

Systemic, Domestic and Cognitive Constraints to EU Norm Diffusion in the Shared Neighbourhood

A neoclassical realist analysis of the European Union's normative disposition in the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy

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Abstract

Building on a neoclassical realist framework, this study employs the method of Causal-Process Tracing (CPT) to assess the limits of EU normative power over the Eastern Neighbourhood. The study finds that the development of the EU's normative approach since the start of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has been ambiguous. While the EU has largely maintained its preference for a normative policy approach for achieving influence in the neighbourhood, in practice the success of that approach has been dependent on the EU's relative economic and military power. Compared to the EU's main rival in its Eastern vicinity, the Russian Federation, the military power balance has become increasingly unfavourable to the EU, given the Russian revival of its military in the past decade. However, in economic terms the EU's power compared to that of Russia has increased over the years. Despite this shift, as a result of remaining economic ties the Russian Federation has preserved its ability to influence its Western neighbours, thereby stalling the EU's normative diffusion. As such, EU normative power has proven to be subject to geopolitical factors such as relative economic and military power. Switching to the unit-level factors that potentially impact EU normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP, this study finds that policy makers' perceptions of such systemic power factors may have played a role in a number of cases. However, more research should be conducted to assess the precise role of perceptions, as well as of other unit-level factors such as domestic constraints on policy making.

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List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
AGRI	EC DG for Agriculture and Rural Development
BTWC	Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies
CES	Common Economic Space
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CoE	Council of Europe
Coreper II	Comité des représentants permanents II
CPT	Causal-Process Tracing
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CWC	Chemical Weapons Convention
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
DEVCO	EC DG for International cooperation and Development
DG	Directorate-General
EC	European Commission
ECFR	European Council on Foreign Relations
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
ECU	Eurasian Customs Union
EEA	European Economic Area
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ESS	European Security Strategy
EU	European Union
EUAM	European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine
EUBAM	EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine
EUFOR	European Union Force
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
EUJUST THEMIS	European Union Rule of Law Mission to Georgia
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission
EUNAVFOR	European Union Naval Force Operation
FAC	Foreign Affairs Council
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis
GAERC	General Affairs and External Relations Council
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IR	International Relations
MARKT	(former) EC DG Internal Market and Services
MS	Member State

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NEAR	EC DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPE	Normative Power Europe
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PMR	Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic
PSC	Political and Security Committee
RELEX	(former) EC DG for External Relations
SANTE	EC DG for Health and Food Safety
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TEU	Treaty on European Union (2007)
TTR	Think Tank Review of the General Secretariat of the Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States of America
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization

Introduction

‘Our enduring power of attraction can spur transformation and is not aimed against any country’ (EU Global Strategy, 2016, p. 25).

Sometimes repeating a message a thousand times eventually leads to that message becoming widely accepted and regarded as the truth. Unfortunately for the European Union, this cannot be said about the above citation, which refers to the Union’s European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and which can be found in the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS). Apart from the European Union’s ‘enduring power of attraction’ being widely debated, 14 years of practice have not yet decisively shown the EU’s ability to structurally ‘spur transformation’ in the countries to its Eastern and Southern proximity that are the object of the Neighbourhood Policy. Especially the EU’s aim to diffuse its own norms on human rights, democracy, the rule of law and the free market has not yet been fruitful for the neighbourhood at large, notwithstanding that in specific countries and/or for specific norms EU policies have brought about changes for the better. While the EU’s normatively motivated transformative intentions in the neighbourhood might not be ‘aimed against any country’, in practice they do affect the vested interests of other actors who, to put it mildly, have other ideas about whether, how and by whom the neighbourhood should be transformed. In the past decade, this has increasingly been true for the conflicting interests of the European Union and the Russian Federation in their ‘shared neighbourhood’, strikingly illustrated by the case of Ukraine’s former president Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement as a result of Russian pressure, and by the way events in the country unfolded thereafter.

From a scholarly perspective, the ENP’s relative failure to reach its normative objectives bears the question of whether there are limitations to the EU’s normative power, and if so, what factors constitute these barriers. To many scholars, the idea of the European Union’s *Sui Generis* normative power is evident. Proponents of the concept of “Normative Power Europe” (NPE) have argued that the EU intrinsically possesses such normative power, regardless of what it does or says (Manners, 2002), while others – especially in recent years – have been more critical of that idea. For example, Sjursen (2006) argued that the conception of Normative Power Europe is biased and lacks precision, as no criteria have been developed to verify whether the EU is a normative power; while Larsen (2014) found that the EU is hardly perceived by the rest of the world as a normative power and therefore considers the claim to be unjustified. Others have also pointed to developments within the EU and contradictions in the EU’s external policies,

making the assumption that the EU is a normative power problematic, as becomes clear later in this study (e.g. Diez, 2005; Johansson-Nogues, 2007; Gstöhl, 2016a; Emiliano, 2016).

Regardless of how scholars perceive EU normative power, the EU Neighbourhood Policy is anchored in the EU treaties with the idea that ‘The Union shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, **founded on the values of the Union** and characterised by close and peaceful relations based on cooperation’ (TEU art. 8(1)). As such, the EU has obliged itself to engage with the neighbourhood – after all, the article speaks of ‘shall’. In practice, however, EU normative discourse on the neighbourhood has become more ambiguous. On the one hand, the EU continues to uphold its normative aspirations, as is clear from the citation from the EU Global Strategy at the beginning of this introduction. On the other hand, in recent years it has moved away from a purely value-based approach, marked for instance by the introduction of the concept of ‘principled pragmatism’ in that very same Global Strategy.

Scope and aim of the research

This study researches the extent to which limits to EU normative power stem from systemic factors like actors’ relative military and economic material capabilities. It employs a neoclassical realist lens to assess the relation between the EU’s relative material power and its normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Using the method of Causal-Process Tracing (CPT), the study tests how systemic factors condition EU normative power and subsequently searches for unit-level explanations to understand how these conditions are translated into EU normative policy choices. In line with neoclassical realist approaches to IR, the study thus conducts a two-level analysis, as reflected in the research questions introduced below.

Research questions and tentative conclusions

The research question central to this study is the following:

How does the geopolitical environment influence EU policy choices on norm diffusion in the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy?

Five sub-questions can be derived from this research question:

1. How have EU normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP developed over time?
2. How does the EU’s relative material military power condition its normative foreign policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP?

3. How does the EU's relative material economic power condition its normative foreign policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP?
4. How do policy maker's perceptions of the EU's relative material power influence EU normative foreign policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP?
5. How do domestic constraints influence EU normative foreign policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP?

Societal and scientific relevance

The (academic) discourse that promotes the EU as being a normative power has 'left many [EU policy makers] blind to the EU's limitations in diffusing its norms in practice' (Dimitrova et al., 2016, p. 10). Because this study examines precisely these limitations, it contributes to a more realistic account of how EU norms are diffused in practice. While this in itself is societally and scientifically relevant, in doing so the study can furthermore contribute to better-informed policy making in the EU institutions and a better understanding of the EU's role in the neighbourhood. Scientifically, the study inheres an interesting adaptation of neoclassical realist theory to the case of the European Union. While not being the first study to do that, a specific neoclassical realist examination of the EU value diffusion in its neighbourhood has not been carried out before.¹ Hence, the study adds to the existing stock of academic knowledge about the ENP.

Structure

This thesis is structured as follows. The first chapter examines the literature on the European Neighbourhood Policy and the concept of Normative Power Europe. Second, a theoretical chapter introduces the core concepts of neoclassical realism, thereby stipulating how these are applied. Subsequently, a third chapter establishes a research design, based on the method of causal-process tracing, which has been fit to adequately answer the research question of this study. The study then turns to the analysis, starting with Chapter four, which traces EU normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP from the establishment of the policy in 2003 up to 2017. A fifth chapter examines the development of the EU's relative military power and the related consequences for its normative power. Chapter six performs the same exercise, focussing this time on the EU's relative economic power. Chapter seven switches to

¹ With the exception of a neoclassical realist study on the ENP from the perspective of the Russian Federation: Giusti, S. (2017). *The Russian Federation's posture towards the European Neighbourhood Policy: a neoclassical realist explanation*. In S. Gstöhl and S. Schunz (Eds.). *Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy*, London: Routledge.

potential unit-level causal conditions, focussing on both domestic constraints and policy makers' perceptions. Finally, the study arrives at a conclusion and reflection.

1. Literature Review

‘If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants’, wrote Isaac Newton in 1676. For any scholar, building upon existing literary traditions is crucial in order to develop meaningful new insights. Therefore, this literature review seeks to embed this study in the multidisciplinary body of literature occupied with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). As this study focusses solely on the Eastern dimension of the ENP – i.e., Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia – literature dealing with the EU’s Southern neighbours will remain largely unaddressed. Given that EU value diffusion forms the core focus of this study, special attention is drawn to the academic debate on the concept of “Normative Power Europe” (NPE). This literature review furthermore contrasts the ENP and NPE debates with each other, before drawing attention to the shifting discourse employed by the EU when it comes to value diffusion in its neighbourhood.²

1. Scholarly research on the ENP

Since its launch in 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has attracted strong academic attention from scholars in the fields of European and EU studies, international relations, political science and public policy. According to Exadaktylos and Lyngaard (2016, p. 39), around mid-2015 over 260 research articles had been written covering the subdomain of EU foreign policy. Exadaktylos and Lyngaard (ibid.) identify the following main foci of this body of literature: a) external governance as a mode or norm; b) how socialisation and adaptation affect policy change; c) mechanisms of policy implementation; d) democracy promotion; e) conditionality; and f) membership prospects. In addition, one can identify literature revolving around: a) inclusion/exclusion issues (e.g. Celata & Coletti, 2015); b) coherence and differentiation (e.g. Natorski, 2016); c) EU actorness; and d) EU competition with other actors (e.g. Ademmer, Delcour & Wolczuk, 2016). A recent ENP literature review by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) focussing on effectiveness and coherence distinguishes six scholarships on the ENP: a) conditionality and socialisation; b) interests and values; c) ownership/local dynamics; d) visibility/perceptions of the ENP; e) external factors; and f) coherence (Kostanyan, 2017).

Despite this abundance of ENP-focussed research, its theorisation remains underdeveloped (Kostanyan, 2017, p. 8; Gstöhl, 2017, p. 4). This might be explained by the ambiguous nature of the ENP itself – between enlargement and foreign policy, and including characteristics of EU

² Note the difference between the acronyms: ENP is short for European Neighbourhood Policy, NPE for Normative Power Europe.

internal policies. Those authors who do place their research in conventional theoretic schools mainly approach the ENP from one of the following three theoretical angles: a) IR theory; b) Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA); and c) EU enlargement studies. These approaches all have their shortcomings: respectively, a fruitless dichotomisation between realist and constructivist explanations, an overly strong focus on the EU as an actor without taking local contexts into account, and a replication of concepts and theories from the EU enlargement context without acknowledging its dissimilarity to the ENP (Schunz, 2017, p. 267, 270). In Chapter two this study is embedded in the wider theoretical landscape.

2. The EU as a normative power

One issue in the research on the international role of the European Union that has spurred much scholarly debate – especially in the discussion on the ENP – is the notion of “Normative Power Europe” (NPE), coined by Ian Manners (2002) and subsequently taken forward by many others (Diez, 2005; Manners, 2006; Gerrits, 2009; Forsberg, 2011). Manners’ study belongs to a rich debate on what sort of power the EU is or should become, whereby scholars have argued for adjectives ranging from ‘civilian’ (Duchêne, 1972; Telò, 2007) and ‘military’ (Bull, 1982) to ‘post-modern’ (Cooper, 2004), ‘ethical’ (Aggestam, 2008), ‘structuring’ (Keukeleire & MacNaughtan, 2008), ‘transformative’ (Leonard, 2005) and ‘soft’ (Nye, 2004).³ The two former types of power, civilian and military (hard) power, are classical concepts in the realist tradition of IR theory, which assesses power in terms of material capabilities and, when applied to the EU, places strong emphasis on its state-likeness (Manners, 2002). However, Manners (ibid.) argues that the EU can better be assessed in terms of its ability to shape conceptions of ‘normal’, i.e., as a norm-setter, thereby shifting the focus to ‘the ideational impact of the EU’s international identity/role’ and taking a rather constructivist approach. Manners (ibid.) argues that a ‘combination of historical context, hybrid polity and legal constitution’ has led the EU to be guided by its intrinsic values, both in its engagement with the Member States and in its external relations. According to Manners, the EU’s normative basis comprises five core norms, i.e., peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, enshrined in key EU treaties and declarations (ibid.).

Various scholars have subsequently outlined how the EU diffuses its values through its international engagements. According to Manners himself, the EU does so by contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion and the cultural filter (ibid.), meaning the following:

³ See for a discussion Gerrits (2009).

- Contagion: the unintentional diffusion of ideas from the EU to other political actors;
- Informational diffusion: through strategic communications;
- Procedural diffusion: through the institutionalisation of relationships between the EU and third parties;
- Transference: through the exchange of goods, trade, aid and/or technical assistance with third parties;
- Overt diffusion: through the physical presence of the EU in third countries and organisations (e.g. the EU Delegations); and
- Cultural filter: 'the impact of international norms and political learning in third states and organizations leading to learning, adaptation or rejection of norms' (Manners 2002, p. 245).

What Manners fails to do is to operationalise and/or theoretically explain these mechanisms. It remains unclear, for example, how being physically present in a third country brings about a transmission of norms towards that host country. Forsberg (2011) identifies only four (partially overlapping) mechanisms of normative power diffusion, slightly closer to an operational level: persuasion, invoking norms, shaping discourse of what is normal, and leading by example.

- Persuasion (largely similar to Manners' informational diffusion): through the dissemination of information;
- Invoking norms (close to Manners' procedural diffusion): through the institutionalisation of a relationship leading to mutual commitments;
- Shaping the discourse of what is normal; and
- The power of example: being a model for other actors.

Sarah Poli (2016a, p. 2), operating in a slightly different strand of literature, not necessarily concerned with the question of what type of actor the EU is in international relations but directly applying the idea of EU normative power diffusion to the ENP, also identifies four means: as essential elements of legally binding agreements, through pursuing countries to ratify and implement multilateral/regional agreements based on universal values, as a prerequisite for financial assistance, and through restrictive measures.

3. Normative power as a concept: Critiques and usefulness

As noted above, the concept of NPE has provoked much scholarly critique and discussion, revolving around the questions of: a) whether the EU is a normative power; b) what the theoretical implications of using the NPE framework are; and c) whether the concept of NPE is a useful lens for assessing EU foreign policy. The first question is an empirical one and is discussed in the fourth section of this chapter. The other two are reflected upon below.

Cebeci's critique on the NPE discourse is that it contributes to the construction of an ideal EU meta-narrative that is not in line with actual EU practice (Cebeci, 2012). Cebeci (ibid.) notes that

NPE proponents lay the foundation for the EU's ability to define what is normal in its differentness from traditional states. Whereas in the NPE approach the EU is thereby believed to go beyond notions of sovereignty and territoriality, Cebeci argues these are actually transferred only from the state to the EU level. Therefore, the argument that the EU's normative disposition follows from 'the EU ... [being] constituted differently' does not hold. Moreover, she refutes the NPE idea that the EU is post-sovereign by pointing to the dominative dimension of the EU's foreign policy present in the EU's normative power diffusion (ibid.).

