

**Rationality Meets Ambition:**  
**The Paradox of the European Union's Neighbourhood Policy**  
**toward the Middle East and North Africa**

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## **Introduction**

Why did the European Union (EU) expand the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)—a policy originally designed for the new bordering states in eastern Europe after the 2004 enlargement—to include the states of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)? Why did Brussels thus adopt a modified enlargement policy to its southern periphery while excluding an EU membership offer? And how did the new policy succeed in overwriting the regional approach of the Union’s “Mediterranean policy” that was in place hitherto?

It is not the redefinition of EU policy towards “the south”, or Eastern Europe for that matter, that requires an explanation. The Union’s 2004 enlargement, which added eight states from Central and Eastern Europe, accounts for the desire of the EU and its member states to redefine relations towards the new eastern “neighbours”, such as Russia and the Ukraine. Similarly, the collapse of the Middle East peace process in 2000 made a rethink of EU policy towards “the south” necessary. What remains puzzling, however, is the inclusion of North African and Middle Eastern states in the emerging Neighbourhood Policy in 2003-2004. While developed as an *alternative* to EU accession, the ENP nevertheless incorporates the logic and key instruments of Brussels’ enlargement policy, thus offering concessions in exchange for reforms.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The ENP covers most countries that share a maritime or a land border with the enlarged EU or EU candidate countries, i.e. Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the East, and Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, and Tunisia in the South. The concessions on offer include “a stake” in the EU’s internal market, i.e.

More importantly, officials in Brussels do not exclude EU membership for some of the eastern “neighbours” in the future, but categorically ruled it out for “the south”.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, lacking the key incentive for inducing change in near-abroad states, i.e. the credible prospect of EU accession<sup>3</sup>, the ENP’s expediency for the southern Mediterranean is highly questionable. Indeed, adopting a policy to the Middle East and North Africa that was developed for a different scope (EU accession of new members), and region (Eastern Europe), and which was stripped off its main incentive (EU membership) is paradoxical and needs to be explained.<sup>4</sup> Why and how did an “enlargement logic” end up in the EU’s Mediterranean policy? Why did the member states agree to a single policy to be applied from Morocco to the Ukraine, given that political realities and EU membership perspectives notably differ across “the neighbourhood”?

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preferential trade relations, integration into the EU’s transport, telecommunications, energy and research networks, foreign investments promotion, support for integration into the global trading system, financial and technical assistance, and perspectives for lawful immigration. See Commission of the European Communities (henceforth “Commission”), *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*, Brussels, 12 May 2004, COM(2004) 373 final.

<sup>2</sup> Interviews with EU Commission officials, DG for External Relations (RELEX), Brussels, 21-22 November 2005. The 1957 Treaty of Rome stipulates that *European* states are eligible for membership.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Diez, Stephan Stetter, and Mathias Albert, ‘The European Union and Border Conflicts: The Transformative Role of Integration’, *International Organization* 60, no. 3 (2006): 563-539.

<sup>4</sup> The French initiative on the “Union for the Mediterranean” of July 2008 once more introduces the differentiation between “east” and “south”. But this does not explain why the ENP was extended to the south in the first place.

One possible explanation focuses on EU-internal bargaining over member states' interests.<sup>5</sup> It would thus describe the ENP's geographical scope as the lowest common denominator among EU governments. A broader account also considers the role of community institutions as well as the procedures of EU policymaking.<sup>6</sup> Processes of transferring and copying policies within bureaucracies and organizational rule-following are also interesting explanations.<sup>7</sup> Low transaction costs associated with the reproduction of a previously successful policy, as compared to the higher costs of contracting over a new one, are a key consideration here.<sup>8</sup> However, given the paradoxical outcome, the assumption of cost-benefit oriented rationality, which generally underpins this type of explanations, is insufficient. Hence, in search of a complementary explanation, this paper looks at normative conventions that support foreign policy change.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, 'Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmental Approach', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31, no. 4 (1993): 473-524.

<sup>6</sup> Mark A. Pollack, *Engines of European Integration: Delegation, Agency, and Agenda Setting in the EU* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Michael E. Smith, 'Institutionalization, Policy Adaptation and European Foreign Policy Cooperation', *European Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 1 (2004): 95-136.

<sup>7</sup> David P. Dolowitz and David Marsh, 'Learning from Abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy-Making', *Governance* 13, no. 1 (2000): 5-24.

<sup>8</sup> Elinor Ostrom, 'Institutional Rational Choice: An Assessment of the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework', in Paul Sabatier, ed., *Theories of the Policy Process* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); Douglas D. Heckathorn and Steven M. Maser, 'Bargaining and the Sources of Transaction Costs: The Case of Government Regulation', *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 3 (1987): 69-98.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

The main proposition is that cost-benefit oriented rationality, which explains why the ENP imitates the EU's enlargement policy, interlocked with a new consensus among European governments and elites regarding the EU's role in world politics. These international aspirations emerged after the end of the Cold war and were considerably nurtured by the EU's 2004 enlargement, which increased the Union's economy, geographical expansion, and population. Acting as a bearer of ideas,<sup>10</sup> I suggest that the ENP and its wide geographical scope *reproduce and encode* both the perceived success of EU enlargement and the resulting perception of itself and place in the world, thus providing the "logic" to an otherwise paradoxical outcome.

The paper proceeds as follows: Starting with theoretical and methodological considerations, it first discusses the conceptualisation of EU foreign policy<sup>11</sup>, the usefulness of the rationality assumption in the making of the ENP, and the possible role played by collective beliefs. The second part seeks to provide empirical evidence for the assumed interlocking of rationality and ambitions in the emerging ENP. Hence, it first looks at rationalist factors in the making of the ENP, and, considering the policy's paradoxical southern dimension, subsequently moves to the possible role played by the Union's international ambitions. The existence of the latter is demonstrated by reviewing

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<sup>10</sup> Albert S. Yee, 'The Causal Effects of Ideas on Policies', *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996): 69-108; pp. 88-92.

<sup>11</sup> EU foreign policy includes the mainly intergovernmental common foreign, security, and defence policy, as well as Community policies, most notably trade and aid.

the development of EU foreign policy over the last decades. I will then try to show that the ENP translates and encodes these new aspirations, which, in turn, made the ENP and its expansion to the south intelligible.

