

**Jean F. CROMBOIS**

American University in Bulgaria

[jcrombois@aubg.edu](mailto:jcrombois@aubg.edu)

## CONFLICTING NARRATIVES?

### GEOPOLITICAL AND NORMATIVE POWER NARRATIVES IN THE EU EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

#### ABSTRACT

Since its inception, the EU's Eastern Partnership has given rise to two seemingly conflicting narratives. The first one, the normative power narrative emphasizes the use of norms expansion as the main objectives of the European Union vis-à-vis its Eastern Partners. The second narrative, i.e. the geopolitical one, emphasizes the need for the EU to develop a geopolitical orientation in its relations with its Eastern neighbours based on interests rather than values. This paper will look at these two narratives, how they originated and how they developed in the EU discourses related to the making of EU foreign policy and more particularly as far as the EU's Eastern Partnership is concerned.

**Key words:** European Union, Eastern Partnership, geopolitics, normative power

**Słowa kluczowe:** Unia Europejska, Partnerstwo Wschodnie, geopolityka, *normative power*

## INTRODUCTION

There is a wide agreement between analysts as well as EU actors that the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP), launched in 2009, has reached a critical juncture. The conflict in Ukraine that spilled into a deep crisis in EU-Russia relations reflected a deep transformation of the geopolitical realities in Europe that raise questions as to the future of EU policies towards its Eastern neighbours. In this context, it should not come as a surprise that, in the spring of 2015, the European Commission (EC) alongside the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRFASP) engaged in a wide consultation process on the future of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy of which the EU's Eastern Partnership is part.<sup>1</sup> This consultation led to the presentation, on 18 November 2015, of the ENP Review by the HRFASP Mogherini and the EU Commissioner in charge of Enlargement and Neighbourhood, Hahn.<sup>2</sup>

The main argument of this paper is that the EU's EaP has produced two different sets of narratives that present the risk of growing increasingly incompatible. The first narrative is the one of the normative power based on the assumption of a possible capacity for the EU to act as a transformative power vis-a-vis its Eastern partners through norms expansion and legislative approximation. The second is the geopolitical narrative that instead emphasises the EU interest in stressing the need to approach the Eastern partners as a buffer against a revisionist Russia. This paper discusses the different aspects of both narratives while assessing their shortcomings. Finally, in terms of conclusion, it will assess the different options available for the EU in its relations with its Eastern partners.

To this purpose, this paper is divided into five parts. The first part gives an overview of main developments of the EaP. The second part discusses briefly the concept of narratives and their importance in terms of shaping EU foreign policy identity. The third part discusses the EaP in the light of the normative power narrative while the fourth deals with the the geopolitical narrative. The fifth part will assess the main differences between the two narratives and the fifth one will propose how to go beyond these two narratives as far as the EU is concerned in its approach towards its Eastern partners.

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<sup>1</sup> See European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council "Eastern Partnership"*, Brussels, 3 December 2008, COM(2008) 823 final, at <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52008DC0823>>, 4 June 2015.

<sup>2</sup> See EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy"*, Brussels, 18 November 2015, JOIN(2015) 50 final, at <[http://www.eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015/151118\\_joint-communication\\_review-of-the-enp\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015/151118_joint-communication_review-of-the-enp_en.pdf)>, 10 December 2015.

## FROM THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY (ENP) TO THE EAP: AN OVERVIEW

The EU's EaP originated from the existing European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). There is therefore a need to go back to the ENP to understand both the nature and the limitations of the EU's policy towards its Eastern partners.<sup>3</sup>

