

# THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AS PART OF THE EU FOREIGN POLICY: A REVIEW OF THEORETICAL APPROACHES

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**Abstract:** *The Eastern Partnership (2009) as a component part of the European Neighbourhood Policy is a tool that aims at the economic integration and political cooperation of the countries that are included in this project by signing association and free trade agreements with the European Union (EU). The recent events in Ukraine have revealed the possibility of these countries to become EU member states depending on the progress made, which is confirmed by many European experts. However, there are big differences among the Eastern Partnership countries on their way to EU integration on the background of the strong pressure from Russia, aimed to suppress any pro-European manifestations of such countries. Despite the sharpening of geopolitical challenges, the EU continues to use the traditional ways of enlargement and deepening of cooperation processes with the Eastern Neighbourhood. This paper aims at reviewing the theoretical approaches through which the EU, as a normative power, exerts major influence on the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries by extending the neofunctional practices, intergovernmental cooperation and the constructivist model. However, in view of reaching the soft power objectives, we aim at transforming and strengthening the EU positions in the context of amplified economic and political-ideological problems at regional level.*

**Keywords:** Eastern Partnership; Eastern Neighbourhood Policy; integration theories; normative power

## INTRODUCTION

The progress made on the European integration path after the collapse of the bipolar world has asserted the EU as a world economic power that amplified after its successive enlargement to the East. The geopolitical stakes materialized at the turning of millennia required the EU to establish more clearly its objectives in the ex-Soviet countries that would exclude the perspective of these countries to be included in the enlargement process but at the same time would avoid a possible security vacuum at its eastern borders. The Wider Europe concept of 2002 was complemented with the European Commission initiative, called the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which was resumed to formulating for the neighbourhood countries “all the advantages” enjoyed by the member states, excluding the advantage of participating in decision making.

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Being a tool used by EU to act in the name of the “force for good”, the ENP offered to some Eastern European countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine the possibility to join the European economic space and, at the same time, to become more democratized, thus forming an EU friendly sphere of influence. With the ending of the 2004 and 2007 enlargement waves, the ENP results were rather modest due to the lack of the perspective of the countries from the Eastern proximity to join the EU but also due to the specific political regimes that promoted an ambivalent foreign policy, oscillating between the East (Russia) and the West (EU, NATO), aggravated by the lack of transparency in decision-making in carrying out the reforms embedded in the Action Plans. In 2009, as an ascending power, the EU tried to extend its influence on the East-European states through the EaP – a new attempt to breathe new life into the ENP, aligned to the realities of a geopolitical fight in the ex-Soviet space, accentuated after the Russian-Georgian armed conflict of 2008. The privileged status given to the EaP countries reflects the EU tendency of playing a primary role in Eastern Europe, in the absence of a clear political and institutional profile of the countries belonging to Europe. The relative failure of the EU around the Vilnius Summit (November 2013), mainly caused by the pressure exerted by Russia on the EaP countries, culminated with the refusal of certain countries, such as Armenia and Ukraine, to sign/initial the Association Agreements (AA), unlike the consistent governments of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. These dramatic events bring a question mark over the efficiency of the EU foreign policy in relation to its Eastern Neighbourhood, thus requiring a review of the theoretical concepts in the context of the EU-EaP cooperation in a region threatened by an eventual Cold War for re-dividing the spheres of influence in Eastern Europe.

## **1. THE EU WAY OF TACKLING THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD – THEORETICAL PUZZLES**

### **1.1. The Neofunctionalism Versus The Intergovernmental Approaches**

The European experiment, seen as a unique phenomenon in the history of humanity by the theoreticians of neofunctionalism, derived from the federalist approach, continued the same practices of enlargement and deepening of the regional integration processes, agreed upon in the 1950s by the countries-founders of the European Communities. The Eastern Neighbourhood thus represents a “circle of friend countries” that follow the logic of shifting the loyalties to a new center whose institutions take over the jurisdictions of the nation-states through the spillover effect that incrementally passes over from one area of cooperation to another. Thus, the EU enlargement to the east in 2004 and 2007 that imposed strengthening the sectorial integration and advancement of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including through the ENP, involves integrating nearly in full the neighbourhood countries, except for the institutional area. The argument that the EU has shaped the ENP on the enlargement process (Kelley,

2006, p. 30) is confirmed by the official documents issued by the European Commission.

