the relative importance people attach to different factors related to international cooperation. We find only limited evidence in this regard. Table 1 shows the results of a set of linear regressions of respondents' judgements about the importance of particular factors and considerations when choosing partners for international cooperation on the experimental frame condition and a small set of control variables (country and age; coefficients for the control variables not shown). We expect each frame to exhibit a positive association with the corresponding aspect of importance for international cooperation. In other words, the frame should have persuaded the participant that the aspect of international cooperation it focuses on (e.g. security) is more important for choosing international cooperation partners than previously thought.

The results from the analysis reveal a positive association between the framing condition and the corresponding importance belief in all cases but one. But the associations are not statistically significant at the 5 % level in any of the cases. In the case of the security and governance frames, the regression coefficients have p-values lower than 0.10.<sup>7</sup>

Altogether, we can conclude that the experimental vignettes only slightly increased the importance of the aspect of international cooperation being primed. But the increase is too small and variable to be estimated precisely with the amount of observations we have.

The regression results also suggest (numbers not shown) that older people are significantly more likely to consider that international cooperation should 'strengthen shared values' and be 'based on shared identity'. Younger people seem to have more utilitarian expectations of international cooperation. There are significant country differences as well. Moldovans are most likely to consider shared identity important (compared to both Belarusians and Ukrainians). They also attach relatively more importance to shared norms of governance.

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<sup>7</sup> In the case of the economic frame, the estimate is actually negative, although the standard error is more than five times the size of the coefficient, so we should not make too much of this effect.

Table 1. Beliefs about the factors important when choosing partners for international cooperation. Results from linear regression models. The models are estimated separately for each framing condition and include controls for country and age. N=278 to 282. Significance code: ^ = p-value between 0.10 and 0.05

**Factors important for international cooperation:**

	<i>Economic benefits</i>	<i>Enhance security</i>	<i>Shared values</i>	<i>Shared identity</i>	<i>Norms of governance</i>
<b>FRAME</b>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>
<b>Economy</b>	<b>-0.32 (0.21)</b>	-0.19 (0.28)	-0.57 (0.35)	-0.25 (0.60)	-0.77 (0.50)
<b>Security</b>	0.03 (0.24)	<b>0.63 (0.32)^</b>	0.47 (0.39)	0.81 (0.68)	-0.12 (0.57)
<b>Identity</b>	0.06 (0.23)	0.11 (0.30)	-0.22 (0.38)	<b>0.81 (0.65)</b>	-0.04 (0.53)
<b>Liberal values</b>	0.11 (0.23)	0.38 (0.30)	<b>0.30 (0.38)</b>	-0.18 (0.65)	-0.14 (0.54)
<b>Traditional values</b>	-0.21 (0.23)	0.44 (0.31)	<b>0.09 (0.38)</b>	0.39 (0.66)	0.30 (0.55)
<b>Governance</b>	-0.01 (0.24)	-0.04 (0.31)	-0.02 (0.39)	-0.01 (0.68)	<b>1.06 (0.55)^</b>

A complication when interpreting these results arises from the fact that respondents evaluated the importance of all these factors independently, so they could just score each of them with the maximum (or a very high) score. This might reflect well the structure of personal judgments about cooperation, but creates problems for the analysis as there is little variation (compared to the range of the measurement scale) in the importance of different factors.

#### 4.2. Beliefs about cooperation and framing

The neutral thematic frames we used in the experiment are not designed to affect the underlying relational beliefs about the benefits of cooperation with particular external actors directly. Nevertheless, it remains possible that although the vignettes are couched in neutral terms that only signal the relevance of particular issues and themes for international cooperation, people interpret them as arguments in favour for cooperation with a particular partner. Indeed, this is what we actually see.

Table 2 shows the results of six linear regression models of the respondents' agreements (on 11-point scales) with statements about the possible benefits of closer cooperation with the EU on different aspects: economy, security, governance, and values, as well as on their subjective European identity. These items capture the relevant beliefs of people about the likely effects of closer cooperation with the EU. In the regressions, we model the support for closer cooperation with the EU in terms of the experimental frames and the country of the respondents, with an additional control for age.

The top line for each frame in Table 2 shows the coefficients with their standard errors from models run on the full sample, while the bottom line shows the coefficients with their standard errors from models run on the

subsample of respondents who passed the manipulation check (i.e. correctly identified the theme of the vignette they read).

Table 2. Agreement with statements about the effects of closer cooperation with the European Union. Results from linear regression models. The models include controls for country and age. Top line: full sample N=505. Bottom line: only respondents who passed the manipulation check; N=297. Significance codes: ^ = p-value between 0.10 and 0.05; \* = p-value between 0.05 and 0.01. \*\* = p-value <0.01

**Closer cooperation with the EU:**

	<i>brings econ. benefits</i>	<i>is good for security</i>	<i>I identify as European</i>	<i>EU supports trad. values</i>	<i>EU supports liberal values</i>	<i>EU follows clear rules</i>
<b>FRAME</b>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>	<i>Coef (s.e.)</i>
<b>Economy</b>	<b>0.27 (0.40)</b>	0.64 (0.47)	0.47 (0.62)	0.34 (0.47)	0.46 (0.32)	0.35 (0.45)
	<b>0.44 (0.41)</b>	0.72 (0.48)	0.22 (0.60)	0.49 (0.48)	0.54 (0.30)^	0.40 (0.47)
<b>Security</b>	-0.12 (0.40)	<b>0.57 (0.46)</b>	0.30 (0.59)	0.59 (0.46)	0.41 (0.32)	0.57 (0.43)
	-0.14 (0.46))	<b>0.99 (0.54)^</b>	0.91 (0.66)	0.60 (0.54)	0.59 (0.34)^	0.45 (0.53)
<b>Identity</b>	0.45 (0.39)	0.42 (0.45)	<b>0.13 (0.59)</b>	0.12 (0.45)	0.60 (0.31)^	0.32 (0.43)
	0.56 (0.45)	0.55 (0.52)	<b>0.36 (0.63)</b>	0.37 (0.52)	0.84 (0.33)*	0.19 (0.51)
<b>Lib. values</b>	0.30 (0.39)	0.60 (0.45)	-0.07 (0.59)	0.10 (0.45)	<b>0.49 (0.31)</b>	0.37 (0.43)
	0.76 (0.45)^	1.12 (0.52)*	0.84 (0.64)	0.44 (0.52)	<b>1.04 (0.33)**</b>	0.51 (0.51)
<b>Trad. values</b>	-0.20 (0.39)	0.06 (0.45)	-0.11 (0.60)	<b>-0.06 (0.45)</b>	0.37 (0.31)	-0.07 (0.43)
	0.13 (0.45)	0.15 (0.53)	0.41 (0.68)	<b>0.00 (0.53)</b>	0.86 (0.34)*	0.10 (0.52)
<b>Governance</b>	0.22 (0.40)	0.10 (0.46)	0.21 (0.59)	0.86 (0.46)	0.70 (0.31)*	<b>0.62 (0.44)</b>
	0.51 (0.46)	0.23 (0.53)	0.55 (0.65)	1.19 (0.54)*	1.00 (0.34)**	<b>0.96 (0.52)^</b>

Altogether, we find some weak (mostly) positive associations between the theme of the frames and the relevant beliefs. The associations are mostly not significant when analysed in the full sample, but some gain precision and statistical significance when analysed in the subsample of respondents who passed the manipulation check.

For example, respondents in the security frame have on average close to one-point higher agreement with the statement that ‘Closer cooperation with the EU is good for the security of our country’ than respondents in the control group, and the difference is significant at the 0.10 level. The one-point difference is 60 % of the standard deviation of the response variable, which suggests that the size of the effect is not negligible. The strength of the association between the liberal values frame and agreement with (an index of) the statements that the EU supports individual freedoms and rights, tolerance, and freedom to choose one’s way of life is similar as in the case of security, and has higher statistical significance. There is a similar association between the governance frame and agreement with the statements the EU follows clear rules and interacts with other countries in accordance with objective criteria. In three cases we do not find significant associations between the frames and the relevant beliefs: economy, identity, and traditional values. In the case of identity, the relevant outcome is in fact not a belief, but a rather stable personal characteristic, so the lack of effect is not surprising. And in the cases

of economy and traditional values, different operationalizations of the variable produce stronger associations, as we will see in the next section. There is also some evidence for effects of the frames on beliefs that are not directly related to the theme of the frame (e.g. of the governance frame on beliefs about the EU's role in supporting liberal values) but given the absence of a theoretical rationale, we should not over interpret these patterns.