## **I. Rationality, Ambitions, and the Making of the ENP**

### **EU foreign policy and the rationality assumption**

Investigating the reasons for including the MENA states in the emerging ENP must first address the thorny question of how to conceptualise EU foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, while the EU is far from being a unitary state, its foreign policy is “less than supranational but more than intergovernmental”<sup>13</sup>; it is highly institutionalized; involves different actors; and transcends the three-pillar structure of the Maastricht Treaty.<sup>14</sup> Hence, it defies realism, functionalist integration theories, and liberal inter-governmentalism alike<sup>15</sup>—and has recurrently proved them wrong.

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Carlsnaes, Helen Sjursen and Brian White, eds., *Contemporary European Foreign Policy* (London: Sage, 2004); Ben Tonra and Thomas Christiansen, eds., *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Christopher Hill and Michael Smith, eds., *The International Relations of the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Wessels, ‘European Political Cooperation: A New Approach to European Foreign Policy’, in David Allen, Reinhardt Rummel and Wolfgang Wessels, eds., *European Political Cooperation: Towards a Foreign Policy for Western Europe* (London: Butterworth, 1982), pp. 1-20, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Michael E. Smith, ‘Institutionalization’; Christopher Hill, ed., *The Actors in Europe’s Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 1996); Stephan Stetter, *EU Foreign and Interior Policies: Cross-Pillar Politics and the Social Construction of Sovereignty* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> See, respectively, Joseph M Grieco, ‘The Maastricht Treaty, Economic and Monetary Union, and the Neo-Realist Research Programme’, *Review of International Studies* 21, no. 1 (1995): 21-40; Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950–1957* (Stanford,

As a result, multilevel governance approaches have become fashionable in the literature.<sup>16</sup> While acknowledging the dominant role of EU governments in the foreign policy realm, these approaches investigate how interests are defined, prioritised, and translated into a common policy through institutionalized processes across the domestic and EU levels. Some studies have specifically focused on policy transfer processes by exploring how policies, administrative arrangements, and ideas in one political setting are used in the development of policies in another context.<sup>17</sup> In the tradition of institutionalist rational choice theory, all these approaches presume rational actors, take interests as given, and conceive of bureaucracies as the aggregation of rational individuals. Outcome is explained in terms of individual or collective cost-benefit calculations, low transaction costs, and increased effectiveness. Bounded

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Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958); Moravcsik, 'Preferences and Power'; Andrew Moravcsik and Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'Explaining the Treaty of Amsterdam: Interests, Influence, Institutions', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 37, no. 1 (1999): 59–85.

<sup>16</sup> Markus Jachtenfuchs, 'The Governance Approach to European Integration', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 39, no. 2 (2001): 245-264; Michael E. Smith, 'Towards a Theory of EU Foreign Policy-Making: Multi-Level Governance, Domestic Politics, and National Adaptation to Europe's Common Foreign and Security Policy', *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 740-758; Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, 'Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 661-679; Sandra Lavenex, 'EU External Governance in "Wider Europe"', *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 680-700; Elsa Tulmets, 'The Management of New Forms of Governance by Former Accession Countries of the European Union: Institutional Twinning in Estonia and Hungary', *European Law Journal* 11, no. 5 (2005): 657–674.

<sup>17</sup> Dolowitz and Marsh, 'Who Learns What from Whom: A Review of the Policy Transfer Literature', *Political Studies* 44, no. 2 (1996): 343-357; Mark Evans and Jonathan Davies, 'Understanding Policy Transfer: A Multi-Level, Multi-Disciplinary Perspective', *Public Administration* 77, no. 2 (1999): 361-385. For the application to the EU see Claudio M. Radaelli, 'Policy Transfer in the European Union', *Governance* 13, no. 1 (2000): 25-43; Simon Bulmer and Stephen Padgett, 'Policy Transfer in the European Union: An Institutional Perspective', *British Journal of Political Science* 35 (2004): 103-126; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 'Governance by Conditionality'.

rationality is the only concession to the rationality assumption encountered in this body of literature.

Departing from these premises, constructivist approaches anchor their understanding of the EU and its international behaviour in the power of identity and shared beliefs.<sup>18</sup> These approaches do obviously not claim that EU foreign policy is an utterly irrational or philanthropic exercise. They contend, however, that instead of following crude utility-maximising strategies, actors respond to a “logic of appropriateness.”<sup>19</sup> The latter is based on an actor’s self-definition and expectations as well as on the normative environment in which foreign policymaking takes place.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the preferences of individual actors depend on normative conventions, which also influence the entire process by which individual preferences are translated into collective action.

As rationalist and constructivist explanations still constitute a major theoretical divide in IR,<sup>21</sup> which mode is more suited to explain the inclusion of

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<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Checkel, ‘Social Construction and Integration’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 6, no. 4 (1998): 545-60; Thomas Christiansen, Knud Erik Jørgensen, and Antje Wiener, eds., *The Social Construction of Europe* (London: Sage, 2001); Emanuel Adler and Beverly Crawford, “‘Normative Power’ and the European Practice of Region Building: The Case of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership”, in Emanuel Adler, Federica Bicchieri, Beverly Crawford, and Raffaella A. Del Sarto, eds., *The Convergence of Civilizations: Constructing a Mediterranean Region* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 3-47.

<sup>19</sup> James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, ‘The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders’, *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 943-969; *idem*, ‘The Logic of Appropriateness’, *ARENA Working Papers*, WP 04/04, Oslo: University of Oslo, Centre for European Studies.

<sup>20</sup> These approaches do generally not presume any ontological primacy between agent and structure: Preferences and identities of actors are shaped by the normative environment, which in turn evolves as a result of identities and preferences of its constitutive actors.

<sup>21</sup> See James Fearon and Alexander Wendt, ‘Rationalism v. Constructivism: A Skeptical View’, in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons, eds., *Handbook of International Relations* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 52-72.

the south in the emerging ENP? Which “logic” best explains outcome? Perhaps unsurprisingly, the picture is not black and white: Both rationalist and constructivist “logics” can be identified in the making of the ENP.

### **A tale of two logics**

Three main aspects support a rationalist interpretation of the ENP. As discussed further below, these include the desire to replicate a previously successful policy (i.e. the Union’s enlargement policy), strategic considerations of single actors, and institutional dynamics of EU foreign policymaking. In fact, a rationalist explanation best explains the great similarities between the ENP and the EU’s enlargement policy. However, applying an enlargement-type policy to states that are neither considered eligible to join the EU, nor interested in doing so (perhaps with the exception of Morocco), seriously challenges the rationality assumption.