After the signing of the Association and Free Trade Agreements between the EU and the partner states, advanced on the European integration path, in the ENP, due to the spillover effect, the sector activities will be more interdependent, thus strengthening the EU governing system. A contradictory moment, in the terms of the classical neofunctionalism terms of E. Haas and L. Lindberg, consists in the fact that the ENP implies an integration of the East-European states in the economic area, with the transmission of sovereignty to the supranational institutions but without the partner states participating directly through their representatives in the supranational bodies.

From another perspective, the ENP is one of the concentric circles around the gravitational center represented by the EU (Moga and Pascariu, 2013, p.154) whose countries implement only a part of the EU's *acquis* depending on the wishes of the political elites or of their absorption capacity. The events around the Vilnius Summit convinced us that the successes of the EaP countries, depending on their approach to the EU, are similar to the 'two-speed' EaP European integration process. Thus, significant pro-European aspirations and approximation to the EU standards and norms have been displayed by the group of countries made up of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, while the second group, comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, has not shown a clear favoring of their integration in the EU.

The neofunctionalism can explain the process and dynamics of the EU integration of the neighbourhood countries, less the result of the integration because the integration process is led by the political elites and by the leaders of various interest groups. It is the EaP country leaders who, being systematically involved in the political integration processes, can eventually develop European preferences and loyalties much faster than the population that may be reluctant to an excessive approximation with the EU due to the damage on the national economies that remain uncompetitive even after the period of accommodation to the European standards as well as to the illegal or less popular activities carried out by the national elites and promoted or hidden behind pro-Europeans slogans.

In the past decades there has been a tendency to reanimate neo-functionalism as a theoretical approach with *new institutionalism*, including in the foreign policy area. Thus, Michael E. Smith thinks the foreign policy has turned into a relatively weak intergovernmental forum under the inspiration of instrumental rationality in a political system increasingly institutionalized, governed by social rationality (Smith M., 2004, p.103), discouraging the unilateralism of external actions of big member states. The new institutionalism proves the assumption that the European institutions influence the behavior of the elites and of political culture both in the member states and in the EaP countries.

The intergovernmentalism represents a very vast spectrum of theoretical approaches that oscillate around the central idea of the primary role of state-nation. In regard to the promotion of CFSP to the Eastern Neighbourhood, the intergovernmentalists tend to explain that it is rather an intergovernmental

cooperation and will remain within the same limits if the partner countries do not turn from the object to the subject of this common foreign policy of the EU.

The crisis in which the EU is involved and the recent pressures of Russia against the EaP countries, reminds us of the need to come back to neorealist contributions. According to this logic, with the disappearance of the bipolar world as a result of the breakup of the USSR and of its spheres of influence, the security motives that deepen European cooperation and represent an anomaly for the neorealist approach should have disappeared (Collard-Wexler, 2006, p.402).

Even if the intergovernmentalists think that the state-nations are not overlooked due to European integration, nonetheless, it was necessary to revise the views of the structural realism that presented the European integration process as one apparently impossible due to the tendencies of the states-nations to have more power and security (Mearsheimer, 2006). Hence, the EaP countries in certain areas are interested in transmitting their sovereign rights and in making them common with the other EU member states.

In the neorealist perspective, the ENP initially designed as a policy at the community level has been directly influenced by the interests and actions of the EU member states (Mocanu, 2013, p.39) that obviously are divided into two groups for supporting the eastern or southern dimensions of the ENP.