Overall, the results suggest that the frames have had some limited but, in several cases, discernible effects on relevant relational beliefs about international cooperation. This is remarkable because the frames were deliberately designed in a neutral way that did not suggest to the respondents how to evaluate international actors on the relevant dimension (i.e. cooperation with the EU is good for security), only that a particular aspect is important for international cooperation. Nevertheless, it seems that people read in the vignettes cues about the *effects* of cooperation with different actors and adjusted, to a limited degree, their relational beliefs. This is important, because, as we shall see below, these beliefs are highly predictive of people's preferences for international cooperation partners, so if communication can affect the relevant beliefs, it can also indirectly change the related preferences (for cooperation partners).

#### 4.3. *Conditional effects of frames and beliefs on preferences for international cooperation*

So far, we have considered the relationships between frames, on the one hand, and relevant beliefs about what international cooperation should be about and what the effects of cooperating with different actors are, on the other hand. But, theoretically, we expect that the effect of frames should be conditional on the underlying beliefs about the effects of cooperation. For example, if the framing of the security vignette was effective, it should change the salience of security issues for questions of international cooperation. However, whether this should increase or decrease support for cooperation with the EU would depend on whether the person believes that cooperation with the EU is good or bad for security. We already saw that this model is not supported by the data because the associations between the frames and the salience of the associated aspect of international cooperation are small and variable, while the associations with the causal beliefs are stronger and better discernible in the data. But it is still worth exploring whether the relational beliefs condition the effects of the frames.

To do that, in this section of the paper we present a series of analyses of each frame separately. In each of the six analyses we regress support for closer cooperation with the EU on the framing condition, the relevant relational belief (which differs per frame), and their interaction. Instead of presenting the numerical results from the regressions, which are hard to interpret directly from the table of coefficients in the presence of interaction effects, we show for each analysis a graph that illustrates the interaction effects, as well as two descriptive plots of the entire distributions of the preferences and of the relevant beliefs. The descriptive plots are necessary, because, as we discover, the linear regressions are often a poor fit to the data and sometimes, on their own, suggest misleading inferences.

Before we present the results, we should note that in these analyses the main variables are operationalized as relative vis-à-vis Russia. That is, we subtract support for closer cooperation with Russia from support for closer cooperation with the EU. This produces a variable with a theoretical range between -10 to +10. We collapse this scale into a set of seven ordered categories (-10 to -5; -4 to -2; -1 to +1; +2 to +4; +5 to +7; +8 to +9; and +10).

These transformations are called for in order to ensure that there is sufficient variability in the data (in light of the heavily pro-European sample) and that we do not have too many categories with too few observations in them. The resulting variable captures relative support for closer cooperation with the EU. In addition to the methodological advantage, this formulation is appropriate in light of the fact that international cooperation is often a matter of making choices *between* cooperation partners and integration initiatives.

#### 4.3.1. Economy frame

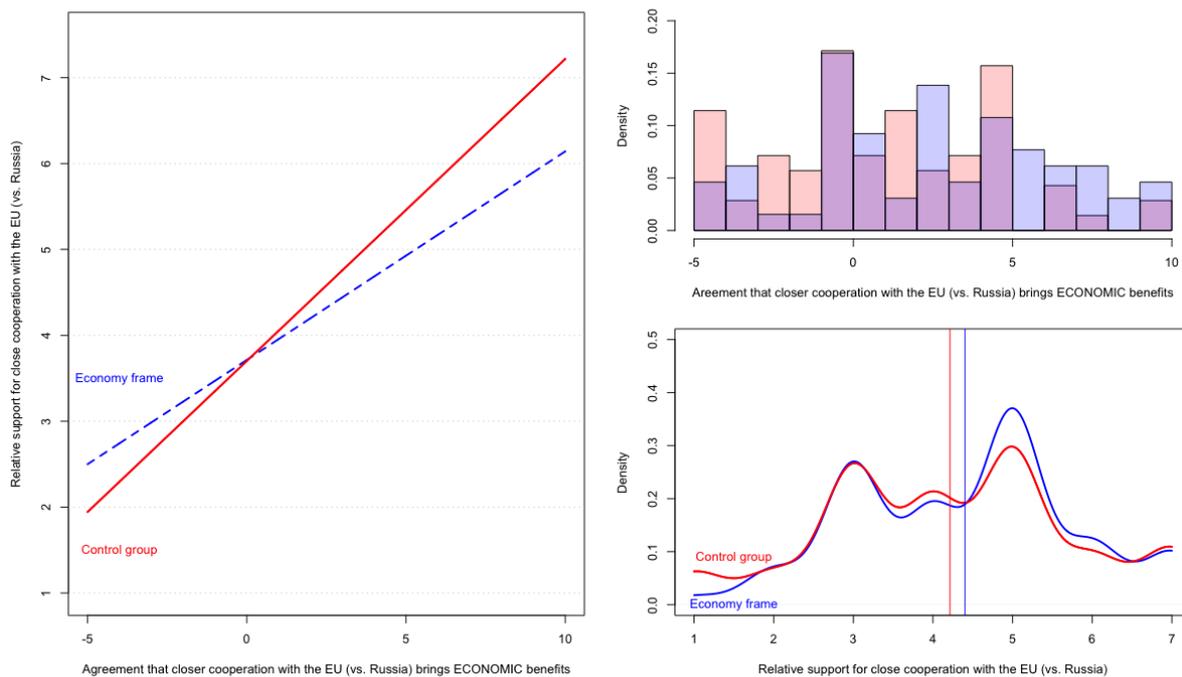
Starting with the analysis of the economy frame, the right panel of Figure 1 shows the predicted probabilities based on a regression model featuring the framing condition, the relevant beliefs (which in this case refer to agreement with the statement that closer cooperation with the EU is good for economic benefits, also calculated relative to agreement with the corresponding statement about Russia), and their interaction. The relevant belief is on the x-axis and ranges from its observed minimum to its observed maximum. The solid red line shows how the predicted probability of net support for close cooperation with the EU changes for respondents in the control group, while the dashed blue line shows that for respondents in the framing condition (economy vignette).

The figure, and the regression model on which it is based, suggests that for both the control and framing conditions, the relevant belief has a major effect on net support for cooperation with the EU. But the figure also suggests that respondents in the framing condition are more likely to support cooperation with the EU than the control group if they have *low* agreement that closer cooperation with the EU (rather than Russia) brings economic benefits, but are less likely than the control group if they believe that cooperation with the EU is *more* beneficial in economic terms. This result is hard to reconcile with the theoretical idea that if people increase their perceived importance of the economy for international cooperation (as the vignettes tried to do), they should support the EU more than before *if* they believe that the EU is good for economic benefits, and less than before if they believe that it is not so good for the economy.

In fact, when we look at the bottom panel on the right side of Figure 1, we can see that the linear regression model with interactions does not represent the patterns in the data very well. That panel shows that for all values of support between 4 and 6 the framing group exhibits higher densities (has higher shares of the observations) than the control group. But at the extreme end of the scale, the control group has a higher density by a tiny margin, which might influence the way the interaction is fitted. From the descriptive density plot it is clearer that if anything the framing condition increased slightly net support for cooperation with the EU. The top-right panel of Figure 1 also shows that the framing group has on average higher net agreement that cooperation with the EU brings economic benefits.

Altogether, we can conclude that the economic frame increased to some, relatively small extent, the support for cooperation with the EU and the belief that it will bring economic benefits, but the first effect *is not conditioned* on the second. Rather, the belief that the cooperation with the EU brings economic benefits seems to *translate* the effect of the economic frame on support for cooperation. That is, the frame might influence the beliefs about the economic benefits of cooperation, which in their turn affect preferences for closer cooperation with different partners.