The ENP originated from a convergence of concerns about the effect of EU enlargement on countries such as Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. These concerns were reflected in the letter sent in January 2002, by the British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, to Brussels calling for a new approach towards these four 'new' neighbours in the light of the upcoming EU enlargement of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Later in the same year, the Polish government submitted a non-paper to the EU member states calling for an 'Eastern dimension', i.e. a new and specific EU approach to countries such as Belarus, Moldova and Russia, including the possibility of EU membership for Ukraine. Interestingly, the Polish memorandum also emphasized the need to expand this Eastern dimension to the South Caucasus. These initiatives, however, were met with some concerns by the Southern EU Member States, France and Spain especially, who asked for the countries of the Mediterranean to be included in the new policy as well.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, in November 2002, the Member states gave the mandate to both the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), Javier Solana, and the EU External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, to develop the new policy under the concept of 'Wider Europe'. That decision was endorsed by the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002 whereby the EU Heads of State and Government stressed the need to design a new policy towards the EU's neighbours in the Eastern part of Europe and in its Southern part including Russia. In reaction, the European Commission released its first communication on the subject by launching the new concept of 'Wider Europe'. However, the discussions over the geographical scope of that new policy which were quickly renamed under ENP were still uncertain. Russia refused to be included in the initiative. Officially, the country rejected the idea of being part of in a group of countries from Morocco to Ukraine and emphasized instead the need to conduct its relations with the EU on a strictly bilateral basis. There were more fundamental reasons to explain Russia's position. These were linked with its rejection of the new normative hegemonic policy that transpired through the ENP project, i.e. to export EU norms, rules and values to the rest of the continent, including Russia itself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See E. Korosteleva, "The Eastern Partnership Initiative: A New Opportunity for Neighbours?", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 27, no. 1 (2011), pp. 1-21, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13523279.2011.544381>>.

<sup>4</sup> See S. Schäffer, D. Tolksdorf, "The Eastern Partnership – 'ENP plus' for Europe's Eastern Neighbors", *CAP Perspectives*, no. 4 (2009), at <<http://www.cap.lmu.de/download/2009/CAPerspectives-2009-04.pdf>>, 10 June 2015.

<sup>5</sup> See H. Haukkala, "Russian Reactions to the European Neighbourhood Policy", in R. Whitman,

After Russia's opt-out, the ENP would eventually include the South Caucasus Republics. The importance of these countries was highlighted in the EU Security Strategy approved by the Member States in December 2003.<sup>6</sup>

More concretely, the ENP is based on the conclusion of Action Plans negotiated on a bilateral basis leading to the conclusion of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with the EU neighbours. These Action Plans included the proposal to the countries concerned to have a stake in the single market, including the four freedoms attached to it as well as security issues and conflict management.

That being said, the literature on the ENP has been divided on the question as to whether it could be defined as a new policy or rather as a composite and multidimensional one. For example, the ENP was not designed to replace existing relations between the EU and its neighbours. At best it consisted mainly of reinforcing the *acquis* set up by the existing PCAs concluded with the partner countries.<sup>7</sup> One of the innovations brought about by the ENP concerned the strengthening of coherence between the two existing EU pillars, namely the Community pillar and the CFSP/European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) pillar.<sup>8</sup>

In May 2008, the 'Eastern dimension' resurfaced in a proposal made to the Council in by the Swedish and Polish governments for an 'Eastern Partnership' to be developed by the EU with its Eastern European neighbours<sup>9</sup>. In June 2008, the Council asked the European Commission to prepare a proposal for EaP. This proposal took the form of a Communication released by the Commission on 8 December 2008.<sup>10</sup> The EaP was officially launched at the EU Summit that took place in Prague on 9 May 2009.<sup>11</sup>

The EaP is addressed to Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine as well as to three South Caucasus Republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. It proposes to develop a new relationship with these countries that goes beyond the existing one within the framework of the ENP while keeping the door for new membership closed. More concretely, it offers the Eastern partners the conclusion of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade

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S. Wolff (eds.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective. Context, Implementation and Impact*, London 2012, pp. 161-180.

<sup>6</sup> See G. Edwards, "The Construction of Ambiguity and the Limits of Attraction: Europe and its Neighbourhood Policy", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2008), pp. 45-62, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07036330801959465>>.

<sup>7</sup> See E. Korosteleva, "The Eastern Partnership Initiative...", pp. 1-21.

<sup>8</sup> See J. Crombois, "ESDP Operations and EU Conflict Management in the Eastern Neighbourhood", in F. Attinà, D. Irrera (eds.), *Multilateral Security and ESDP Operations. The Changing Practice of Peace Operations and the European Contribution*, Farnham 2010, pp. 145-161.

<sup>9</sup> See Polish-Swedish Proposal – Eastern Partnership 2008, at <<http://www.enpi-info.eu/library/content/polish-swedish-proposal-eastern-partnership>>, 4 June 2015.

