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In-betweenness and Migration Interdependence: Lessons from Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine

Abstract

In this paper, we draw on the concepts of in-betweenness and migration interdependence in order to investigate the vulnerability of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine due to their conflicting relations with Russia and the exposure of their economies to remittance flows from the latter. To achieve this goal, we explore whether and how migrant flows and remittance flows have diverged since 2014, when the three states signed their Association Agreements with the EU and their economic relations with Russia deteriorated. In this respect, we examine how interstate relations impact upon migration and remittances flows. After discussing in-betweenness and migration interdependence, we investigate the origin of the remittance inflows in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine and the destination of the migration outflows. We map the development of remittances from the World, Europe, and Russia and relate it with the development of their GDP using longitudinal data. A comparative analysis of our findings suggest that the three cases differ from each other, but, in all three cases, Russia has not used migration interdependence as leverage. We conclude that remittance flows in the three in-between states are more affected by the state of the global economy, the economic situation of Russia, and domestic circumstances rather than from interstate relations.

Keywords: Migration Interdependence, Remittances, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia

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Introduction

In-betweenness is the new norm for small states such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The three states have been the objects of conflicting integration projects in a region where both the West, namely the European Union (EU) and the United States (US), and Russia compete for influence, and the three lesser states struggle for autonomy (Ademmer, Delcour, Wolczuk, 2016; Cadier, 2014; Dembińska, Smith, 2021; Pedi, 2020; Torbakov, 2013). The Western and Russian competing strategies in the region impact upon the in-between states and the latter have reacted in various ways (Ademmer, Delcour, Wolczuk, 2016; Grigas, 2016; Gnedina, 2015; Morar, Dembińska, 2021; Nizhnikau, 2016; Wivel, 2016). The in-betweenness status has produced interdependencies in the areas of trade, security, energy, and migration, and opened the road for competing alternatives between Russian and EU policies (Całus et al., 2018). To this background, given the importance of the remittance flows for the economies of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine (Peković, 2017; World Bank Group, 2020) in this paper we investigate migration interdependence between the three in-between states and Russia and the EU respectively.

We focus on the issue of remittances and migration interdependence in order to explore how in-betweenness affects migration and remittances flows. To this end, we examine whether and how migrant flows and remittances flows have diverged since 2014, when the three states signed their Association Agreements with the EU and their economic relations with Russia deteriorated (Cenusa et al., 2014). In this respect, we examine how interstate relations impact upon migration and remittances flows. We are particularly interested in two questions; firstly, whether the in-between states are vulnerable to Russian influence due to their dependence on the remittances flows and in this case whether the in-betweenness constitutes a source of vulnerability. Secondly, we examine whether the three states see in-betweenness as a source of resilience and precisely whether they have followed a policy of diversification, as the Association Agreements with the EU brought them closer to the West and provided opportunities to decrease their dependence on Russia.

In doing so, we rely on the concept of migration interdependence which suggests that remittances, as well as migration, produce interdependence between the involved states. Such interdependence can be used as political leverage by host countries especially in the case of small states (Tsourapas, 2018; Gazizullin, Delcour, Jaroszewicz, 2018). Our approach is one of an interdisciplinary nature, and combines insights from the International

Relations discipline and from the Economics of International Migration field. We rely on longitudinal data retrieved from the World Bank Group (2017; 2020) for the period from 2003 to 2017 to investigate the origin of remittances, map their development, and relate it to GDP growth in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Furthermore, we follow the evolution of the three states' migrant outflows towards Europe and Russia and the remittance-inflow counterparts with respect to developments in their relations with Russia. In this respect, our study constitutes a systematic and comparative overview of migration interdependence in the region. Our findings indicate that migrants and remittance flows can be affected by multiple variables of both domestic and international natures, beyond the leverage that migration interdependence offers to a hosting state.

In what follows, we first look at migration interdependence in the context of the three in-between states. Next, we look at the contribution of remittances to each one of the three economies. Our analysis of the remittance flows and migrant flows towards Russia and the EU then follows. Finally, based on our analysis in our conclusion, we discuss the factors that influence the migrants and remittance flows regarding the three in-between states, and we assess the relationship between the state of in-betweenness and migration interdependence. The analytical process we followed presents several limitations. First and foremost, there is no single theory on migration (Castles, 2010; De Haas, 2014; Massey et al., 1998). The available data on remittances in the countries under examination are incomplete and unreliable (Shelburne, Palacin, 2007). In addition to that, data on remittances include only official financial flows, while unofficial ones are believed to be 50% larger (Ratha, 2017). To overcome this issue, we have used data available from the World Bank as one single and reliable source and base our analysis on them only.