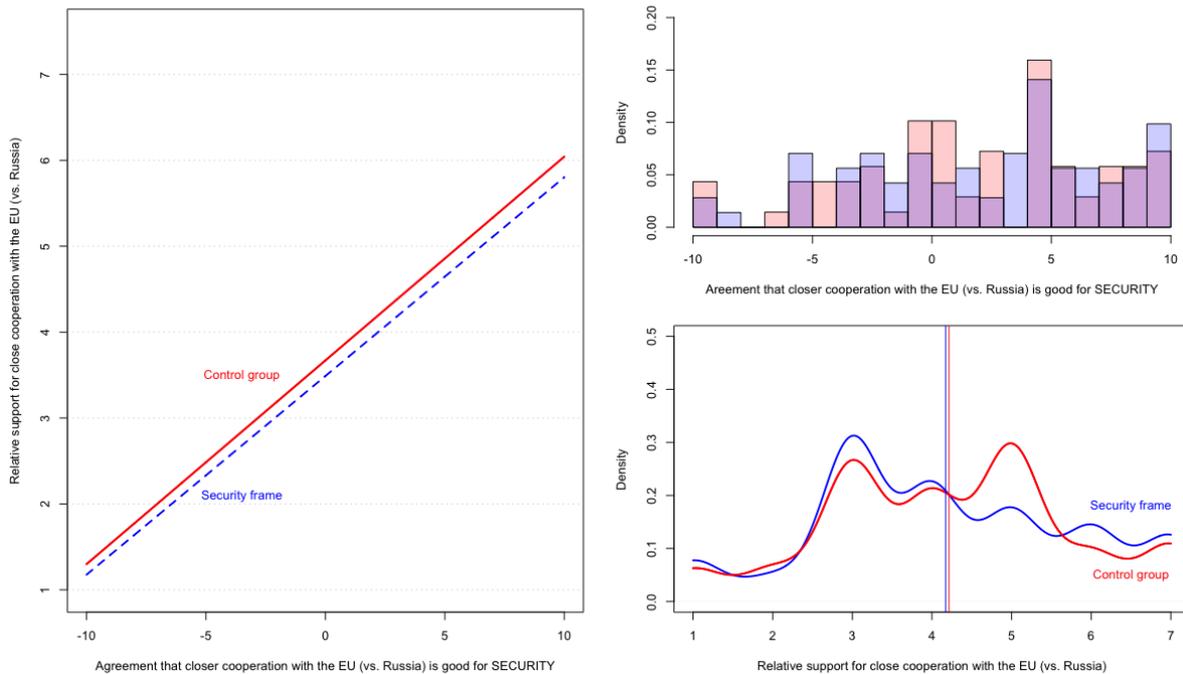
Figure 1. Analysis of the conditional effect of the economy framing condition. Left panel shows the predicted probabilities from a regression model of net support for closer cooperation with the EU on the framing condition, net agreement with the statement that close cooperation with the EU (vs. Russia) brings economic benefits and their interaction. The top-right panel shows the density of observed distribution of the latter variable for the control group (in light pink) and for the economy framing condition (in light blue). Note that the bars are printed on top of each other, so that if the red bar is higher, the control group has a higher share of observations at that value, and if the blue bar is higher, the framing group has a higher share of observation at that value. The bottom-right value shows the smoothed densities of the outcome variable for the control group (in red) and for the economy framing condition (in blue). The vertical lines show the means for the two groups.



#### 4.3.2. Security frame

The overall effect of the security frame has been to decrease slightly net support for the EU (see the bottom-right panel). But the effect does not vary with the relevant beliefs about the security effects of cooperation. The beliefs themselves seem to be somewhat polarized by the frame, with a smaller share of the respondents in the middle of the scale, compared to the control group.

Figure 2. Analysis of the conditional effect of the security framing condition. For explanation, see the notes to Figure 1.



#### 4.3.3. Identity frame

The identity frame seems to have decreased slightly the dispersion in the scores of net European identity of the respondents (there are more people in the middle categories, top-right panel). The mean of support in the framing condition is slightly higher than the mean in the control group, but the effect does not vary as predicted with the values on identity. Importantly, comparing the interaction effect plot to the density plot of support also shows that the linear model does not capture all aspects of the distribution of the observed data well.

#### 4.3.4. Governance frame

Analysing the governance frame, we find a relatively larger positive effect of the frame (bottom-right panel). Agreement that the EU follows clear and impartial rules also has increased (top-right), but not preferences for impartial governance as such (mid panel on the right). Looking at the interaction effect, we do not find the hypothesized interaction, but, again, the plot is misleading since in the data there are no respondents in the framing condition that scored less than -5 on the agreement variable represented on the x-axis of the left-side panel (compare to the empirical distribution plotted in the top-right panel). In principle, the interaction effect should also vary depending on whether one values impartial rules or not, but we find no evidence for that neither (model and plot not shown).

Figure 3. Analysis of the conditional effect of the Identity framing condition. For explanation, see the notes to Figure 1.

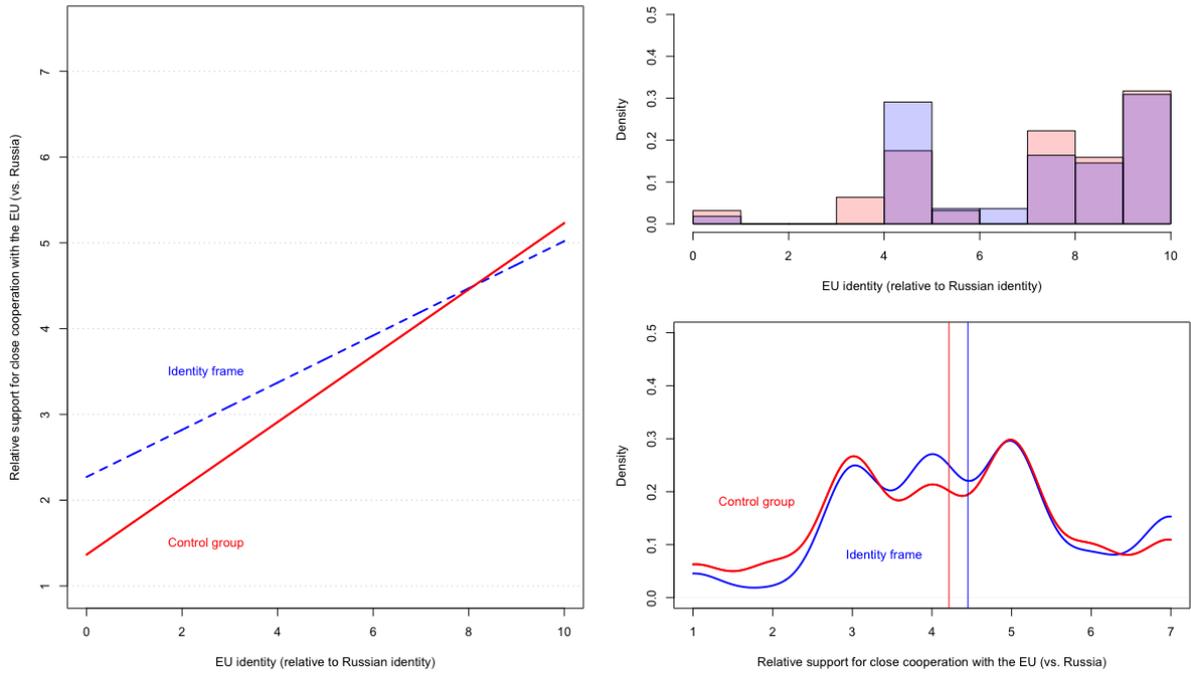
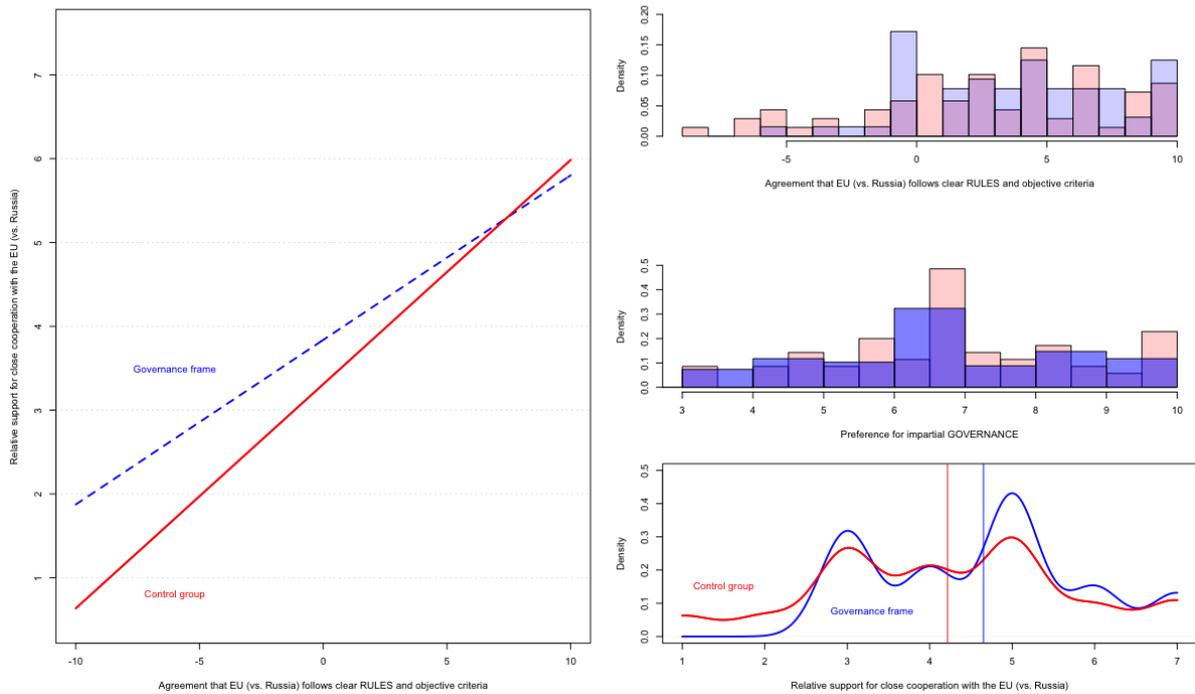