Second, also according to Cebeci, the terms *normative* and *power* are inconsistent, as it is problematic to apply the term 'power' when regarding the EU as post-sovereign, given that the existence of the EU stems from a rejection of power politics. This realist line of thought follows the idea of Bull (1982) that a civilian power Europe is a 'contradiction in terms', yet replacing 'civilian' with 'normative' (Cebeci, 2012).

Thirdly, Sjursen (2006) argues that the conceptualisation of the EU as a normative power could be legitimate, but that a lack of identifying criteria and assessment standards make it impossible to qualify, substantiate or reject such a conceptualisation for the time being. Therefore, the current conception of NPE lacks precision and is normatively biased. Sjursen jocularly notes that 'the fact that it [the NPE concept] corresponds very closely to the EU's own description of its international role could be enough to set the alarm bells ringing' (Sjursen, 2006, p. 235).

A fourth critique is offered by Diez (2005), who argues that normative power is, in contrast to NPE arguments, not exclusively held by the European Union. According to Diez, especially the creation of a self- (and consequently 'other'-) image that a normative power view brings about has been historically evident elsewhere, notably in the US (ibid.).

4. Normative power diffusion and the ENP

The EU normative power diffusion, or the externalisation of its internal norms, both political and economic, has been particularly evident in the ENP (Gstöhl, 2016a, p. 58). As Ghazaryan (2016, p. 11) notes, 'exporting EU values is a means to an end, i.e., the achievement of the EU's wider policy objectives of securing a stable and safe zone around its post-2004 and 2007 enlargement borders'. As such, in the ENP the EU pursues two classic sets of goals distinguished in foreign policy theory, i.e., possession goals and milieu goals (Ghazaryan, 2014, p. 13). Kostanyan (2017, p. 39) describes the former as 'strategic objectives', or an actor's narrow economic and security interests, while defining the latter as 'dealing with the transformation of an actor's external environment while trying to combine altruism and self-interest'. Whereas in the academic and policy discussion on values versus interests the two are often depicted as mutually exclusive, it

should be emphasised that when looking upon EU value diffusion in the ENP as a milieu goal, conflict between self-interest and altruism does not necessarily emerge. However, it is argued in the literature (e.g. Youngs, 2008) that the EU's simultaneous pursuit of both possession and milieu goals can be problematic, the most evident example being the tension between the objectives of democratic reform (milieu) and stability (possession).

5. New political realities and perceptions

Scholars have identified a multitude of developments that possibly undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of EU normative power diffusion, namely: a) increased instability; b) increased normative competition; c) internal issues; and d) the decreasing perception of the EU's normative power.

First, increased instability in the neighbourhood has made clear that the EU has largely failed to attain its possession goal of creating a 'ring of friends surrounding the Union' as once envisaged by former Commission President Prodi (2002). Instead, as Swedish former Prime Minister Carl Bildt noted in 2015, to both the East and the South the direct vicinity of the EU has turned into a 'ring of fire' (Reuters, 2015). The Donbas conflict and annexation of Crimea in Ukraine have added yet another "frozen conflict" to the list of territorial disputes in the post-Soviet space, indicating a backlash in the stabilisation of the region. At the same time, none of the six Eastern ENP countries' political systems have made a decisive turn towards what in EU discourse is called "deep and sustainable democracy", with some countries such as former ENP "poster child" Moldova even experiencing democratic setbacks (Montesano, van der Togt & Zweers, 2016, p. 2). As Haukkala (2017, p. 78) notes, 'the EU has been faced with a host of markers of change, both trends and great events alike, that have put it into an increasingly reactive mode'. This has negatively affected the assertion of the EU as a normative power.

A second point in question is that in the ENP, the EU is increasingly confronted with positive normative competition by other actors, notably Russia. According to Romanova (2016), since 2011 the latter has developed an alternative value framework, emphasising traditional family values and religion, thereby credibly defying the EU's value framework, which it itself largely regards as universal. Although it can be doubted whether normative competition from Russia is genuinely positive, i.e., actually providing a comprehensive alternative set of norms and not only instrumental in challenging the EU's norms, it does undermine the EU's claim of universality, making it clear that, as Cebeci (2017, p. 64) notes, 'defining the 'normal' for others is [...] an act of political power'.

Third, a number of internal issues have undermined the idea of Normative Power Europe. Emiliano (2016, p. 4) of the College of Europe argues, for example, that the way in which the EU is handling the refugee crisis goes directly against its proclaimed values, leading the EU to lose 'moral credibility' and therefore normative power. Indeed, as Nicolaïdis and Nicolaïdis (2006, pp. 348 - 349) stress: 'Fundamentally, normative power can only be applied credibly under a key condition: consistency between internal policies and external prescriptions and actions'. Smith (2016, p. 456) puts this even more clearly:

Idealistic ambitions ... have a price for political actors when they fail to live up to their ideals, or deliberately violate them through action or inaction; such actors lose credibility/legitimacy at best and can be accused of hypocrisy at worst. This is especially problematic in democratic polities or international organizations pursuing normative or 'aspirational' goals'.

Along such lines critique has also been vented by non-EU countries, with especially Russia voicing that the EU 'does not live up to its expectations and therefore cannot reprimand others and give lectures on human rights' (Romanova, 2016, p. 385), and scholars noting that 'the Europeans have difficulties in complying with their own norms' (Cebeci, 2012, p. 576). Even Manners himself acknowledges that 'consistency is important in ensuring that the EU is not promoting norms with which it does itself not comply' (Manners, 2010, p. 39), yet without recognising the current absence of such consistency and the theoretical implications for the NPE framework.

Moreover, whereas the 2011 revision of the ENP expanded its focus to nearly all imaginable policy sectors and the EU thereby showed its high ambitions as 'transformation entrepreneur' in its vicinity (Bouris & Schumacher, 2017, p. 2), the simultaneous widespread rise of right-wing populism amongst the EU Member States and in the European Parliament elections of 2014 implied a contradictory trend. This nationalist re-emergence has eroded Manners' principal foundation of the EU's normative power, i.e., his notion that 'the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is' (Manners, 2002, p. 252), by exposing that also within the EU, national values for an increasing share of its citizens supersede European values.

Fourth, the perception of the EU's normative power abroad, which in turn affects EU normative power itself, is low and further decreasing. Larsen (2014), linking together the strands of literature on external perceptions of the EU and on NPE, argues on the basis of various studies that the EU is widely regarded as an economic rather than a normative power. Interestingly, however, he also notes that the Eastern neighbours, with the exception of Belarus, conceive of the EU as normatively attractive, and that these countries' citizens do associate those EU values

presented earlier in this study with the EU, notwithstanding that in these countries 'trade and economic development remain the areas where the most important role for the EU is envisaged' (Larsen, 2014, p. 904).

6. The development of the EU's normative power diffusion in the ENP

It is interesting to see how the developments laid down in the previous section relate to the EU's ability to employ its normative power in the neighbourhood. Various authors have analysed this issue in general (e.g. Johansson-Nogués, 2007; Haukkala, 2008a; Manners, 2010; Del Sarto, 2016), or by zooming in on its Southern dimension (Bicchi, 2006; Pace, 2009; Powel, 2009) or Eastern dimension (Haukkala, 2008b; Stewart 2008). Haukkala (2008a, p. 1617) thereby already argued in 2008 that the EU was losing its normative position in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Johansson-Nogués (2007, p. 182) concluded one year earlier that 'the many contradictions inherent in the multifaceted EU's foreign policy conducted in the Union's relations with neighbouring countries makes it difficult, for the time being, to fully concur with the assertion that the Union is a normative power'.

Looking more specifically into the diffusion of norms and values, a recent wave of literature has sought to identify the conceptual and implementational flaws in the EU's promotion of values in the ENP, whereby Gstöhl (2016a, pp. 61 - 66) gives the most comprehensive overview. She argues that the EU values are: a) ambiguous; b) mutually conflicting; and c) increasingly subject to competing values in the Arab world and post-Soviet space (ibid.). Subsequently, with regard to the mechanisms for the diffusion of values, she argues that: a) targeted countries have been incapable or unwilling to adhere to the EU values; b) the EU has been inconsistent in the application of its values which undermined the credibility of its policies; and c) the EU faces normative competition from other actors such as Russia (ibid.).

Where does this leave the EU's normative power over its Eastern neighbours? Given Belarus' economic and political focus towards Russia, the EU's ability to foster change in the country has been negligible. While Azerbaijan is a more active member of the ENP, the EU has not yet forwarded an effective reply to the country's low interest in replicating EU norms. With Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, the EU has been more successful in diffusing its values, and relations are on a higher level, reflected among others in advancements in visa liberalisation and the conclusion of Association Agreements (AAs) including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs). Finally, EU norm diffusion in Armenia has been partly successful despite the country's decision in 2013 to terminate Association Agreement negotiations. Successes of and

barriers to EU norm diffusion in the six Eastern neighbours will be further elaborated upon in Chapters four to seven of this study.

7. The EU's shifting discourse: From idealism to pragmatism?

Faced with the ineffectiveness of its policies, a lack of progress or even a setback with regard to democratisation and stabilisation of the neighbourhood, and normative competition by other actors, the EU revised the ENP in 2011 and commenced on another review in 2015. The corresponding communications allow their readers to trace continuity and change not only in the ENP policy framework but also in the EU discourse on its normative power diffusion, especially when compared to the initial European Commission 'wider Europe' communication from 2003 and the ENP Strategy paper from 2004 that then set the stage for the ENP. At the same time, in mid-2016 the EU updated its 2003 Security Strategy (ESS) in the form of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS). In both documents, the neighbourhood is marked as a key priority, and hence these texts also provide great insight into the EU's shifting discourse on the region.

The 2004 ENP strategy paper discusses the role of values as follows:

The privileged relationship with neighbours will build on mutual commitment to common values principally within the fields of the rule of law, good governance, the respect for human rights, including minority rights, the promotion of good neighbourly relations, and the principles of market economy and sustainable development (COM (2004) 374 Final, p. 3).

What is striking is that the document speaks of *common values*, whereas it can be discussed whether this was (and still is) the case. The text furthermore reads that 'the level of ambition of the EU's relationships with its neighbours will take into account the extent to which these values are effectively shared' (ibid., p. 3). Hence the Commission already recognised that values might not be effectively shared with the ENP countries and that relationships with them will at least take this into account.

Jumping ahead a decade, the 2015 ENP review restates a commitment to pursuing values, which are now called 'universal' (JOIN (2015)6 final, p. 2). Of course, the claim that values are universal aims to legitimise the by then contested EU normative disposition in the ENP. As Diez (2005, p. 614) states, 'the discourse of the EU as a normative power constructs a particular self of the EU ..., while it attempts to change others through the spread of particular norms'. Somewhat in contradiction, the 2015 review recognises that not all partners aspire to EU rules and standards, and therefore concludes that differentiation and mutual ownership should be increased (JOIN (2015)6 final, p. 2). Although standards do not equal values, the former are effectively based on the latter, and therefore it follows that the Commission recognises that partner countries might

not be so fond of importing EU values as initially thought. The 2016 EUGS furthermore introduces the concept of “principled pragmatism” as a principle to guide the EU’s external policies in the coming years (EUGS, 2016, p. 8). This is a clear shift from an approach made conditional upon the EU set of values to a more lenient approach, and as such might strongly impact the EU practice of value diffusion.

Although one cannot speak of a complete 180-degree turn in EU discourse on normative power diffusion, there are surely minor changes in the EU’s approach to the issue. This discourse shift naturally raises the question of how the EU is adapting its policies in practice to overcome the flaws related to its value diffusion. Although scholars have repeatedly researched the revisions of the ENP, most recently in the bundle edited by Bouris and Schumacher (2017), such research has not specifically looked upon the EU as a norm-setter. Therefore, this study aims to provide more clarity as to the question of how the EU is adapting its value diffusion strategies in practice and what factors confine EU value diffusion. The following chapter provides a theoretical framework through which these issues will be analysed.

2. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical section first aims to clarify how this study relates to the Normative Power Europe (NPE) framework. Second, it introduces the IR school of neoclassical realism, through which this study will assess the normative disposition of the EU in the neighbourhood. Neoclassical realism, like other forms of realism, considers systemic (power) factors to explain the general direction of a state's behaviour (or in the case of this study, that of the EU) in foreign policy making. However, in addition, it attributes explanatory power to unit-level factors such as domestic constraints and policy makers' perceptions of power capabilities. As such, compared to purely liberal or purely systemic approaches, it offers a more comprehensive framework with which to study the ENP, thereby allowing for a better informed and more detailed assessment of the policy. Third, the chapter relates neoclassical realism to the case of the EU, thereby seeking to overcome theoretical hurdles related to EU actorness in international affairs, and provide a justification for using neoclassical realist lenses to scrutinise EU foreign policy behaviour. Finally, it applies the introduced theories to the case of EU normative power diffusion in the Eastern dimension of the ENP, which leads the author to a number of propositions.

1. Normative Power Europe

As became clear in the literature review, the assertion that the EU intrinsically is a normative power is problematic in both a theoretical and an empirical sense. Therefore, and unlike Manners, this study does not assume that the EU is a normative power. Instead, and given the fact that in its treaties and communications the EU has explicitly emphasised the ENP's value-driven approach, it employs a neoclassical realist lens to examine the normative aspects of the European Neighbourhood Policy, thereby only assuming that the EU potentially has the ability to deploy normative power. Hence, it turns around Manners' notion that 'the most important factor shaping the international role of the EU is not what it does or what it says, but what it is' (Manners, 2002, p. 252). Namely, this study focusses on exactly *what the EU does* (in the ENP) and *what it says* (the EU discourse), while devoting less attention to *what it is*. This becomes clearer when looking at Gstöhl's (2016a, p. 59) definition of NPE, which is that NPE 'conceives of the EU as a value-driven foreign policy actor based on the core norms that form its own identity'. This study tests whether the EU was and/or is *a value-driven foreign policy actor* by looking at its normative power diffusion, thereby examining the case of the Eastern dimension of the ENP. It does not seek to conclude on *the core norms that form its own identity*, notwithstanding the idea that the norms and values potentially diffused by the EU may find their roots in what the EU intrinsically is, e.g. in the EU's legal constitution.

2. Neoclassical realism

As with all realist schools, neoclassical realism considers the international sphere to be defined by anarchy. However, it assumes that what states primarily seek is influence (as opposed to other schools of realism which focus exclusively on power). Neoclassical realism holds that the systemic factor of a state's relative material power is the main determinant of state behaviour in the international sphere, but that in the short and medium term state foreign policies depend on domestic (cognitive) factors such as state perceptions and calculations of relative power, state structures and government capabilities to exercise power (Rose, 1998, p. 146). It thus attributes explanatory power to variables in all three of Kenneth Waltz's images of analysis: the personal (first) level (perceptions), the state (second) level (state structures) and the systemic (third) level (Waltz, 1959). Note that not absolute but relative power – i.e., the material power of a state vis-à-vis other states – is, in line with neorealist accounts of International Relations theory, the key explanatory mechanism in the neoclassical realist paradigm. The school of thought partially bridges the gap between constructivist and classical realist accounts of international relations by taking into account both systemic and unit-level variables when examining state behaviour. Whereas for classical realists systemic factors translate directly into individual state behaviour, in the neoclassical paradigm such a transmission belt is distorted by unit-level variables (Rose, 1998, p. 147). By complementing the classical realist paradigm with liberal – also referred to as *Innenpolitik* theory⁴ – insights, neoclassical realism provides a more realistic account of why states act the way they do, and thereby successfully refutes the often heard allegation that the realist school is a-historical, i.e., incapable of explaining actual historical developments.

