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AGENTS AND LEARNING IN FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING: THE EU'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE MOLDOVA PROTRACTED CONFLICT, 2002-2019

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KATERINA KAPODISTRIA
CANDIDATE NUMBER: 1030162

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To personal and intellectual growth,

and to everyone who was part of this journey

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to analyze how the EU learns, and in particular, how the EU learns in its foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts. Through a case study analysis of Moldova's protracted conflict with the Transnistrian de facto breakaway state between 2002-2019, I examine the conditions through which learning is facilitated and leads to policy change in the EU. Using my original Theoretical Model of Learning – an adapted model building on previous learning theories looking at learning as a constitutive process – I analyze the adjustment of goals, instruments, and processes in policy to examine how the EU learns, who are the agents involved, and where learning takes place. A qualitative analysis is conducted of 150 official documents and 8 elite interviews. The project identifies conditions under which learning and policy change impact EU foreign policy towards Moldova, and how it has evolved between 2002-2019 in diffusing lessons learned from the individual, to the organizational levels. I argue theories of learning thus far have failed to account not only for the constituent levels of policy reflection informing the learning process, but also in illustrating the nuanced forms in which learning can manifest, often in reaction to external political shocks. I assert the prevalent conditions impacting EU learning are twofold: The presence of ***agents of change*** *on-the-ground where policy diffusion is buttressed; and engagement of local agents through bestowment of* ***issue ownership****, as it balances policy learning entrenchment at the organizational level.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Association Agreement
ATP	Autonomous Trade Preference
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
DFID	Department for International Development
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG Trade	Directorate-General for Trade
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighborhood Partnership Instrument
EU	European Union
EUBAM	EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine
GLR	Green Line Regulation
H1	Hypothesis 1
H2	Hypothesis 2
H3	Hypothesis 3
MFA	Micro-Financial Assistance
MP	Mobility Partnership
MS	Member State(s)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PD	Protocol Decision
PSRM	Party for Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TACIS	Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange
TML	Theoretical Model of Learning
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
UN	United Nations
WG	Working Group
WNIS	Western Newly Independent States

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When politicians think back to the European Union's (EU, formerly known as the 'European Community' until 1993) 2004 enlargement round, a common thread is to regard the historic event as one of courage and promise for the institution's future. European Commission (EC) Enlargement Commissioners Günther Verheugen and Olli Rehn respectively regarded it as an "obligation" (European Commission 2001b: 1), and "a matter of the EU's enlightened self-interest" (European Commission 2009). The simultaneous accessions of 10 new Member States (MS) – Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia – was like no other accession round the EU had experienced before, both in scope and character. It not only meant the extension of EU identity to almost 500 million people, but also called into question the EU's weight in the world.

EU foreign policy was also changed indefinitely, where its political rigor and power *vis-à-vis* its foreign policy was now under scrutiny. While in some ways the enlargement refined the EU's oft-resembling 'security strategy' by stabilizing a large swathe of Central and Eastern European states, it also heightened concerns over EU security further (Blockmans 2014). It imported the protracted conflict over Cyprus, thus heightening security tensions with Turkey, and the Baltics' and Poland's tumultuous relationship with Russia put the EU's stability of its territory into the spotlight. I define protracted conflicts as states which are frozen in a divided stalemate, whereby the situation is characterized by neither war nor peace, and the status quo is maintained following separation without the immediate threat of violence (Lynch 2002). Along with importing such situations, the EU's role as mediator and its capabilities for crisis management were also being developed, as an enlargement of this scale meant it also inherited a number of protracted conflicts in its Eastern neighborhood. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, several

conflicts erupted in the post-Soviet states, leading to separation of metropolitan and *de facto* independent breakaway states (such as Moldova and Transnistria, Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia and South Ossetia, etc.) Particularly given these developments, learning from experience and acquiring knowledge from these new MS in moving forward with foreign policy-making was a crucially opportunistic moment.

Cyprus' MS accession as a divided island was thus a perplexing foreign policy move (Kyris 2015). Since 1974, Cyprus has been divided between the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots; the former occupying the Southern two-thirds of the island, known as the internationally recognized Republic of Cyprus (RoC), and the latter occupying the Northern third as the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), recognized only by Turkey. Following the 1974 invasion of the island by Turkish military troops, the country has been divided by a United Nations (UN) buffer zone, and little progress has been made in official negotiations to resolve its protracted conflict. When accession negotiations were opened between the EU and the RoC in 1998, a major cornerstone of the EU's foreign policy in Cyprus was to promote accession as a catalyst for conflict settlement through conditionality. However, following a deterioration of relations between the Cypriot sides throughout the 1990s, a decision was made at the 1999 Helsinki Summit of the European Council to lift the settlement condition for Cyprus' accession. The EU believed that by no longer requiring a settlement prior to the RoC's accession, Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots would be more willing to reach a compromise and abandon their intransigence to a settlement. However, the opposite occurred. The Greek-Cypriots have since flouted the EU's expectations of looking constructively for a peaceful solution, and instead have used their EU membership as leverage against both Turkey and the Turkish-Cypriots to encourage a settlement along Greek-Cypriot lines (Tocci 2002: 119). Particularly since the 2004 enlargement, the EU's *modus operandi* of foreign policy – especially in dealing with the Cyprus and neighborhood protracted conflicts – has

largely been based on civilian crisis-management, financial assistance, and political conditionality (Popescu 2011: 37). Following the Cyprus experience, however, few positive lessons can be derived from how foreign policy-making was conducted.

Despite this, the EU nevertheless committed itself to taking a more active role in facilitating conflict settlement in the neighborhood. In its 2003 *Communication on a Wider Europe*, it asserts:

> Greater EU involvement in crisis management in response to specific regional threats would be a tangible demonstration of the EU's willingness to assume a greater share of the burden of conflict resolution in the neighboring countries (European Commission 2003: 12).

A pertinent question still remains: how and why does the EU concern itself with conflict management? Visoka & Doyle (2016) and Scalera & Wiegand (2018) would argue a strategic security approach, where in its Eastern neighborhood, foreign policy-making is buttressed in enacting a positive transformation agenda in order to maintain stability and security, and keep the post-Soviet states increasingly Western-looking. In a secondary normative endeavor to export the European model to its backyard, it is inevitable the EU would be incentivized to take a closer look at their protracted conflicts. Given this, one cannot help but think of the EU's failed Cyprus settlement, and what policy lessons it could derive from its resident protracted conflict in applying them to the neighborhood. Particularly, it bears asking if the EU learns at all. And if so, *how* does it learn?

This leads to the thesis' central research question: *Under what conditions does learning impact EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts?* I expect learning to most likely take place in protracted conflicts for similar reasons to the EU's motivations for involvement in conflict mediation. That is, managing conflict in the neighborhood is

in European security's best interests, and if policy learning is at all directly proportional to policy *change*, further progress can be achieved in promoting positive transformation in the region. The theoretical landscape on policy learning is wide and varied, with little consensus on precisely in which aspects of foreign policy learning is grounded. Some scholars assert learning is derived from networks comprised of both state and non-state actors at the local level driving policy ideas upwards (Sabatier 1987, 1988; Heclo 1974), while others argue learning leads to policy change at the organizational level through imitation of best practices (Rose 1991). With a slew of actors all pursuing different ends within the institutional complexity of protracted conflicts, pinpointing the center of learning and policy-making is even more difficult. In their discrepancy, some frameworks operationalize learning as the deliberate adjustment of policy *goals* (Hall 1988, 1993), while others view learning through the evaluation of policy *instruments* or *processes* (Heclo 1974). In short, our understanding of learning's influence on policy lacks substantial clarity, especially when scholars construct arguments of varying origin while employing the same term to describe them.

This thesis thus calls for a refinement of learning theories, not only to account for the highly dynamic environments within which learning takes place, but also to bridge some of the gaps through which learning is differently interpreted and utilized. I undertake this by constructing the Theoretical Model of Learning (TML); my original contribution which adapts existing policy learning theories and builds on gaps left behind. Whereas previous theories have attempted to capture one element of policy learning in the process, thus reducing learning to a static and linear mechanism, the TML is a *constitutive* and non-sequential model capturing the different phases of learning as part of the same holistic process. While I do not assert the TML is the only manner in which learning can manifest, I argue it appropriately adjusts the theoretical foci when analyzing learning in foreign policy-making. It pertains to mapping learning at various stages of policy diffusion, whereby policy learning is transferred

from the individual to the organizational levels. Depending on the actor interactions at each phase (agents on-the-ground up to policy-makers at the top of the EU's hierarchy), the learning foci change from *goals*, to *instruments*, to *processes*.

I empirically examine this through a qualitative analysis of the EU's foreign policy-making in Moldova's[1] protracted conflict with Transnistria[2]; a Russia-backed breakaway *de facto* state which declared independence from Moldova in 1992 following the fall of the Soviet Union and a brief civil war with Moldovan authorities. The reasons for choosing Moldova are twofold. Firstly, both Moldova and Transnistria are the most developed democratically compared to their Eastern counterparts, and the European Parliament has reported Transnistria to be the most open entity for cooperation with the international community (European Parliament 2016: 19). Secondly, scholars have even drawn similarities between the conflicts in Cyprus and Moldova, in that a dispute over security has long been an impediment for settlement (De Waal 2018; see also Akgün 2013). My temporal scope covers the 2002-2019 period, beginning with negotiations on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) – the EU's primary foreign policy vehicle in the Eastern neighborhood – and ending with the present day. Examining nearly two decades of policy-making enables me to appropriately capture numerous learning phases with sufficient documented progress on each, as well as pinpoint cornerstones where policy evaluation and (re-) formulation occurred following learning.

Through an analysis of 150 official documents and 8 semi-structured elite interviews, my argument is based on three hypotheses, discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Hypothesis 1 (H1) tests for the TML's phases pertaining to interactions between individuals and agents of change on-the-ground to be the most pivotal in driving policy learning in Moldova in 2002-2007. Hypothesis 2 (H2) expects the 2008-

[1] Officially the Republic of Moldova, hereby referred to as 'Moldova'.
[2] Officially the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR), or Transdniestria; hereby referred to as 'Transnistria'.

2014 period of EU foreign policy-making in Moldova to be influenced by a transitional stage of learning, where adjustment of policy goals and greater issue ownership by Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities sees policy learning diffused to the organizational level. Finally, hypothesis 3 (H3) tests for the TML's policy reflection phase in Moldova during 2015-2019, where learning is assumed to be fully entrenched and formalized at the institutional level following evaluation of the process in Transnistria. The analysis is divided into these year groupings to account for major EU policy-setting milestones and learning cycles. This thesis provides empirical evidence that **agents of change** and **ownership** of settlement issues are common denominators at all stages of the learning process, in that they are the key drivers of policy diffusion from local to organizational levels.

The structure proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 provides a review of the academic debate on theories of learning and policy change. Chapter 3 illustrates the TML as the theoretical framework through which learning in EU foreign policy-making in Moldova is analyzed, and underlines its strengths and shortcomings in being applied to the Moldova case. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological decisions made, including data collection, how key variables like learning and EU foreign policy-making are operationalized, and case selection strategies. Chapter 5 provides the first of three parts of the empirical analysis, covering the 2002-2007 period of EU learning in Moldova and Transnistria, drawing on the ENP as well as the failed Cyprus settlement in informing the learning mechanisms at play. Chapter 6 examines the 2008-2014 period, where key areas of policy are scrutinized for learning within the context of the EU's democratization promotion and rule of law implementation. Chapter 7 analyzes the final 2015-2019 period and tests for observations of policy learning and reflection, particularly within the context of Moldova's deterioration of anti-corruption standards. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes by summarizing the arguments made, as well as their theoretical implications, and posits recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter serves to situate the research question into the broader context of learning in the academic field, EU foreign policy, and how lesson learning is observed within these processes. Particularly, it is important to understand the following: How do lessons learned affect policy change? Even more so, can change be observed *without* learning? Defining the ways in which learning is conceptualized is a necessary starting point. The differing understandings ought to first be disaggregated in order to successfully operationalize the varying learning approaches in policy analysis. Different authors tackling 'lesson learning' construct their arguments with differing notions of the concept in mind, while simultaneously employing the same term to describe them (Bennett & Howlett 1992: 276), hence I aim to disentangle them.

The structure is as follows. Firstly, I define my understanding of learning as it is informed through existing theories in the field, while also drawing on the competing conceptualizations to highlight learning's discrepancy in academia. I then widen the theoretical scope by looking at Epistemic Communities and Mediation Theory as alternative explanations in understanding *how* institutions learn, as well as *where* learning occurs. All theories of learning are illustrated in 'The Learning Matrix' (see Figure 1) in order to visually demonstrate the disparity in how scholars have thus far defined policy learning.

2. 1 COMPETING UNDERSTANDINGS OF LEARNING

The significance of lesson learning in foreign policy-making remains largely under-researched in the academic literature, and the two are often instead discussed separately. That is to say, little scholarly attention has been given to the interplay between learning and policy-making, whether it be at the national or supranational

levels. Zito & Schout (2009) argue that learning theories ought to better capture the 'micro-processes' of policy change, which have been largely neglected by "macro integration processes" such as intergovernmentalism (Pomorska 2015). Key theories of learning in the field range from focus on agent networks and the interactions between them on-the-ground (Sabatier 1987, 1988; Heclo 1974), to learning manifested as imitation of best practice at the organizational level (Rose 1991). Despite not agreeing on precise sources and mechanisms of learning, all understanding fall broadly into two distinct, yet inextricably linked categories: Evidence-based Approaches to learning; and Value-based Approaches to learning, illustrated graphically in 'The Learning Matrix' (see Figure 1).

An Evidence-based Approach directs attention to the organizational level of the entity in question, whereby learning's primary drivers are political power and improvement. For example, Heclo's 'political learning' focuses on knowledge accumulation and experience in driving policy change, where the adjustment of the learning *process* is the primary objective, and is buttressed in evidence of how successfully (or not) policies are executed. Equally, Rose's 'lesson drawing' also pertains to learning at the organizational level, however is driven by imitation from best practices and through evaluation *ex post*. Within these understandings, learning is thus an instrumental endeavor, where the adjustment of both *instruments* and *processes* are imperative to achieving effective policy diffusion to the institutional level. Alternatively, Value-based Approaches direct attention to the local level and to interactions between individuals, or 'agents of change', where learning instead occurs to confirm individual policy preferences. Sabatier's 'advocacy coalitions' and Hall's 'social learning' are rooted in gradual learning through acquired knowledge and interactions between individuals. Feedback loops are integral to this process, as well as how links are established between the state, civil society, and international organizations. Ultimately, it pertains to knowledge advancement through social interaction at the local level.

Furthermore, clarifying the distinction between policy learning and policy change is equally significant, as it contextualizes how these terms are understood throughout the analysis. Policy learning pertains to adjusting understandings and beliefs based in the realm of public policy, where experiential mechanisms informing how courses of policy action should be taken. Understandings of learning vary largely, as I demonstrate in the following sub-sections. However, learning is not always conducive to policy change, as learning can constitute one of several factors influencing policy change. Little research exists on learning mechanisms in their effect on policy change, even more so when unpicking the *different* changes which can occur in policy, such as objectives, processes, or actors involved. The concepts are ideationally distinct, and thus must be taken into consideration in further examinations of the interplay between them.

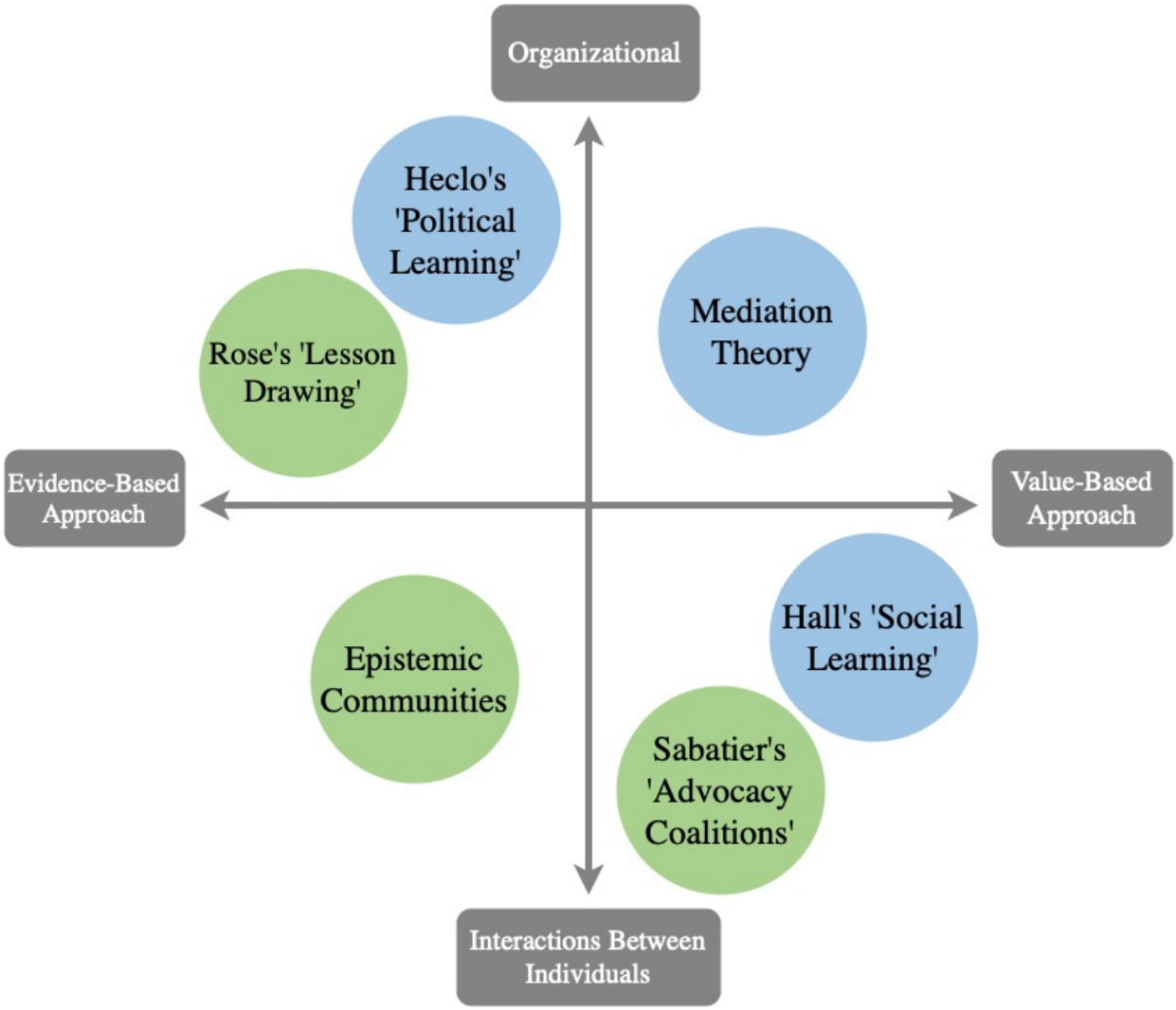


Figure 1: The Learning Matrix (Built by author and adapted from Tamtik & Sá 2013)

2. 1. 1 HECLO'S 'POLITICAL LEARNING'

One of the most prominent thinkers in the learning space, Hugh Heclo's (1974) conceptualization of learning effects on policy-making concerned the utilization and acquisition of knowledge. He argued that "politics finds its sources not only in power but also in uncertainty – men collectively wondering what to do…Policy-making is a form of collective puzzlement on society's behalf" (Heclo 1974: 305). In discussing the object of learning, he asserted to look beyond information and analysis. In fact,

learning is about both the *substance* and *process* of policy, as he asserts that power indeed does matter; policy-makers are not only interested in *what* efforts were made by past governments, but also in *how* they were executed, inducing change buttressed in response to external stimuli (Heclo 1974: 306 & 310). Ultimately, mechanisms of learning are significantly shaped by social interaction, "the organizations (the teams), and institutions" (Dunlop et al. 2018: 7).