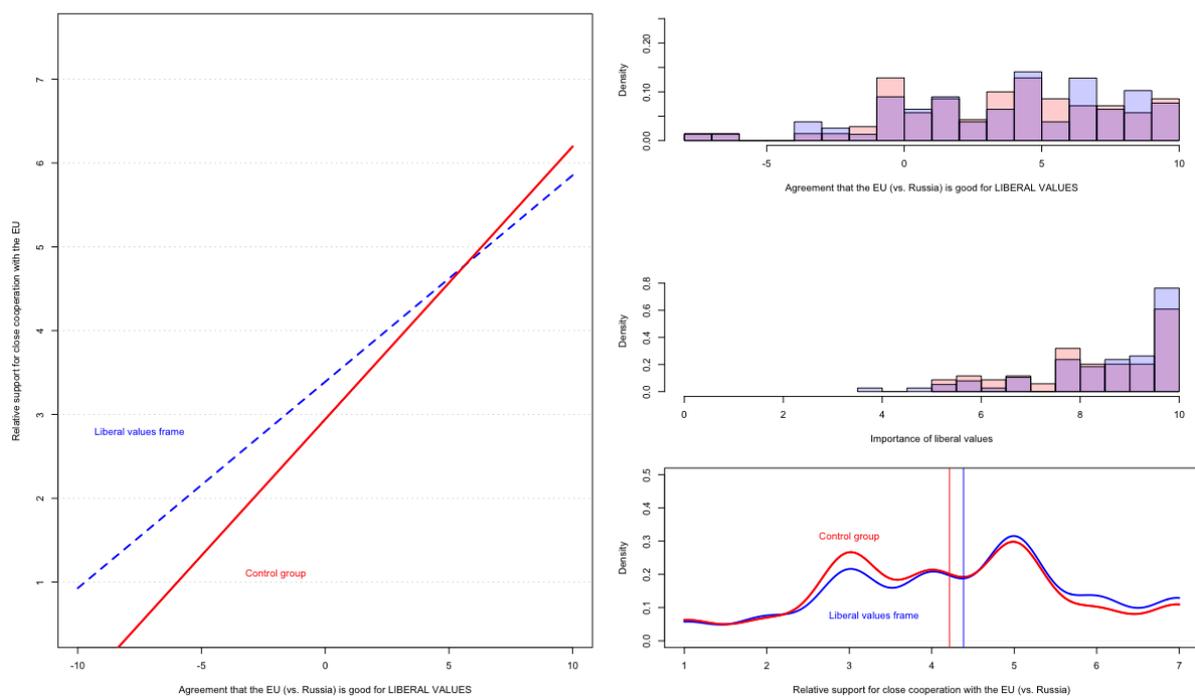
Figure 4. Analysis of the conditional effect of the Governance framing condition. For explanation, see the notes to Figure 1.



### 4.3.5. Liberal values frame

The situation is rather similar when it comes to the liberal values frame. Agreement that the EU is good for liberal values is slightly higher (top-right), as well as the importance of liberal values to the respondent (mid-right), and net support for cooperation with the EU (bottom-right). But the hypothesized interactions between beliefs, values and the frame cannot be found. (And, again, due to the lack of respondents in the framing condition with low agreement that the EU is good for the promotion of liberal values, the regression model plotted on the left misrepresents the relationship with support).

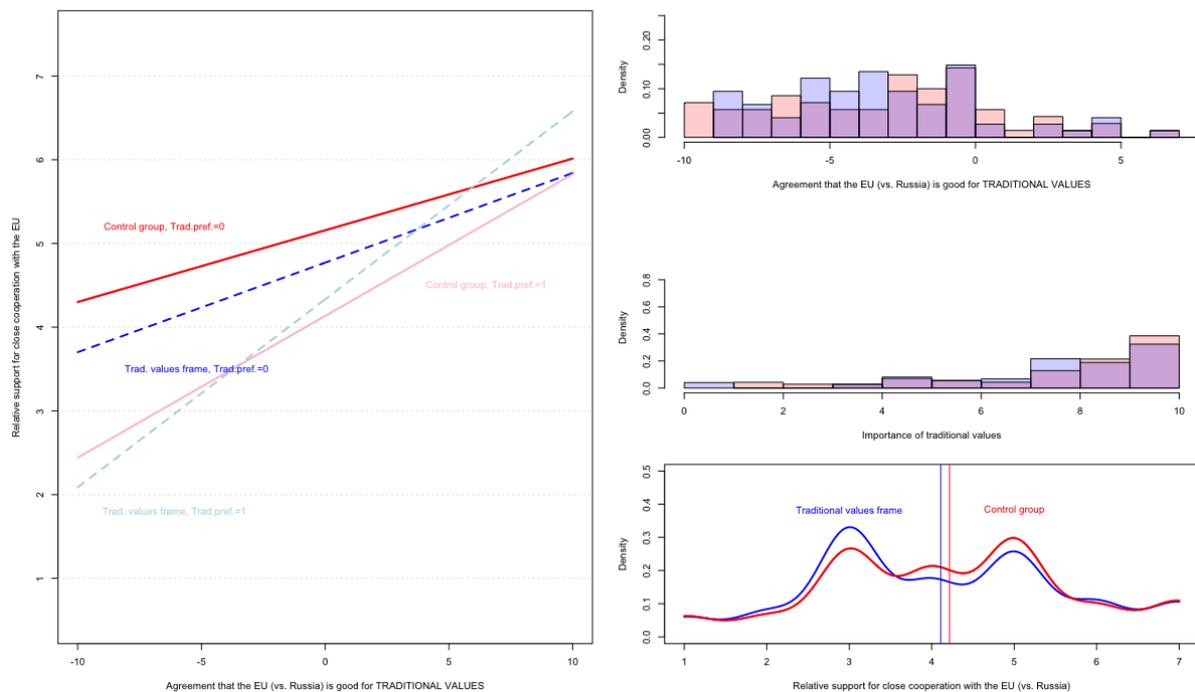
Figure 5. Analysis of the conditional effect of the liberal values framing condition. For explanation, see the notes to Figure 1



### 4.3.6. Traditional values frame

Analysing the traditional values frame, we find more evidence in line with our theoretical reasoning. Agreement that the EU (rather than Russia) is good for traditional values has decreased (top-right), the importance of traditional values has also slightly decreased, as well as, more markedly, support for cooperation with the EU. But in this case also the interactions between the variables are consistent with our hypotheses. For respondents in the framing condition that consider traditional values important, the relationship between the relevant belief and support is stronger (the regression line is steeper) than for respondents with similar values but being in the control group (compare the slope of the light blue dotted versus the slope of the light red solid line). But both of these slopes are steeper than the ones for respondents who do not find traditional values important (at least not more so than liberal ones).

Figure 6. Analysis of the conditional effect of the traditional values framing condition. For explanation, see the notes to Figure 1



This last comparison is an exception. Overall, we do not find much support for the idea that the frames affect levels of support for cooperation with the EU conditional on the underlying beliefs about the effects of cooperation and personal values. If anything, the frames might affect the relevant beliefs themselves, and through them, levels of EU support.

The experiment we conducted to study the effects of the frames was embedded in a survey that also collected information on the respondents' patterns of media consumption and other demographic and attitudinal data. In the section below, we turn towards the analysis of this data that provides additional insights to complement the results from the experimental survey. We focus first on differences in support for close cooperation with the EU in terms of the preferred media source of news of the people, and then we move to analyse the associations between a number of demographic and attitudinal variables and EU support.