Although neoclassical realism has not yet put forward a comprehensive and theoretically-informed set of domestic factors that act as intervening variables between relative power and state behaviour, it becomes clear from the literature that the scholarship distinguishes between two broad categories of such factors (Kunz & Saltzman, 2012, p. 102). The first of these is decision-makers' perceptions and calculations of relative power – in other words, not the actual relative power of a state, but how those in charge of the state's foreign policy perceive that relative power, is decisive for how they conduct that state's foreign policy (Rose, 1998, p. 158; Taliaferro, Lobell & Ripsman, 2009, p. 4). As Toje and Kunz note, 'the international system is not as easy to read as neorealists assume' (Toje & Kunz, 2012, p. 3). The second category relates to domestic constraints to foreign policy (Kunz & Saltzman, 2012, p. 102). An example is the

⁴ *Innenpolitik* theory assumes that foreign policy directly results from domestic politics (Rose, p. 146, 1998).

strength of a country's state apparatus, or what Zakaria has coined as 'state power' (Rose, 1998, p. 162). Note that this is not equal to national power, but only comprises that fraction of national power that governments can extract and mobilise for their foreign policies, i.e., the means at the disposal of decision-makers in politico-military institutions. This is closely related to the concept of *national political power*, as introduced by Christensen, which could be defined as the degree of political momentum a state faces to exercise foreign policy (Rose, 1998, p. 163). A third domestic constraint as identified by neoclassical realist scholars is formed by the degree of influence domestic societal actors and interest groups have on the state apparatus, which in turn depends on the level of autonomy a state has from society. In another line of thought, Schweller (Rose, 1998, p. 164) points towards the nature of a state's goals/interests as an intervening variable, which is the degree to which states aim to preserve the status quo or overthrow it (revisionism). It remains unclear, however, whether he considers this a unit-level or systemic factor, and hence this factor is not addressed in this study.

3. Neoclassical realism and the EU

When seeking to apply neoclassical realist theories in a European Union context, one runs into several theoretical difficulties. It is no coincidence that most neoclassical realists take the grand strategies of the United States, China, Soviet Union or other great powers as their object of study. This section seeks to adapt the paradigm to fit EU reality. It furthermore provides a justification for why this study considers neoclassical realism to offer a relevant framework for assessing EU normative policies in the ENP.

Although noting that the EU is not a state but an international institution comprising a group of states is clearly stating the obvious, the theoretical consequences of this notion for examining the EU through a neoclassical realist lens are complicated. Relating this to the two-level (systemic and unit-level) analysis that arises from neoclassical realist theoretical conceptions, on the systemic level this study maintains that the EU is 'a major power impacting upon contemporary international relations' (Hill & Smith, 2011, p. 8). The EU is hence regarded as a unitary actor subject to the very same systemic forces as other major global powers in the international sphere, and can thus be studied by means of Kenneth Waltz's third image of international relations – i.e., as subject to the incentives provided in the international system. However, at the unit level, the divergent institutional configuration of the EU compared to that of a state requires us to obtain a valid answer to the question of how to account for intra-EU bargaining as a determinant of EU foreign policy. It should thereby be acknowledged that 'EU positions, decisions and actions in the world are produced as a result of often complex interactions in a multilevel system, involving the member states singly and collectively, as well

as the common institutions' (Hill & Smith, 2011, p. 6). As described above, many unit-level variables as distinguished by neoclassical realist scholars are related to the capabilities of state institutions to conduct foreign policy, which in turn depend on the relations between state and society. To make these variables 'fit' EU reality, the EU can be conceptualised as a "superstate" performing state-like functions. It is then crucial to identify what can be regarded as the EU's "state apparatus" concerned with the ENP – in other words, to identify those policy-makers responsible for ENP decision making and daily implementation, as well as communications. While it lies outside the scope of this study to provide a full institutional overview of ENP decision making, some relevant basic aspects are highlighted below, thereby paying special attention to the relationship between EU Member States and EU institutions.

While formerly being in the hands of the European Commission DG RELEX, with additional roles for the European Commission's sectoral DGs, as of the Lisbon Treaty, the ENP is a joint venture of the EEAS and the European Commission. The EEAS is thereby responsible for annual progress reports for the neighbourhood countries, plays a strong role in the allocation of budgets, and leads the negotiations of AAs and DCFTAs (Kostanyan, 2017, pp. 122-123). The European Commission, on the other hand, while conceding the bulk of DG RELEX activities to the EEAS, has maintained its grip on the ENP, with the Commissioner of DG NEAR (the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations) having been responsible for the ENP since 2015. Formal responsibility of budget allocation lies with this DG, which also provides expertise and resources to the EEAS. Additionally, DG DEVCO, Trade, Energy, Home, AGRI, Health, SANTE and MARKT remain directly involved with sectoral policies in the neighbourhood (Kostanyan, 2017, p. 117). It should be noted that in both the pre- and post-Lisbon era, the EU Member States, through the working groups of the Council, the PSC and Coreper II and through the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) itself, possess considerable decision making power and furthermore act as a principal through what is called 'police patrolling', i.e., executing 'immediate supervision' (Kostanyan, 2017, p. 119). The EU "state apparatus" thus comprises both Member States and EU institutions, thereby constituting a two-level game, in which the Member States can be regarded as the executive and the institutions the bureaucracy. These insights will be adequately reflected later in this thesis, notably in Section 7.1, which analyses domestic constraints, and in the rest of Chapter seven, which focusses on perceptions of policymakers.

4. An appropriate framework?

There are several reasons for this study to consider neoclassical realism an appropriate framework with which to assess EU foreign policy in general and EU normative approaches in

the ENP more specifically. First, and on a general note, the ENP scholarship often lacks a theoretically-informed perspective on the neighbourhood (Gstöhl, 2017, p. 4; Kostanyan 2017, p. 8).⁵ According to Walt, this low level of theoretical ambition is problematic, as '[t]heory remains essential for diagnosing events, explaining their causes, prescribing responses, and evaluating the impact of different policies' (Gstöhl, 2017, p. 4). Second, despite the end of history having been declared in 1992 (Fukuyama), in recent times geopolitical power competition seems to have made a comeback, especially in light of the shift towards multipolarity in the international system. In contrast to liberal theories and the NPE paradigm, neoclassical realism takes into account systemic factors and hence the geopolitical environment. (Neoclassical) realist conceptions of IR are therefore highly relevant, as both liberal and constructivist approaches lack explanatory power for these developments. Third, in contrast to purely systemic approaches, neoclassical realism allows for hermeneutic or cognitive unit-level factors as key filters of systemic incentives to country behaviour. By complementing classical and neorealist approaches with constructivist and *Innenpolitik* insights, it adds to overcoming what has, especially in the context of the ENP, been observed as an unfruitful dichotomisation between realist and constructivist explanations (Schunz, 2017, p. 270).

Fourth, realist approaches to IR are descriptive rather than normative or prescriptive. As such, they create distance between the object of study and the researcher when assessing the ENP, which is often lacking in the NPE scholarship (Toje & Kunz, 2012, p. 3). Blatter and Haverland warn that engaging in case studies – which form the bulk of European Neighbourhood Policy Research – always bears the risk of researchers becoming 'too closely affiliated to the actors they investigate and tak[ing] their statements at face value' (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 102). As Hyde-Price argues, it is precisely these dynamics that are at play in the NPE scholarship, whose proponents look upon normative power as something 'good' and whose approaches are hence informed by their ideals (Hyde-Price, 2006, p. 218; also see Sjursen 2006, p. 235). This is problematic because 'when the object of study is seen as embodying the core values one believes in, it is difficult to achieve any critical distance' (Hyde-Price, 2006, p. 218). It is furthermore problematic because scholarships have an undeniable impact on practitioners, as clearly noted by Dimitrova et al., who, as already cited in the introduction to this thesis, observe that 'defining the EU as a normative power has led to an almost apologetic discourse by some

⁵ Note that recently various scholars have acknowledged the urge for more theoretically-informed research on the ENP and have taken the first steps toward this, notably Gstöhl, S. & Schunz, S. (Eds.) (2017), 'Theorizing the European Neighbourhood Policy'.

EU policy makers, which left many blind to the EU's limitations in diffusing its norms in practice' (Dimitrova et al., 2016, p. 10).

5. Propositions

One of the main rationales of a theoretical framework is to arrive at a number of propositions for the specific object that is being studied. Remember that the central research question of this study is the following: How does the geopolitical environment influence EU policy choices on norm diffusion in the Eastern dimension of the ENP?

Gideon Rose provides a non-case-specific hypothesis stemming from the neoclassical realist paradigm:

Neoclassical realism predicts that an increase in relative material power will lead eventually to a corresponding expansion in the ambition and scope of a country's foreign policy activity – and that a decrease in such power will lead eventually to a corresponding contraction (Rose, 1998, p. 167).

There are two additional predictions to be made. First, Rose points out that the process of foreign policy adjustment to shifts in relative material power might be neither gradual nor uniform, as apart from these objective trends policy makers' subjective perceptions of such trends determine state behaviour (Rose, 1998, p. 167). Second, the more restrained policy-makers are in their foreign policy conduct – as a result of a lack of ability to employ the resources necessary for such conduct, of powerful civil society actors influencing foreign policy decision making, and/or of the absence of political momentum – the longer it will take for relative material power shifts to translate into foreign policy adjustments (ibid.).

Applying the general predictions of neoclassical realist theory as depicted above to the case of the EU normative disposition in the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy leads to the following propositions:

- a) A relative decline in the material power of the EU vis-à-vis other actors in the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, notably Russia, leads the EU to scale back the ambition and scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy. A relative rise in material power has the opposite effect.
- b) Given that the European Neighbourhood Policy approaches the neighbourhood in a highly normative matter, a scaling back of the ambition and scope of the ENP as in proposition A is most evident in the normative disposition of the EU in the neighbourhood. As a result of increased power competition, the EU has thus decreased its attention to the normative aspects of the ENP.

- c) EU policy makers' perceptions and/or calculations of relative material power have intervened in the adjustment of the ambition and scope of the ENP as expected in proposition A, leading to such adjustment having become non-gradual and/or non-uniform.
- d) Constraints on EU policy-makers as a result of a lack of ability to employ the resources necessary for their foreign policy conduct, of powerful civil society actors influencing foreign policy decision making, and/or of the absence of political momentum, have potentially delayed the EU policy response in the neighbourhood to shifting material power as expected in proposition A.

These propositions will be tested by employing a research methodology as outlined in the following chapter.

3. Research Methodology

This qualitative study researches how dynamics in the geopolitical environment have influenced EU policy choices on norm diffusion in the European Neighbourhood Policy over time. This chapter introduces a research design which is fit to adequately do so and which logically derives from the theoretical framework introduced in the previous chapter. It thereby primarily draws upon the book by Blatter and Haverland, 'Designing case studies: Explanatory approaches in small-N research' (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). After introducing the research method, the chapter outlines how the variables are operationalised. The focus then shifts to case selection and data generation before elaborating on validity and reliability. Finally, the chapter addresses the societal and scientific relevance of this study.

1. Research method

While discussing neoclassical realist research methods, Toje and Kunz argue the following:

Methodologically speaking, analysts wanting to understand any particular case need to do justice to the full complexity of the causal chain linking relative material power and foreign policy outputs. The conclusion to be drawn for neoclassical realist research design is that it will rely heavily on in-depth case studies and process-tracing. (Toje & Kunz, 2012, p.6)

In the same bundle, Reichwein adds: 'The aim of neoclassical realism is to trace precisely the ways systemic, cognitive and domestic factors, which are clearly linked, or integrated, in a causal chain, shape the foreign policy of a state' (Reichwein, 2012, p. 36). Therefore, the method of causal-process tracing is most appropriate for this study. This especially holds as CPT shows 'a clear affinity ... to Y-centred research questions because ... [it] is especially suited to tracing the combination and interaction of divergent causal factors in the process that leads to an outcome' (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 84).

Blatter and Haverland define CPT as 'an analytical approach that draws causal inferences based on causal-process observations with the goal of identifying the sequential and situational configurations of causal factors that lead to specific outcomes' (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 142). They argue that CPT 'is geared toward identifying the causal chains, causal conjunctions, and causal mechanisms that make specific kinds of outcomes possible' (ibid.). The features that distinguish CPT from other research approaches, as put forth by Blatter and Haverland, are twofold. First, CPT is based on configurational thinking, which posits that: a) 'a plurality of causal factors work together to create an outcome'; b) there are multiple pathways to achieve an outcome; and c) equal causal factors can have different effects in divergent situations (ibid., p. 81). Second, CPT assumes that 'causality plays out differently depending on the spatial and temporal setting', which 'provides the ontological fundament for one of the central

epistemological features of the CPT approach: causal inferences are drawn on the basis of temporal and spatial contiguity' (ibid., p. 91). The research goals of this study coincide with one of the main typical research goals of CPT, which is to provide comprehensive explanations of single, important events/outcomes – the latter being in this case EU normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP.

The CPT approach does not speak of dependent and independent variables, but instead refers to the former as outcomes, with the CPT equivalent of the latter being causal conditions (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 114). As Haverland and Blatter note, 'CPT is always searching for causal conditions that are individually necessary [i.e. – crucial to an outcome] and, in combination with other causal conditions, sufficient for the outcome', with sufficient meaning that the specific combination of causal conditions always leads to a specific outcome (notwithstanding that this outcome may have also emerged from another combination of causal conditions) (ibid., p. 93). In the case of this study such a configuration is considered a causal chain, in which systemic factors through unit-level factors lead to a specific outcome.

For the empirical analysis of this study, it is crucial to discuss here how CPT – and thus also this study – draws causal inferences. CPT distinguishes between three empirical fundamentals for doing so: 'comprehensive storylines', 'smoking guns' and 'confessions'. The former provide narratives of how potentially relevant causal conditions on a macro-level play out in time and space. These are then complemented with meso-level oriented 'smoking guns': 'empirical observations that provide certainty and density with respect to the pathway leading from cause to effect' (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 81), given that conditions of temporal and spatial contiguity are fulfilled. Finally, 'confessions' allow causal conditions to be additionally explained by focussing on micro-level 'insights into the perceptions, motivations, and anticipations of important actors in crucial moments' (ibid., p. 110). Taken together, these three types of empirical observations allow this study to make adequate conclusions regarding the necessity and/or sufficiency of causal conditions and configurations for the outcomes that it researches.

2. Operationalisation of outcome

The outcome under scrutiny in this study is 'EU policy choices on norm diffusion in the Eastern dimension of the ENP'. These can be operationalised as **the degree to which the EU in its cooperation with third countries seeks to diffuse its values within those countries**. The values under discussion can be found in the Treaty of Lisbon (TEU), which stipulates that 'the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of

law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities' (TEU, art. 2). The treaty furthermore states:

In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter. (TEU, art. 5)

A number of the above factors can be considered as inherent to the EU normative approach and manifest themselves in the EU's policy choices on norm diffusion in the Eastern dimension of the ENP as follows:

- Promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including those of minorities and the rights of the child;
- Promotion of peace;
- Democracy promotion;
- Promotion of the rule of law;
- Promotion of international law; and
- Promotion of sustainable development.

The promotion of free and fair trade and transition to a free market economy plays a strong role in the EU's policies towards its neighbours. This study, however, considers such economic factors, in line with the general NPE framework, to fall outside the scope of EU normative power (Dimitrova et al., 2016, p. 10). Instead, they fall within potential systemic causal conditions, as they constitute economic power instead of normative power. It is precisely the relation between these two forms of power (as well as between military power and normative power) that this study searches to expose.