The supporters of the liberal intergovernmentalism argue that the *bargaining power* of the national and sub-national actors has a conclusive importance in the European experience. Therefore, the negotiation and signing of the association and free trade agreements would denote *power of negotiation* and would ensure the economic interdependence of the EU with the Eastern Neighbourhood, promoting the extension of interests to other areas, where the member states have major interests. In the foreign policy area, the national governments enjoy a disproportionate control over the ideological and political access to the international system. The liberal intergovernmentalists stress that the weakness of the EU in the foreign policy and security area is closely related to geopolitical considerations, such as power, peace and war (Moravcsik 2001, p.177) that play a sporadic role in the EU history.

Contrary to the neorealist logic, after the end of the Cold War, the EU ensured total peace among the member states while the conflict threats came from the transition democracies and authoritarian countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. In this connection, the concept of 'soft power' is considered to be extremely important in defining the EU's position of international actor. The proponents of liberalism claim that the EU knew how to hold the soft power to obtain preferable results; even if it is not a global military power, the EU may settle global issues through diplomacy, trade, and assistance for development (Nye, 2004, p. 78).

Hereafter, the EU has been recognized as a 'quiet' superpower that uses the enlargement as the most important tool of the EU and the ENP, directed by big member states, is diplomatically used for settling conflicts (such as the one in Georgia) and for promoting political and economic policies in the neighbouring countries (Moravcsik, 2010, pp.158-159).

Under the influence of the latest developments on the EaP agenda, there can be identified requests for formulating strategies implying a successful combination of *hard power* and *soft power* in the EU interaction with its East-European partners beyond the intergovernmental system of bilateral relations (Dîrdală, 2013, pp. 132-133).

However, the intergovernmentalism cannot explain the advancement of the ENP with a possible economic integration based on neofunctional principles. It is important to stress that the ENP is nonetheless an expression of the Commission's position to the EU members while the EaP, even if it was a Polish-Swedish initiative, perfectly fit in the ENP through the participation in the Commission's and European Parliament's decision-making.

In my opinion, the traditional distinction between neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism is obsolete due to the appearance in the specialized literature of a range of alternative concepts, using cross-disciplinary research. This view is also closer to the reality in which the approximation of the Eastern Neighbourhood to the EU takes place. As proof of this assumption, the supranational and the intergovernmental approaches manifest themselves differently depending on the area involved in the synergy between the EU and its Eastern partners.

## 1.2. The Constructivist Approach and the Normative Power

The proponents of the constructivist approach identify themselves as a third means and challenge the classical schools of realism and liberalism, considering the interests to have social basis and that the international system hence is a consequence of 'collective meanings'. This was an attempt to build a 'constructive' bridge between the two main approaches, using liberal arguments that the international institutions can change the countries' identities and interests.

Most of the countries today identify themselves as a component part of a 'state society' (Wendt 1999, p.242). For certain reasons, these states will tend to transpose internal modalities in their behavior in the area of foreign policy on conflict settlement, organization of economic relations, observance of rule of law, and others. In this sense, one can notice a clear relation of constructivism to the 'power of adjective'. It is these constructivist analyses of realistic character that tend to research the interrelations between power and international norms in moral sense (Barkin 2003, p. 337). A common concept for both approaches is power, a factor that in the past years has been estimated as having low importance as compared to the Cold War period.

Indeed, the constructivism facilitates promotion both of an ethical foreign policy and of practices and methods within the foreign policy, thus stressing the importance of ideas, ethical norms and moral convictions in international politics. Thus, the constructivist answer can be found in the speeches of EU officials that show how the EU constructed its own actorness, including its dynamic aspects. (Larsen, 2002, p. 293).

