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The Eastern Partnership Initiative: A New Opportunity for Neighbours?

ELENA KOROSTELEVA

The EU's relationship with its neighbours to the east has long been founded on the aspiration to build a kind of partnership that does not automatically offer the prospect of membership to former Soviet republics apart from the Baltic States. The mechanism for this was initially the European Neighbourhood Policy, embracing a wider range of countries, which has been further buttressed by the Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP) in an effort to revitalize the partnership-building process in the east. Although more differentiated and versatile, the EaP has nevertheless inherited the Neighbourhood Policy's original conceptual limitations, especially concerning the ill-defined nature of partnership. Practical limitations, on the other hand, include the policy's lack of coherence and management, as well as its low visibility and public appreciation on the ground across the board. The East European response to the EU's initiative reveals further tensions and contradictions, especially pertaining to partner countries' geopolitics and cultural and civilization differences. It is clear that the EU's 'politics of inclusion' needs further conceptualization in order to shift the balance away from the EU towards the partner countries themselves. Only in these circumstances of de-centring can the notion of partnership become true and effective.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2004 in response to the eastward enlargement of the European Union (EU). Given its unprecedented geographical and political expansion into the former socialist bloc, the

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I wish to record my gratitude to the ESRC for the financial support given to the project, and to thank Giles Polglase, Tanya Radchuk and the journal editors for their helpful comments on an earlier version of the present article. Our special thanks to all the project's participants for their insightful contributions and hard work.

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policy sought to address two critical strategic issues: ‘to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the new borders of the Union’.¹ Despite these commendable aims, the ENP, however, had from the outset a conflicting logic embedded in its rhetoric and action, which subsequently prevented its successful realization in the neighbourhood. The policy found it difficult to reconcile its ‘idealist’ *rhetoric* of creating ‘a ring of friends’² around Europe with its ‘realist’ security-predicated need to protect its borders and encircle itself with ‘well-governed countries’.³ It also struggled to adapt suitable *means* to incentivize the neighbours into adopting painful and costly reforms in exchange for a less-tangible promise of economic integration in the future. ‘Special’ or ‘privileged’⁴ relations, devoid of EU membership, carried limited appeal. The *vision* of the future, the so-called *finalité* for the neighbours, has been an obstacle equally for EU policy-makers and for the recipients, as the conflicting descriptors, ‘European neighbours’ and ‘the neighbours of Europe’,⁵ applied to the outsiders, tacitly suggest.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that the ENP received a mixed and delegitimizing response from the eastern neighbours who were either hesitant or indeed rejective from the outset. To respond to the policy’s unintended consequences,⁶ the Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP) was launched on 7 May 2009, at the Prague summit of EU member states and EU officials. A joint declaration with six East European partners – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – was signed to facilitate closer co-operation with the region. The EaP was declared an essential step towards creating ‘the necessary conditions to accelerate *political association* and further *economic integration* between the EU and interested partner countries’.⁷ The policy’s added value was unambiguously seen in the realization of ‘*a more ambitious partnership*’ with neighbours, based on mutual interests, shared ownership and responsibility.⁸

The new initiative indeed offers the whole range of original projects, tools and resources. It has innovatively launched a dual-track approach to the region, which envisages both deepening EU’s bilateral relations with the interested parties, and also, through a multi-lateral dimension, developing new relations with those that hitherto lacked structured relations with the EU (for example, Belarus) and one another. In principle, the dual-track approach seeks to pursue greater differentiation towards the front runners (such as Ukraine and Moldova), and also to provide more opportunities for the less experienced partners, with the ambition of creating a joint Neighbourhood Economic Community in the future.⁹ The initiative also outlines four thematic platforms of *good governance and democracy*, *economic convergence with EU legislation* (the *acquis communautaire*), *energy security*, and *people-to-people contacts*, to be embedded through new *association agreements*,

and a range of specific projects to bring the partners into 'ever closer' union. It also envisages five flagship initiatives to be developed on a needs-serving basis, and through intensive engagement with the region's civil society. In summary, the EaP appears to be timely and potentially capable of reinvigorating the ENP's appeal and its legitimation in the area. In the words of Stefan Füle, the Commissioner for Enlargement and the ENP, the EaP is better equipped 'to support democratic and market-oriented reforms in partner countries, consolidate their statehood and bring them closer to the EU'.¹⁰

A year after its launch, the EaP was slowly beginning to demonstrate its visibility for the partner countries: a number of concrete projects had received financial endorsement; the ENP/EaP budget for 2010–13 had increased by a third of a billion euro; and a string of meetings concerning inter-parliamentary and civil society activities were under way, along with negotiations on the new Association Agreements.¹¹ Could this suggest that the EaP may finally become the desirable and successful EU foreign policy needed for the neighbourhood? Will the initiative be capable of regaining and revitalizing the ENP's appeal in the region? Is it really a new opportunity for the neighbours, a sort of a 'reset' moment in their relations with the EU?

In order to address these and other questions, an extensive empirical investigation was conducted during 2008–10 under the aegis of the ESRC-funded project, *'Europeanising or Securitising the "Outsiders"? Assessing the EU's partnership-building approach with Eastern Europe'* (RES-061-25-0001).¹² The project focused on examining the ENP and EaP's effectiveness in the neighbourhood, and on the difficulties associated with its implementation in the four East European countries – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Russia.¹³ Over a hundred interviews with officials in Brussels and Strasbourg and across the eastern neighbourhood were conducted, in addition to comprehensive nationwide surveys, focus-groups and a study of school essays in the Eastern region.¹⁴ The members of the cabinet of the commissioner for enlargement and the ENP¹⁵ noted that taking stock of the ENP/EaP's realization in the region and monitoring the extent of the acceptance of the policy by the partners has proved useful for the forthcoming review of major instruments and EU actions in the eastern neighbourhood.

