

FEBRUARY 2024



**EXPANDING HORIZONS:
ASSESSING THE IMPLICATIONS
OF EU ENLARGEMENT TOWARDS
MOLDOVA, UKRAINE, AND
GEORGIA FOR EUROPEAN
SECURITY & MILITARY
COOPERATION**

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Introduction

In an era marked by dynamic geopolitical shifts and evolving security challenges, the European Union (EU) finds itself at the crossroads of an ambitious endeavour, namely the broadening of its horizons to integrate Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. As the EU works towards extending its reach to the eastern fringes of Europe, the implications of doing so extend beyond political and economic integration. This analysis delves into a critical facet of this transformative process, specifically the ramifications for European military interoperability.

In a historic turn of events, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia have pursued EU membership since early 2022. Following a rigorous evaluation process and exercise of political will, the three Eastern Partnership countries were granted candidate status, signifying a step toward their full integration into the EU. The year 2023 marked a pivotal moment, with negotiations for accession formally opened in December for both Moldova and Ukraine (European Commission, 2023).

The prospect of EU enlargement introduces a new dimension to the European security architecture. This paper will evaluate the readiness of the military forces of these candidate states, examining their preparedness and capabilities to align with European defence standards and ability to contribute effectively to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

Against a backdrop of historical complexity and given the diverse security challenges faced by these Eastern Partnership countries, this paper scrutinises the strategic considerations underpinning the EU's outreach. The analysis will encompass the alignment of defence policies, joint military exercises, and the disparities or harmonisation of defence capabilities, shedding light on how the accession process will influence the broader European defence framework.

Essentially, this analysis seeks to deepen comprehension of how EU enlargement has transformative effects on defence, within the context of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia's accession to the Union.

EU Enlargement Policy

With reference to the EU, enlargement refers to the process by which states become members upon meeting a predefined set of political and economic prerequisites. Any European nation demonstrating a commitment to democratic values is eligible to seek EU membership, with the essential conditions that all aspiring countries must meet outlined in the Copenhagen criteria (European Commission, n.d. - a).

These include:

1. Political criteria: EU-aspiring countries must ensure the stability of institutions that safeguard democracy, uphold the rule of law, protect human rights, and respect minorities.
2. Economic criteria: EU-aspiring countries must develop a functional market economy and exhibit the ability to navigate competition and market forces effectively.
3. Administrative and institutional capacity: EU-aspiring countries must demonstrate the capability to implement the EU acquis (a body of common rights) and the readiness to fulfil the responsibilities associated with EU membership (European Commission, n.d. - a).

The EU's enlargement policy between 2013 and 2022 can be characterised as stagnant and lacking in proactive expansion efforts. However, the dramatic shift in the European landscape brought about by Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 altered the cost-benefit balance in favour of potential new members (Karjalainen, 2023). This geopolitical shift provided a compelling reason for the EU to reignite its enlargement agenda. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognise that enlargement is not solely a geopolitical strategy, as it also hinges on successful state-building endeavours in the neighbouring regions. The formulation of EU enlargement policy thus results from the intricate overlap of geopolitics, state-building, and the inner dynamics of the EU (Karjalainen, 2023).

As a result, EU enlargement policy has undergone a significant change, transforming from a geopolitical challenge to a deliberate geopolitical tool or objective. This shift, observed after February 2022, was influenced by several key factors. Firstly, European members conducted a thorough strategic reassessment, which questioned the longstanding assumption that peace and security in Europe could be achieved without the prospect of enlargement (Buras & Morina, 2023). Notably, EU leaders transitioned from perceiving enlargement as a value-driven pursuit to regarding it as a strategic instrument to safeguard the EU's security interests (European Parliament, 2023; Elysée, 2023), with the acknowledgement that the 'EU must be a reliable partner and a credible geopolitical actor' and that 'enlargement should be seen as an investment in a strong, stable and united Europe, as well as a transformative process for the countries following the EU path' (European Parliament, 2022a). Based on previous developments, the European Parliament also observed that refraining from enlargement carries significant strategic consequences and has the potential to weaken European security and stability (European Parliament, 2022a).

The war in Ukraine has reignited solidarity within the EU toward nations facing security risks, but it has concurrently heightened difficulties in terms of reconstruction, democratisation, and the modernisation of armed forces and structures.

Consequently, the war poses additional obstacles to the European membership path of the Eastern European nations with which this InfoFlash is concerned. The primary challenges that the conflict is likely to exacerbate include the democratic deficits in Moldova and Ukraine, along with persisting, unresolved territorial disputes with Russia.

