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Title **(In)compatible Partners? The EUs and Local Civil Societies Framing of Human Rights Promotion in the South Caucasus**

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**Abstract** Within the policy framework of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the EU has increasingly been engaging with local civil society actors in the South Caucasus – particularly human rights organisations – considering them as important partners in the promotion of human rights. The EU's success in improving the human rights record of these countries, including by supporting local human rights organisations, has nevertheless been limited. While the existing literature has mostly been concerned with policy effectiveness, highlighting the gap between the stated ambitions and outcomes of the EU's human rights promotion policies, this paper suggests to take a step back and look at how these policies are discursively constructed in the first place. In fact, despite the emphasis on a EU-civil society partnership in the realm of human rights, there are elements suggesting that these actors have diverging interpretations of the actual substance of human rights promotion – in both its content and modalities. This puzzle has been only sparsely addressed in the literature, and the perspective of local non-state actors on the EU's human rights promotion has so far been largely neglected. In order to fill these gaps in the literature, and to provide a discourse-centred, bottom-up perspective on the EU's human rights promotion, this paper explores how human rights promotion policies are discursively framed by the EU and by civil society actors working in the South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia). With the goal of unpacking and mapping out actors' discursive framings, the paper formulates a framework to answer the following questions: how is human rights promotion framed by the EU and human rights organisations from the South Caucasus, and to what extent do these framings resonate with each other? The framing analysis is based on in-depth interviews conducted with EU and a wide range of civil society stakeholders. Building on a 'political and dynamic' approach to framing analysis, the paper takes into account the following dimensions: how actors frame (1) the substance of human rights promotion, but also (2) the identities and the relations among framers, and (3) the policy process

itself.