#### 4.4. Support for close cooperation with the EU per media consumption

The analysis of the coverage of the EU and Russia on the national news programmes in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine (Dimitrova et al. 2017) showed that different media landscapes in these countries affect how the two external actors are presented. Furthermore, a recent analysis of the Belarusian press found large differences between governmental and independent outlets. Government controlled press focused more on favourable relations with Russia and presented a more negative narrative about the EU, while independent outlets were found to be friendlier towards the EU (Korf 2013). As the media play an important role in transmitting messages and shaping the image of international actors in the EaP countries, we included in the survey a question about media use to see whether support for closer cooperation with the EU varies depending on the type of media that the citizens regularly consume.

Although our sample is not necessarily representative of the general population in terms of proportions of those who use different media, we can still show how reliance on a particular media is related to the preference of cooperation with the EU over Russia. We asked participants to respond which media and how often they use to get trustworthy information about political developments. The results of this analysis are presented separately for each country in Table 3: A-C.

The table shows the difference in percentage points between people who use occasionally or frequently different types of media, as indicated in the column heading (e.g. public TV) as a source of 'trustworthy information about political developments' and those who do not, for each level of the ordered variables of relative support for close cooperation with the EU (the rows of the table). The rightmost column of the table shows the total number of participants in each of the categories of support (also as a percentage of the total). The bottom line of the table indicates the percentage of people who use the media type. The penultimate row shows the p-value of a t-test for equivalence of means of EU support between the groups of users and non-users of the media type.

In Belarus, the largest part of our sample expressed neutrality regarding support for cooperation with the EU relative to Russia (29 % of respondents). The most popular sources of 'trustworthy' information about politics in our sample are the Internet, private TV, and private press. People who use these sources of information tend to be more supportive and less negative about cooperation with the EU than people who do not use them or use them only sometimes. This is also largely the case when our participants are consuming social media. The effects are opposite for those who watch public TV and listen to public radio: there are fewer people with high levels of support for cooperation with the EU relative to Russia among those who watch public TV or listen to public radio compared to those who do not use these media to get informed about politics. The effects of reading public press are less clear, but it appears that compared to those who do read private independent press, there are fewer respondents who read public press and have moderate levels of support for the cooperation with the EU relative to Russia and more of those who are either somewhat opposed to it or neutral.

In the case of Belarus, we can see rather clear differences between those who consume information from a particular source and those who do it less frequently or not at all. In all cases beside one (public radio), the differences are statistically significant and in expected direction: the consumption of public, government-controlled media is associated with lower level of support for cooperation with the EU relative to Russia, while the consumption of private media and Internet is associated with higher levels.

In Moldova, respondents most often expressed moderate support for cooperation with the EU relative to their support for cooperation with Russia. In our sample, the most popular sources of reliable information on politics are private and public TV (over 80 % of respondents indicated that they use each of these media) and public radio. Watching TV (especially public stations) seems to substantially decrease the support for cooperation with the EU relative to the support for cooperation with Russia.

In comparison with those who do not use public TV, there are fewer public TV users who expressed extreme, strong and weak support. At the same time, there are more public TV users who express moderate and weak opposition or indicated that they are neutral about the preference for cooperation with the EU relative to Russia.

Table 3. Relative support for close cooperation with the EU (vs. Russia) by media usage

A. Belarus									
	TV public	TV private	Radio public	Radio private	Press public	Press private	Internet	Social media	% (N) in category
Moderate opposition	4	-4	-2	-4	-1	-5	-4	0	5 % (9)
Weak opposition	11	-6	18	-3	7	-7	-16	-10	9 % (16)
Neutral	16	-10	20	-13	5	-8	-22	-6	29 % (54)
Weak support	-5	4	-15	-11	0	0	0	-12	16 % (30)
Moderate support	-17	7	-9	12	-11	11	23	18	24 % (45)
Strong support	-1	5	-7	14	1	5	14	3	11 % (20)
Extreme support	-8	3	-5	5	-1	3	6	7	6 % (12)
<i>p-value of t-test</i>	<0.01	0.02	<0.01	<0.01	0.24	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01	-
% users	49 %	75 %	22 %	52 %	37 %	63 %	76 %	58 %	-
B. Moldova									
	TV public	TV private	Radio public	Radio private	Press public	Press private	Internet	Social media	% (N) in category
Moderate opposition	6	-6	3	2	4	-2	-2	1	5 % (7)
Weak opposition	4	3	1	2	5	4	1	2	3 % (5)
Neutral	8	17	-9	-6	12	3	10	7	26 % (39)
Weak support	-9	5	-10	-6	-3	-10	9	-10	19 % (29)
Moderate support	2	-1	15	15	-12	12	-14	-4	33 % (50)
Strong support	-8	0	-7	-6	-3	-5	-5	-2	5 % (7)
Extreme support	-2	-17	7	0	-4	-3	0	5	10 % (15)
<i>p-value of t-test</i>	0.07	0.19	0.42	0.96	0.01	0.67	0.26	0.81	-
% users	83 %	86 %	72 %	59 %	57 %	66 %	66 %	54 %	-
C. Ukraine									
	TV public	TV private	Radio public	Radio private	Press public	Press private	Internet	Social media	% (N) in category
Moderate opposition	3	0	-1	-2	-2	0	0	2	3 % (5)
Weak opposition	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1 % (1)
Neutral	-14	-11	-4	-8	-7	-2	-11	-8	19 % (30)
Weak support	-12	-8	-5	6	5	4	2	-2	20 % (32)
Moderate support	12	17	-2	6	11	6	4	-4	24 % (38)
Strong support	4	-4	5	-7	-6	-11	1	5	15 % (24)
Extreme support	5	5	4	3	-2	2	4	6	17 % (27)
<i>p-value of t-test</i>	0.11	0.19	0.42	0.57	0.87	0.68	0.33	0.34	-
% users	61 %	61 %	31 %	47 %	48 %	51 %	58 %	47 %	-

Note: The entries in the table show the difference in percentage points between respondents who use the particular kind of media (named in the column heading) 'occasionally' or 'frequently' vs. those who do not. The t-tests are testing for equality of means between these two groups.

The effect of private TV<sup>8</sup> seems different: respondents who watch private TV more frequently express neutral views about the cooperation with the EU relative to Russia and display less frequently extreme support or moderate opposition (two extreme ends of our scale). At the same time, more respondents are neutral in their support of cooperation with the EU relative to Russia when they use private TV than when they do not.

The association of public press with support for closer cooperation for the EU relative to Russia is very clear and the result of the t-test confirms its significance. Respondents who read public press more frequently tend to express less supportive attitudes towards cooperation with the EU than those who do not. Moreover, they more frequently express opposition or are neutral about cooperation with the EU relative to Russia than respondents who do not read public press.

Users of the Internet are generally more often moderate and neutral in their support of the cooperation with the EU relative to Russia than non-users. The difference between the users and non-users of social media in terms of their EU support is less clear, but if anything, social media use seems to have a polarizing effect (fewer people in the middle categories, more at the extreme ends of the support scale).

In Ukraine, predictably, the patterns are different. Major Russian broadcasters and outlets have been removed from the media landscape by Ukrainian authorities. In addition, we need to take into account that the media transmit diverse messages (both negative and positive) regarding the EU and mostly negative narratives about Russia (Dimitrova et al. 2017).

In our sample, the most frequently used sources of information about politics are public and private TV, followed by the Internet and private press. Respondents who frequently get information about politics from public and private TV, the Internet, and social media have more polarized views by comparison to the participants who do not (frequently) use these media sources for political news. For example, people who regularly use social media as a source of political news are less likely to be neutral about cooperation with the EU, but more likely to express either extreme support *or* opposition to cooperation with the EU. Among those who consume public and private press there are fewer people expressing strong support for cooperation with the EU by comparison to those who do not get their political news from these sources, but the differences are not statistically significant.

It is also noteworthy that, compared to Belarus and Moldova, fewer of our respondents in Ukraine indicated that they frequently use the Internet to get trustworthy information about politics (Ukraine: 58 %, Belarus: 76 %, Moldova 66 %). This is in line with the findings of a recent study of the Ukrainian youth that showed that “television still dominates the Internet as a key source of information for Ukrainian youth (60 % vs. 50 %)” (Zaremba 2017: 19). This representative sample of the youth showed also much lower relevance of the social networks for getting informed about politics: only 12 % of the respondents indicated that they use social networks to get information about politics (Zaremba 2017: 21).

