

**BORDERING AND ORDERING
THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD:
A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EU TERRITORIALITY
AND GEOPOLITICS**

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Abstract. The European Union is presently constructing a new model of regional cooperation that includes not only economic objectives but also social, cultural and environmental agendas. One of the main challenges this project faces is the development of closer ties to neighbouring states without offering outright membership to the EU. As a result, however, cooperation and security-oriented agendas of the EU will automatically compete with each other for influence. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) can be thus understood in terms of an ongoing project of re-territorialisation that combines traditional geopolitical concerns and a ‘politics of regional difference’ with a post-national focus on mutual interdependence and partnership. Evidence for the consequences of these competing territorialities will be presented from the results of European research on civil society networks between the EU and neighbouring states. The focus will be on EU-Ukrainian relations within the ENP context.

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“Interdependence – political and economic – with the Union’s neighbourhood is already a reality. The emergence of the euro as a significant international currency has created new opportunities for intensified economic relations. Closer geographical proximity means the enlarged EU and the new neighbourhood will have an equal stake in furthering efforts to promote trans-national flows of trade and investment as well as even more important shared interests in working together to tackle transboundary threats – from terrorism to air-borne pollution. The neighbouring countries are the EU’s essential partners: to increase our mutual production, economic growth and external trade, to create an enlarged area of political stability and functioning rule of law, and to foster the mutual exchange of human capital, ideas, knowledge and culture” (EU Commission 2003:3).

1. Introduction

The European Union – and its emergence as an international actor of increasing importance – challenges received views of geopolitics, either conventional or critical. Characterised by national difference and socio-cultural heterogeneity, the EU defies interpretation through central narratives of world-systemic order. The EU is a composite polity endowed with several state-like functions but without many of the mandates and treaty-level competencies enjoyed by sovereign states. The EU has an executive, a legislative and a court system yet it, at the writing of this article, lacks a constitution and a common foreign policy. Similarly, in a manner reflecting its institutional mosaic, the EU is a geopolitical actor with different, often conflicting agendas. Some aspects of the EU's geopolitical agenda appear to correspond to traditional *Realpolitik* and state-based pursuits of self-interest. At another level, however, the EU strives to make an ideational and moral difference in the world, acting as a 'force for good' and promoting a set of values that includes democracy, human rights, social cohesion, gender equality, a market economy, peace and stability, minority rights, and international solidarity.

In this essay I will argue the necessity of linking the emerging geopolitics of the European Union, particularly in terms of its Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), to questions regarding the territorial nature of the EU. The territoriality of the European Union as an institution and political project has attracted attention in a variety of academic fields ranging from International Relations to political geography, but has also inspired a number of cross-disciplinary approaches (see, for example, Mamadouh 2001, Berezin and Schain 2003). Furthermore, the EU's drive to re-territorialise Europe is not a mere academic question, it has very real consequences for people and places. As Luiza Bialasiewicz (2008) has pointed out, the 'soft power' approach of the EU, one that works at the level of society and its transformation, has been rather successful in terms of structuring interstate relations in Post-Cold War Europe. Assuming that the EU's normative power is substantial, the 'soft geopolitics' of the EU has, nevertheless, its hard edge as well. This is evidenced by the establishment of a strict border regime at the outer confines of the Union, securitisation discourses and a conditionality that informs the EU's evolving relations with neighbouring states. Indeed, the emerging geopolitics of the EU as expressed, for example, in the European Neighbourhood Policy, highlights increasing tensions between the EU as an idea and socio-cultural project of community on the one hand and its institutional 'hardening' on the other. Cultural and economic anxieties as well as a perceived loss of control over local affairs, national identity and sovereignty have been increasingly evoked in European debates. As a result, we are currently witnessing what might be termed a 're-bordering' of national-states within the EU and, consequently, a heightened demand for more defensive borders (e.g. against irregular immigration) for the EU as a whole.