Moreover, what conditions does the literature identify as facilitators to policy idea transference from one system to another? Heclo emphasized an instrumental conditioning to learning, where policy-makers conduct their actions in response to social concerns and pressures, where "what one learns depends on what one does" (Heclo 1974: 316). That is to say, policy-makers study and therefore criticize past initiatives, whereby lessons learned from the past are considered in policy-making *ex ante*; a phenomenon known in cognitive psychology as 'groupthink'. Groupthink pertains to groups who make sub-optimal choices fueled by a particular agenda, and more often than not valuing coherence over rational thought; simply put, groups will think alike because they have been trained to do so (Janis 1972). I would argue Heclo most strongly subscribes to this belief of social effects on learning, as he argues policy change is a natural development in response to interest group pressures and growth in administrative expertise (Heclo 1974: 284-285). While these informal avenues are by no means recent phenomena, they nonetheless constitute a long-standing dimension of European politics more broadly. In reference to an EC 2001 White Paper on European governance, which aimed to build a more structured relationship with civil society, Christiansen et al. (2004: 2) argue the following:

> The creation of policy networks linking Commission officials with representatives of interest groups and NGOs also aided the Commission in gauging the likely reception of future EU policies 'on the ground'.

In short, learning constitutes instrumental mechanisms, driving policy change based on experience and sourced from multiple different avenues of information, not merely on the part of government. Heclo ultimately argues there to be a connection between political and instrumental mechanisms of learning, where drive for policy change is informed by several avenues of information, both through formal and informal processes vying to influence policy-making. Nevertheless, a focus remains on the power to influence policy-making at the *organizational* level. This poses some issues as the relevance of actors on-the-ground and interactions between agents remains unclear.

2. 1. 2 HALL'S 'SOCIAL LEARNING'

In order to address some of the gaps left behind, this review turns to Peter Hall (1988, 1993), who approaches his conceptualization of learning from a similarly instrumental definition and perspective, whereby he argues that "learning serves the object of better goal attainment by governments" (Bennett & Howlett 1992: 276). Hall (1988: 6) states that learning constitutes a deliberate attempt of adjusting policy *goals*, whereby new information on policy can lead to better attainment of the desired ends. Similarly to Heclo's vision of learning, he views actors to be involved in the "powering of knowledge" (Stone 2001: 10), and it is an interesting take, particularly as it departs from a state-centered institutional focus and places importance on how ideas can link state, civil society, and international organizations (Stone 2001: 10).

While Heclo's and Hall's approaches are buttressed in Evidence-based and Value-based camps respectively, they nonetheless overlap in placing agency of change at lower levels in the institutional hierarchy. This is especially significant in building my theory in Chapter 3, where I argue learning mechanisms driven from agents at the local level are pivotal in the institutional learning process. Nevertheless, theoretical

gaps remain, particularly on the question of 'feedback loops'– processes of policy evaluation (and potentially policy *change*) following learning. As Deutsche (1966) argued, organizations are 'webs of communication,' whose core functions pertain to responding to signals and events, transmit information, and manage feedback from several sources. In short, learning pertains to an institution's capacity to pursue changing *goals* as well as *processes;* hence instrumental learning.

2. 1. 3 SABATIER'S 'ADVOCACY COALITIONS'

Following on from Hall's Value-based Approach to learning through 'social learning', Paul Sabatier's (1987, 1988) 'advocacy coalitions' are equally imperative to discuss in refining the schema on learning. Similarly to Heclo's notion of loosely defined issue networks, Sabatier's advocacy coalitions constitute a variety of both state and non-state actors such as journalists, researchers and policy analysts, who play important roles in generating as well as disseminating policy information (Sabatier 1988: 131). These typically involve feedback loops, as well as an increased awareness and knowledge of the problem parameters and the factors affecting them. In short, it pertains to people "who share…a set of basic values, causal assumptions, and problem perceptions – and who show a non-trivial degree of coordinated activity over time" (Sabatier 1987: 660). Ultimately, learning is about a much broader network of individuals and organizations interacting with each other. However, this bears questioning: Is policy a product of firms' and states' best interests, or is it instead a product of sub-optimal policy choices emulating those of a 'groupthink'?

In an argument first put forth by Weaver (1986), and later taken up by Hood (2010), decision-makers and policy implementors are primarily motivated to emulate positive examples of successful policies, and equally, engage in 'blame avoidance' by avoiding negative examples of policies which failed elsewhere. That is, decision-

makers undergo an examination of their own and other governments' practices and draw lessons on evaluating future policy (Howlett 2012: 541). One common thread in the literature on learning and policy success and failure prevails; that successes and failures are purely relativistic and interpretive, and bears consideration when undertaking an empirical analysis of these mechanisms. Regarding policy failure, studies have examined which factors may influence their success in primary instances, and which may inhibit success in some contexts, but not others. Robustness of policy design is largely discussed with regards to policies' ability to adapt to a gamut of foreseeable circumstances (see Moynihan 2009), as well as policy resilience in dealing with opposing forces (see Walker et al. 2010; Capano & Woo 2017). In short, however, it is significant to flag up the competing mechanisms of policy-making that informs an institution's capacity for learning when conducting policy-making.

2. 1. 4 ROSE'S 'LESSON DRAWING'

In similar fashion to Heclo's concern with policy evaluation, Richard Rose's (1991, 1993) 'lesson drawing' implies passing a judgement on a program implemented elsewhere, where learning and evaluation are inextricably linked. Defined as an "action-oriented conclusion" (Rose 1991: 7), it is more an evaluation of an initiative taken from within its own context, and hence, implies a judgement about treating it in the same manner somewhere else. Typically, 'lesson drawing' depends on external observation; theoretically, if another country is doing better in dealing with specific issues, positive judgements are made. However, if it seen to be doing worse, lessons drawn are based on what not to do in the future. Rose asserts that, within this process, agents of change at the local level are held responsible for any learning undertaken (Rose 1991: 3). He states that learning and the acquisition of new knowledge occurs as a reaction to discontent with the established status quo, rather than representing a feat governments would typically pursue. Ultimately, a distinction ought to be made

between *evaluation* and *lesson drawing*; whereas evaluation of an existing implemented initiative or program concludes with making either positive or negative judgements about its course or conduct, lesson drawing evaluates *whether* a successful programme can be transferred from a context or setting to another (Rose 1991: 7).

Overall, the ambiguity surrounding various definitions of policy learning is significant, as scholars construct their arguments with differing notions of learning in mind, while simultaneously employing the same term to describe them (Bennett & Howlett 1992: 276). Existing concepts of learning and policy change as they stand are not systematic; they document learning, but are inconsistent in identifying *where* learning takes place, *what* is learned, and with what effects (Dunlop & Radaelli 2017: 305). For Hall, 'social learning' pertained to taking part in the policy-making process, while Heclo's 'political learning' involved policy-makers reacting to external policy environments. As the environment changes, so do policies if they are not to fail (Dunlop & Radaelli 2017: 277). In failing to reach cohesion on what constitutes learning, operationalization of the term in further empirical analyses becomes a challenge. Therefore, I argue that in order to successfully operationalize the varying learning approaches, these differing concepts ought to first be disaggregated. Without coherent parameters, not only does it have consequences on the efficiency of policy-making to begin with, but also on successfully identifying the *outcome* of learning. In the literature, this outcome is most often captured by the proportional relationship between learning and policy change, "but actually there are many more possible outcomes, and some involve normative issues that haven't always been prominent in the field" (Dunlop et al. 2018: 2). In beginning to rectify this, and in discussing learning in EU foreign policy-making particularly, we have to successfully bridge these gaps in understanding.

2. 2 CONCEPTUALIZING LEARNING IN EU FOREIGN POLICY

In order to adequately analyze learning in European foreign policy, our definition needs to evolve with our understanding of the context in which foreign policy operates in the first place. Numerous scholars of European foreign policy and Foreign Policy Analysis (see Smith 2010; Tonra 2000; Nuttall 2000) have argued European foreign policy's multifaceted nature yields for an increasingly complex and inextricably linked definition of what constitutes 'foreign' policy. Davis (2014: 174) defines European foreign policy as:

> EU principles directed at the wider world; EU policies and practice deriving from those principles and directed at contributing to change (positive, negative or neutral) within the multiple layers of the external environment, which include: international institutions; official (national) political-legal institutions and security structures; civil society and official or unofficial structures at the community level; bilateral and other external actors.

European foreign policy encompasses elements from Foreign Policy Analysis, International Relations theories, and the study of European integration, thus these several fields are compounded into establishing a critical link between what is nowadays deemed as *EU* foreign policy and *European* foreign policy. It has become too difficult to disaggregate the two from one another. Between the EU's several enlargement rounds over the previous decades, expanding its *acquis politique*, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), and other region-specific policy initiatives such as the ENP or the Eastern Partnership (EaP), extensive overlap has occurred in bringing together 'national' and 'EU/European' foreign policy (Smith 2010: 2). In addition, Smith (2010: 2) argues that the fact that non-EU MS are permitted to participate in some EU foreign policy institutions means it is important to include them in analyses of European

foreign policy. Thus going forward, the use of 'EU foreign policy' in subsequent chapters will also inherently be synonymous with 'European foreign policy.'

Furthermore, a distinction ought to be made when discussing learning in EU foreign policy. Particularly, how learning may differ depending on how issues are framed in the foreign policy sphere, and what kind of attention is directed to particular solutions. This especially pertains to answering the question on *who* learns in policy-making, particularly when speaking on the EU's multiple layers of hierarchical decision-making. This is a key challenge in identifying the EU's process of learning. As foreign policy is made through interactions and processes of exchange at the executive level of the MS, Sjursen (2011: 1089) argues that disaggregating decisions is complex, as key MS actors have limited autonomy and room for discretion. Even more so, it is important to identify the various ways in which learning takes place within the EU's role in the wider neighborhood; an immediate foreign policy responsibility beyond its borders. A crucial debate in European foreign policy studies have been the EU's role as mediator in its relations with third countries, and the contested and often questionable coherence of EU external action (see Meunier 2000; Thomas 2012). When speaking of the EU as 'mediator', I refer back to the distinction made in the introductory chapter. Not only does the EU view itself as a project of peace-building, but if also employing a security strategy approach, the EU is incentivized to act as mediator both within and outside its borders in order to ensure stability (Visoka & Doyle 2016; Scalera & Wiegand 2018). By assuming an effective mediator role in engaging in crisis management, the EU is able to promote a positive transformation agenda in securing the stability of its backyard.

Thus, it becomes significant to analyze other theoretical frameworks that may be better equipped in underpinning the EU's capacity to learn in its foreign policy. This is especially relevant in protracted conflicts, where there is not only a potentially higher need for effective mediation, but there is also an increased number of agents

involved in the policy-making process. While many analyses often treat the notion of mediation to be impacted *by* politics, there is insufficient discussion in how mediation may be *part* of politics, and foreign policy endeavors to be precise; a discussion is needed on mediation as a foreign policy *instrument* to be learned from (Touval 2003: 95). The following section examines Mediation Theory as a framework in exploring *how* and *where* learning take place.

2. 3 MEDIATION THEORY

Oran Young's (1967) *The Intermediaries* provides a starting point for looking into Mediation Theory, with the work of Touval (1982) and Rubin (1981) further building on his contributions. Mediation is defined as "a form of third-party intervention in conflict for the purpose of abating or resolving that conflict through negotiation" (Touval & Zartman 1985: 7), where mediation is an essentially *political* process. In developing its mediator profile, the EU aimed to bring a more coordinated and focused approach to its role, as exemplified in the Council of the EU's 2009 *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities*. The 2009 Concept built upon the lessons learned during the Aceh Peace Process[3], and soon became the benchmark with which mediation policy would thereby be referenced (Coibion 2017). During the early stages of the EU's evolution, integration was used a peace-building instrument in creating interdependence in the region (Stefanova 2006: 81), thus based on our contemporary understanding of European integration, it is linked to conflict resolution in a dual capacity.

Furthermore, many analyses of mediation do not see it as an integral component of foreign policy; instead, mediation is seen as an "autonomous activity that is impacted

[3] The Aceh Peace Process was an EU-lead mission in 2006 with a mandate to monitor and support the peace process in the Indonesian province of Aceh. The Aceh conflict is one of Asia's longest-running conflicts, and the mission was the first European Security and Defence Policy operation in Asia.

by politics but is not *part* of politics" (Touval 2003: 91). Despite some exceptions (see Bergmann & Niemann 2015; Brandenburg 2017), the literature has largely not followed the EU's growing position as an international mediating body. By viewing EU foreign policy and its capacity for learning through the lens of mediation, this allows us to reconcile two disciplines which have often been opposed, or at the very least been dismissive of one another (Coibion 2017: 5). The literature on international mediation and EU foreign policy have yet to be substantially harmonized, and thus bridging the two allows for stronger empirical assessments of the EU's foreign policy role in conflicts; contexts which I argue require a large amount of mediating capacities.

Overall, Mediation Theory helps in answering the question of *where* learning takes place, but it is still conceptually unclear *who* learns. In order to tackle this, I now examine Epistemic Communities as a theoretical framework in further unpicking learning, and particularly, where the source of policy innovation can be pinpointed. Epistemic Communities pertains to networks of powerful actors involved in the agenda-setting phase of policy processes (Dunlop 2017: 215). I discuss the pivotal role Epistemic Communities play in buttressing policy change, which in turn can lead to revealing the conditions which facilitate learning. While it yet remains empirically unknown if change in the EU's foreign policy can still take place without institutionalized learning, the conversation on Epistemic Communities sheds light on *who* may be internalizing these lessons in the first place.

2. 4 EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES

The study of Epistemic Communities follows the work of Ernst Haas (1964, 1992) and John Ruggie (1975), who argued the process of learning formed through *collective* interpretation highlighted an instrumental manner of deciphering *who* learns, *what* is learned, and *why*. First conceptualized by 'soft' Constructivists concerned with agency

in the field of International Relations, Epistemic Communities are "actors associated with the formulation of causal beliefs and the circumstances, resources, and mechanisms by which new ideas or policy doctrines get developed and influence the political processes" (Haas 2008: 792). The term was first coined to explain interest groups most likely to be found working on scientific issues of salience that can be applied to policy-oriented work, such as energy policy and environmental protection. Since then, it has become synonymous with groups of actors acting as principle vehicles in driving new ideas on policy and governance. Instead of conceptualizing Epistemic Communities as new units of analysis of international actors, they are best understood as vehicles for further theoretical development with regards to the creation of collective interpretation in policy and politics. In his 1988 presidential address to the International Studies Association, Robert Keohane expressed the need for a "reflective" approach to International Relations and its subsequent theories. He lamented the absence of research programs which illuminate the important issues of world politics (Adler & Haas 1992: 367). In response to this, one can argue Epistemic Communities offer the reflective response Keohane sought, where their impact on policy-making aims to erase the blurred boundary between domestic and international politics (Adler & Haas 1992: 367).

Epistemic Communities most closely align with Rose's (1991: 19) understanding of 'lesson drawing', where the acquisition of new knowledge and experiential learning can sometimes arise out of a state of discontent with the established status quo. While Epistemic Communities may have an influence on certain policy discussions, it is important to distinguish that political discussions will continue to take place on matters of difficult political nature, whereas in less divisive issue areas, Epistemic Communities may have a larger role in influencing policy diffusion to the institutional level (Zito 2001). Ultimately, while Epistemic Communities may be influential in persuading bureaucratic policy-makers to revise previously entrenched conceptions, the level to which policy-makers are receptive towards the information will be based

on their own perceived interests (Litfin 1994). In comparing Haas' Epistemic Communities to Sabatier's 'advocacy coalitions', the concept of Epistemic Communities has been unable to resolve the issues of public policy that 'advocacy coalitions' are better equipped to tackle. Zito (2001: 468) argues that Sabatier's more bounded focus on policy subsystems and ability to operationalize policy sectors grants the theory greater research impetus.

A question yet remains: how can Epistemic Communities develop our understanding of learning in EU foreign policy-making? Particularly, can they explain *who* learns in EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts? Following Dunlop's (2017) fourfold mode typology on policy learning, her final categorization – which she terms 'hierarchical' where knowledge is imposed from the top – best captures the proposed relationship between Epistemic Communities and their influence on learning in EU foreign policy (Dunlop 2017: 223). Hierarchical learning pertains most closely to the shadows cast by institutions and standard-setting organizations like the EU, where Epistemic Communities often appear in these settings as technical information gatherers (Dunlop 2017: 223).

The ways in which the literature on Epistemic Communities underpin this thesis' research question are twofold. Firstly, the decision-makers and expert stakeholders in question are pivotal in how lessons are contextualized within the wider socio-economic schema, which further solidifies the prospect of their policy preferences to emerge. Secondly, in order to fully conceptualize policy outcomes and influence, explanations are in order that venture beyond the rational and technical interpretations. Epistemic Communities possess a unique policy resource, however their foundational knowledge "opens the door to myriad actors and contending interpretations" (Dunlop 2017: 228). This strongly echoes calls for disaggregation made earlier; while it becomes easier in answering the question of *who* learns, another obstacle becomes even more prevalent. The literature has shown the highly dynamic

environments within which policy-makers operate, and the role of Epistemic Communities only further blurs our understanding of how learning is interpreted and utilized.

2. 5 CONCLUSION

Ultimately, one question stands at the end of this review of the literature: how does the EU learn? Particularly, under what conditions is learning facilitated in EU foreign policy-making? As foreign policy is made through interactions and exchange processes at MS executive levels, it becomes even more difficult to disaggregate policy decisions at the institutional level (Sjursen 2011: 1089). I argue existing literature on learning is unsatisfactory in explaining this process, as competing understandings illustrate learning as a static and linear process. Differing conceptualizations have focused on adjustment of goals, *or* instruments, *or* processes, yet never as constitutive elements of each other in the same holistic learning process. In the end, accounting for learning's 'micro-processes' constitutes a more robust adaptation of theories presented thus far. Therefore, the following chapter addresses these conceptual gaps with the TML; an original theory, building on existing theories of learning and policy change. I argue previous foci on learning have constrained it to a linear mechanism, with different centers of influence operating independently of one another. Instead, one must take into account the various strands of influence, moving beyond one center of power or one sub-group of policy-makers. The TML achieves this, and offers a more robust method through which learning can be analyzed.

CHAPTER 3: THE THEORETICAL MODEL OF LEARNING

The previous chapter disaggregated the competing conceptualizations of learning, and illustrated the linear form in which learning and policy change are examined. However, in building my theory, I seek to fill the conceptual gaps left by the literature. While simultaneously attempting to tackle different learning explanations, previous theories not only adopt a heavily *ex post* approach, but also constrain learning to the national political context. It is one task to rationalize the conditions which facilitated learning in the past, but another entirely to adapt a theoretical framework which can also work in deconstructing learning and policy change *ex ante*. It is significant to find a theory which pinpoints the *who, where,* and *what* of learning and policy change in organizational hierarchies as complex as the EU. Hence in the Theoretical Model of Learning (TML, see Figure 2), I capture the epistemological value of different learning interpretations, utilizing the benefits each provides, and see different phases as *constituent steps* in policy learning. While scholars attempt to sell their theoretical interpretation as *the* theory of learning, I instead assert they all constitute different phases of policy learning, but still of the same holistic process. It is precisely these micro-processes which I scrutinize, to which little academic recognition is attributed. As is analyzed in greater detail below in the context of individual, structural, and organizational learning, both Evidence-based and Value-based Approaches to learning are necessary, yet not always sufficient, at varying phases of the process.

The following chapter elaborates on the five learning phases I have identified in the TML. It is a constitutive model, not a sequential one, in that all phases, from the individual to the organizational level, are pivotal in driving the learning process forward. However, the phases need not be sequentially carried out in the order illustrated, as I ultimately argue the feedback loop mechanisms discussed previously are recurring underlying processes continuously propelling policy diffusion. I am not

arguing per se that successful processes of learning ought to only follow the pattern illustrated, or begin from the same point I have chosen to begin. Instead, what will most likely occur is a form of 'stop-and-go' learning occurring at multiple steps in the model simultaneously, rather than following a liner path. In taking competing conceptualizations and ordering them in a new adaptation of a learning theory, I have created a more coherent and applicable model to operationalize policy learning. Moreover, in the TML's novelty, it is able to adequately capture the robustness and resilience of policy goals, instruments, and processes; an approach which few theories discussed previously were able to critically address. In its ability to account for the comparative dimension of learning over time, the TML highlights the transformative effect learning has on foreign policy-making.