Our research, however, has revealed a rather mixed picture. On the one hand, the findings clearly point to a greater Europeanization of the general public, and growing knowledge of, and interest towards, the EU. Younger, educated and professional members of the East European societies evidently demonstrate stronger interest in or awareness of their western counterparts; whereas policy-makers and government officials generally welcome the opportunity of closer co-operation and economic assistance. On the other hand, this positive experience is counter-balanced by the increasing anxiety in relation to the choice the partner countries feel they have to make: a closer integration with

the EU or with Russia? They also seem confused by the joint-ownership rhetoric, which appears to be asymmetrical and heavily dominated by EU priorities, and equally disheartened by the uncertainty of the *finalité* for their efforts and commitment to reform. The policy continues to be fraught with misconceptions and expectation gaps across the eastern border, still falling short of the desired credibility and leverage to facilitate reform in the region.¹⁶

This collection offers an analytical excursion into the realities and rhetoric of the EU and four partner countries, each aspiring to different treatment and end-products of co-operation, and each presenting a varied range of dilemmas and challenges for the EU. The present introduction will offer a general overview of the conceptual and practical limitations of the policies (ENP/EaP), stemming from a theoretical examination of policy documents and official discourse in the EU and Eastern Europe. It will then conduct the reader through the corpus of differences and expectations presented by individual case studies, and explain the nature of contributions to the volume by the teams of national researchers.

Conceptual and Practical Limitations of the ENP/EaP

*New Wine in Old Wineskins?*¹⁷

In his seminal article of 1996, Michael E. Smith raised a number of critical issues related to defining the nature of the relationship between the EU and the changing European order.¹⁸ He noted that one of the most striking and remarkable developments in the 1990s was a paradigm shift away from a 'fixed set of boundaries'¹⁹ to a 'politics of inclusion', necessitated by the EU's growing internal complexity and its interdependency with the outside world. In contrast to the 'politics of exclusion' which dominated much of the European Community's existence, the new 'politics of inclusion', he argued, was seen as more advantageous for responding to radical changes of the new European order.²⁰ The core assumptions of the EU's new politics directly challenged the traditional notions of statehood by viewing boundaries as more porous; of security which precipitated 'a multilayered conception of political and security space'²¹ going well beyond the borders of Europe; of culture and identity, and finally of EU institutional and legal scaffolding requiring redefinition.

The 'politics of inclusion' demanded diversity of method and paths of development: it prioritized *internalization* of external disturbances over their *containment*, and sought to gain *access to* rather than *control over* its exterior. This has become known as a discourse of 'negotiated order', which amalgamated both exclusiveness and inclusiveness of the EU, making the latter a centre, a pole of attraction for its external milieu, and a

‘shaper of [the] normal’ in international relations.²² The EU’s centrality to its external environment offered a new social construction of order, premised on the politics of malleable boundaries, which are there ‘for crossing rather than defending’.²³ By ‘boundaries’ Smith implied distinct differences between sovereign subjects, which would demarcate insiders from the outsiders. He singled out four critical boundaries that would define a polity as unique: *institutional and legal, transactional, geopolitical and cultural*. Smith advocated the continuing re-drawing of boundaries by the EU, as they would help to shape the EU’s normative status and legitimate its strategies beyond its borders by positively transforming the realities affected by them. He clearly perceived EU boundaries as those that are necessary to shift and expand in order to ‘accommodate new political and other realities’,²⁴ and to face the challenges associated with them.

In designing the neighbourhood policy, the EU in a way followed Smith’s argument of ‘inclusion’, which aimed to blur the differences between the insiders and the outsiders, without necessitating their amalgamation. In order to prevent new dividing lines that would emerge between a more prosperous Europe and its less stable ‘backyard’,²⁵ the EU sought to offer to the latter an inclusive policy of *partnership* – a kind of partnership that would push EU boundaries to the limits of interconnectedness by proffering political association and economic integration to the neighbourhood, but nevertheless would prevent neighbours’ physical accession to the EU: ‘to share everything with the Union but institutions’.²⁶ The notion of partnership was to be based on ‘shared values’, ‘common interests’ and ‘joint ownership’, whereby ‘the EU [would] not seek to impose priorities or conditions on its partners ... There can be no question of asking partners to accept a pre-determined set of priorities’.²⁷ In an actual fact, the EaP went even further to make ‘a more ambitious partnership’ *central* to its relations with the neighbours.

In reality, however, this approach proved difficult to sustain. The notion of partnership devoid of a membership perspective caused a number of tensions, which have been widely analysed in scholarly literature.²⁸ Bechev and Nicolaidis argue the principal tensions, which may be hard to reconcile, include (i) hegemony versus partnership: embedding the asymmetry of EU power politics in the relations with neighbours from the start; (ii) conditionality versus ownership: questioning compatibility of the logic of coercion and order with that of consent and equality; (iii) bilateralism versus multilateralism: endeavouring to shift the focus away from the EU on to more regional co-operation between the states; (iv) differentiation versus homogeneity: implying limited resources and the lack of tangible rewards to more committed partners; and finally (v) functional versus geo-strategic vision: suggesting conflicting visions of the finalité for EU co-operation with the outsiders.²⁹

The major shortcoming in the design of the neighbourhood policy, as the present article contends, lies with the ill-defined concept of *partnership*, critical to the development of structured and successful relations with the outsiders. *Partnership* as a concept has hitherto struggled to find its proper meaning in EU official documents. It still causes an appearance of obfuscation among EU officials when they are asked to discriminate on the nature and the degree of embedded asymmetry in the relationship of ‘equals’ between the EU and partner countries.³⁰ Even its constitutive elements – those of ‘shared values’ and ‘joint ownership’ – receive better elaboration in official documents, yet still struggle to accommodate two parties in the equation. Contrary to their etymological meanings, the partnership elements explicitly prioritize the EU-laden agenda. In particular, ‘shared values’ have now become fully institutionalized as ‘the values of the Union’ by the Lisbon Treaty, in Article 7a; and ‘joint ownership’, which intended to avoid EU imposition and unilateralism, has been replaced by *mutual commitments* under the EaP, thus diminishing the meaning of ownership altogether. As one EU official commented, ‘It is about injecting our values into the neighbourhood ... after all, it is about them aligning with us, rather than *vice versa*’.³¹

In the absence of a well-defined notion of partnership and growing confusion about the concepts of ‘joint ownership’ and ‘shared values’, the EU elected to deploy a means-tested method of external governance, used for EU enlargement and operating through conditionality and top-down rule transfer.³² External governance draws on a compulsory element of conditionality, which is at odds with voluntarism and equality of partnership. In different circumstances (such as when offering accession for convergence), external governance would be ideally suited for the EU’s control over the process of partners’ convergence. However, neighbours are not candidates, and may never become such, and thus the use of conditionality and top-down rule compliance demanded by the EU from the outsiders under the relationship of *partnership* becomes not only problematic practically, in terms of steering neighbours’ motivations, but entirely erroneous conceptually.