The EU has undergone a notable transformation in the past two decades, developing into a multi-clustered entity characterised by substantial integration variations in many policy areas and institutional development. This evolving structure facilitates diverse levels of integration among member states and with countries outside the EU. The EU's encounter with differentiated integration has gradually altered the understanding of membership. Member states now wield formal and de facto sovereignty in crucial domains such as the single market, monetary policy, foreign and security policy, as well as justice and home affairs (Leuffenet al., 2013). Notably, the observed different levels of integration can be viewed in a positive light, especially regarding the enlargement process, expanding the range of a candidate country's military capacity and standards for interoperability within the context of EU membership.

Moldova

Whether the Republic of Moldova becomes a member of the EU will surely depend on its level of European integration, including the extent to which its armed forces are integrated into the European framework. In order to integrate further into the EU and enhance military interoperability with its European counterparts, the Moldovan National Army will need to boost its peacekeeping capabilities to participate in CSDP missions as well as modernise its equipment and practices to transform its Soviet-style army into a Western-style one. A lack of experience in peacekeeping missions is one of the primary challenges to the Republic of Moldova's integration into the CSDP. After all, the CSDP is heavily reliant on peacekeeping. Thus, the more participation an army has in such missions, the more interoperable it will become with European armies (Boyer & S. Lindley-French, 2007). While Moldova's contribution to the CSDP began in 2014, as a constitutionally neutral state, its contribution has been marginal, with a total of eight experts provided to just two EU missions prior to 2020 (Dobrescu, 2023).

Moldova's overall involvement in peacekeeping missions has been relatively limited. Since 2003, Moldova has only contributed 77 servicemen to UN-led missions to date and only 10 servicemen are currently involved in these missions (Moldovan Ministry of Defence, n.d.). By contrast, Luxembourg, the EU member state with the closest military capabilities to Moldova (World Firepower Index, 2024), has deployed 1500 soldiers in peacekeeping operations since its first peacekeeping mission in Yugoslavia in 1992 (Luxembourg Chronicle, 2022).

The Moldovan National Army has remained in a perpetual state of weakness for a variety of reasons. Notably, until its last presidential and legislative elections, Moldova was ruled by Russophiles (Borodin, 2023). As a result, over the last decade, the Moldovan government did not allocate any funds towards procuring military equipment (Borodin, 2023).

Clearly, in pursuing enhanced interoperability with European armed forces, the Moldovan National Army will require significant domestic investment and foreign aid, as it currently occupies the position of the third least powerful military in the world (World Firepower Index, 2024). Given the country's geographical proximity to Russia and its potential significance within the CSDP, the National Army's overarching weaknesses can be considered concerning from an EU perspective (Dobrescu, 2023).

Looking at the needs of the National Army, urgent acquisitions are necessary. For instance, one such area is in air defence capabilities (Borodin, 2023). Due to the country's proximity to the war in Ukraine, the risk of stray rockets and debris entering its airspace has increased substantially (Costiță & Vulcan, 2023).

At any rate, 90 per cent of Moldova's equipment is Soviet-made, a potential obstacle for enhanced interoperability with a Western-style army. Although Moldova has benefitted from military donations, such as Piranha 3Hs from Germany, strategically planning future acquisitions is key in the long term, especially as the National Army decries the lack of vehicles such as tanks, aircraft, or helicopters (Borodin, 2023).

Additionally, the army desperately needs new training and housing facilities. Due to the chronic lack of funding, all the Moldovan National Army's housing and training facilities were built during Soviet times, without the necessary training and housing facilities an army which would want to be interoperable with other European defence forces should have. Thus, in terms of training facilities, the Moldovan Army needs to modernise its target practice courses and its ammunition storage facilities (Infotag, 2019; U.S. Embassy in Moldova, 2017). Moreover, everyday facilities are in desperate need of modernisation, including housing, barracks, canteens, medical facilities, and conference and study rooms for military personnel (Infotag, 2019; U.S. Embassy in Moldova, 2017).

Foreign aid has been used as a tool to facilitate enhanced interoperability with European military counterparts. In recent years, Moldova has received substantial support from the EU to enhance its defence capabilities. Notably, in June 2022, the EU adopted a €40 million initiative aimed at bolstering various aspects of the Moldovan Armed Forces. This funding aims to strengthen logistics, mobility, command and control, cyber-defence, unmanned aerial reconnaissance, and tactical communications units. The support extends beyond financial aid to include the provision of essential non-lethal equipment, supplies, and services, accompanied by relevant training on equipment usage, which is interoperable with other European armies (European Commission, n.d. - b).