Firstly, I walk through the TML's five phases and elaborate on the assumptions each posits in being applied to the empirical analysis. The five phases – Individual Learning; Social Learning; Instrumental Learning; Political Learning; and Lesson Drawing – all account for differing stages of agency, actors involved in the learning process, and the important aspect of *who* is learning, *where* learning is taking place, and *what* is being learned. Each phase embodies particular expectations of the learning process which need to be satisfied in order to argue the TML phase has occurred, and these are discussed below. I then discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this model in being applied to my research question, as well as the nuanced nature an institution such as the EU brings to applying the TML.

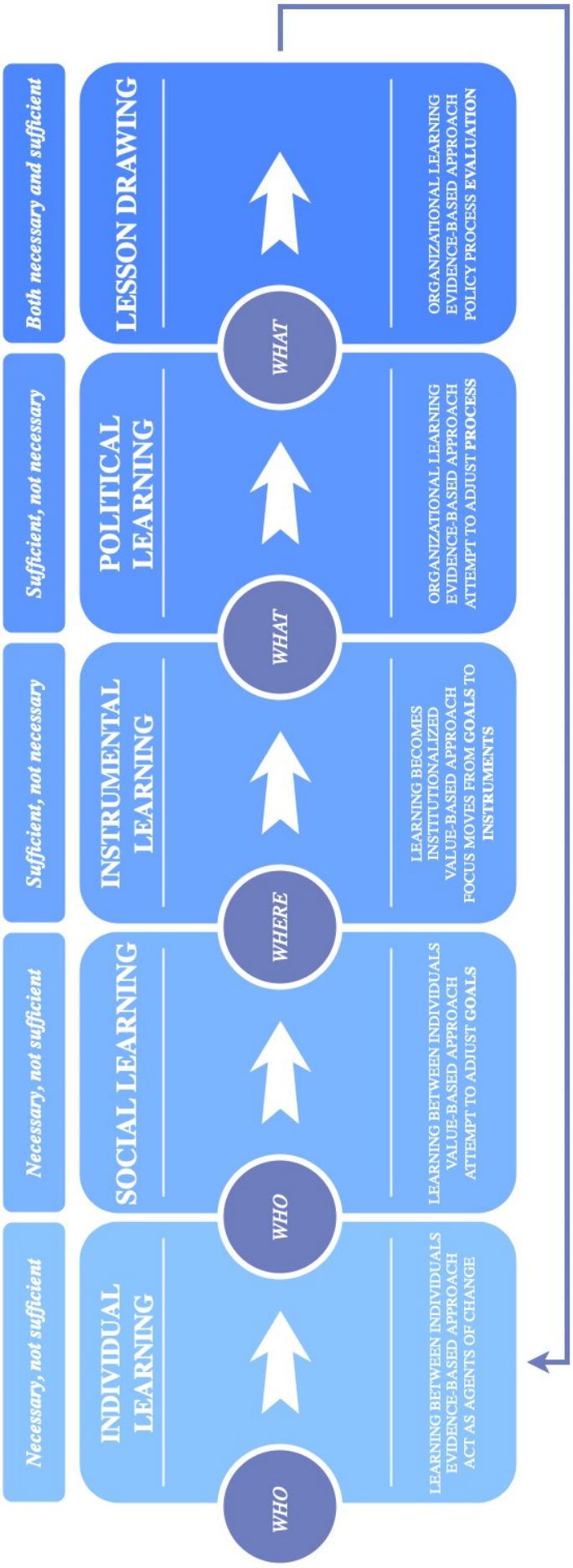


Figure 2: Theoretical Model of Learning (Built by author)

3. 1. 1 INDIVIDUAL LEARNING

Individual Learning denotes an Evidence-based Approach closely resembling that of Epistemic Communities and Sabatier's (1987) 'advocacy coalitions'. I argue Individual Learning is a **necessary but not sufficient** phase, as individuals act as primary agents of change in their interactions. This stage greatly emphasizes *who* learns in foreign policy analysis, which I assert is a primary necessary step before learning successfully becomes institutionalized and embedded within the structural hierarchy. While an Evidence-based Approach has largely been attributed to directing attention to political power at the *organizational* level, I argue interactions between individuals nevertheless are necessary points in recognizing the need for policy change. Hence, while this contradicts the assertions put forth by scholars thus far, such as Heclo's (1974) arguments on instrumental influences, I contest that an Evidence-based Approach to adjusting preferences is indeed the best explanatory mechanism in discussing interactions on-the-ground. One of my hypotheses, discussed in greater detail below, expects it is difficult for organizational learning to occur, or any policy evaluation to become institutionalized structurally, if key interactions between individuals do not precede it. That is to say, learning between individuals on an interactive basis need not begin the constitutive cycle, but must be a necessary part of it. Answering the question 'who learns' is imperative in mapping a comprehensive route of policy change in foreign policy-making.

3. 1. 2 SOCIAL LEARNING

Social Learning constitutes a processual advancement in the model; a continuation of the gradual learning manifesting between individuals rooted in acquired knowledge and experience. Attention is put on addressing the *who*, however, a Value-based Approach to learning becomes more dominant in the implicit interactions between

actors where individual policy preferences are confirmed. Most importantly, this TML phase signposts an important mechanism discussed in the literature review; feedback loops are imperative in establishing the necessary links between the state, civil society, and international organizations. In the EU's case, these links become most apparent in establishing an avenue of clear policy communication between the abstract 'Brussels bubble', and policy action on-the-ground in the region in question. Moreover, this phase signifies a deliberate attempt in adjusting the *goals* around policy change. Exchanged experience and knowledge between agents of change sheds light on policy *goals* which ought to be refined before learning becomes institutionalized, where subsequently greater focus is placed on the *process* and *instruments* invoked.

Similarly to Individual Learning, Social Learning, and hence goal adjustment, is a **necessary but not sufficient** threshold in the process to lead to a provable assumption of learning. I argue organizational learning cannot be structurally embedded without active contribution from feedback loops at the local level through agents of change and civil society actors. Moreover, goal adjustment in itself is a necessary, but not sufficient observation to constitute learning. A deliberate attempt to adjust the goals of policy ought to also be linked to instrument and process adjustment in order to verify organizational learning; otherwise, the learning assumption cannot be proven and hence policy change is the only provable occurrence. All phases in the model which address adjustment of any of the above factors are indeed necessary in proving learning has influenced policy change; in many ways, the intentional adjustment of goals, instruments, or the process of policy shows the opportunity of learning is taken when presented.

3. 1. 3 INSTRUMENTAL LEARNING

Instrumental Learning places great importance on the institutional mediator as an effective tool in driving learning from the individual to the institutional levels. It constitutes a **sufficient, but not necessary** mechanism in mapping transitional policy change. However, the idea is that Instrumental Learning as a connective mechanism in the cognitive learning process is influential in buttressing instrumental mechanisms of learning as discussed through a Value-based Approach. This organizational link also provides the necessary resources and capabilities to shift the focus from policy *goals* to *instruments*, where policy-making institutions provide the resources and capabilities for learning to become better institutionalized. At this stage, learning has shifted from feedback loops between individuals with common values and shared knowledge through negotiation, to becoming an instrumental endeavor. That is to say, learning is informed through various avenues of communication, not merely on the part of national government representatives, and is now also used as a normative instrument. This stage is critical in shifting the question of *who* learns, to *where* learning takes place.

3. 1. 4 POLITICAL LEARNING

Political Learning pertains to the initial stages of learning at the organizational level, where the question of *what* is learned is further demonstrated through policy adjustments. Drawing on Heclo's (1974) view of policy-makers adapting to the external shocks and events, Political Learning is a proactive reaction to organizational learning. Aligning closely with the preceding phase, learning is instrumental, yet is characterized by an Evidence-based Approach instead. Instrumentally, knowledge and experience accumulate into driving policy change, yet the *process* becomes the primary objective buttressed in evidence of successful or failed policy execution.

Feedback loops inform the capacity for policy evaluation within the process. Similarly, organizational learning is better equipped in identifying the problem parameters and issues affecting the feedback loops themselves, as the power for policy evaluation ultimately resides at the top of the institutional hierarchy.

In moving to questioning *what* is learned, the emphasis is placed on critiquing the process itself, closely entangled with policy implementation. While general theories of learning take either top-down approaches (see Sabatier & Mazmanian 1979; Matland 1995) or bottom-up approaches (see Elmore 1979; Hjern & Hull 1982), the TML employs a top-down mechanism of policy implementation. I am concerned with this form of the policy process because policies can change as they are being implemented; a prerogative only accessible to policy-makers at the organizational level. In the case of institutions like the EU, this means the policy process adjustment rests in the hands of Brussels-based policy-makers and those at the EC, where feedback loops are at their strongest in informing policy execution. Political Learning is a **sufficient but not necessary** mechanism in testing for learning. Drawn out in the empirical chapters, changes occurring in policy *processes* do not reflect as clear an evaluative function compared to adjustment of policy *instruments*, yet are significant in asserting that policy reflection has taken place nonetheless prior to subsequent policy (re-)formulation.

3. 1. 5 LESSON DRAWING

Finally, Lesson Drawing exemplifies the reflective stage policy-making must pass for learning observations to be confirmed. It draws on Rose's (1991) notion of learning through imitation, as well as evaluative rhetoric in comparing the current state of policy to externally similar cases. Inextricably linked to reflective language and retrospective observation within the institution, Lesson Drawing takes the Evidence-

based Approach as the most prevalent example of feedback loops informing policy-making. At this point, the policy process as a whole undergoes evaluation to assess its success or failure in achieving the desired *goals* while utilizing the available *instruments*. Existing research demonstrates that policies do not always fail or succeed based solely on their own merit (see Hudson et al. 2019); hence identifying effective policy designs to replicate *ex post* are crucial.

Lesson Drawing is **both necessary and sufficient** in proving that learning is institutionalized at the organizational level. Despite this, the TML is fortified in confirming my hypotheses when any of the following phases precede it: Individual Learning; Social Learning; and Political Learning. While Instrumental Learning need not necessarily be observed, it can be the sole step before Lesson Drawing. Similarly, one can still argue learning lead to policy change when any of the following phases are present: Individual Learning; Social Learning; Political Learning; and Lesson Drawing. I am aware this distinction places a greater emphasis on policy *instruments,* than on *goals* or the *process* as a whole. However, a difference in importance persists; an agent-centric view of foreign policy-making, as the TML adopts, inevitably places greater ontological significance on instruments. That is not only due to the greater transformative effect they play on learning as demonstrated in the literature review, but also are easier to track in terms of reflection and alteration as demonstrated in the empirical analysis.

3. 2 APPLYING THE TML

I now examine the conditions or stimuli needed in order to accurately apply the model to the research question. To reiterate, the TML is a constitutive model, and thus the phases are not meant to be interpreted as a sequential step-by-step of the learning process. On the contrary, the TML employs this thesis' agent-centric view of policy

learning, and thus bottom-up mechanisms of policy diffusion from the individual to the organizational level are the key observations. In discussing competing understandings of learning in the literature review, I highlighted that learning theories oscillated between placing importance at instrumental mechanisms of learning, and feedback loop mechanisms. I have demonstrated that the TML is fundamentally underpinned by feedback loops at every step, conceived through an epistemological assumption that the interactions necessary to drive policy diffusion forward between and across agents would not be inherently possible without feedback loops. Thus, in applying the TML to examining learning in EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts, I am particularly interested in how learning occurs in an *instrumental* manner.

A particular strength of the TML is its ability to account for issues of policy agency where previous theories were unable to. One of the central arguments, which is further discussed in subsequent empirical chapters, is accounting for learning's non-linear and fluid nature. The conditions through which learning is facilitated are non-static in structure, meaning they are often context- and time-specific to the case under examination. In addition, learning – either as a standalone process or constituent to policy change – is often characterized by a 'stop-and-go' rhythm, or can freeze altogether. While previous theories of learning captured static moments of policy learning, the TML's five phase process is not only attentive to non-linear mechanisms of learning, but also to reality's disjointed and complex nature of policy-making. While one may question if the EU's agency and institutional structure complicates the applicability of the model beyond the national context, I assert the TML fits well precisely because international organizations are made of distinct actor-centric units of policy information operating in their own cause-effect schemata, rather than as a uniform collective. "It is not individuals, entire governments, blocs of governments, or entire organizations that learn; it is clusters of bureaucratic units within governments and organizations" (Haas 1990: 26). Moreover, in ensuring I am attentive

to learning processes as well as an absence of learning, I pay particular attention to the institution's stimuli in its external environment. While I concede internal changes such as sources of revenue, internal monitoring, or coordination of units within an institution like the EU are important in drawing more accurate conclusions on opportunities of learning, it is not the current concern (for such an account, see Haas 1990). Instead, I address exogenous sources of change, pertaining to institutions' hyper-dependency on their environments and actors' utilization of new ends not previously accessible to them. In assessing if learning opportunities are taken in policy-making in protracted conflicts, I expect learning to be triggered in the conjunction of issues of high salience for the actors involved, and in interactions between groups with differing sources of policy knowledge.

3. 3 CONCLUSION

The TML is a novel take on the learning mechanisms under scrutiny, as I am unsatisfied with the justifications put forth on policy learning by existing theories. It is often difficult to determine the points in time in which change occurs, and theories thus far can only account for change occurring in the past, rather than refine their predictive power on change in the future (Cerna 2013). While other theories in the schema focus on specific facets of learning, and lack in their ability to capture learning and change's fluid, transformative shifts, the TML captures the micro-processes I argue are the most significant. In maintaining an agent-centric, bottom-up, feedback loop approach to learning conditions, I argue the TML offers a unique perspective on learning conceptualization; yet, I do not claim it is the *only* way of understanding learning. In an updated version of the Learning Matrix (see Figure 3), the TML would situate itself closer to the corner of Epistemic Communities, with an emphasis on interactions between agents of change on-the-ground. However, there is still importance placed on the TML's awareness of organizational dynamics, where the

multiplicity of learning outcomes is further exacerbated through large-scope networks such as those at the institutional level (see Moyson & Scholten 2018). By consolidating various learning approaches discussed in the literature review, my theoretical framework carves a new path in the bigger picture concerning the processes it attempts to capture. In addressing the conditions under which learning is facilitated in EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts, the TML accounts for the cognitive dynamics of policy learning. Even more so compared to previous theories, it pays greater attention to the heuristic approach to learning most often found in networks of agents of change in policy-making, such as civil society actors or localized agents.

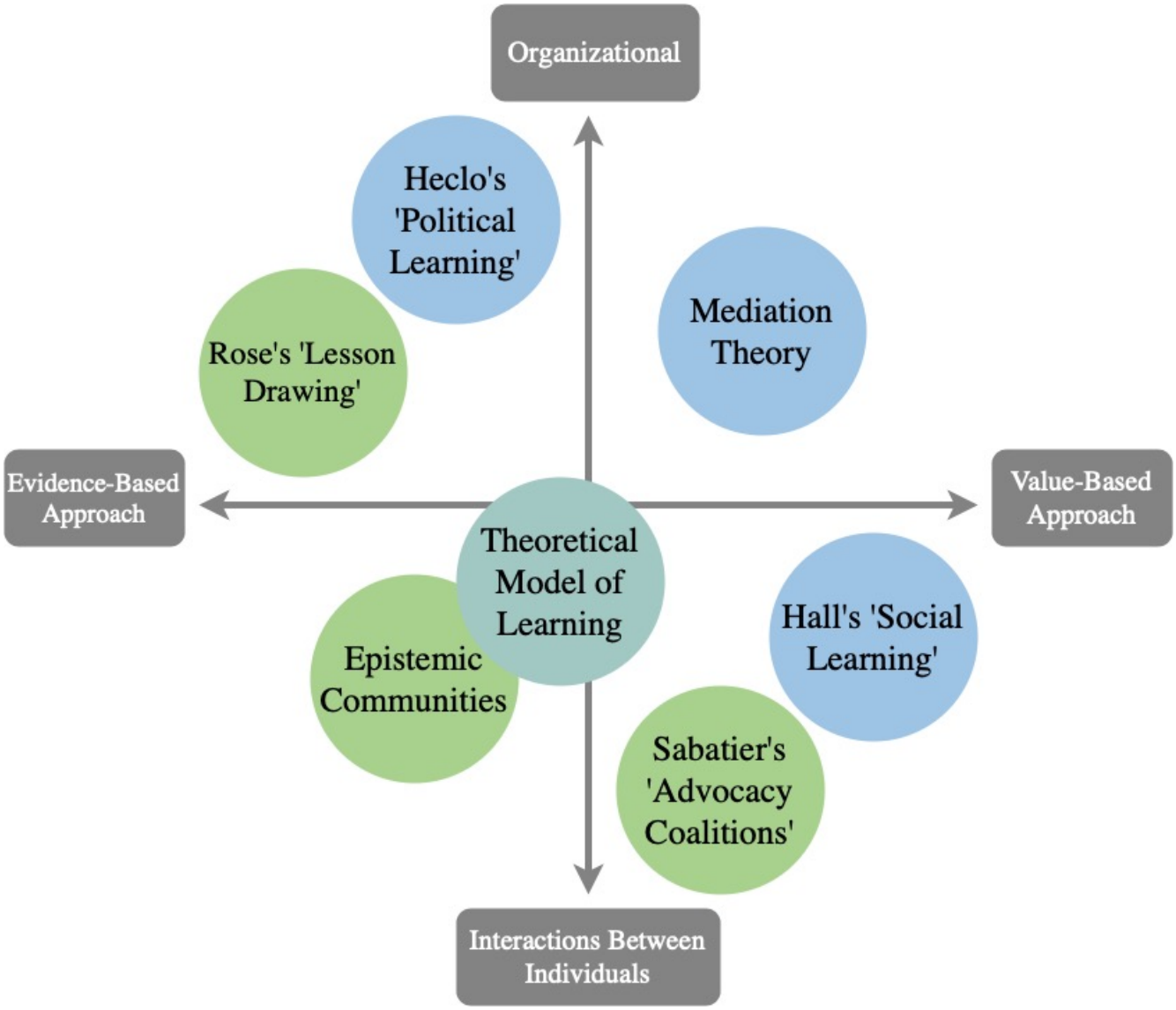


Figure 3: The Learning Matrix, including the Theoretical Model of Learning (Built by author)

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Methodology, like sex, is better demonstrated than discussed

Adler-Nissen 2014: 198

In this chapter, I demonstrate the methodological decisions taken to test the TML against the research question. Learning is a cognitive process and as such cannot be quantified; thus I employ a qualitative analysis and carry out constitutive process-tracing over specified periods of time to test under what conditions learning takes place in EU foreign policy-making. Firstly, I discuss the benefits of my chosen analytical method, followed by my operationalization of the variables in question and chosen data sources. Lastly, I discuss my case selection strategy, and the significance of Moldova's protracted conflict in analyzing learning as both an effect on, and result of, policy-making.

4. 1 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

I utilize qualitative methods due to the cognitive nature of capturing learning. It pertains to utilizing the concept as a comparative tool for capturing change within specified temporal scopes. My analysis is described as within-case process-tracing, which is traced through my TML and at every phase must pass one of four process-tracing 'tests' in order to either fortify or weaken my hypotheses. Process-tracing is the technique of systematizing qualitative methods, where it allows for explanation of *how* certain events lead to observed effects (Collier 2011); the most robust method in capturing the constitutive effects of learning I am interested in. There are four types of tests in searching for causal mechanisms: hoop (necessary but not sufficient, fortifies hypothesis if found); straw-in-the-wind (not necessary, not sufficient, slightly fortifies hypothesis); smoking gun (not necessary but sufficient, fortifies hypothesis); and doubly decisive (both necessary and sufficient, confirms hypothesis) (Beach &

Peterson 2013). Process-tracing also has an agent-centric focus looking at *interactions*, thus enabling me to also test for alternative explanations on the conditions which facilitated learning in Moldova, based on interactions between various institutions or actors with differing motivations in the region. While it is difficult to generate external validity from process-tracing as it lacks quantitative means of assessing significance (Bennett & Checkel 2015: 102-103), this analytical method allows me to identify catalytic events and interactions.