The new theoretical approaches include a certain view of the EU taken as a normative model for other regions of the world. The dispute over the role of the

European Communities in international relations appeared with the introduction of the term of *civilian power*, proposed by François Duchêne, which considers the economic power to be extremely important in promoting the European interests (Duchêne, 1972). The critical response of Hedley Bull who thought it necessary to create a military dimension in Western Europe (Bull, 1982, p.151) raised ardent discussions around the concepts of power.

Starting from the assumption that EU is a *normative power*, Ian Manners used a holistic approach to identify the global role of the EU as being bigger than the sum of its sides. The normative peculiarities of the EU are determined by the specific historical context, hybrid polity and the political-legal framework (Manners, 2002, p.240). Thus, the normative ethics of the EU should be based on “being reasonable” in the foreign policy and on “doing least harm” (Manners, 2008, pp. 58-59) in the relations with its partners.

The concept of normative power seems to be of long-term perspective in a world that promotes democracy and human rights, sustainable economic development, social equity, solidarity, the rule of law, and good governance. In this connection, the ENP represents EU as a ‘force of good’ and serves the European interests by creating a ring of well-governed states (Barbe and Johansson-Nogues, 2008, p.81). The recent inputs contain more and more suspicions that the actors use the norms to justify the promotion of certain interests and thus the problem of dual standards arises. By promoting the CFSP, the EU may create expectations both from the member states and from the partner states to live up to the standards it identifies as its own norms.

The criticism of normative power concepts stress that the EU either uses its norms for constraining its partners or does not act as a normative power but rather as an instrument of “collective hegemony” (Hyde-Price, 2006, p.227). According to the realistic logic, the EU acts a *civilizing power* only when the most powerful member states impose the common values and norms to the Eastern Neighbourhood.

How do the Eastern Partnership countries see this normative power of the EU? Oftentimes, the political elites look at the promotion of European values with suspicion because the EU, through its policies, tries to promote certain interests that would be in contradiction with the so-called “traditional” values. However, at the beginning of 2013, using its normative and civilian power, the EU had also an impact on the overcoming of the political crisis in the Republic of Moldova that threatened the latter’s European path and an eventual turn of face to Russia. In this period, the coalition of pro-European forces felt pressure put on it from the European emissaries, but also from the member states interested in the success of this project in the Eastern Europe.

### 1.3 External governance in Eastern Neighbourhood

The recent theoretical inputs on EaP cover an important segment represented by the concept of external governance in the logic of application of the enlargement mechanisms on the ENP.

Given that the ENP promotes enlargement, at least from the functionalist perspective, at the level of certain areas, without ensuring the access to the decision-making of EU institutions (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2008, p.155), the main question was the sectorial approach with the promotion of opportunities for flexible horizontal integration of the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU. Thus, external governance means extending the EU's legal-institutional framework on the non-members states, as a response to the complex interdependence of the EU with the Eastern neighbourhood.

There are certain fears that the relevance of enlargement may lose intensity and significance for the EaP states in the context of the EU crisis. In this connection, the EU attitude to the Eastern neighbourhood has been "hierarchical" and "prescriptive" (Korosteleva, 2012, p.46). In this perspective, the need arises to develop one's own apparatus to offset the deficiencies of hierarchical governance (Korosteleva, 2013, p.17) with assistance for implementing the common goals, which in my opinion would require increased attention to avoid the 'export of instability' to the EU.

The renouncing of the realistic concepts of the intergovernmentalism and of the hierarchic governance model contributes to the institutionalization outside the EU boundaries. Also, external governance is less fixed on the export of the *acquis* than on promoting the EU norms and practices (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009, p. 807).

The latest inputs claim that even if certain EaP states adopt the EU strategies in certain sectors, their efforts are not compensated enough for the EU's limited governance capacity in its eastern neighbourhood (Langbein, 2014, p.158), creating new divisions among the member states and the states outside EU, including increasing the economic discrepancies and convergence standards with the EU.