The Three In-Between States and Migration Interdependence

Russia perceives Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine as parts of its own sphere of interest and any competing vision for the region, coming from the West or the in-between states themselves, is considered a sign of disrespect to the status of Russia as a great power and a threat against its interests (Bloomfield, Kirkup, 2008; Buzan, Wæver, 2003; Trenin, 2009). To safeguard its influence in the region, Russia employs traditional strategies, such as soft power exercise in the context of the Russian World doctrine (Feklyunina, 2016; Rotaru, 2018), as well as unorthodox methods such as: russification, separatism, passportisation, disinformation campaigns, the weaponisation of gas prices and even the use of violence as in the case of Crimea's annexation (Grigas, 2016). The European orientation of the three in-between states is securitised by the Russian side; issue linkage and punitive economic measures are employed in order to put Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine under both economic and social pressure (Cenusa et al., 2014; Gazizullin, Delcour, Jaroszewicz, 2018). The three in-between states respond with a reorientation of their policies and turn to the EU (when they are able to do so), in order to decrease their dependence on Russia (Cenusa et al., 2014; Delcour, Całus 2018; Dragneva, Wolczuk, 2016; Gazizullin, Delcour, Jaroszewicz, 2018). Despite their importance, interdependencies among the three in-between states Russia and the EU have not been the object of much scholarly attention in a systematic and comparative way, with the exception of the work of Całus et al. in 2018. Such a lack of research is especially evident in the case of migration interdependence.

Tsourapas (2018, p. 386) defines migration interdependence as "the reciprocal political economy effects arising from cross-border flows of people between a sending and a host state". In this context, according to Tsourapas, the host state holds the ability to exercise coercive migration diplomacy in order to force the sending state to conform with its preferences. Empirical examples show that coercive migration diplomacy can take two forms: a) the host state can restrict the flow of migrant remittances or of the migrants themselves and b) the host state can order the expulsion of citizens of the sending state. As in other cases of interdependence (Keohane, Nye, 1973), sensitivity is a sine qua non to migration interdependence; the level of vulnerability of the sending state, however, is determined by its ability to bear the economic and/or social costs at the domestic level and/or find alternatives (Tsourapas, 2018).

Migration dependence in the three in-between states is high. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine experienced massive outflows of migrants after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Their international migrant stock in 2017 reached 875,753, 1,024,551 and 5,995,314 respectively (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2017). Given that the total population of these countries was 3,728,004, 2,755,158 and 44,831,135 (World Bank Group, 2020) respectively, the migrant stock as a percentage of the total population reached 23.5%, 37.2% and 13.4% respectively (the authors' own calculations). Moldova has been among the top remittance receivers in the world in 2017 (World Bank Group, 2018b). Ukraine is among the largest recipient countries of remittances in Europe and Central Asia (World Bank Group, 2018b). One way to assess the importance of remittances to a migrant's country of origin is to look at the ration of remittances to the international reserves (Bracking, 2003). Remittances amount to 61.8% of the total reserves in Georgia, 61.4% of the total reserves in Moldova, and 74.14% of the total reserves in Ukraine (World Bank Group, 2020).[1] Migration interdependence with Russia is heavy. The Russian Federation has been the top destination country for the emigrants from these countries. It hosts 51.4% of the Georgian migrant stock, 28.7% of the Moldavian stock, and 54.6% of the Ukrainian stock (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2017; the authors' own calculations).[2] Ukraine was one of the top five countries of origin of international migrants in the Russian Federation in 2019. Remittances sent from Russia to Georgia made up 59% of all remittances received in Georgia in 2014 (Ademmer, Delcour, 2016).

Russia is among the top destination countries for international migrants and migrant flows come from the post-soviet space (Chudinovskikh, Denisenko, 2017). The Russian migration legal framework has undergone significant changes from focusing on Russian population abroad, to a more liberal framework, and from there to policing; the changes reflect issues of repatriation and national identity, the country's economic needs, as well as social circumstances (Urinboyev, 2021). In 2014 and 2015, due to the consequences of an economic crisis and rising anti-immigrant sentiment in society, Russia introduced new migration policies aimed at restricting migrant flows (Chudinovskikh, Denisenko, 2017; Chawryło, 2014). Such measures, despite their economic, social, and political roots, have also been perceived as being punitive measures against the aforementioned in-between countries, as their timing coincides with the process of signing the Association Agreements with the EU (Delcour, Całus 2018). Remittances' value equals 11.8% of GDP in Georgia, 20.2% in Moldova, and 10.8% in Ukraine (World Bank Group, 2020). This is indicative of the high level of their dependence on remittances. Therefore, a restriction strategy in the remittances could negatively affect the economic security of the three small in-between states. The systemic insecurity can impact on their structures, shorten planning horizons, inhibit investment, and dampen growth perspectives (Griffiths, 2014). With this in mind, in the following section we examine whether and how remittances and migrants flows have been influenced since the signing of the Association Agreements with the EU. Following the migration interdependence logic presented above, a rational hypothesis would be that interstate relations

[1] World Bank Group and the authors' own calculations.

[2] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2017 and the authors' own calculations.

would impact upon the migrants and remittances flows; Russia would use its leverage to exert pressure upon the in-between states, while the latter would try to diversify their options in order to find alternatives and decrease their vulnerability.