Ultimately, the frozen conflict over the Dniester River remains of utmost importance in the region's defence landscape. The existence of the breakaway region of Transnistria on the territory of the Republic of Moldova will prove a security challenge to further European integration, especially considering the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria. Although multiple scenarios have been proposed for Moldova's accession by EU officials, including joining the EU without Transnistria (Ostiller, 2023), this issue presents Moldova with an additional hurdle along similar lines to the situation presented in the Republic of Cyprus. Although Moldova does not have a stated strategy for its European integration and Transnistria, the Moldovan authorities have repeatedly emphasised

their hope for the people of Transnistria to be lured into believing in a European future by what would be an inevitable increase in the quality of life on the right bank of the Dniester as the Republic of Moldova's controlled territory furthers its European integration (Ceban, 2023).

Georgia

The Georgian Army's approach to becoming interoperable with European armies differs drastically from the Moldovan case, as it is arguably already further down the path of increased interoperability with European armies due to several efforts of the Georgian government.

Firstly, Georgia has taken significant steps in becoming interoperable by contributing to peacekeeping operations, proving it has the experience to take part in such operations should it become a member of the EU. Per capita, the Georgian Defence Forces (GDF) were the biggest contributor to the NATO mission in Afghanistan (VICE News, 2022) and, until 2008, Georgia was the third-largest contributor to the NATO mission in Iraq (Hamilton, 2009). Furthermore, while Georgia began to contribute to the CSDP at the same time as Moldova in 2014, its contribution rose significantly in a short period of time. It has contributed a force of 35 soldiers to EUTM RCA, which has so far conducted 12 rotations and it is planned that they will stay until the mission is concluded. Georgia also contributed to other missions, such as a liaison officer with EUTM Mali and a civilian HR officer in the EUAM to Ukraine (Dobrescu, 2023).

Secondly, when it comes to the professionalisation of the military, Georgia's strategy was to seek out foreign help in order to carry out training programs. Thus, the Georgian Army benefited from United States-led military personnel training, enabling them to benefit from pre-deployment training for Iraq, maintenance training for their helicopter fleet, and professional military educational training (Dobrescu, 2023). Most of these programs have been taken over by the Georgian military, demonstrating to the present day a significant degree of training, as GDF personnel are not only able to learn from but also teach professionalisation programs. These training programs, even though carried out by the United States, prove the extent of Georgian military operational readiness, as it has allowed them to operate NATO-grade military equipment and move beyond the exclusive use of Soviet-made systems (Dobrescu, 2023).

Not withstanding, considering the current military equipment the Georgian Army has at its disposal, full interoperability with European counterparts remains a distant reality. Along with its non-existent navy, most of the equipment destroyed in the conflict with Russia in 2008 has yet to be replaced (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2015). One of the reasons for this was an inefficient allocation of funds by the Georgian Ministry of Defence (Барабановет al., 2018). Despite a considerable percentage of its GDP being allocated for defence in the years since 2007 (The World Bank, 2022) and other budgetary measures such as the dismantling of the navy to concentrate funds for other land-based efforts (Барабановет al., 2018), Georgia has spent a considerable amount of its defence budget on projects which have been too ambitious and subsequently remain unfinished. For instance, one of the first post-war measures Georgia took was the construction of a series of fortifications around Tbilisi to protect the capital from attacks from South Ossetia.

This initiative absorbed a considerable amount of funds and has stalled arms acquisitions. Furthermore, in 2012, after a change of government, funding for the project stalled, rendering it unfinished to this day (Барабановet al., 2018).

Ukraine

By the end of 2021, Ukraine had implemented a fresh military doctrine to align with its 2020 National Security Strategy (Kuzio, 2020). This initiative entailed an overall organisational restructuring of the Ukrainian military, with the creation of new commands and the distinct appointment of a new position of chief of the general staff from the role of the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Before the outbreak of the war, Ukraine's military capabilities appeared limited compared to Russia, its eastern neighbour. The country's armed forces consisted of approximately 200,000 personnel, boasting around 2,000 tanks and a similar number of armoured vehicles, in addition to 146 aircraft and 42 attack helicopters (Sanders, 2023). Additionally, due to the Russian annexation of Crimea and the relocation of Ukrainian naval headquarters to Odesa, significant negative changes occurred, as the navy consisted of one principal surface combatant, 12 patrol and coastal combatants, one countermeasure ship, two amphibious platforms, and 8 support vessels with a notable complete lack of submarines (Martin, 2022). Despite Kyiv's efforts to modernise its defence infrastructure, most equipment continued to date back to the Soviet era.