On the other hand, EU identity and shared beliefs provide the basis of a constructivist explanation. From this vantage point, a shared conviction among EU elites that the enlarged Union is “entitled” to play a greater role in world politics potentially counts as a norm of social behaviour. It can affect policy outcome in two ways: First, by setting the standards of what is expected, it can act as a powerful platform for converging interests among EU member states and institutions. Constituting the logic of appropriateness, such shared beliefs

can “frame” the definition of problems and solutions at the collective level and thus distort instrumental means-end considerations.<sup>22</sup> Second, social norms entail a cognitive dimension; they act as filters through which information is processed. Hence, norms can modify the “background knowledge” of actors and thus *precede* the reasoning process.<sup>23</sup> While potentially altering the assessment of what is “logical”, collective beliefs potentially also influence the perception of a policy’s effectiveness.<sup>24</sup> Hence, considering the question of how norms affect outcome<sup>25</sup>, this paper suggests that the EU’s global aspirations provide the missing link of intelligibility between a partly rational policymaking process and a paradoxical outcome.

### **Tracing ambitions**

Identifying the EU’s new global ambitions and linking them to outcome is central to the explanation suggested here. This methodologically rather tricky task—which obviously differs from counting tanks and missiles—rests on three main considerations: First, the emergence and existence of a new consensus on the EU’s global role must be observable. Since there is evidence that “public

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<sup>22</sup> March and Olsen, ‘The Institutional Dynamics’; *idem*, ‘The Logic of Appropriateness’.

<sup>23</sup> Emanuel Adler, *Communitarian International Relations: The Epistemic Foundations of International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 21 ff.; Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> Mark Lubell, ‘Collaborative Institutions, Belief-Systems, and Perceived Policy Effectiveness’, *Political Research Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2003): 309-323.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993); Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security*.

philosophies” and even collective rhetorical commitment influence policy behaviour<sup>26</sup>, it is largely irrelevant whether the EU’s new aspirations resulted from a “deep” identity change or from different pragmatic considerations of European governments. What matters is that the presence of the EU’s international ambitions can be demonstrated. Continuous references in foreign policy documents and the discourse of European elites, along with a favourable public opinion, serve as indicators here.

Second, the EU’s new power ambitions must affect its foreign policy behaviour. But how would we know if this was the case? In fact, since EU foreign policy depends on the unanimity of the member states, it is possible to look at behaviour first: If the EU’s external action expanded in scope and quality over time, nothing but a new consensus among EU governments could have caused it. Put differently, precisely because EU foreign policy depends on the consensus of the member states, a more active EU foreign policy over time must necessarily result from a new shared understanding among European political elites on the EU’s purpose in world politics.

Finally, it must be possible to show that the ENP reproduces and encodes the key elements of the EU’s new self-perception and lust for power, thus making the instruments and broad geographical scope of the policy intelligible.

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<sup>26</sup> Yee, ‘The Causal Effects’; Frank Schimmelfennig, ‘The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union’, *International Organization* 55, no. 1 (2001): 47-80.

An analysis of relevant documents, along with interviews and informal discussions conducted with EU officials and elites will shed light on this aspect.

Hence, while this paper suggests a possible explanation to a paradoxical outcome, the investigation into the role played by ambitions in EU foreign policymaking must partly rely on 'circumstantial evidence'. In presenting my case, I will first focus on the rationalist aspects in the emerging ENP before shifting the attention to ambitions—and the interlocking of both logics.

## **II. Rationality in the making of the ENP**

### **Replicating a previously successful policy**

The wish to replicate a previously successful policy constitutes the main rationalist aspect in the making of the ENP. It is significant here that the ENP—back then termed “wider Europe”—emerged with an exclusive view to the east.<sup>27</sup> The ENP's origins can indeed be traced back to the EU's preoccupation with Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the flawed transition processes in Russia, Moldova, Belarus, and the Ukraine. Already from the late 1990s on, EU governments and east European candidate countries—particularly Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Great Britain, Finland, and Sweden—started lobbying for the formulation of a new EU strategy towards the

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<sup>27</sup> Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Tobias Schumacher, 'From EMP to ENP: What's at Stake with the European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southern Mediterranean?', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10, no. 1 (2004): 17-38; Elsa Tulmets, 'Explaining the Transfer of Ideas and Methods from Enlargement to the Neighbourhood Policy', paper presented at the Luncheon seminar, Robert Schuman Centre, European University Institute, Florence, June 2006.

East in support of political reforms. Community institutions and EU key officials were involved from the outset. Thus, foreign policy Chief Javier Solana and former EU External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten jointly called for new relations with the Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova in a letter of mid-2002.<sup>28</sup> With the fifth EU enlargement in sight, European governments reacted by proposing a “wider Europe” initiative in December 2002, and the Commission was given the task to draft a proposal, which was published in March 2003.<sup>29</sup>

Only at this stage, and virtually at the last minute before the document’s internal publication deadline, were the states of the “southern Mediterranean” added, mainly following the “surprise coup” instructions of former Commission President Romano Prodi.<sup>30</sup> The last-minute inclusion of “the south” explains some of the document’s inconsistencies, such as the recommendation to upgrade relations “with the *new* neighbours”<sup>31</sup>, which is obviously an incorrect description of the MENA states. Similarly, the document devotes much attention to cross-border cooperation, which is arguably more pertinent to the eastern

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<sup>28</sup> Chris Patten and Javier Solana, *Wider Europe: Joint Letter*, 7 August 2002, at [http://ec.europa.eu/comm/world/enp/pdf/\\_0130163334\\_001\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/comm/world/enp/pdf/_0130163334_001_en.pdf), accessed 30 June 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Commission, *Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, Brussels, 11 March 2003, COM(2003) 104 final. The imminent EU enlargement caused cognitive uncertainty, which Bicchi identifies as a necessary condition for the materialization of new EU Mediterranean policy initiatives. Federica Bicchi, *European Foreign Policy Making towards the Mediterranean* (New York: Palgrave, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Interview, DG RELEX, 22 November 2005. Previously, Sweden had floated a similar idea.

<sup>31</sup> Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood*, 4; italics added.

land borders of the enlarged EU. This issue was of great concern to the new east European members as well as to Finland and Germany.<sup>32</sup>

The original view to the east largely explains why the ENP borrowed from the instruments of the EU's enlargement policy. This regards, for instance, the principles of "positive conditionality" and "benchmarking", which entail the "action plan" method of planning and evaluation.<sup>33</sup> The idea of granting financial assistance according to "progress" achieved by each country, and not on the basis of fixed country allocations, was also copied from the EU's enlargement strategy; it aims at generating competition and peer pressure in implementing reforms.<sup>34</sup> The ENP also took over two technical assistance instruments from the 2004 enlargement policy, namely "twinning" and access to the Technical Assistance Information Exchange (TAIEX).<sup>35</sup> Finally, based on the enlargement experience, the ENP aims at strengthening cross-border cooperation.

