Secure the Neighbourhood for EU’s sake! The Eastern Partnership between the internal and external dimensions of security

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Abstract: After the end of the Cold War, the EU developed a foreign policy dimension, which enabled it to face new security challenges. From the beginning the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Common Security and Defence Policy, the Policy of Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy were built upon the belief that a stable neighbourhood was completely necessary to guarantee EU’s peace and security. To achieve that purpose, the EU has been promoting economic, political and social relations with its neighbouring countries.

As a result, the Eastern Partnership arises as a new framework for relations and co-operation with old goals, through which the EU tries to assure stability, good governance and economic development in its neighbourhood. However, despite the cover of “force for good” or “peace promoter”, the EU is pursuing an interested approach aiming at securing its borders and preserving its internal stability.

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to analyse the Eastern Partnership, highlighting its blurred internal and external security dimensions. For that purpose, the paper will focus on EU’s relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus: the shared neighbourhood with Russia.


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Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative was presented in 2008 to enhance the EU’s relationship with the countries in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. It aims to promote further integration between these countries and the European Union (EU), in order to assure European security and stability. This results from the idea that EU’s security begins outside its borders. For that purpose, the EaP promotes new frameworks for these countries to come into gradual integration with the EU economy and fosters political reforms to reduce socio-economic imbalances. Overall, the goal is to reinforce the framework previously provided under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) giving coherence to EU’s approach towards its Eastern vicinity.

It follows from the EU’s foreign and neighbouring policies, which rely on a blurred notion of internal and external security. After the end of the Cold War, the EU developed a foreign policy dimension, which enabled it to face new security challenges. From the beginning the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the Common Security and Defence Policy, the Policy of Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy were built upon the belief that a stable neighbourhood was completely necessary to guarantee EU’s peace and security. In other words, securing the EU’s external environment was seen as a *sine qua non* condition for its internal security. To achieve that purpose, the EU has been promoting economic, political and social relations with its neighbouring countries.

As argued by Sebastian Barnutz (2010: 378), the EU perceives “situations of poverty and under-development as security relevant because they potentially led to conflict” and create insecurities that can easily affect its internal stability and the main (liberal) principles of EU’s identity. Here, security is not understood as an objective phenomenon, but as a relational and discursive realm which is influenced by perceptions (Fierke, 2007).

Moreover, the EU seems to conceptualise security in a manner highly congruent with Didier Bigo’s argument on the merging of the internal and external aspects of security, which is nothing more than the “expansion of the internal security dimension beyond the state and the extension of the internal border to larger areas” (Bigo, 2006: 395). After the end of the Cold War, the growing visibility of external and transnational threats and the need to create an ‘other’ to replace the communist threat led to the diffusion of an official rhetoric presenting the need to intervene abroad as a crucial step in the process of ensuring one’s internal peace, security and stability (Lutterbeck, 2005). Therefore, a good response to insecurity is “neither internal nor external, but integrated” (Bigo, 2006: 389) in what is called the “internal-external security nexus” (Eriksson and Rhinard, 2009: 243).

As a consequence, there is a widespread perception that the EU’s most visible security challenges – from terrorism to illegal immigration – cannot be properly addressed without external action. Accordingly, the EU has
externalised its internal security goals through various forms of external action, namely the ENP and its most recent initiative: the EaP. Accurately, this was a movement already visible in the EU’s Policy of Enlargement, but the Eastern Enlargement forced the EU to focus on the security risks originating from its new neighbourhood. Therefore, the ENP became one of the most important, and certainly the most visible, fields of externalisation of the EU’s security rationale (Monar, 2010: 23-26).

The paper argues that the EaP arises as a new framework for relations and co-operation with old goals, through which the EU tries to assure stability, good governance and economic development in its neighbourhood. Despite the cover of “force for good” or “peace promoter”, the EU is pursuing an interested approach aiming at securing its borders and preserving its internal stability. Hence, the EaP – and the ENP overall – can be regarded as a security approach relying on a blurred definition of the internal and external dimensions of security.

For that purpose the paper analyses the EaP, highlighting its blurred internal and external security dimensions and focusing on EU’s relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus: the shared neighbourhood with Russia. To do that it proceeds as follows. The first part analyses ENP as a framework to relations with EU’s neighbours aiming at securing its borders and assure peace, prosperity and security in the European continent. The second part exposes how the EaP recycles EU’s security goals in the neighbourhood. The third part looks specifically at the cases of Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus in order to shed light on the EU’s security approach in the neighbourhood. Here, the mapping of the EU’s relations with each one of its Eastern neighbours and the identification of the hot topics in their agendas will reinforce the argument that EU’s approach towards the neighbourhood is primarily a security one. The paper finishes with some concluding remarks.

1) European Neighbourhood Policy: between the internal and external dimensions of security

The Eastern Enlargement faced the EU with a series of challenges at its new borders, namely the fact that any signs of instability or disruption in the neighbourhood could easily spill over into the Union, which led to the development and approval of the ENP (Jeandesboz, 2007: 397).

