
Transregional Processes

The Official Development Assistance Policy of the European Union in the Post-Soviet Space: Geopolitical Factors

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Abstract—The structure, priorities, conceptual framework, methods, and resources of EU policies in the Official Development Assistance (ODA) program are considered. Research shows that the EU funding of ODA programs for the post-Soviet space hiked fourfold between 2010 and 2020. The share of funding for Central Asian states decreased substantially compared to the Western part of the post-Soviet space against the background of confrontation with Russia, as well as due to presidential elections in Belarus. This paper argues that this redistribution is caused by geopolitical factors of EU policy. A conclusion is drawn that the recent declarations by the EU leadership about strengthening the “hard” power and the “geopolitical” agenda are not new and reflect long-term trends in EU foreign policy. Thus, a significant share of ODA funds is traditionally allocated to “social infrastructure,” strengthening Brussels’ control over the sociopolitical sphere in target countries of the periphery, aiming to bring them under EU influence in the economy, governance, goal setting, and ideology. This policy serves the interests of the EU, entrenching asymmetrical “metropole–periphery” relations between the EU and target countries.

Keywords: European Union, EU, official development assistance, post-Soviet space, Eastern Partnership, soft power, humanitarian influence

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In May 2022, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy J. Borrell, referring to the conflict over Ukraine, said that the EU “is not enough to be a good civil power—we need to be also a military power.”¹ The current composition of the European Commission began to promote this thesis long before the start of Russia’s special military operation in Ukraine. Behind these statements, one can see another attempt by Brussels to reconsider its foreign policy identity, citing an external threat. An alternative hypothesis is that the EU is articulating the previously formed logic of foreign policy, which includes an element of geopolitical struggle for spheres of influence, trying to use the Ukrainian crisis to legitimize it and equip it with new tools. The purpose of this article is to test these hypotheses on empirical material. The subject of this study is the policy of the supranational institutions of the European Union in the field of international development assistance (hereinafter,

IDA),² the main item of Brussels’ foreign policy expenditures. The European Union has long tried to compensate for weakness in the military–political sphere by creating an extensive infrastructure of humanitarian influence on neighboring countries, including the post-Soviet space. This activity, which presents a challenge to Russian interests and the stability in the region, deserves careful analysis. The general chronological framework of this study covers the period after the EU enlargement in 2007, after which Brussels moved to active expansion in the post-Soviet space. The analysis of the latest trends is counted from 2014 to the present, taking into account the consequences of the Ukrainian crisis. The official documents of the EU bodies and political statements of the EU leadership, statistical data, and specific EU projects in the countries of the post-Soviet space are analyzed.

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¹ European Council: Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell upon arrival, May 31, 2022. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-council-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-upon-arrival-0_en. Cited May 31, 2022.

² In the framework of this article, the concept of international assistance is used as a synonym for the wording adopted in the European Union and the OECD—“official development assistance”—which includes official grants, loans, and other financial flows. For more details, see Official Development Assistance (ODA) OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/official-development-assistance.htm>. Cited April 30, 2022.

The internal heterogeneity of the EU hinders the pursuit of a consistent foreign policy and increases its “impulsiveness, irrationality, and aggressiveness” [Gromyko, 2021, p. 22]. A consequence of this in recent years has been attempts by the EU top bureaucracy to use the “external threat” agenda from Russia and China to expand their supranational powers [Sutyryn, 2021]. The area where the foreign policy autonomy of the EU supranational bodies is noticeably manifested (and hence the logic of their behavior) is the promotion of international development. At the working level, there is coordination between EU institutions and member states (and sometimes competition [Bartenev, 2020]), but EU bodies have the ability of relatively independent medium-term planning and prioritization.

The European Union began deploying a large-scale program of political, economic, and ideological development of the region in the post-Soviet space long before the Ukrainian crisis of 2014—after the inclusion in 2007 of Romania and Bulgaria, former members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO). In the spring of 2008, Poland and Sweden initiated the Eastern Partnership program aimed at deep integration of the six former Soviet republics into the economic, political, and legal sphere of the EU influence, ignoring Russia’s interests. The main instrument of influence within this program, in addition to political dialogue and agreements with the governments of the participating countries, has become the IDA policy of Brussels. It financially supported EU interventions in the target countries based on a combination of program and project approaches.