In its enthusiasm for ‘inclusion’, but of a different sort, and guided by its own agenda, the EU clearly fails to discriminate between its own priorities and what would constitute ‘mutual interests’, or indeed what would constitute ‘access’ rather than ‘control’. By utilizing external governance rather than partnership, the EU offers a false choice to the outsiders, or, more precisely, no choice at all: it is either co-operation on EU terms or no co-operation at all. And this is not the choice EU’s eastern neighbours are easily prepared to make. Being also neighbours of Russia, they struggle to balance their relations with these two competitive powers. Furthermore, as our research indicates, they also demonstrate a wide array of differences in culture and civilization, which renders *their* boundaries harder for the EU to penetrate in order

to establish the foundations for ‘shared values’. In addition, they have come to question the notion of ‘partnership’, which they thought would work in both directions and which instead stipulated a one-way flow of EU directives.

External governance considers EU relations with neighbours as a one-way traffic, premised on a donor–recipient formula. This one-way modality is not capable of recognizing the existence of ‘the other’ in the partnership, ‘the other’ who may equally, as sovereign subjects, have their own boundaries to consider and to shift, and whose interests and needs appear to be excluded a priori from their equation of partnership with the EU. In other words, the principal *conceptual* difficulty in applying governance at the expense of partnership (even if ill-defined) is that the EU treats the neighbours not as sovereign subjects, who may have their own boundaries to re-draw, but as EU ‘objects of governance’, in a contradictory attempt to manufacture a circle of ‘well-governed countries’, thereby running the risk of losing them as ‘friends’.

Conceptually, the Eastern Partnership does not address this problem either, having in place the same logic of ‘negotiated compliance’ carried from the ENP. From this point of view, therefore, it is very difficult to see how much more successful, and consequently more legitimate, the new initiative is likely to be, since it is premised on the same ‘old’ presumption of EU centrality to the outside world, including the contested neighbourhood.

EU Official and Public Discourses: United in Inconsistency?

In addition to these conceptual (and possibly irreconcilable) problems, the ENP/EaP also encounters difficulties of a practical nature. Owing to internal reforms, triggered by the recent enforcement of the Lisbon Treaty plus ramifications from the global economic and financial crises, the EU is not at present well-placed to address the problems of the ENP/EaP’s implementation in the region.

The most critical issues do not relate to the ENP/EaP’s being under-resourced or under-staffed, but essentially disclose the lack of coherency and strategic vision in the policy for pursuing reforms in the neighbourhood. There are also issues of limited legitimacy of EU foreign policy efforts within the EU itself, as evidence from the 2007 Eurobarometer reveals. This section will explore some horizontal and vertical discrepancies that permeate the policy discourse at the EU official level, and will discuss low public awareness of, and approval for, the policy among EU citizens.³³

EU official discourse reveals a curious discrepancy between the key political actors involved in its formulation and evaluation. Research analysis has noted conspicuous differences in the discourse of the Commission officials (EC), and members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and Member States’

representatives (MS) in their understanding of the ENP/EaP's role in the eastern neighbourhood. Some scholars may insist that these discrepancies are unavoidable, given the multifaceted nature of EU foreign policy. Nevertheless, the case could be made that, given the strategic importance of the ENP/EaP for EU normative aspirations and its rising role as a global transformative power, more coherency and cohesion are vital to pursue these ambitions.³⁴

As expected, the EC officials in Brussels take a more 'technical' executive approach to the ENP/EaP. After the problems with the ENP's low legitimisation in the region, they seem to be less ambitious about the policy's overall success and measure its progress incrementally. Although united by their function to make the policy effective, they present *no coherent understanding* of how it should be better managed or implemented in the region, and lay full responsibility for the policy's implementation on the partner countries. They also show no particular discrimination between the relevance of *governance*, which they view as positively conducive to facilitating reform, and *partnership* in EU relations with the neighbours. This appears to be strikingly contradictory to the EaP's critical intention to offer a 'more ambitious partnership' as a more re-invigorating form of co-operation for the neighbours. Partnership, in all cases, is viewed as residual, and more about 'projecting [the] EU model' on to the outsiders. Furthermore, the EaP is construed as representative of EU strategic interests, especially of security, and partners are largely perceived as 'needy' – 'wanting membership, or money'.³⁵

In contrast, the MEPs and MS reveal a more nuanced understanding of the ENP/EaP's role in the region. They all note the policy's contradictory logic, but settle for a 'middle way' approach between partnership as a strategy to accommodate the neighbours' interests, and governance as a more efficient way to promote EU reforms: 'The ENP has primarily been an attempt of governance, but in practice . . . was forced to accept more partnership elements'. EU security interests yet again dominate the policy's strategic agenda, and many MEPS and MS make no secret that 'the notion of "shared values" is there to cover EU values, which we wish to disseminate. The EU takes less into consideration how the [partner] countries could positively contribute to its future development'.³⁶ They also seem to be more aware about the 'cultural gap' between 'us and them', and point out, especially the new MS, that this gap may not be easily bridgeable.

Notwithstanding these subtle differences, the reality on the ground, as seen by the in-country officials and MS representatives, differs markedly from that of Brussels. Not only did all the in-country officials complain, *off the record*, about the lack of 'strong and consistent EU foreign policy', pointing to the EaP's limited added value and its 'lacking teeth'; the EU delegation officials also showed absolutely no awareness of the difference between *partnership*

and *governance*, and were unconcerned about the use of conditionality and the prioritization of the EU agenda. EU delegation officials also took a more principled approach on the ground, demanding that ‘shared values’ should come first, in exchange for co-operation with the EU.³⁷ MS yet again appeared more willing to differentiate the policy’s limitations. They themselves insisted, *off the record*, that, in order for the EU to achieve its ambitious reforms, it should offer a long-term membership perspective, in return for the partners’ convergence with EU norms.