Remittances in the In-between States

Georgia

Georgia's economy has been steadily growing during the last decade, poverty has declined by almost 50%, and household welfare has improved. In fact, Georgia has the reputation of that of a "star reformer" (World Bank Group, 2018a). Part of the growth is owed to the large capital inflows in the form of remittances, foreign direct investment, and government spending. However, the economy suffered various shocks especially in the period of 2008–2009, affecting capital inflows which haven't yet returned to their pre-crisis levels (CIA, 2020). Due to the economic situation, the remittance spending pattern in Georgia includes covering basic necessities such as food, paying communal fees, health and education expenditures, and using remittances to pay for special occasions, with weddings and funerals as the most common reported uses rather than saving those remittances or investing them in businesses (State Commission on Migration Issues, 2016; Tukhashvili, Shelia, 2012). Apart from increasing the household income and alleviating the recipients from poverty, according to Gerber and Torosyan (2010), remittances also enhance the formation of social capital when they are donated by the recipient households to other households or to the local community, contributing to collective well-being and reinforcing the ties of mutual obligation.

Moldova

Moldova faced a sustained recession during the 1990s when poverty, unemployment, corruption, and underdevelopment pushed people to emigrate. The 1998 Russian financial crisis and the conflicts with the separatist province of Transnistria deeply affected the economy (Pantiru et al., 2007, p. 4; Munteanu, 2005, p. 41). In 1998, 80% of Moldovans lived below the poverty threshold (Pantiru et al., 2007, p. 5). By the late 1990s, it was clear that remittances were the main, if not the only, mechanism for poverty alleviation in the country (Marandici, 2008, p. 1). Moldova relies on the annual remittance inflows which exceeded 34% of its GDP in 2006 (World Bank Group, 2019). Due to an inappropriate investment and business environment, most of the amounts of remittances have been spent on consumption expenditures. According to Luecke et al. (2007, p. 10), the Moldovan remittances' recipients use this income to cover the expenses of their daily needs and buy consumer durables. Moreover, they spend considerable parts of these amounts on their children's education and even on luxury goods and on health (Hristev et al., 2009, pp. 32–33). However, part of the remittances inflows is channelled to investments, especially in the retail and wholesale sectors to cover the increased aggregate demand (Stratan et al., 2013).

Ukraine

Ukraine used to be the most important economic part of the former Soviet Union. However, from 1991 to 1999, there was a 60% reduction in the country's output. From 2000 to 2013, albeit excluding 2009, there was positive GDP growth, but later on, the annexation of Crimea deeply hurt the Ukrainian economy (CIA, 2019). As a result of the economic situation in Ukraine, remittance inflows have been mainly directed towards covering the daily subsistence needs of the recipients and the purchase of durable goods (Kupets, 2012). According to Kupets (2012), remittances have also been spent on improving the housing conditions of the recipient families who have bought a house or have repaired their properties. In accordance with the aforementioned potential impact of these private inflows, remittances have been used to cover the expenses for the education of the family members of the emigrants. The accumulation of savings or the repayment of debt haven't been the first priorities of those recipients' spending plans. Additionally, business investments haven't attracted the interest of the recipients nor the return migrants due not only to the indispensable character of consumption-based needs, but also to the unfavourable investment environment. All in all, remittances in Ukraine have contributed to the development of several economic sectors (construction, real estate, trade, the food industry, and financial insurance), increased the financial literacy and the welfare of the recipients, and have helped the financial development along with the reduction of poverty.

Data Analysis

As the first step of the empirical analysis, we estimated the value of the remittances sent to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine by the Russian Federation and by the EU Member States as a percentage of their GDP to identify a pattern. Figures 1, 2, and 3 present our findings. Since all the three countries signed the Association Agreement with the EU in

2014, we used data from 2013 to 2017 in order to identify any changes in the flows signalling either increasing pressure from the Russian side or a diversification of migration policies of the in-between states towards the EU, a reaction that could increase their resilience.

It is worth mentioning that the values of the total remittances received by Ukraine as a percentage of its GDP kept growing through this time period. While in 2013 personal remittances received in Ukraine used to be 5.3% of its GDP, they subsequently increased to 10.8% of the country's GDP as at 2017. Russia's share is twice as much as the EU's. The difference is even bigger in the case of Georgia where, in 2013, personal remittances received in the country from the EU were estimated to be 2.02% of its GDP, while those from Russia reached 7.12% of GDP. However, in Moldova's case, although the values were lower in 2017 than they had been in 2013, it is interesting to consider that remittances originated from the EU were worth more than those received from Russia as a percentage of the Moldavian GDP. Specifically, personal remittances received from the EU in 2014 were estimated to be 9.62% of the Moldavian GDP and, in 2017, that percentage changed to 7.67%, while those originating from Russia went from 8.67% to 6.56% accordingly.