Although the issue began to be debated in 2002, the ENP was not fully developed until 2004. There are currently 16 participating states in the ENP that cooperate with the EU in a number of fields, namely: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine (European Commission, n.d.). Largely inspired from the Enlargement experience (Gebhard, 2010), the ENP aims at creating a “ring of friends” around the EU, “avoid new dividing lines in Europe”, and “promote stability and prosperity”
across the continent (Communication from the Commission, 2003). However, the ENP Strategy Paper strictly recognised that this policy “offers a means to reinforce relations between the EU and partner countries, which is distinct from the possibilities available to European countries under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union” (Communication from the Commission, 2004: 3), i.e., the membership process.

While the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (in the case of Eastern Europe and South Caucasus) and the Association Agreements (in the case of the Mediterranean) remain, legally and structurally, the basis of EU’s cooperation with the neighbourhood, the ENP created the Action Plans, a new political instrument based on conditionality and intended to frame EU’s relations with each one of its partners (Communication from the Commission, 2003: 16; Edwards, 2008: 48). However, the Action Plans have not been successful tools and its implementation has been rather irregular, reflecting the ENP’s fragilities (Delcour, 2007: 122).

“Positive conditionality” remains the ENP’s main instrument, whereby the EU offers a stance in its internal market and financial support to stimulate economic, political and social reforms, as well as security cooperation in the neighbourhood (Communication from the Commission, 2003: 10-15; Whitman and Wolff, 2010: 8), in order to address the root causes of instability, crisis and conflict. Nonetheless, conditionality is applied strictly with the EU favouring stability and economic interests over effective and real reforms, showing little consideration for local settings and available resources (Biscop, 2009: 10). Furthermore, the numerous ENP’s political and financial offers are much less appealing when compared to the Enlargement ones and the costs of reforms promoted by the EU are too high, which together with the lack of membership diminishes EU’s leverage, transformative potential and thus credibility, decreasing the likelihood of a successful strategy based on “positive conditionality” (Ágh, 2010: 1241).

In addition, the ENP has a socialisation axis relying on social learning processes resulting from institutional and people-to-people contacts and aiming at creating collective shared understanding of proper behaviour. The result is a structural foreign policy seeking to influence and transform the political, economic and social systems of EU’s neighbours (Emerson, 2011b: 56-57): a *sine qua non* condition to preserve EU’s internal peace and security. However, in practice socialisation has not been extensively applied or has been restricted by domestic constraints (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 2), lessening EU’s security achievements in the neighbourhood.

The ENP’s roots lay at the European Security Strategy (ESS) a document, reinforced in 2008 (European Council, 2008), acknowledging that the Enlargement brought the EU closer to troubled areas and the need to promote stability and good governance in the immediate EU neighbourhood (European Council, 2003). The document highlights that “the internal and external aspects of security are indissolubly linked” (European Council, 2003: 2) and therefore EU’s security interests cannot be untied from its overall approach to the neighbourhood (Browning and Joenniemi, 2008: 520). Accordingly, the EU’s neighbouring policies constitute an extension of the European project aiming at establishing stability and prosperity in the periphery (Averre, 2009: 1693-1694). The tension between the internal and external dimensions of security led some scholars to argue the EU, and the ENP particularly, to promote a refined
external governance strategy (Ágh, 2010: 1246; Sasse, 2008) exporting governance through integration (but without membership) and transforming the environment at its borders with the ultimate rationale to preserve and promote EU's internal security.

In this view, one may argue that the ENP has been coined out of purely pragmatic reasons responding to the new situation at EU’s borders (Joenniemi, 2007a: 142) and ensuring the stability and security of the periphery as EU’s “first line of defence” (European Council, 2003: 7), preventing the spill over of potential threats – proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and organised crime, trafficking in drugs and human beings – into its territory (European Council, 2008).

Hence, even if one of the main goals of the ENP is to “avoid new dividing lines in Europe”, it has been essentially exclusive when making a clear division between insiders and outsiders, while presenting the neighbourhood as a “cordon sanitaire” separating the EU from the threatening world out there (Armstrong, 2007: 3). The European peace and security argument becomes, thus, one of the most important rationales of EU neighbouring policies (Higashino, 2004: 347). For that reason, the EU’s political and financial support to the neighbouring countries is used to persuade them to take the reforms that best suit the European security interests. The logic is that, in order to be part of EU’s “ring of friends, the vicinity must accept the European political and economic models of governance, through the internalisation of the acquis commnautaire (Joffé, 2007: 98). The goal is to promote a security approach leading to the institutional, economic and social development of EU’s neighbours, thus, increasing the likelihood these countries provide an external barrier to international risks potentially affecting the EU (Monar, 2010: 34): “by helping our neighbours, we help ourselves” (Whitman and Wolff, 2010: 7). This premise is particularly clear in the ESS when it states:

The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order. (European Council, 2003: 10)

This follows from a liberal security view whereby acceptance of the other – and the security of the self – becomes conditional on the internalisation of the EU’s political and economic governance models (Browning and Christou, 2010: 112). What is at stake is a differentiation between the internal and the external, with the inside projecting itself as the superior guardian of liberal values and the outside being labelled as inferior, dangerous and insecure because lacking those very same values (Joenniemi, 2007b: 132). The goal of EU’s neighbouring policies become, thus, the mitigation of differences between the inside – the EU – and the outside – neighbours –, through cooperation and interdependence – i.e. a process whereby the neighbourhood is transformed and ‘Europeanised’ –, in order to safeguard EU’s internal stability, security and prosperity (Bengtsson, 2008: 598).