Apart from some evident discrepancies in the interpretation of partnership and the role of shared values and joint ownership, a principal disagreement between Brussels and the in-country officials emerged on the role of Russia in the neighbourhood. While Brussels informally acknowledges the discomfort of intruding into the traditional sphere of Russian interests, it also points out that this takes place in the interests of all parties involved. On the ground, however, in-country officials not only consider Russia as a crucial (and often superior) player, but also as an obstacle. They also believe that the neighbours, sandwiched between the EU and Russia, sooner or later will have to make a choice, which of necessity is totally unacknowledged by the Brussels officials. This choice, however, whichever way it goes, will cause security dilemmas for the neighbours, whereby, having attractive alternatives from both greater powers, the neighbours will find it impossible to make a commitment, and this will precipitate uncertainty and a rising sense of insecurity for themselves.³⁸

In summary, our analysis of the official EU discourse at home and abroad reveals a number of strategic gaps; these range from the understanding of *partnership*, through the nature and the direction of the developing relationship, to the acknowledgement of partners’ boundaries, especially those of culture and geopolitics, which the EU, from its own lofty position, has so far failed to recognize.

Public discourse in the EU reveals similarly low levels of awareness and differentiation between the outsiders, as well as limited understanding of what the EU should do with the neighbours. A Eurobarometer survey³⁹ indicated that about two-thirds of EU respondents designate Russia and Ukraine as their neighbours; only half of the surveyed participants treated Belarus as such, and only a third considered Moldova a neighbour. The identification of the four countries as EU neighbours was the strongest among the new formerly communist member states, which had historical links with the countries in question. Only one in five respondents claimed to have heard about the ENP; but, despite the limited awareness, the majority thought it would be important to develop good-neighbourly relations with the outsiders. A similarly large majority contended that the most pressing issues to tackle under the proposed co-operation with neighbours were those of organized crime

and terrorism, confirming that the prevalent perception of the neighbours by the majority of EU respondents was that of a threat, rather than simply of 'being different'.⁴⁰

Two-thirds of the EU respondents agreed with the idea that the neighbours should be offered assistance and access to EU markets. In 2007, however, one in two believed that helping neighbours might be expensive for the EU, which could endanger the EU's own 'prosperity'; and their opinion was clearly divided over whether the EU should provide financial support to them, with less than a third in favour of this. It is likely that, with the financial crisis, public opinion has probably turned against co-operation, and would find the assistance to neighbours a 'wasteful opportunity'. The majority of the EU respondents believed that the EU should only co-operate with the 'interested parties' – that is, those who were willing to adopt EU values.

On the issue of shared values, one in two respondents contended that the neighbours did not have common values with people in the EU. Interestingly, this belief was the strongest among the new post-communist member states, whereas German, Danish, Dutch and UK respondents displayed the strongest proclivity (on average 33 per cent) in support of shared values with the neighbours. As our research in Eastern Europe indicates,⁴¹ a similar situation arises with regard to the perception of a values gap among the neighbours. A large majority in all four countries associated the EU with a specific set of liberal values (including democracy, a market economy, respect for human rights, and lawfulness). However, in their description of their own countries, three-quarters of respondents happened to mention a diametrically opposite list of beliefs, with fewer than 5 per cent on average failing to respond to the question.

In summary, the above analysis suggests that the ENP and the EaP continue to experience difficulties of a conceptual and practical nature. The EaP is not likely to make the EU's appeal in the region more effective or legitimate, as it conceptually purports to value the same politics of limited equality and ill-defined partnership with the neighbours. In practical terms, the EaP encounters the problems of inconsistency and reduced cohesion at the decision-making and implementation levels, thereby further reducing neighbours' feeble motivations for reform. Finally, the EU public in general, despite being benevolently inclined towards the wider Europe, shows limited awareness about the neighbourhood, and often perceives them as a threat. Furthermore, the public demonstrates unwillingness to legitimize EU 'politics of inclusion', in the forms of financial assistance or advocacy of more reform. Thus, public opinion in a way reflects the extent of the existing ambivalence and lack of resolve prevalent among EU policy-makers and officials.

The East European Response: Too Many ‘Sizes’ to Fit the Bill?

The ambitious but ambiguous ENP has received a mixed response from the neighbours, ranging from their hesitant approval (in the absence of a better alternative) to an outright rejection of the policy as too political, or a ‘policy of double standards’.⁴² The EaP initiative intended to overcome the problem of the ENP’s legitimation and, by offering a more substantive notion of *partnership*, would foster neighbours’ closer engagement with the EU.

On the basis of extensive research fieldwork, we shall now provide a general overview of the East European response, which will be detailed by individual case studies in subsequent contributions. This section will first offer some regional comparisons between the three partner countries involved in the ENP/EaP, and then present some general thematic observations, concerning partners’ perceptions of and associations with the EU and its neighbourhood policies, thereby offering an insight into their own boundary-drawing in the framework of the EU partnership-building process.

Regional Overview: Individual ‘Size’ Matters

One of the most frequently cited criticisms of the ENP was that of its ‘one-size-fits-all’ philosophy.⁴³ In its attempt to become a ‘norm-maker’ for the neighbourhood, the EU unreflexively intended to promote its own model, because ‘institutions tend to export institutional isomorphism as a default option’.⁴⁴ In this endeavour, the EU aimed to alter the exterior to its own design, mirroring ‘the deeply engrained belief that Europe’s history is a lesson for everyone’.⁴⁵ As experience demonstrates, not all the partners positively responded to the EU’s call, with some rejecting outright the idea of ‘alien values’. The EaP in its design, and on recommendations from the European Commission,⁴⁶ intended to offer a more regional focus – to learn more about partners – and more differentiation – to attend correspondingly to the partners’ individual needs. Conceptually, the initiative purported to provide more engagement with the neighbours, premised on joint ownership and mutual commitments, thus aiming to take into account partners’ interests and needs; however, the research reveals that, in reality, the EU has been prioritizing its own agenda, seen as better fitted for the outsiders’ needs. There is, however, as Bicchi argues, a very thin line between ‘giving voice to’ the people, and ‘speaking on someone’s behalf’;⁴⁷ and the EU clearly fails here to move beyond its Eurocentric vision of the partnership.