With this contribution, I hope to shed light on the challenges facing the EU in its drive for a more prominent international role. The complex nexus between EU territorialities and EU geopolitics will be interpreted here in terms of the political

agendas and cooperation practices promoted by the ENP. While the ENP strives to provide the foundations for a new regional community, it also contributes to a politics of difference – creating distinctions between the EU, non-EU Europe and ‘non-Europe’. This might suggest a rather simple dichotomy between inclusionary and exclusionary elements of the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy. In reality, the EU’s geopolitics is an ongoing project of re-territorialisation that is subject to many influences and whose outcome is far from clear. On the one hand, elements of traditional state-centred geopolitics are being reaffirmed and reformulated by the EU, partly in an attempt to strengthen its formal political status. On the other hand, a post-national geopolitics of regional co-operation is also evident in the ENP. Evidence for the consequences of these competing territorialities will be presented from the results of European research on civil society networks between the EU and neighbouring states. The focus will be on EU-Ukrainian relations within the ENP context.

2. Reinterpreting geopolitics, interrogating EU territorialities

Traditionally, geopolitics has focused on grand narratives of world order – both real and imagined. At the centre of the geopolitical imagination has generally figured a hegemon or powerful state with the authority, economic clout and military and/or diplomatic prowess to influence the course of international politics (see Dodds 2007). Geopolitics as statecraft has always been an attempt to objectivise the particularistic interests of nation-states, justifying intervening action beyond national borders in terms of a supposed ‘realism’ that promotes peace and stability. Geopolitics as an academic discipline has often attempted to provide an empirical and scientifically acceptable basis for understanding political order within the world system – often at the risk of collusion with state actors (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998). However, the present-day geopolitical scene reveals a picture that appears fragmented and incoherent. Our post-Cold War ‘disorder’ shows few signs of abating, despite the attempts of major national powers and international organisations to impose a sense of global governance. Geopolitics as statecraft has thus shifted in focus from a one-sided concern for the physical/military control of space to a competitive – and rather unstable – management of the forces of economic and political globalisation (Hocking 1996). It is also no longer a simple matter to locate the central hegemon who succeeds in giving order to Hobbesian unruliness, the rules and ruling elites in the world are to a large extent, international and networked (Ó Tuathail, Herod, and Roberts 1998). Indeed, there exists a universe of paradigms and ideological discourses that is transnational in nature, employed by international organisations and national governments alike, and that serves to condition social and economic policies at the local level.

This is, in part, an expression of a ‘post-national’ geopolitics where international political agendas are increasingly set not by individual states but by

groups of states, international political fora, NGOs and groups opposed – sometimes violently – to the existing order. The post-national perspective operates at several levels. Locally, it potentially opens up spaces for societies at the ‘margins’ of power to articulate their interests (Nakashima 2002). Supranationally (and regionally) it offers a platform for a ‘new regionalism’ that eschews power politics and geo-economic domination (Ethier 1998, Hettne 1999). It can be argued that the European Union embodies post-national geopolitics. Having emerged from a vision of co-operative economic, political and social development, the EU’s development partly reflects Perroux’s (1954) notion of Europe as an open society rather than a geographical project of ‘self-defence’. Even if the EU’s future institutional architecture has never been an object of consensus, the transcending of inner-European borders and the facilitation of cross-border exchange are largely seen as EU success stories. In fact, it is precisely the de-bordering of a major part of Europe that has fed notions of the EU as a force for good in the world. Having achieved historic enlargements in 2004 and 2007, the EU has set its sights further abroad and sees itself as developing a new kind of international political partnership – one that goes beyond traditional geopolitics and, with it, chauvinism and imperialism.

Given the panorama of complexity and multipolarity in the world system – and the institutional indeterminacy of the EU, David Newman’s (2006, p. 88) notion of reterritorialisation offers a means of interpreting the EU’s geopolitical role. According to Newman, re-territorialisation involves both a *process* through which “territorial configurations of power are continually ordered and reordered” as well as a continuous *practice* of differentiating and defining borders between societies according to specific criteria. Geopolitics understood in this manner is a constant process of reflecting group interests and identities against those of other groups in the world and through this reflection deriving principles for strategic action. Taking these socio-spatial perspectives a bit further, geopolitics can be understood as a multilevel process of boundary-making or ‘bordering’ (Browning and Joenniemi 2008). Bordering is basically about the everyday construction of borders through ideology, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and agency (Scott and Matzeit 2006). Bordering is, by nature, a multilevel process of re-territorialisation. It takes place at the level of high politics and is manifested by physical borders and visa regimes. Bordering is also reflected in media debates over national identity, legal and illegal immigration and language rights. Within this context, geopolitics can also be read in terms of 1) a politics of identity (who is ‘in’, who is ‘out’), 2) a regionalisation of difference (defining who is a neighbour, a partner, a friend or rival) and 3) a politics of interests (in which issues of economic self-interest, political stability and security play a prominent role).