<sup>10</sup> See European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*

<sup>11</sup> See Council of the European Union, *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, Press 78, Prague, 7 May 2009, at <[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/eastern\\_partnership/documents/prague\\_summit\\_declaration\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/eastern_partnership/documents/prague_summit_declaration_en.pdf)>, 10 June 2014.

Agreement (DCFTA) in view of establishing a Neighbourhood Economic Area.<sup>12</sup> The EaP also includes the creation of new areas of multilateral cooperation in five specific fields of actions that include good governance and democracy, economic convergence with EU legislation, energy security and people to people contact.<sup>13</sup>

## NARRATIVES AND FOREIGN POLICY IDENTITY: THE CASE OF THE EU FOREIGN POLICY

Since its inception, the European integration project has struggled at creating a distinct foreign policy identity. For some authors, such aim has to be considered as the overriding one in the EU actions in external affairs.<sup>14</sup> One way of approaching the question of EU foreign policy identity is through the use of narratives. Narratives are usually defined as the articulation of identity that is derived from discourses. More specifically, by narratives one means representations of reality as reflected in institutional, experts, and academic views of one given issue or policy.

The concept of narratives allows approaching foreign policy beyond the empirical assessment of the external representation of states. In other words, they may be useful to assess how foreign policy actors achieve their goals and objectives<sup>15</sup> in the context of discourse.

The concept of narratives has already been used in research related to EU foreign policy in general and to the ENP more particularly.<sup>16</sup> Two reasons may account for this. The first lies in the uncertainty as to the identity EU foreign policy. The second lies in the need to EU foreign policy actors, EU member states, EU institutions and others to justify their policy options vis-à-vis one another.

<sup>12</sup> To date Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have concluded such agreement with the European Union.

<sup>13</sup> See European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*

<sup>14</sup> See S. Anderson, *Crafting EU Security Policy. In Pursuit of a European Identity*, Boulder 2008; T. Risse, "Identity Matters: Exploring the Ambivalence of EU Foreign Policy", *Global Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2012), pp. 87-95, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12019>>.

<sup>15</sup> See B. Tora, "Democratic Foundations of EU Foreign Policy: Narratives and the Myth of EU Exceptionalism", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 18, no. 8 (2011), pp. 1190-1207, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2011.615209>>.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibid.* Cf. C. Nitoiu, "The Narrative Construction of the European Union in External Relations", in *idem*, N. Tomic (eds.), *Europe, Discourse, Institutions. Challenging the Mainstream in European Studies*, London 2015, pp. 76-92; A. Cianciara, "Stability, Security, Democracy: Explaining Shifts in the Narrative of the European Neighbourhood Policy", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 39, no. 1 (2017), pp. 49-62, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2016.1256397>>.

## THE EUS EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND THE NORMATIVE POWER NARRATIVE

The first narrative of the EaP is the one of the EU normative power. Such a power is defined by its reluctance to use military power and its preference for the expansion of its norms and values. In seeking to accompany and to guide the reforms process in the Eastern partners in order to align them with EU values and norms such as the commitment to rule of law, the principles of good governance and the approximation of their domestic legislation in line with the Single European market,<sup>17</sup> the EaP reflects the role that the EU assigned for itself as a civilian and normative power. For these purposes, the EU relies essentially on financial assistance, partnership, conditionality, expansion of norms to partner countries and reluctance to use military force in the Eastern neighbourhood, the EaP appears as a good example of the use of civilian and normative instruments.<sup>18</sup>

The normative power narrative raises, however, two questions which are, in some way, linked to each other. The first one relates to the issue of EU membership. The second one concerns the issue of conditionalities.

Indeed, the normative power narrative is deeply embedded in the experience of EU enlargement to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Considered by some as the most effective EU foreign policy, the EU enlargement led to a more or less successful process of reforms in the candidate countries, thanks to use of the EU membership 'carrot' as a motivation to accept the cost for the membership preparedness in terms of conditionalities.<sup>19</sup>

The path of dependency is particularly evident in the time period between the EU enlargement and the ENP from which the EaP originated. The use of similar terms and concepts such as conditionalities, approximation of domestic legislation or use of benchmarks are all reminiscent of the EU enlargement policy.<sup>20</sup> The closeness between the two policies is also being reflected at the bureaucratic level within the EU Commission, especially following the merging of the DG Enlargement and the DG in charge of ENP decided by the Juncker Commission.