There seems to be some tension between two different discourses in the ENP. On the one hand, the EU is presented as having the mission to bring
stability to Europe (Browning and Joenniemi, 2008: 522) while the ENP is projected as a "virtuous circle" intended to share with the neighbourhood the benefits of Enlargement – prosperity and security (Boedeltje and Houtum, 2011: 138). According to this perspective, the EU "has a duty" to protect and preserve the European project, but also its neighbours, resulting in a blurred line between insiders and outsiders. Consequently, difference is embraced and the relations of the EU with its neighbours are put in terms of equal partnerships (Christou, 2010: 416-417). Following Julien Jeandesboz’s argument (2007: 395-396) this is the idea of Europe as a promoter for peace, security and cooperation among countries and peoples with the overarching goal of stability and prosperity. The following quotation exemplifies this type of discourse.

The EU has a duty, not only towards its citizens and those of the new member states, but also towards its […] neighbours to ensure continuing social cohesion and economic dynamism. The EU must act to promote the regional and sub-regional cooperation and integration that are the preconditions for political stability, economic development and the reduction of poverty and social divisions in our shared environment. (Communication from the Commission, 2003: 3)

On the other hand, the ENP assumes itself as a security approach protecting the EU from the dangers and threats at its borders. The neighbourhood is, thus, seen as the root cause of the problem, and the EU as a security provider that addresses the problem by exporting its own norms and values (Delcour, 2010). Opposite to the previous discourse, this one is about asymmetrical relations and the imposition of the EU’s model out of self-interest (Christou, 2010: 418). Within this last discourse, the ENP countries are expected to adopt the proposed liberal reforms and to modernise themselves, regardless of their local settings and available resources (Dimitrovova, 2010: 465-469). The EU focuses on top-down measures and conditionality that present security as a disruptive, rather than gathering, concept (Joenniemi, 2007b: 140). This ‘neighbourhood as threat’ discourse can be identified in this quotation.

It is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed. Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe. The integration of acceding states increases our security but also brings the EU closer to troubled areas. (European Council, 2003: 7-8)

This results in schizophrenic discourses that project the neighbourhood, simultaneously, as the threat – securitising the neighbourhood – and the solution for EU’s security – highlighting the need to construct politics of cooperation –, even if both are underpinned by the issue of security. Furthermore, these narratives do not exist independently and they should rather be understood in a dynamic and interconnected perspective (Jeandesboz, 2007: 399). George Christou (2010: 414) explains that situation as a tension “between the EU’s normative/duty security narrative and its threat/risk security
narrative [...], resulting in a loss of credibility, which diminishes the EU’s security governance ambition to the East”. Therefore, the EU is caught in a mass of contradictory impulses between its security interest and the image of normative external actor it wants to promote (Manners, 2010: 30). Because EU’s potential to bring transformation to its neighbourhood depends on its political leverage, when that leverage is undermined or weakened the EU’s ability to transform the environment at its borders becomes compromised, impacting negatively on its regional security goals (Monar, 2010: 35). Nonetheless, the EU is still seen as a club that can create prosperity and stability, and for that reason it possesses considerable power of attraction to its neighbours (Feroci, 2011: 25) that tend to accept EU’s conditions and social behaviour in exchange for the deepening of their integration in the European project (Nitoiu, 2011: 468-472).

Accordingly, the ENP emerges as a self-interested EU policy towards its vicinity with serious discursive tensions and implementation fragilities, which aims at transforming the EU’s external environment with the ultimate rationale to preserve EU’s internal security. This rationale is inherited by and imprinted in the EaP, which, as the following section will reveal, replicates the ENP’s strategy in the neighbourhood, its understanding vis-à-vis the blurred internal and external dimensions of security and its goal: secure the neighbourhood as a condition for EU’s security.

2) The Eastern Partnership: old wine in new bottles

A series of events such as the regression of the democratic progresses in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, the lack of democracy improvements in the region, the severe economic crisis experienced by the Eastern neighbourhood in 2009, as well as the Russian military aggression to Georgia and the vulnerability of energy supplies from the region, among others, reminded the EU that security, stability and economic development remain key challenges in the Eastern neighbourhood (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 1).