I divide my empirical analyses into three separate timeframes which are set at major policy-setting events and points of policy evaluation. My TML pertains to policy learning undergoing numerous transformations, as information is diffused from the individual to the organizational level. I look at time periods encompassing the formulation of new policy and several reviews of implementation in between milestone foreign policy events, such as enlargement rounds, regional conflicts, or the negotiation of new policy agreements. In doing so, I monitor interactions between key agents of policy change *ex post,* as learning moves between the TML's levels. I briefly set out the reasons for this method as follows: **2002-2007** (Negotiations on the ENP → European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) negotiations); **2008-2014** EaP negotiations → Signing of Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between EU and Moldova); **2015-2019** (Implementation of AA/DCFTA with Moldova → Present). The aim of my research is ultimately theory-testing (Beach & Peterson 2013), as the analysis is exploratory and pursues testing of a refined theoretical framework within a same-case temporal comparison.

4. 2 OPERATIONALIZATION AND DATA COLLECTION

I operationalize **learning as the independent variable**, and as shown in the literature review, the concept of learning is an elusive one for many key thinkers in the field, thus it is beyond this thesis' scope to operationalize and test for several kinds of learning. Instead, I opt for employing a type of learning technique which maps formal knowledge-sharing relationships, with particular emphasis on an agent-centric view of policy-making and keeping the emphasis on instrumental learning. Espousing an agent-centric perspective allows for the revelation of several policy diffusion sources, as well as the conditions under which policy change is facilitated through various policy actor networks (Howlett et al. 2017). Agent centrality also informed the methods with which both official documents and elite interviews were analyzed. In adopting an approach which accounts for knowledge-sharing relationships and how certain policy networks are formed, policy diffusion avenues of communication were thus elucidated. As Howlett et al. (2017: 246) assert, knowing agent positionality within policy-making "is akin to knowing the blueprint of the knowledge infrastructure and can inform us on the possibilities of learning to occur." Hence, the interest lies in creating a roadmap to track learning in protracted conflicts. In perusing official documents and my interview transcripts, I look for mention of past policy initiatives in Moldova and Transnistria discussed in prior publications, and any mention of their success or failure in meeting the desired goals, as potential indicators of learning. As the distinct difference between learning and policy change has already been discussed, the cognitive policy decisions identified in documents is thus significant, particularly in being able to differentiate where learning and/or policy change occurred.

EU foreign policy in protracted conflicts is the dependent variable, which in both its nature and through its actions, I define as the EU's substantial record of affecting

conflict resolution through European integration and as a mediating force (Popescu 2011: 32). Its foreign policy is a build-up of foreign, security, and defense policies, placing a substantial focus on its soft power and in refining its role as a conflict management actor in absence of hard power and military capabilities (Popescu 2011: 34). It is closely linked to the EU's security strategy for within and beyond MS borders, as its strategy to keep neighboring regions secure and stable is both an instrument, as well as a goal. Particularly since the 2004 enlargement round, the EU has inherited a number of protracted conflicts, both within its borders (Cyprus), as well as in its Eastern neighborhood (Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, etc.). As they pose a potential risk to the EU's regional security, it has become increasingly important to export a positive transformation agenda to ensure the security of its neighborhood. Thus, EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts constitutes a *modus operandi* based largely on civilian crisis-management, financial assistance, and political conditionality (Popescu 2011: 37). The context of learning in the EU is a peculiar one, as unlike mapping learning in national contexts, the EU possesses a strong institutional side as well as accounting for 28 (pre-Brexit) separate MS perspectives. While there are a number of stakeholders involved in the EU policy-making process, I do not assume it to differ greatly from other contexts. Studies have found the increased use of stakeholder consultations, as well as the involvement of various external actors to indeed increase democratic legitimacy of decision-making (see Rasmussen & Toshkov 2013), and thus I assume EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts to reflect that.

Having established this thesis' operationalization methods, I now turn to the data collection portion of my research. This study's empirical venture builds on data extrapolated from over 150 official EU documents, including: National country reports; Communication papers; National Indicative Programs/Regional Indicative Programs; EC Reports; Action Plan Programmes; European External Action Service (EEAS) studies; Policy strategy documents; EC Staff working papers; Evaluation

roadmaps; Ministerial statements; and Council progress reports. I looked for documents pertaining to a policy exchange between the EU and Moldova, and particularly if Transnistria was named. These included border management, civil society support, financial assistance, settlement negotiations, and trade relations. The importance of these specific sectors are examined in more detail in subsequent chapters, but in short, I argue these areas of policy not only pertain most closely to the EU's relationship with Transnistria *through* Moldova, but also are the most relevant in buttressing foundations which can lead to an eventual conflict settlement between the sides.

While I concede EU foreign policy with Moldova includes facets beyond conflict management and Transnistria, the Transnistrian issue was reported to be the primary obstacle preventing Moldova from further European integration (Interviews 1 and 5), and thus I see it as the most significant. The benefits of analyzing official documents of this sort are twofold. Firstly, I assume information communicated through these official releases to be of credible sources and authoritative in accurately depicting the actors' official stance on the issues. While I nonetheless continuously look out for institutional confirmation bias, documents found in archives and online registers can provide concrete policy positions on foreign policy matters. Secondly, given I am tracing processual progress in policy information diffusion, official documents allow sketching the order in which certain events occur, the actors involved, motivations communicated at the superficial level, and how policy positions are altered over time.

The analysis was then corroborated through 8 semi-structured elite interviews, the broad structure for which was informed by the initial empirical perusal of these policy documents. Data from both official documents and interviews were analyzed in triangulation, as this analytical method allows to overcome potential biases or limitations which would otherwise arise when focusing on only one type of data (Gerring 2004). Interviews took place between November 2019 and March 2020, and

were conducted in either Brussels, Belgium; Chisinau, Moldova; or by telephone. All interviews lasted approximately ninety minutes. I sought out both active and retired diplomats from various institutions, civil society representatives, and national diplomatic representatives. The common thread for selection was involvement in, or thorough knowledge of, the Moldovan protracted conflict, as well as the EU foreign policy process implemented in Moldova and Transnistria as a whole, potentially among policy implemented in other Eastern Partnership or ENP states as well. Anonymity was requested in most cases, and I was able to audio-record all but one of the interviews. Recognizing the probative value of conducting interviews, the questions were designed to gage the participant's view of the particular facet of EU foreign policy in their field of expertise, and unveil trends of lesson learning under certain conditions and following certain events.

4. 3 CASE SELECTION

This section outlines the decision to choose the Moldovan protracted conflict with Transnistria as the appropriate case for examining learning in EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts. Interest in protracted conflicts and their effect on EU policy-making is based on Cyprus' EU accession as a divided MS in 2004. While I delve deeper into the Cyprus case in the 2002-2007 empirical chapter, I provide here a brief overview.

The evolution of the Cyprus conflict back to the island's occupations by the Ottoman and British Empires. Seeds of conflict have always been sown between the communities by their respective 'motherlands' – Greece and Turkey – which often culminated in ethnic clashes, but the largest occurred in 1974 when Turkish troops invaded Cyprus in order to prevent the Greek junta from annexing the island to Greece. Since then, the island has been divided by a UN-controlled buffer zone, with

Greek-Cypriots occupying the Southern two-thirds, and Turkish-Cypriots the Northern third. While Turkish-Cypriots have operated under their own administration since 1963, the TRNC became self-proclaimed in 1983. Following decades of separation, a window of opportunity was finally opened in 2002, when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan proposed a federal agreement be put to simultaneous referenda in 2004 to unify the island.

Simultaneously, the EU was in the midst of accession negotiations with the RoC– the internationally-recognized Greek-Cypriot side – with the condition a settlement be reached prior to its accession. However, the 1999 Helsinki Summit saw the EU lift the settlement conditionality, and thus the Greek-Cypriots rejected the Annan Plan by leveraging the possibility to accede to the EU without the TRNC. It is not in this thesis' scope to delve deeper into the ramifications of the EU's decision to lift conditionality (for this account, see Kapodistria 2018). However, I argue this was not only a missed learning opportunity, but also impeded the "much acclaimed catalytic effect" (Tocci 2007: 52) of accession to achieve conflict resolution. I also do not aim to draw succinct parallels between the Moldovan and Cypriot protracted conflicts, however this prompted me to question: under *which* conditions does the EU learn in its policy-making in protracted conflicts, if not in the Cyprus case? Furthermore, my universe of cases pertained to protracted conflicts which challenge the EU the most, both politically and geographically. Following the 2004 enlargement round, the Eastern neighborhood protracted conflicts closely follow this, as the EU now found itself with several conflicts to tackle in its backyard. It identifies peacemaking in its neighborhood as an "essential aspect of [its] external action" (Tocci 2007: 1), and the Moldova-Transnistria protracted conflict is arguably the most complex of the post-Soviet states.

A narrow strip of land located between the Dniester river and Moldova's most Eastern border with Ukraine, Transnistria is a *de* facto independent breakaway state

internationally recognized as part of Moldova[4], with a population of approximately half a million Romanian and Moldovan-speaking residents. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and thus Moldova becoming an independent state, a civil war broke out between Russian-backed pro-Transnistrian forces and Moldovan military units, with fighting intensifying in March 1992. A ceasefire was agreed in July of the same year, however Russian military troops have retained control of the Transnistrian region ever since, with Transnistria remaining an unrecognized but *de facto* independent unitary republic. Since then, Moldova has been unable to exercise any direct control or influence over Transnistria; the latter of whom has even established its own parliament, government, constitution, currency, and national flag. The conflict broke out not over ethnic or religious divisions, but instead over political status of the region (unlike the other regional conflicts of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, or South Ossetia). As such, the Moldova-Transnistria division is particular in that there is no issue of ethnic group suppression or religious armed conflict occurring. Moreover, of the breakaway *de facto* states in the neighborhood, Transnistria is not only the most democratically developed, but has also been the most open entity for cooperation with the international community in the Eastern neighborhood, despite its unrecognized status (European Parliament 2016: 19). Further to this, EU involvement in the region is met with the least resistance compared to its counterparts.

Moldova is the best example of conflict movement and transformation in the neighborhood (Interview 7), and as elaborated in subsequent chapters, EU involvement in the separatist entity stems from its goal to reform both Transnistria, as well as Moldova, in closer alignment with EU values. Stemming from its '3D' strategy elaborated in 2003, the EU asserts its role in the region through the promotion of

[4] Transnistria has been recognized as a sovereign state only by three other mostly non-recognized states: Abkhazia (de facto sovereign state as part of Georgia), Nagorno-Karabakh (de facto sovereign state as part of Azerbaijan), and South Ossetia (de facto sovereign state as part of Georgia). Together these four regions make up what we refer to as the post-Soviet "protracted conflict" zones.

democratization, decriminalization, and demilitarization. The implicit idea of this strategy is pursuing a gradual transformation of both Moldova and Transnistria, so as to eventually push for a peaceful re-unification (European Parliament 2016: 19; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8). I expect the EU's motivation for involvement and conflict resolution in Moldova to be high as there is little to no interference internally from MS to influence policy change based on ulterior motives (see Kruessmann 2015). The only MS with vested interests in the matter is Romania, who only became an EU MS in 2007, and my empirical analysis demonstrates that policy in the conflict had already been substantially entrenched by then. In fact, Romania likely wants to avoid another Ukraine-like crisis between Russia and Transnistria as a security risk on its doorstep, and so has even more reason to support a Transnistrian settlement and further European integration for Moldova (DeGhett 2015; Interviews 1, 2, and 5). Overall, the Transnistrian conflict is a **most likely case**; if EU learning and policy change do not coalesce in Transnistria, where would they?

CHAPTER 5: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA (2002-2007)

I have thus far set the context within which I examine policy changes and learning dynamics at the EU level, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of comparative change over time within the Moldovan and Transnistrian case. This chapter begins in tracing the EU-Moldova historical relationship from 1992 following the fall of the Soviet Union. While the general start to the temporal foci in question is the early 1990s, my particular empirics look at 2002 onwards. This year is noteworthy, not only marked by the foremost negotiations of what would become the ENP, the EU's primary foreign policy instrument in the Eastern European states; but also covers the preliminary steps in the UN 'Annan Plan' referendum concerned with solving Cyprus' own protracted conflict with the TRNC. Cyprus presents a fascinating case of failed policy learning *vis-à-vis* EU foreign policy in protracted conflicts. As the last remaining divided capital of Europe and an EU MS since 2004, a secondary assumption explored is whether any lessons learned dealing with the Cyprus case influenced the EU's involvement with Moldova's own conflict.

Furthermore, this chapter also evaluates Hypothesis 1 (H1) between 2002-2007, where I argue both Individual Learning and Social Learning were pivotal in shaping EU foreign policy towards Moldova and in constituting a part of the learning process according to the TML. Individual and Social Learning are both necessary but not sufficient in extrapolating proof of structural EU learning and in subsequent policy change thereafter; the 'Hoop Test' of H1. Yet, it is nevertheless imperative to observe an establishment of links between Moldova and Transnistria, civil society, and international organizations through feedback loops in order to fortify H1. As I expect to observe the EU looking to individual agents on-the-ground to report new policy effectiveness, learning is buttressed in individual interactions which occur following the implementation of new initiatives like the ENP. The assumptions underpinning

this expectation are twofold. Firstly, as traced in the TML, I argue it is difficult for learning to become organizationally institutionalized if no individual learning is observed to precede it. Secondly, while learning between individuals on an interactive basis ought not always begin the learning cycle, it must be an integral part for learning to be established.

When H1 dictates that Individual and Social Learning would be pivotal during this time, I assert that these particular TML phases will be the most *impactful*, in that they may be the phases lasting the longest compared to others, or carry the most weight, without eliminating the presence of other phases. In exploring the research question of how the EU learns in its foreign policy in protracted conflicts, H1 states identifying *who* learns is integral at even the most rudimentary phases of policy formulation. Having established the nuance, I thus provide a brief recount of the EU's historical relationship with Moldova and Transnistria. I follow this with an overview of the ENP's establishment and negotiations, as well as drawing a parallel with the EU's tumultuous relationship with the RoC and the TRNC in the context of the UN-brokered federal settlement plan for reunification. The analysis hence focuses on identifying indicators of Individual Learning and Social Learning as presented in H1 when looking at the formative years of EU-Moldova relations.

5. 1 THE EU – MOLDOVA – TRANSNISTRIA NEXUS

Following the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union, and the end of the ceasefire in 1992, Moldova was caught in a stalemate of territorial sovereignty. While simultaneously tackling its protracted conflict with the Transnistrian *de facto* independent state, ever closer connections to the international community became a priority for Moldova (Interviews 2 and 3). In as far as the EU's relations with Moldova throughout the 1990s, bilateral agreements were only pursued under the Technical Assistance for the

Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS)[5] and Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA)[6]. The EU-Moldova PCA was signed in 1994 and entered into force in 1998, with an aim to establish legal and institutional frameworks for bilateral relations in several policy areas. These areas of collaboration included trade and economic cooperation, political dialogue, and Justice and Home Affairs, among others (EEAS 2007). The EU has never engaged in bilateral agreements with Transnistria directly, and instead has opted for measures applying to Moldova and extending into Transnistrian benefactors as well (Interview 1); examples of which include primarily economic and trade instruments such as Autonomous Trade Preferences (ATPs). ATPs were introduced following the 2005 ENP Action Plan for Moldova, where Moldovan access to the EU market was marked as a key economic instrument in developing relations. The aim was to offer Moldova improved access to the EU market through ATPs, in an attempt to support growth of the Moldovan economy through an increase in export preferences with the EU (European Commission 2007c).

The EC's (2001a) *2002-2006 Country Strategy Paper* on Moldova constitutes a formative example of EU commitments to economic development in the region under its TACIS and PCAs, and is the first detailed EU communication to be published regarding the EU's relationship with the Moldovan government. Prior to the ENP's pivotal establishment, the EU's foreign policy in Moldova constituted continuous adjustments on existing processes. In its *2002-2006 Country Strategy Paper*, the EC states all cooperation instruments should be utilized to contribute to Moldova's economic, political, and financial stabilization, the economic instruments for which are three-pronged. The three prongs focus on: tackling poverty and social destitution; implementing a legal framework to promote the development of the market economy

[5] TACIS was the EU's (the 'European Community' at the time) effort to support ongoing economic and development reforms in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Georgia. As the world's largest aid programme of its time, TACIS provided advice, practical experience, and best practices to various sectors in the countries involved.
[6] PCAs are legally binding agreements between the EU and third-party countries with an aim to support economic and democratic development through aid, with a primary objective to establish thriving trade relations. A PCA is typically entered into for ten years, with reviews for extension taking place annually thereafter.

and economic growth; and providing Micro-Financial Assistance (MFA) (European Commission 2001a: 3). MFA features quite prominently in the years to come, and this paper is the first published by the EU to mention it as an instrument used in developing Moldova, and by extension Transnistria, to adhere to EU standards. So much so, the benefits of MFA are explicitly linked to promoting other values and reforms, such as "the prevention of, and…the fight against, fraud, corruption and any other irregularities" (European Council 2007: 2). While an official decision to provide MFA to Moldova was only adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in 2017, MFA as a relationship-building mechanism and economic tool to promote market growth existed long before then (European Parliament 2017).

MFA underpins the core economic relationship between the EU and Moldova (Interviews 1, 2, 3, and 4). The benefits of MFA are not only enjoyed by Moldovan society as it undergoes large reforms in its governance, judicial, and banking sectors, but are also extended to Transnistria in attempts to indirectly aid conflict settlement. MFA constitutes one form of ATPs enjoyed at the time by Moldovan and Transnistrian operators, and still applies today under certain finely tuned conditions (Interviews 1, 2, 3, and 4)[7]. Transnistria is vitally important for Moldova's economic relations with the EU for two reasons. Firstly, Moldova's territorial dispute with Transnistria factors heavily into the former's foreign relations and economic development. As long as the protracted conflict continues, Moldova can make little progress in democratic consolidation and economic improvement. Secondly, Transnistria constitutes an enormous economic asset to Moldova, housing the locations of Moldova's only big power plant, and modern and competitive steel mill. Transnistria represents 30% of Moldova's industrial output, and 60% of Moldovan and Transnistrian steel and electricity exports to the EU are provided for by only two companies based in the

[7] These particular conditions of MFA are drawn out in following chapters between 2008-2019, when Moldovan government administration and anti-corruption standards were influential in the EU's willingness to extend MFA benefits to local actors.

Transnistrian region (Interview 2). Transnistria is seen as the industrial powerhouse of the country, and thus healthy trade relations between the EU and Moldova are driven by interests on the Transnistrian side as well, who wish to keep their preferential access to the EU market (Interviews 1 and 2).

Therefore, the *2002-2006 Country Strategy Paper* highlights the EC's primary concern of that time; that economically speaking, Moldova is "unable to control its borders and…flows of goods and capital with its Eastern neighbors" (European Commission 2001a: 7). While there is great focus on instruments in reforming Moldova economically to the EU model, this position nevertheless exemplifies a commitment to adjusting EU policy processes. In speaking to a high-level official in DG Trade [Directorate-General for Trade], financial assistance such as MFA was explicitly referred to as adjustment work in figuring out best processes which would aid Moldova's, and by extension Transnistria's, economic development (Interview 1). The significance of maintaining the effectiveness of these processes is underpinned by the EU's motivation to retain Moldovan and Transnistrian preferential treatment. This is particularly the case in the absence of any contractual agreements between the EU and Moldova, which would only be introduced in the form of an Association Agreement (AA) in 2014, and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) in 2016, both of which are discussed in greater detail later on. Ultimately, in answering the question of how the EU learns in its foreign policy towards protracted conflicts, the analysis so far points to several interesting points.

