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Highway to hell? – European Union's Eastern Policy from a Civilian power perspective

There is no doubt that the enlargement of the EU to now include 28 member states can be seen as the most successful exercise in preventive diplomacy and projection of political stability, democratic peace and economic prosperity since the Roman Empire. The downside of this success story of European Union enlargement, however, is that it has complicated the relationship between the EU and Russia and has led, step-by-step, to a political destabilization on the eastern boundaries of the EU. In this respect, the Eastern Partnership initiative, launched by the European Union in 2008 to cover the eastern dimension of its already existing European Neighborhood Policy was a major turning point. Prior to the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in late November 2013, Russia exerted intense pressure on its neighborhood states not to accept the EU's initiative and it was successful in the case of Ukraine. At the Vilnius summit, Ukrainian President Yanukovich refused to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. His decision not to sign the Agreement led to violent public protests in Kiev which culminated in President Yanukovich's overthrow on February 22, 2014. As a result, Russia invaded and annexed the Crimean peninsula and actively supported pro-Russian separatist forces fighting the Ukrainian army in a bloody and violent conflict in the eastern part of Ukraine (Larsen 2014).

All these events, taking most Western government officials by surprise, represent a major geopolitical shock to the Post Cold War European Security order. While slowing down the European Union's initiatives on Eastern Partnership for the time being, the crisis over Ukraine also calls for an urgent reassessment of the underlying political discourses on Europe as an international actor shaping the European Union's attempts to promote the political and economic integration and/or association of its eastern neighbours: particularly influential in this context has been conception of the EU as a "civilian" or "normative" power.

The EU as a "civilian power" in international politics

There is a widespread consensus in the European political as well as academic discourse that the European Union plays a distinctive role in international politics (Hyde-Price 2008). The idea that the EU is a distinctive, qualitatively new and better international actor was first outlined by François Duchêne in the early 1970's when he referred to the EU as an "example of a new stage in political civilization. The European Community in particular would have a chance to demonstrate the [international, M.M.] influence which can be wielded by a large political cooperative formed to exert essentially civilian forms of power" (Duchêne 1973, 19). This is often (critically) compared to the USA's (international) policy based on classical tools, including the usage of military power. Since the European Community is a "civilian group of countries with a long history of economic power and relatively short on armed force" (ibd., 20), it has a fundamental interest in trying to domesticate relations between states. From the perspective of the domestication of international relations, "civilian powers" like the EU essentially pursue the following aims (Harnisch/-Maull 2001, 4):

- Constraining the use of force through cooperation and collective security arrangements;
- Strengthening the rule of law through multilateral cooperation, integration and partial transfer of sovereignty;
- Promoting democracy and human rights within and between states.

It is quite obvious that this list of "civilian aims" reflects to a very large extent the political structure and values upon which the European Union is built on. Because of its unique and innovative internal political and institutional structure, the EU has no other choice but to project these principles and norms in its external relations. For the EU, acting as a "force for good" in international relations is the

compelling consequence of the internal logic of the European integration process (Orbie 2006, 125-126). Not surprisingly, the academic discourse on EU as a "civilian" power has been favourably received by the European political establishment. Central elements of the "civilian power" concept can be found in various official EU documents and speeches of EU officials. The most comprehensive and most clear document on the European Union's identity as an international actor however is the European Security Strategy of 2003 entitled "A secure Europe in a better world" which is a "well-written description of the EU's role concept as civilian force" in world politics (Maull 2005, 792).

It is in the context of this European political and academic discourse on the EU's international identity that the enlargement process as well as the Eastern Partnership Initiative gain its specific meaning. From the perspective of the "civilian power" discourse, both the enlargement process as well as the Partnership Initiative were and still are all about transferring and diffusing the EU's internal values and norms to the states of Central and Eastern Europe allowing a post-national order to replace the logic of power politics that governed this part of Europe until the end of the Cold War. The transformative power of the EU was based for the most part, if not exclusively on its own distinctive polity and its influence on the Central and Eastern European states, stemming not from what the EU does, but what it is (Manners 2008).