Aiming at strengthening the Eastern dimension of the ENP and address the rampant security challenges in the region, the EaP initiative was endorsed in Prague in 2009, based on a Polish-Swedish proposal of the EU’s new policy towards the neighbourhood (Council of the European Union, 2009: 6). The EU’s approach eastwards is by no means consensual among member states. Given the historical past and memory of many of the EU’s new members, these countries tend to favour a stronger rapprochement towards the East and the inclusion of membership in the frameworks for relations with the Eastern neighbourhood. That position is not shared by the EU’s greatest nations. France and Germany have often pushed a “Russia-first” policy when dealing with the Eastern neighbourhood to block initiatives to strengthen the Eastern dimension of the ENP or include a membership perspective within the EaP (Nitoiu, 2011: 463-465), because they believe any rapprochement to the East will impact negatively in their relations with Moscow (Emerson, 2011a: 1). These diverging
approaches within the EU have hampered the effective promotion of its norms and values in the Eastern neighbourhood, affecting perceptions vis-à-vis the coherence and effectiveness of EU’s foreign and neighbouring policies.

Nonetheless, the ESS implementation report confirms the EaP importance – and thus the need to strengthen EU’s neighbouring policies Eastern Dimension – to EU’s security when it states:

The Eastern Partnership foresees a real step change in relations with our Eastern neighbours, with a significant upgrading of political, economic and trade relations. The goal is to strengthen the prosperity and stability of these countries, and thus the security of the EU. (European Council, 2008).

Additionally, the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit affirms:

The main goal of the Eastern Partnership is to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries. [...] the Eastern Partnership will seek to support political and socio-economic reforms of the partner countries, facilitating approximation towards the European Union. This serves the shared commitment to stability, security and prosperity of the European Union, the partner countries and indeed the entire European continent. (Council of the European Union, 2009: 6)

The need to offer further differentiation, ownership and a more ambitious partnership between the EU and its Eastern neighbours, suggesting a greater role for the EU in the region, is at the core of the initiative (Averre, 2009: 1964; Communication from the Commission, 2008; Emerson, 2011b: 51). For that purpose it provides a dual-track approach combining the traditional bilateral relations between the EU and its neighbouring countries – that foresees their political association and economic integration with the EU – with a multilateral track that supports regional cooperation and the development of closer ties among the EaP partners (Council of the European Union, 2009: 6).

At the bilateral level the EaP’s main goals – “create a closer relationship between the EU and each of the partner countries to foster their stability and prosperity in our mutual interests” – are to be implemented through Association Agreements (which will supersede the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements as the legal basis for EU’s relations with its Eastern neighbours), deep and comprehensive free trade areas, visa liberalisation, enhanced cooperation in the field of energy security and support to reforms in the EU’s

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2 Emphasis added.
partner countries (Communication from the Commission, 2008: 3; Council of the European Union, 2009: 7). Moreover, the EU grants new concessions to the Eastern partners and a fast track into the framework to Belarus, which lacked structured relations with the EU, despite its formal inclusion in the ENP (Korosteleva, 2011a: 244).

The multilateral track is the main novelty of the EaP, as for the first time the EU is directly supporting regional initiatives in the post-Soviet Space. Based upon the principle of differentiation, the multilateral dimension is regarded as one of the main strengths of the EaP providing for high-level political support and a number of experts meetings, which may have the potential to ensure its practical impact. Furthermore, it opens a number of channels for socialisation and social learning that can impact positively in EU’s approach towards the neighbourhood and represent an improvement regarding the original ENP framework (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 6). According to the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit held in 2009:

> It will provide a forum to share information and experience on the partner countries’ steps towards transition, reform and modernisation and give the EU an additional instrument to accompany these processes. It will facilitate the development of common positions and joint activities. (Council of the European Union, 2009: 8)

There are four thematic platforms (“Democracy, good governance and stability”; “Economic integration and convergence with EU policies”, “Energy security”, and “Contacts between people”) and five flagship initiatives outlined within this track but funded by the private sector (Communication from the Commission, 2008: 9-12). Another innovation from the EaP is the Comprehensive Institution-Building Programme “for improving administrative capacity in all relevant sectors of cooperation” (Communication from the Commission, 2008: 4), “including training, technical assistance and any appropriate innovative measures” (Council of the European Union, 2009: 7). The EaP also ambitions to create a joint Neighbourhood Economic Community and involve non-state actors into this framework through the creation of EURONEST – the EU-Eastern partners Parliamentary Assembly – and the EaP Civil Society Forum, though its influence in the overall process is not clear (Korosteleva, 2011b: 2). So far, the multilateral track has been successfully implemented and the four multilateral thematic platforms have met regularly

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3 Until then the EU supported regional integration only indirectly through technical assistance programmes and encouraged the individual partners to cooperate regionally within the margins of the ENP (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 5).

4 According to the Communication from the Commission Eastern Partnership, meetings at the level of Heads of State or Government are to be held every two years and the Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the EU and its Eastern partners should held annual meetings. At the level of the four thematic platforms meetings should be held twice a year (Communication from the Commission, 2008: 9).
since 2009, suggesting that the EaP has the potential to amplify the ENP’s effectiveness in the region (Report to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2010).

The EaP provides a response to some of the EU’s Eastern neighbours complains regarding the fact that the ENP groups them with countries without membership aspirations and with a very different relation with Brussels, i.e. the Mediterranean countries (Whitman and Wolff, 2010: 14). Simultaneously, it focuses on the areas the EU perceives as vital to preserve its security, namely political capacity-building, socio-economic development, immigration and energy security (Report to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2009). Therefore, the EaP replicates the understanding that the internal and external dimensions of security are indissolubly interconnected. For that reason, it focuses on the transformation of the political, economic and social environment at EU’s Eastern borders in order to guarantee and preserve EU’s own peace, security and stability.