On the other hand, the two policies have tended to grow more and more apart from one another. The inclusion in article 8 of the Treaty on the European Union by the

<sup>17</sup> See European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*

<sup>18</sup> See H. Sjursen, "What Kind of Power?", in eadem (ed.), *Civilian or Military Power? European Foreign Policy in Perspective*, London 2007, pp. 1-13; M. Telò, *Europe, a Civilian Power? European Union, Global Governance, World Order*, London 2007; I. Manners, "As You Like It: European Union Normative Power in the European Neighbourhood Policy", in R. Whitman, S. Wolff (eds.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy...*, pp. 29-50.

<sup>19</sup> See K.E. Smith, "Enlargement, Neighbourhood, and European Order", in C. Hill, M. Smith (eds.), *International Relations and the European Union*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford 2011, pp. 299-323.

<sup>20</sup> See J. Kelley, "New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms through the New European Neighbourhood Policy", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2006), pp. 29-56, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2006.00613.x>>.



Treaty of Lisbon stressing the need for the EU *to develop a special relationship with the neighbouring countries*<sup>21</sup> is often considered as closing any prospects for EU membership as far as some of the Eastern partners are concerned.<sup>22</sup>

The most recent developments indicate that there is a growing dichotomy between the EaP and EU Membership. In a proposal supported by about twelve member states – among which are Germany, Britain and most of the Central and Eastern European countries – the Swedish government put forward, in February 2014, the concept of a ‘European package’ to be offered to the Eastern partners stressing the need for closer involvement for them in the EU programs and agencies while falling short of mentioning membership prospects.<sup>23</sup> In the last summit between the EU leaders and their counterparts of the Eastern partners that took place in Riga in May 2015, the question of EU membership was not mentioned at all. Moreover, EU leaders such as Angela Merkel made it quite clear that the EaP should not be considered as a preparation for EU membership for the countries concerned.<sup>24</sup>

The perspective for EU membership offers two main advantages. First, it creates a pre-determined process and gives the EU considerable power in terms of leverage. Second, it gave a clear objective to the applicant countries as a tool for mobilization of their public opinion. The absence of such a perspective, on the other hand, poses a challenge for the EU to act as a transformative power as far the Eastern Partners are concerned.<sup>25</sup>

That being said, the perspective for EU membership should not be overstated as well. First, such a prospect concerns a limited number of Eastern partners, e.g. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Second, as shown in the cases of the EU enlargement to Romania and Bulgaria especially, the enlargement conditionalities had only a limited effect in terms of domestic reforms and further post-accession monitoring system had to be established.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See *Treaty on European Union (Consolidated Version 2016)*, Official Journal of the European Union, C 202, & June 2016, at <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2016:202:TOC>>; *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Consolidated Version 2016)*, Official Journal of the European Union, C 202, 7 June 2016, at <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:C:2016:202:TOC>>, 10 June 2015.

<sup>22</sup> See N. Ghazaryan, “The Evolution of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Consistency of its Inconsistencies”, *Review of European and Russian Affairs*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2012), pp. 1-13.

<sup>23</sup> See *Non-Paper “20 Points on the Eastern Partnership Post-Vilnius”*, 6 February 2014, at <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/206150753/20-Points-on-the-Eastern-Partnership-post-Vilnius>>, 10 June 2015.

<sup>24</sup> See “Merkel Tells Eastern Partners Not to Expect too Much”, 22 May 2015, EuroActive, at <<http://www.euractiv.com/sections/europes-east/merkel-tells-eastern-partners-not-expect-too-much-314788>>, 6 June 2015.

<sup>25</sup> See L. Delcour, “Technical, Geopolitical or Transformative? What Future for the Eastern Partnership?”, 23 May 2015, Open Democracy, at <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/laure-dalcour/technical-geopolitical-or-transformative-what-future-for-eastern-pa>>, 8 June 2015.

<sup>26</sup> See A.B. Spendzharova, M.A. Vachudova, “Catching Up? Consolidating Liberal Democracy in Bulgaria and Romania after EU Accession”, *West European Politics*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2012), pp. 39-58, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2012.631312>>.