After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, the expansion of the European Union did not encounter serious obstacles until it crossed into the territory of the former Soviet Union. As rightly noted by I.V. Bolgova, the expansion of the value approach of the European Union turned out to be possible only in a favorable internal and external political environment, and the direct opposition of the EU values to Russian policy led to destabilization in the region [Bolgova, 2019]. The “geopolitical” logic of the EU’s foreign policy has been openly declared by its leadership over the past 6–7 years; however, the imperial features in the EU’s foreign policy (the desire of the political center to establish control and develop the periphery by consolidating asymmetric relations) appeared earlier. Since the early 2000s they have become noticeable to a number of Western researchers [Cooper, 2002; Forsberg and Haukkala, 2018; Zielonka, 2008], but have not received significant attention in the Russian literature. However, a decade later, these attitudes were enshrined in doctrinal documents. Thus, the EU Global Strategy, adopted in 2016, confirms the traditional thesis that “the power of [the EU’s] attractiveness can spur transformation [in the neighboring countries].” At the same time, the foreign policy of Brussels is tasked with “coping with the superpowers.”

It is stated that, in the modern world “soft power is not enough”; therefore, it is necessary to “strengthen credibility in the field of security and defense,” and the expansion policy is seen as a “strategic investment in security” [Shared Vision, 2016]. Considering that attempts to create a European army have not yet been successful, Brussels sought to increase political influence through an IDA toolkit [Youngs and Zihnioglu, 2021]. After the Arab Spring and the invasion of Libya, the EU expanded the use of IDA to limit migration flows from the south [Kiratli, 2021]. In the post-Soviet space, the EU sought to expand its influence through “democratization” and the reorientation of new regimes towards the West.

In 2021, EU institutions committed \$19 billion to international development assistance around the world.³ IDA in the EU is overseen by the Directorate General for International Partnerships of the European Commission. The Commission is responsible for administering aid and monitoring the IDA implementation. The European External Action Service (EEAS) provides overall coordination. In the EU budget plans for 2021–2027, it is argued that EU assistance programs to neighboring countries, which includes the western part of the post-Soviet space, are designed to “strengthen the EU socioeconomic influence” in the region and strengthen the role of the EU as a “global player.”⁴ In 2020, the EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy was adopted, linking the IDA, environment, migration, security, and trade issues of the EU with the target country with an assessment of the situation of human rights. A “human rights approach to development” and a “geopolitical human rights agenda” were proclaimed.⁵

The EU IDA paradigm is to export EU norms and standards to the legal and public administration spheres of the target countries.⁶ The EU IDA priorities

³ Total flows by donor, 2018–2021. Official OECD Website. <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=113263>. Cited April 14, 2022.

⁴ *The EU’s 2021–2027 Long-Term Budget and Next Generation EU: Facts and Figures* (Publications Office of the European Union, Luxemburg, 2021), p. 19. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d3e77637-a963-11eb-9585-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>. Cited April 14, 2022.

⁵ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024, March 25, 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=JOIN\(2020\)5&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=JOIN(2020)5&lang=en). Cited May 14, 2022.

⁶ EU High Representative Josep Borrell, in his speech in November 2021, eloquently articulated this principle: “Socioeconomic structures, labor, and the balance of power in the world will change. We, the Western nations, the US and the EU, ruled the world because we set the norms and standards, we dominated the way technology worked... if we can no longer set norms and standards, we will not rule in the 21st century.” Source: J. Borrell’s Address at Global Progressive Forum. Official Account of Foundation for European Progressive Studies. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CVNR-ZuXIyM>. Cited April 14, 2022.

are determined by the EU Global Strategy, the New European Development Consensus, and the Commission's priorities for the period 2019–2024, which include the green deal, digitalization, economic development (with a focus on youth and small businesses), strengthening the global role of the EU, and promoting a European lifestyle and “democratization.”⁷

The Commission and EEAS are the main players in the IDA space, providing operational management of IDA funds and policy support, respectively. The following tools are used: political dialogue, policy dialogue with the participation of NGOs and officials from the target country, project activities (EU delegations subordinate to the EEAS coordinate many IDA projects in the host countries and provide monitoring), and conditionality. The assessment of the results of the application of these instruments by the EU affects the volume and choice of recipients of IDA funds (government, NGOs, opposition) sent by Brussels to the target countries.

Indirect confirmation of the growing importance of the geopolitical factor in the distribution of EU IDA funds is the creation by Brussels of institutional mechanisms for the rapid transfer of IDA funds between specific countries, despite seven-year budget plans. We are talking about the introduction of the so-called “operational” approach into the financial planning process. With the help of a special reserve fund (€3.2 billion allocated for 2021–2027), the EU can quickly raise additional funds to work with target countries where there is an emergency or opportunities for “fast reform.” In this way, the EU is adapting its IDA system to address not only medium-term challenges but also ad hoc interventions, reminiscent of the experience of the US Agency for International Development, which long ago created such mechanisms for political intervention.