However a "civilian" or "normative power" driven enlargement process of the EU has serious downsides. First of all, from this perspective the enlargement of the EU cannot be anything other than open-ended, lending the project - in fact – a universal nature. Since the purpose of civilizing international relations exclusively based on the norms and principles outlined above has a global and/or universal dimension, the geographical limitation of EU enlargement is to a large extent excluded. Moreover, the open-ended nature of the enlargement process is one of the key factors in preserving the EU's legitimacy to promote its norms and values beyond its boundaries. As has been pointed out by a Finnish analyst, the EU's attempts to divorce its normative power from the accession process run the risk of being counterproductive. Therefore, the Eastern Partnership Initiative represents both the avoidance and the continuation of enlargement by other means (Haukkala 2008), being an instrument

designed both to let the partner states in and to keep them out. To summarize, both the EU's enlargement policy and its Partnership Initiative seem to end up as a form of "soft imperialism" since each enlargement round creates new boundaries beyond which the European Norms and values have to be imposed if the EU wants to counter the concerns over the "fortress Europe" idea (Haukkala 2008).

It is obvious that this "imperial logic" inherent in the "civilian power" concept has a strong potential for conflict when third powers perceive EU's strategies on its eastern boundaries as a zero-sum game and are determined enough to loudly articulate this perception as well as strong enough to undertake counteractions. And this is exactly what happened in the case of Ukraine when Russia very quickly developed a hostile zero-sum attitude to the EU's growing influence in this region as a result of the Eastern Partnership initiative. This hostile zero-sum attitude has been furhter intensified by the fact that major member states like Germany have shown, at least up to now, little understanding for Russia's interests in containing the EU because they perceive the latter as an inherently benign civilian power (Larsen 2014, 17). Since the "civilian power" concept rests on the assumption that there are cosmopolitan norms and values which transcend the particular or even rival claims of states or other political entities, the eastward expansion of the EU might never be seen by the EU as a threat to Russia. On the contrary, any opposition to further initiatives to promote the "European project" further eastward might be perceived as a threat to the EU's vision of establishing a post-national order in Europe based on democratic values, international harmony and effective multilateralism. From this perspective there is no other way for the European Union other than to "punish" recalcitrant opponents like Russia. "Punishing" Russia by imposing ever increasing sanctions, as carried out by the EU in the recent past, is an extremely dangerous and conflict prone strategy because it makes an already bad situation even worse (Mearsheimer 2014).

With this perspective in mind, the fundamental problem with the EU's foreign policy in general and its eastern policy in particular becomes very clear: the European Union still clings to a "civilian" model of international relations which relies on the promotion of norms and values and explicitly eschews traditional power politics while at the same time the boundaries of the EU seem to require a much diffe-

rent role model that bears directly on the anarchic structure of the international system. A brief excursus on geopolitics and geopolitical models of the European Union might further develop this assessment of the civilian power concept as being largely inappropriate for the EU to cope with the challenges emanating from international politics.

Geopolitics and geopolitical models of the European Union – changing paradigms and perceptions

The concept of the EU as a "civilian power" has been implemented under the very specific political-territorial conditions of post-Cold War Europe. They were characterized by an absence of strong competing centers of integration in the neighborhood after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Consequently the expansion of the EU was based on structuring its internal and external borders according to one of four strategies: *networked (non)border, march, colonial frontier* and *limes* (Browning and Joenniemi 2008). In the case of a *networked (non)border,* state boundaries were gradually eroding together with free flows of people and goods, which was coordinated by numerous local centers. A *march* corresponds with a buffer zone (Browning and Joenniemi, 2008, p. 527; Walters, 2004), a *colonial frontier* is a line, constantly pushed forward and separating asymmetric structures. The line itself is one dimensionally permeable, with norms and values being transferred from a more developed partner to the less advanced one. A *limes* represents a final border, however also separating asymmetric structures (Browning and Joenniemi, 2008, p. 529; Walters, 2004). In the practice of EUrope structuring its borders, it seems that the *networked (non)border* has been applied in the case of western European non-member states, limes for Mediterranean neighbors. The continental east was seen as *colonial frontier,* that was to replace *march.*

However the considerations outlined above reveal even more – they give a more general picture of the geopolitical model of the EU. Christopher Browning and Pertti Joenniemi (2008) identify three of them: Westphalian, imperial and neomedieval. The first one has a clearly determined space, enclosed within precisely designed state(-like) boundaries. The center controls the entire territory on a basis of the equal exercising of norms, values and laws. In the case of the European Union one can see it as a semi-state structure (Caporaso, 1996), with defined territory marked and protected by the external boundary (Schengen boundary), *acquis communau-*

taire being here the legal base for the whole territory and the new political center taking over powers and responsibilities from the member states (Browning and Joenniemi, 2008, pp. 522-526). The second assumes that the center and peripheries can be identified, with the former producing ideas and solutions transferred to the latter. The further from the center, the weaker the influence is. The center is consequently surrounded by circles of a concentric character. Both the enlargements and external involvement illustrate this model in the case of the EU (Zielonka, 2007), with the European Neighborhood Policy as an example (Browning and Joenniemi, 2008, pp. 522-526). The neomedieval model assumes there is no single dominating center, and several regional and local functionally networked centers can be identified (Wind, 2003).