The second question relates to the EU record in relation to promotion of democracy and its results on the ground. If democratic promotion is mentioned as one of the objectives of the ENP and then strengthened as far as the EaP is concerned, such commitment has never been reflected in financial terms. Since the beginning of the EaP, only 30% of the ENPI has been committed to such a purpose.<sup>27</sup> Here again, the rhetoric on shared values is also deeply influenced by the enlargement experience by relying on positive conditionalities and socialization.<sup>28</sup>

In terms of results and achievements, however, the human rights situation has tended to deteriorate among the Eastern partners, with perhaps the exceptions of Georgia and Moldova.<sup>29</sup> As far as the legal approximation to the single market *acquis* required by the DCFTAs, research shows how limited the process has been so far in the countries that have already concluded such an agreement. Finally, the absence of the prospect of EU membership also considerably decreases the funding opportunities for the Eastern partners – as compared to EU candidate countries – help them to mitigate the cost of such approximation.<sup>30</sup>

## THE EU'S EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND THE GEOPOLITICAL NARRATIVE

Since the start of the Ukrainian crisis, the EU has been caught in a whole array of geopolitical discussions. Most of them would attribute, among the reasons for the fall out between the EU and Russia, the lack of clear strategic thinking on the part of the EU or the lack of a clear geopolitical approach.<sup>31</sup> The Russian decision to launch a Eurasian Customs Union,<sup>32</sup> mutually exclusive with the DCFTA, to be concluded with the EU's Eastern partners contributed in exacerbating such discussions.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>27</sup> See N. Shapovalova, R. Youngs, *EU Democracy Promotion in the Eastern Neighbourhood: A Turn to Civil Society?*, FRIDE Working Paper 115, Madrid 2012, at <[http://fride.org/download/WP\\_115\\_EU\\_democracy\\_promotion\\_in\\_the\\_Eastern\\_neighbourhood.pdf](http://fride.org/download/WP_115_EU_democracy_promotion_in_the_Eastern_neighbourhood.pdf)>, 9 June 2015.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> See J. Lovitt (ed.), *European Integration Index 2014 for the Eastern Partnership Countries*, February 2015, at <<http://www.eap-index.eu/sites/default/files/EaP%20Index%202014.pdf>>, 5 May 2015.

<sup>30</sup> See L. Delcour, K. Wolczuk, *Approximation of the national legislation of Eastern Partnership countries with EU legislation in the economic field*, European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, Directorate B, Policy Department, May 2013, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2861/22028>>.

<sup>31</sup> See A. Byrne, "EU's Response to Ukraine Highlights Limits to Power", *Financial Times*, 8 May 2014, at <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/2dcb625c-d146-11e3-81e0-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3h5rpe13D>>; U. Klusmann, "The Global Implications of the Ukraine Crisis", *Der Spiegel* Online, 20 February 2014, at <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-geopolitical-implications-of-conflict-in-ukraine-a-954724.html>>, 3 June 2015.

<sup>32</sup> To date, two Eastern partner countries, Armenia and Belarus, have decided to join the Eurasian Union.

<sup>33</sup> See L. Delcour, "Escaping Geopolitical Entrapment: the EU's Eastern Policy in Light of EU-Russia Rivalry", Sofia Platform Policy Papers, at <[http://sofiaplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Escaping\\_Geopolitical\\_Entrapment\\_the\\_EU-s\\_Eastern\\_Policy\\_in\\_Light\\_of\\_EU-Russia\\_Rivalry.pdf](http://sofiaplatform.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Escaping_Geopolitical_Entrapment_the_EU-s_Eastern_Policy_in_Light_of_EU-Russia_Rivalry.pdf)>, 7 July 2015.



There is no doubt that the end of the Cold War in Europe has led to a return of geopolitics to Europe.<sup>34</sup> Even if the causes for this comeback go beyond the scope of this paper, it is, however, worth mentioning the kind of geopolitical approaches we are talking about. Critical geopolitics has emerged as a reaction to classical geopolitics and its dubious legacy of Nazism. Instead of emphasizing the relations between geography and politics, critical geopolitics focuses on geographical representations and how these interact with foreign policy analysis using a more constructivist approach. In other words, the extent to which geography can be a social construct that may be used to legitimize political decisions. Another approach called neo-classical geopolitics has tried to propose a fresh view that would break with the excesses of the past while re-assessing the importance of some forms of environmental determinism.<sup>35</sup> Neo-classical geopolitics is more embedded in realist approaches to international relations. Its core principle lies in the concept of power expansion seen as a necessity even though a distinction can be made between a political brand and a military brand of these approaches.<sup>36</sup>