Following Poli (2016a, p. 2), this study takes into account four channels through which the EU seeks to accomplish the above normative objectives:

- As essential elements of legally binding agreements;
- Through pursuing countries to sign and implement multilateral/regional agreements based on universal values;
- As a prerequisite for financial assistance; and
- Through restrictive measures.

As such, indicators for the degree to which the EU seeks to employ its normative approach are the following:

- The degree to which the aforementioned values are implicitly or explicitly reflected in mutual agreements between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries;

- The degree to which the EU vocally pursues target countries to sign and implement multilateral/regional agreements based on universal values;
- The degree to which the EU makes financial support to target countries conditional upon adherence to the aforementioned values; and
- The degree to which the EU employs restrictive measures in the case of non-adherence to the aforementioned values.

Moreover, EU normative policy choices are reflected in more general EU strategic communications that do not form a part of actual policy towards a target country but provide the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Therefore, a fifth indicator is:

- The degree to which the aforementioned values are implicitly or explicitly reflected in EU (strategic) communications.

These indicators are addressed in Chapter four, which examines EU normative policy choices towards the six countries to its Eastern proximity.

3. Operationalisation of potential systemic causal conditions

This study operationalises the potential causal conditions by laying down specific indicators. The potential systemic causal condition in the research question – i.e., geopolitical environment – can, following the neoclassical realist framework, be operationalised as the relative material power of the EU. These can be further defined as ‘the capabilities or resources ... with which states can influence each other’, while replacing ‘states’ with the EU at large (Wohlforth, in: Rose, 1998, p. 151). Following Reichwein, this study posits both military and economic capabilities to be crucial material power (Reichwein, 2012, p. 38). While the former directly condition the security or “hard power” of an actor, the latter prove to be of major importance in the specific case of the European Neighbourhood Policy, as various actors possess considerable economic clout, employ that clout as a geopolitical instrument, and are moreover mostly perceived as a power in economic terms (Larsen, 2014, p. 904). This especially holds for the EU itself, whose military power remains highly constrained because these competences largely remain in the hands of its Member States (as outlined in Chapter five). It is important to note that material power is considered in this study to be relative – i.e., vis-à-vis other actors. As such, economic and military power need to be further conceptually demarcated in order to make comparisons of such power possible.

Military power can best be defined as **the capacity of an actor to exercise influence over another actor through the actual or threatened exertion of force**. As such, this study derives the military power of an actor from real-world events in which it is (potentially) employed. Of

course, the size and credibility of the actual or threatened exertion of force is determined by a number of absolute factors, notably:

- Size of the actors' armed forces;
- Contemporaneity / technical advancement of the armed forces;
- Nature of the country's armed forces (navy / ground troops / defensive / offensive);
- Combat readiness of an actor's armed forces; and
- Capacity of the state to turn resources into military capabilities.

These factors are addressed in Chapter five when assessing the EU and other actors' military power in reference to the six countries in the EU's Eastern vicinity.

Economic power in the context of foreign policy supersedes mere quantitative indicators such as GDP or GDP growth. As a geopolitical instrument, economic power can best be defined as **the capacity of an actor to exercise influence over another actor through economic means**, or in short: **economic clout**. Such clout can be the result of coercive, attractive, cooperative, or competitive economic means, under which categories this study employs the following indicators:

- Coercive factors
 - o Capacity to successfully implement economic sanctions to the target country.
- Attractive
 - o GDP and GDP growth;
 - o Openness of the trade regime;
 - o Similarity of economic regime with the target country;
 - o Level and successfulness of economic diplomacy; and
 - o Historical economic ties with the target country.
- Cooperative
 - o Level of Foreign Direct Investment in the target country;
 - o Level of foreign workers in the target country and the level of remittances from the target country; and
 - o Level of economic aid and/or sectoral technical support to a country.
- Competitive
 - o Possession of key strategic sectors (e.g. energy) and ability to employ these as leverage in economic relations with the target country.

These factors are addressed in Chapter six, which assesses the EU and other actors' economic power over the previously defined Eastern European states.

4. Operationalisation of potential unit-level causal conditions

The potential unit-level causal conditions in this study are: a) policy makers' perceptions of relative power; and b) domestic constraints.

Central to neoclassical realism is that 'the distribution of power among states and systemic stimuli are a matter of perception of those who make foreign policy in a particular state regarding its situations and power capabilities, the environment in which it is embedded and the threats with which it is confronted' (Reichwein, 2012, p. 42). In its operationalisation of perceptions, this study thus includes relative material power, leading to the following indicators:

- Policy makers' perceptions of relative military material power; and
- Policy makers' perceptions of relative economic material power.

Clearly, these indicators should be sought at the policy making level, which in our case, as outlined in the theoretical framework, comprises the European Commission DG NEAR, as well as the EEAS, with a controlling role for the MS. In Chapter seven they are assessed.

The second potential unit-level causal condition is that of domestic constraints. Here the neoclassical realist factors commonly brought forward need to be adapted to reflect EU policy making realities. Remember that these factors revolve around: a) the part of national power that governments can extract and mobilise for their foreign policies; b) political momentum; and c) influence of domestic societal actors and interest groups (and hence, level of state autonomy from society). Transposing these towards EU reality leads to the following indicators:

- Constraints resulting from limitations in capacity to extract resources for foreign policy (e.g. resulting from the EU not possessing the full competences of a state);
- Constraints resulting from the institutional set-up and shared competences between Member States and EU institutions when it comes to ENP policy making (i.e., constraints resulting from intra-institutional bargaining); and
- Constraints resulting from the influence of non-state or non-EU actors such as societal actors and interest groups.

These indicators have been the subject of much scholarly research, both covering the EU as a whole and in the context of the ENP. Therefore, this study concisely discusses only domestic constraints, in Section 7.1.

5. Case selection

As noted earlier, this study takes the case of the Eastern dimension of the ENP. It thus comprises only the Eastern Partnership countries: Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. While acknowledging individual differences, the study considers these countries as one case, as they fall within the same policy framework of the EU, i.e., the European Neighbourhood Policy. The considerations for selecting this case are threefold. First, although the ENP is also aimed at a number of countries to the Southern vicinity of the EU, it can be argued the dynamics at play and policy approach of the EU there differ considerably from those

in the East (Whitman & Wolff, 2010, p. 9). As Blatter and Haverland argue, CPT requires 'dig[ging] deep into individual cases to find convincing and comprehensive evidence' (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 100). As such, it was taken into account that the ENP at large would damage the efficacy of this study and decrease the chances of arriving at substantiated causal inferences and conclusions. Second, the fact that the Eastern dimension of the ENP is a rather 'positive case' (i.e., a case in which an outcome exists) does not affect its appropriateness for this study. Instead, as this study searches for necessary conditions for the outcome, a positive case is not only justified but can be considered a necessity for its research goals (ibid., p. 101). Third, and on a more practical note, the Eastern Dimension of the ENP constitutes a demarcated field of study, which strongly adds to the availability and accessibility of literature. Also, a unitary body of primary sources such as EU policy documents exists for this region, again adding to the accessibility of sources.

Turning to its temporal scope, the study takes into account the period from 2003 (when the ENP was initiated) up through 2016. The reason to do so is that the EU normative disposition in the Eastern dimension of the ENP only came into play after the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and prior to that no comprehensive policy approach of the EU to its Eastern neighbours existed. The phenomenon central to this study – EU normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP – thus only substantially manifested itself from that point in time. Therefore, when building a comprehensive storyline of causal conditions, there would be no point in starting our analysis prior to 2003. The other end of the scope, 2016, results from the fact there is nothing to analyse after 2017, as history has not yet unfolded itself beyond the present and thus outcomes have not yet manifested themselves. Due to limitations in resources, the analysis does not reach the present but ends with 2016.

6. Data generation

As this study takes a qualitative approach, its resources mainly fall within the categories of peer-reviewed academic articles, think tank policy briefs and/or reports, media-outlets, as well as statistical databases such as from EUSTRAT, the World Bank, and think tanks (e.g. the SIPRI Military Expenditure database). As the quality of research largely depends on the quality and comprehensiveness of its sources, the method of retrieving them is crucial. This study therefore first employs effective (Boolean) search strings when searching for sources. The author engages in thorough term identification and uses search operators such as ones that exclude unwanted terms or include multiple synonyms, contributing to a decrease in recall and increase in relevance of search results. Second, the author uses a method of snowballing by examining the references used in previously found sources. Such snowballing is especially effective when

conducted in sources that provide a comprehensive literature review in a specific research area, of which an example for this study is the CEPS report edited by Kostanyan (2017) entitled 'Assessing European neighbourhood: Policy perspectives from the literature'. When selecting sources, the author attributes strong value to the quality of think tanks, academic journals and media outlets, which can highly vary. For think tanks, this is reflected in their ranking in the University of Pennsylvania Global Go To Think Tank Index (2017), and their inclusion in the Think Tank Review (TTR) of the General Secretariat of the Council (2017). For academic journals and individual peer-reviewed articles, the study pays value to the impact factor and number of citations. Finally, in order to ensure included sources reflect the present state-of-the-art knowledge, when collecting data the author attributes strong value to the recentness of sources by mainly including literature from the past years.

7. Reliability, validity and research objectives

As argued by Bryman, the concepts of reliability and validity in qualitative research are not as straightforward as in quantitative research (Bryman, 2012, p. 389). Bryman, recapitulating the main argument of a study by leCompte and Goetz, firstly distinguishes external reliability, said to be 'the degree to which a study can be replicated' (ibid., p. 390). While the social setting of this qualitative study cannot be frozen (ibid.), this study is explicit in justifying the reasons for taking an approach of causal-process tracing, and following a neoclassical realist model. Moreover, as became clear in the first section of this chapter, the research method (CPT) logically derives from the neoclassical realist theoretical framework of the study. Also, the methods for resource retrieval are clearly laid down, and as such, the study can be regarded as externally reliable. Second, internal reliability according to Bryman means, in the case of multiple researchers, whether they agree on their observations (ibid.). Such 'inter-observer consistency' is not relevant in the case of this study, as it is solely conducted by one researcher. Third, internal validity refers to the congruence between theoretical conceptions and empirical observations (ibid.). In this study, the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism has been somewhat adjusted to match the reality of the EU being the main actor instead of a state. This adjustment is carried out explicitly and is theoretically informed, with the EU being conceptualised as a state, thus adding to the internal validity of the study. Finally, Bryman points to external validity, said to entail 'the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings' (ibid.). As this study concerns a case study, its findings are in fact not valid for other cases (such as EU normative engagement with its Southern neighbours). However, as typical for IR research following a causal-process tracing method, the objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive explanation of a single, important outcome (Haverland & Blatter, 2012, p. 88) –

in this case EU normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP. As such, the study is not meant to arrive at generally applicable conclusions.

4. EU Normative Power Ambitions in the Eastern Dimension of the ENP Over Time

This chapter traces EU normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP from the establishment of the policy in 2003 up to 2017. As this study considers the Eastern neighbourhood as one case, it falls outside the scope of the study to go into the individual action plans, progress reports and EU policy choices in the six countries part of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). While acknowledging the divergent dynamics in the relationships between the EU and its partners (e.g. between the EU and Belarus and in the EU-Ukraine relationship), because the central object of this study is the EU normative policy approach in the Eastern Neighbourhood at large, it is considered an appropriate ambition of this chapter to provide an overall comprehensive storyline of EU normative policy ambitions in the region. As such, the policy documents under scrutiny here are limited to overall ENP and EaP communications of the EC and/or the High Representative, overall ENP regulations, and those parts of wider EU foreign policy strategic documents (The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) and 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) related to the neighbourhood. While it is acknowledged that the GAERC and later FAC⁶, as well as the European Council, have by defining ‘overall goals and principles’ (COM (2004) 373 final, p. 2), have contributed to the development of the ENP, documents stemming from these bodies are not dealt with here, as they are considered to be reflected in subsequent EC communications. On a similar note, as the chapter focusses on policy outputs, it considers MS influence on the ENP through council preparatory bodies to be reflected in the policy documents to which this chapter limits itself. The chapter is ordered according to the indicators as distinguished in Section 3.2 and ends with some concluding remarks.

1. EU strategic communications

Over the years, the European Commission and High Representative (the latter in both its pre- and post-Lisbon roles) have released a considerable number of strategic communications guiding the ENP⁷. From the foundational European Commission’s ‘Wider Europe’

⁶ GAERC: General Affairs and External Relations Council. FAC: Foreign Affairs Council.

⁷ Most notably: European Commission (EC) ‘Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with Our Eastern and Southern Neighbours’, COM (2003) 104 final, 11 April 2003; European Council, European Security Strategy, 12 December 2003; European Commission (EC), ‘European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper’, COM (2004) 373 final, 12 May 2004; European Commission, ‘On Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy,’ COM (2006) 726 final, 4 December 2006; European Commission, ‘A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy’, COM (2007) 774 final, 5 December 2007; European Commission, ‘Eastern Partnership’ COM(2008) 823 final, 3 December 2008; European Commission/High Representative, ‘A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood’, COM (2011) 303, 25 May 2011; European Commission/High Representative, ‘ENP: Working towards a Stronger Partnership’,

Communication (COM (2003) 104 final) up to the latest implementation report (JOIN (2017) 18 final), all documents reflect a clear intension to ‘ensure that a partner country’s political, economic and regulatory development converges with EU values and norms’ (Poli, 2016b, p. 33). Following a principle of conditionality, over the years partner countries have been offered incentives ranging from a stake in the internal market (notably through the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs)), financial and technical support, and visa liberalisation in order to adhere to EU values. However, within the short existence of the ENP, several aspects of the EU normative approach have been subject to change and are therefore worth highlighting.

First, when examining whether all values as specified earlier have been part of the EU’s approach towards the Eastern Neighbourhood, it becomes apparent that no trend can be identified as to what values the EU emphasises over time. Respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law are almost always explicitly referred to, with the others being mainly implicitly present in the documents. What changed following the 2011 ENP review was the introduction of the notion of deep and sustainable democracy. This discursive change was mainly an EU reaction to the Arab uprisings, but in the context of the Eastern Neighbourhood it has not been followed by actual policy changes (Ghazaryan, 2016, p. 22). A second such change in the 2011 review entailed the movement from an emphasis on EU values towards universal values. From that moment on, no communication makes references to ‘EU values’ or ‘European Union values’, instead speaking only of ‘universal values’ (See COM (2011) 303) and subsequent communications as outlined in footnote 7). As the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that ENP relations are ‘founded on the values of the Union’ (TEU, art. 8(1)), it could be argued the EU considers EU and universal values to coincide. This can best be explained as a conscious move of the EU to alter the credibility of its normative approach (Cebeci, 2017, p. 67; Diez, 2005, p. 614), albeit without substantially altering its character.