However, and despite its attempt to promote a comprehensive approach towards the East, the EaP seems to perpetrate the ENP’s mistakes. First, it relies on the Enlargement tools – conditionality – knowing that the lack of a prospect of accession undermines EU’s leverage in its vicinity. Second, the benefits offered are either too vague or too costly to be attractive to the neighbourhood. Third, a distant and difficult access to the EU market is increasingly being challenged by other regional initiatives, such as the ones promoted by Russia (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 3).

Furthermore, the EU remains ambiguous regarding some issues of major concern to its neighbours. That is the case of human mobility a long time request from the Eastern neighbours, which the EU has been reluctant to fully deploy, even if mobility partnerships are a prominent feature on the EaP’s agenda (Communication from the Commission, 2004: 5-7). Likewise, EU’s trade policies in the neighbourhood are fragile. The negotiations with the EaP partners regarding the developing of a deep and comprehensive free trade are time-consuming and have been ineffective in areas of sensitive concern for the EU, namely the trade of industrial goods and agriculture (Emerson, 2011a: 2-3).

Above all it seems that the EaP repeats the ENP’s external governance model that aims to bring stability, prosperity and security beyond EU’s borders by focusing on the dissemination of its norms, rules and policies, while disregarding their needs, perceptions and systems of understanding (Korosteleva, 2011a: 250-251). Though the initiative claimed for a more ambitious partnership, EU’s relations with its Eastern vicinity remain largely asymmetrical. At best, conditionality means unequal partnership, as one side imposes its conditions on the other side. Furthermore, EU’s security-oriented rationalism pervades the normative discourse and contributes to spread the image of a confused and contradictory EU in the periphery, affecting the practical implementation of its neighbouring policies and its reputation as an international actor and “force for good” altogether. Simultaneously, the risk
narrative continues to be diffused in the EU’s official discourse when it says that:

It is in our interest that the countries on our borders are well-governed […]. The Eastern Partnership foresees a real step change in relations with our Eastern neighbours […]. The goal is to strengthen the prosperity and stability of these countries, and thus the security of the EU. (European Council, 2008: 6-10)

Despite all the above-mentioned reasons, the EU’s own evaluation on its neighbouring policies has been positive. As stated by the EaP Warsaw Summit in 2010:

Much has been achieved already. Political and economic reforms have been implemented in partner countries and relations between the EU and its Eastern European partners have deepened significantly. There is more trade and economic interaction between the EU and the Eastern European partners than ever before. (Council of the European Union, 2011: 2)

The only downgrade recognised concerns the situation of Belarus, where human rights, democracy, rule of law and media freedom have been deteriorating steadily. In face of such events, the EU made the deepening of its relations with Minsk conditional on progresses made towards respect for democracy, human right and the rule of law (Council of the European Union, 2011: 9).

Such biased evaluation suggests that the EU has still to acknowledge the conceptual and practical tensions that have, so far, stood in the way of a successful approach towards its Eastern vicinity. Therefore, the EU needs to engage in a critical internal debate regarding its neighbouring policies and regional strategies if it wants to become a security provider. This is a crucial step if the EU wants to meet its own internal-external security rationale. If the EU understand the need to secure the neighbourhood to guarantee its internal security, compromising relations with its neighbouring countries is to put at stake its own security, stability and prosperity. The paper will now focus on the EU relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus under the framework of the EaP, highlighting the security aspects of their agendas and the interlinkages between the internal and external dimensions of security that imprint these relations.
3) EU’s relations with Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus: a self-interested security agenda

The ENP has so far not yet been a success in Eastern Europe (Boedeltje and Houtum, 2011: 139). The regression of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the deteriorating of the political environment in Belarus and the lack of progress in the Moldova-Transnistria conflict are only a few examples of the security scenario in EU’s Eastern neighbourhood. Thus, the ENP’s main goals – secure the neighbourhood and protect the EU from political and socio-economic destabilisation at its borders – has, so far, fell short on expectations, for the “EU’s eastern neighbourhood is not approaching desired level of security, prosperity and stability” (Boonstra e Shapovalova, 2010: 1). Furthermore, the countries in Eastern Europe are part of the shared neighbourhood with Russia. For Moscow seeks to maintain and, if possible, to expand its influence in the region, the EU has adopted a cautious approach to Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus – its immediate Eastern neighbours. From the beginning the ENP was infused with defensive elements on how to mediate between the EU’s relationship with its Eastern neighbours and Russia (Browning and Joenniemi, 2008: 536-537). Moreover, the EU recognises that a successful policy towards the region will have to take into account the interests and modi operandi of other important regional and global players, namely Russia, the US, UN and OSCE (European Council, 2008: 10). The region is, thus, an unique laboratory of different (and sometimes antagonist), overlapping and conflicting power dynamics, which are a cornerstone cause of tension and refrain the EU from engaging further in its relations with the Eastern neighbours. As a result the EU has, so far, opted for a low-profile performance in the region promoting capacity-building and socio-economic development measures (Biscop, 2010: 83) in order to contribute to the European security.