As far as the EaP is concerned, the main line of division between the Member States relates to their views on whether or not the Eastern partners should be considered as either a buffer zone or a bridge between the EU and Russia. These positions were revealed in US diplomatic telegrams released by Wikileaks to some leading European newspapers. In these telegrams, Radosław Sikorski, at the time Polish Foreign Affairs Minister, was expressing his fears after the Russia-Georgian conflict of 2008 and the need thereof to strengthen the relations between the EU and its Eastern Neighbours.<sup>37</sup>

It should be borne in mind that the conflict in Georgia was not mentioned in the Swedish-Polish memorandum that focused its attention instead on Ukraine. Nevertheless, the conflict contributed to accelerate the agenda of the discussions for the adoption of the EaP by the EU Member States. However, the division between the same Member States on the issue of the future of EU-Russia relations was central to these discussions. In other words, the EU was divided between countries such as Poland and the Baltic States that saw the Eastern Partners as buffers against possible Russian revisionism. For other countries led by Germany and to some extent France, the Eastern partners were seen mostly as a possible bridge between the EU and Russia.<sup>38</sup>

The recent events linked to the Ukrainian crisis have indeed hidden the important point that both the EaP and EU-Russia relations were discussed in parallel. In the

<sup>34</sup> See S. Guzzini, *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe? Social Mechanisms and Foreign Policy Identity Crises*, Cambridge 2012.

<sup>35</sup> See T. Haverluk, W. Beauchemin, B.A. Mueller, "The Three Critical Flaws of Critical Geopolitics: Towards a Neo-Classical Geopolitics", *Geopolitics*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2014), pp. 19-39, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2013.803192>>.

<sup>36</sup> See S. Guzzini, *The Return of Geopolitics...*, pp. 18-44

<sup>37</sup> See "Cablegate: Poland: A Natural U.S. Ally on Eastern Policy", 12 December 2008, ref. 08WAR-SAW1409, Scoop Wikileaks, at <<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WL0812/S00107/cablegate-poland-a-natural-us-ally-on-eastern-policy.htm>>, 10 June 2015.

<sup>38</sup> See B. Depo, *Theorizing the Interests of the EU Member States in the Eastern Partnership*, ISA BISA Conference, Edinburgh, June 2012, at <[http://www.exact.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/home/depod/Bogdana\\_Depo\\_Theorising\\_EaP.pdf](http://www.exact.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/home/depod/Bogdana_Depo_Theorising_EaP.pdf)>, 3 June 2015.

aftermath of the Russian Georgian war of August 2009, the French were even threatening to block the EaP unless significant progress was made in the EU-Russia negotiations in view of concluding a new Partnership and Cooperation agreement.<sup>39</sup>

The discussions about the geopolitical dimensions of the Eastern Partnership have flourished in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine crisis of 2013. In reality, two sets of discussions have emerged.<sup>40</sup> The first one takes its inspiration from neo-classical geopolitics and emphasises the fact of the geopolitical nature of the EaP. These views would refer to the Eastern neighbourhood as a locus of competition between Russia and the European Union. In this perspective, they would explain the reasons for the Russian opposition to EaP as an attempt to control the space between the EU and Russia both politically and economically.<sup>41</sup> Others prefer to rely on some more classical geopolitical concepts such as the one of rimland to describe the countries included in the EaP. As a result, they call for the need to strengthen the political and security alliances between some of the Eastern neighbours and the 'West' through NATO membership and more economic and political closeness with the European Union.<sup>42</sup>

The question of EU energy security is central to the geopolitical narrative. Since the first Ukraine-Russia gas dispute of January 2006, the question of the security and diversification of supplies ranked high on the EU agenda as reflected in the EU Commission's Second Strategic Energy Review and in the Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy.<sup>43</sup> It also became a central point in the new EU Energy Union initiated by the new President of the European Council, Donald Tusk.<sup>44</sup> As far as the EaP is concerned, the question of security and diversification of energy supplies is an important part of the bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the EU and its Eastern partners. This takes different forms according to the countries concerned – firstly, the inclusion of energy interdependence provisions in the Association Agreements to be

<sup>39</sup> See House of Lords. European Union Committee, *After Georgia. The EU and Russia. Follow-Up Report. Report with Evidence*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Report of Session 2008-09, London 2009.

