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Introduction

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a fascinating object of study. Although the policy is relatively young, it has been moving forward very quickly, and today it covers almost all the EU neighbours. At the time of its birth, many experts and analysts argued that the policy is doomed to fail since it included widely different countries from Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, the Middle East and the southern shores of the Mediterranean. Today, with the growing differentiation between its Eastern and Southern dimensions and with the creation of the Eastern Partnership, the policy, implemented on a bilateral basis, has turned into a background policy against which the increasingly autonomous regional policies are developed. At the same time, the recent developments do not mean that the policy is losing its importance. To the contrary, as long as the EU neighbour countries included in the policy do not become candidates for membership, the ENP will constitute the main framework for their relations with the EU. The EU approach to these countries can be understood as having one umbrella policy, the ENP, which is then complemented by various other multilateral initiatives (the Northern Dimension, the Union for the Mediterranean, Black Sea Synergy, the Eastern Partnership) that are juridically more or less linked to the ENP.

In spite of its juvenile nature, the policy has attracted considerable interest from scholars dealing with European integration, and, in particular, EU external relations (for a detailed overview of the academic contributions to the study of the policy, see chapter II). Yet most of these contributions have been predominantly empirical, exploring the policy´s predecessors, its present standing, and its potential future evolution. Only a handful of authors have so far tried to couple the research on the policy to the theoretical debates in the field of international relations and EU studies.

This can be explained only by the policy´s quick evolution and the frequent changes both in its membership and the institutional structure since in all other dimensions, the policy represents an ideal testing ground for competing theories of European integration. There are many theoretical puzzles related to the policy. For instance, if we look at the policy as an example of the EU´s external relations, the varying levels of the Europeanisation of the participating countries can be explored because the policy includes substantially different countries that are offered the same – or very similar – incentives. Another possible strategy would

be to approach the policy from the perspective of the EU´s internal policy-making since the policy is an intriguing and complex creation which reflects the internal balance in the EU, both in terms of the policy´s geographic coverage and the financial resources earmarked for its two regional dimensions.

Each of these two perspectives – the external and the internal – belongs to a distinct subfield of the study of international relations. The first perspective, that of the ENP as an example of the EU´s external relations, is a part of foreign policy analysis. The second, that of the ENP as an example of internal policy-making of the EU and its inter-institutional balance, would rather use the *instrumentarium* offered by theories of European integration. Each of these two subfields is confronted with different theoretical puzzles and comes up with different solutions to them. However, one feature that unites virtually all subfields of the study of international relations is the dominance of the debate between rationalist and constructivist approaches. Be it the question of the role of identity in politics, or that of the possibility of strategic manipulation of prevailing political norms, the axis of rationalism versus constructivism (even though these labels are sometimes not directly used) is an omnipresent element of the theoretical debates in the field.

The prominence of this debate and its still unresolved state is the first and foremost reason for our decision to explore the relevance of these two broad approaches for the study of the ENP. Our aim is not only to show the possible interpretations of the policy from both perspectives but primarily to contribute to the theoretical debate itself. Aiming at a redefinition of the two approaches and suggesting a novel way of combining them, we believe that the fruitfulness of our strategy can be demonstrated with a series of case studies covering the EU´s relations with several ENP partner countries. We are well aware that such an ambitious goal will be contested by many, especially by those who have come up with alternative interpretations of constructivism and rationalism. At the same time, we very much hope that our study will reinvigorate the discussions about the rationalist-constructivist divide in international relations and in EU studies.

We argue that instead of monopolising the EU´s external relations by either constructivism or rationalism, a more fruitful strategy is to see both approaches as analytical lenses that can be put on or taken off in accordance with the requirements of the empirical context. In this sense, our position is different from those who start with a set of metatheoretical assumptions and only then descend to the level of theory and then finally to the empirical analysis. Our position is much closer to the stance defended by pragmatists who delimit different "scope domains" for each of the two approaches and thus do not reject either of them out of hand.

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But the *similarity* of our position to that of pragmatically oriented IR scholars does not mean *identity* with this approach. Most scholars who prefer the pragmatic position (e.g. Jeffrey Checkel and Alexander Wendt, to name but two) are *methodological* pragmatists. This means that they first choose the method and only then apply the method to the empirical case. Our position is different; we believe that a sort of hermeneutic movement back and forth between the empirical world and the methodological *instrumentarium* is possible, allowing us to choose methods that are the most suitable for the case study. In other words, it is not method first, application second, but rather the gradual specification of the preferred approach stemming from the empirical experience. This is why we came up with a theoretical model that explicitly links the two approaches (constructivism and rationalism) as *analytical* lenses to *empirical* types of behaviour of the studied actors. For more details of our methodology, see the section "Research Design" in chapter I.