Firstly, it is significant to note the EU's attentiveness to its process adjustment in Moldova despite a lack of organized action implemented in the region from which to draw concrete policy lessons. Before introducing the ENP in 2004 and the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) in 2005, EU-Moldova-Transnistria relations operated in purely preferential circles beyond the TACIS and PCAs, and thus an active attempt to still learn from and improve upon economic

measures is noteworthy, based more strongly on normative values than contractual arrangements. Secondly, in accordance to the EU's supposed 'more for more' and 'less for less' philosophy, MFA to Moldova from the beginning has had multiple strings attached to it; an approach multiple EU officials at the EEAS hoped to be more 'carrot' and less 'stick' in incentivizing good governance, rule of law, and democracy (Interviews 3 and 4). In its ability to give and take in MFA as much as it sees fit in reaction to Moldovan political developments, the EU very clearly makes a link between expectations and deliverance in the political reforms it wishes to see in approximation to its own model. It is especially interesting in the absence of a rigid contractual relationship with Moldova, which I argue would be easier to learn from and enact policy change as adjustments to goals, instruments, or processes can be made in reference to agreed-upon policies put on paper.

5. 2 A NEW ERA OF COOPERATION: THE ENP AND EUBAM

Following on from these rudimentary steps in establishing EU-Moldova relations, the ENP marked what would be a transformational shift in the way the EU interacted with third-party states such as Moldova. The EC launched its ENP in its *Communication on Wider Europe* in 2003 (European Commission 2003). In this Communication, the EC also introduced what would be its Neighborhood Programmes and the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), which would support the policy in the post-2006 period following the end of the TACIS program (EEAS 2007). The 2003 EC Communication on a 'wider Europe' highlights how the impending 2004 enlargement would affect the EU's relations with many of its present and future neighbors, placing particular emphasis on Russia, Western Newly Independent States (WNIS) such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, and Southern Mediterranean states.[8] According to the EC, the enlargement would

[8] Southern Mediterranean states (full list as in the 2003 EC Communication): Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia.

provide a new impetus to draw closer the 385 million residents who would now find themselves on the EU's external land and sea border. It states, "over the coming decade and beyond, the Union's capacity to provide security, stability, and sustainable development to its citizens will *no longer be distinguishable from its interest in close cooperation with the neighbors*" (European Commission 2003: 3, emphasis added). The Communication also states that if the EU is to commit to creating an area of shared prosperity and stability in the neighborhood, its "proximity policy" must ultimately tackle the root conditions fueling political instability, such as conflict (European Commission 2003: 6). The EC sets out provisions to enhance areas such as education, health, and promote a functioning legal system. The document calls out the Transnistrian issue as a challenge needing addressing, as it claims unrecognized statelets are "a magnet for organized crime and can de-stabilize or throw off course the process of state-building, political consolidation and sustainable development" (European Commission 2003: 9). In light of these motivations, the EC declared a conflict settlement between Moldova and Transnistria to be of utmost importance, as it worked in full collaboration with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Particularly, the EC stated that "the current situation is a matter of concern for regional peace and stability and it will be at the doorstep of the EU after Romania's accession [as a MS in 2007]" (European Commission 2002: 5). Ultimately, the EU saw the ENP's novelty as an ambitious yet realistic framework in further building upon EU-Moldova relations and promoting confidence-building measures in the region, placing particular emphasis on "joint ownership and commitment to shared values" (European Commission 2002: 5). As demonstrated in greater detail throughout my empirical analysis, all stages of learning in the EU's foreign policy, regardless of temporal scope and extent of policy change, have two buzzwords in common. Two mantras which are mentioned in every single document analyzed, and every single interview conducted – mentioned so often I would have thought they were merely

generic EU jargon were it not for the tangible, and often effective, policy trajectories they lead in defining the EU's relationship with this particular conflict. These are **confidence-building measures**, and **ownership**.

Both trends are illuminated most evidently in the EU policy changes that followed the ENP's enactment in the years to come. Particularly, the creation of EUBAM not only highlights the importance of Individual Learning and Social Learning in EU foreign policy-making in the context of what H1 tests. Instead, it also highlights the important roles confidence-building measures and ownership play on drafting EU policy which can be reviewed closely, and also bring effective results. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 1992, many external parties such as the Council of Europe and the OSCE have been involved in the issues, however recognizing the threats to the security and economic prosperity not only in the region but the EU as a whole, the EU has been increasing its mediating role. In this regard, the ENP is considered as the first initiative through which the EU declared its explicit role and commitment in finding permanent settlement to the conflict. In this regard, the EU initiated EUBAM. EUBAM is based in 67 border crossing points along the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, including 25 of which at the Transnistrian segment (see Figure 4). The mission is composed of police and customs officials with the aim to: foster Moldova's government capabilities to impose regulations; facilitate and strengthen the bilateral and multilateral dialogue between Moldova and Transnistria; and ensure the commitment of external parties such as Ukraine and Russia and their implementation of the objectives in regard to the conflict. EUBAM experts come from 13 MS, and thus share their countries' experiences in contributing to the mission (Betlii 2016: 32).



Figure 4: EUBAM's Area of Responsibility (Source: EUBAM 2009)

EUBAM's objectives are twofold. Firstly, the Mission aims to contribute to the implementation of the EU's ENP Action Plans with Moldova and Ukraine[9]. As one of the EU's new partnership perspectives with Moldova in the *Action Plan*, the Transnistrian issue features quite prominently, and "sustained efforts towards a viable solution to the Transnistria conflict" are listed as the top priority (European Commission 2005a: 3). The *EU-Moldova Action Plan* is one of the first EU-Moldova agreements recorded to outline the Transnistrian issue as one of paramount importance as a constituent step in promoting stability of democracy and effective rule of law. Above all, however, respect for Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders remains the EU's primary concern (Interviews 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8).

Secondly, strengthening border control and border surveillance in Moldova and Ukraine is seen as an active contribution to Transnistrian conflict settlement (European Commission 2005b: 7). It functions in effect as a border control mission in line with international standards, improving security at the Moldova-Ukraine border and ensuring all Transnistrian exports comply with the same legal conditions as apply to residents on the right bank of the Dniester river (European Commission 2007a: 85). Besides EUBAM, the EC is not involved in any other major Transnistria-related activities. Above all, however, is EUBAM's significance in illustrating the learning mechanisms which take place at the EU organizational level, and the processes which occur in diffusing information and learning from the individual level in becoming institutionalized. In Article II of the EC (2005b) *Memorandum of Understanding* between the EU, Moldova, and Ukraine, there is a clear setting out of the institutional hierarchy put in place within EUBAM, most importantly regarding the diffusion of information

[9] The EU-Moldova Action Plan sets out strategic objectives of the cooperation covering three years. While its implementation helps fulfill the provisions set out by the PCA, it also aims to facilitate Moldova's social and economic integration into European structures. The primary objectives of the Action Plan contribute to the approximation advancement of Moldovan legislation, norms, and practices, as well as building solid foundations for further economic integration based on trade and economic rules and regulations, and social cohesion (European Commission 2005a: 1-2).

from the ground to the EU level. In the Memorandum, EUBAM is instructed to report all findings, activities, and development of assistance projects in progress to the EC (HQ as well as its delegations in Chisinau and Kiev), the EU Special Representative for Moldova, and to the Moldova and Ukraine governments. Interestingly, the document refers to the Mission representatives and its staff as "experts" (European Commission 2005b: 2).

The implications of this for the research question are twofold. Firstly, the reference to EUBAM's representatives and staff as "experts" alludes back to the typology of Epistemic Communities discussed in the literature review, on which the TML's Individual and Social Learning phases are based. Experts on-the-ground provide advisory assistance through experiential learning, and are pivotal in how lessons are contextualized within the wider socio-economic sphere. In EUBAM's context, the in-built monitoring mechanism is the only manner in which policy development can be communicated to the EU organizationally (Interviews 1 and 2). A high-level representative at DG Trade stressed how EU officials based in Brussels rely on information diffused from experts in Chisinau and the Transnistrian capital of Tiraspol. As EU officials rarely make state visits to the Odesa or Chisinau field offices, publications and reports from on-the-ground specialists on the efficacy of the Mission's goals are paramount to understanding and realizing the EU's objectives (Interviews 1 and 2).

Furthermore, I argue "expert" signals an internal acknowledgement within EU structures of the legitimacy and value of this information. This affirms the Individual Learning legitimacy that these individuals are significant agents of change regarding learning and EU policy-making. In illustrating this, the EC 2007(d) *Commission Decision on the ENPI Annual Action Program in Moldova* states that in the year prior to its publication, EUBAM officers on-the-ground provided 41 recommendations, calling for improved control standards and in aligning them even closer to those of the EU.

In taking into account these recommendations, the EC supported infrastructure development to account for the financial implications of policy adjustments, such as operational and surveillance technology (European Commission 2007d: 5). This highlights the active communication occurring between cross-sections of EU institutional hierarchy.

Before addressing H1, it is important to firstly examine the 2004 failed Cyprus protracted conflict settlement which was unfolding in tandem to the EU's heightened involvement in Moldova. While it is not this thesis' aim to establish causal links between EU learning in Cyprus and Moldova, it is nevertheless paramount to understand the role that Cyprus plays as a MS in questioning the EU's capacity to learn in its foreign policy-making. Not only is MS expertise in EU foreign policy-making extremely influential in drawing effective lessons, but Cyprus also aids in asking broader questions on learning in EU foreign policy: If not with Cyprus, *when* would we expect the EU to learn?

5. 3 THE FAILED CYPRUS SETTLEMENT

The 2004 failed Cyprus settlement process represents the ultimate irony of the EU's foreign policy in trying to promote conflict settlement in disputed territories close to its borders. The Cyprus problem posed a major challenge to the EU enlargement effort, and understanding the EU's role in the conflict is relevant in exploring the role of societies in failing to deal with intractable patterns of confrontation (see Kovras & Loizides 2012). While documents such as the EC *Communication on a Wider Europe* commit the EU to conflict settlement in order to promote "state-building, political consolidation and sustainable development" (European Commission 2003: 9), the Cyprus case developed differently. I begin with a brief historical recount of the territorial conflict between the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities

leading up to the 2004 settlement process, before discussing the EU's role in the conflict.

The island's 1.2 million population consists primarily of Greek-speaking, Christian Orthodox Greek-Cypriots (77%), and Turkish-speaking, Muslim Turkish-Cypriots (18%). Cyprus has historically endured substantial colonial interference due to its strategic geographical position, situated in the Mediterranean Sea between Europe, Asia, and Africa. Following centuries of colonization by the Ottoman and British Empires, the RoC achieved independence as a consociational democracy in 1960, following negotiations from the "motherlands" of Greece and Turkey (Kapodistria 2018). While this government recognized the equality of both communities in legal and political matters, the island's history was always plagued with ethnic conflicts, which ultimately culminated on July 15th, 1974. In a bid to overthrow President Archbishop Makarios – head of the Greek-Cypriot government – the Greek right-wing military junta orchestrated a military *coup d'état* to annex the island to Greece. In a reactionary attempt to protect the Turkish-Cypriots from the coup and violence which erupted, Turkey deployed 'Operation Attila' on July 20th with 40,000 military troops, thus capturing the Northern third of the island, as the Greek-Cypriots held the Southern two-thirds (Kapodistria 2018). To this day, both sides have been separated by a UN-controlled buffer zone, which has operated under the EU's Green Line Regulation (GLR)[10]. While Turkish-Cypriots have operated under their own administration since 1963, the TRNC became self-proclaimed in 1983, but is not internationally recognized besides by Turkey.

The EU formally opened accession negotiations with Cyprus in 1998, however only to the RoC. Initial strings were attached between achieving a settlement and moving

[10] The GLR has separated the island since the 1974 ceasefire, and controls the movement of goods and persons from the non-Cypriot government-controlled areas to the Cypriot government-controlled areas. However, it does not constitute an external EU border, and while it applies to fiscal and customs territory outside the EU, it does not affect the personal rights of Turkish-Cypriots as EU citizens.

forward with accession negotiations, when the EC stated that "as soon as the prospect of a settlement in surer, the [European] Community is ready to start the process with Cyprus that should eventually lead to its accession" (European Commission 1993). However, the 1999 Helsinki Summit saw this conditionality lifted, mistakenly I argue, as EU leaders decided Cyprus would be allowed to accede as a MS without having resolved its protracted conflict (Müftüler-Bac & Güney 2005: 282). This decision brought the EU's 'impartial' position into question, as it became a catalyst for achieving a viable solution. "By creating a set of overlapping contingencies, this tied Cyprus' accession outcome, Turkey's candidacy path, and Greek-Turkish rapprochement together" (Kapodistria 2018: 22). In light of these conflicting interests, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan introduced the 'Annan Plan' in 2002; a plan to form the federal 'United Cyprus Republic' in hopes of resolving the protracted conflict prior to Cyprus' EU accession. The plan would be put to simultaneous referenda in both communities on April 24th, 2004, in preparation for Cyprus' accession on May 1st, 2004. The plan was accepted by Turkish-Cypriots with a 65% majority, while Greek-Cypriots rejected it with a 76% majority; hence Cyprus acceded to the EU as a divided MS. Greek-Cypriots hence lost interest in reaching a settlement once they were able to enjoy EU benefits without the perceived Turkish-Cypriot 'burden', and have since opted to maintain the status quo of separation on the island (Kapodistria 2018).

I discussed previously that a major motivation of the EU's foreign policy in Moldova and Transnistria is through confidence-building measures in promoting a settlement. It is interesting to note that, while the EU has often promoted these confidence-building measures in Moldova through a civil society approach, it lacked this initiative in Cyprus. Following the lifting of the settlement conditionality, the EU could no longer play an influential role since Cyprus was no longer an aspirant country for membership, and instead now a full MS (Severin 2013: 72). While I argue the EU is still considered a successful actor of integration and in maintaining peace and conflict resolution, its lack of cohesion in building a strong presence in Cyprus

and in incentivizing civil society to push for a settlement constituted a major downfall. Moldova's conflict has seen an EU promotion of 'small steps' policy in hopes of leading to conflict settlement with Transnistria, such as establishing links with civil society and encouraging actor ownership on-the-ground through EUBAM. On the contrary, the EU's approach in Cyprus saw a greater focus on "mechanical solutions" of federal power-sharing between the communities based on a "zero-sum game principle", as opposed to a more synchronized and calculated effort to transform civic perceptions of reunification and EU membership (Severin 2013: 73).

Given these developments, one should not assume that EU involvement, or even intervention, in conflict resolution will always be inherently positive (see Diez et al. 2008; Popescu 2011). In fact, I argue Cyprus is an example where the EU undertook actions which overtly harmed conflict settlement. Academic consensus would assert that the EU is uniquely capable of utilizing its soft power for peace mediation and in transforming conflict parties' incentive structures (Kovras & Loizides 2012: 407). However, the presence of positive incentive structures for local communities does not guarantee positive transformation, as interpretation of these incentives in the domestic context is not always translated automatically to the organizational level in order to deduce coherent policy lessons. In terms of the TML, incentives in establishing strong Individual and Social Learning roots appear absent, as the EU was unable to transform local ownership of the issue into effective grass-roots rapprochement. I ultimately do not draw on the Cyprus experience to establish causal links with Moldova. However, understanding the EU's foreign policy role in Cyprus allows for appreciation of the very civil society policies in Moldova this chapter questions. Where policy learning due to the Cyprus experience cannot be conclusively argued, I instead am interested in how Cyprus amongst other MS, with its first-hand expertise on such matters, may influence EU learning in Moldova.

5. 4 THE ROLE OF AGENTS AND OWNERSHIP IN LEARNING

Turning to H1, the remaining analysis aims to address the significance of Individual and Social Learning mechanisms in shaping learning in EU foreign policy-making. To reiterate, H1 tests for high levels of policy ownership given to civil society actors in Moldova and Transnistria, which in turn fortifies learning between agents of change and in diffusing this initial policy learning to become institutionalized at the EU level. Having analyzed the Cyprus case and the EU's lack of 'small steps' policies in that conflict, it becomes even more prevalent to discuss the various ways in which local actors are engaged in Moldova to strengthen H1. The analysis is as follows: I firstly look at how MS experience may factor into policy learning at the EU level, particularly following the 2004 enlargement round and the EU now having to take multiple new voices into account when instituting policy change. Despite the EC being made of equal MS representation, I nevertheless take EU authority over policy-setting as a given, with MS providing experiential input on a more informal basis. Secondly, I look at how, both on paper and in policy action, ownership is given to actors on-the-ground in examining the efficacy of policy. Individual and Social Learning are both necessary but not sufficient in showing learning to occur at the organizational level, thus proving the importance of civil society through H1 is crucial in part to prove the applicability of the TML during the preliminary phases of big policy-setting.

The EC's 2007(a) *Country Level Evaluation* on Moldova particularly highlights the pivotal role MS expertise plays on EU foreign policy effectiveness in Moldova, within and without the Transnistrian issue. While EUBAM represents merely security-related endeavors, MS nonetheless perceived this one-dimensional aspect to EUBAM as a missed opportunity. The evaluation states, "the experience of other international partners, including MS, demonstrates that it is also possible to address the non-political social and economic aspects of the problem" (European Commission 2007a:

87). I argue this reflects Social Learning, where there is a suggested adjustment of goals from purely political aspirations to social and economic inclinations as well. Social Learning reflects this initial stage of lesson diffusion to the organizational level, where MS expertise reaches the EC, and is thus evaluated in its conclusions on the Moldovan issue. The paper further states:

> The team recommend that the EC should review its support for Civil Society with a view to broadening it. In this context, the team recommend that the EC examine, perhaps starting with a key dialogue with Member States with *experience in the area*, the potential for small, low-key, "people to people" social and development actions related to Transnistria (European Commission 2007a: 11, emphasis added).

On the topic of MS support, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark have also taken active roles through technical and financial assistance. The latter has been active in Moldova since 1998, particularly on issues of the environment (European Commission 2002: 18), and Cyprus has even been actively involved in EU conflict prevention and management initiatives, all within the frameworks of the Petersburg Tasks[11] and the ENP (EEAS 2016).

Moreover, I draw on three key EC documents which fortify H1, which were regarded repeatedly in interviews as cornerstone documents worth investigating (Interviews 5, 6, and 8): the 2007(b) *Fiche Contradictoire*; the 2007(d) *Annual Action Programme*; and the 2007(e) *ENPI Action Fiche*. In order to prove H1, feedback loops between agents on-the-ground are necessary to show how policy learning was facilitated. Particularly, they are key in showing *who learned* during this period, and the impact Individual and Social Learning had on shaping the EU's foreign policy in Moldova's conflict.

[11] Set out in the Petersburg Declaration of 1992, the Petersburg Tasks pertains to Western European Union MS declaring their readiness to provide military units to the EU and NATO if required. Military units may be used for conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, humanitarian aid, and post-conflict stabilization tasks (EEAS 2016).

Adjustment of goals is especially apparent stemming from individual interactions, where agent ownership of the issues is significant.

The 2007(b) *Fiche Contradictoire* follows on the main actions and recommendations that arose from the evaluation report on the EC Program of Cooperation with Moldova from 2000-2006 (European Commission 2007a). This document follows the actions that occurred in the year following that report's publication. Section 3 of the *Fiche Contradictoire*'s strategies regarding EU action in Moldova pertains to particular recommendations for Moldova-Transnistria relations. Specifically, the original EC report (2007a) recommended "people-to-people" social development actions be examined, first and foremost through consultation with MS with experience in these fields. The report suggests as a first step to "review critically experience with the EIDHR [European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights] and to formulate a plan for more effective use of the instrument" (European Commission 2007b: 3). This explicit focus on refining the EIDHR, as well as figuring out its best utility thereafter, confirms there are mechanisms of the TML's Instrumental Learning taking place as well. However, in proving H1, I argue Individual and Social Learning Mechanisms are instead more prevalent here. This is shown in the EC Services' response to this recommendation, where it affirmed that information regarding policy success was already being diffused from the individual to the organizational level through confidence-building measures and dialogue (European Commission 2007b: 3).