These observations corroborate the assumption that the ENP resulted from an intra-institutional process of copying the EU's enlargement policy. As Brussels considers the last round of enlargement as a "historic step for the entire

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<sup>32</sup> Interviews, DG RELEX, 21 November 2005.

<sup>33</sup> As in the Union's enlargement policy, monitoring is carried out by bilateral sub-committees according to specific topics. The Commission also regularly prepares Country Reports.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, DG RELEX, 21 November 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Twinning involves assistance and training provided by experts from EU member states; TAIEX is an information data base on the EU's legal provisions.

European continent”<sup>36</sup>, the desire to “repeat the success story of enlargement”<sup>37</sup> certainly qualifies as rational behaviour. This holds also true for the then-candidate countries that would join the EU in 2004 and that were already playing the lobbying game in Brussels. The crucial involvement of the Commission in formulating the ENP further supports a rationalist mode of explanation, as discussed in the next section.

### **The Commission’s agenda-setting role**

Although a senior official from the Commission’s Directorate General for External Relations (DG RELEX) drafted the first ENP-wider Europe proposal, DG *Enlargement* officials provided the main input to the emerging policy. This fact explains the great similarity between the latter and the EU’s enlargement policy in the first place.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> European Council (GAERC), *European Neighbourhood Policy: Council Conclusions*, 14 June 2004. For the numerous references to the EU’s enlargement success see for example Romano Prodi, ‘A Wider Europe: A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability’, Brussels, 5-6 December 2002, SPEECH/02/619, at <http://europa.eu.int/rapid>, accessed 20 July 2005; Pascal Vennesson, ed., *European Worldviews: Ideas and the EU in World Politics*, RSCAS Working Papers Series (Florence: European University Institute, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> Marise Cremona, ‘The European Neighbourhood Policy: Partnership, Security and the Rule of Law’, in Andrew Mayhew and Nathaniel Copsey, eds., *European Neighbourhood Policy and Ukraine* (Sussex: University of Sussex, European Institute, 2005), pp. 25-54, p. 29. See also Dov Lynch, ‘The New Eastern Dimension of the Enlarged EU’, in Judy Batt et al., eds., *Partners and Neighbours: A CFSP for a Wider Europe* (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2003), pp. 34-59; pp. 47-48.

<sup>38</sup> Del Sarto and Schumacher, ‘From EMP to ENP’; Judith Kelley repeats this argument in ‘New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms through the New European Neighbourhood Policy’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 29-55.

Former enlargement officials also dominated the “Wider Europe Task Force”, which was in charge of further developing the new policy, including its financial aspects. Established after the “wider Europe” proposal had obtained the green light of the member states at the Thessaloniki European Council in June 2003, this task force initially reported to former Enlargement Commissioner Günter Verheugen, an influential personality.<sup>39</sup> With the new Commission under José Manuel Barroso taking office in November 2004, the ENP was eventually transferred to DG RELEX. However, former enlargement officials, who moved to DG RELEX upon completion of the EU’s 2004 expansion, continued to dominate the ENP-making process. Interestingly, enlargement bureaucrats generally display a rather technical and transversal approach to the EU’s broad “neighbourhood”, whereas traditional DG RELEX officials tend to emphasise the specificity of states and regions.

In defiance of intergovernmental explanations of EU foreign policymaking, the input of major member states with traditional interests in North Africa and the Middle East, such as France, Italy, and Spain, was limited. Since the European “Club Med” states significantly influenced the EU’s Mediterranean policy in the past, one could have expected them to do so again this time around, i.e. by seeking to counter-balance Brussels’ preoccupation with

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<sup>39</sup> During the Prodi Commission, the task force comprised 18 officials from DG Enlargement, and only 10 officials from DG RELEX. On the ENP’s financial instrument see Commission, *Paving the Way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument*, Brussels, 1 July 2003, COM(2003) 393 final.

Eastern Europe and secure EU funds for the south.<sup>40</sup> But France was sceptical of Prodi's idea of including the Mediterranean, Italy under Berlusconi was largely absent from European politics, and Spain had preferred to maintain two different policies for "east" and "south".<sup>41</sup>

Hence, particularly in the absence of extensive bargaining among the member states, the EU Commission played a significant agenda-setting role. As its civil servants accumulated extensive experience in preparing candidate countries for EU accession over the decades, choosing the proven "enlargement toolkit" for the emerging ENP certainly qualifies as cost-benefit-oriented rational behaviour. The latter can indeed be linked to lower costs as well as to a rationalist type of learning that assumes a rather linear accumulation of skills and knowledge based on previous experience.<sup>42</sup> In this vein, EU bureaucrats claim that the dominant role of former enlargement officials in the emerging ENP evidences the efficient use of existing skills within the Commission.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, EU officials who seek to expand their competences by proposing

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<sup>40</sup> Bicchi, *European Foreign Policy Making*

<sup>41</sup> Interviews, DG RELEX, 21-22 November 2005; on Italy see Roberto Aliboni, 'La Politica Estera del Governo Berlusconi', in Alessandro Colombo and Natalino Ronzitti, eds., *L'Italia e la Politica Internazionale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003), pp. 81-92; on Spain see Esther Barbé and Laia Mestres, *CFSP Watch 2004: Spain*, at <http://www.fornet.info/CFSPwatchannualreports2004.html>; accessed 18 June 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Colin J. Bennett and Michael Howlett, 'The Lessons of Learning: Reconciling Theories of Policy Learning and Policy Change', *Policy Sciences* 25 (1992): 275-294. In contrast to rationalist learning, social learning is associated with changing perceptions, attitudes and preferences as a result of social interaction, which also implies the re-examination of previously held beliefs on cause and effect. For a concise discussion see Adler, *Communitarian International Relations*, pp. 19-22.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, DG RELEX, 22 November 2005.

instruments of their area of expertise can be said to act rational in a utility-maximising way.

From yet another rationalist vantage point, the ENP may also have served as an EU-internal employment strategy with regard to those enlargement officials who would not have much work once the 2004 enlargement was completed.