But our aim is not solely theoretical and methodological. The analysis of both written materials related to the ENP and the interviews that we collected offers some surprising empirical findings about the EU´s relations with its neighbours. This pertains to the interplay of domestic politics in the partner countries and their external ties, to the different ambitions of these countries as well as their widely differing perceptions of each other and many other topics. In addition, our empirical research often has a critical edge. For instance, the principles of joint ownership and the legal equality between the partners and the EU are very much stressed inside the EU, but they are, at the same time, seen as a mere smoke screen in all the partner countries. In these situations, we did not back away from the discussion about the contradictory nature of the policy and about the incompatible views held by different actors.

Many our findings are counterintuitive. For instance, in spite of the lofty rhetoric about "normative power Europe", the rationalist mode of behaviour seems to be prevalent in all three of the groups of actors we analysed – EU institutions, EU member states and EU neighbours. At the same time, our analysis also shows that speaking about the EU´s position *vis-à-vis* its neighbours is a huge oversimplification. The national policies of EU members have evolved in different ways, and while some convergence to rationalism has been taking place in recent years, there is by far no unity inside the EU concerning the neighbourhood, both in terms of the geographical accents and in terms of the incentives the EU should offer. Hence, it is often the position of the European Commission that is (mistakenly) interpreted as that of the EU as a whole.

Interestingly, in the foreign policies of many EU member and partner countries, both rationalism and constructivism are present at the same time. Typically,

when an EU member state prefers the "constructivist" (i.e. normatively-laden) approach to the neighbourhood (as Poland and France did, for some time), then it behaves in a strongly rationalist (i.e. utility-seeking) manner inside the EU and *vice versa*. Also, the partner countries frequently use the EU as a (rationalist) means to solve their domestic or regional problems that are interpreted in the constructivist way.

The structure of the book is quite simple. The first chapter explores the possibilities of a theoretical synthesis between rationalism and constructivism. Before presenting the approach applied in this monograph, we discuss previous attempts at such a synthesis. We identify two basic groups of scholars whose aim is similar to ours: The first group sees rationalism and constructivism as two metatheoretical positions, which means that for them the synthesis must be achieved not only at the level of the study of international relations, but also at the level of philosophy of science, which makes it extremely difficult for their enterprise to succeed. The second group, which is less influential today but which is situated closer to our understanding of the problematique, interprets the two approaches as mere perspectives that can be changed depending on the empirical contexts and on their usefulness in these contexts. After the exploration of the lines of contention in this debate, we introduce our own stance and discuss its corollaries for international relations theory and for the empirical application of our approach. The second half of the chapter specifies our research design and the methodologies we used.

While the first chapter introduces the *theoretical* background, the second chapter analyses the *historical* evolution of the policy and the academic reflection thereof. The chapter starts by reiterating the main problems related to the academic discourse on the ENP, mentioning the problem of analysing a policy that has not yet been implemented and its huge geographic coverage. In spite of these problems, a considerable body of work on the ENP has been done in recent years, and the chapter also serves as a general overview of the research on the policy. In its second part, the chapter presents a brief outline of the policy's evolution, focusing both on its bilateral dimension and multilateral aspects linked to it.

The third and fourth chapters present a detailed analysis of our findings, whereby the former is dedicated to the partner countries (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and the latter to the EU (France, Germany, and Poland; and the European Commission, the Council of the EU, and the European Parliament). It may seem strange that we start with the partner countries and only then move on to the European Union itself. We have, however, at least two reasons for this order:

First, our main focus was the EU´s Eastern neighbourhood – we carried out more interviews in the neighbour countries than in the member states; and we also believe that the innovative potential of our approach can be better demonstrated on the EU´s neighbours. Second, it became clear during our research on the neighbourhood that both in the practical political life and in the academic reflection of the policy, there is a huge and growing perception asymmetry between the EU and its partners. While the EU is often seen as the active player, the neighbourhood is presented as an unreflective object of the EU´s policies or, at best, as the EU´s periphery, which merely reacts to the EU´s proposals. By discussing the neighbourhood first and the EU only second, we would like to stress the importance of the partner countries as international actors with strong policies *vis-à-vis* the Union.

To make our results more accessible, all sections of these two chapters follow the same structure. For each analysed country (or EU institution), we first examine the results of the analysis of the ENP-related political discourse(s), drawing mainly on the most important official documents and the speeches of key policymakers. Afterwards we compare these results with the data from our interviews. The conclusions of each section are briefly summarised in a table that builds on both the textual analysis and the interviews. Since we explored three partner countries, three member states and three EU institutions, altogether the monograph contains nine such sections with summarising tables.

The two empirical sections are followed by the concluding chapter, which sums up both the theoretical and the empirical findings and points to some promising directions of future research.