The territorially and normatively expansive character of the EU allows us to classify it as the imperial model (Zielonka, 2007). Consequently the logic of concentric circles can be applied, where the very core is made up of the most integrated (institutionally and non-institutionally) group of member states. The further away from the core, the less intensive the participation in the integration project (Comelli, Greco, Tocci, 2007). Outer circles consequently reveal those areas not participating in the euro zone, the Schengen zone, further away the non-member candidates, then potential candidates, and finally the partner states.

The dynamics illustrated here have at least three significant consequences for understanding the Eastern policies of the EU. First of all, it is the expanding character of the *EU project,* following the neo-functional linearity (Lindberg, 1963) of territorial and functional spill over. It is attracting (and is trying to attract) more and more states located further and further from the original center. Consequently the EU has been growing in size. But the newly 'absorbed' territories' link to the center diminishes the further they are away from the center. Secondly, the borders of the *European project* are much wider than the borders of the EU, representing in addition more of a frontier scheme than a boundary one. They are often fuzzy and undefined, with constantly changing locations, further and further away. The geostrategy of a *colonial frontier* describes its character in the eastern part of the continent, with neighboring states as an expansion space. Here the EU, as the normative power, exports norms and values, stabilizing, democratizing and

developing the outer circles. Thirdly, both academic reflection and the political practice of the *European project* have been strongly Europe-centric. For over two decades they have assumed (directly or indirectly) that the EU is a dominating (or even a single existing) project in this part of the world, representing a kind of civilized space surrounded by 'barbarian' territories. This perception resulted from economic (high GDP) and political (liberal democracy) asymmetries, but also from a lack of alternative 'gravity centers' located in the neighborhood. Consequently, the *European project* was treated and developed as if surrounded by 'no man's land,' expanding almost without limit towards the outer spaces.

However this Europe-centric perspective was undermined by the "recovery" of Russia and her attempt to reconstruct her own empire in the 2010s. Consequently the conflict in Ukraine can be seen as an outcome of the overlapping influences of two competing centers: Brussels and Moscow. Both are exporting their projects to the neighboring territories, creating outer circles. Ukraine is consequently a frontier for both sides, a space where the political, economic and cultural influences of Brussels and Moscow are penetrating and overlap. This situation has been acceptable for both sides until recently, motivated however by various factors: The EU, tired with the 2004/7/13 big bang, was not able to offer very close relations, for example membership, to its eastern neighbors. At the same time Russia had (almost) no means or resources to prevent Ukraine from implementing its western orientation. The treatment of Ukraine as a form of *colonial frontier* meant that in practice it became a sort of *march,* geopolitically separating both parties.

But the 2013 Eastern Partnership Vilnius Summit created a situation where both projects suddenly became mutually exclusive. The signing of the association agreement would mean further expansion of the EU, colliding with the Russian offer of the Eurasian Economic Union. The previous forms of influence tolerated *frontier* borders (or even *march*), the new one was based on an either-or principle. This had to lead to the (re)boundarization of the border between the *European project* and the *Russian project*. The question has been where it is to be located (the cause of the territorial disputes) and how is it going to be settled (confronting the EU's normative power with the Russian form of intervention which follows a traditional means of power)?

The line of argument presented above makes it necessary to redefine the nature of both projects. The exclusivity and the potential for conflict corresponds much better with the Westphalian model (Caporaso, 1996), also with regard to the instruments of external policies. Both structures cannot go on expanding indefinitely, blocking each other territorially, but also politically, economically, and – in the case of Russia - militarily. The overlapping of influences is no longer an option, a boundary between both structures has to be established. Consequently Ukraine can belong either to the *European project,* or the *Russian project*. This can include its entire territory or can alternatively lead to its disintegration. In any case one can expect the geostrategy of *limes* being applied by both sides, with the new boundary being "final" for them. This opens – together with the previously debated criticism of the civilian power concept – a window of opportunity for a neo-realist perspective.