The research underlines the importance of differentiating every partner in partnership, as they appear to be different, not only in their perceptions and attitudes, but also in their ambitions and readiness to co-operate with the EU.

Belarus, for example, stands out as a country that is prepared to engage with the EU only *on equal terms*, ‘without the EU’s imposing its alien values’.⁴⁸ It clearly perceives itself as an equal partner with Europe, but concedes that *equal partnership* with the EU may be difficult in practice. This is not because of the EU’s size and weight on the international arena, but more essentially because the EU has a tendency ‘to choose partners to its liking. Whereas, we are different and conscious of our national interests, and the EU finds it difficult to swallow’.⁴⁹ Belarus is pragmatic and realistic about its expectations of the EaP. In the words of many EU officials,⁵⁰ Belarus always comes well prepared for EU meetings, and in fact was the only country which participated in the first joint ministerial meeting under the EaP, with a full list of joint projects prepared for the EU’s consideration.⁵¹ Belarus is critically aware of its own internal limitations, and most of all ‘ideological’. Nevertheless, it is adamant that co-operation with the EU should be based on joint interests rather than political values: ‘joint interests and a long track record of co-operation may generate common values, norms and understanding. And not the other way around’.⁵²

Ukrainian officials, by contrast, rejected the ENP outright and have had similar reservations for the EaP, contending that ‘there is no policy. EaP may give us a needed focus; but it does not offer the right path’.⁵³ According to many government officials, the EaP ‘offers no coordination’, ‘no adequate resources’ and more importantly, ‘no sense of direction’. Nevertheless, faced with the EU’s ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ presentation of choice, they feel they have to engage: ‘The EU does not want to see Ukraine as an equal partner. We have no trust and no concrete objectives. If we had a prospect of membership, we would have allowed the EU to dictate’.⁵⁴ All Ukrainian officials, from government and presidential administration to parliament, were critical of EU–Ukrainian relations of *partnership*: ‘there is no partnership, the idea of joint ownership is not working ... We come with a lot of ideas, but the EU has its own priorities’; ‘we are not equal by definition, or at least this is what we are led to believe’.⁵⁵

Moldova’s position is altogether different. Initially, Moldovan officials were very critical of the EaP, too, but nevertheless were prepared to engage: ‘EaP is an odd attempt to show bureaucratically that something is being done without any specific purpose’.⁵⁶ The question of partnership has been dismissed in Moldova as irrelevant, as ‘it is clear that the EU governs here’,⁵⁷ and there can be no equal partnership in principle between the EU and Moldova. The country, in the opinion of all interviewees, seriously needs reforms, and, even more so, requires clear guidance from the EU on how to undertake them: ‘We should help the EU to see what we require. We also need advice on how to implement our good laws. The EU is too soft and needs to be more concrete and critical’.⁵⁸ In fact, they were ready

to draft a new Association Agreement *for* the EU, following existing templates with the candidate countries, in order to start the reforms immediately.

This brief comparison of countries' official positions in relation to the EU, and their readiness to co-operate, demonstrates conspicuous regional diversity and the need for the EU to approach each partner country individually. From the interviews with government officials across the border, however, it transpired that neither the EU knew the exact direction of reform, nor were the partners themselves certain of what was required of them, under the notion of a *more ambitious partnership*, leaving many ambitions unanswered, and frustration growing.

Thematic Overview: Socio-cultural, Geopolitical and Partnership Gaps

The extensive research findings generated a number of thematic observations which indicate serious gaps and misconceptions that exist between the partner countries and the EU, from top-level officials to the general public, and that need to be addressed as a matter of urgency if the EaP is to become successful in the region.

Policies' Low Visibility on the Ground

In contrast to the intensifying relations between the EU and its eastern partner countries under the EaP, the policy acquires low-level legitimation and appreciation by the general public across the border. As noted, in the EU, the population is largely unaware of the neighbourhood policy; has limited geographic knowledge of EU neighbours and generally perceives them as a threat; and perceives the neighbourhood as an area of political instability and of criminal and terrorist activities. Having limited familiarity with the EU abroad, the public is understandably undecided about the nature and extent of EU assistance needed for the partner states. Beyond the EU border, in Eastern Europe, the general population displays a varied but equally low-level awareness about the EU as a whole, often failing even to name the administrative capital, the nature of the union and the key member states correctly. Case-study analysis suggests that Belarus's population is generally uninterested, that of Ukraine is uninformed, and the population of Moldova is, by contrast, exceptionally keen and ready. A study of school essays further underlined a marked divergence in public acceptance and knowledge of Europe. It has emerged that the Moldovan youth show a greater degree of socialization and aspirations for a common European future, whereas Ukrainian youth appear sceptical and Belarusian – indifferent. In Russia, the younger generation espoused full support for the government's foreign policy course, and displayed equal interest in both the EU and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Inequality of Partnership

In all four countries, government officials and parliamentarians point out the importance of *equal partnership* in their relations with the EU. They see it first and foremost as a relationship based on joint interests, which may lead eventually to the development of common understanding and values: 'Joint interests pave the way to long-term shared values'.⁵⁹ The majority of interviewees and focus group participants commented that their countries' co-operation with the EU was driven by EU interests and priorities in the first instance, and this asymmetrical framework of relations, they felt, was embedded in all EU directives and strategy documents. Many found that the ENP and EaP are beneficial in theory, but that they fail to differentiate among the countries they encompass. Furthermore, the newly proposed partnership contains unclear dividends in cases where countries meet the requirements and offers limited added value, duplicating many regulations already realized in the past. Notwithstanding the general criticism of the asymmetrical partnership, only Belarus insisted on steering a course towards more equality with the EU; Ukraine and Moldova felt they had no choice but to comply.