This implies Social Learning is simultaneously occurring through continuous feedback loops, and thus facilitating Political Learning to occur at the organizational level. On the recommendation to develop civil society links over both sides of the Dniester river, the EC states, "lessons have been systematically drawn from the

experience of a now completed DFID[12]/SIDA[13] project on Transnistria. The EIDHR instrument is one of the many instruments that could be used in the context of Transnistria" (European Commission 2007b: 3). The report continues on to state that strategic support will be raised, as well as "*ways and means* to use the thematic instruments (including EIDHR)" in the most efficient manners (European Commission 2007b: 4, emphasis added).

Secondly, the EC 2007(d) *Annual Action Program* identifies the important needs of Transnistrian communities in further supporting economic prosperity, and supports a community-based approach. It is significant to note here the EU's acknowledgement that existing policies as they operated up until that point had been inadequate in targeting the groups they were most concerned with, that being Transnistrian civil society. It further identifies that "the experience of other donors shows that projects implemented through *informal links* between Moldovan and Transnistrian organizations and *individuals on the level of local communities* have a chance of being successful" (European Commission 2007d: 19, emphasis added). In line with the TML, I would argue this notion of delegating information exchange to the ground level shows how influential mechanisms of Individual and Social Learning are in collecting valuable insights of policy effectiveness. This can then move into Instrumental Learning where success or failure of community efforts are communicated to the organizational level; a mechanism which is starkly illustrated in the *Annual Action Program*'s Implementation methods on policies on the Transnistrian issue, where centralized management would depend on "independent reviews, communication and evaluation of the Program" (European Commission 2007d: 22).

[12] DFID [Department for International Development] is the UK government ministry responsible for delivering assistance to the world's poorest states, despite Moldova moving to middle-income country status in January 2009.
[13] SIDA [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency] is a government agency working on behalf of the Swedish government and parliament with an aim to reduce world poverty through cooperation.

In the EC 2007(e) *ENPI Action Fiche*, the EU devotes considerable portions of the document to lessons learnt within EUBAM's scope in Moldova, and is a prime example of evaluation and reflection on existing policy taking place within the theory's Lesson Drawing phase thanks primarily to the Individual and Social Learning phases which preceded it. Particularly, it states a major component of EUBAM's successful start was the "adequate and complimentary use of different EU tools and resources", including rapid community funding and a capacity-building approach on the local level, combined with the successful utilization of MS experts' technical expertise on the matter (European Commission 2007e: 42). Not only does it highlight EUBAM's successes, but it also makes reference to policies which proved insufficient in reaching the Mission's goal, such as border guard and customs services.

A clear link is shown between Lesson Drawing thanks to successful Individual Learning. This is especially highlighted in the focus on EUBAM border guards, who are the Mission's primary agents of policy change and information dissemination, and in a pursuit to establish even closer communicative links between them and high-level EU officials. Within the TML's context, I assert here the importance of feedback loop learning continuously occurring within institutional structures, and their significance is further reinforced following Lesson Drawing at the organizational level. The policy process is particularly scrutinized here in conducting risk analysis, a sufficient sign in fortifying the assertion Individual and Social Learning are considered highly influential in the foreign policy-making process. Hence, I have shown that effective policy communication from the *who* in the TML is particularly constructive during periods of landmark policy initiatives, such as the ENP and EUBAM.

5. 5 CONCLUSION

The analysis thus far has illustrated the nuanced ways learning took place in the formative years of EU-Moldova foreign policy, most notably with the creation of the ENP and EUBAM following the 2004 enlargement round. I proved H1 in testing feedback loop learning as constituent in Individual and Social Learning, which played key roles in how policy efficacy came to be translated to the EU's organizational level. As argued in subsequent chapters, Individual and Social Learning are not in themselves sufficient in showing learning to be institutionalized, however are extremely impactful in showing learning is about *interactions* and connecting civil society to international organizations. It is in this vein that the Cyprus case is an exemplary one to mention, as in 2004 the EU was unable to incentivize grass-roots rapprochement in seeking settlement to the island's now 46-year-long protracted conflict. Having analyzed goal adjustment in the EU's initial foreign policy involvement in Moldova, the next chapter shifts to focus on *process adjustment*, now having been implementing policy in Moldova for some time, the scope ranging from 2008-2014. In short, I have argued the interplays of *who* learns in EU policy-making; now I look to *what* is learned and *where*.

CHAPTER 6: THE FLUIDITY OF LEARNING IN POLICY ADJUSTMENT (2008-2014)

The previous chapter illustrated the importance of the EU going 'local', placing issue ownership on-the-ground and incentivizing individual agents to enact change and diffuse policy efficacy to the organizational level. While much of the EU's relationship with Moldova is not to achieve conflict settlement with Transnistria explicitly, the aim from the start has been to promote good governance, rule of law, reform the judicial system, and fight corruption, in hopes a domino effect may lead to an eventual Transnistrian settlement (Interviews 3, 4, 5, and 8). However, this section illustrates the problems which persisted in the EU's approach to *how* and *what* of learning, despite even the promising beginnings achieved, and underpins several adjustments in policy *processes* in adapting to the success and failure of previous initiatives. Ultimately, I argue this period shows most prominently the fluidity of learning, as well as the EU's role in influencing conflict settlements. Through the TML, I show EU learning to be continuously transforming in adaptation to the changing political contexts in Moldova.

I tackle this with Hypothesis 2 (H2), which tests for Instrumental Learning and Political Learning to be the most impactful in shaping this period of foreign policy-making. Both Instrumental and Political Learning are sufficient, but not necessary, mechanisms to argue learning has occurred at the organizational level; the 'Smoking Gun' of H2. In observing learning to have affected policy change, or even merely policy reflection, the TML is fortified through H2 in arguing that learning must undergo institutional entrenchment at the organizational level in order to assert that learning occurred as a reactionary mechanism. With the EaP's creation in 2009, as well as the resumption of the 5+2 negotiation format between Moldova and Transnistria, with Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE as mediators, and the USA and EU as observers,

I expect Instrumental and Political Learning to be the prominent mechanisms in place. During this time, H2 expects to observe an overt shift to *instrument*, as well as *process* adjustment in aiming to meet these desired policy goals. That is not to say that simultaneous goal adjustment cannot and would not take place if process adjustment and institutional learning are at the forefront of policy-makers' agendas. On the contrary, I would argue that having already established end goals for Moldova – being economic growth and structural development in approximation to the EU model with eventual Transnistrian settlement – the importance is now placed on *how* these are achieved. Additionally, H2 at this point presumes a focus on identifying *where* learning takes place and *what* is learned; however, I nevertheless concede that identifying *who* learns is still incredibly beneficial and significant to the overall question, running as a consistent undercurrent.

This chapter addresses H2 and refutes alternative explanations through the scrutiny of key EU policy documents between 2008-2014. The temporal scope is significant in that it captures several key turning points in EU policy revision, within and outside the EU's borders. Beyond the pivotal 2009 launch of the EaP, the 2011 ENP review also built upon its partnership instrument agreed with the Southern Mediterranean states, in immediate response to the upheaval and democratic aspiration in North Africa and to the Arab Spring. How could these crises have affected the EU's perception of statehood and foreign policy? And what does its response to such events say about how it learns? I illustrate my argument of learning through instrument and process adjustment in a key area of policy in Moldova, that being civil society rapprochement. I then turn to Twinning, and ownership of negotiations and capacity-building as secondary policy areas to corroborate my findings. I argue these three EU policy facets in Moldova highlight the intricacies of instrument and process adjustment under scrutiny. Simultaneously, the occurrence of external shocks such as the Arab Spring has an equal influence on EU learning more broadly. While I do not argue there to be a causal relationship between a foreign policy response to the Arab Spring and policy

change in Moldova, they are nonetheless entangled in speaking of learning through policy *reaction*. I thus refute alternative explanations which argue that external shocks create mere distractions to learning. Instead, external events such as the Arab uprisings can *propel* learning, and illustrate the EU's growing need to step up even more as a foreign policy actor.

6. 1 CIVIL SOCIETY RAPPROACHMENT

"A strong civil society represents one of the fundamental building blocks for any democracy. It helps to strengthen good governance, democratic dialogue, citizenry participation, and accountability" (EUBAM 2012). Rapprochement of civil society draws on policy initiatives already discussed in the previous chapter, where incentives to reach conflict settlement are buttressed at the local level in order to promote change from within. Particularly, the evidence showed EUBAM to be the primary driver of civil society engagement, through both the agents on-the-ground themselves in mobilizing individuals, or border management assistance as an instrument between the two sides. Even more so, the 2008-2014 period shows deep contention in the way Moldovan-Transnistrian rapprochement can be moved forward. I argue the European Parliament's (2012b) study on lessons learned across 21 of its CSDP missions worldwide is a key document in mapping entrenched reflections on EUBAM's role in Moldova, which otherwise are rarely communicated in other documents. This study is important in arguing the utility of civil society rapprochement for learning in Moldova from the EU side, and in drawing on the TML's Political Learning phase in demonstrating the fluidity of learning. Further to this, strengthening civil society is also a key motivator of the EaP, thus this policy initiative encapsulates the multiple avenues within which the EU constructs its relations with Moldova (European Commission 2015a: 30). There are no other official documents which specifically address lessons learned in the EUBAM mission

(European Parliament 2012b: 66). While the Transnistrian issue is not explicitly referred to in many documents on lessons learned, I have already argued that initiatives such as civil society engagement constitute one of the several structural reforms being promoted in Moldova, in hopes this can lead to an eventual conflict settlement.

Interestingly, while EUBAM's learning approach is often referred to as 'ad hoc' negatively (European Parliament 2012b: 66), I argue it is EUBAM's precise strategy of trial and error which facilitates a more organic learning approach. In emphasizing its role as more a neutral partner rather than a disciplining supervisor, and acting as an advisory and technical body, I argue EUBAM has been more effective in fast information exchange on improving the Mission's structures and instruments on the go (European Parliament 2012b: 67; Interviews 6, 7, and 8). The evidence has shown the effectiveness of informal collaborative bridging of different civil society actors, and I argue this distinct acknowledgement of EUBAM's particular implementation shows its success in bringing different agents together in formal commitment. Moreover, EUBAM outrightly benefits from its mix of professional and national backgrounds, enabling a collaboration of authentic experiences (European Commission 2013a: 4). Additionally, I previously discussed the 2007(d) EC Decision on the *ENPI Annual Action Programme in Moldova*, and of one of the ways in which learning was diffused from the ground level to the EU organizational level was through EUBAM recommendations pertaining to improved border control standards and surveillance technology. Following on, EUBAM's 2009 annual report shows while some learning and progress was made in some areas, others faltered in the years following those recommendations. On the topic of border control standards, the annual report states that if alignment to EU standards is the desired goal, "further reform of overall border management…is required. This includes further changes to the legislative framework, *working methodologies* and institutional culture" (EUBAM 2009: 9, emphasis added). It is interesting to note EUBAM officials' view of the EU's working methodologies as a

hindrance to progress. Not surprisingly, both in interviews and the report, officials call for an intensification of activities which most develop and support relations amongst sectors; namely being civil society and in further promoting confidence-building measures (EUBAM 2009: 22, Interviews 5, 6, and 8).

In terms of H2, I assert these informal structures of learning aid in fortifying it. In confirming the necessary but not sufficient mechanisms of Social Learning and Instrumental Learning, within which I argue EUBAM's implementation structures fall, this study affirms the manner in which the EU learns from these mechanisms. While the Mission's scope of engagement itself does not extend beyond that of border management (European Parliament 2012b: 67), it is imperative the EU continuously assesses the effectiveness of its activities against the resources available. In this case, information diffusion and lessons learned come from informal interactions between civil society agents. However, this is not to say learning cannot be formally institutionalized. Instead, my argument insists these very mechanisms of learning actively *enable* policy changes to be facilitated organizationally, as the EU is pushed to seek further adjustments in policy formulation; within the scope of the TML, Political Learning, and thus Lesson Drawing, are facilitated through these interactions in Moldova.

The European Parliament's study (2012b: 101-102) on EUBAM even states, "the system could and should be improved in order to maximize the impact of learning mechanisms…[including a more] systematic inclusion of best practices…[with a focus on] improving the product." I argue civil society rapprochement fortifies H2 that Instrumental and Political Learning are most prevalent during this period against the changes developed within Moldova and the EU. In promoting active communication between various EU levels and in shifting learning from being a *reactive* mechanism to a *proactive* mechanism (European Parliament 2012b: 105; Interview 4), I illustrate the multifaceted nature of learning in leading to Lesson Drawing. That is to say, such

recommendations highlight the mechanisms which take place in the background of policy evaluation, confirming that learning in neither a static nor linear function.

Moreover on engagement instruments, I previously spoke of the feasibility of using the EIDHR in spurring Transnistrian economic prosperity. In terms of instrument adjustment intended for civil society mobilization, the EIDHR, among others, was not discussed again in policy documents or reports on Moldovan civil society engagement. Instead, the European Parliament's (2008) analysis of the EU's assistance to Moldova signposts a key document where substantial policy progress is monitored. Overall, the analysis of the EU's assistance indicated mixed results regarding policy progress. While civil society rapprochement and the provision of MFA to Moldova proved successful in some areas, the policy brief also concluded that the EU had been a "reluctant actor" as far as the protracted conflict was concerned (European Parliament 2008: 15). This sentiment was further echoed during interviews, where several high-level officials asserted the EU has yet a more active role to play in the matter (Interviews 5 and 8). I previously highlighted the Commission's (2007b) *Fiche Contradictoire*, which recommended the EIDHR be refined to maximize its best utility in the region. Interestingly, one of the European Parliament's (2008) EU assistance analysis main conclusions pertains to a more active utilization of opportunity structures provided by the EIDHR. I concede the limited time frame between the reports may not have allowed for sufficient revision of the instrument's use even if intent was there, however little mention is made of the EIDHR thereafter in subsequent documents, hence I can only infer no further policy action was taken. Thus, I argue this illustrates an instance where learning can occur *without* policy change, as Instrumental Learning had come of the EIDHR in recognizing the need for adjustment, yet little action was taken.

Ultimately, the EU's 'small steps' policy for Moldova is not without its issues, namely being the inherent short-term nature of bringing different strands of civil society

together and promoting cooperation. In its essence, civil society rapprochement and learning can only go so far, as any change is yet limited to low-politics issues due to limited resources or expertise; no matter how beneficial these constituent achievements may be to a settlement. It is thus why I argue learning must be diffused to the organizational level in order to constitute learning, as the top of the institutional hierarchy is more likely to possess the resources and power to enact change in areas of high-politics as well. The European Parliament's (2012a) report on the Transnistrian issue captures precisely this dichotomy; policy evaluation must be institutionalized organizationally. In terms of the TML, Political Learning and Lesson Drawing are the phases which best encapsulate deeper structural change. Nevertheless, the urgent need for greater civil society engagement in promoting a shift away from the status-quo is precisely why I assert an overt EU policy process adjustment was made during this period. Similarly to the Cyprus case, both Moldovan and Transnistrian citizenry have long accepted the territorial division as it is, in light of several other socio-economic problems they must focus on day-to-day. The consensus both at the EU level and on-the-ground in Chisinau is that the debate surrounding the future territorial status of the Transnistrian region is ill-informed, ideologically based, and heavily influenced by the government-sponsored media (European Parliament 2012a: 30; Interviews 5 and 8). Further civil society engagement falls in the hands of the EU in order to promote a constructive settlement process; a recommendation which has been long pushed for by representatives locally in Moldova as well (Interviews 3, 4, and 5).

6. 2 TWINNING ARRANGEMENTS

Secondly, Twinning arrangements as a form of EU technical assistance provided to Moldova constitutes an additional layer of policy *instrument* adjustment which featured often in interviews and several EU reports. Twinning has become a brand-

name for a unique form of peer-to-peer assistance, and refers to one of the ENP's institutional cooperation instruments between public administrators of EU MS and partner countries (European Commission 2014). By bringing together EU MS public sector expertise and representatives from partner countries, peer-to-peer cooperation is strived for in order to foster operational results, namely approximation of national laws and regulations to the EU model. Twinning subsequently follows the EU's main motivations in Moldova already discussed, primarily seeking to promote good governance, fight corruption, and reform the judicial system. While resolving the Transnistrian issue is not of primary concern within this context, it is believed among EU and OSCE officials of various levels of seniority that a conflict settlement can be achieved following the successful implementation of these other structural reforms (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8).

Since the ENP's advent, the EC has utilized a number of such institution-building instruments as part of the EU's Action Plan with Moldova, as identified in its 2008 *Action Fiche for Moldova*[14]. The progress achieved in Moldova as a result of Twinning is one of the most tangible to track thanks to the EC's annual activity reports on its Twinning and Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) projects in the Eastern neighborhood (see European Commission 2012, 2013b, 2014, 2015b, 2016, 2017b, 2018d). On the question of Moldovan willingness to partake in such projects and receive external expertise, the evidence shows Moldova consistently topped the list as one of ENPI's most ardent users of TAIEX, as well as registered the second highest number of Twinning project participants between 2006-2013, behind Ukraine (European Commission 2013b: 5). Twinning undoubtedly ranks amongst the EU's most essential policy instruments for fostering prosperity, security, and stability in the region (European Commission 2015b), and its long-term, demand-driven, policy-

[14] The EC's 2008(b) *Action Fiche for Moldova* is the first detailed document to identify Twinning as a viable policy instrument to be further implemented in Moldova in light of its political progress. However, Twinning has been officially available to Moldova as part of the ENP since 2004.

driven, and on-the-ground nature captures the very essence of policy instrument, as well as process, adjustment in question. Numerous progress reports find Twinning to be among the most effective policy- and citizen-strengthening instruments at the EU's disposal, with its continuous modernization and improvement a direct result of cross-sector communication (Social Learning) and policy effectiveness reflection (Lesson Drawing) (European Commission 2016; 2017b; Interviews 7 and 8).

Twinning constitutes classic mechanisms of Individual and Social Learning, particularly when in collaboration with other MS. By receiving expertise from similar institutions, Moldova strengthens its public administration in pursuit of structural reforms approximated to the EU standard. Moreover, horizontal collaboration between Moldovan and EU MS' public institutions is enhanced, buttressing the possibility for Social Learning to lead into Political Learning through process adjustment. The EC (2008: 21) report considers heavily the lessons it could learn from Twinning in applying them to Moldova, not only through MS expertise provision, but also in the benefits Twinning can yield in pursuing structural reforms across several sectors. In the decade following that report, Twinning has evolved into a more efficient and adaptable policy instrument, fit for purpose and increasingly tuned in to EU political priorities (European Commission 2018d: 1), thanks to institutional reflection and continuous feedback from administrative sources on-the-ground.

A high-level official in DG NEAR [Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations] stressed the importance of the EU having several 'entry points' into Moldovan and Transnistrian civil societies (Interview 6), where Twinning allows for links to be established between reforms at the local and national levels, primarily through cross-sector individual communication following most closely the TML's Social Learning mechanism. On the other hand, the implementation of Twinning constitutes precisely Political Learning as well, in that it is about *process* adjustment in order to fulfill certain technical assistance goals. In utilizing MS

expertise to diffuse learning to the organizational level, Political Learning's Evidence-based Approach to learning is well-captured by the tangible results of Twinning, and its inherent component of teamwork (Interview 6). The EU's foreign policy priority is repeatedly expressed as good and close relations with its neighbors, and Twinning is an additional, ever-changing *tool* to this end (European Commission 2018d: 7; Interviews 6 and 7).