<sup>40</sup> See J. Crombois, "Which Geopolitics for the European Union? The EU's Eastern European Partnership", *International Relations and Diplomacy*, vol. 3, no. 7 (2015), pp. 480-486, at <<http://dx.doi.org/10.17265/2328-2134/2015.07.005>>.

<sup>41</sup> See A. Debattista, "Geopolitics, Security, and the Eastern Partnership", 12 November 2013, One Europe, at <<http://one-europe.info/geopolitics-security-and-the-eastern-partnership>>, 10 June 2015.

<sup>42</sup> See S. Velenciuc, *Geopolitics of Eastern Partnership*, at <[http://www.academia.edu/8271412/Geopolitics\\_of\\_Eastern\\_Partnership](http://www.academia.edu/8271412/Geopolitics_of_Eastern_Partnership)>, 10 June 2015.

<sup>43</sup> See Council of the European Union, *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions "Second Strategic Energy Review"*, Brussels, 19 November 2008, COM(2008) 781 final, at <<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52008DC0781>>, 19 June 2015; *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy "Providing Security in a Changing World"*, 2008, at <[http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/reports/104630.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/reports/104630.pdf)>, 10 July 2015.

<sup>44</sup> See R. Dickel et al., *Reducing European Dependence on Russian Gas: Distinguishing Natural Gas Security from Geopolitics*, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, OIES Paper, NG 92, October 2014, at <<http://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NG-92.pdf>>, 5 June 2015; A. Hedberg, *EU's Quest for Energy Security. What Role for the Energy Union?*, EPC Policy Brief, 3 March 2015, at <[http://www.epc.eu/pub\\_details.php?cat\\_id=3&pub\\_id=5374](http://www.epc.eu/pub_details.php?cat_id=3&pub_id=5374)>, 15 April 2015.

concluded with the EU's Eastern partners, secondly – the conclusion of a Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Moldova, Georgia and Armenia, thirdly – the enhancement of bilateral relations with countries such as Azerbaijan and Belarus, and fourthly – to the participation to the EU Energy Community for Ukraine and Moldova. The multilateral dimension includes the need to create a mutually beneficial interconnected and diversified energy market between the EU and its Eastern partners as well as the harmonization of their energy legislation. Finally the Commission Communication highlights the need to reach out to countries of Central Asia using the Baku process and promoting the realization of the so-called Southern Corridor.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, EU energy security is not included as part of the wider EU CFSP but remains distinct. As a result, it has consisted of a technical approach and centred on the need to finance new infrastructures in terms of pipeline connections and upgrading of the energy sectors in the Eastern partners.<sup>46</sup> The case of Azerbaijan is quite telling in this respect. If the country was included in the ENP and then became part of the EaP, Azerbaijan stood out as the only energy producer while being central to the Southern Corridor project supported by the European Union.<sup>47</sup> However, the country is not really interested in accepting the politically binding commitments that the conclusion of the new Association Agreement would entail and instead expressed its interest in concluding a Strategic Modernisation Partnership (SMP), clearly much less binding. The EU, although it keeps repeating its commitments to its core value, has been deeply involved in the financing of infrastructure projects through the negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding on Energy while the human rights situation in the country had been deteriorating.<sup>48</sup>

In the case of energy policy vis-à-vis its Eastern neighbours, the EU seems to be playing geopolitics by default, i.e. a fragmented policy navigating between values and interests that prevented it from developing a clear strategic vision.

## CONFLICTING NARRATIVES?

The emergence of two different narratives in the EU's EaP reflects the difficulty for the EU in creating a foreign policy. While the decision making process in CFSP based on unanimity often leads to reaching the lowest common denominator, the emphasis on core values appears as the least adverse path. In other words, the emphasis on core

<sup>45</sup> See European Commission, *Communication from the Commission...*

<sup>46</sup> See R. Youngs, "A New Geopolitics for EU Energy Security", Carnegie Europe, 23 September 2014, at <<http://carnegieeurope.eu/publications/?fa=56705>>, 4 May 2015.