FINANCING VOLUMES AND PRIORITIES

The priority regions for the EU IDA are the Middle East and North Africa in connection with the problem of migration, as well as the western part of the post-Soviet space, which is involved in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program. Within the EaP framework, action plans are adopted for countries for a period of 3–5 years, which are based on the EU political priorities: “promoting democracy,” “quality of public administration,” “rule of law,” and supporting economic liberalization through financing of small and medium-sized businesses [Turp-Balazs, 2021].

Central Asian countries received EU IDA funds through the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) in accordance with the Regional Strategy Doc-

ument.⁸ In 2019, a new EU strategy for the region was adopted, identifying priority areas for funding, coinciding with the above priorities of the Eastern Partnership, as well as issues of regional integration, water security, and Afghanistan.⁹ Brussels has confirmed its bet on “soft power” as an instrument of its influence in the region. At the same time, the activity of the EU in Central Asia is declining, which experts attribute to a decrease in the geopolitical priority of the region: the EU has an understanding that in the medium term it will not be possible to obtain energy resources from the region.¹⁰ In countries that have signed Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreements with the EU—Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine—Brussels is working to implement and monitor the provisions of these agreements, as well as pan-European priorities. In addition, an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed with Kazakhstan¹¹ (fully entered into force in 2020) and the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement was signed with Armenia¹² (entered into force in 2021). In addition to the emphasis on the convergence of the legislative framework and economic regulation, the agreements include a block of issues on humanitarian cooperation, including “convergence, almost complete convergence” of the educational systems of Kazakhstan (Article 244) and Armenia (Article 93) with “policies and practices of the European Union.”

Over ten years, the amount annually allocated by the EU for IDA programs in the post-Soviet countries, according to the OECD, has grown from \$605 million in 2010 to \$2834 million in 2020.¹³ Moreover, the main jump occurred in 2020 (a 2.8-fold increase

⁸ See the Accounts Chamber estimates of the results of EU aid to the region: EU Development Assistance to Central Asia (2013). European Court of Auditors. Special Report No. 13/2013.

⁹ Council of the EU. Central Asia: Council adopts a new EU strategy for the region. Press release, June 17 (2019). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/17/central-asia-council-adopts-a-new-eu-strategy-for-the-region/>. Cited April 14, 2022.

¹⁰ For more, see S. Blockmans and M. Sahajpal, “The new EU strategy on Central Asia,” CEPS, June 21 (2019). <https://www.ceps.eu/the-new-eu-strategy-on-central-asia/>. Cited April 14, 2022.

¹¹ “Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the One Part, and the Republic of Kazakhstan, of the Other Part,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, Feb. 4 (2016).

¹² “Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the Other Part,” *Official Journal of the European Union*, Jan. 26 (2018).

¹³ Hereinafter, the author's calculations are based on OECD data as of 2022. For more, see *GeoBook: Geographical flows to developing countries*. Official OECD Website. <https://stats.oecd.org/viewhtml.aspx?datasetcode=DACGEO&lang=en>. Cited April 14, 2022.

⁷ The European Commission's priorities for 2019–2024. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_en. Cited May 14, 2022.

compared to 2019), mainly due to the financing of projects in Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, and Moldova.

As the data show, funding for EU IDA projects in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which was the lowest in previous years, has virtually disappeared. Allocations for IDA programs in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have increased, but the growth rates are significantly inferior to the western flank of the post-Soviet space, and the absolute volumes are not comparable. In the post-Soviet space, the EU directs most of its funds to countries that have signed association agreements with the European Union and embarked on “the path of European reforms.” At the same time, judging by the content of the IDA programs, which is discussed below, the formation of prerequisites for the “political choice” of the national government in favor of rapprochement with Brussels is the goal of many EU IDA programs. In addition, there are possible exceptions to this rule dictated by geopolitics. For example, for the period 2014–2019, the amount of funds allocated for work with Belarus has more than doubled, although this country does not even have a basic Cooperation Partnership Agreement (PCA) with the EU (eight times from 2010 to 2020). The recent increase coincided with a period of “thaw” in relations between Brussels and Minsk amid EU interest in encouraging Minsk’s “neutral stance” on the Ukraine crisis in 2014–2020. At the same time, the main jump occurred in 2019 (more than \$100 million were allocated) and 2020 (more than \$160 million) and coincided with the preparations for the presidential elections in August 2020.