Providing a multilateral framework for relations, the EaP can impact positively in the EU approach towards the region and help it to reach its security objectives (Biscop, 2010: 84). In opens room to region-building and the identity-based process that derives from it, while in opens a number of channels for socialisation and social learning, aiming at cooperative peace and security practices (Bengtsson, 2008: 599).

Nonetheless, the EaP framework for relations has caused different and sometimes confusing reactions in the EU’s Eastern neighbourhood. The initially enthusiastic Ukraine and Moldova have opted for a more pragmatic approach, since they have already an advanced relationship with Brussels. In fact, both countries perceive the EaP as failing short on their expectations concerning the evolution of relations with the EU, while lacking sense of direction, coordination and adequate resources (Korosteleva, 2010a: 252-254). Minsk is only involved in this framework for purely pragmatic reasons refusing to accept any demands regarding the improvement of its political and social systems (Radchuk, 2011: 27).
Relations between the EU and Ukraine are based on the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement that entered into force in 1998. Since 2005, the EU-Ukraine ENP Action Plan became the political instrument to boost EU-Ukraine relations in all areas of cooperation. Currently, the EU and Ukraine are negotiating the terms of the Association Agreement that shall replace Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (Report to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2009: 5), renew the EU-Ukraine common institutional framework and facilitate their political association and economic integration (Third Joint Progress Report, 2009). The negotiations have been conducted in three negotiation groups covering: political dialogue and foreign and security policy; justice freedom and security issues; and economic and sectorial cooperation. Ukraine’s goal in the negotiation process is to move “away the principles of partnership and cooperation to the principles of political association and economic integration (Joint Progress Report, 2007). The EU aims at bringing Ukraine closer to its principles in the political, security and economic fields in order to secure the environment at its borders. The EU and Ukraine have also been very active in the negotiation of a deep and comprehensive free trade area as a core element of the Association Agreement, confirmed and made possible by Ukraine’s accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in May 2008 (Second Joint Progress Report, 2008). Progresses are also being made in the EU-Ukraine visa dialogue, which entered a fully operational phase in 2010. In the energy security field, Ukraine has been taken energy sector reforms forward to ensure the sector’s sustainability (Report to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2010: 2-3) and has joined the Energy Community Treaty in February 2011 (Joint Staff Working Paper, 2011).

In 2008, the leaders of the EU and Ukraine announced the preparation of an Association Agenda to replace the ENP Action Plan and facilitate the entry into force of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (Third Joint Progress Report, 2009: 3). It was the first document of this kind developed with and ENP/EaP country. Since it was endorsed in June 2009, the Association Agenda has been the main reference point for joint activities and the road map for political and economic reforms in Ukraine. The agenda stresses that EU-Ukraine relations have been developing on the basis of a “shared understanding that the prosperity, stability and security of both the European Union and Ukraine could be significantly enhanced by close cooperation” (European Commission, 2009: 1). Therefore, it defines a number of priorities for action in the fields of political dialogue (including the areas of “democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms”, “combating corruption” and “foreign and security policy – regional and international issues, cooperation on foreign and security policy, WMD non-proliferation and disarmament, conflict prevention and crisis management”), co-operation on justice, freedom and security issues, economic integration and energy co-operation including nuclear issues (European Commission, 2009).
EU integration remains high in Ukraine’s political agenda. Therefore, EU leverage on the country is still high (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 10), offering an opportunity for the EU successfully promote political and economic changes in the country according to its regional security interests. The increasing levels of EU’s financial assistance to political and economic reforms in Ukraine as well as the growing support for civil society activities and people-to-people contacts is contributing to keep EU’s attractiveness high in Kiev (Joint Evaluation Report EU-Ukraine Action Plan, 2008). So far Ukraine has taken positive steps in the implementation of vital political and economic reforms, but there are a number of challenges to be addressed, namely: the reform of the judiciary; fight against corruption; improvement of electoral legislation; and strengthening of local self-government. In the field of cooperation on foreign and security policy Ukraine has continued to cooperate actively with the EU, aligning itself with CFSP declarations, participating in EU’s operations and cooperating constructively with the EU on the Transnistria settlement (Joint Staff Working Paper, 2011: 8). The field of human rights and fundamental freedoms is a matter of particular concern for the EU. The situation of this field has been deteriorating rapidly are there a number of reported cases of harassment, prosecution of human rights activists, violence and intimidation of journalists, and restrictions on the freedom of assembly (Joint Staff Working Paper, 2011).

Overall, Ukrainian elites regret the lack of any membership prospect in EU-Ukraine relations, acknowledging that EU policy towards the East is restrained, cautious (Radchuk, 2011: 29) and dependent on Russia’s perceptions about the EU’s engagement in the region (which have been rather critical on the EU’s policies eastwards since the 2004 Enlargement) (Tumanov et al, 2011: 130).