Following Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukraine has continuously received essential military support, encompassing a diverse array of equipment such as small arms, artillery vehicles, tanks, spare parts, and ammunition. Notably, NATO member countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Poland, Germany, Canada, and France, took the lead as major contributors (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022; The Federal Government of Germany, 2024; Mills, 2024). Foreign aid extended beyond material provisions to include training initiatives, a key domain, as in the initial phase of the conflict, Ukrainian forces encountered challenges in effectively integrating Western-supplied weaponry. This hurdle stemmed from a lack of training among Ukrainian troops in operating Western equipment, hindering their ability to proficiently operate the newly acquired systems and armaments. Recognising this issue, fourteen countries have actively participated in contributing to the training of Ukraine's armed forces (Mills, 2024).

Notably, the EU Military Assistance Mission in Support of Ukraine (EUMAM UA) focuses on enhancing the capabilities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) to safeguard the country's territorial integrity (EEAS, 2022). Its primary goal is to prevent and deter military offensives by Russia and other potential aggressors. In practical terms, EUMAM UA conducts training sessions for Ukrainian military personnel, covering basic, advanced, and specialised skills such as medical assistance, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear substances and explosives defence (CBRN), demining, logistics, communication, maintenance, and repair. The mission also provides junior leadership training at the section, squad and platoon level up to the company level, as well as incorporating operational training for companies, battalions, and brigades in collective manoeuvres and tactics up to the battalion level. Additionally, EUMAM UA provides guidance on planning, preparing, and conducting live fire exercises. Notably, all mission activities take place on EU territory (EEAS, 2022).

To date, 24 EU member states have contributed to the mission, while the equipment necessary for both lethal and non-lethal purposes is supplied by member states and funded through the European Peace Facility (EEAS, 2022).

Despite facing disadvantages, the UAF have effectively repelled and counteracted Russian forces across various regions (Congressional Research Service, 2023). Throughout the conflict, the UAF has displayed adaptability and successfully incorporated Western security assistance into its military strategies. While the UAF's command structure can still be characterised as centralised, remnants of Soviet-style command persist, particularly among officers educated under Soviet doctrine. Nevertheless, presently the UAF exhibits increased flexibility at unit and junior levels, adjusting operations to changing circumstances (Congressional Research Service, 2023). The integration of Western equipment into new and existing units has bolstered capabilities and survivability, with a focus on urgent needs such as air defence, armoured mobility, artillery, and long-range fires, including the upgrade and equipment of both new and existing units (Congressional Research Service, 2023).

By the conclusion of the conflict and with Ukraine's accession to the EU, the Ukrainian Army is poised to emerge as a more well-equipped force, prepared to fulfil its obligations under the CSDP and actively participate in peacekeeping efforts. Despite possessing limited military capabilities before the conflict, the substantial military support since received by Ukraine has played a pivotal role in the war efforts. The ongoing training is crucial in enhancing the capabilities of the UAF through comprehensive training and guidance on various skills. With this substantial support, Ukraine is well-positioned to meet its CSDP obligations, which represents a significant transformation from its pre-war state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present analysis examines the implications of EU enlargement towards Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia for European security and military cooperation. The analysis underscores the transformative effects of this expansion, particularly on defence capabilities and military interoperability.

The EU's strategic shift towards enlargement, sparked by geopolitical developments such as Russia's war in Ukraine, highlights a departure from previous hesitation. The EU now considers enlargement as a crucial tool for safeguarding its security interests. This shift has prompted a re-evaluation of defence and security frameworks, emphasising the interconnectedness of European military forces. Moldova's journey towards EU membership faces significant challenges, especially in the realm of defence as the National Army requires substantial modernisation. While recent EU funding has sought to enhance Moldova's defence capabilities, addressing urgent needs like air defence and equipment modernisation is essential. The frozen conflict over Transnistria further complicates Moldova's path to European integration, posing a unique challenge that requires careful consideration.

The UAF, despite its limited military capabilities before the conflict with Russia, has undergone significant transformations. With substantial support from NATO and EU, the UAF has displayed adaptability and effectiveness even in a full-scale war scenario. Previous experience in peacekeeping missions, ongoing training initiatives, and the integration of Western equipment position Ukraine to fulfil its CSDP obligations post-accession, marking a notable shift from its pre-war state.

Georgia has actively pursued military reforms guided by the objective of interoperability with European armies since the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. The reduction and professionalisation of its military, along with contributions to foreign missions, demonstrate Georgia's commitment to aligning with European defence standards. Despite limitations in military equipment, Georgia's emphasis on training and contributions to CSDP missions sets it on a positive path in the enlargement process.

In essence, the EU's enlargement policy serves not only as a geopolitical strategy but also as a catalyst for transformative national army-building efforts and their evaluation against European defence standards. The analysis highlights the complexities and challenges each candidate country's army faces, emphasising the importance of tailoring approaches to address their specific needs. As these nations progress towards EU membership, their military capabilities will play a crucial role in shaping the future landscape of European security and defence cooperation.

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