Conceptualisations of the EU as a geopolitical actor reflect a variety of disciplinary, philosophical, and critical approaches as well as rather different normative perspectives. However, they all explicitly raise questions regarding the EU and its territorial nature. While the notion of a state-like territoriality, and by extension, the geopolitics of the EU, might appear counterintuitive given the

present lack of cohesion within the EU, it is nevertheless more than an academic issue. Long-standing realist debate has suggested an inherent weakness of the EU due to its lack of Westphalian stature. However the obvious vulnerability of super-powers, actual or putative (e.g. the United States, Russia or China) to economic, political and social forces beyond their control has also convincingly demonstrated the limits of 'real' power in the world system. Similar to Luiza Bialasiewicz (2008), I therefore understand the EU as a new type of international actor whose strengths lie less in the state-like exercise of power and rather more in its ability to affect gradual social transformation. Whether the EU actually succeeds in developing its post-national potential for transformation is as yet unclear.

3. EU geopolitics and the 'bordering' of the neighbourhood

The European Union is a project of re-territorialisation that partly transcends but also partly reconfirms state-centred geopolitics. As Browning (2005) points out, attempts have been made to model the evolution of the EU according to notions of a 'Westphalian' (state-centred), 'Imperial' (Core-Europe-dominated) and 'Neo-medieval' (fragmented and regionalised) political order. Fitting the geopolitical notion of 'empire', for example is the model of a concentric EU-order that emphasises core-periphery relationships based on political and economic power. In essence, abstract models such as these relate to different periods of European history and the existence/absence/relative significance of nation-states in each of them. Alternatively, New Regionalism (NR) has been put forward as a normative framework for understanding the EU's emerging geopolitical role. Hettne et al. (1999), Telo (2001) and others suggest the possibility of a geopolitics of cooperation: this would be based on decentralised and multidimensional agendas that emphasise peaceful co-development rather than national or ideological hegemonies. Furthermore, Hettne and other advocates of NR indicate that Europe presents a possible locus of this progressive understanding of geopolitics. This view, on the other hand, appears to be informed by a European cultural narrative that sees European historical experience as providing a basis for non-exploitative international relations based on mutual interdependence.

To what degree then can the EU be understood in terms of tensions between Westphalian, Post-Westphalian or even Neo-Westphalian political identities? As Bialasiewicz, Elden and Painter (2005) have indicated, EU territoriality is both 'hard' in the sense of institutions, borders and policies and 'aspirational' in terms of a space of values and an area of solidarity. This applies in equal measure to EU geopolitics which can be interpreted in terms of contested projects of re-territorialisation and bordering. This involves, on the one hand, the consolidation of an economic, social and political European space, partly through the flexible construction of Europe within a context of a composite polity. On the other hand, with its New Neighbourhood policy, the EU pursues a role of stabiliser and promoter of greater cooperation. The central quandary of this geopolitical project

lies in an attempt to reduce ambiguities associated with the EU and its future political, economic and social role.

In the sense of Zaki Laidi (1998), bordering at its most basic level is about the construction of 'spaces of meaning'. This signifies, on the one hand, that moral authority and international political influence contribute to the self-confirmation of national (and other group) significance. It also means that it is difficult to separate material interests from more mundane issues such as cultural values (Scott 2005). The construction of the European Union is in large part an attempt to create a coherent political, social and economic space within a clearly defined multinational community. A central aspect of this re-territorialisation process is the definition of rules, norms and practices that aim to 'Europeanise' national spaces; from this derive the objectives and values that create a common set of discourses in which various policy issues can be negotiated. In effect, a border is being drawn around the EU-27 in order to consolidate it as a political community and thus manage regional heterogeneity, core-periphery contradictions and political-organisational flux (see Jensen and Richardson 2004). This also involves an attempt to structure EU-European space through, for example, central political agendas, structural policies, spatial planning strategies and research-funding programmes.