However, for Ukraine the EaP is interesting as an instrument to promote multilateral cooperation with the EU and to boost its regional leadership. Therefore, if Kiev criticizes the initiative for not taking into account its expectations to join the EU, it also underlines the need to enforce the EaP’s operationalization and implementation (Stegniy, 2011: 55). Ukraine tries to appear as EU’s best pupil, hopping to create pressure on Brussels to open the door for membership in the longer term (Casier, 2011: 961).

The EU-Moldova relations are based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement ratified in 1998, intended to promote Moldova’s transition to a free democracy and market economy. Since 2004, the ENP the EU-Moldova Action plan endorsed in 2005 are the main frameworks for relations between the EU and Moldova. The EU-Moldova cooperation principal goal is to develop close relations in the area of “foreign and security policy and in the resolution of the conflict in Transnistria, and to promote economic growth and poverty reduction” (European Commission, 2007a). The EU’s reports emphasise the good evolution of relations with Chisinau and the positive steps to prepare Moldova for the implementation of a deep and comprehensive free trade area, possible since the country became a member of the WTO in 2010. The Transnistria
issue and the dialogue on visa-free travel for Moldovan citizens are perhaps the most important topics of the EU-Moldova agenda (Report to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2009: 5). Moldova has been actively cooperating with the EU on regional and international issues, including the Transnistrian issue where it continues fully committed to the work of the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM). Despite the positive performance and the EU-Moldova political dialogue intensification, Chisinau has still to do significant progresses in a number of sensitive areas, namely: “ensuring the fundamental freedoms of citizens, addressing some market and regulatory issues, and enforcing effectively national strategies in areas such as the fight against corruption, drugs and trafficking in human beings, or in sectors such as transport and energy” (Commission Staff Working Document, 2009: 2).

Moldova is regarded as the EaP’s success story and the only country whose relations with the EU have developed dynamically since the launch of the EaP. In 2010, Moldova became a full member of the Energy Community Treaty contributing to EU’s aim to promote a secure energy supply system in the neighbourhood (Report to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2010: 5-6). The bilateral cooperation under the framework of the EaP provides the foundations for Association Agreements that will deepen EU-Moldova political association and economic integration by promoting further convergence to EU legislation and standards (European Commission, 2011b: 32-33). The EU and Moldova are currently negotiating the Association Agreement that will enhance their relations across all areas of cooperation and provide for establishing the deep and free trade area with the EU (European Commission, 2011b: 8). Furthermore, in 2011 Chisinau confirmed its interest in the Comprehension Institution Building Programme and the new flagship initiatives envisaged by the EaP. This programme, developed jointly by the Commission and Moldova, intends to assist Moldova with institution-building initiatives vital to prepare the implementation of the future Association Agreement and deep and comprehensive free trade area.

Moldova sees the EaP as the first big step towards the EU prospect and hopes that it will accelerate the resolution of the Transnistrian issue. Perceptions about the EU and European integration remain widely positive stressing the EU’s support to political and economic reforms in the country (Radchuk, 2011: 29). Therefore, the EU leverage on the country remains high but Moldova’s political instability makes hard to predict for how long the EU will be an attractive partner to Chisinau (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 10).

Belarus is a singular case in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement established with the EU has never entered into force, and while the country is covered by the ENP, it does not fully participate in it. EU-Belarus relations were curtailed for many years due to Belarus violations on human rights. In 2008 The EU decided to resume ministerial contacts and to temporarily suspend the travel ban imposed on Belarus as a response to the mild changes in the country. As a result Belarus
was included in the multilateral track of the EaP and in the Northern Dimension, the EU increased the financial assistance to the country and opened a European Commission in Minsk (European Commission, 2011c: 4). So far, the EU has two key goals in its relationship with Belarus: promote social and economic development and foster democratic development and good governance. The long term objective is for Belarus to become “a democratic, stable, reliable, and increasingly prosperous partner with which the enlarged EU will share not only common borders but also a common agenda driven by shared values” (European Commission, 2007b). However, for that to be possible, Minsk has to address several hot topics that remain a matter of concern to the EU, namely its: transition towards a market economy; electoral law; violations on human rights and fundamental freedoms; freedom of expression and media freedom; labour rights; increasing mortality rates and the spread of chronic diseases; border issues and migration; fight against organised crime and trafficking in human beings (European Commission, 2007b).

Belarus is ready to participate in a number of policy areas but remains unwilling to accept EU's democracy and human right demands or to accept the participation of the civil society in the EaP. Relations with the EU are perceived as a new direction for the country, but Minsk is essentially interested in the economic benefits from this relationship (Radchuk, 2011: 27). Lukashenka and its regime remain loyal to their national needs and, thus, are willing to engage in the EaP only on an interest-driven basis (Rotman and Veremeeva, 2011). In the period 2009-2010, a number of mild but positive changes in the country’s political environment led to a rapprochement between Brussels and Minsk. A series of high level visits from and to Belarus and political dialogue and technical cooperation advances encouraged further reform efforts (Report to the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, 2009: 4; European Commission, 2011c: 6-7). This is a major shift in the EU policy towards the country. It is the first time that Belarus is included in the EU’s neighbourhood map, even if Minsk is driven by the interest to diversify its foreign policies partners and strengthen its independence from Russia.