Second, whereas in 2003 only Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus were foreseen as becoming part of the Eastern ENP (COM (2003) 104 final, p. 4), in 2004 the ENP – and hence, the EU normative agenda – was extended to the Southern Caucasus countries, as marked in the 2004 strategy paper which stated that ‘the EU wishes to see reinforced, credible and sustained commitment towards democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights ...’ in the region (COM (2004) 373

JOIN(2013) 4 final, 20 March 2013; European Commission/High Representative, ‘Neighbourhood at the Crossroads’, JOIN(2014) 12 final, 27 March 2014; European Commission/High Representative, ‘Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy’, JOIN(2015) 50 final, 18 November 2015; European Commission/High Representative, ‘Report on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review’, JOIN(2017) 18 final, 18 May 2017.

final, p. 10). While formally remaining based on strict conditionality, over the years the ENP – now hosting a more divergent set of countries, with which the EU had varying (economic) interests – has caused the EU to apply conditionality more selectively (Cebeci, 2017, p. 65; Poli, 2016a, p. 13). With Belarus and Armenia, the EU has maintained strict conditionality, while in Azerbaijan it has been relatively lenient (Cebeci, 2017, p. 65). Up until 2015, the EU applied a soft-conditionality approach with Moldova, long regarded the “poster child” of the ENP. However, in the absence of further reforms it then changed course (Montesano, van der Togt & Zweers, 2016, p. 2, 15). Over the years Georgia and Ukraine have shown the most progress towards EU values, making it unnecessary for the EU to adjust its conditionality severely.

Given these divergent experiences, as well as the criticism the selective application of conditionality the EU has received, from 2011 onwards EU communications have attached much more value to the differentiation of ambitions in cooperation with partner countries (COM (2011) 303, p. 2). Notably, experiences with partner countries that show little interest in adopting EU values have one constant in the EU normative approach: the dichotomy between advancing EU values and following its interests (Cebeci, 2017, p. 65; Poli, 2016a, p. 14; Kochenov & Basheska, 2016, p. 155). Searching to address this dichotomy, in the 2016 EUGS the EU introduced the notion of ‘principled pragmatism’ and a strong focus on resilience. As the EUGS argues, ‘a resilient state is a secure state, and security is key for prosperity and democracy’ (EUGS, 2016, p. 23). In practice, such resilience should especially hold for societies that uphold democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development as main tenets (ibid., p. 24). As Juncos argues, ‘resilience facilitates the emergence of a more pragmatic EU foreign policy’ (Juncos, 2016, p. 11). Such a pragmatic turn has been explained as taking “into consideration the “reality” of power and interests by recognising that norms can only be advanced when they are “anchored in a supportive configuration of power and interest”” (Snyder and Vinjamuri in Juncos, 2016, p. 11). In practice, the implications for the EU normative approach towards the neighbourhood are a stronger focus on the EU’s own security and, simultaneously, a less ambitious democracy promotion agenda (Biscop, 2016, p. 2). While the EU upholds that a more pragmatic approach will continue to be principled, the evident intrinsic ambiguity of this discourse means that the EU does not yet have a credible answer to the interest-values dichotomy in its neighbourhood (see Juncos, 2016, pp. 13-14; Biscop 2016).

2. Mutual agreements

The relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries are based on Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) or – more recently, and further reaching in terms of cooperation – Association Agreements (AAs). With Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, such AAs

were signed mid-2014 and were ratified in July 2016 (Moldova, Georgia) and July 2017 (Ukraine). The promotion of EU values is a key future of the agreements, mainly through their inclusion in so-called “essential element clauses” (Petrov, 2016, pp. 100-103). While older PCA agreements also include such clauses, the AAs take the EU normative approach towards these countries one step further in several respects. First, the essential elements clauses are broader in scope than their predecessors by including values such as ‘promotion of respect for the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity’ and the ‘inviolability of borders and independence’. Second, in addition to the essential elements clauses, they include human rights references in a number of other provisions (ibid., p. 103). Third, the AAs aim at a high level of regulatory convergence through their strong emphasis on exporting the EU *Acquis Communautaire*, which, on the condition that such legislative approximation goes further than just formal adoption, is an effective way of exporting EU values. Indeed, the AAs provide for detailed provisions to ensure real approximation (ibid., pp. 104-105).

While the AAs can thus be seen as strengthening the EU’s normative approach, it should be noted that relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus continue to revolve around PCAs. While the EU had been negotiating an AA with Armenia for four years, in September 2013 the country made a 180-degree turn and opted to instead join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, of which Belarus is also a member. Armenia’s not having in place an Association Agreement does not mean that the EU neglects its normative ambitions in the country, as marked by efforts made in 2015 to reinstall talks on an agreement widening the scope of the PCA (EEAS, EU-Armenia relations, 2017). While starting similar talks with Azerbaijan in 2017, due to the EU’s determination to ‘not compromise on the core values of the Eastern Partnership’ (European Council, 2017), not much progress has been made. However, democratic setbacks and continuous human right violations in Azerbaijan did not withhold the EU from signing a Strategic Energy Partnership with the country in 2006, and they only spurred limited vocal reactions from the side of the EU (Poli, 2016b, p. 39; RFEFL, 2006). In doing so, the EU has above all followed its interests rather than its values in its engagement with the country (Poli, p. 39, 2016b).

3. Multilateral/regional agreements based on universal values

Another means for the EU to project its values – notably that of respect for international law – in the neighbourhood is through pursuing its Eastern neighbours to sign, implement and adhere to multilateral agreements based on universal values (Poli, 2016a, p. 2) and to join multilateral institutions. As Cremona argues, ‘for the EU, the promotion of multilateral institutions and conventions (‘a rule-based international order’) is one way in which it can create a

neighbourhood of shared values which reflect its own' (Cremona, 2016, p. 84). A quick scan through selected human rights conventions like the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* and the *Convention Against Torture* shows that the six Eastern neighbours all became signatories to such conventions prior to the establishment of the ENP (EC Commission working staff document statistical annex – 2014, p. 5).⁸ Furthermore, the countries are all party to the *European Convention on Human Rights* (ECHR) with the exception of Belarus, whose special guest status as a result of not meeting democratic standards and introducing the death penalty has been suspended as of 1997 (Council of Europe, 2017). The EU furthermore already adopted a common position to strive for the universalisation of international law on non-proliferation and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in 2003 (Cremona, 2016, p. 85). It subsequently laid down provisions on accession to and implementation of such international law in the action plans for its Eastern neighbours in 2005 and 2006.⁹ With the conclusion of Association Agreements, the EU enhanced this strategy by including WMD clauses as essential elements.¹⁰ The AAs furthermore contain numerous references to international agreements in a wide variety of fields, for which the EU also offers assistance in their implementation (ibid., p. 90).

Another multilateral means of the EU worth mentioning aimed to advance values revolving around Human Rights and democracy promotion in the neighbourhood is through the cooperation with other multilateral organisations, notably the OSCE and Council of Europe (CoE). Cooperation with the latter was first disclosed in the 2011 EC communication on the review of the ENP and was subsequently reflected in Association Agendas with Moldova and Ukraine, programmes under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), and in a 2014 “statement of intent” between the EC and CoE (Cremona, 2016, p. 92). Finally, the founding of the Eastern Partnership can be explained as a regional means for the EU to develop a shared understanding of multilateral norms. As such, the Eastern Partnership can be viewed as strengthening attention to multilateralism (ibid., p. 83). Overall, while already promoting multilateral agreements from the start of the ENP, it can be concluded the EU normative approach has been strengthened

⁸ The other conventions listed in the document are the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR), the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), and the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC).

⁹ See for example EU-Armenia Action plan p. 14, 14 November 2016.

¹⁰ The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (2014 L 161/3 of 29.5.2014), EU-Moldova Association Agreement ([2014] OJ L 260/4) and EU-Georgia Association Agreement ([2014] OJ L 261/4) do not refer to specific Conventions. However, in a joint proposal for a council decision on the implementation of the EU-Ukraine association agreement (JOIN/2015/0004), international treaties referred to include the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention (BTWC), and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

gradually with the introduction of the EaP, the conclusion of Association Agreements and through increased cooperation with other international organisations.

4. Financial support

Through the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI, 2007-2013), and since 2014, its successor as of 2014, the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the EU funds cooperation with the Eastern neighbourhood countries, notably in the form of technical assistance, budget and policy support, administration reform, and sectoral and economic support/reform programmes. When assessing the ENPI and ENI regulations, two developments can be identified with regard to the EU's value-based approach. First, the ENI regulation is more concerned with value diffusion than its predecessor, as it gives priority to value diffusion over other objectives such as market integration (Poli, 2016b, p. 40). The first of a list of specifically targeted objectives as laid down in the regulation is 'promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, principles of equality and the fight against discrimination in all its forms, establishing deep and sustainable democracy, promoting good governance, fighting corruption, strengthening institutional capacity at all levels and developing a thriving civil society including social partners' (ENI, art. 2(2a)). Second, looking at conditionality, the ENI follows a more differentiated approach than its predecessor did, thus showing high positive conditionality. This means that the allocation of funds is now more dependent on the progress made by partner countries in achieving agreed reforms (Poli, 2016b, p. 42). However, more differentiation under the ENI also means the EU pushes partner countries less than before to conduct value-based reforms if they do not wish to do so, as for example marked by the European Council website on Azerbaijan, which notes: 'Azerbaijan is free to choose to what extent it will participate in the EU's offer of political association and economic integration' (European Council, 2017).

What is striking is that in contrast to the ENPI regulation, the ENI does not explicitly offer the suspension of budget support in the case of serious non-adherence. The only manifestation of such negative conditionality in the regulation is largely implicit and constitutes that 'support may be reconsidered in the event of serious or persistent regression' (ENI, art. 4(2) fourth paragraph). The ENPI, on the other hand, actually articulated that 'in such cases [i.e., the suspension of budget support], Community assistance shall primarily be used to support non-state actors for measures aimed at promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and supporting the democratisation process in partner countries' (ENPI, art 28(2)). No such provisions are included in its successor. In practice, budget support has been completely suspended only in the case of Moldova in 2015, where a massive bank fraud spurred serious concerns over the country's 'endemic corruption and widespread financial mismanagement'

(Montesano, van der Togt & Zweers, 2016, p. 6). While the overall picture is mixed, the EU's conditionality approach seems to be strengthened by the ENI as compared to its predecessor. (Poli, 2016b, p. 43). As such, and given that value diffusion gained a more prominent role in the ENI, it can be concluded the new regulation has moderately strengthened the EU normative approach.

5. Restrictive measures

As identified by Poli, a fourth channel for EU value diffusion is that of restrictive measures, which refer to the Union's sanction regime. This regime comprises potential measures such as arms and trade embargoes, the targeted freezing of assets and instalment of travel and visa bans for individuals, the restriction of diplomatic contacts, boycotts of sport or cultural events, and flight bans (EC Restrictive measures, 2008; EU Restrictive measures fact sheet, 2014). A first stop in tracing the course of EU sanctions in the Eastern Neighbourhood are those issued in 2003 against the leadership of the Moldovan secessionist entity known as Transnistria.¹¹ These and subsequent sanctions towards the region were specifically aimed at those individuals obstructing the peace process and violating human rights. In 2006, 2010 and 2013, the EU applied sanctions in Belarus against key politicians, as a reaction to continuous violations of human rights and electoral fraud. In Ukraine, sanctions were raised in 2014 against former president Yanukovich and his close family and allies for reasons of human rights infringements and misuse of state funds. Further sanctions were established against the authorities of the secessionist entities of Luhansk and Donetsk, and against those involved in the secession and subsequent annexation of Crimea (Poli, 2016b, p. 52). The Russian Federation and certain of its citizens have also been subject to EU sanctions related to their involvement in the Annexation of Crimea and support for the Eastern Ukrainian secessionist areas.

Given that sanctions are reactive in nature (notwithstanding that the EU has agency regarding whether or not to deploy the instrument), merely examining the development of issued sanctions in terms of numbers does not provide clarity on whether the EU has followed a more stringent or more lenient normative approach over the years in its deployment of this instrument. What does become clear is that the EU has, since the commencement of the ENP, installed sanctions as an instrument against human rights violations, substantial democratic infringements, and violations of territorial integrity (and thus international law). As such, sanctions in the Eastern ENP have been underpinned by a wider range of values than the EU

¹¹ Officially named the 'Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR)'

sanctioning regime at large.¹² It should thereby be noted that while for reasons of territorial integrity sanctions can be classified under the EU value of peace, they do serve a broader security interest than the normative justification provided by the EU.

6. Concluding remarks

After assessing four different channels for the EU to diffuse its values, as well as more general EU communications reflecting EU values, it has become clear that an overall and unitary development of the EU normative approach towards the Eastern neighbourhood can hardly be identified. What conclusions can nevertheless be drawn for this study's first sub-question of how EU normative policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP have developed over time? The first proposition of this study reads that a relative decline in the material power of the EU vis-à-vis other actors in the Eastern dimension of the European neighbourhood, notably Russia, would lead the EU to scale back the ambition and scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and a relative rise in material capabilities would have the opposite effect. Second, this study hypothesised that such a shift in the ambition/scope of the ENP would be most evident in the EU's normative disposition in the neighbourhood. While material power shifts are only assessed in the following chapters, this chapter did show that the comprehensive storyline (to use the CPT terminology) with regard to the development of EU normative policies towards the ENP countries is not as clear-cut as the propositions suggest. On the one hand, one constant factor for the EU has been the need to formalise differing ambitions with less and more willing partners, and in countries where it has less or more strategic interests. Through introducing a focus on differentiation and, most recently, 'principled pragmatism' in its communications, the EU has sought to embed its normative ambitions in a more realistic context. This could be explained as an apparent move away from a purely value-based approach. However, on the other hand, such a move has not translated into the means the EU employs to diffuse its values. On the contrary, a new generation of Association Agreements has – albeit only in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – actually strengthened the EU's normative approach by increasing the number of "essential element" clauses and stepping up efforts to export the EU *Acquis Communautaire*. The same can be concluded for the EU's multilateral efforts and its financial support strategies, although the latter provides a slightly more mixed picture. Due to their reactive nature, it cannot be concluded on the basis of restrictive measures whether the EU has strengthened or decreased its normative ambitions. Overall, and going back to this study's position in the Normative Power Europe debate, 'what the EU says' (the EU discourse) in the

¹² Outside the ENP, the EU mainly applies sanctions as a reaction to human rights violations.

strategic communications has shown a decrease in normative scope, while the development of 'what the EU does' has been more ambiguous, mainly as a result of a differentiation of policies towards individual neighbourhood countries, and also due to opposing trends both within and between the various channels for value diffusion as examined in this chapter. The following two chapters seek to relate these trends to the development of EU relative military and economic power throughout the course of the ENP.

5. Shifting of Relative Military Power

Following the neoclassical realist framework, this study has theorised that relative military power confines EU normative policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood. This chapter seeks to empirically test this proposition by carefully tracing the development of the EU's relative military capabilities. To employ CPT jargon, it offers a "comprehensive storyline" of the EU's relative military power throughout the course of the ENP. It therefore shines light on the absolute factors (size, nature and combat readiness of forces) established in the methodology chapter. As these capabilities are considered relative, they are examined vis-à-vis Russian capabilities. Secondly, the chapter provides the most evident cases in the neighbourhood in which relative material power capabilities have directly confined the EU normative power ambitions. Following the definition of military power introduced earlier, it explores those instances where another actor has influenced the EU through the actual or threatened exertion of force. In the case of the Eastern Neighbourhood, such "hard realities" that have impacted the success of the EU's own (normative) policies include: a) the 2008 Russian-Georgian war and subsequent occupation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia; b) the continuous presence of Russian troops in Moldova's secessionist entity of Transnistria; c) the proclamation of the Luhansk and Donetsk independent republics in Eastern Ukraine as being (militarily) backed by Russia, and the Russian annexation of Crimea; as well as d) Russia's military role in Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

1. The EU's relative military power

Within the institutional framework of the EU, under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) military capabilities lay with the EEAS. Since the Cologne European Council in June 1999, where EU leaders first acknowledged the need for autonomous military capabilities, the EU has gradually sought to build up common military capacity. Its first (1999) headline goal aimed at developing a force of 60 000 soldiers, an achievement for which several initiatives were set up.¹³ Also, the Union published its first comprehensive security strategy (the ESS) in 2003. As Toje outlines, due to a high disparity between the 'frantic rate of activity in declarations and in institution-building ... and the mustering of actual capabilities' (Toje, 2011, p. 50), in 2004 ambitions were cut back to develop only 1500-troop-strong Battle Groups. Full operational capacity was reached in 2007, and as of that moment, two Battle Groups can, at any time, be simultaneously deployed within just 15 days (Bickerton, 2011, p. 6). While scoring seemingly

¹³ The November 2001 Capabilities Improvement Conference led to the creation of the European Capabilities Action Plan. In December 2003 Member States created the Capability Development Mechanism. In 2006 the Long-Term Vision was developed by the European Defence Agency (see Toje, 2011, p. 49).

high in terms of combat readiness, due to their limited size, these Battle Groups are not suited for comprehensive warfare. Moreover, until June 2017 no Battlegroups have actually been deployed, leading scholars to question their viability (Toje, 2011, p. 50; Barcikowska, 2013, p. 1).