### **Bureaucratic rule-following**

From a rationalist vantage point, insights from organizational behaviour also tell an interesting story. As institutions tend to store past experiences in rules, practices, and standard operating procedures, bureaucracies tend to re-propose proven instruments instead of searching for alternatives. Yet, while rule-following and bureaucratic inertia count as rational behaviour, encoding past experience in standard operating procedures also explains why past success does not necessarily lead to a subsequent optimal policy outcome. In fact, it most aptly explains cases of bureaucratic *inefficiency*.<sup>44</sup>

True, the making of the ENP does not fully corroborate the so-called garbage-can model of organizational choice, which highlights the fully

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<sup>44</sup> James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, 'The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life', *American Political Science Review* 78, no. 3 (1984): 734-749, p. 745; Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), chapter 2.

accidental crossing of problems, decision-makers, and solutions.<sup>45</sup> But rationalism still falls short of explaining why the member states unanimously accepted the Commission's idea of including the MENA states in the emerging ENP. In fact, European governments did impose some changes on the Commission's first "wider Europe" proposal. But modifying the policy's "southern dimension" was not part of their requests.<sup>46</sup>

### **A paradoxical outcome**

While a rationalist mode of explanation accounts for the modelling of the ENP after the EU's enlargement policy, the inclusion of the Mediterranean was far more accidental than the rationality assumption allows for.<sup>47</sup> This is even more intriguing as Brussels already had a policy towards the "south".

Regulated by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, or Barcelona Process, the success of the latter was limited, mainly because it became entangled with

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<sup>45</sup> March and Olsen, 'The New Institutionalism', 746; Jonathan Bendor, Terry M. Moe and Kenneth W. Shotts, 'Recycling the Garbage Can: An Assessment of the Research Program', *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 1 (2001): 169-190. Thanks to Ulrich Krotz for bringing this point to my attention.

<sup>46</sup> Russia, which disliked being one among many "neighbours", was taken off the list of ENP countries. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were added. The member states also cancelled the incentive of the free movement of people, as initially proposed by the Commission. Compare Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood* and *idem*, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*; see also Council of the European Union, *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council 17 and 18 June 2004*, Brussels, 18 June 2004, D04/02 10679/04.

<sup>47</sup> Kelly's explanation of the ENP in terms of strategic considerations of Commission officials alone disregards both the member states' decisive role in EU foreign policy and the policy's awkward Mediterranean dimension. Kelley, 'New Wine in Old Wineskins'

the fate of peace-making.<sup>48</sup> Yet, while the adoption of the ENP to the south was not a response to changed conditions in the region, it did change the course of the EU's Mediterranean policy: It supplanted a region-building approach<sup>49</sup> with an explicitly bilateral and differentiated policy, which rewards reform-willing states for "good behaviour". The ENP also decouples bilateral relations from Middle East peace-making, by stating that conflict resolution "cannot be a pre-condition for confronting the urgent reform challenges" in the region, "nor vice versa".<sup>50</sup> With the deadlocked peace process, Brussels' decision to qualitatively upgrade relations with Israel clearly attests to this new philosophy.<sup>51</sup>

But the main problem with the EU's new approach to the south is that MENA governments—authoritarian regimes except for Israel—are unlikely to embrace political reforms and renounce their grip on power for the sake of some economic concessions. The ENP's appeal is further reduced by the high costs involved in the necessary economic restructuring for obtaining "a stake" in the

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<sup>48</sup> On the Barcelona Process see Adler et al., eds. *The Convergence of Civilizations*; Raffaella A. Del Sarto, *Contested State Identities and Regional Security in the Euro-Mediterranean Area* (New York: Palgrave, 2006); Tobias Schumacher, *Die Europäische Union als internationaler Akteur im südlichen Mittelmeerraum: Actor Capability und EU-Mittelmeerpoltik* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2005); Alfred Tovias, 'Can the EU Anchor Policy Reform in Third Countries? An Analysis of the Euro-Med Partnership', *European Union Politics* 5, no. 4 (2004): 395-418. Legally, the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements concluded within the Barcelona Process remain the basis of EU-Mediterranean relations.

<sup>49</sup> Adler and Crawford, "'Normative Power" and the European Practice of Region Building'.

<sup>50</sup> Council of the European Union, *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council 17 and 18 June*, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Sharon Pardo, 'Towards and Ever Closer Partnership: A Model for a New Euro-Israeli Partnership', *EuroMeSCo* paper 72, October 2008, Lisbon: IEES / EuroMeSCo Secretariat; Raffaella A. Del Sarto, 'Wording and Meaning(s): EU-Israeli Political Cooperation according to the ENP Action Plan', *Mediterranean Politics* 11(1): 59-74.

EU's internal market.<sup>52</sup> This situation stands in clear contrast to the "east", where an EU membership perspective is left open, for example for the Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the claim that with regard to the south, the ENP is compatible with the Barcelona Process and would actually strengthen the latter became the dominant mantra in Brussels.<sup>53</sup> The Spanish government, on the other hand, detected the advantage in "linking the fate of Morocco to that of the Ukraine" post-factum.<sup>54</sup> Prodi himself acknowledged that the "goal of accession is certainly the most powerful stimulus for reform", but he also asked why a "less ambitious goal" should not "have some effect".<sup>55</sup> But these claims are hardly convincing, let alone conducive to a rationalist explanation. Hence, an alternative explanation of this paradoxical outcome focuses on the role of shared beliefs underpinning EU foreign policymaking.

### **III. Ambitions and the Making of the ENP**

The consensus around the ENP and the high priority attested to it in the corridors of Brussels and in European capitals remain intriguing. Similarly striking are the numerous references to the Union's aspired role in world politics, which characterise the discourse of European elites and are also

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<sup>52</sup> Del Sarto and Schumacher, 'From EMP to ENP'.

<sup>53</sup> Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood*; *idem*, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*; Interviews with Commission officials, Brussels, 20-21 November 2005.

<sup>54</sup> Discussion with senior Spanish diplomat, 13 December 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Prodi, 'A Wider Europe'.

reflected in ENP documents.<sup>56</sup> European (or EU-based) scholars followed suit by discussing the EU's international role and by embedding the ENP into the latter.<sup>57</sup> But are the EU's new global ambitions relevant at all? And if so, do they impact on behaviour?