Geopolitics Matters

All neighbours felt that they were 'caught' between the EU and Russia, having to prioritize their allegiances to one or the other. As stated above, this was not a choice they were prepared to make unconditionally. As key officials noted, only with the prospect of EU membership would Moldova and Ukraine surrender their relationship with Russia. In fact, however, all three countries indicated that they would intend to pursue more balanced relations with both powers, building alliances, but reserving allegiances for more substantive propositions from either side in the future. In particular, officials in Belarus felt they were divided about their choice of direction, upon which both major powers tacitly insisted. Some interviewees suggested that Belarus should be treated independently and not as 'a bridge, or the window between two civilizations';⁶⁰ others insisted that Belarus should 'come to Europe' with Russia ('we are too interdependent to be treated apart'⁶¹). In either case, the sensitivity of being part of the 'contested neighbourhood' was strongly felt, especially in the circumstances of the recent disputes over gas supply and pricing and the customs union with Russia. In Ukraine, Russia was named as one of the potential obstacles for the acceleration of EU-Ukrainian relations. Ukraine acutely felt the divisive and competitive politics of both neighbours, which pressure has intensified under the new Ukrainian leadership: 'Russia is a key player here, and we should balance our security interests, and work with Russia more'.⁶² In contrast, in

Moldova officials did not necessarily see Russia as a hindrance: ‘the main problem is the internal situation’.⁶³ They explicitly insisted that ‘we need[ed] to bring Russia into the equation too’, as they saw Russia as a key player in resolving the Transnistrian conflict, a perceived stumbling bloc for Moldova’s integration with the EU. In summary, each neighbour indicated the difficulty of the choice they were forced to make by both powers, and their reluctance to pledge commitments to either, in the absence of concrete guarantees of membership from the EU. At the same time, EU officials remained illusory about ‘working in partnership with Russia’ to promote modernization in the ‘near abroad’. Their ‘soft-power’ incentives appear to be as politically divisive as the ‘hard politics’ of Russia.

The Socio-cultural Gap

Finally, the socio-cultural gap remains very pronounced in all four countries, with a measure of variation related to the extent that it was viewed as bridgeable. The majority of the survey respondents and interviewees in all four countries insisted that cultural differences existed, especially in relation to mentality and religion. The legal and political culture of Europeans was contrasted with the communal and authority-abiding living in Eastern Europe. Respondents at all levels acknowledged that Europeans looked deprecatingly on their neighbours, like a civilized nation on a barbarian one. The differences also exist among the neighbours themselves. In Moldova, for example, although officials acknowledge that ‘we don’t at present share values, instead we repeat phrases and create illusions of values, without real practical outcome’, they nevertheless suggest that this is all reconcilable, the more cooperation ‘we would have with the EU’.⁶⁴ Ukrainians insist on their European identity but acknowledge that they lack a European political culture, and are clearly burdened by the Soviet legacies and geographical disparities within the country. Belarus tenaciously perceives itself as different: officialdom openly acknowledges the differences in values and cultural heritage, and public opinion points at the diametrically opposite set of values it associates with the EU and with Belarus.

In summary, as the research indicates, EU ‘politics of inclusion’ remain patchy and inconsistent, making it difficult for the neighbours to commit themselves to the European course of reform. European public opinion largely mirrors their leadership’s lack of resolve in relation to the outsiders, and perceives these neighbours mainly as a security threat. The gap widens further across the border. The east European partners appear to be critical of and disappointed by the intangible promises of partnership, and perceive their relations with the EU as asymmetrical and one-sided. In consonance with their peoples, they observe a distinct gap in values between the partner countries and the EU, and sincerely struggle to reconcile conflicting priorities

pressed upon them by their larger neighbours. EU officials, however, appear unaware of – or indeed unconcerned by – the security dilemmas that they inadvertently unleash on their neighbours, naively believing that what the EU offers is a true *partnership* for all the parties concerned.

Structure of the Volume

This volume offers a collective assessment of the development and impact of the ENP/EaP on its eastern neighbours, Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova in particular, juxtaposed with Russia's stance. Founded on extensive empirical and conceptual research, it uniquely bridges the perspectives of all parties across the EU's eastern border, in an attempt to detect gaps in perception and misconceptions related to the effective implementation of the EU-proffered partnership in the eastern region.

After this general introduction, the volume presents an individual analysis of each of the four case studies involved in the research project, preceded by a comparative overview of the empirical findings across the region.

In her article, Tanya Radchuk examines the whole array of thematic issues – from foreign policy preferences and EU relations to mutual perceptions and values – from a regional perspective, revealed by expert interviews, focus group discussions, nationwide surveys and a study of school essays in the countries studied. Cross-country analysis exposes the decisive significance of Russia for its neighbours and their insistent preference for a multi-vector foreign policy. As regards the EU, the partner countries explicitly value trade relations and developing economic links, but at the same time believe that the EU manages these relations primarily for its own benefit, coercing partners into a one-sided relationship of limited choice. Very often this kind of relationship evokes feelings of negligence and inferiority, engendering the rise of Euro-scepticism in the front runner Ukraine, and enduring suspicions in the laggard Belarus. Substantial cleavages in the value system persist between the EU and Eastern Europe, implying that the EU's 'politics of inclusion' has yielded only limited results for the partnership-building process in the region.

The contribution by Oleksandr Stegny provides a specifically Ukrainian perspective on the country's relations with the EU. On the surface, as the 2010 presidential election revealed, Ukraine is increasingly demonstrating the durability of its commitments to European standards. In reality, the country is struggling to find the right balance in its relations with the EU, and is becoming increasingly resentful and sceptical of the proposed path for European integration. Research findings disclose a growing lack of motivation for a European future, not only within the Ukrainian political establishment, but among the population too. As the author concludes, the country has

now reached a critical juncture at which it should reassess its foreign policy priorities and more decisively promote its national interests.