It should be noted that under the CSDP, the EU has deployed over 30 military and civilian missions abroad since 2002, gradually expanding their quantity, size and duration (Toje, 2011, p. 51).¹⁴ Due to their nature, as reflected in the limited CSDP mandate, CSDP military missions (named EUFOR or EUNAVFOR) cannot be regarded as tools through which the EU can exercise influence over other actors through the actual or threatened exertion of force.¹⁵ Given their limited size, scope and/or mandate, the same can be said for other military initiatives within the EU.¹⁶ For the last absolute indicator of military power – i.e., the capacity of the EU to turn resources into military capabilities – as discussed above, the EU has had difficulty in turning individual Member States' resources into EU-wide capabilities. Also, the EU capacity to do so has been hindered by the fragmentation of the European defence market, which, according to Toje, leads to 'both duplication and waste' (Toje, 2011, p. 50).

It should be noted that when defining EU military power as the cumulative capabilities of its individual Member States, the picture is rather different. While in terms of size the number of combat ready troops is substantially larger, total EU MS military expenditure between 2005 and 2015 remained steady at around EUR 195 billion annually, meaning that as a percentage of GDP it has dropped by almost 20% (EDA Collective and National Defence Data, 2005-2014, 2017). Furthermore, due to the Member States' military policies being embedded in both the EU's CSDP and, for a substantial part, NATO, the probability of these states taking military action on their own in the neighbourhood is negligible.¹⁷ The conclusion for the EU is similar: while during the existence of the ENP its military capabilities and initiatives have shown an upward trend, the EU should be seen as a small power not possessing actual war-fighting capacity in the neighbourhood.

Following the neoclassical realist assumption that not absolute but relative capabilities matter, EU military power should be examined vis-à-vis its main competitor in the neighbourhood, the Russian Federation. According to SIPRI data, Russian military expenditure rose from USD 26 338

¹⁴ See for a full overview: EEAS (2016). 'Military and civilian missions and operations', to be found [online](#). Past and present CSDP mission in the Eastern Neighbourhood include EUBAM Moldova/Ukraine, EUAM Ukraine, EUMM Georgia, EUJUST THEMIS/Georgia.

¹⁵ The CSDP mandate is limited to humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping and conflict prevention, peacemaking, disarmament operations, advice and assistance, and post-conflict stabilisation (see TEU, art 43).

¹⁶ Notably: Eurocorps, the European Gendarmerie Force, European Maritime Force.

¹⁷ EU Member States not part of NATO are Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden.

million in 2003 to USD 70 345 million in 2016 (SIPRI Milex, 2017). Especially as of 2008, Russia has invested heavily in military reforms and the modernisation of its armed forces (Trenin, 2016, p. 23). Estimations of the size of Russia's armed forces differ considerably, mostly as a result of different interpretations of employed and reserve troops. World Bank data show an increase from around 1.37 million forces in 2003 to 1.5 million in 2009, a subsequent fall to 1.26 million in 2013, and then a rise again to 1.49 million in 2015 (World Bank, 2017a). The NMC Dataset by Correlates of War gives a more modest estimation of the size of Russian military personnel, presenting an original figure of 961 000 that grew to 1.03 million in 2005, then decreased to 956 000 in 2012 (Correlates of War, 2017). While doubts about the actual combat readiness of these figures persist among scholars (Trenin, 2016, p. 23), what is clear is that in the neighbourhood, Russia has expanded its military presence over the years by increasing its number of troops, strengthening its Black Sea Fleet and air force, and strengthening coastal and air defence infrastructure, as well as through agreements with Belarus, Armenia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (EP DG for External Policies, 2016, p. 8, 24).

2. Military capabilities and normative power in the neighbourhood

As a result of the threatened or actual exertion of force in the neighbourhood through increased Russian military presence in the region, EU norm diffusion towards its Eastern neighbours is substantially undermined. Confronted with expressions of hard power, continuing to diffuse its values in ENP countries within a mode of 'business as usual' has been impossible for the EU, mainly because value diffusion takes place through policy and technical support and, hence, in the field of low politics.¹⁸ The four most evident cases are presented below.

First, in the case of Georgia, the actual exertion of force by Russia in the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 has negatively impacted the EU's normative objective of promoting peace directly. Furthermore, the subsequent Russian (de facto) occupation of South Ossetia has further lowered the prospect for progress on the rule of law, human rights and democracy promotion in the region. While EU policies of non-recognition and the instalment of a CSDP Monitoring Mission (the EUMM) have had a positive effect on stability, they simultaneously mark a move away from the EU's traditional normative approach of promoting the rule of law, democracy and human rights through policy support. The fact that the EU did not manage to gain a mandate for its monitoring mission to operate in Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be seen as a failure of the EU to exert normative power (Forsberg & Seppo, 2010, p. 9). Moreover, as argued in the

¹⁸ 'Business as usual' is cited from the 2011 ENP review, which states that 'Business as usual is no longer an option if we want to make our neighbourhood a safer place and protect our interests'. See: European Commission (2011). A new response to a changing neighbourhood, COM (2011) 303 final, p. 5.

European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) scorecard report of 2012, and underlined by other scholars, ‘besides maintaining stability on the ground around the conflict zones, the EU lacks other clear and sustainable policy goals’ (ECFR, 2012; Forsberg & Seppo, 2010, p. 9). Also, because the EU acted as a peace broker, it was obliged to act in an impartial manner, which directly conflicted with its normative aspirations (Forsberg & Seppo, 2010, pp. 9-10). This shows that in the case of Georgia, when confronted with hard power the EU was largely unable to employ its normative power to shape conceptions of “normal” and effectively promote peace, democracy, rule of law and human rights.

In the case of Moldova, Russian military presence – among other factors – continues to hinder a peaceful solution to the long-lasting “frozen” conflict over Transnistria, which lies between the Dniester River in the West and the Ukraine border in the East (Montesano, Van der Togt & Zweers, 2016, p. 16; Beyer & Wolff, 2016, p. 339). The significantly lower level of EU projects compared to Moldova at large shows that it is significantly more difficult for the EU to effectively implement its policy and civil society programmes aimed at diffusing values such as democracy and the rule of law in this secessionist region, which draws heavily on Russia as its security patron.¹⁹ Out of 63 projects listed on the website of the EU delegation to Moldova, only one – on so-called confidence-building measures (CBMs) – is directly implemented in Transnistria. While between 2012 and 2015 the EU contributed EUR 9.5 million to this project, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (UNDP, 2017), funding of projects in Moldova at large in 2014 totalled EUR 131 million (C(2014) 5140 final). Moreover, the persistence of conflict regions in the neighbourhood negatively affects EU value diffusion in their “parent countries” (Montesano, Van der Togt & Zweers, 2016, p. 16). In the case of Transnistria, the reason is, as Schleifer argues, that Russia employs the secessionist entity for ‘disinformation campaigns, either in Russian or local languages, depending on the target audience, to destabilize and foster divisions in the parent states, thus countering the spread of democratic ideas and values’ (Schleifer, 2015, par. 2). Such would not be possible for Russia without the area having the security guarantee provided by its military presence.

¹⁹ See Delegation of the European Union to Moldova (2017). ‘List of projects’, to be found [online](#); Delegation of the European Union to Moldova (2017). ‘Project Fiche – Support to Confidence Building Measures’, to be found [online](#) (accessed 21-06-2017). Between 2012 and 2015 the EU contributed EUR 9.5 million to this project implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (see: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2017). ‘Support to Confidence Building Measures Programme (III)’, to be found [online](#) (accessed 12-09-2017)). Yet funding of projects in Moldova at large in 2014 only totalled EUR 131 million (see European Commission, C(2014) 5140, to be found [online](#) (accessed 19-09-2017)).

For Armenia, too, Russia is of utmost importance as a security guarantor. The country is isolated between Turkey and Azerbaijan, having no open borders nor diplomatic relations with the former and being involved in a long-lasting, recently intensifying (Reuters, 2017) dispute over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh with the latter. Armenia hosts three Russian military bases comprising an estimated 5 000 military personnel, is the single South Caucasian member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO, the military counterpart of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)) and is engaged in far-reaching air defence cooperation with Moscow (EP DG for External Policies, 2016, p. 26; Reuters, 2016). How Russian military clout over Armenia can thwart EU-Armenian relations became clear in the 2013 finale of the Association Agreement negotiations that had been running for four years. Instead of concluding a DCFTA with the EU, Armenia promptly switched orientation and joined the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, thereby effectively bringing any prospect of an AA – which would have significantly altered the EU’s means of value diffusion in the country – to an end. It was precisely the Armenian military dependency on Russia, complemented with a clever and direct diplomatic Russian offensive, which led Armenian president Sargsyan to conclude that ‘when you are part of one system of military security it is impossible and ineffective to isolate yourself from a corresponding economic space’ (Sargsyan, quoted in De Waal, 2013). While enhanced political association with the EU is still on the table and an alternative political agreement has been concluded (EEAS, Joint Press Release, 2017), the 2013 turn of events shows that Russian military power over Armenia may also prevent the country from further replicating EU norms in the future.

Finally, EU normative power diffusion in Ukraine has been severely affected due to the use of force by Russia. While in 2013 a similar scenario to that of Armenia seemed plausible following former Ukrainian President Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the long-negotiated Association Agreement with the European Union following severe Russian pressure, massive pro-European protests met with solidarity from the EU, which instead forced the president to abdicate. The then quickly evolving conflict involving Russian troops and/or military support over both Crimea and the Eastern separatist entities of Luhansk and Donetsk has, as in the Georgian case, directly harmed the EU’s peace projection in the area. The loss of effective Ukrainian control simultaneously meant the end of EU value diffusion through European Neighbourhood Policy projects in these areas. It should not come as a surprise that ever since then substantial setbacks in democracy, the rule of law, and human rights have been reported (Freedom House, 2017).

3. Concluding remarks

This chapter has searched to answer this study's second sub-question of how the relative military power of the EU conditions its normative foreign policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP. In the timespan of the ENP, several military initiatives have been brought forward by the EU, though this has not yet led to an operational force ready for large-scale warfare. The publication of the ESS, its update in 2008 and more recently the EUGS, in addition to the attention given in these papers to the neighbourhood, show a maturing of security thinking at the EU level. Looking at actual military figures, it is Russia, however, that clearly shows possession of the strongest military power, with an upward trend between 2003 and 2016. This means that between 2003 and 2016 the EU's relative military power vis-à-vis the Russian Federation decreased. Has such a decrease over the years limited the EU's ability to deploy its normative power in its relations with the EaP countries? As the cases presented in the second part of this chapter have shown, the answer to this question is clearly affirmative. Acting as 'smoking guns', the cases have shown that in almost all Neighbourhood countries, with the exception of Azerbaijan, the increased military presence and assertiveness of Russia – i.e., the increased exertion of its military power – has been a strong hindering factor for EU normative power diffusion. The proposition that EU normative power is increasingly confined as a result of the EU's declining relative military power vis-à-vis the Russian Federation thus largely holds.

6. Shifting of Relative Economic Power

The previous chapter revolved around relative military power as a limitation to EU normative power in the Eastern Partnership countries. This chapter shifts its attention to relative economic power, with the aim of assessing its restricting/enabling influence on EU norm diffusion. It therefore outlines the development of the EU's relative economic power from the early days of the ENP up through 2016, comparing EU statistics for the various indicators of economic power established in Section 3.3 with those of the Russian Federation. These indicators include the size and openness of the EU's and Russia's markets, their levels of trade and investment with neighbourhood countries, as well as other (historical) economic ties, such as the level of remittance flows and the possession of key strategic sectors. Second, the chapter advances a number of pertinent cases that display how the EU's relative economic capabilities have constrained its aspirations of norm diffusion, thereby making clear that such EU normative power has been largely dependent on its relative economic capabilities. These cases include: a) the weak normative influence of the EU in Belarus; b) Ukraine's – and more specifically, former president's Yanukovich's – rejection of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in November 2013; c) the signing of the AA with Moldova and that decision's consequences for Transnistria; and d) the economic power of Azerbaijan stemming from its position as an energy supplier to the EU.

1. The EU's relative economic power

As has often been argued, the size of the EU's internal market – the European Economic Area (EEA) – is the key source of the EU's economic power and attractiveness. In terms of GDP, the market grew from almost 12 trillion in current USD in 2003 to just over 19 trillion in 2008, then slowly descended during the global economic downturn to 16.4 trillion in 2016 (World Bank, 2017b). Apart from being the largest trading block in the world, the EU features a significant sales market, as reflected in its aggregate population of 496.5 million potential consumers in 2006, which had grown to 511.8 million by 2016 (Eurostat, 2017). With the EU enlargements of 2004, 2007 and 2013, the EEA has gained in attractiveness for the neighbourhood countries, not only due to an increase in GDP, number of potential consumers and other purely economic factors, but also given the enhanced geographical proximity to the region. Hence, in the past decade the prospect of full access to the European market has provided the EU with considerable – and rising – economic leeway over the Eastern Neighbourhood. This largely holds when measured against Russia as well, whose GDP remained significantly lower between 2003 and 2016, with a strong economic downturn since 2014 as a result of low oil prices and international sanctions against the country following its annexation of Crimea and intervention

in Eastern Ukraine (World Bank, 2017c).²⁰ It should be noted that Russia managed to attract Belarus and Armenia to its own customs union, the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) later transformed into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which marked and simultaneously brought about a greater economic power over these countries compared to the other four neighbourhood countries.

In terms of the openness of the EEA, exports to the EU are subject to considerable (technical) requirements which act as non-tariff barriers to trade. The Common Customs Tariff for third countries is still in place, though diminishing, following a worldwide trend instigated by the GATT and WTO trade negotiation rounds, in which the EU acted as a forerunner of trade liberalisation. This is with the exception of agricultural goods, in which the EU remains more protectionist to the benefit of its internal agricultural producers. However, the bilateral trade agreements between the EU and Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia mean that these countries are exempted from all tariffs and have effectively become members of the internal market. Such a prospect of full access to the EEA, both for exports of goods and services, has provided the EU with substantial economic clout over these countries and has incited them to engage in all-encompassing economic reforms. The transparency and non-corruptness of the EU market can furthermore be regarded as an asset, adding to the attractiveness of the EU as a trade partner.