### **An emerging global power?**

While the Europeans' objective to "speak with one voice" in the international arena is not new, developments over the last decades have been impressive. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent European incapacity to prevent and stop the Balkan wars forged a new agreement among EU governments on the need for common military structures for crisis management and peace-keeping. Originally, these were to be set up *within* NATO through the West European Union (WEU). The EU's 1997 Amsterdam Treaty adopted this understanding and also created an EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy. However, the late 1990s witnessed a shift towards the development of an

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*; Javier Solana, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003, at <http://ue.eu.int/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>, accessed 18 November 2008; Benita Ferrero-Waldner, 'The European Neighbourhood Policy: The EU's Newest Foreign Policy Instrument', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 11 (2006): 139-142; Vennesson, 'European Worldviews'; Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*; *idem*, *Implementing and Promoting the ENP*, Brussels, 22 November 2005, SEC(2005) 1521; *idem*, *Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy*, Brussels, 4 December 2006, COM(2006) 726 final.

<sup>57</sup> On EU power, see Ian Manners, 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235-258; Thomas Diez, 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering 'Normative Power Europe'', *Millennium* 33, no. 3 (2005): 613-636; Helen Sjusren, ed., *Civilian or Military Power? European Foreign Policy in Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2006); on the link between the ENP and the ESDP see Roland Dannreuther, ed., *European Union Foreign and Security Policy: towards a Neighbourhood Strategy* (London: Routledge, 2004); Batt et al., *Partners and Neighbours*.

*autonomous* European security pillar. Thus, the 1999 Cologne European Council declared that the EU “must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces”.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, the EU set up a Political and Security Committee, the European Military Committee assembling the member states’ chiefs of staff, and a European Union Military staff in charge of military planning.

In December 1999, EU governments decided to establish a “rapid reaction force” of 60,000 troops that could carry out the so-called Petersberg tasks of humanitarian intervention, crisis management, and peace-keeping. The EU launched its first *military* operation in March 2003, a peace-keeping mission in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) that it took over from NATO. The number of operations under EU command has been increasing ever since, and so has the institutionalization of the Union’s security policy.<sup>59</sup> The latter also includes the establishment of a “Joint Situation Centre” for intelligence-sharing.

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<sup>58</sup> Council, *Presidency Conclusions, Cologne European Council, 3-4 June 1999*, Brussels, 4 June, 150/99 REV 1, p. 33.

<sup>59</sup> EUFOR Concordia (FYROM) was followed by EUFOR Artemis in the DR Congo in 2003, EUFOR Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina from December 2004, and a second mission to the DR Congo from June 2006 on. In 2008, the EU deployed a military mission under UN mandate to Eastern Chad and the Central African Republic as well as to Somalia. Civilian EU missions include monitoring missions in Aceh (Indonesia) since September 2005, security sector reform assistance in Guinea-Bissau (since June 2008), EU police missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina (2003), FYROM (2003-2005), DR Congo (since 2005), the Palestinian territories (since January 2005), Afghanistan (since June 2007), and Georgia (September 2008). Other missions include rule-of-law missions to Georgia (2004-2005) and Iraq (since July 2005), and border missions to Moldova, the Ukraine (both since June 2005), and Gaza (since November 2005, currently suspended). See also Sven Biscop, ‘Able and Willing? Assessing the EU’s Capacity for Military Action’, *European Foreign Affairs Review* 9, no. 4 (2004): 509–527.

As EU foreign policy action is contingent on unanimity among member states, these developments necessarily resulted from a new agreement among the latter. Indeed, the European consensus on an *independent* EU security pillar, as formally agreed at the French-British St. Malo summit in December 1998, became possible because Britain modified its *exclusive* Atlanticist preference, France departed from its “exceptionalism”, and Germany shifted from its post-World War II non-interventionism towards the acceptance of a common European peace-keeping role. As for the smaller member states, the reappraisal of their foreign policy in a European context has been observed since the 1970s.<sup>60</sup>

Certainly, the process by which “West European élites gradually constructed [...] a transformative discourse on foreign and security relations”<sup>61</sup> has been marked by hesitations and repeated set-backs—caused for instance by the EU-internal rift over Iraq, or, more recently, the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008. However, a persistent “will, if not always the capacity, to produce collective action”<sup>62</sup> in the realm of EU foreign policy has been observed.

### **International ambitions as a social norm**

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<sup>60</sup> Jolyon Howorth, ‘Discourse, Ideas, and Epistemic Communities in European Security and Defence Policy’, *West European Politics* 27, no. 2 (2004): 211-234; Thomas U. Berger, ‘A Perfectly Normal Abnormality: German Foreign Policy after Kosovo and Afghanistan’, *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 2 (2002): 173-193; Ben Tonra, *The Europeanisation of National Foreign Policy: Dutch, Danish, and Irish Foreign Policy in the European Union* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2001).

<sup>61</sup> Howorth, ‘Discourse, Ideas’, p. 212.

<sup>62</sup> Christopher Hill, ‘Renationalizing or Regrouping? EU Foreign Policy since 11 September 2001’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 42, no. 1 (2004): 143-163, p. 143.

The EU's international ambitions are reflected in the official discourse and activities in Brussels. Significantly, the EU defined its genuine *interests* for the first time in the 2003 European Security Strategy, which also boldly stressed the need for "a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid and, where necessary, robust intervention".<sup>63</sup> The formulation of EU positions on a plethora of foreign policy issues followed. Thus, Brussels adopted a common strategy on weapons of mass destruction, counter-terrorism, and European defence procurement, and drafted a strategy for the Middle East and for Africa.<sup>64</sup> It stepped up its international role in justice and home affairs, created a European Defence Agency in July 2004, plans to establish a common diplomatic service, and has been debating on how to increase the coherence and visibility of its global role ever since.<sup>65</sup>

The EU's "big bang" enlargement of 2004 undoubtedly fed into these aspirations, as the official discourse in Brussels demonstrates.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, a

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<sup>63</sup> Solana, *A Secure Europe*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> See, respectively, Council of the European Union, *EU Strategy against the Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Brussels, 10 December 2003, 15708/03 (Annex); *idem*, *The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, Brussels, 30 November 2005, 14469/04/05; Commission, *European Defence—Industrial and Market Issues: Towards an EU Defence Equipment Policy*, Brussels, 11 March 2003, COM(2003) 113 final; Council, 'EU Strategic Partnership with the Mediterranean and Middle East: Final Report', *Euromed Report* 78, 23 June 2004; Commission, *EU Strategy for Africa: Towards a Euro-African Pact to Accelerate Africa's Development*, Brussels, 12 October 2005, COM(2005) 489 final.

<sup>65</sup> Jörg Monar, 'The EU as an International Actor in the Domain of Justice and Home Affairs', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 9, no. 3 (2004): 395-415; Commission, *Europe in the World: Some Practical Proposals for Greater Coherence, Effectiveness, and Visibility*, Brussels, 8 June 2006, COM(2006) 278 final; Council of the European Union, *Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council 15-16 June 2006*, Brussels, 17 June, 10633/06.