<sup>47</sup> See J. Hale, *EU Relations with Azerbaijan: More for Less*, Open Society Discussion Paper, Brussels, 4 May 2012, at <<http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/eu-relations-azerbaijan-20120606.pdf>>, 3 May 2015.

<sup>48</sup> See M. Merabishvili, *The EU and Azerbaijan: Game on for a More Normative Policy?*, CEPS Policy Brief no. 329, March 2015, at <<http://www.ceps.eu/publications/eu-and-azerbaijan-game-more-normative-policy>>, 3 June 2015.

values would be seen as the inability of the Member States to agree on a common strategy and more as an attempt to externalise them as part of EU foreign policy identity.<sup>49</sup>

In any case, these two narratives are indeed conflicting. The use of such civilian and normative instruments renders all discussion about the EU's geopolitical views very difficult if not impossible. Indeed such instruments are premised on the rejection of a neo-Malthusian view of a world based on the idea of inherent competition and scarcity. They also challenge any geographical determinism in favouring the need to build partnership and to export EU norms. Nevertheless, as a civilian and normative power, the EU has been reluctant to adopt the views of neo-classical geopolitics in its external policies. Instead of approaching geography in terms of distinct spaces and as loci of competition, the EU has emphasized the expansion of norms and values based on the inter-connectedness with its partners.

### INVENTING A NEW NARRATIVE?

The emergence of the two narratives has led the EU to adopt geopolitical views by default while remaining attached to its normative power role. Such a mix does not seem tenable in the future. Instead, there would be a need for the EU to move beyond these two narratives and to invent a new one. Such a new narrative could be based on the following aspects:

First, there is a need for the EU to re-define a set of core values in terms of democracy and human rights. This would mean for the EU to clean its act both internally – vis-a-vis some of its member states, and externally.

Second, there is a need for the EU to prioritise the legal approximation required as far the Eastern partners are concerned. At this stage, and without prospect for EU membership in the short or medium term, the EU overestimated the capacity of the Eastern partners to reform their economy and has underestimated the cost of such approximation as far as local entrenched economic interests are concerned.

Third, there is a need for the EU to define clearly, collectively and democratically its objectives as far as the Eastern Partners are concerned. This would require a political clarification for the EU in determining its strategic interests in its Eastern neighbourhood.

### CONCLUSION

The EU's EaP has given rise to two narratives. The first narrative, the normative power one emphasises values and norms over interests. Such a narrative is deeply embedded in the EU enlargement experience. It is mostly produced by EU institutions and the

<sup>49</sup> See S. Lehne, "EU – Actor or Toolbox? How Member States Perceive the EU's Foreign Policy?", in A. Hug (ed.), *Europe in the World. Can EU Foreign Policy Make an Impact?*, The Foreign Policy Center, London 2013, at <<http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/1535.pdf>>, 5 June 2015.

EU Commission in particular. In terms of results, however, it has not accomplished much. Since its inception, it seems that the EU's Eastern Partners have somewhat drifted away from EU values and norms rather than the other way around. The second narrative, the geopolitical one, originated already in the first discussions over the EaP initiative. It gathered momentum in the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine crisis of the autumn of 2013. Such a narrative was generated in some EU member states by policy actors and analysts of EU foreign policy. It led to an emphasis on interests rather than on values.

The main challenge for the EU in the years to come will be to move beyond these two narratives. One possible way forward would be for the EU to focus the expansion of its norms to the countries that expressed an interest in them. This would mean getting rid of the geographical definition of the neighbourhood. However, such insistence by the EU on expanding values and norms should be based on a strong consensus between the Member States themselves. In other words, a consensus not produced as a result of the EU's decision-making process but as the result of choice clearly endorsed collectively by the EU as a whole.

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**Jean F. CROMBOIS** holds the PhD degree in Modern European History, received at the Free University of Brussels in 1999, and Postgraduate Diploma in Political Science from the University of Essex (2003). Currently he works as associate professor at the American University in Bulgaria. Among his main research interests there are: European neighborhood policy and European security, history and theories of European integration, comparative constitutionalism in Europe, EU external affairs and institutional framework, EU law, EU interest groups and lobbying, history of European integration, comparative politics in Europe. Authored many publications on international politics and European integration.