The article by the Belarusian colleagues David Rotman and Natalia Veremeeva stands out in the volume as the one that exposes the critical relevance of a 'no choice' situation for the contested neighbourhood. The authors trace Belarus's historical trajectories of its relations with the EU and Russia, and suggest that both neighbours are continuing to manipulate the country's precarious geopolitical position in the pursuit of their specific, security-predicated interests. While constantly feeling under pressure, and often torn apart by the contradictory demands of both sides, Belarus naturally resists offering full allegiances to either, and remains acutely conscious of its national strategic interests and of the importance of *equal partnership* in its relations with the outside world.

The analysis of Moldova's situation, provided here by Olga Danii and Mariana Mascauteanu, yet again questions the effectiveness and the *finalité* of the ENP/EaP for the neighbourhood, and especially those countries that make the course of European integration their explicit national priority. Both authors insist that the current indeterminacy of the EU regarding Moldova's future considerably inhibits the progress of reform in the country, and erodes its motivation and commitment to the quality and pace of progress. Being exceptionally enthusiastic and knowledgeable about Europe, the country also feels trapped between the EU's ambiguous promises and Russia's unwillingness to resolve the Transnistrian conflict, which, Moldova feels, is critical for its progressive relations with the EU. Often feelings of abandonment and lack of commitment on the EU side dominate Moldovan official discourse. In general, however, the country remains, at all levels, one of the staunchest supporters of European integration, and is ready to cooperate no matter what happens.

Finally, the article by Sergey Tumanov, Alexander Gasparishvili and Ekaterina Romanova reveals what the Russians really think of the EU and its policies towards the eastern region. It contends that, although Russia is beginning to prioritize the EU in its foreign policy, evidence also suggests that it is also becoming increasingly conscious and defensive of its strategic interests in the 'near abroad' (former Soviet republics). While there is little open official discussion of the potential impact of the ENP/EaP on the area, Russia's relations with partner countries, informal interviews and public opinion point to growing discontentment with what is perceived as the EU's encroachment on Russia's traditional sphere of influence. As it is illustratively revealed by public perceptions of Ukraine as a country hostile to Russia following its rapprochement with the EU, Russia still entertains its divisive Cold War attitude of 'who is not with us, is against us' towards its external environment, and on that basis intensifies the promotion of its interests in

the neighbourhood. Whether this succeeds is a question upon which individual country contributions comment, but the issue of competitive strategies and interests on the part of the EU and of Russia in the contested area remains.

In conclusion, the volume offers a unique up-to-date insiders' perspective on the effectiveness of the ENP and EaP, and their potential for strengthening EU relations with the neighbourhood. The issues of boundary politics, especially of geopolitics and culture, remain critically important for the partners in the east, and underscore the need to reassess EU perceptions of the boundaries. These are not only the boundaries of the EU's own design, but also those of the partners, which a global player such as the EU rightfully has to acknowledge. In synopsis, the notion of *partnership* remains at stake, especially for legitimizing EU policies among the outsiders. Learning about 'the other', and recognizing their interests in partnership, is the key for effective co-operation in the future. Whether the EU is able to take this 'de-centring approach'⁶⁵ towards the neighbourhood is an area for further research and discussion.

NOTES

1. Commission of the European Communities, 'Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours', Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, COM (2003) 104 final, Brussels, 11 March 2003, p.4.
2. Romano Prodi, 'A Wider Europe – a Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability', speech (SPEECH/02/619), delivered at the 6th ECSA–World conference, Brussels, 5–6 Dec. 2002, p.3.
3. Council of the European Union, 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', European Security Strategy, Brussels, 12 Dec. 2003, available at <<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>>, accessed 5 July 2010.
4. Article 7a of the Treaty on the European Union (as introduced by Article 1, Para. 10 of the Lisbon Treaty) states the following: '1. 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 characterized by close and peaceful relations based on co-operation': cited from Dimitar Bechev and Kalypso Nicolaidis, 'From Policy to Polity: Can the EU's Special Relations with its "Neighbourhood" be Decentred?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.48, No.3 (2010), pp.475–500 (p.477, n.1).
5. See Radoslaw Sikorski's statement differentiating between the 'neighbours of Europe' to the south and the 'European neighbours' to the east, in Renata Goldirova, 'Eastern Partnership Could Lead to Enlargement', *EU Observer*, 27 May 2008, available at <<http://euobserver.com/9/26211>>, accessed 6 July 2010.
6. And also to respond to the competitive French efforts of policy regionalization in the Mediterranean, available at <<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1611&format=HTML&age>>, accessed 6 July 2010.
7. Council of the European Union, *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, Brussels, 7 May 2009, 8435/09 (Presse 78), p.6, available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf>, accessed 21 June 2010; emphasis added.
8. *Ibid.*, p.5; emphasis added.