The EU, unlike the United States, did not provide the countries of the region with official military assistance but sought to influence the law enforcement agencies. In 2014, the EU Council created the EU Civilian Advisory Mission on Security Sector Reform in Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine).¹⁴ The activities of the Commission are supervised by the EEAS within the mandate given by the EU member states. The mission is developing strategic documents and bills, providing logistical assistance, and coordinating donor assistance to Ukraine for law enforcement reforms. The EU has created similar missions in Iraq and the Central African Republic. In 2019, the budget of the Mission to Ukraine increased by 25% and amounted to €54 million for two years.¹⁵ The official goal is to restore the confidence of the Ukrainian society in the civilian security services.¹⁶ The mission officially employs 370 people, is headquartered in Kyiv, and has a network of regional offices. Day-to-day activities

include the introduction of the practices of the EU countries at the legislative and administrative levels; clarification of the EU policy; expert support; and supply of equipment, software, educational programs for the police, prosecutors, the State Bureau of Investigation, and other bodies. Thus, the classic IDA tools are used by the EU to influence the security sector of the target country.

IDA MECHANISMS AND IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS

The main funds of the EU IDA in the post-Soviet space, as in other regions of the world, are directed to the sphere of the so-called “social infrastructure” (support for civil society, communications, education, and work of social and communal services). A significant part of the activity is concentrated in the areas of direct communication and interaction with the people and societies of the target countries. Thus, for example, for 2016–2019 inclusive, according to the Commission, in the Eastern Partnership countries alone, 78 000 young people took part in exchange programs with the EU, among them 32 000 are students and university teachers, 3000 schools, and 7600 teachers.¹⁷ The “economic infrastructure” includes transport (promoting the development of EU priority transport corridors), energy (“green” energy and energy efficiency), communications, and financial services (loans to small and medium-sized businesses). Infrastructure created using EU funding must meet EU standards, thereby expanding markets for European business.

According to the results of analysis of the databases of EU projects in the post-Soviet countries,¹⁸ they can be classified in the following ways:

- promotion of reforms of public administration institutions in line with EU standards, development of draft laws, creation of expert groups and networks to promote reforms in the direction of opening markets, liberalization, and reduction of state control, and decentralization;

¹⁷European Commission: Structured consultation on the future of the Eastern Partnership. SWD (2020) 56 final/2. March 18 (2020). https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jswd_structured_consultation_on_the_future_of_the_eastern_partnership.pdf. Cited April 14, 2022.

¹⁸The passports of the EU projects under the IDA, published on the official websites of the EU delegations in the post-Soviet countries, as well as those contained in the database on the official website of the OECD for the period 2013–2021, were analyzed. It should be noted that this analysis is incomplete since information on a significant part of EU-funded projects is not published on the official EU websites and does not contain a description in the OECD databases. Thus, we can only talk about those project areas that the EU considers appropriate to make public. For more details, see official websites of the EU delegations in the post-Soviet countries, as well as the OECD database: Development finance data. Official OECD Website. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/>. Cited April 14, 2022.

¹⁴“Council of the EU Decision 2014/486/CFSP of 22 July 2014 on the European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine),” Official Journal of the European Union, July 27 (2014).

¹⁵EUAM Ukraine: Council extends mission and approves budget increase, May 13 (2019). <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/news/euam-ukraine-council-extends-mission-and-approves-budget-increase/>.

¹⁶Ibid.

- implementation of EU norms and standards in infrastructure (energy, utilities, transport, border, communications), as a rule, in cooperation with Western development institutions (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank, World Bank, etc.);

- lending and grant support to small and medium-sized businesses that form dependence on EU support for socially active groups (business sectors) in target countries;

- stimulation of mobility between the EU and the target country (student exchanges; internships; and study visits of officials, businesses, experts, scientists, and journalists) and scientific research, providing access to human capital and the formation of scientific priorities of the target country;

- introduction of digital platforms, databases, and registries based on Western standards and software into the work of state bodies;

- creation of institutions of public or mixed (public–private) control (in the field of combating corruption, monitoring reforms, and implementing obligations to the EU), which allow influencing the decisions and agenda of public authorities;

- financing projects of individual NGOs and media for active social groups (youth, entrepreneurs, urban communities, protest movements, environmentalists, cyclists, etc.) and minorities in order to “grow” active pro-Western groups in society;

- organization of media campaigns, expert events, and information campaigns dedicated to the benefits of cooperation between the target country and the European Union, promotion of EU values, advocacy for reforms, and promotion of EU foreign policy approaches.