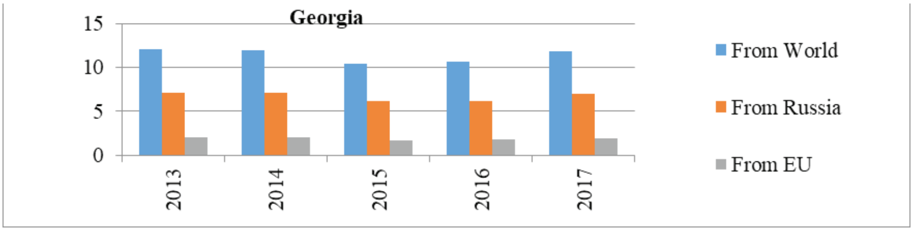

Figure 1. Personal Remittances Received by Georgia from the World, from Russia and from the EU (% of GDP)

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; 2020; the authors' own calculations.

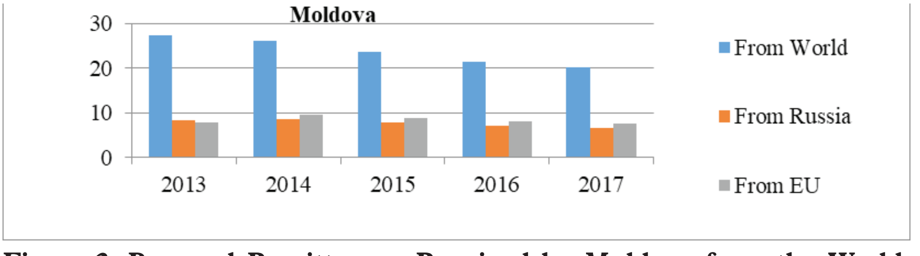

Figure 2. Personal Remittances Received by Moldova from the World, from Russia and from the EU (% of GDP)

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; 2020; the authors' own calculations.

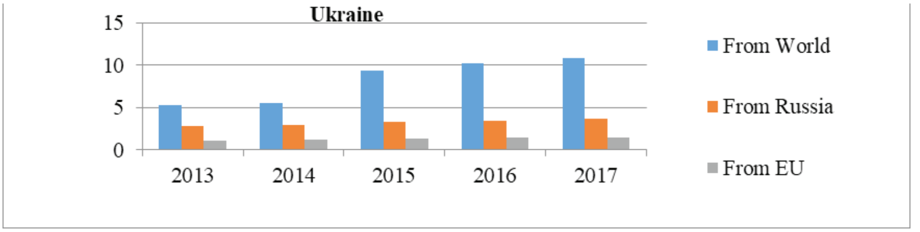

Figure 3. Personal Remittances Received by Ukraine from the World, from Russia and from the EU (% of GDP)

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; 2020; the authors' own calculations.

After having a quantitative indication of the significance of remittances for the examining economies classified by origin, we proceed with the empirical analysis by spotting the major sources of the remittances inflows in absolute terms in 2013 and 2017. Moreover, we investigate whether the destination countries of the migration outflows have changed. That is, whether emigrants from Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova prefer to migrate to the West after the singing of the Association Agreements with the EU and the turbulence in Ukraine instead of Russia.

The Russian Federation, being the top destination of migrants from these countries, has a leading role as a source of remittances for them. In particular, in 2013, 59.2% of the total remittances received by Georgia were of Russian origin. Russia remained as the majority remittance sender through 2017 when the percentage was 58.7%. Accordingly, it is enumerated in Figure 4 below. The EU's share follows the stable pattern of Russia's share. In 2013, the remittances from EU Member States made up 16.74% of the total remittances received in Georgia and in 2017, this share stood at 16.42%. However, there is a decrease in the migrant stock of Georgia in Russia (Fig. 5). Although it used to make up 58.44% of Georgia's migrant stock in 2013, it changed to 51.44% in 2017. Migrant flows were directed towards EU Member States and other countries as well. As a result, the EU's share in the Georgian migrant stock went from 15.52% to 19.27%, and the share of the rest of the world went from 26.02% to 29.28%. Taking into consideration that Russia's share of Georgian migrant stock has been reduced but its share in the remittance flows remains almost stable, it could be assumed that the migrants in Russia remit larger amounts.

With regard to Moldova, Russia has also been established as a significant source of remittances. In fact, Russia's share has slightly increased since 2013. While the remittances coming from Russia made up almost 30% of the total amount Moldova received in 2013, the percentage of remittances from Russia translated into 32.5% of the total inflows in Moldova in

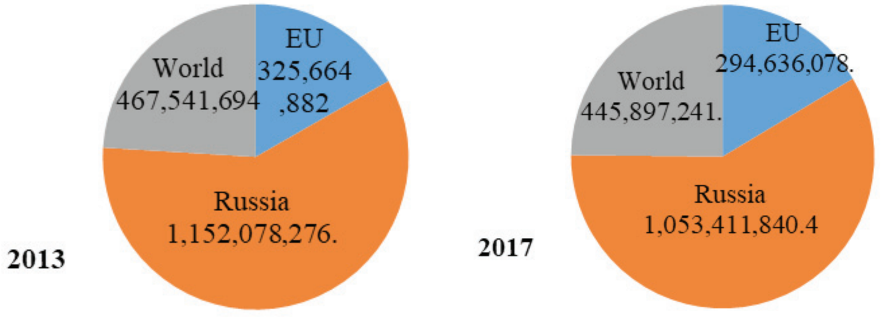

Figure 4. Origin of Remittances Received by Georgia in 2013 and 2017

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; the authors' own calculations.