<sup>66</sup> See for example Clara Portela, 'Security Policies through Community Means: The Worldview of Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy Benita Ferrero-

Commission pamphlet of 2004 states that the “European Union is *a world player*. It has a population of 450 million—more than the United States and Russia combined. It is the world’s biggest trader and generates one quarter of global wealth”.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, the websites of EU delegations around the world contain the same passage in their section on “Europe in the world”.

Thus, the enlarged EU is slowly but steadily claiming an international role for itself—irrespective of whether this objective is realistic at all.<sup>68</sup> As the growing institutionalization of EU foreign policy actually strengthens the member states in this domain,<sup>69</sup> the expansion of the EU’s external action can only be explained by a new consensus among European governments on the Union’s new purpose in world politics. Concurrently, around 75 percent of EU citizens support a common European defence and foreign policy, and another 68 percent are in favour of a common foreign policy.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the Union’s international aspirations act as a new social norm that affected its foreign policy behaviour. As the following sections suggest, the ENP encodes the main building blocs of the EU’s global ambitions.

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Waldner’, in Vennesson, ed. *European Worldviews*; Marise Cremona, ‘The Impact of Enlargement: External Policy and External Relations’, in *idem*, ed., *The Enlargement of the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>67</sup> Commission, *A World Player: The European Union’s External Relations* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2004), 1, italics added.

<sup>68</sup> For a critical view see Ulrich Krotz, ‘Momentum and Impediments: Why Europe Won’t Emerge as a Full Political Actor on World Stage Soon’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 47, no. 3, forthcoming May 2009; manuscript obtained by the author.

<sup>69</sup> Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet, ‘The New CFSP and ESDP Decision-Making System of the European Union’, *European Foreign Affairs Review* 7, no. 3 (2002): 257-282.

<sup>70</sup> *Eurobarometer* polls of 2003-2008, at <[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/standard\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm)>, accessed 20 March 2009.

### **Interlocking the new ambitions with the ENP**

The ENP became once of the main policies through which the EU defines its international role. The renaming of the External Relations Commissioner into "Commissioner for External Relations and the Neighbourhood Policy" is a strong case in point. Concurrently, Brussels labelled the ENP "a key EU external relations priority".<sup>71</sup> The policy, in turn, encodes and thus cements the EU's new perceptions of itself and its aspired international role in at least three respects: First, the ENP reproduces the success story of enlargement, which is central to the EU's new ambitions. Second, it encodes the EU's new centre-periphery approach. And third, it translates Brussels' acknowledgement of unequal power relations.

Most significantly, the ENP replicates the EU's perceived success of enlargement, which nurtures the conviction that a bigger and hence more powerful EU is fully entitled to a greater say in world politics. At the practical level, this is reflected in ENP's imitation of the enlargement policy, as discussed above. At the discourse level, the EU's greater weight and geographical extension resulting from enlargement are portrayed as the main driving force for the launching of the ENP in the first place. In this vein, the opening statement of the 2003 ENP documents refers to the "new and historic phase" that the EU will

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<sup>71</sup> Commission, *Implementing and Promoting the ENP*, no page number (1).

enter after enlargement, stressing that an “enlarged Union of 25 countries [...] will fundamentally increase the political, geographic and economic weight of the EU on the European continent”. EU enlargement gives “a new impetus” to relations with the “inhabitants of the countries that will find themselves on the external land and sea border”;<sup>72</sup> it also entails new “opportunities and challenges”<sup>73</sup> for the Union. The ENP is hence designed to “share the benefits of the EU’s 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries.”<sup>74</sup> And while Brussels identifies a new “New Vision and a New Order”<sup>75</sup>, it purportedly developed a “Neighbourhood Policy for a European Union acting coherently and efficiently in the world”.<sup>76</sup>

Second, the ENP translates and encodes a conspicuous centre-periphery perspective of the EU, with the periphery ranging from Morocco to the Ukraine. In this vein, the ENP aims at creating a “ring of countries [...] that are drawn into an increasing close relationship”<sup>77</sup> with the EU. Along the same lines, ENP documents stress the importance for the EU of having “a zone of increasing prosperity, stability and security on its borders”<sup>78</sup>, whereby external border controls are of particular concern. This image of the “ring of friends” is in fact as telling as the concepts of “wider Europe” and “neighbourhood” themselves.

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<sup>72</sup> Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Commission, *Wider Europe: Neighbourhood*, 9.

<sup>76</sup> Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*, 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>78</sup> Commission, *Implementing and Promoting the ENP*, no page number (1), italics added.

Thus, departing from EU-talk euphemisms, the ENP in fact seeks to establish a “buffer zone” around the EU by moving dividing lines farther away, keeping immigrants out, and connecting the periphery to the core in vital fields such as trade, energy, and infrastructure.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, and perhaps most significantly, including North Africa and the Middle East into a broad “neighbourhood” to which the same policy framework can be applied *makes sense from an EU-centric perspective.*

Third, the ENP encodes a new acknowledgement of unequal power relations. This entails both the definition of genuine EU interests and a greater inclination to make use of EU leverage vis-à-vis third countries.<sup>80</sup> As regards interest, ENP documents frankly assert that cooperation with the “neighbours” is geared at providing security and welfare to EU citizens.<sup>81</sup> It is thus “*in the EU’s interest* to have a zone of increasing prosperity, stability and security on its borders”.<sup>82</sup> Referring to poverty, authoritarianism, and conflicts in the region, Brussels stresses that “the EU *has a clear interest* in ensuring that these common

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<sup>79</sup> Michele Comelli, Ettore Greco, and Nathalie Tocci, ‘From Boundary to Borderland: Transforming the Meaning of Borders through the European Neighbourhood Policy’, *European Foreign Affairs Review* 12(2): 203-218, 2007; Raffaella A. Del Sarto, ‘Borderlands: The Middle East and North Africa as the EU’s Southern Buffer Zone’, in Dimitar Bechev and Kalypso Nicolaidis, eds., *Mediterranean Frontiers: Borders, Conflict and Memory in a Transnational World* (London: I.B Tauris, forthcoming).

<sup>80</sup> Interviews, Commission, 20-21 November 2005; discussions with senior German Foreign Ministry official, throughout 2005 and 2006; discussion with senior diplomat, Spanish Embassy to the State of Israel, Tel Aviv, 13 December 2006; interview with EU Commission official, EU Delegation to the State of Israel, Tel Aviv, 14 December 2006.