With the ENP, EU-European space is being differentiated from the rest of the world by a set of geopolitical discourses and practices that extol the EU's core values. This differentiation is, in turn, attenuated by the offer of 'privileged partnership' and the joint development of cooperation policies. In several ways, therefore, the ENP signals a culmination of post Cold War re-territorialisation. The EU has reconfigured the borders of Europe – not in the sense of redrawing state boundaries, but in transforming their socio-spatial significance (Scott 2006). Furthermore, the EU has played a key role in shaping the post-Cold War political order in Europe. Through the process of enlargement and the development of new political relations with neighbouring states, the EU has exerted considerable influence on political institution-building and socio-cultural processes beyond its borders. In seeking to be a 'force for good in the world', the EU has been exporting its values and norms to states of post-Soviet Europe, the Mediterranean region, the Black Sea area and beyond (Tocci et al. 2008).

Because of geographical proximity, long-standing (e.g. post-colonial) economic, social and political interrelationships and deepening mutual interdependencies, the EU is keen to assume a stabilising role in post-Soviet, Eurasian and Mediterranean regional contexts. The very norms, values and *acquis* that define EU-Europe (e.g. the virtues of co-operation, democratic ownership, social capital and general values such as sustainability, solidarity and cohesion) are also projected upon the Neighbourhood in order to provide a sense of orientation and purpose to third states. The geopolitical vision that underlies this ideational projection of power is that of 'privileged partnership' – that is, of a special, multifaceted and mutually beneficial relationship with the EU, in some cases in place of concrete perspectives of EU membership.

The ENP is the most explicit form of geopolitical integration between the EU and its immediate region, it is a policy framework that aims to structure relations between the EU and its neighbours according to the criteria ostensibly set by both the EU and its partners. The countries involved are: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.¹ As such, the geographical reach of the ENP – and hence of the concept of neighbourhood – is considerable. Two major neighbouring countries, Russia and Turkey, are not included within the ENP but have concluded special agreements with the EU; membership negotiations, although controversial, have been initiated in the case of Turkey. As has been documented elsewhere, the ENP is a means by which to maintain the momentum of Europeanisation and to promulgate the values of the EU without actually offering direct membership to third countries (Commission of the European Communities 2004, Wallace 2003). In effect, a selective partnership is being offered to neighbouring states via the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Initiative (ENPI) in order to strategically manage the ‘wider European’ geopolitical context. In some specific cases (e.g. Ukraine, Moldova, Morocco, Turkey) partnership rather than an unambiguous perspective of possible EU membership is being offered.²

By association, it can be argued that the new regionalist geopolitics as originally espoused by the EU (Commission of the European Communities 2003) – a geopolitics of co-operation based on social development rather than coercive means – is central to the maintenance of the EU’s identity. As Bachmann and Sidaway (2008) remind us, the EU’s normative authority is closely tied to its affirmation of ‘civilian power’ and thus the development of plausible alternatives to realist, Hobbesian understandings of the world. However, in order to achieve this, the EU must establish a clear sense of purpose as a political community projecting its values and ideas beyond its borders. At the same time, it must accept and work with local and regional differences in order to promote a more fruitful dialogue with neighbouring states.

In the following sections, I will characterise the ENP in terms of its hybrid geopolitics, combining more traditional, state-centred politics of interest with a new regionalist concern for mutual interdependence and joint policy formulation. On the one hand, this will be done with a focus on civil society as a new cooperative actor between the EU and neighbouring states. On the other hand, aspects of the EU-Ukrainian ENP agenda will be discussed. It is difficult at this juncture to give any kind of verdict on the ENP. Most attempts to analyse and evaluate it are based on

¹ While formally included in the ENPI, no agreements have been established with Belarus and Syria.