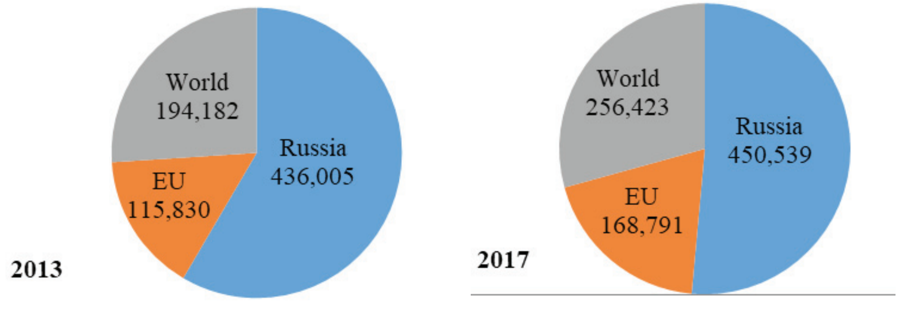

Figure 5. Bilateral Migration Matrix Between Georgia and Russia/EU in 2013 and 2017

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; the authors' own calculations.

2017 (Fig. 6). However, Russia's share in the Moldavian migrant stock decreased from 33.16% to 28.74% (Fig. 7). A bigger change happened as regards the flows originating from the EU and from the World. The flows from the EU Member States increased from 28.76% to 37.75% of the total amounts received following the increase in the migrant stock of Moldova in the EU countries from 34.92% to 43.16%. The remittance flows from the rest of the world decreased from 41.26% to 29.75% of the total remittances received in Moldova and the Moldavian migrant stock in other countries dropped from 31.9% to 28%. The absolute amounts of remittances received by origin and by year are portrayed in Figure 6.

The findings regarding Ukraine reveal that the latter constitutes a different case. Both Russia's and the EU's share in the amount of

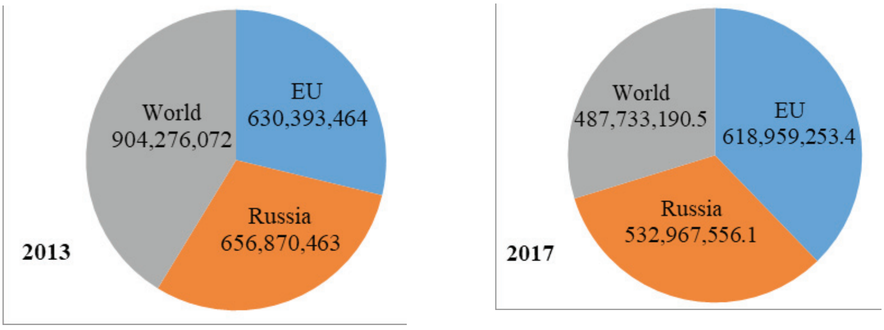

Figure 6. Origin of Remittances Received by Moldova in 2013 and 2017

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; the authors' own calculations.

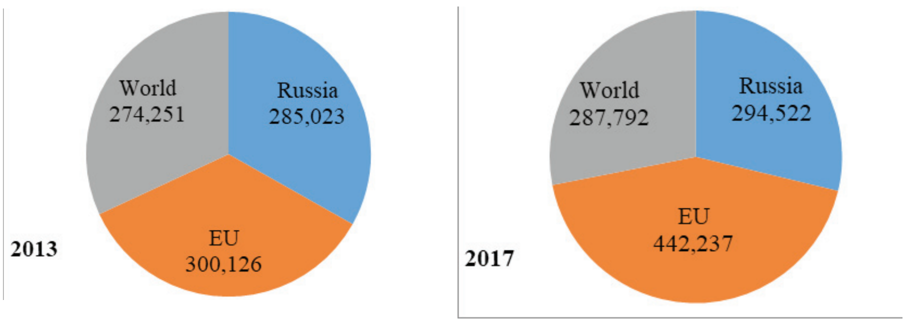

Figure 7. Bilateral Migration Matrix Between Moldova and Russia/EU

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; the authors' own calculations.

remittances received by Ukraine have been considerably diminished. Russia used to send 51.87% of the total amount of remittances received by Ukraine in 2013 and the EU 21.31% respectively. These percentages have been shrunk to cover only 33.32% and 13.85% of the total remittances inflows in Ukraine in 2017. Conversely, the share of remittances originating from the rest of the world increased from 26.82% in 2013 to 52.83% in 2017. Figure 8 illustrates these changes. However, Russia remains the main destination for Ukrainian migrants. Its share in the total migrant stock increased from 52.64% to 54.58% while the EU's share diminished from 20.8% to 20.2% (Fig. 9). That being said, migrants in Russia remit much less than they used to, while those headed to other regions of the world send more significant amounts of money.