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<sup>8</sup> Although the presence of private TV channels in Belarus is very limited, people can receive TV channels alternative to the state TV. The TV listings for news programmes broadcasted in Belarus include CNN and Euronews, which are available via cable TV, as well as the original broadcasts from Russian TV channels. Officially there are nearly 60 non-state TV channels; see: <https://tvset.tut.by/category/8/19-03-2018/filter/18-00/> and <http://www.mininform.gov.by/ru/statistika-ru/> (accessed 19 March 2018).

Overall, the analysis shows clear differences in average levels of support for close cooperation with the EU in terms of the preferred type of media used to get political information only in Belarus. In this country regular consumers of public TV and radio are significantly less likely to support cooperation with the EU rather than with Russia, while regular consumers of private TV, radio, and newspapers, as well as frequent users of Internet and social media for political news are significantly more likely to support cooperation with the EU.

We do not find many significant differences in average support among users of different media types in Moldova and Ukraine, other than public press consumers being less supportive in Moldova and public TV consumers being more supportive in Ukraine. But even if the average is unaffected, the media has effects on the spread of opinions, often inducing higher polarization, as the use of social media for political news seems to do in both Moldova and Ukraine. The polarizing effects of media consumption make the results of the testing for differences between the means (t-test) less sharp. Although the differences are not significant in most of the cases, it does not mean that the samples of users and non-users of media do not differ: the means might have stayed the same, but the support for the EU moved to the negative or positive extremes of the scale.

We should be careful not to interpret these differences in causal terms, i.e. that watching public TV *makes* Belarusians less supportive of the EU, because it is plausible that self-selection confounds the differences. Nevertheless, the differences remain important, even if only in descriptive and predictive terms. Having explored the role of media use, we can expand the analysis to include other correlates of support for cooperation with the EU, in order to build more comprehensive models and identify additional significant predictors.

#### 4.5. *Correlates and predictors of support for close cooperation with the EU*

The analysis above focused on the possible effects of the frames embodied in the experimental vignettes and on the differences in EU support in terms of the media consumption of the respondents. However, our data allows further analysis. We can explore the relationships between the demographic and attitudinal variables we have collected and support for close cooperation with the EU<sup>9</sup>. Such an analysis can reveal which variables correlate most strongly and consistently with support for the European Union. While the interpretation cannot be taken to imply truly causal relationships, the analysis can still teach us something about the correlates and predictors of EU support.

The results from this analysis are presented in Table 4, summarizing the output of a series of multivariate linear regression models. All regressions model relative support for close cooperation with the EU (net of support for Russia) on the original scale of the variable ranging from -10 to +10. The models differ in the set of predictors included: we start with a simple model including only demographic variables and increase progressively the complexity of the models by adding attitudinal variables.

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<sup>9</sup> The questionnaire is available upon request.

Table 4. Multivariate linear regression models of support for close cooperation with the EU relative to Russia

Variable Name	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
<b>(Intercept)</b>	0.66 (2.24)	-0.08 (2.34)	-0.14 (2.34)	-1.1 (2.33)	-2.93 (2.43)	-1.84 (2.46)	-2.3 (2.46)	-2.3 (2.46)	-0.44 (1.9)
<b>Age</b>	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02) *	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.01)
<b>Sex (1=male)</b>	-0.45 (0.38)	-0.39 (0.4)	-0.34 (0.4)	-0.26 (0.4)	-0.15 (0.4)	-0.18 (0.4)	-0.25 (0.4)	-0.25 (0.4)	-0.32 (0.31)
<b>Occupation</b>									
<b>private</b>	1.89 (0.67) **	1.55 (0.69) *	1.47 (0.7) *	1.41 (0.7) *	0.86 (0.7)	0.92 (0.7)	0.76 (0.7)	0.76 (0.7)	0.87 (0.54)
<b>state</b>	-0.31 (0.65)	-0.65 (0.67)	-0.73 (0.68)	-0.73 (0.67)	-0.96 (0.69)	-0.71 (0.7)	-0.79 (0.7)	-0.79 (0.7)	0.01 (0.54)
<b>student</b>	3.04 (1.01) **	2.54 (1.06) *	2.41 (1.07) *	2.11 (1.07) *	1.52 (1.07)	1.72 (1.06)	1.56 (1.06)	1.56 (1.06)	1.62 (0.82) *
<b>Education</b>	0.59 (0.52)	0.72 (0.55)	0.65 (0.56)	0.8 (0.55)	0.28 (0.58)	0.28 (0.58)	0.18 (0.58)	0.18 (0.58)	0.36 (0.44)
<b>Country</b>									
<b>Moldova</b>	1.78 (0.53) ***	1.7 (0.56) **	1.71 (0.56) **	1.87 (0.55) ***	.02 (0.59) ^	1.36 (0.61) *	1.24 (0.61) *	1.24 (0.61) *	0.26 (0.47)
<b>Ukraine</b>	2.48 (0.45) ***	2.53 (0.47) ***	2.5 (0.47) ***	2.67 (0.46) ***	2.03 (0.46) ***	2.18 (0.46) ***	2.06 (0.46) ***	2.06 (0.46) ***	0.47 (0.38)
<b>Media use (vol.)</b>		0.12 (0.06) *	0.12 (0.06) ^	0.05 (0.06)	0.07 (0.07)	0.1 (0.07)	0.1 (0.07)	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.05)
<b>Pol. knowledge</b>			0.2 (0.23)	0.18 (0.23)	-0.28 (0.24)	-0.28 (0.24)	-0.33 (0.24)	-0.24 (0.2)	-0.14 (0.18)
<b>Pol. interest</b>				1.02 (0.31) **	0.53 (0.33)	0.39 (0.33)	0.36 (0.33)	0.25 (0.29)	0.18 (0.26)
<b>Net European identity</b>					0.67 (0.09) ***	0.64 (0.09) ***	0.63 (0.09) ***	0.22 (0.09) *	0.18 (0.08) *
<b>Trad. values imp.</b>						-0.19 (0.08) *	-0.19 (0.08) *	-0.14 (0.07) *	-0.14 (0.06) *
<b>Impartial gov. pref.</b>							0.19 (0.11) ^	0.06 (0.09)	0.06 (0.08)
<b>EU coop good for sec</b>								0.48 (0.04) ***	0.18 (0.05) ***
<b>EU coop good for econ</b>									0.5 (0.06) ***
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.11</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.25</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.57</b>

According to the estimates of Model 1, respondents working in the private sector and students are significantly more likely to support close cooperation with the EU compared to dependents (unemployed and pensioners) and those employed by the state, with the effects being quite large as well (approximately two and three points on the 20-point scale). Net of occupation, age, sex and education have no significant associations with EU support, which is in fact quite remarkable given the expectation that older and less educated people would be less supportive of the EU. The significant country effects for Moldova and Ukraine (compared to the baseline Belarus) are not unexpected, and the size of the effects is comparable to the effects of the occupation categories.

In Model 2 we add the variable 'media consumption', which is an index capturing how many different media sources the participants rely on to get trustworthy information (for each type of media we add one point for occasional use and 2 points for frequent use). The variable appears to be positively and significantly associated with support for close cooperation with the EU, but the effect is relatively small in substantive terms, with respondents with maximum scores on the variable (16, meaning that they consume frequently eight types of media) having approximately two points higher support than those who consume none.

Model 3 adds the variable 'political knowledge' that tracks respondents' knowledge of simple facts about the international cooperation (the capital and number of member states of the EU and whether their country is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union or not). The variable has no significant association with EU support. Only in the Belarusian sample are there traces of a positive relationship between knowledge and support (as a model with interactions between political knowledge and country dummies indicates, model not reported in Table 4). But overall, it would seem that political knowledge as such (and of the EU in particular) is not predictive of EU support, at least in the relatively EU-supportive sample that we have.

As Model 4 shows, however, the interest in European political matters ('political interest') is positively and significantly associated with EU support. Moreover, the effect is large (respondents who occasionally discuss European political affairs with friends or relatives score about one point higher on EU support and respondents who frequently discuss European political affairs score two points higher, compared to those who never do). It is also worth noting that including political interest removes the significance of the effect of media (and political knowledge continues to be insignificant). This implies that when accounting for political interest, media consumption does not matter independently for EU support. In other words, for the same level of interest in European politics, the volume and diversity of media consumption has no further association with EU support. Of course, it could be that media consumption drives interest in European politics to some extent. What we can say for the moment is that we have no evidence that the two variables exert *independent* effects on EU support.