² Above and beyond ENPI, the “Europeanisation” of the Neighbourhood is being promoted through other means, such as research and education (priority 2.6 in the EU-Ukraine Action Plan as “people to people contacts”). The EU’s Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technology (FP7), for example, contributes to the construction of a European Research Area (ERA) by promoting networks of universities and research teams not only within the EU but also internationally.

received notions of international relations and conventional measurements of institutional performance (see Tocci et al. 2008, Pace 2004). However, it is possible to decipher the present state of the ENP in terms of a geopolitical transition that reflects increasing multipolarity and fragmentation in the world system.

3.1. Geopolitical characterisations of the ENP from the perspective of civil society

Developing a sense – let alone instruments – of a common EU foreign policy is an inherently contested project. Furthermore, the EU's geopolitical role is conditioned by competing territorial agendas that reflect local, national and supra-national concerns. To the extent that they benefit from co-operation, local actors at the EU's external boundaries have intensified attempts to transcend national territorial contexts in political, economic and social terms. The EU has supported these efforts, promoting the establishment of Euroregions and other organisations that facilitate interregional networking (Skvortova 2006). However, national governments, particularly of the new member states, often view such border transcending exercises with scepticism and try to co-opt or regulate cross-border co-operation in ways that serve national interests (Popescu 2006, 2008). Popular attitudes towards cross-border co-operation, furthermore, are a frequent although rather unpredictable variable that can often hinder local attempts to forge international links. The EU must navigate between these competing territorialities and, both by design and experimentation, has emerged as a geopolitical actor that simultaneously confirms and transcends its external borders.

Despite a certain risk of simplification, I thus argue that the EU is engaged in a hybrid geopolitics that combines both neo-Westphalian re-inventions of the state as well as a post-Westphalian perspective that universalises political concerns. This hybridity is reflected, furthermore, in the ENP and is largely responsible for the ambivalent perceptions of the EU as an actor in the world system. This has been borne out by the EUDIMENSIONS research project that examines new opportunities for civil society co-operation between EU member states and neighbouring countries.³ Civil society has been singled out by the EU as an important actor in the development of new regional partnerships. But similar to Euroregions, civil society actors are subject to the competing, often conflicting territorialities of EU regionalism, post-Cold War nation-building, social transformation and local interests.

The perceptions of civil society actors reflect these conflicting territorialities as well as central contradictions of the ENP. On the one hand, the EU is seen to pursue a new quality of non-exploitative and multidimensional regional relationships in which the neighbours are inclusively treated as partners. On the other hand, the EU's

³ Reference is made here to the international project EUDIMENSIONS: Local Dimensions of a Wider European Neighbourhood: Developing Political Community Through Practices and Discourses of Cross-Border Co-Operation (contract: CIT-CT-2005-028804), financed by the European Union's Sixth Framework Programme for Research (see: www.eudimensions.eu). Research was carried out between 2006 and 2009 and was co-ordinated by the author.

desire for a state-like political authoritativeness, combined with exclusionary populist discourses emanating from member states, has promoted policies of conditionality that tend to encumber these partnerships (van Houtum and Pipers 2007, Van Houtum and Boedeltje 2008). One major interpretation of this situation is that civil society is marginalised in areas of 'high politics' but offered a prominent role in broader political and social platforms where policy issues are discussed. However, there appears to be a lack of communication between these formal and informal arenas. Furthermore, the main common denominator in the dialogue between EU member states, elites of EU quasi-statecraft and the governments of many neighbouring states is seen to be security and the creation of a wider security community. Consequently, illegal immigration, human trafficking, terrorism and cross-border organised crime often crowd out other important concerns of civil society. This clearly impacts on the ability of local civil society organisations to transcend the EU's hardening of its external border.