This infrastructure is most widely represented in Ukraine. For comparison, in the previous financial period 2014–2020, EU sent €454 million to Central Asian countries¹⁹ and €2.2 billion to Ukraine. The infrastructure created under the IDA programs, which provides channels of EU influence on the target countries in the post-Soviet space, is actively used by the EU for political purposes. Thus, in 2014, in Ukraine, pro-European organizations played an active role in organizing mass protests [Shapovalova and Bulyuk, 2018]. After 2014, Brussels adopted a series of institutional decisions to counter “Russian disinformation,” as a result of which the humanitarian infrastructure of the European Union began to be used to combat “Russian narratives,” and, in fact, to counteract Russian interests in target countries.

An analysis of the EU budget plans for 2021–2027 and the plans of the European Commission and the Directorates General shows that long before the start

of Russia’s special operation in Ukraine, Brussels made decisions to advance the external threat agenda (primarily the “Russian threat” but more often the “Chinese threat”) into the content of the main humanitarian programs of the European Union, including in the field of education, mobility, science, and culture [Sutyryn, 2021].

The EU links the allocation of assistance to target countries with their legal and political commitments, including the opening of the internal market, public administration reforms, the introduction of European standards in energy and transport, the promotion of human rights in their European understanding, and the demonopolization and decentralization of power. IDA is allocated in parts with an annual assessment by the European Union of the fulfillment of the obligations assumed by the recipient country.

Despite the overall increase in IDA allocations for participants in the Eastern Partnership program, the EU is minimizing direct budgetary assistance to the governments of the countries of the region. They account for only about 5% of the funds under this global EU IDA item, while North African countries receive three times as much [Sergeev, 2021]. The difference reflects the geopolitical priorities of the EU: in the western part of the post-Soviet space, Brussels, as a rule, is interested in solving political problems through humanitarian influence on societies instead of Brussels’ more pronounced orientation in North Africa towards creating structural mechanisms to limit migration.

In 2018, the EU Court of Auditors released a report stating that part of the funds allocated by the EU to nongovernmental organizations is being spent without control, and the ultimate beneficiaries of this assistance are unknown [European Court of Auditors, 2018]. EU audits revealed the theft of IDA funds in Ukraine and Moldova, including the transfer of funds to offshore companies.²⁰ However, this did not become a reason to reduce the amount of IDA allocated to Kyiv. The report of the EU Court of Auditors, published in 2021, notes that the EU approach did not focus enough on corruption at the highest echelons of power (grand corruption) in Ukraine. The authors of the document believe that the EU has helped reduce the opportunities for corruption in the country, but the key problem is precisely corruption at the highest echelons, and the Commission and the European External Action Service have not developed or implemented a special strategy to address it [European Court of Auditors, 2021, p. 4].

The question remains open about the accident or regularity of the lack of systematic EU activity in this direction over the long years of implementing programs in Ukraine. Thus, A.V. Gushchin and A.S. Levchen-

¹⁹International Partnerships. European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/where-we-work/kazakhstan_en. Cited April 14, 2022.

²⁰G. Gotev, “Auditors expose failures in EU assistance to Moldova,” *Euractiv*, Sep. 1 (2016).

Table 1. EU allocations within the IDA to the countries of the post-Soviet space in 2015–2020, mln USD

Country	Appropriations			Country	Appropriations		
	2015	2019	2020		2015	2019	2020
Azerbaijan	27.4	19.1	26.2	Moldova	70.3	167.2	264.6
Armenia	148.8	32.1	126.1	Tajikistan	28.3	34.2	25.2
Belarus	25.3	109.5	162.3	Ukraine	234.8	413	1636
Georgia	146.3	166.7	462	Turkmenia	4.6	4	2.6
Kazakhstan	14.2	2.5	1	Uzbekistan	11.8	27.3	52.1
Kyrgyzstan	33.5	37	76.5				
Total: 2015, 745.3; 2019, 1012.6; 2020, 2834.6							

Source: OECD data at constant prices as of 2022.²¹

²¹ GeoBook: Geographical flows to developing countries. Official OECD Web-site. <https://stats.oecd.org/viewhtml.aspx?dataset-code=DACGEO&lang=en>. Cited April 14, 2022.

kov come to the reasonable conclusion that the lack of success in the modernization of the economy and the conflicts of oligarchic groups contributed to the fact that Ukraine followed in the wake of Western partners [Gushchin and Levchenkov, 2019]. Researchers have identified similar trends regarding EU IDA in the Balkans, where “aid” became a form of rent for local power groups, and EU donors preferred to turn a blind eye to corruption in pursuit of their foreign policy interests [Bartlett, 2021].