6. 3 OWNERSHIP OF NEGOTIATIONS AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

Finally, I discuss ownership of negotiations and capacity-building as another key policy area through which to test H2, primarily through the resumption of the 5+2 negotiations talks in 2011 and the negotiation coalitions which arose from that format. The previous empirical chapter covering 2002-2007 already exhibited the importance of issue ownership at the local Moldovan level through agent engagement as a driving force of EU foreign policy learning. In continuum, I draw on the 5+2 format, as well as the less formal Working Group (WG)[15] format, to analyze against H2 whether Instrumental and Political Learning are indeed the most prominent mechanisms driving EU learning during this period. A long-reiterated EU sentiment regarding its approach to Moldova and Transnistria has been a focus on confidence-building measures, and even more so, promoting this confidence-building through an *output*-oriented approach (Interviews 3, 4, and 5). In probing the exact meaning of what an output-oriented approach meant for officials at various levels of both the EU and the OSCE, they all spoke of one common element: Ownership of negotiations on the Moldovan and Transnistrian sides through WGs and a resumption of the 5+2 format, with the EU fulfilling a more formal mediator role (Interviews 3, 5, and 8). In tandem, several ministerial statements show the output-oriented approach to be inextricably

[15] WGs (also sometimes referred to as Expert Groups) contain representatives of government from Moldova and Transnistria, who come together regularly to discuss issues relating to the citizenry's daily lives in the region, and are not aimed at overt conflict settlement negotiations. Topics of negotiation include but are not limited to: road transport, education, economy, health, etc.

tied to increased development of joint proposals on further capacity-building measures, as well as the commitment and political will of the negotiating sides to achieve resolution on a number of long-standing issues (OSCE 2018; 2019).

Within the 5+2 negotiations, it is interesting to note the difference between the EU's formal status in the talks compared to the perceived reality by actors involved. In unpicking the formalized centers of power, a conflation of the EU's formal role in the format illuminates an interesting facet of the learning mechanisms at play. An OSCE diplomatic representative noted that, while there is a large formal difference between observers and mediators within the 5+2 format, reality of the discussions shows this is not necessarily the case (Interview 8). In implying the EU has a more hands-on involvement in the negotiations than is officially reported, H2 is fortified in arguing that prevalent Instrumental Learning mechanisms take place. As I discussed in the theoretical chapter, Instrumental Learning pertains to how the EU exerts power *through* its instruments, and in this case, highlights how policy learning is institutionalized through its normative role as a mediating force. While Russia and Ukraine are considered the formal 'mediators' of the 5+2 process, with the USA and EU as 'observers', the reality of this blurred line in action says a lot about the EU's normative influence amongst the actors involved (Interviews 3, 4, and 5).

Moreover, WGs are especially relevant in fortifying H2 that the transitional state of learning diffusion from individual to organizational in sufficient in arguing that learning is fluid. WGs play significant roles in the discussions of technical issues pertaining to civil society rapprochement and an eventual conflict settlement. While the number of operating WGs vary greatly year to year, they nevertheless are primary drivers in pushing negotiations further between the sides. As one diplomatic representative in Chisinau stated, WGs allow for real and sustainable progress to be made on the conflict, since the Transnistrian issue has historically been only a matter of priority among a small circle of top-level officials in Moldova (Interview 5). By

discussing low-level political issues, WGs allow for cooperation to be made in areas other than that of the conflict, hence progress can be made in some regards where the official 5+2 negotiations falter, as these often fall apart at the mention of respect to Moldova's territorial integrity (European Parliament 2012a: 18; Interviews 5 and 8). Due to lack of capacity at times in both Moldova and Transnistria in progressing official 5+2 negotiations, WGs also foster a greater sense of local ownership on the matters; a dimension to settlement negotiations already demonstrated as highly significant. WGs "draw on the considerable expertise available from earlier periods of the conflict and utilize it for the current negotiations" (European Parliament 2012a: 30; Interview 5). By broadening its base of consultations and cooperation through WGs, the EU is able to achieve buy-in from all sides at the negotiation table, while also adding an analytical capacity to its confidence-building process. Interview data shows an overwhelming consensus on the effectiveness of WGs in achieving low-politics cooperation between the two sides (Interviews 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8). In the context of H2, I argue the significance of WGs and the assumption of certain roles in the 5+2 format highlights the presence of impactful Political Learning mechanisms. An adjustment of the 5+2 negotiation process, as well as the added ownership capacities of WGs, shows the fluidity of the EU's foreign policy-making process in adapting to Moldova's political context.

Prior to concluding, I firstly address the Arab Spring uprisings which began in late 2010, in order to examine the alternative explanation that learning in Moldova was not a result of policy process adjustment within the case, but instead a reaction to external shocks. While I am aware external events can constitute justifiable explanations for policy learning, or policy change, my foci thus far have been to argue learning is the result of mechanism transformation and endogenous reflective forces *within* the EU structure. In addressing the Arab uprisings, it is important to question how major events interact with our understandings of learning.

6. 4 THE EU'S RESPONSE TO THE ARAB SPRING

Since the first Tunisian uprisings in 2010, the Arab Spring's effect on the EU's foreign policy role is an interesting one, not least due to its changing perception of statehood, but also in questioning its foreign policy instruments used to navigate civil discontent. As a wave that shook the Arab world, these demonstrations pertained to citizenries calling for democracy, dignity, and social justice (European Commission 2011). While the Arab Spring calls into question the EU's relations with its Southern neighborhood as opposed to the Eastern one, it nonetheless posits significant questions about EU learning in foreign policy-making: are responses to external events such as this *different* to learning, or do they *propel* learning?

The Arab Spring pertained to a series of pro-democracy protests enveloping largely Muslim countries in the Middle East[16]. Beginning in late 2010 in Tunisia with Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation, protests quickly spread across the region in response to their oppressive regimes, and people's unjust treatment at the hands of their authoritarian leaders. The EU responded with a striking *mea culpa*, and vowed to make greater efforts in fixing its relations with the region (Burke 2013: 6). This manifested primarily in the form of economic aid, and in capturing a 'more-for-more' approach to incentivize democratic reform. However, while the EU made repeated references to the '3 M's' in resolving the Arab Spring (money, mobility, and markets), evidence showed these were inadequate in transforming the region (Burke 2013: 14).

Throughout the EU's response, one major priority was to strengthen support to and cooperation with civil society, in the belief that supporting these informal grass-roots networks could improve governance and government accountability (European Commission 2011; Interview 2). Reminiscent of the 'more-for-more' and 'less-for-less'

[16] The primary countries affected by these demonstrations were Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt, and Bahrain.

approaches described for Moldova by an EEAS official (Interview 4), Bremberg (2016: 432) shows there was also EU momentum for this approach at the beginning of the Arab Spring. It is interesting to note several EU officials interviewed in the aforementioned piece noted regret in framing the Arab situation as such, asserting it was "ill-informed" and gave neither clear carrots, nor credible sticks to the actors (Bremberg 2016: 433). Conceptually, a 'more-for-more' approach in the region made sense, however was ultimately difficult to implement in practice on an individual country basis (Burke 2013: 8). The critique of an absence of credible instrumental policy incentives in the Arab region echoes strongly the sentiments expressed regarding the Moldova-Transnistria issue (Interviews 3, 4, and 5).

Ultimately, the EU's response towards the Arab uprisings scrutinizes various facets of foreign policy, the main being that there is a lot to be gained from moving away from formal decision- and foreign policy-making arenas in Brussels (Bremberg 2016: 435). Instead, while it cannot be argued if the external shock of the Arab Spring had any causal influence on the EU's approach to Moldova's own question of statehood, it does illustrate the significance of looking into the nuanced mechanisms underpinning policy action. The EU's heightened involvement in the Transnistrian issue long preceded the Arab uprisings, as well as the ENP review which underpinned the EU's response to the demonstrations. Even more so, an EC thematic evaluation on support for civil society support in Moldova attributed specifically the 2011 and 2015 ENP reviews to the EU's recognition of civil society's importance in approximating the Eastern neighborhood region to EU standards (European Commission 2018a: 1).

It is nevertheless significant to note the effect external shocks have on the EU's capacity for both *reactive* and *proactive* learning as discussed within the context of Moldovan civil society rapprochement. Overall, one persistent argument underlines most policy and scholarly commentaries of the EU's role both in the Arab Spring and in the Eastern protracted conflicts: the call for a more active EU (see Witney 2012;

Burke 2013; Bremberg 2016; Interviews 3 and 4). Clear acknowledgement of this need is also made in the European Parliament's (2012a: 22) study of the Transnistrian issue, where it calls for the EU to "develop a clearer strategic vision of the kind of settlement it would like to see, including the policies to achieve it and the resources necessary to commit." I argue this illustrates a call for more robust understandings of policy instruments and processes, as the desired goals with Moldova had already long been formulated.

6. 5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has exemplified H2's expectations, and in aiming to address the question of *what* is learned, the answer lies in increasing civil society engagement, as well as issue ownership provision to negotiating parties. Even more so, Instrumental Learning and Political Learning capture the very EU policy adjustments achieved in Moldova. Between its foci on civil society rapprochement, rigorous implementation of Twinning, and issuing negotiation ownership to Moldovan and Transnistrian representatives beyond the formal 5+2 format, I assert attention ought to be paid to the fluidity of learning in policy adjustment. Particularly speaking through the lens of external shocks as *propellers* of the learning process, this time period most clearly illustrates the non-static forms in which learning occurs. In unpicking *what* is learned at the EU's informal and formalized centers of policy-making, Instrumental and Political Learning illuminate learning's transitional status from the individual, to the institutional. Moving forward, the next chapter shifts its scope to the 2015-2019 period, with an aim to assess Lesson Drawing phases more closely. I not only aim to examine how policy reflections relate to one another constitutively, but also how event shocks *within* Moldova may have impacted EU foreign policy-making.

CHAPTER 7: THE PROTOCOL PARADOX (2015-2019)

The previous chapter exemplified elements of the TML's Instrumental and Political Learning mechanisms in facilitating EU foreign policy-making in Moldova's protracted conflict from 2008-2014; where learning as a fluid, non-linear mechanism underpins the key manner in which learning can be linked to policy change. As information continues to be diffused from the ground to the organizational level, learning can hence be linked to change in that it brings about certain *instrument* as well as *processual* adjustments. Moving forward, the final 2015-2019 period aims to capture the consolidation of the EU's learned approach towards Moldova, where I expect the TML's Lesson Drawing to be the most prevalent as several stages of policy evaluation and revision are at the foreground.

This expectation is tackled through Hypothesis 3 (H3), which assumes the TML's Lesson Drawing mechanism to be the most influential in facilitating EU foreign policy-making in Moldova from 2015-2019. Primarily, H3 is fortified through major policy reviews pertaining to Moldova and its territorial integrity *vis-à-vis* Transnistria, and can be proven if shown that Lesson Drawing took precedence over policy adjustments, such as the goals, instruments, or processes which would affect policy efficacy. Lesson Drawing is both necessary and sufficient in arguing learning to have transpired in policy-making; the 'Doubly Decisive' test of H3, as it lies at the organizational level, is buttressed in an Evidence-based Approach, and pertains to evaluative and reflective cognitive processes. That is to say, while decision-makers at the institutional level possess both the resources and power to alter policy, I expect learning to be present at this stage while consolidation of approaches occur, even if policy change does not ensue. While I concede multiple learning mechanisms may be present simultaneously during a given period, and the roles of *what* is learned, *who* learns, and *where* it is learned are of still paramount importance, I am examining how

the presence of reflective mechanisms like Lesson Drawing affect the overall policy-setting context and how learning is *formalized*. Conflict settlement with Transnistria may still be of secondary priority to establishing sound structural reforms in Moldova pertaining to anti-corruption measures, rule of law, and good governance. However, H3 is confirmed if it is proven the EU underwent major evaluation as it not only looks back on 10 years of the ENP, but also sets out to establish new ambitious agreements with Moldova. The EU's stance on the issue from the get-go has been to construct a settlement with Transnistria not as a security issue, but as a social and development one (European Commission 2007a: 108), and testing Lesson Drawing allows for reflection on how this was realized.

It begins with major policy-setting events, such as the EU's signing of an AA and DCFTA with Moldova, and ends with Moldova's tumultuous political context of 2016-2019, as oligarchic interests undermine its pursuit for rule of law and democratization. With the foundation of 'small steps' policy previously set, the analysis thus moves to what I call 'big cooperation' both between the EU and Moldova, and between the Moldovan and Transnistrian negotiators. In perusing larger-scale bilateral agreements, I am especially interested in which policy initiatives and sectors the EU deems successes, and which necessitate alteration or re-formulation. Given I have already argued the nature of on-the-ground focus on civil society actors and issue ownership as drivers of policy learning to the institutional level in years prior, H3 is fortified if shown that these drivers are effectively consolidated through policy evaluation.

Namely, I examine what I call the 'Oligarchy Paradox,' wherein the majority of successful Protocol Decisions (PDs)[17] were signed between 2016-2019, marking

[17] PDs are documents based on key day-to-day issues discussed and negotiated, in this case, during WG meetings and in 5+2 negotiation formats. PDs cover a wide range of sectors, such as but not limited to: road transport, education, economy, health, etc. PDs are discussed in more informal settings similar to those of WGs, and if a PD is successful and signed, it is moved for discussion to the formal 5+2 format.

substantial progress between the sides hardly seen previously in the formal 5+2 negotiations. However, the PDs during that time were negotiated between the two oligarchic regimes in power in Moldova and Transnistria, through the lens of business interests (Interview 5), and thus it bears questioning how EU priorities are shaped in situations where the EU's normative influence is contradicted. I also examine the impact the 2014 banking crisis in Moldova had on the learning and policy change process for the EU in dealing with high levels of corruption and fraud. Similarly to the previous examination of the Arab Spring as an external shock to the EU's foreign policy, the shifting domestic political climate in Moldova brings into question the EU's abilities to continuously reflect on and improve its existing policy mechanisms.

In speaking of the impact of learning on EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts, it is particularly salient to assess not only the robustness of its existing policy instruments in withstanding various shocks, but also the EU's ability to evaluate critically its own policy trajectory. The analysis reveals the inadequacy of H3 in explaining learning mechanisms between 2015-2019. Lesson Drawing is indeed a prominent facet of EU policy, as seen through the ENP's 2015 review and the EC's *20 Deliverables for 2020,* which was repeatedly regarded as a major policy reflection milestone in EU-Moldova relations (Interviews 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8). However, through the EU's consistent focus on civil society strengthening and utilization of this instrument as a formative negotiation mobilizer between Moldova and Transnistria, the TML's Individual and Social Learning through agents of change and individual interactions appear to instead be the primary drivers of policy evaluation and change. That is to say, while H3 would have expected Lesson Drawing to occur following organizational level learning as seen from 2008-2014, agent learning and on-the-ground cooperation are more influential.

7. 1 FROM 'SMALL STEPS' TO 'BIG COOPERATION'

The promotion of good governance, economic growth, and structural reforms are one of the EU's top priorities insofar as its involvement in Moldova, and inadvertently in helping them pursue a conflict settlement with the *de facto* state. Therefore, Moldova developed an ever closer political and economic relationship with the EU over the years, which ultimately culminated in the signing of its AA, including a DCFTA, in 2014 and entering into force in 2016. Replacing the previous PCA between the EU and Moldova, the AA now allowed for Moldova's deeper political and economic integration. Moldova's ability to progress structural reforms and meet implementation challenges is particularly accelerated with its AA/DCFTA. The DCFTA pertains to ambitious structural reformulations, where through trade liberalization and implementation of EU legislation, it becomes easier to approximate Moldova to the EU *acquis* (Interviews 1 and 2). In speaking to DG Trade representatives, the EU's DCFTA with Moldova was described as the most comprehensive and ambitious agreement they have with any third country (Interviews 1 and 2). I argue the EU has a major role to play in Moldova's European integration process, and most importantly, this role ought not only be limited to official meetings, declarations, and state visits. In this way, the AA/DCFTA also serves to enhance the EU's representation through consultations, assistance, and support of domestic reform processes (Morari 2016: 422). Upon further discussion with DG Trade representatives, it became clear that trade benefits are inextricably linked to civil society support through more contact entry points (Interviews 1 and 2). Making full utility of Moldova's economic incentive for cooperation with the EU in order to regain elements of territorial sovereignty, policy-based operation strengthening through civil society is further pursued; including MFA and Mobility Partnerships (MPs) such as visa liberalization (European Commission 2017a).

The reasons for ensuring Moldova's macroeconomic stability, and the importance of supporting their reform process are twofold. The first pertains to the sociopolitical implications tied to Moldova's economic stabilization; in buttressing anti-corruption measures and nurturing a viable economic sphere, the EU can simultaneously promote eventual territorial reconciliation with Transnistria. However, MFA and other such fiscal strategies served secondary purposes for the EU as well, in attempting to combat rising regional instability during that period; notably the conflict in Ukraine. A 2017(a) EC staff working document on the EU's provision of MFA to Moldova highlighted the growing negative impact the neighborhood's regional instability was having on Moldova's socioeconomic situation. Fearing "a prolongation of weak economic conditions in Russia and/or possible new trade and economic sanctions by Russia," the EU's capabilities for confidence-building in Moldova underwent increasing reflection and evaluation; a mechanism most strongly aligning with the TML's Lesson Drawing. This argument is further corroborated with the following statement:

> The proposed MFA would increase substantially the EU's leverage on policy-making in Moldova, helping steer the country towards a reform trajectory that would help restore macroeconomic stability, address governance problems and boost potential growth in the longer run (European Commission 2017a: 18).

On the other hand, even in speaking of the successes and failures of MFA in ensuring Moldova's socioeconomic stability, civil society benefactors of MFA were still considered vital informational sources for policy learning and evaluation (Interviews 1, 2, 5, and 6). Hence, I argue this is a first instance in seeing where H3 is not sufficiently confirmed in capturing the drivers behind the learning process.

Given this state of play and within the context of 'big cooperation', I turn to the implementation of the EU's other confidence-building measures in Moldova in order

to test H3 for the prevalence of Lesson Drawing in dictating the trajectory of policy change. Civil society engagement through agents of change and support for issue ownership on-the-ground constitutes one of the most important facets of EU foreign policy. The 2015-2019 period sees confidence-building measures as a consistent policy tool implemented in Moldovan and Transnistrian territories, including through media outlet cooperation from both sides, joint trainings for social and care workers, and the establishment of solidarity funds to provide technical and informational assistance to Transnistrian non-governmental organizations (Council of Europe 2016: 24). The EU not only believes these measures can establish a socio-political environment conducive to conflict settlement, but also recognizes the success people-to-people contacts can have on cross-sectional constructive interaction between professional groups, the general public, and authorities at varying levels (Council of Europe 2016: 23; Interviews 3 and 4). I thus argue MPs to be one of the EU's key people-to-people entry points through the lens of policy evaluation, particularly as it is further corroborated below in examining the EC's (2017c, 2018b) *20 Deliverables for 2020*. The EU's 2020 Deliverables were repeatedly regarded as a major policy reflection milestone in EU-Moldova relations (Interviews 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8); yet of even more importance is analyzing how learning mechanisms can be consolidated through this milestone.

7. 2 MOBILITY LIBERALIZATION AS LEARNING

A 2009 EEAS working document on MPs marks a significant turning point in EU-Moldova relations with regards to increased citizen mobility, and is one of the first of its kind to direct attention to local citizenry itself as a means to achieve structural reforms. The EU had long expressed until this point the benefit of aiming policy to civil society as opposed to government, in hopes this could incentivize a potential settlement to be pushed by the ground level. MPs promote citizen mobility such as

through visa liberalization agreements[18]; a policy which many interviewees considered a game-changing initiative for Moldova's relationship with the EU when a dialogue for which was introduced in 2008 (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7). With regards to climbing the ladder towards further European integration, Moldova was the first post-Soviet state to achieve this with its visa liberalization and ratification of its AA. The EC argues that visa liberalization, as long as it is secure and well-managed, "promotes movement of people and the diversification of professional cross-regional networks" (European Commission 2017c: 42); a collaborative mechanism strongly echoing the TML's Social Learning of individual networking. This form of confidence-building measure directly benefited Moldovan citizenry, as they were now able to receive biometric passports and travel visa-free within the EU; an initiative which built upon a wider EU-Moldova MP (see Betlii 2016; Interviews 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8).