Model 5 adds European identity to the mix of predictors. The effect of European identity is highly significant and very large in size (the variable ranges from 0 to 10, so that someone at the high end of the scale has almost 7 points higher predicted level of EU support compared to someone at the lower end of the scale). Including net European identity also improves the fit of the model significantly (adjusted R-squared 0.25 compared to 0.14 without this variable). Net of European identity, the other variables that were previously associated with EU support, such as occupation and political interest, do not seem to matter anymore. European identity also picks up part of the effects of the country dummies. Hence, once we know the extent to which someone considers himself or herself 'European', knowing their occupation, media use of political knowledge does not improve our prediction of their level of support for close cooperation with the EU. Again, this is not to say the effect of

European identity is truly independent and causal, as identity itself is a product of socialization processes that are related to some of the variables we use in the models. The effect of net European identity is greatest in Belarus, and significantly lower in Moldova, where net EU support as such is the highest (model with country interactions not shown).

In Model 6 we start adding the individual values and beliefs of the respondents as predictors. Based on the frame analysis presented before, we anticipate that these will have big and consistent effects on EU support, and this turns out to be the case indeed. Model 6 includes the variable capturing the importance of traditional values for the respondent. The variable has a negative effect on EU support that is statistically significant and independent from the effect of European identity. People who find the traditional family model and traditional way of life highly important are less likely to support cooperation with the EU, even when their identity, occupation, media use, and political knowledge are taken into account. The negative effect of traditional values is biggest in Belarus and is non-existent in Ukraine. Interestingly, the variable capturing the importance of liberal values for the respondent (individual rights and freedoms, tolerance, free choice of way of life) does not have such a consistent positive association with EU support. While finding traditional values important is associated with lower support for the EU, finding liberal values important is not necessarily associated with higher support.

Model 7 adds the importance of norms of impersonal governance to the set of predictors. This variable has a positive and significant association with EU support, and one that is independent from the effects of identity and traditional values. The size of the effect is comparable to the one of traditional values, although the effect is somewhat more variable.

In Models 8 and 9 we add the respondents' beliefs about the effects of close cooperation with the EU (net of the corresponding beliefs about close cooperation with Russia). Including the net beliefs about the effects on security (Model 8) leads to a considerable improvement in the fit of the model (to an adjusted R-squared of 0.48). As expected, support for cooperation with the EU increases when respondents are more convinced about the positive effect of the EU on their country's security. This effect is relatively big – one-point change in beliefs is associated with half a point change in support, and is highly significant. The effect is robust across different operationalizations of the outcome variable (as the 7-point ordered category analysed in the previous section, as raw rather than net EU support, etc.) Remarkably, once we include these beliefs in the model the country dummies are no longer significant. This implies that any average differences between EU support across the three countries can be accounted for by including the respondents' beliefs about the security implications of cooperation (a similar conclusion can be drawn about the effects of beliefs about the implications of cooperation with the EU on governance). The effects of identity and traditional values are much smaller in size, although still significant.

Finally, in Model 9 we add the beliefs about the economic effects of cooperation with the EU (net of the corresponding beliefs about Russia). The effect is even greater in terms of size and is highly significant as well, even when the security beliefs are still in the model. The fit of the model is also better (adjusted R-squared of 0.57). The country differences are still not significant, but on a model with the economic beliefs only, the country differences persist. Interestingly, the variable for 'student' status has a separate positive effect, implying that students are more likely to support cooperation with the EU, even for the same level of beliefs about the effects of cooperation.

To summarize the analysis, we can account for more than 50 % of the variation in net EU support in our sample by a mix of attitudinal and demographic variables. Beliefs about the effects of cooperation have the strongest and most consistent associations with support. But European identity and the importance of traditional values also have significant effects on support. Once the beliefs are taken into account, political knowledge, interest and media use do not seem to matter much. Similarly, differences across demographic groups and even across countries, disappear once the beliefs about cooperation are accounted for.

The relational beliefs about the effects of cooperation are clearly not exogenous to the preference formation process. They are a product of socialization and possibly influenced by media, knowledge and socio-economic positions. Tentatively, we view the relational beliefs as a powerful mediator, to the extent that once the beliefs are known, factors such as media consumption and knowledge have no further predictive potential.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper we set out to examine the potential for different messages contained in specific frames about international cooperation (with the EU) to influence the opinions and preferences of the general public in three countries in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood: Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. We used frames that are thematic and neutral rather than personalistic and evaluative, building on previous media monitoring research suggesting that these are defining characteristics of the communicative mode of the EU in the region. We designed vignettes that embodied six frames emphasizing different aspects of what international cooperation could be about (economy, security, identity, liberal and traditional values, and shared norms of governance), and we tested experimentally the potential effects of these frames.

Altogether, we find that the frames had only very limited and highly variable influence on support for close cooperation with the EU among the publics in the EaP countries. The only two frames that seem to marginally increase levels of EU support were those arguing that international cooperation should be based on *shared liberal values* and that it should be based on *shared norms of impersonal governance*. In retrospect, it is not too surprising that the short, thematic and neutral vignettes we administered had very limited effects, especially given that cooperation with the EU and Russia are salient topics in the Eastern neighbourhood and the framing of their role in international affairs in the mass media is intensely contested. Still, our results suggest the limits that impersonal thematic neutral frames and discourses have in terms of influencing the opinions and preferences of citizens in information-rich and contested media environments.

Among the possible reasons why we find no strong effects of the frames are the characteristics of the target populations we tried to reach. Two relevant characteristics were pre-existing levels of support for the EU and comprehension of foreign affairs themes. Our surveys were administered in person across a variety of urban and rural locations. Despite the different geographical settings, our respondents still exhibited a very high level of support for close cooperation with the EU to begin with, as well as very strong beliefs about the economic, security, and other benefits of cooperating with the EU. This might reflect, to some extent, the broader situation in the three countries we studied (although EU support is certainly higher, on average, in our sample than in the general population), but it creates serious methodological challenges for the analysis of the experimental data.

Simply put, when the base level of EU support is so high, it is close to impossible for the frames to increase it any further.

Our experimental design employed relatively simple, if abstract, texts in the language of the respondents and was administered in person. Nevertheless, it would appear that even our short and simple vignettes were not understood very well by many respondents, as indicated by the failure of a large part of the sample to indicate the main topic of the texts they had just read. Importantly, comprehension is associated with levels of EU support, so that participants who had lower levels of EU support had a smaller chance to understand the text. And understanding the frame is an important pathway for being influenced by it. This is not only a methodological challenge. In substantive terms, it underscores the fact that it is extremely hard to communicate effectively to the parts of the population in the Eastern neighbourhood that are less supportive of the EU. Yet these are precisely the people that have scope to increase their support for closer cooperation with the EU and to strengthen their beliefs about the benefits of cooperation.

Unexpectedly, the frames were more successful in influencing the beliefs of people about the benefits of cooperation with the EU, although they were not designed to do that. Participants were more likely to agree that cooperation with the EU is good for security if they read the vignette on security, that it is good for the promotion of liberal values if they read the liberal values frame, and that the EU follows clear rules if they read the governance vignette. It is possible that the participants inferred cues from the social context in which the experiment was administered about the desired changes in their beliefs, and acted accordingly. But it is also possible that the short reflection on what international cooperation should be about that the vignettes encouraged triggered changes in evaluations about what cooperating with the EU can achieve.

What we find much weaker evidence for is the idea that the frames can affect which aspects of international cooperation people find salient for forming opinions and preferences on issues of international cooperation. Simply put, people were not more likely to consider the economy much more important for international cooperation if they read the economy vignette. But then it also turns out, against our theoretical expectations, that the relationship between the belief that cooperation with the EU brings economic benefits and support for cooperation with the EU is not moderated by the belief about the importance of the economy for international cooperation. The data suggests that many people consider more than one aspect of international cooperation extremely important and do not have well-formed hierarchies of what aspects are more important than others.

To sum up the experimental results, our study suggests that thematic neutral frames have limited potential to influence directly the preferences for international cooperation of ordinary citizens. But they might be more successful in influencing relevant relational beliefs about the benefits of international cooperation with different external actors (e.g. a belief that closer cooperation with the EU brings economic benefits to the people). Such beliefs in themselves are highly predictive of preferences for cooperation. Thematic frames have only small and variable effects on the perceived salience of individual aspects of international relations. And the perceived salience of different aspects does not moderate the link between the relevant beliefs and preferences for cooperation partners.

Beyond the experimental results, our data offers additional insights about the structure of mass preferences for EU support in the EaP countries. Exploring differences in support across users of different media types, we find that only in Belarus there are clear differences in *average* levels of support, but in Moldova and Ukraine some

media types, including social media (when used as a source of political information), are associated with significant *polarization* of opinions.