At another rather general level, cross-border co-operation at the external borders simply does not enjoy support commensurate with the EU's discursive exhortations to greater regional neighbourliness. One telling indicator of contradictions between EU promises of 'privileged partnership' and its regionalisation practices are the imbalances in resources allotted to cross-border cooperation. The EU's Cohesion and Regional Policy 2007–2013 has an operating budget of 321 million euros with a clear focus on distributing aid to poorer areas of the EU-27. By comparison, the ENP's total budget for the same period will be about 15 billion euros. In addition, and most surprisingly, out of this amount very few funds will be allocated to cross-border and interregional cooperation with neighbouring states. Ironically, over 1 billion euros will be dedicated to border security and technology studies within European research programmes, more than the entire CBC budget planned for the ENP.⁴

A further irony is that with the INTERREG IV structural initiative, which will also cover the 2007–2013 programming period, there is now one Europe-wide programme supporting cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation. However, almost all of this is focused on cooperation within the EU and very little on projects involving neighbouring states. In the July 2006 ERDF Regulation, strict tenets of exclusive territoriality governing the use of regional development funds are not only upheld but underscored.⁵ This rather strict separation of EU

⁴ See the Cordis website on security research at <http://cordis.europa.eu/security/>.

⁵ To wit: "It is necessary to support effective cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation with the Community's neighbouring countries where this is necessary to ensure that the regions of the Member States which border third countries can be effectively assisted in their development. Accordingly, it is appropriate to authorise on an exceptional basis the financing of assistance from the ERDF for projects located on the territory of third countries where they are for the benefit of the regions of the Community". Text taken from Regulation (EC) No. 1080/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the European Regional Development Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No. 1783/1999, published in the Official Journal of the European Union, L210/1, 31.7.2006.

internal and external activities makes little sense in terms of regional development strategies aimed at avoiding wider divisions between the EU and its Neighbourhood. As a result, the ENPI appears authoritative only in areas where strategic investments are deemed necessary and in areas that directly serve the EU's own agendas.

3.2. Power asymmetries, conditionality and the neighbours: the case of Ukraine

In the specific case of the EU-Ukraine relationship, contested bordering takes place in several ways. In seeking to induce institutional convergence to EU norms and practices, the EU is attempting to 'Europeanise' Ukraine and thus to reduce the level of perceived mutual difference. What we see is a differentiation between Ukraine and 'Europe' through discourses that emphasise the former country's internal crisis, its internal political divisions (and especially the very thorny issues of Russian-European contradictions) and corruption as a systemic element of Ukraine's political system. Frequently embedded in the EU perspective is a perceived duality of Ukrainian identity in which Russian and Ukrainian/European identities are seen as antagonistic opposites. As Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2006, p. 100) has argued: "the 'imaginative geographers' behind the recent EU enlargement – politicians, bureaucrats and intellectuals – were very slow and reluctant to recognize Ukraine as a European country, rather considering it as a buffer state undeniably belonging to the Russian sphere of influence, a grey zone of the Near Abroad". Long before the enlargement process had started, the EU preferred to define its relationship with Ukraine mainly in terms of security. Support for market transformation and democratic reforms in Ukraine (rather limited in comparison to other post-communist countries) was designed more with the aim to maintain political stability in the region than to help Ukraine prepare for eventual accession.

This attitude on the part of the EU continues to be expressed within the ENPI. The EU is pressing its political and security concerns onto the template of partnership (as defined, for example, in the Action Plan) and is re-casting them as 'common' interests. One example of this is the extension of the EU's border security perimeter to Ukrainian territory. In part, this has helped stabilise border controls with Moldova and the self-styled, break-away region of 'Transdnistria'. On the other hand, conditions mandating the readmission of illegal immigrants who cross from Ukraine into the EU as well as the preventative apprehension of undocumented persons put considerable pressure on Ukraine's limited resources. More complex is the issue of Ukraine's borders with Russia and potential future restrictions on movement between the two countries. Given the very close cultural, social and economic ties between Ukraine and Russia, visa requirements and border checks have proven highly disruptive (Mrinska 2006, Krok and Smietkowski 2006).

The EU-Ukraine Action Plan (Council of the European Union 2004), adopted in February 2005, is indicative of the asymmetric political dialogue that characterises the Neighbourhood Policy. This document sets out comprehensive priorities that express the values, policy imperatives and strategic interests of the

EU. As closer examination of the Action Plan reveals, however, these priorities only partially reflect the geopolitical interests and ambitions of Ukraine. In terms of the EU's values and principles, the Action Plan calls for:⁶

- 1) Further strengthening the stability and effectiveness of institutions guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law;
- 2) Ensuring respect for the freedom of the media and freedom of expression;
- 3) Gradual approximation of Ukrainian legislation, norms and standards with those of the European Union; further reinforcing administrative and judicial capacity.