Despite the unfavorable international environment, the horizontal governance becomes increasingly open to association and cooperation, involving the respective structures, which contributes to promoting the EU values in the EaP states (Moga and Pascariu, 2013, p.157), being a much more flexible form of integration as compared to the hierarchical model. Thus, democratic governance promotes the implementation of the EU legislation and favors favorable attitudes of eastern neighbourhood officials, although it can be applied with the implication of economic risks and reverse strategic results. An important result is also the use of the recent inputs by the European officials to reformulate the ENP. Thus, the approach of the "more for more" principle favors the implementation of reforms by the EaP states and, hence, the motivation and accountability of governments and the civil society grows due to the increased support from the EU.

## 2. THE EASTERN PARTNERHIP IN THE POST-VILNIUS CONTEXT

A decade has passed since the beginning of promotion of the ENP and the first important experience of EU enlargement to the East. The EU enlargement strengthened the EU importance as a global actor, at regional level led to increased economic discrepancies between the EaP states and the new EU members (Epstein

and Jacoby, 2014, p.11). This phenomenon influenced considerably the EU need to extend its economic and political influence in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The EU eastern enlargement and the armed Russian-Georgian conflict of 2008 served as an impetus for the EaP development in view of the approximation of the EU to the Eastern Neighbourhood and inclusively differentiated it from the Southern Neighbourhood by advancing bilateral cooperation with the involvement of various social layers from the partner countries (Summits, Foreign ministers' meetings, Euronest, CS Forum, Business Forum etc.).

The Vilnius Summit marked the moment of a serious break away of the EaP group of states. These developments within the Eastern Neighbourhood confirm that the EU's ability to trigger reforms crucially depends not only on internal factors (European Integration Index 2013) but also on external ones. In this connection, the "pro-European" group of the EaP (made up of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), countries that unfortunately do not control fully their territories, given the armed offensives and deployment of Russian troops in the separatist regions. In this connection, it is possible to rethink also the priorities of other East-European countries that have had modest results in advancing the EaP (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus).

The historical experience of the latest enlargements to the East shows that the transition that leads the association process may pose risks for the partner states. This development takes place on the background of the negative impact of the active promotion by Kremlin of the Eurasian Economic Union that could minimize the EU efforts of building in the EaP a circle of well-development countries with European values. The studies based on empirical results confirm the fact that the deep and comprehensive free trade regions by applying the provisions of these agreements, have excluded the possibility of armed conflicts among their members (Vicard 2012, p.67). The CIS and the Eurasian Union, on the contrary, are an example of a poorly-developed free trade zone that maintains the danger of military conflicts if the interests of the EaP countries do not coincide with the imperial ambitions of Russia.

The change of the regional environment has put new tasks before the EU in its relations with the EaP states. At present, having much more active contacts, the European and the neighbouring countries political elites must align fast to the requirements of the situation in Eastern Europe, after Russia began its offensive in Armenia and Ukraine in the fall of 2013. This process is promoted by the civil society that thus supports the pro-European efforts of the EaP countries (Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) as well as by the diasporas of the said countries in the EU member states.

In this connection, such countries may benefit from increased financial assistance for development, due to the military threats. The Ukraine may repeat the economic experience of Turkey of 1980s-1990s during its process of association to the European Communities. The EaP may definitely choose the status of countries associated with the EU despite their economic weakness.

We can state that, even if the EU acts as a normative power, it is forced to adjust its objectives and practices on a case to case basis. In this connection, we

can establish that some countries, such as Russia, through its actions, can urge the EU and the member states to act promptly to the security challenges on the European continent, no matter how 'soft' the promotion of this power is. As confirmation thereof comes the decision of the EU member states to suspend the construction of the South Stream gas pipeline, which increases the energy dependence of the EU and EaP countries on Russia's natural resources as well as the expediting of energy projects to ensure the reverse transportation of gases from the EU member states to Ukraine and Moldova by May-June 2014. In this connection also falls the decision of the EU countries to increase expenditures for military and security purposes.