Turning to actual trade and investment figures for the EU and the EaP countries, since the instalment of the ENP the EU28 have become the top trade partner (in goods) for Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan at the expense of the Russian Federation, and rank second (after Russia) for Armenia and Belarus (European Commission DG Trade, Trade in Goods with Georgia, 2017; Ukraine, 2017; Moldova, 2017; Armenia, 2017; Azerbaijan, 2017; Belarus, 2017).²¹ These countries' exports (and thus their GDPs) are dependent to a large extent on the EU (with the exception of Belarus, where the trade difference between the EU and Russia is considerable). This is not the case the other way around, which has strongly added to the EU's economic power over these countries. Due to the unavailability of data on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows by partner country (most countries do not compile such information), it is hard to draw conclusions on the development of the position of the EU as an investor in the neighbourhood countries. However, while Milcher and Slay (2005, p. 11) suggest that in the early 2000s, most FDI inflows to the Neighbourhood were of Russian origin, others note that the EU has since then become the largest investor in the Eastern Neighbourhood (e.g. Haukkala, 2017,

²⁰ Russia's GDP increased from USD 430 billion in 2003 to just over USD 2.2 trillion in 2012, decreasing to USD 1.3 trillion in 2016. See World Bank, 2017c.

²¹ These are 2016 figures.

p. 81). As such, in terms of investment and trade relations, economic power has shifted over the years from the Russian Federation to the European Union, with the exception of Armenia and especially Belarus, whose economies remain highly Russian oriented.

In addition to trade and investment, the level of remittances flowing from the EU to neighbourhood countries is another potential factor adding to the interwovenness of neighbourhood economies with that of the EU and hence the EU's economic clout over the region. However, calculations using 2014 estimates from the World Bank show that remittances flowing from the Russian Federation to the EaP countries are significantly higher, with the exception of Moldova (World Bank, 2015).²² This can be explained by a number of factors, among which are historical economic ties and the fact that a high share of the population of the neighbourhood countries speak Russian. In terms of economic power, this means that for this indicator the EU is outrun by Russia.

Two other indicators worth examining are: 1) the capacity to successfully implement economic sanctions towards neighbourhood countries, and 2) the possession of key strategic sectors and the ability to employ these as leverage in economic relations with the partner country. Regarding the former, while the EU currently does have sanctions in force against neighbourhood countries or individuals within them, it does not target complete economic sectors of EaP countries in order to steer their behaviour – with the exception of export bans on arms and dual-use goods in the case of Belarus (EEAS, Restrictive measures (sanctions) in force, 2016). While the Russian Federation has economically sanctioned neighbourhood countries over the years, these moves have not always been showcases of its economic power. That economic sanctions can actually be rather counterproductive is exemplified by a number of Russian import bans on Moldovan and Georgian wine, forcing these countries to direct their exports to the EU and other global markets (*Financial Times*, 2014; Ademmer, 2017a, p. 674, 684; Ademmer, 2017b, p. 198). Economic sanctions as an indicator of economic power therefore provide a mixed picture. The possession of key strategic sectors, on the other hand, is less ambiguous, showing strong Russian clout given its position as energy supplier towards its Eastern neighbours. While still in its infancy, the EU has started to counteract such dependency, among other things by physically and institutionally connecting its internal energy market to its Eastern neighbours through the Energy Community (Energy Community, 2017). The Russian Federation is, however, increasingly active in coercing the neighbourhood countries, as a result of its de facto

²² All figures are in millions of USD: Armenia: 223 from EU, 1.380 from RU; Azerbaijan: 64 from EU, 1.107 from RU; Belarus: 248 from EU, 576 from RU; Georgia: 346 from EU, 1.223 from RU; Moldova: 738 from EU, 656 from RU; Ukraine: 1632 from EU, 3936 from RU. Calculations based on World Bank, 2015.

monopolist position as an energy supplier (Wilson & Popescu, 2009, p. 322; Montesano, van der Togt & Zweers, 2016, p. 16).

A last indicator adding to economic power over a country is the level of economic aid and/or sectoral technical support provided to it. This is the main tenet of the ENP, whereby technical support channelled through the ENI, as well as financial support through the European Investment Bank (EIB) and Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF), provide the EU with considerable clout over the EaP countries. While Russia also actively seeks to employ economic aid as a means of economic power, e.g. by coupling low-interest rate loans and/or grants to neighbourhood governments with political reforms, it is less active in providing technical support. As such, the EU tops Russia when it comes to this indicator.

2. Economic capabilities and normative power in the neighbourhood

It follows from the neoclassical realist theoretical framework guiding this thesis that the EU's ability to employ normative power in the countries in its Eastern vicinity depends on its relative economic power (in addition to relative military power). This proposition is supported in this section by highlighting four cases in which a lack of EU economic power has evidently confined the EU's ability to exert normative power.

The first such case is presented by Belarus, where the EU's weak normative influence largely stems from the EU's weak economic power (in addition to low military power) over the country. Here, in terms of the level of FDI, trade and remittances, and due to the similarity of economic regime and historical economic ties between Belarus and the EU, the EU is clearly topped by Russia. Over time, the interwovenness with and dependence of the Belarussian economy on Russia, in addition to the country's being politically and militarily dependent on its Eastern patron, have led the country to join the Russian-led ECU/EEU (Korosteleva, 2016, p. 22). This has left the EU in a position where it condemns Belarus for neglecting EU values, yet without the ability to back such condemnations with action. The non-interest of the country in adopting the EU economic model has left the EU without economic leverage to make Belarus adhere to EU values; Belarus would first need to show interest in moving towards an EU economic model before the EU could employ instruments such as (temporarily) freezing its support when Belarus violates such values. Having said that, Korosteleva argues that EU non-political 'low-key technocratic engagement and sector cooperation' (*ibid.*, p. 693) is, albeit at a small scale, effective below the surface in promoting democracy in the country.

A second case is the decision of Ukrainian former president Yanukovich not to sign the long-negotiated Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013. Relative economic power

indicators can explain this move to a large extent. First, in terms of trade figures, in 2013 Ukraine still exported more goods to and imported more goods from the CIS-countries than the EU (although the EU figure did surpass that of Russia alone) (Ukraine Statistics office, 2013; 2017).²³ In the past decade Ukraine had furthermore followed a strategy of keeping free trade with Russia and the CIS countries alongside its EU-aspirations, reflected among other things in the country's entering the Russian-led Common Economic Space (CES) initiative in 2003 (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2014, p. 226) and having negotiated far-reaching bilateral tariff cuts with Russia. This allowed president Putin to credibly forward the threat of (re-)imposing tariffs and installing further trade restrictions during the EU-Ukraine negotiations (ibid., p. 233). Furthermore, Russia had lobbied Ukraine strongly since 2010 to join its own economic integration project, the EEU, in order to stall the AA negotiations and provide the country with an alternative. Third, as Kubicek argues, Russia offered Ukraine a more generous aid package than stipulated in the EU AA (Kubicek, 2017, p. 153). Fourth, Ukrainian dependency on Russian energy provided Russia with additional leverage to pressure Yanukovich to forego the AA with the EU. As the AA featured a strongly normative agenda, the effective thwarting of the agreement by Russia as a result of its economic power over Ukraine shows the dependency of EU normative power on its relative economic capabilities. The fact the AA was eventually signed is of course a result of the Euromaidan events unfolding after Yanukovich's decision, which in the end led to his impeachment, and therefore does not effectuate the core of this argument.

As identified earlier, apart from trade relations, economic power over a country or region can also be the result of remittance flows and investment relations. In the case of the breakaway region of Transnistria, it is Russia that manages to influence the turn of events through these relations, thereby limiting the EU in its normative power diffusion. Remittances, the bulk of which stem from Transnistrians working in Russia, are a major and growing source of income for the secessionist entity (Calus, 2013, p. 4). Given the instability of the region, Transnistria is solely dependent on its Eastern patron for Foreign Direct Investment (Montesano, van der Togt & Zweers, 2016, p. 17). Between 2012 and 2015, the major destination of Transnistrian exports became the EU, at the cost of the CIS countries, meaning relative economic power for that indicator shifted in favour of the EU. This was an important lever for including the region in the DCFTA negotiations between Moldova and the EU (ibid.). However, the Transnistrian economy and welfare system remain highly dependent on Russian structural aid. As is the case in the rest

²³ In 2013, Ukrainian exports to the EU totalled 16.759 Million USD, while exports to the CIS countries and Russia accounted respectively for 22.077 and 15.077 million USD. Ukrainian imports from the EU, CIS and Russia constituted respectively 27.047, 27.942 and 23.244 million USD.

of the neighbourhood, dependence on Russian energy imports – in the case of Transnistria combined with a large energy debt to Moscow – provides the latter with additional economic leverage over the non-recognised entity (Calus, 2016, p. 4, 6). As in the case of Belarus, the EU's absence of economic power means it is unable to influence the political establishment in the region, as it lacks a clear economic incentives to back its normative aspirations. As such, EU normative power diffusion in Transnistria is negligible.

The last case presented in this chapter focusses on Azerbaijan, where a slightly different dynamic is at play. Here the EU is increasingly confronted with Azerbaijan's own economic power, stemming from its position as an energy supplier and net exporter to the EU (European Commission DG Trade, Trade in Goods with Azerbaijan, p. 8, 2017). EU normative power diffusion has been highly unsuccessful in Azerbaijan, as marked by the country's deteriorating democracy and human rights situation in recent years (van Gils, 2017, p. 388, 391). As Van Gils notes, the strategic interest of the EU in Azerbaijan indirectly explains the ineffectiveness of EU value diffusion in the country, and the fact that compared with Belarus, the EU is considerably more lenient towards its South Caucasian neighbour. The key to this explanation is that Baku enjoys a stronger bargaining power than the other EaP countries as a result of its economic independence – i.e., the lack of EU economic power over the country (ibid., pp. 392-393).

3. Concluding remarks

This chapter has sought to answer the sub-question of how the relative material economic power of the EU conditions its normative foreign policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP. It therefore first assessed the EU's relative economic power compared to that of Russia. This assessment does not identify an unambiguous trend (or comprehensive storyline) for the years 2003-2016. In terms of GDP, the EU has clearly remained the most attractive, especially given Russia's economic downturn since 2014. Regarding trade, over the course of the ENP the EU has become the main trading partner for most of the neighbourhood countries, marking a significant shift in economic power in its favour. In terms of openness of the trade regime the picture differs for the respective EaP countries, with some joining the European Economic Union and others instead becoming part of the Eurasian Economic Union. In the past decade remittance flows and Russia's position as a main energy supplier have remained a strong pillar of Moscow's economic power over its Western neighbours. While Russia also sought to exert economic power through economic sanctions, this strategy has been partially counterproductive, at times even reducing the country's economic leverage.

What has become clear is that the EU's normative power diffusion greatly depends on its economic power. In those neighbourhood countries where the EU's economic power is relatively low compared to that of Russia for a number of key indicators, its normative power diffusion has been largely ineffective as a result. In the case of Azerbaijan, such ineffectiveness has also stemmed from the country's own economic power vis-à-vis the EU. The four cases act as 'smoking guns' and have thus confirmed this study's proposition that EU normative power is – in addition to relative military power – in practice dependent on relative economic power. However, whereas on average EU economic power over the neighbourhood countries vis-à-vis Russia has increased over the course of the ENP, the trend for relative military power has, as became clear in Chapter five, been the other way around. Hence, the trend of EU material power at large compared to that of Russia has been ambiguous. The expectation of this study that a relative decline in the general material power of the EU vis-à-vis Russia would lead the EU to scale back the normative ambition and scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and that a relative rise in material capabilities would have the opposite effect, has thus proven to be hardly falsifiable. Still, both the economic and military chapters have shown that EU normative power is dependent on relative economic and military material power. Following the neoclassical realist theoretical framework of this study, the next chapter assesses how shifts in the relative military and economic power of the EU have been perceived by EU policy makers, thereby determining EU normative policy decisions in the ENP. As such, the following chapter switches from a systemic to a unit-level analysis.

7. Unit-level Causal Conditions: Policy Makers' Perceptions of Shifting Relative Power

For a neoclassical realist analysis such as conducted in this study, assessing trends in systemic power factors provides only one side of the picture. The neoclassical realist paradigm supposes that a state scales back its foreign policy ambitions and scope when confronted with a decline in its relative material power capabilities – and vice-versa.²⁴ However, shifts in relative economic and military power do not automatically nor in a linear way translate into foreign policy. Unit-level factors hinder the predictability of this transmission belt. One of these factors, domestic constraints on policy making, is concisely discussed in Section 7.1. This chapter mainly examines the other unit-level factor commonly recognised by neoclassical realists: policy maker's perceptions and calculations of relative power (Rose, 1998, p. 158; Taliaferro, Lobell & Ripsman, 2009, p. 4). It aims to explain those instances where EU foreign policy ambitions in the neighbourhood did not follow the trends of relative power in the short to medium term that were identified in the previous two chapters. Hence, it addresses the sub-question of how policy makers' perceptions of the EU's relative material power influence EU normative foreign policy choices in the Eastern dimension of the ENP. A reservation should be made in advance: the indicators for economic and military power have themselves sometimes showed opposing trends and diverged depending on the neighbourhood country one zoomed into. The fact that EU relative economic power showed a partially upward trend whereas EU relative military power declined further complicates the question of whether those EU policy reactions not in line with the general course of Brussels' economic or military capabilities were a reaction caused by a (mis)perception of EU relative material power or simply reflected the possibility that policy makers attributed more value to one than to the other. In other words, it remains to be seen whether strengthening economic power made up for a loss of military power or if it was the lowest common denominator of relative material power which shaped policy makers' ambitions. After discussing domestic constraints, the chapter examines the influence of perceptions in the cases as introduced in the previous two chapters.

1. Domestic constraints on EU policy making

As outlined in Section 3.4, this study only briefly touches upon the issue of domestic constraints (with 'domestic' referring here to the EU). Three categories of constraints that bear impact on

²⁴ 'Ambitions' should thereby not be interpreted as ideal-type long-term visions of an entity, but rather as the intentions of an entity that can be derived from its actual foreign policy behaviour and/or discourse.

EU policy making in the neighbourhood can be distinguished, the first being limitations in capacity to extract resources for foreign policy. In the case of the EU, these result from the EU not possessing the full capacities of a state. The ENP is thereby a special case as of 2008, as at that time the Lisbon Treaty established ‘an express EU ‘neighbourhood competence’ outside the scope of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), bringing together instruments from the full range of EU competences (Hillion, 2013, p. 2, 5).²⁵ Still, a number of competences fall outside the scope of the ENP, most evidently military action (with the exception of the participation of neighbourhood countries in CSDP missions).

A second category of constraints concerns political bargaining. In the case of the EU, inter-institutional bargaining constrains policy making in the neighbourhood, among others as a result of the responsibility for the ENP being shared by the Commission (DG NEAR) and the EEAS, a construction that omits a structured allocation of competences (Hillion, 2013, p. 5). Increased involvement of the European Council, the European Parliament, and continuous involvement of the rotating Presidency in the relations with the EaP countries further inhibits the policy making process, each holding its own view on the neighbourhood (ibid.). Apart from the institutions, the EU Member States also posit and execute individual policies towards the neighbours (e.g. the Dutch MATRA programme) (ibid., p. 6).²⁶

Third, and following neoclassical realist theory, ENP policy making can be constrained as a result of the influence of societal actors and interest groups. That European citizens can complicate matters when it comes to the ENP became painfully clear when the Dutch, in an advisory referendum, rejected the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, with Dutch societal interest groups like *Geenpeil* having considerable influence on that outcome (Politico, 2016).²⁷ On the European level, corporate and/or NGO lobbying efforts possibly affect sectoral components of the ENP, although such activities cannot be fully regarded as constraining the policy. It falls outside the scope of this study to assess the role of domestic constraints in the cases presented in Chapters five and six. The following sections do make such an assessment for the role of perceptions in ENP policy making.