In terms of the political imperatives of security cooperation and development of a 'functioning' market economy the Action Plan prioritises

- 1) Enhanced co-operation in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation;
- 2) Enhanced co-operation in our common neighbourhood and regional security, in particular working towards a viable solution to the Transdnistria conflict in Moldova, including addressing border issues;
- 3) Gradual removal of restrictions and non-tariff barriers that impede bilateral trade and implementation of the necessary regulatory reforms; tax reform, transparent business conditions;
- 4) Closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant as well as completing and starting-up of the 'K2R4' nuclear reactors, in compliance with the internationally accepted nuclear safety standards.

Finally, the Action Plan reflects a limited degree of reciprocity through the following objectives:

- 1) establishing a constructive dialogue on visa facilitation between the EU and Ukraine, with a view to preparing for future negotiations on a visa facilitation agreement, taking account of the need for progress on the ongoing negotiations for an EC-Ukraine readmission agreement;
- 2) Encourage dialogue on employment issues and best endeavours, in accordance with the PCA, to ensure that treatment of migrant workers does not discriminate on grounds of nationality;
- 3) Promote Ukrainian accession to the WTO.

All in all, the Action Plan reveals an attempt at constructive engagement. Furthermore, while the EU's own sense of moral authority is clearly expressed in the Action Plan, the document is also multilateralist, invoking, among others, the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and Council of Europe Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO). For example, under the heading "Democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms" the EU-Ukraine Action Plan states (p. 4) that: "In line with Ukraine's international commitments and its strategic goal of further European integration, Ukraine will continue its internal reforms based on strengthening democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, the principle of separation of powers and judicial independence, democratic

⁶ From the original text of the Action Plan

election in accordance with OSCE and Council of Europe norms and standards (political pluralism, freedom of speech and media, respect for the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, non-discrimination on grounds of gender, and on political, religious and ethnic grounds).”

Generally speaking however, the Action Plan displays a similar degree of paternalism evident in much official framing of the political situation in the Ukraine by EU elites.⁷ Pressure to conform to EU norms has made for considerable friction in bilateral relations. One prominent example of this has been the conditionality imposed by the EU with regard to more advantageous border and visa regimes. These have been contingent upon intensified border controls – including the detention and repatriation of illegal immigrants – and the readmission of illegal immigrants who cross into the EU from Ukraine. Ukraine’s government has decried these proposals as discriminatory as they threaten to stretch Ukraine’s limited resources. According to the Ukrainian Mission to the European Union: “The European Commission is unfamiliar with the real situation in Ukraine and has used all resources in talks to justify proposals that are absolutely unacceptable to Ukraine, proposals for the agreement on readmission”.⁸ After some negotiation, and considerable pressure from the EU, however, a readmission and visa facilitation agreement was finally signed in June 2007.

It should be added, however, that more recent deliberations between the EU and Ukraine indicate a change in political language and attitude: the Country Strategy Paper 2007–2013 (Commission of the European Communities 2007), for example, is much more forceful in its recognition of Ukraine’s geopolitical situation and in its support of Ukraine’s regional role. In this way accession to NATO, the maintenance of good relations and intensive cooperation with Russia and Ukraine’s role in promoting cooperation within the GUAM region (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) are explicitly acknowledged. Furthermore, the EU has made overtures to Ukraine that, while not promising outright EU membership, offer prospects of an ‘enhanced’ partnership agreement, including the establishment of a Free Trade Zone.

⁷ In a May 2007 statement the EU Commissioner of External Affairs, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, had this to say about political developments in Ukraine: “The re-establishment of political stability in Ukraine is fundamental for the continuation of the political and economic reform process in the country, and indeed for the strengthening and deepening of Ukraine’s partnership with the EU (...) In this context, I call upon all political forces in Ukraine to engage in an inclusive constitutional reform process, with a view to establishing a balanced constitutional system in Ukraine, with appropriate checks and balances.” Statement available from: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/ferrero-waldner/speeches.