Unfortunately, the EU still has a long way to go to become a single actor in promoting an efficient CFSP, ready to react to the European security challenges, a level hard to reach because it has never experienced in its recent history another power to be so aggressively against European enlargement. Thus, we can say that the group of EU member states made up of Germany, Poland, Sweden, the Baltic States, and Romania – the countries-neighbours of Russia, are the most consistent defenders of a common foreign policy and of the viability of the EaP objectives. Undoubtedly, the latest events in the EaP countries have contributed to reconsidering some of the EU priorities to them but also its major objectives for the proximate future.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the scientific inputs, the opinion prevails that the CFSP will develop under the impact of external challenges. It is important to stress that the CFSP, although remains closely related to intergovernmental cooperation, from Maastricht to Lisbon gives up more free space in favor of the supranational institutions, even if it is the member states that have the last word to say in this area.

There is no common position of the supranational institutions with the positions of the member states in regard to giving to the EaP countries the perspective of requesting EU membership, an initiative approved on 17 April 2014 by the European Parliament on the background of the disagreement of certain member states with the statements made by European officials. This ambiguous situation, without giving a clear European perspective to the EaP only underlines the need to reconsider the priorities of the EU and of the member states in the East-European region as compared to the West Balkan countries, whose successes in implementing reforms in certain areas are more modest than those achieved by some EaP countries.

Political affiliation raises many question marks in the absence of the possibility for the partner states of participating directly in decision-making. In this connection, no theoretical approach denies the fact that the ENP does not imply institutionally the governments or the partner states in the process of approximation to the EU and thus the issue of the democratic deficit arises, sharper than in the case of the EU member states.

Economic integration in functional terms, implying economic interdependence with the EU is beneficial for the EaP countries. Another incentive would be the rather serious financial situation of the EaP countries and that see the EU as an important source of investment for their national economies. The signing of the AA and of the DCFTA in the proximate future can ensure the viable integration of the economies of the Eastern neighbourhood into the EU single market.

From another perspective, the EaP states have many reminiscences of the Soviet past, common for the national elites, oftentimes with tendencies to autocracy and a criminal past represented by ascension of oligarchs and their accession to governance and, eventually the criminal control of such countries. The European norms are often taken over formally while in reality all the substantial reforms remain imitated by the pseudo-European elites. In this process, a part of the responsibility is certainly borne by the European institutions that are responsible for monitoring the progress made by such countries but often, due to the geopolitical stakes, the 'sins' are forgiven in exchange for displaying a pro-European attitude. This situation undoubtedly corrupts the entire image of the EU and of its normative values.

Nonetheless, the EU soft power achieved some success in 2013 when it managed to bring the Republic of Moldova closer while in Ukraine it led to changing the government with a pro-European coalition, which resulted in signing the "political association" with the EU. This example proves that even in the absence of a clear perspective of becoming of full-fledged EU member, the population feels part of the same European identity. Thus, the arguments that the social influence and the power of transnational mobilization are not efficient in the case of the EaP countries, can be questioned.

A small success achieved by such a tiny country as the Republic of Moldova after the abolition of visas with most of the EU member states on 28 April 2014 represents a big success and a real impetus for other countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood. In my opinion, the EaP needs tangible results for their maximum approximation to the EU economy and promotion of normative values in the year of signing of the AAs and the DCFTAs. This logic falls under the 'more for more' approach, according to which the EU offers increased incentives to those EaP states that fulfill these requirements, including greater mobility to citizens through visa liberalization; access to the EU single market for the countries implementing the DCFTA and ensuring observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, promoted by the EU normative power.

Finally, without the member states' political will of building a viable foreign policy and of supporting their statements and intentions with real political and economic force, the EU will become a nominal political power. Hence, it will be extremely difficult to influence the process of "Europeanization" in the EaP countries under the impact of the complicated geopolitical and geoeconomic situation of the latest regretful developments in this European region.

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