The IDA policy remains one of the main instruments of the European Union for the expansion of regulation and the inclusion of post-Soviet countries in the common market on EU terms. The widespread introduction of programs in the areas of science, education, government regulation, and human resources enhances the competitiveness of European business and gives the EU access to human resources and scientific developments of the post-Soviet countries, many of which are based on the Soviet legacy. When distributing aid to countries in the region, European officials proceed from political priorities and are often actually ready to put up with local corruption. However, in the absence of a realistic prospect of EU membership, it is difficult for Brussels to ensure the implementation of the desired reforms in the target countries, especially when these reforms run counter to the interests of large local elite groups and come down to “decorative Europeanization.”

The EU policy in the field of IDA is largely determined by the logic of the political and economic development of the EU itself: the expansion of the common market around the Western European core and the inclusion of new territories and resources in the common market. In the academic sphere, as well as in the official rhetoric of the European Union, the thesis is often encountered that the integration priority and EU support are addressed to countries that are

more ready for rapprochement with Brussels and the adoption of European practices and standards [Utkin, 2018]. As the analysis showed, the EU is not always guided by this principle: IDA tools are often used to create public demand and pressure in favor of the pro-European course in those countries that are within the scope of the EU’s geopolitical interests, to “push through” agreements, as was the case with Ukraine [Gaman-Golutvina et al., 2014]. As rightly noted by O.P. Popova, a significant share of IDA’s financial flows is directed to really needy countries in the EU periphery, but among the real motives the desire to realize the economic, political, and geostrategic interests of the EU and the member states of the Union prevails [Popova, 2016]. At the same time, local elites are willing to play on the geopolitical motivation of the EU in the region, trying to divert attention from corruption and their obligations to Brussels by peddling the “Russian threat.”

CONCLUSIONS

From 2010 to 2020, the EU has more than quadrupled funding for IDA programs for the post-Soviet countries, despite the problems of “decorative Europeanization” and corruption factors in the recipient countries, well known to Brussels. The EU’s total global IDA allocations rose by a quarter over this period. At the same time, the lion’s share of funding in the post-Soviet space falls on its western part, the relative share of Central Asian countries has significantly decreased against the background of Brussels’ lack of relevant geopolitical motivation. On the contrary, faced with Russia’s interests in Eastern Europe, Brussels tried to use the full range of its tools to increase its influence in geopolitical competition with Russia. This is not only about “pushing through” the association agreement and supporting the protests in Ukraine

but also about the growth in funding for projects in the western part of the post-Soviet space with the virtual absence of systemic EU efforts to address the problems of “grand corruption” in the highest echelons of government of the recipient countries. The largest increase in EU allocations was observed in Ukraine, which by 2020 had become the absolute world leader in receiving Brussels IDA funds, as well as in Moldova and Georgia (all three countries signed an association agreement with the EU). At the same time, funding for programs in Belarus increased by more than eight times in ten years, reaching a peak by 2020 (the year of presidential elections), despite the absence of a formal agreement between Brussels and Minsk. Such jumps in the EU IDA policy, which are rare in the work of Brussels in other regions of the world, against the backdrop of support for protests in Ukraine and Belarus, testify to the obvious influence of the geopolitical situation on the decisions of Brussels.

The EU policy in the field of IDA is not limited to loans, grants, and loan guarantees, but includes tools closely related to managing the priorities of the socio-political development of the target countries of the post-Soviet space (project financing in the fields of science, education, and civil society, and support for conglomerates of pro-Western NGOs and the media). Thus, the EU seeks to include the post-Soviet countries in its own system of coordinates in matters of goal setting and ideology through control of the sociopolitical sphere. It is not always possible to measure accurately the political effectiveness of such assistance in terms of EU objectives. However, it leads to the formation of Brussels-funded clientele groups in the target countries, which are called upon to advance the European agenda. The goals and instruments of the EU IDA policy in the post-Soviet space can be explained in terms of interests and geopolitics, without resorting to a value “superstructure.” The EU has created an elegant shell of institutions of influence, based on the features of imperial politics: an asymmetric model of relations with target countries, which, despite the EU policy of differentiation, have not received the right to discuss with Brussels the basic framework and strategic goals of cooperation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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