Moving towards wider civil society mobilization strategies, the EC's (2018a: 1) *Thematic Evaluation of the EU's Support to Civil Society* highlights particular strategic foreign policy objectives adopted in ENP countries, including Moldova, pertaining to civil society strengthening and its beneficial impact on highly volatile political contexts. In speaking of the importance of civil society engagement for strengthened policy capacities and targeted support, the evaluation states:

> Such civil society engagement can involve anything from *improved access to information related to policy-making* as well as to civil society providing input and *participating actively in the identification of priorities and implementation* of domestic policies and programs (European Commission 2018a: 1-2, emphasis added).

Within the context of H3 and the TML, civil society rapprochement and strengthening is a continued pursuant throughout the formative years of EU foreign policy-making

[18] Visa liberalization in Moldova pertains to citizens' ability to travel with biometric passports within the Schengen area without a visa; an allowance also extended to citizens of the Transnistrian *de facto* state.

in Moldova. While the Transnistrian issue is not explicitly referred to, civil society support is again linked to structural reforms and the rule of law. The significance of placing power and agency back at Individual and Social Learning constitutes a fortifying of the argument that the TML is able to cycle back to initial phases following successful Lesson Drawing mechanisms, in this case the 2011 and 2015 ENP reviews. Evaluation roadmaps, and the EC's subsequent multiannual evaluation plans, are particularly interesting to peruse for policy reflection mechanisms for two reasons. Firstly, their very purposes are to emphasize the need for systemic and timely evaluations of the EC's activities and initiatives, in order to demonstrate accountability and learn lessons in moving forward with policy improvement (European Commission 2018c). Secondly, the input from stakeholders, and especially citizens, implies a potentially unbiased view of recommendations, as financial or political ulterior motives are less likely to cloud contributions.

Bearing in mind the significance of mobility and people-to-people contacts in the EU's policy strategy for Moldova, I turn to the EC's *20 Deliverables for 2020* as a pertinent document in unpicking how the EU learns in its foreign policy-making, as well as a key piece of policy evaluation and policy-setting. My argument has demonstrated the significance of civil society engagement, rapprochement, and support in building information structures which can effectively be diffused to the institutional level *vis-à-vis* policy change and learning. The value of people-to-people collaboration lies in promoting the diversification of professional cross-sector networks (European Commission 2017c: 3); the precise structures I assert drive the formidable stages of learning through Individual Learning and Social Learning. The 2015-2019 period in EU-Moldova relations shows this to be the case. As the TML's Lesson Drawing plays out, in this case through an implementation evaluation of the 20 Deliverables, the constitutive cycle drives recognition back to the individual level, where interactions between agents of change persist as essential mechanisms for effective policy formulation and implementation. An example of this is seen in the EC's call for

improved multi-stakeholder policy dialogue in supporting civil society platforms (European Commission 2017c: 7).

The importance of civil society engagement persists as a notable policy instrument through which much of the EU's foreign policy-making is developed between 2017-2019. The 20 Deliverables aim to deliver tangible results for citizens in priority areas of strengthening institutions and good governance, and mobility and people-to-people contacts, among others. In reading through the document and any evaluation roadmaps which succeeded it, as well as the data presented in interview triangulation, the EU's *Deliverables for 2020* are internally regarded as an invaluable practical tool for coherent and efficient implementation of policy (European Commission 2017c: 1; Interviews 6, 7, and 8). Outside the EU bubble, however, and in speaking to representatives on-the-ground in Moldova who experience first-hand the supposed benefits of the 20 Deliverables, little can be said for its achievements (Interview 5). This is an added sign of cognitive disconnect in the information received at the organizational level on policy efficacy vs. the experienced realities on-the-ground.

In subsequent evaluation roadmaps on the implementation of the 20 Deliverables in Moldova, attention was now given to the lackluster effectiveness of this supposed coherent and efficient policy tool. Even then, I argue neither learning nor policy change was effectively brought about, as the sectors of civil society engagement were not properly evaluated, hence weakening H3. In ranking the progress that had been made on different issues since its last evaluation a few years prior, the EC reported only moderate progress was made on the deliverable of more engagement with civil society organizations (European Commission 2018b: 4). Given the supposed importance of greater civil society engagement in Moldova, it is interesting to note the lack of policy change to achieve this. I not only argue that learning had occurred across several institutional levels, but also that civil society rapprochement was consistently communicated from several sources of policy information to be a key deliverable.

However, the lack of policy *process* adjustment in altering this progress trajectory would signify the assertion that learning need not be inherently linked to policy change, as they are clearly ideationally distinct.

7. 3 THE OLIGARCHY PARADOX

Moving away from mobility liberalization and civil society engagement policy per se, I now turn to discuss the government regimes in power in both Moldova and Transnistria in 2016-2019. I maintain the assertion that, along with the role civil society plays, negotiation issue ownership of local agents is both a result of, as well as a means by which the EU learns in its foreign policy-making. I previously discussed the power of informal negotiation networks in driving policy learning diffusion, particularly within the context of the 5+2 negotiation format. A recurring interview topic pertained to these informal networks, and how the EU learns in its policy-making through observation of the successes and failures of the discussions between these network individuals (Interviews 3, 4, 5, and 8).

I refer to what I term as 2016-2018's 'Oligarchy Paradox', where the EU found itself caught between a rock and a hard place *vis-à-vis* Moldova-Transnistria issue negotiations. As an observer of the 5+2 format, EU officials were faced with deciding which issues took precedence in addressing. On the one hand, successful 5+2 negotiations were finally being completed, following years of stalemate and little progress. On the other, they were faced with two national political scenes marred by oligarch-run politics, dating as far back as 2009 (Balmforth 2015). Following Moldova's AA signing with the EU in 2014, citizens became increasingly disappointed with President Timofti's pro-European incumbent government and began shifting their trust towards the pro-Russian Socialist party (PSRM), not least due to the aftermath of the 2014 banking crisis (Trefz 2019) and a lack of strict observance of implementing the AA (Kosmehl 2018). The PSRM thus won the 2016 elections with

Igor Dodon as President, while oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc had been effectively controlling the Moldovan government and administration through a parliamentary majority since 2010, although formally he only held the position of chairman of Moldova's pro-European Democratic Party (Całus 2017; Interview 5). On the other side of the bank, Vadim Krasnoselsky emerged victor as the new Transnistrian President in 2016, who was portrayed in the media as a marionette figure of Transnistria's largest commercial enterprise (Leşanu 2016). A new chapter commenced in Moldova-Transnistria relations, as negotiation spokespeople Plahotniuc and Krasnoselsky proposed to resume negotiations on any issue apart from Transnistria's political status, which remained a touchy subject for Moldova's territorial integrity (Leşanu 2016; Interviews 5 and 8).

Ever closer individual ties and cooperation between the sides was particularly apparent in 2017, when under the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship in Office, several PDs were successfully signed by Chisinau and Tiraspol under the official 5+2 negotiation auspices. Some of the most notable PDs signed were the opening of the Gura Bîcului-Bîcioc bridge across the dividing bank; the apostillation of Transnistrian university diplomas to be recognized as official documents; and standardized license plates allowing Moldovan and Transnistrian vehicles to travel outside their borders. These PDs were repeatedly regarded as cooperative milestones and seen as a further improvement in the implementation of confidence-building measures (European Commission 2018e: 5-6; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8). Particularly, the opening of the bridge significantly increased "opportunities for the movement of people and goods, transport and business activities on both banks of the [Dniester] river and in the wider region" (European Commission 2018e: 6). This notable progress, in turn, paved the way for what would later be referred to as one of the most historically successful 5+2 negotiation rounds (Interviews 3, 4, and 5).

While a legislative success as an observer in the process, I assert the oligarchic backdrop to the agreements should have posed a greater challenge of ideals for the EU. However, a diplomatic representative in Chisinau complained about the EU's inability to assert its position amidst Plahotniuc and Krasnoselsky's business collaboration, particularly following Moldova's 2014 bank scandal (Interview 5), discussed further below. While the long sought-after issue ownership at the local level was fruitful, adequate Lesson Drawing and subsequent policy change did not occur to address the EU's ideational conflicts with Moldova, and thus H3 is further weakened. Instead, while the EU had long promoted its foreign policy in Moldova as one based on good governance, rule of law, and democratization, I argue the EU neither learned nor pushed for policy change amidst this situation, and opted to turn a blind eye to Moldova's deeply-ingrained cronyism and demise of anti-corruption standards. Hence, I turn to the country's 2014 bank scandal to test for Lesson Drawing against one of Moldova's largest political shocks in its history.

7. 4 MOLDOVA'S 2014 BANKING CRISIS

The 2014 bank scandal involved the fraudulent diversion of $1 billion depositor funds from three major Moldovan banks (equal to 12% of Moldova's GDP), which subsequently shook the country's political establishment and sent it into a period of both political and financial vulnerability (European Commission 2017a: 22). $870,000 in taxpayer funds was needed to rescue the banks, and many suspected Plahotniuc as the main beneficiary of this scandal (Trefz 2019). Through this event, I examine the EU's policy learning response towards *internal* shocks, juxtaposed to the Arab Spring's *external* challenges it brought. While it does not chronologically follow the argument made previously, it was imperative to firstly set the context of the dominant oligarchic scene in Moldova before testing the EU's learning response towards Moldova in light of H3. Caught up in its geopolitical rivalry with Russia, I argue the EU failed to take

strict action when opportunity arose, and facilitated Plahotniuc's oligarch grip on the state. While the EU stepped up its involvement in the post-Soviet region following the 2008 Russia-Georgia war through the EaP, its venture to stop Russia from establishing a stronghold meant many of its liberal pursuits in the region such as democratization and anti-corruption were marginalized. While funding for various democratization projects was inadvertently meant to resolve existing conflicts such as that with Transnistria, the provision was based on supposed conditionality, where a lack of progress towards conflict resolution and anti-corruption would see MFA suspended. Despite this, EU funding towards Moldova was at €40 million in 2007 and reaching €130 million in 2014, and Plahotniuc "continued to receive financial support even as Freedom House's democratization metrics for Moldova steadily declined year after year" (Trefz 2019) – something isn't quite right here.

It is thus interesting to note the EU's foreign policy response to Moldova's banking crisis, in that there were resolute calls made to systematically improve Moldova's financial sector and hence minimize potential future risk of another large-scale bank fraud (European Parliament 2018: 3). This was even followed by expressions of grave concern for Moldova's backsliding of democratic standards, with the EU fearing them being:

> Undermined by the ruling political leaders colluding with business interests and unopposed by much of the political class and the judiciary, resulting in the Republic of Moldova being a state captured by oligarchic interests (European Parliament 2018: 8).

Privatization was the crucible in which the oligarchies in Moldova and Transnistria were formed (Trefz 2019), and while the EU finally did evaluate its failed policies towards Moldova (see European Parliament 2018), I argue H3's Lesson Drawing falls short in explaining the lack of responsibility taken before it was too late. This in turn

not only harmed the image of further European integration in the eyes of Moldovan citizens (Interview 5), but also in the eyes of the EU's local 'agents of change' in Moldova (Interview 3). Civil society groups have always maintained a strong influence over public opinion on favoring a potential settlement (Interviews 3, 4, and 5), and the EU's lack of credible support for such groups, then more than ever, constituted an opportunity missed.

7. 5 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the EU's consolidated learning approach towards Moldova coming to the fore during 2015-2019. Particularly, it sought to identify mechanisms of the TML's Lesson Drawing in testing H3, where the temporal scope was expected to show signs of major policy evaluation milestones in driving policy trajectory. Instead, a very different picture was painted as for learning mechanisms which occurred and policy changes which ensued, and sometimes did not. Lesson Drawing is both necessary and sufficient in order to assert learning occurs at the organizational level, and Evidence-based policy reflection did indeed transpire within the EU. This took the form of the ENP's 2015 review, as well as the EC's *20 Deliverables for 2020*; a milestone agenda set out through the EaP, aiming to provide coherent and efficient policy instruments to deliver tangible results in the region. However, H3 was neither able to fortify nor confirm this given the national political contexts within which the EU's foreign policy-making operated. In Moldovan and Transnistrian settings marred by a corrosive rivalry between oligarchs, as well as a sensitive geopolitical rivalry unfolding between the EU and Russia during the 2014 Ukraine crisis, neither policy change nor substantial learning can be argued to have occurred. While the 2016 elections of two oligarchs in both territories meant a streak of successfully signed PDs in driving issue ownership and negotiation forward, many of the EU's foreign policy objectives in the region were undermined. Paired with the EU's inadequate policy

reflection and response towards Moldova's banking crisis, Lesson Drawing could not be confirmed to have shaped the EU's policy stance insofar as critical policy evaluation goes.

Instead, I argue learning mechanisms based at the individual agent level are closer aligned in mapping how events transpired; the reasons for which are twofold. Firstly, the EU's focus on civil society engagement and rapprochement through MPs and MFA-funded democratization projects highlights its continued support for agent ownership, as attention is driven back to Individual and Social Learning to drive progress (Interview 5). Secondly, while Lesson Drawing cannot be argued to have occurred for big picture policy responses such as Moldova's banking scandal, the EU declared it would continue to fund projects which have a "direct and positive impact on Moldovan citizens" (Eldarov 2018). Similarly to the previously discussed periods of 2002-2007 and 2008-2014, the greatest influences appear to lie at local levels, where agents of change and issue ownership are paramount to illuminating how the EU learns in its foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Nothing is possible without individuals; nothing lasts without institutions

Jean Monnet

Referred to as 'The Father of Europe' and postwar architect of European unity, Jean Monnet recognized Europe's interdependence between the individual and the institutional. Individuals are the instigators of new ideas, and in the EU's nature as a continuously-evolving project, progress is made when it learns from the individuals that form it. My objective throughout this thesis has been to examine the conditions under which the EU learns in its foreign policy, and was conducted through a case study analysis of the Moldova protracted conflict with Transnistria. This final chapter summarizes my findings and the theoretical implications they provide. I then discuss the significance of this thesis for the wider academic fields on learning and EU foreign policy, and how future research can build on the results.

This thesis has demonstrated the EU's at-times intractable nature of foreign policy-making, particularly in protracted conflicts where the stakes of implementing effective policy are even higher. Following the 2004 enlargement round and importing Cyprus' own protracted conflict, the EU's soft power as a supposed catalyst for European integration and stability was further scrutinized. Despite committing itself to a more active role in conflict settlement both within and outside its borders, the EU was unable to achieve successful rapprochement of the conflicting sides. In a pressing need to now engage with the post-Soviet protracted conflicts in its Eastern neighborhood in order to stabilize the region, pressing questions remain on the institution's ability to rise up to the challenge: how does the EU learn in its foreign policy? And under what conditions is learning facilitated in enacting change in its foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts?

I have argued learning in EU foreign policy-making to be a constitutive and non-sequential process, and addressed this by creating the Theoretical Model of Learning (TML, see Figure 2). Unsatisfied with the current scholarly landscape on learning and policy change and the conceptual gaps left behind, I sought to tackle these discrepancies through a refined and adapted model of the existing literature. Previous theoretical frameworks on the dynamics of institutional learning were highly domestic in focus, and perceived learning as a static and linear mechanism which only concerned itself with *either* an adjustment of policy goals, *or* agent interactions on-the-ground, *or* pursuing a change in policy implementation at the organizational level. My response to overcoming these conceptual gaps and providing my own take on the mechanisms was, while with its limitations, a refined and sophisticated model which can better account for the various interacting levels of *foreign* policy-making as well. In its ability to pinpoint the *who*, *where*, and *what* of learning and policy change in organizational hierarchies as complex as the EU, it successfully uncovered several interesting findings on EU learning in Moldova's protracted conflict with Transnistria.

Firstly, I demonstrated how **agents of change** are pivotal in driving the learning process forward, precisely because international organizations are made of distinct actor-centric units of information acquisition and experiential learning operating within their own cause and effect schemata. Since its implementation in 2005, EUBAM's operations in both Moldova and Transnistria are a clear example of the influence local policy actors can have on both civil society engagement and policy diffusion. As shown during the 2002-2007 period of EU foreign policy involvement in Moldova, the 'agents of change' concept highlights the important roles interactions between individuals and knowledge acquisition play on effective learning entrenchment at the institutional level. EUBAM officials utilized their agency in pushing for the Mission's reforming from being purely security-related, to undertaking responsibilities of social and economic relations as well in civil society. In doing so, not only did civil society rapprochement within Moldova help facilitate

the state's democratization and good governance reformation, but civil society engagement would also soon be institutionalized at the organizational level and become a cornerstone of EU foreign-policy in the territories. Through feedback loops and expertise sharing also reminiscent of the Twinning arrangements implemented in Moldova and Transnistria, projects implemented through *informal links* showed not only to have a higher chance of proving successful in meeting their goals, but also to becoming internalized by policy-makers and in leading to policy change.

Secondly, **issue ownership** constitutes another condition under which learning is shown to have impacted EU policy-making. Particularly salient in speaking of the WG and 5+2 negotiation formats in Moldova between 2008-2014, learning is argued to be a fluid and non-linear mechanism precisely because issue ownership exemplifies learning's transitional state in pushing policy diffusion. In fostering a greater sense of issue ownership to the conflicting actors involved, protracted conflict policy-making benefits from broadening its base of consultations and cooperation locally, thus encouraging an organizational adjustment of policy instruments and processes. While policy change and adjustment of its various facets is not always indicative of learning mechanisms at play, evidence throughout the empirical analysis illustrates the cognitive evaluation of these processes which unfolded at the EU level. Even amidst Moldova and Transnistria's 2016-2019 oligarch-run political scenes, issue ownership and increased communication at the local agent level spurred on cooperation and successful negotiation in several key sectors. In speaking of learning in EU foreign policy-making in protracted conflicts, an implicit expectation is that learning helps realize the foreign policy's aims in the territory. In the Moldova-Transnistria case, it is rapprochement of the sides on matters unrelated to the conflict, but which will hopefully lead to an eventual settlement down the line.

Overall, the significance of this research venture for the wider field is twofold. There is not extensive research on learning in foreign policy, particularly analyses which

take several learning mechanisms into account. Thus, one benefit of this thesis lies in its illumination of often competing learning mechanisms in shaping policy-making. While my analysis is specific to learning in EU foreign policy-making in Moldova, that is not to say my findings cannot be generalized to the wider field of policy-making endeavors; institutional or domestic. In this thesis' practical implications, being made aware of, and critically reflecting on, interactive forces of experiential learning on-the-ground is important in further dissecting notions of policy integration, as well as the EU's role as a conflict mediator. In showcasing the power of individual agency and ownership confidence-building in foreign policy learning, we move one step closer to deciphering what works and what does not in the EU's engagement beyond its internal borders.

Theoretically, the inception and application of the TML showcases both the strengths and limitations of existing theories on policy learning. The theoretical framework proved to be flexible and nuanced in contextualizing the wider socio-economic forces at play in impacting learning as a *constitutive* process in Moldova. That being said, it is likely it can benefit from adjustment in expanding its generalizability, insofar as refinement of the TML can also help yield explanations on learning in policy-making *ex ante*. While learning in itself implies adjusted conduct based on past experience, the scholarship on European integration and the EU's foreign policy role outside its borders would be further enhanced by employing a policy learning theory which can account for *internal* institutional changes as well, and how these may impact how policy learning is projected *externally*. It is also worth future examination to determine if the EU's foreign policy involvement in Moldova is an extreme case, or perhaps can be generalized to the wider protracted conflicts in the Eastern neighborhood. Even more so, is learning *necessary* when advancing foreign policy? And how does an organization's internal political evolution impact its policy efficacy more widely?

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APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW LIST

INTERVIEW NO.	ORGANIZATION, LOCATION	SENIORITY LEVEL
1	DG Trade, Brussels	High seniority
2	DG Trade, Brussels	Medium seniority
3	EEAS, Brussels	Medium seniority
4	EEAS, Brussels	High seniority
5	Anonymous, Chisinau	High seniority
6	DG NEAR, Oxford	High seniority
7	EU Commissioner's Cabinet Representative, Oxford	Medium seniority
8	OSCE, Oxford	High seniority