We also find that EU identity and support for traditional values are significant predictors of support for close cooperation with the EU and account for substantial parts of the variance in support. By contrast, basic demographic variables, as well as media use and political knowledge, have no consistent associations with support, once the attitudinal variables are taken into account. Interest in European political affairs is a stronger predictor of support. However, the strongest and most consistent associations are between people's beliefs about the effects of cooperation on the economy, security, governance norms and values and support for cooperation with the EU. Once these beliefs are taken into account, even the sizeable differences in average support across Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine all but disappear.

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## Supplementary Material

### ***Part I Text of the experimental 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.

## ***Part II Sample and alertness and manipulation checks***

### *Sample distribution*

The survey and data collection were implemented with the help of partner institutions in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine (SYMPA in Belarus, IDIS ‘Viitorul’ in Moldova, and UIPP in Ukraine). 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, Gomiel, and Vilnius<sup>10</sup>) 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. The sampling of the locations and participants was not random. Our partners arranged data collection at different locations using a snow-ball technique starting with their diverse set of contacts. The survey was administered as a pen and paper questionnaire conducted with multiple groups.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> Most importantly, participants were *assigned randomly* to experimental conditions, which is the crucial aspect of experimental design.

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). Overall, we received even more, in total 579 completed survey questionnaires in the three countries (207 in Belarus, 183 in Moldova, and 189 in Ukraine).

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.

Here are a couple of examples to illustrate how our sample compares to general population in each of the three countries. According to the World Bank data from 2016, females constitute 49-54 % of the population in the three countries, so we seem to have only slightly more females in our sample. Depending on the source and exact measure of higher education, among the population of Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine, the percentage of population with higher education ranges between 19 %, 24 %, and 29 % respectively<sup>13</sup>. In our sample we have

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> In Belarus, because of different restrictions, the questionnaires were partly administered on a one-to-one basis.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup>[http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2014/05/20/ic\\_articles\\_116\\_185560](http://naviny.by/rubrics/society/2014/05/20/ic_articles_116_185560) (based on UNESCO data); <http://www.futureskills.org.ua/ua/map> (based on the data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine); <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.CUAT.BA.ZS?locations=MD> (World Bank data) (accessed 16 March 2018).

around 78 % of people with higher education, therefore we are presenting the results that are valid mostly for the higher educated people. Median age in Belarus is 40, in Moldova 36.7, and in Ukraine 40.6, which is not far from our sample<sup>14</sup>. When it comes to the image of the EU that citizens have in each of the countries, respondents in our sample are much more likely to be positive about the EU than respondents in a representative sample in a survey of attitudes in the EaP countries conducted by Ecorys (2017: 10)<sup>15</sup>. Table A1 also shows that we have fewer respondents who are neutral in all three countries. The percentage of respondents who have a negative image of the EU is similar in our sample and Ecorys sample in the case of Belarus, but our sample has fewer respondents who are negative in Moldova and in Ukraine.

*Table A1. Sample comparison*

Image of the EU*	Belarus		Moldova		Ukraine	
	Ecorys	Our sample	Ecorys	Our sample	Ecorys	Our sample
Positive	35 %	73 %	43 %	74 %	43 %	80 %
Neutral	53 %	24 %	39 %	16 %	35 %	16 %
Negative	6 %	4 %	17 %	10 %	16 %	4 %

\* The question in both surveys was formulated in a very similar way and asked about respondent's image of the EU. The scale in the Ecorys survey was a five-point scale that was collapsed into three categories: positive (very positive and fairly positive responses), neutral, and negative (fairly negative and very negative responses). The scale in our survey was an eleven-point agreement scale with the statement 'I have a negative image of the EU'. We reverse-scored the answers and collapsed them into the same three categories: positive (from 7 to 10), neutral (from 4 to 6) and negative (from 0 to 3).

#### *Alertness check*

To ensure that people are not filling 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 (10 on the scale) 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.

#### *Manipulation check*

To check whether the survey participants had comprehended the experimental vignettes, we ask 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 (this is after removing the inattentive respondents as identified above). This percentage is rather low given that the task was relatively simple and the text of the vignettes has many words signalling its theme and main issue. Table A2 provides an overview of the distribution of correct answers per experimental condition (frame). The main insight is that many

<sup>14</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, The World Factbook, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2177.html> (accessed 16 March 2018).

<sup>15</sup> Ecorys (2017) Annual Survey Report: Regional Overview. Open Neighbourhood—Communicating for a stronger partnership: connecting with citizens across the Eastern Neighbourhood, June 2017, available at [https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2017-10/EUNEIGHBOURSeast\\_AnnualSurvey2017report\\_EaP\\_OVERVIEW\\_0.pdf](https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2017-10/EUNEIGHBOURSeast_AnnualSurvey2017report_EaP_OVERVIEW_0.pdf) (accessed 16 March 2018).

respondents identified 'Economic benefits' as the main issue discussed in their texts even if economic themes and issues were not mentioned at all.

*Table A2. Distribution of respondents per frame and result on the manipulation check*

<b>Frame</b>	<b>N wrong</b>	<b>N correct</b>	<b>% correct</b>
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%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>61%</b>

It is possible that people interpreted the question more broadly to refer to their opinions what international cooperation should be about rather than what it was discussed to be about in the text. However, we do not find a positive correlation between 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.

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 the extent of media consumption are negatively related with the chance of providing a correct answer, while political interest is positively related. In addition to the surprising effect of media, we also find that education and political knowledge do not seem to matter. Most 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 above 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 above we include an individual-level control for age (unless otherwise indicated), to help in balancing the control and framed groups.

**Part III Descriptive statistics**

Variable	Mean	Median	St. dev.	Min	Max	N
<i>Support for close cooperation with EU</i>	8.38	10	2.19	0	10	501
<i>Support for close cooperation with Russia</i>	4.71	5	3.31	0	10	501
Rel. support for close cooperation with EU (vs. Russia)	3.67	4	4.15	-10	10	497
Cooperation should bring economic benefits	9.30	10	1.27	1	10	499
Cooperation should enhance security	9.01	10	1.65	0	10	495
Cooperation should be based on shared identity	5.20	5	3.40	0	10	491
Cooperation should strengthen shared values	8.55	10	1.93	0	10	493
Cooperation should be based on shared rules of govern.	7.77	9	2.62	0	10	493
<i>Closer cooperation with the EU brings econ. benefits</i>	7.63	8	2.46	0	10	500
<i>Closer cooperation with the EU is good for security</i>	6.92	7	2.80	0	10	498
<i>The EU supports traditional values</i>	4.92	5.00	2.83	0.00	10.00	500
<i>The EU support liberal values (index of 3)</i>	8.07	8.67	1.93	0.00	10.00	501
<i>The EU follows formal rules (index of 2)</i>	6.81	7	2.66	0	10	495
<i>Closer cooperation with Russia brings econ. benefits</i>	5.57	6	3.12	0	10	498
<i>Closer cooperation with Russia is good for security</i>	3.94	4	3.43	0	10	497
<i>Russia supports traditional values</i>	7.16	7.50	2.50	0.00	10.00	500
<i>Russia support liberal values (index of 3)</i>	3.83	3.67	2.68	0.00	10.00	500
<i>Russia follows formal rules (index of 2)</i>	3.37	3	3.07	0	10	494
... brings economic benefits (EU-Russia)	2.05	2	4.18	-10	10	494
... good for security (EU-Russia)	3.00	4	5.02	-10	10	492
... supports traditional values (EU-Russia)	-2.26	-2.50	4.31	-10	10	498
... support liberal values (EU-Russia)	4.25	4.67	3.84	-10	10	499
... follows formal rules (EU-Russia)	3.47	4	4.61	-10	10	487
Traditional values are important (index of 3)	7.63	8.50	2.54	0	10	500
Liberal values are important (index of 2)	8.51	9	1.51	3	10	498
Preference for formal rules (index of 3)	6.67	6.67	1.80	0	10	502
<i>Consider myself European</i>	6.92	8	3.29	0	10	427
<i>Consider myself Russian</i>	1.77	0	3.08	0	10	406
Consider myself European – Russian	5.12	6	4.72	-10	10	393
Age	38.39	37	13.66	15	96	476
Media consumption (index)	7.44	7	3.28	0	16	466
Political knowledge	1.84	2	0.84	0	3	505
Interest in politics	4.73	5	2.03	0	8	492



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## **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.

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