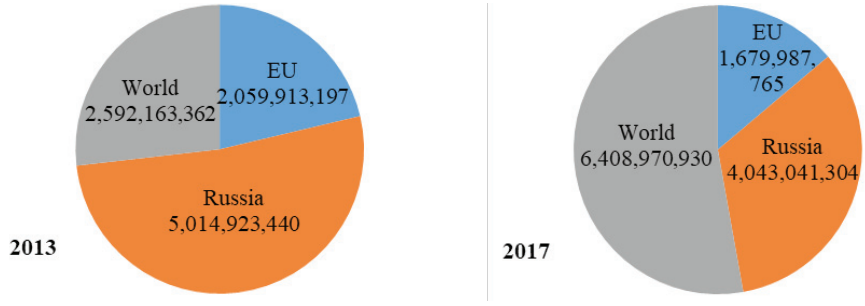

Figure 8. Origin of Remittances Received by Ukraine in 2013 and 2017

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; the authors' own calculations.

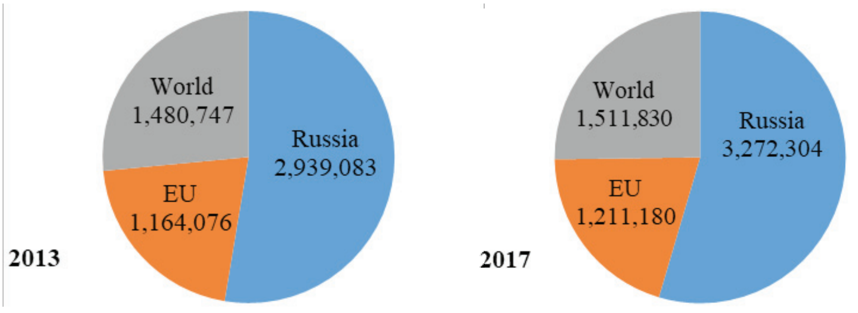

Figure 9. Bilateral Migration Matrix Between Ukraine and Russia/EU

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; the authors' own calculations.

To further explore migration interdependence among the three in-between states, Russia, and the EU, the progress of the remittances is mapped for a time period between 2003 and 2017. Specifically, we followed the growth of remittances received in total by each of the three countries, those received from Russia, and those from the EU in order to compare and juxtapose them.

The remittances flows in Georgia tend to grow. However, the growth rate of remittances slowed down in 2009 and 2010 and even more dramatically in 2015 (Fig. 10). The former could be attributed to the instability provoked by the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict over the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions. Additionally, the negative effects of the global financial crisis on the remittances flows could also have impacted upon the Georgian case. Mohaparta and Ratha (2010) noted that developing countries in Europe and Central Asia experienced the largest decline in remittance flows in 2009 partly due to the depreciation of the Russian rouble. The latter could be considered a side effect of the Russian financial crisis of 2014–2015. The leading role Russia keeps as a remittances sender (Fig. 4) as well as the concurrence between the trend of the remittances inflows from Russia with the total amounts received in Georgia (Fig. 10) support the aforementioned argument. Additionally, the remitters could have been influenced by the intense political climate in Georgia in 2015 and economic downturns. That is, in August 2015, the internal border in South Ossetia was shifted by Russian forces 1.5 km further inside Georgia territory threatening the main route linking the west and the east of the country (BBC News, 2019). In December of the same year, then-Prime Minister Garibashvili resigned and was replaced by his foreign minister, Giorgi Kvirikashvili (BBC News, 2019). Georgian GDP declined by 18% in 2015. In this case, it is the procyclical nature of the remittances that affected the flows and their positive correlation with the cyclical components of real output (Ruiz, Vargas-Silva, 2013). As portrayed in Figure 10, the growth of remittances in Georgia from the EU follows a similar pattern with that of Russia and the total remittances inflows.

With regard to Moldova, remittances grew constantly until 2008, were reduced in 2009, continued to grow until 2013, and afterwards they decreased until 2016 (Fig. 11). The outcome of the global financial crisis could, as mentioned in the case of Georgia, be responsible for 2009's sharp reduction. A survey by ILO and IOM (25th May, 2009) revealed that 20%

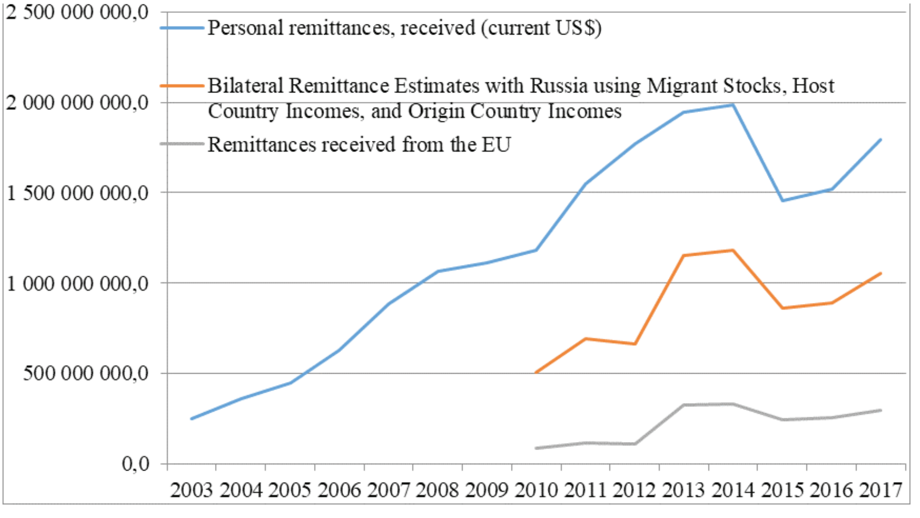

Figure 10. Remittances Received in Georgia

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; 2020; the authors' own calculations.