<sup>81</sup> Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood*, 3.

<sup>82</sup> Commission, *Implementing and Promoting the ENP*, 1; italics added.

challenges are addressed”.<sup>83</sup> Cooperation on border controls is explicitly mentioned as a common interest, and the EU also expresses its desire to play a greater role in conflict prevention and management, particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Western Sahara dispute.<sup>84</sup> Some ENP documents also refer to the European Security Strategy, which set the precedent for a relatively audacious definition of EU interests.<sup>85</sup>

Reflecting the observed normative framing of EU interests,<sup>86</sup> ENP documents extensively refer to shared (or common) values. However, the aim is not to *create common values* with the so-called neighbours, but rather to export the EU’s own rules and laws to the periphery. Indeed, the “commitment to shared values”<sup>87</sup> is followed by a list of norms that (allegedly) define *the EU and its member states*. Moreover, EU’s concessions will depend on “concrete progress demonstrating shared values”<sup>88</sup>, as the Commission nicely puts it. With it, the Union acknowledges its ambition of acting as a “normative power” in a quite self-confident way—whereby the emphasis should perhaps be put on “power” *tout court*.

The ENP also prescribes the *means* by which the EU intends to make use of its “power” vis-à-vis the periphery. Echoing the European Security Strategy,

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<sup>83</sup> Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood*, 16; italics added.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>85</sup> Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper*.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Youngs, ‘Normative Dynamics and Strategic Interests in the EU’s External Identity’ *Journal of Common Market Studies* 42, no. 2 (2004): 415-35.

<sup>87</sup> Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper*, 12.

<sup>88</sup> Commission, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood*, 4 and 10.

these are positive conditionality and benchmarking, which underpin the idea of offering incentives in exchange for reforms. In EU-talk, benefits will be “conditional on meeting the agreed targets for reform”.<sup>89</sup> Irrespective of the Commission’s claim that the “EU does not seek to impose conditions [...] on its partners”<sup>90</sup>, Brussels, by means of the ENP, aims at doing precisely that. Hence, it is hardly relevant whether the incentives of the ENP match its declared objectives as regards “the south”. The important point is that the EU, convinced of its power of attraction and persuasion, is set on employing all means at its disposal to prod the “neighbours” into “good behaviour” and thus to stabilise its periphery.<sup>91</sup>

Hence, it is in the perspective of a large and powerful EU standing at the centre that a single policy towards a broadly conceived periphery makes sense. This is particularly the case if this policy promises a greater leverage on the single states within it, and with it, the pursuit of EU interests. An (allegedly) “single, inclusive, balanced and coherent policy framework”<sup>92</sup> for an area ranging from North Africa to the Ural, which entails incentives, conditions, and the export of EU rules, most notable reflects the allures of a would-be international power indeed.

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*; also Solana, *A Secure Europe*.

<sup>90</sup> Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*, 8.

<sup>91</sup> Ferrero-Waldner, ‘The European Neighbourhood Policy’; Vennesson, ed., *European Worldviews*.

<sup>92</sup> Council of the European Union, ‘Council Conclusions on European Neighbourhood Policy’, 2851 External Relations Council Meeting, Brussels, 18 February 2008, p. 1.

## Conclusions

The suggested explanation for the EU's Mediterranean policy paradox draws attention to the interlocking of a rationalist with an ambition-driven "logic". In search for a new policy towards Eastern Europe, the EU's self-congratulatory attempt to repeat the enlargement success story is rational. In the absence of strongly divergent member states interests, Commission officials played an important agenda-setting role. Their attempt to impose proven instruments of their area of expertise, along with their world view, is also supportive of utility-maximising strategies of rational actors. Finally, expanding the ENP to the south is consistent with organisational rule-following and bureaucratic inertia, which however, already points to the limits of a rationalist explanation. Indeed, without offering any EU membership perspective, crude utility-oriented rationality provides an insufficient explanation for the ENP's expansion southward. Hence, the paper suggested that the Union's new international ambitions provide the missing link to the paradoxical adoption of an enlargement-type policy to MENA states, which also changed the course of the EU's previous Mediterranean policy.

The ENP's inherent enlargement rationale not only *reproduces* the EU's success of exporting its laws and values to candidate countries, but also translates the key elements of the EU's new self-perception and aspirations in

world politics. These entail a greater self-confidence, the explicit acknowledgement of unequal power relations, and a new centre-periphery perspective that conceptualizes the EU's backyard as extending from Morocco to the Ukraine. Acting as a "taken-for-granted" pattern of reality among European politicians and bureaucrats, the EU's global ambitions emerged as a powerful social norm, which has been driving the expansion in scope and intensity of EU foreign policy over the last years. The shared conviction of being *entitled* to play a greater role on the world stage also explains the EU's adoption of a single policy to a vast periphery ranging from North Africa to the Ural, which promises the use of its leverage. It complies with what the EU expects from itself as an international power-in-the making.

Reminding of Galileo's (probably legendary) dictum on the earth "*Eppur si muove!*" (And it does move!), the EU's claim for an international role for itself may be slow and unspectacular. It may also be utterly unrealistic for the time being.<sup>93</sup> However, it acted as a shared understanding that motivates, sustains, and validates an otherwise questionable policy towards North Africa and the Middle East.

The proposed explanation has two main implications. First, the existence of different "logics" in EU foreign policymaking calls for a reconsideration of

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<sup>93</sup> Krotz, 'Momentum and Impediments'

essence and role of rationality in IR.<sup>94</sup> While it has remained problematic to treat organisations, including states, as aggregated individuals in terms of rationality, the main difference is not between “rationality” and “irrationality”. Rather, there are different types of rational behaviour, some of which are only “rational” in the context of social norms. While this finding also indicates that *rationality itself* is the product of social construction, different modes of rationality may interlock in complex policymaking processes, thus explaining a non-optimal outcome.

Second, the suggested explanation begs the question as of why the EU’s new international ambitions emerged in the first place. One possible explanation points to the impact of identity dynamics on foreign policy behaviour. From a constructivist perspective, the EU’s new aspirations in world politics can clearly be linked to its quest for a new purpose after the end of the Cold War. An alternative reading can be found in classical realism: Greater material resources (of the enlarged EU) foment a greater lust for power. Assessing the validity of these competing explanations, however, would be the subject of another paper.

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<sup>94</sup> Fearon and Wendt, ‘Rationalism v. Constructivism’; Miles Kahler, ‘Rationality in International Relations’, *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 919-941