9. *The Eastern Partnership – An Ambitious New Chapter in the EU’s relations with its Eastern Neighbours*, press release, IP/08/1858, Brussels, 3 Dec. 2008, p.2.
10. Stefan Füle, ‘Strong Civil Society Pillar – Major Objective of the EU Eastern Partnership Policy’, speech (SPEECH/10/78) offered to the 4th meeting of the Executive Committee of the Pan-European Regional Council, Brussels, 8 March 2010.
11. For more information see Commission’s press release, ‘Key Investment Projects in the European Neighbourhood Get €85 Million Boost’, IP/10/880, Brussels, 2 July 2010, available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/880&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>, accessed 5 July 2010; also the 2009 annual Operational Report of the Neighbourhood Investment Facilities (NIF), available at http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/neighbourhood/regional-co-operation/irc/documents/vi_operational_annual_report_2009_nif_en.pdf, accessed 6 July 2010.
12. For more information regarding the project see its websites: www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/minisites/widereurope/index.html or <http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en/research/EKPproject/index.htm>, accessed 6 July 2010.
13. Although Russia is not a participant of the ENP/EaP, it was nevertheless included in the project, as a greater geopolitical neighbour affecting decision-making and policy implementation in the region.
14. For technical description of research methods visit <http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en/research/EKPproject/Research%20Findings.htm>, accessed 6 July 2010.
15. Research results have been disseminated and were discussed in detail with members of the cabinet of Commissioner Stefan Füle, and heads of units and other relevant officials of DG RELEX, in Brussels on 25 June 2010.
16. An excellent analysis of the ENP, and the issues of its credibility and limited leverage, is provide in Richard Whitman and Stefan Wolff (eds.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective: Context, Implementation and Impact* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
17. This sub-title captures an enduring discussion of the compatibility of new ideas pursued in the neighbourhood with the traditional means of conditionality deployed by the EU, first powerfully presented by Judith Kelly in her article ‘New Wine in Old Wineskins: Promoting Political Reforms through the New European Neighbourhood Policy’, published in the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.44, No.1 (2006), pp.29–55.
18. Michael A. Smith, ‘The European Union and a Changing Europe: Establishing the Boundaries of Order’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.35, No.1 (1996), pp.5–28.
19. *Ibid.*, p.23.
20. *Ibid.*, p.20.
21. *Ibid.*, p.21.
22. Ian Manners, ‘Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.40, No.2 (June 2002), pp.235–58 (p.239).
23. *Ibid.*, pp.23–4.
24. *Ibid.*, p.25.
25. Prodi, ‘A Wider Europe’, p.3.
26. *Ibid.*, p.5.
27. Commission of the European Communities, *European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy Paper*, COM(2004) 373 final, Brussels, 15 May 2004, p.8.
28. Whitman and Wolff (eds.), *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective*; Michael Smith, Katja Weber and Michael Baun (eds.), *Governing Europe’s Neighbourhood: Partners or Periphery?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007); Dieter Mahncke and Sieglinde Gstohl (eds.), *Europe’s Near Abroad: Promises and Prospects of the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008).
29. Bechev and Nicolaidis, ‘From Policy to Polity’, pp.479–81.
30. For more discussion of the topic of partnership see Elena Korosteleva, ‘Change or Continuity: Is the Eastern Partnership an Adequate Tool for the European Neighbourhood?’, *International Relations* (forthcoming, March 2011).
31. Interview with a senior official, RELEX DDG2 E2, Brussels, 6 Oct. 2009.

32. A pre-set agenda of EU priorities, inclusive of conditionality, was sought to be avoided in the earlier ENP documents: see the definition of 'joint ownership' in the *ENP Strategy Paper* (2004), p.8.
33. These findings are based on a series of interviews undertaken with the officials of the European Commission, members of the European Parliament and Member States' permanent representations in Brussels and Strasburg during Sept.–Oct. 2009 (11 interviews) and June 2010 (10 interviews), and with members of EU Delegations and EU Member States' representations in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova during Oct. 2009 (17 interviews in total). Analysis of public perceptions of the ENP is based on the published survey data of Special Eurobarometer, entitled 'The EU's Relations with Neighbours' (285, wave 76.3, Brussels 2007).
34. For more discussion see Michael E. Smith and Mark Weber, 'Political Dialogue and Security in the European Neighbourhood: The Virtues and Limits of "New Partnership Perspective"', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol.13, No.2 (2008), pp.73–95; also Smith et al. (eds.), *Governing Europe's Neighbourhood*; Whitman and Wolff (eds.), *The ENP in Perspective*.
35. Interview with a senior official, DG RELEX DDG2 Task Force 'Eastern Partnership', Brussels, 28 Oct. 2010.
36. Interview with MEP, Strasburg, 2 Oct. 2009.
37. This particularly related to interviews with EU delegation officials in Kyiv and Chişinău.
38. See Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Introduction: What is the Security Dilemma?', in Ken Booth and Nick Wheeler (eds.), *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Co-operation and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
39. Eurobarometer, 285, wave 76.3 (2007).
40. For an interesting discussion on the perception of the 'other' see Thomas Diez, 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering "Normative Power Europe"', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol.33, No.3 (2005), pp.613–36.
41. For a more detailed account, see Tanya Radchuk's article entitled 'Contested Neighbourhood or How to Reconcile the Differences' in this volume, and also individual contributions by national teams of scholars.
42. Alexander Lukashenko, State of the Nation Address, 23 April 2009, (p.27), available at <<http://www.president.gov.by/press84268.html>>, accessed 12 Oct. 2010.
43. For more discussion of this issue see Federica Bicchi, "'Our Size Fits All": Normative Power Europe and the Mediterranean', *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol.13, No.2 (2006), pp.286–303.
44. *Ibid.*, p.287; original italics.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Commission of the European Communities, *A Strong Neighbourhood Policy*, Communication from the Commission, COM (2007) 774 final (Brussels, 5 Dec. 2007).
47. *Ibid.*, p.289.
48. Interview with the chairman of the foreign affairs committee (FAC), House of Representatives, Minsk, Belarus, 22 Sept. 2009.
49. Interview with a senior government official, ministry of foreign affairs (MFA), Minsk, Belarus, 21 Sept. 2009.
50. Interviews with Commission officials conducted in Brussels in Sept.–Oct. 2009.
51. See David Rotman and Natalia Veremeeva's article in this volume.
52. Interview with an official, European Division, MFA, Minsk, Belarus, 21 Sept. 2009.
53. Interview with a deputy chairman, FAC, Rada [Parliament], Kyiv, Ukraine, 29 Sept. 2009.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Interviews with various members from the department for European integration, MFA, and Rada, Kyiv, 29 Sept. 2009.
56. Interview with deputy minister, department for European integration, MFA, Chişinău, Moldova, 1 Oct. 2009.
57. Interview with chairman, FAC and European integration, Parliament, Chişinău, Moldova, 1 Oct. 2009.

58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Interview with a senior government official, MFA, Minsk, Belarus, 21 Sept. 2009.
61. Interview with chairman of the FAC, House of Representatives, Belarus, 22 Sept. 2009.
62. Interview with a deputy chairman, FAC, Rada, Ukraine, 29 Sept. 2009.
63. Interview with chairman, FAC and European integration, Parliament, Chişinău, Moldova, 1 Oct. 2009.
64. Interview with a former deputy minister of foreign affairs, MFA, Chişinău, Moldova, 2 Oct. 2009.
65. For more discussions of the 'de-centring approach', see Bechev and Nicolaidis, 'From Policy to Polity'.