²⁵ These include the CFSP, Common Commercial Policy (trade), visa facilitation and mobility, and technical and development cooperation.

²⁶ For the Dutch MATRA programme, see: Government of the Netherlands (2017). ‘NFRP/Matra: Grants for strengthening democracy and the rule of law in Europe’, to be found [online](#).

²⁷ In fact, *Geenpeil* was largely responsible for collecting the number of signatures necessary for reaching the threshold for holding the referendum as set by Dutch law.

2. EU perceptions and calculations of its relative military capabilities

Chapter five of this study largely affirmed the proposition that EU normative power is increasingly confined as a result of the EU's declining relative military power vis-à-vis the Russian Federation. When following the neoclassical realist framework, an overall scaling back of EU normative policy ambitions was expected, as Chapter four displayed. Yet this has not always been the case, with the EU actually scaling up its engagement over the years, such as through concluding Association Agreements. This section returns to those cases introduced in Section 5.2, where Russian military power confined the EU's ability to disperse its norms. It thereby specifically researches the EU's policy reaction in these cases and assesses whether a discrepancy between expectation (scaling back) and actual reaction took place. Subsequently, in the case of discrepancies, it is examined whether these can be attributed to misperceptions or miscalculations of the power trends signified by these cases.

In the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, the EU did not scale back its normative policy ambitions or scope of its activities. The conflict directly impacted the EU's ability to effectively promote its values in Georgia and brought about a setback in terms of the extent to which EU norms were replicated in the country. However, the EU continued to employ all four channels of value diffusion for the country at large, opening up Association Agreement negotiations only two years after and continuing financial support through the ENI. Can this discrepancy, when assessed from a neoclassical realist perspective, be explained by the role of (mis)perceptions by EU policy makers of Brussels' relative military power capabilities? There is reason to believe the Russian military threat ceased after the war as a result of Russia having achieved its military objectives and bearing severe international consequences of its aggression (Boonstra, 2008, p. 4). As such, the EU automatically regained manoeuvring room to scale up its normative approach. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that not only relative military, but also economic power plays a role in the normative ambitions of the EU's policies. As assessed in Section 6.1, on average the EU relative economic power has only increased in the course of the ENP. The EU's scaling up of its normative ambitions can thus additionally be explained by the decline of EU relative military capabilities being partially offset by that increase.

The continued presence of Russian forces in Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria has been an important barrier to the resolution of the conflict with Moldova proper, and as such has constrained the EU in diffusing its values through the four channels identified earlier in this study. Given the predominance of Russian relative military power in the region, no discrepancy with the expectations stemming from this study's neoclassical realist framework can be identified. Therefore, no additional explanations revolving around perceptions of the EU policy

elite are required. The same holds for other long-term secessionist regions in the region, notably Abkhazia and South Ossetia where, during the whole course of the ENP, Russian military presence has formed an effective guarantee to their existence. As noted in Chapter five, the continued existence of Transnistria has also hindered EU norm diffusion in Moldova proper. As the relative military balance since 2003 does not explain the increase in EU normative ambitions leading to the Association Agreement in that case, it could be argued that perceptions of EU policy makers did play a role here. Indeed, the EU might have calculated that the best way to transform Moldova is through advancing (economic) cooperation with the country. An additional explanation is that this strategy has been informed by the EU's increasing economic leverage over the country.

In the case of Armenia, Russia's relative military weight became painfully clear to the EU in the final stages of the Association Agreement negotiations in 2013. While EU normative power diffusion was indeed undermined as a result, the EU at least partially restored its normative ambitions by launching new negotiations on a political and trade partnership in late 2015. To some extent a discrepancy occurs when comparing this move to the relative military weight of Russia, which remained at the same level or even rose since 2013. Again, the question remains as to whether this can be explained by looking at EU perceptions of its relative military power. While many factors were at play, in the case of Armenia, as a result of the country joining the EEU, the EU lost a fair bit of its relative economic power to Russia. Hence, in this case relatively weak military capabilities were not offset by increased relative economic capabilities. EU constraints to policy making did also play a role, given that searching for a new political agreement could be considered the only viable option for the EU, as economic means had deteriorated and military instruments remained absent.

Finally, turning to the Russian military involvement in Ukraine that showcased Moscow's increased military power over the neighbourhood, EU policy ambitions did not deteriorate in the short term. While EU norm diffusion took a severe hit as a result of Ukraine losing effective control over Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk, Brussels moved forward with negotiating the Association Agreement with Ukraine's new government, sealing the agreement at the end of June 2014. The ability of the EU to do so was largely the result of the Ukrainian domestic 'Euromaidan' revolution that led to president Yanukovich's deposition from power and the instalment of a pro-Western government under Poroshenko. Of course, the involvement of the EU, which firmly backed pro-Western protesters, should thereby be acknowledged. For example, the Foreign Affairs Council of 20 February 2014 installed sanctions against Ukrainian politicians, and several MEPs and EU MS politicians visited the Maidan square (Council of the

EU, FAC conclusions February 2014; Euractiv, 2014; EUobserver, 2013). However, without domestic political revolution in Ukraine, the EU would not have been able to conclude the Association Agreement. This domestic development (instead of the perceptions of EU policy makers) in Ukraine thus explains that EU policy ambitions towards the country did not decrease as much as expected from Brussel's declined military power vis-à-vis Russia.

3. EU perceptions and calculations of its relative economic capabilities

Chapter six of this study concluded that the EU's relative economic power vis-à-vis Russia has been an important condition for the EU's ability to diffuse its norms among its Eastern neighbours. With the exception of Belarus and Armenia, the EU's economic attractiveness for the neighbourhood countries went up as a result of a combination of the increased openness of its trade regime, the relative rise in GDP and increased proximity of its market to the neighbours, and the resulting increased trade relations. However, the continuous vast number of foreign workers from the neighbourhood in Russia and remittance flows this brings about, in addition to Russia's near monopolist position as an energy supplier, have ensured continuous Russian influence in the region. Returning to the cases presented in Chapter six, which exemplified this continuous influence, this section examines whether EU policy reactions have been in line with the theoretical assertion of this study that Russian economic influence confined EU normative policy ambitions. In the case of discrepancies, the section discusses the potential role of policy makers' perceptions.

The continuous or even increased Russian economic leverage over Belarus has caused EU policy ambitions towards the country to remain at a low level since the beginning of the ENP, as marked by Belarus being the only neighbourhood country for which no Action Plan was installed, and ENP bilateral programmes have therefore been neither developed nor implemented (European Commission, MEMO/12/332). Given the EU's low overall material power vis-à-vis Russia over Belarus, no discrepancy with the theory can be identified, and no additional explanations need to be sought. Continuous EU sanctions targeting individuals responsible for human rights violations, as well as low-level civil society engagement from the EU in the country are examples of how the EU, given the constraints posed by its relatively weak material power, employs the remaining instruments at its disposal to diffuse its norms in the country. It is clear that these measures are a sign of low but realistic foreign policy ambitions compared to the EU's engagement with other neighbourhood countries.

While against the trend of increasing EU economic leverage over Ukraine, as outlined in Section 6.2, in 2014 Russia still bore sufficient economic weight over the country to prevent Yanukovich

from signing the Association Agreement with the EU. It thereby successfully thwarted a potential increase of EU normative power diffusion (through the AA). One can reasonably argue that the fact the EU was not compelled to downplay its normative policy ambitions towards Ukraine was mostly a result of domestic power shifts in the country in favour of an EU-oriented regime. This meant a quick return to the trend of increasing EU economic (and political) leverage over the country, as had been the case before Yanukovich's unanticipated move towards Moscow. As such, no discrepancy with the theoretic systemic propositions of this study arose, meaning that EU perceptions are not of crucial additional explanatory value.

Turning to Moldova's secessionist entity of Transnistria, Section 6.2 found that while Russia remains dominant in terms of economic leverage over the region as compared to the EU, the latter did become increasingly important as an export outlet to the region and, as a result, succeeded in including the region in the DCFTA with Moldova – although in terms of implementation it remains to be seen to what extent this inclusion will crystallise. In any case, Transnistria's increased Westward orientation in terms of exports has slightly increased the EU's ability to normatively influence the region, a development the EU has smartly employed to its benefit. As such, EU normative ambitions rose in congruence with its increased relative economic power (although Russia still tops the EU in absolute economic and military power), and again no discrepancy with the systemic propositions of this study occurred.

Finally, Section 6.2 turned its attention towards Azerbaijan, presenting a divergent case from the others, as it is that country's own increased economic power which limits Brussels' ability to exert normative power in its relations with the Southern Caucasian country. As a result, the EU has put its normative ambitions largely aside, instead mainly pursuing its economic interests. Again, this is in line with the expectations derived from the systemic part of our neoclassical realist framework, and no additional expectation needs to be sought in the perceptions of EU policy makers.

4. Concluding remarks

The conclusions that can be drawn from this chapter are rather tentative in nature. The chapter has, due to limitations of this research project, limited itself to outlining the discrepancies between neoclassical realist structural propositions and actual policy ambitions of the EU, instead of assessing the issue from the perspective of EU policy makers and diving into the EU policy making process that leads to the policy outcomes. While outside the scope of this study, such an exercise could more specifically trace how policy makers' perceptions of relative material capabilities translate into the ambitions and scope of the policies they pursue.

Nevertheless, the cases presented above allow us to arrive at minimally four lessons. First, trends in relative military capabilities have proven to be partially offset by trends in relative economic capabilities, and vice-versa. Second, for both categories, the domestic constraints EU policy makers are confronted with in terms of the instruments they have at their disposal have proven to be at least partially key to explaining EU policy ambitions in the wake of shifting material power. Third, as highlighted by the case of Ukraine, domestic developments in the partner country can be decisive for the extent to which the EU can exert normative power, even when relative material power remains constant. Fourth, and arriving at the main research object of this chapter, perceptions did potentially play a role in the formation of EU policy ambitions in the cases of the (aftermath of) the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the ultimately failed Association Agreement negotiations with Armenia in 2013. More research is needed, however, to examine the precise role played by EU policy makers' perceptions of relative material power in these cases.

8. Conclusions and Reflection

1. Conclusions

Building on a neoclassical realist framework, this study has employed a method of causal-process tracing in order to assess the limits to EU normative power over the Eastern Neighbourhood.

It has first outlined how the development of the EU's normative approach within the timespan of the ENP has been ambiguous. While the EU has moved away from a purely value-based approach in its communications throughout the course of the ENP, the other four channels for value diffusion (i.e., through legally binding agreements, through pursuing third countries to sign multilateral agreements, as a prerequisite for financial assistance, and through restrictive measures) have not followed in due course. A new generation of Association Agreements has actually strengthened EU norm diffusion in the neighbourhood, though only in three of the six countries under scrutiny in this study. As such, EU normative ambitions have become more differentiated between the various countries to its Eastern vicinity. Also in its multilateral efforts and, to a lesser extent, financial support strategies, the EU has actually strengthened its normative approach.

While the EU has continued its preference for a normative policy approach in achieving influence the neighbourhood, in practice the success of that approach has first been dependent, as Chapter five has shown, on the EU's relative military power. Compared to the EU's main rival in its Eastern vicinity, the Russian Federation, the military power balance has become increasingly unfavourable toward the EU, given the Russian revival of its military in the past decade. Increased Russian military assertiveness in the neighbourhood has, as the cases have shown, clearly impacted the EU's ability to diffuse its values.

In economic terms, Chapter six has shown that the EU's power compared to Russia's has increased over time. Despite this shift, as a result of remaining economic ties, the Russian Federation has preserved its ability to influence its Western neighbours and thereby stall the EU's normative diffusion, as shown in the cases. As such, EU normative power has proven to be subject to relative economic power in addition to military capabilities.

Shifting attention to unit-level variables, the thesis subsequently examined the extent to which EU policy makers' perceptions of relative power capabilities played a role in the cases. It found that perceptions did potentially play a role in the formation of EU policy ambitions in the cases of (the aftermath of) the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the ultimately failed Association

Agreement negotiations with Armenia in 2013. Still, more research is needed to exactly trace how perceptions impacted EU policy making in the neighbourhood.

Going back to the propositions of this study, did a relative decline of EU material power lead the EU to scale back or expand the normative ambition and scope of the ENP? This question cannot simply be answered with a yes or a no. As this study has outlined, military and economic power have shown opposing trends, and for some indicators the EU did scale back its normative ambition, while simultaneously strengthening it for some others. What did become clear is that the EU's relative material power does determine to a large extent its ability to diffuse its values. As such, the study did provide an answer to the question of how the geopolitical environment influences EU policy choices on norm diffusion in the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

2. Reflection

As this research concerns a case study, it should be noted that its conclusions cannot simply be generalised among other settings. They are bound to the time frame and geographical area of the Eastern dimension of the ENP, meaning that dynamics could be different in, for example, the EU's engagement with its Southern neighbours. While the external validity of the study is thus limited, in terms of internal validity, the combination of employing a method of causal-process tracing and a neoclassical realist framework did prove capable of providing a comprehensive explanation of the limits of EU power diffusion in the Eastern ENP.

There are, as with all scientific research, some limitations to this study that call for additional research. First, this study considered the EU mostly as a unitary actor. Subsequent research could focus on the inter- and intra-institutional dynamics of the EU, as well as between the institutions and the Member States. Second, while outside the scope of this study, which has mostly focussed on systemic factors, more research into unit-level factors believed by neoclassical realism to affect foreign policy ambitions could help shine light on the precise working of the two-level (systemic and unit-level) transmission belt that neoclassical realism presumes determines foreign policy making.

Finally, do the conclusions of this study allow for the formulation of concrete (policy) recommendations? The insight that EU normative power is confined by relative material power is not yet fully reflected in the EU's engagement with its Eastern neighbours. However, it would be advisable for EU policy makers, when developing EU normative policies for specific neighbourhood countries, to take more closely into account the relative material power (especially economic leverage) the EU has over these countries. In terms of expectations

management, raising the bar too high with regard to human rights and democratisation objectives might actually be counterproductive, adding to what is often referred to as the EU's "expectations-capabilities gap". This furthermore means that EU policies could be adjusted to actively contribute to raising economic (and, to a lesser extent, military) power over the neighbourhood countries, e.g. through strengthening economic ties. The "market power" of the EU has already proven to be an effective tool in this regard, meaning that its further employment through the conclusion of DCFTAs with third countries can be expected to create more room to manoeuvre when it comes to EU value diffusion in those countries. While not the main focus of this study, EU practitioners should moreover carefully appraise the relationship with the Russian Federation beyond daily practices, seeking not only to counter Russian military assertiveness in the Eastern Neighbourhood through balancing between constructive engagement and credible deterrence, but also by reconsidering the broader European security order and the position of the Russian Federation therein. While this study, following current dynamics in the Eastern neighbourhood, has displayed EU competition with Russia largely as a zero-sum game, in the long term such a reconsideration could allow for the achievement of a genuinely shared neighbourhood. This would require the EU to make its ENP approach more inclusive, aimed at decreasing regional tensions and overcoming traditional power dichotomies.

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