of the 2008 Moldovan recipients of remittances stopped receiving money flows in 2009. The downward slope from 2014 to 2016 (Fig. 11) could be attributed either to the effect of the Russian financial crisis or, since the remittances coming from the EU are also affected, to the procyclicality of remittances. Moreover, a Moldovan banking scandal in 2015 raised local concerns over high-level corruption and poor living standards (BBC News, 2019).

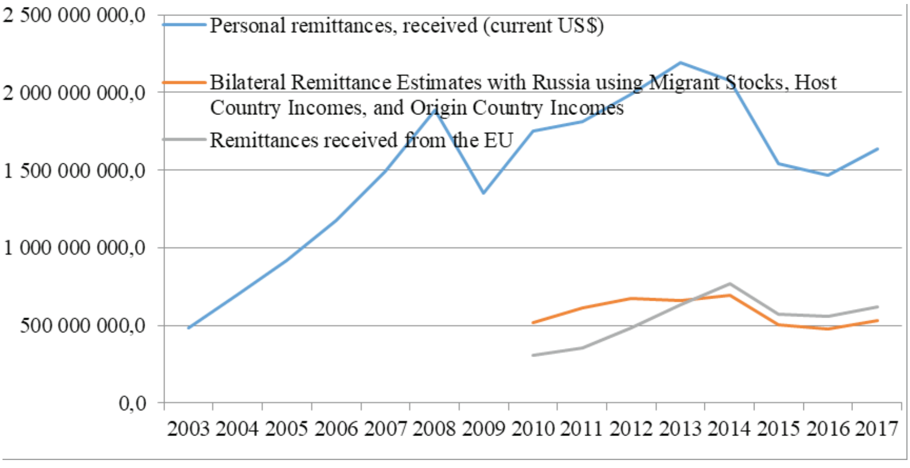

Figure 11. Remittances Received in Moldova

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; 2020; the authors' own calculations.

In the case of Ukraine, there are two time periods when the remittances inflows decreased. The first one happened in 2009 and the second one occurred in 2014 (Fig. 12). The 2009 reduction in the remittances is a common feature for three countries under examination and could be the outcome of the global financial crisis. It could also be an effect of the Russian aggression in the region after the MAP offered by NATO to Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 (NATO, 2008) and the Russo-Ukrainian gas dispute. The 2014 reduction for the remittances originated from Russia and, for the total amounts, coincides with the Russian financial crisis. However, considering the procyclicality case, it could have been the result of the worsening economic situation in Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea by Russia and the War in Donbas severely damaged Ukraine's economy, shrinking by a 12% decline in GDP in 2015 as a result (Mykhnenko, 2020). The total inflows, however, recovered in 2015, while those from Russia and the EU started to increase one year later.

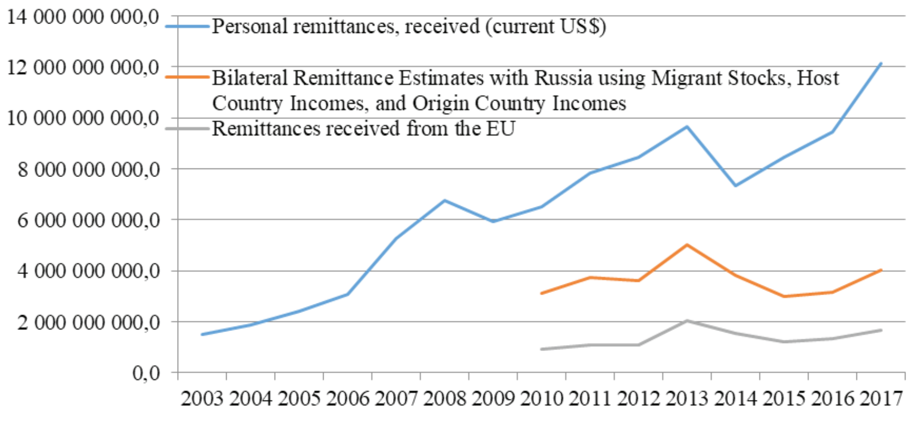

Figure 12. Remittances Received in Ukraine

Source: World Bank Group, 2017; 2020; the authors' own calculations.