⁸ “Kiev turns down EU proposals on readmission agreement”, *New Europe, the European Weekly*, 7 October 2006 - Issue 698.

4. Potential consequences of the EU's emerging geopolitics

By way of conclusion, I argue for more place-bound understandings of geopolitics and its material and socio-cultural consequences. John Agnew (2003, pp. 128–129) writes: “what is needed is a geopolitical imagination that takes *place* seriously as the setting for human life and tries to understand world politics in terms of its impacts on the material welfare and identities of people in different places. This involves addressing questions of national and other identities under conditions of massive population movement and diaspora (and) growing global inequalities (...).”⁹ A focus on identity and place also makes it necessary to confront the very human propensity to construct ‘spatial Others’ – a device with which negative images of foreign cultures and/or narratives of cultural difference are created to enhance positive self-images of one’s own culture and to more clearly define one’s own ‘community’.

With this brief discussion of EU geopolitics, I have argued that the EU is attempting to create a coherent political space that is at the same time a space of cultural identification with a sense of purpose. However, this process is inherently contested and contradictory; it produces notions of a European space that is ‘bordered’ according to perceptions of cultural and ideational affinity, institutional proximity and basic political and economic interests. What consequences might the emergence of ‘messy’ new regionalist geopolitics imply? Perhaps the main regional concern that emerges from this multilevel complexity (and from the ambiguities embedded in EU policies) is the possible exacerbation of *socio-economic inequalities and cultural difference through exclusionary practices*. On the one hand, the tightening of the border regime at the EU’s eastern borders threatens to reinforce social inequalities in the borderlands and could lead to a widening of the development gap between the EU and its eastern neighbours. On the other hand, if one follows national debates about immigration policies, the integration of foreign-born citizens, a possible Turkish accession to the EU or about perceptions of intractable cultural antagonisms, especially between Christianity and Islam, EU-Europe also seems to signify closure, with identity politics played out in both public and private arenas.

Given these identity-based conflicts, the question remains as to whether the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy announces a substantive change in bordering practices. To an extent, New Regionalist scenarios proposed by Björn Hettne and others are vindicated by the EU’s positive influence on internal processes of political reform and democratisation (e.g. in the case of Ukraine, Moldavia, Romania and other post-socialist countries). Gauged against the internationalist and programmatic rhetoric of the EU’s Wider Europe strategy, however, the ENPI appears a great deal more mundane, realist and modest – and more opportunistic. If the EU is indeed true to its ideals, the future of its geopolitical strategy will depend on a capacity to tolerate cultural difference and understand ‘partnership’ in

⁹ Emphasis in cursive provided by the author.

terms of social opportunities, inclusion, freedom of cultural expression and greater civil society participation in policy processes that affect the 'Neighbourhood'.

While critical, this discussion is also sympathetic to the EU's approach to geopolitics. Despite the ENP's highly structured political dialogue and somewhat manufactured consensus on common values, the EU has indeed had a positive and stabilising effect, both on post-socialist states that have eventually become EU members and other neighbouring countries. Through the establishment of regional dialogues, mechanisms of conflict mediation and resolution and its through influence on wider political debate, the EU has opened new international cooperation perspectives for countries that have been isolated for decades. However, the transformational and structuring effects of the EU – through its discourses, ideas, values and practices – work gradually and in the long term. It is therefore perhaps too early to condemn, as some authors do, the inconsistencies of the ENP as indicative of a dysfunctional ethics (e.g. Tocci et al. 2008), incoherence in the definition of security concerns (e.g. Pace 2004) or a freezing of 'postcolonial' or 'imperial' relations in time (Böröcz and Sarkar 2005). Indeed, there is no central concept that can capture the complexity and uniqueness of the EU as a regional idea. There is no 'central screenplay' that has been or is being followed in the making of the EU. Rather, it is the precise *absence* of a totalising political geographical model that has been so significant for the EU's evolution during the last decade.

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