The (neo-) realist perspective – an alternative?

The basic tenet of the neo-realist or structural realist perspective on is that the pressures stemming from the international system "shape" and "shove" the behavior of states without completely determining this behavior. The structure of the international system is – in principle – anarchic. Anarchy here is by no means chaos – it simply means that states as sovereign entities are formally equal with each other and are not subordinated to a higher authority which has a system wide law making and law enforcing authority. Therefore, international politics have no authority bound by law and there is no international police force to rely on. It is rather a realm in which states have to figure out by themselves how they want to live with each other, how they are to manage their relationship and ultimately how they are going to manage their security concerns as well as their own survival as a sovereign entity. So far, international politics can be described as a realm of self-help or as a self-help system. Given the anarchic structure of the international system, some degree of security competition especially between the great powers is persistent and – more important – inevitable. Balancing and the strong tendency of shaping the international environment conducive to their own strategic interests and preferences has become the dominant feature of great power behavior. (Waltz 1979, 78-128).

From this perspective, the European Union's role in

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international politics cannot be seen primarily as an exporter of norms and values, but as a collective actor whose primary concern is to secure its survival under the conditions of international anarchy. To this end, the European Union serves three main purposes for its member states:

1. It serves as an instrument to preserve and promote the international economic competiveness of its member states in the light of the challenges of globalization.
2. It serves as instrument for the EU member states to meet the geopolitical challenges.
3. It serves as an instrument for collectively shaping the European Union's regional international environment according to its own political, economic and security interests (Hyde-Price 2006, 222).

The latter purpose become increasingly prominent in the early 1990s when the European Union's well-being was threatened by the prospect of political instability and economic crisis within the post-communist Central and Eastern European states. And it is these international pressures which have led the EU to gradually shape its regional international environment, establishing a blend of imposed and negotiated order in its neighboring territories. Far from being a "civilian" or "normative power", the European Union's transformative power in Central and Eastern Europe was based on its economic clout, the fear of exclusion from its attractive economic market and the promise of future membership (Hyde-Price 2008, 31). Therefore, by projecting stability into its eastern regional environment in this specific way, the European Union acquired the classical role of an ordering power on the European continent (Hyde-Price 2006, 226).

If the EU acknowledges its role as that of a European ordering power rather than clinging to the self-image of being an exporter of values and norms in international politics, it would not only mean that the agenda outlined above of a "civilian power" would be seriously constrained by the structural pressures of the self-help system. It would also allow it to design the eastern enlargement process of the European Union as a clearly defined geographical project whose boundaries would largely depend for a large part upon the degree of security competition between the EU and Russia. Both the European Union and Russia have – as Hedley Bull has already pointed out in his seminal analysis of

the role of great powers in an anarchical society – a special obligation to dampen their security competition in order to preserve and promote a stable and peaceful international order (Bull 1977, pp 200). Accepting a role model inspired by neo-realist logic would allow the EU to tone down its "civilian power" discourse while at the same time being better primed to resolve great power conflicts on the basis of reciprocity!

Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that the "civilian" or "normative power" model which is shaping the EU's efforts towards the political and economic integration or association of its eastern neighbours is not only for the most part inefficient but is also prone to conflict when it comes to the management of boundary problems related with this process. A brief excursus on the geopolitical models of the European Union supports this assessment. In contrast to the "civilian power" model, by recognizing that there are enduring security competition and rival interests between states given the anarchic structure of the international system, the neorealist perspective opens up space for compromise and – at least – a partial resolution of conflicts.

However, even if there is some virtue in the neorealist argument in this context, there is a strong indication that the challenges of managing the boundary problems related to the European Union's eastern policy will become increasingly detrimental to the core values on which the European Union is based on – democracy, the rule of law, transforming the notion of sovereignty, eschewing and rejecting traditional power politics. If the European Union is not be able to reconcile in its foreign policy the competing logic of being a "civilian power" (which is of crucial importance for the success of the European integration process itself) with the logic of international anarchy, it runs the risk of ending up as a tragic international actor finding itself on a highway to hell. To find a viable exit from this highway will constitute an immediate challenge for the European Union's credibility and legitimacy as a serious international actor!

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