However, by 2011, the EU at the EaP Warsaw Summit expressed its concern at the deteriorating political and social contexts in Belarus, including violations on human rights and media freedom. Furthermore, the country lacks significant progress in key areas of democratization and economic reforms (European Commission, 2011c: 8). Consequently, the deepening of EU-Belarus relations is made “conditional on the progress towards respect by the Belarusian authorities for democracy, the rule of law and human rights” (Council of the European Union, 2011: 9). Furthermore, Belarus is not participating in the EaP’s bilateral track, so the EU cannot really influence the transformation process in the country (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 11). For the moment, EU’s limited leverage is channelled towards civil society under the initiatives promoted through the EaP (European Commission, 2011c: 18). Given the EU’s limit capacity to influence Minsk, the country emerges as a security threat to the
EU not only because it refrains the pursuing of its regional security agenda (Browning and Christou, 2010: 116), but also because the increasing political and socio-economic instability in Belarus risks at spill over into the EU’s territory.

Despite its limited results since it was endorsed, the EaP is slowly contributing to change the regional dynamics of cooperation in Eastern Europe. Since Belarus as become interested in the EaP it improved relations with Ukraine, solving the border demarcation issue between the two countries. Similarly, Moldova is building better relations with Kiev. They signed several important agreements, including an agreement on the demarcation of the Ukraine-Moldova border in the Transnistrian territory (Boonstra and Shapovalova, 2010: 9). These are important steps towards securing EU’s neighbourhood, impacting positively in its goal to create a friendly shield in its periphery against external threats, thus, guaranteeing the EU’s security.

The mapping of the EU’s agenda with its Eastern neighbours reveals that security issues are the cornerstone of the EU’s approach towards the Eastern neighbourhood. The EU perceives these countries as security lynchpins and, thus, tries to transform their political, economic and social environments through the promotion of reforms and the harmonization of their legal system with the EU’s acquis communautaire. Alongside, the EU’s is increasingly pushing for multilateral frameworks under the EaP to change the regional dynamics in the Eastern neighbourhood and, consequently, address the causes of tension and conflict in the area. The EU’s strategy and its relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus mirror the belief that the stabilization of the neighbourhood is pivotal to EU’s internal security. Therefore, EU’s security rationale and ultimate goal in these relations under the framework of the EaP becomes crystal clear: secure the neighbourhood for EU’s sake.

Concluding Remarks

This paper argued that the EaP is a new framework for relations with the EU’s Eastern neighbourhood, endorsed in 2009, aiming at securing the region to assure the EU’s internal security and stability. However, because it replicates the ENP’s perceptions and security rationale, the EaP has been so far an old approach towards the neighbourhood with new clothes. In fact, it follows from the idea common to the EU’s foreign and neighbouring policies that the internal and external dimensions of security have become blurred and, thus, the EU’s security challenges cannot be properly addressed without external action. Furthermore, although it introduced new instruments and a multilateral dimension to the EU’s relation with the East, its main modus operandi remains the same: transform the political, economic and social environments in its neighbouring countries, through the promotion of reforms and the harmonization of their legal systems with the EU’s acquis communautaire.
EU’s approach to the Eastern vicinity, both in the framework of the ENP and EaP, revolves around security, because the EU uses the neighbourhood to deal with its own insecurities (Jeandesboz, 2007). The EU’s relations with the Eastern neighbourhood are, thus, coined out of pragmatic reasons and security interests. Accordingly, EU’s neighbouring policies are an extension of the European project aiming at securing EU’s periphery as a *sine qua non* condition for EU’s internal security. In that sense, the EU’s political and economic support is used to persuade the neighbouring countries to take the reforms that best suit EU’s interests. Ultimately, the EU aims at creating a ring of friendly countries in the vicinity that can protect it from the threatening world out there. However, competing security narratives, the lack of attractive incentives to promote change in the neighbourhood and the absence of consensus among member states vis-à-vis the EU’s eastern strategy (because the EU’s greatest nations fear to jeopardize its relations with Russia) have led to ineffective practices that undermine EU’s security goals: ensuring security, stability and prosperity in the neighbourhood.

The analysis of the EU’s relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus validated the argument that the EU’s approach eastwards is primarily security-oriented. The EU perceives these countries as security lynchpins and their integration into the EU’s political and economic system (though not membership) as cornerstone to address the root causes of tension and conflict in the region and contribute to assure the security of the European project.

The link between the internal and external dimensions of security will, most likely, continue to define EU’s approach towards the neighbourhood. There are a number of statements that emphasise the need to ensure the consistency of EU external action and a more systematic interconnectedness between internal and external security policymaking. However, the EU has still to acknowledge the conceptual and practical tensions that have, so far, stood in the way of a successful approach towards its Eastern periphery. This is a crucial step because if the EU understand the need to secure the neighbourhood to guarantee its internal security, compromising relations with its neighbouring countries is to put at stake its own security, stability and prosperity.

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