A comparative analysis of the data presented above for the years 2013 and 2017 reveals that the state of remittances and migrants flows in the three cases differs markedly. In the case of Georgia, the levels of remittance flows from Russia and the EU respectively remain relatively stable, despite the fact that migrant flows towards Russia decreased by 7% in 2017, the very same percentage of migrants that was absorbed by the EU (3.75%) and the rest of the world (3.25%). In the case of Moldova, the amount of remittances received from Russia increased by 2.5% in comparison to 2013, despite the fact that the flow of migrants decreased by 4.86%. In contrast, Moldova experienced a dramatic increase of almost 9% in remittance flows from the EU, following a rise of 8.24% in migrant flows towards the EU. The picture is totally different with regard to Ukraine, where remittance flows from both Russia and the EU dropped dramatically by 30.56% and 19.47% respectively. At the same time, remittances from the rest of the world rose by 25.82%. Concerning migrant flows, those towards Russia have slightly increased (1.94%), despite the conflict between the two countries, in contrast with those towards the EU that have decreased by 0.6%. For all the differences among the three countries, the data indicate a trend for the years when remittance flows from both Russia and the EU suffered a considerable drop, namely in 2009–2010 and 2014–2015. The divergence can be attributed to the status of the global economy as the global economic crisis was evolving, to the economic turbulence in Russia in 2014 as well as to instability arising in each country for different reasons, either due to conflict with Russia or due to domestic scandals, corruption, etc. In this regard, our hypothesis that Russia would use migration interdependence as leverage upon the three in-between states is not confirmed. Interstate relations do not seem to impact upon remittance and migrant flows. However, the above data show that all the three in-between states remain vulnerable to the state of the Russian economy and it is in this way that they are influenced by migration interdependence. Figure 13 supports the above argument, as it shows that all the personal remittances paid by Russia follow the trend of personal remittances paid by Russia in the three countries and are closely related to its financial situation. That said, the fact that Russia has not used migration interdependence as leverage in the period under examination in this paper does not mean that it will not do so in the future.

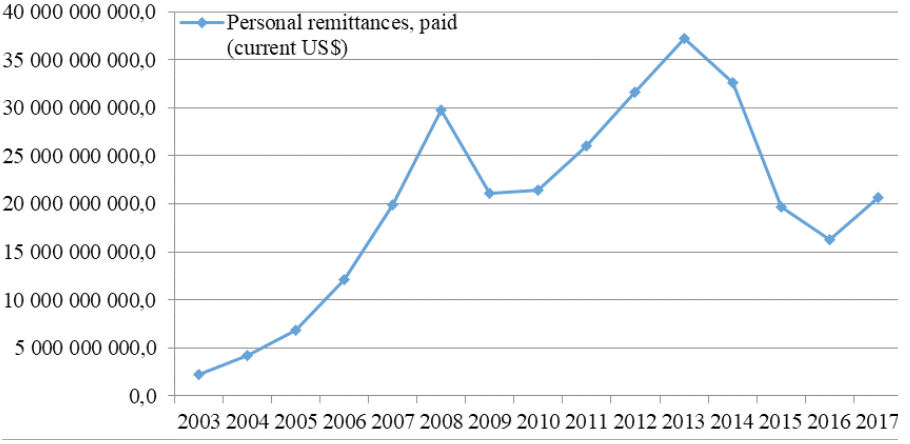

Figure 13. Personal Remittances, Paid by Russia (current US$)

Source: World Bank Group, 2020.

Regarding the EU, in-betweenness encouraged migration interdependence between Georgia, Moldova, and the EU; migrant flows towards the EU grew in both countries, while remittance flows rose considerably only in Moldova's case. As regards the latter, the EU surpassed Russia as the primary source of remittances and the primary destination for migrants, thus providing an alternative for Moldova's economy and society. It seems that for Ukraine, this alternative is offered from remittances coming from the rest of the world. Given Ukraine's firm pro-EU stance and the intensifying cooperation between the two sides in many sectors (Vošta Musiyenko, Abrhám, 2016), the decline in remittance and migrant flows supports our suggestion that remittance and migrant flows are not affected by interstate relations.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have built upon the concepts of in-betweenness and migration interdependence in order to examine the vulnerability of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine due to their conflicting relations with Russia and the exposure of their economies to remittance flows from the latter. Based on migration interdependence logic, we introduced the hypothesis that Russia would use migration interdependence as leverage and that interstate relations would impact upon remittance and migrant flows. We investigated the origin of the remittances inflows in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine and the destination of the migration outflows. We mapped the development of remittances from the World, from Europe, and from Russia and relate it with the development of their GDP using longitudinal data. Our findings suggest that the three cases differ from each other, but, in all three, Russia has not used migration interdependence as leverage. At the same time, at least for Moldova, the EU has been a viable alternative to Russia as the former experienced a considerable rise in personal remittances paid from the latter as well as an impressive increase in migrant outflows towards EU countries. In any case, the above analysis suggests that remittance flows in the three in-between states are more affected by the state of the global economy, the economic situation of Russia and domestic circumstances rather than from interstate relations. In this sense, this paper sheds some new light on migration interdependence of the three in-between states, and also contributes to the literature on remittances.

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