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# The Eastern Partnership – Soft Power or Policy Failure?

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**First rough draft, not for citation – comments very welcome**

## **Introduction**

As the European Union's new Eastern Partnership (EaP) was being unveiled in late 2008, Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso stated the purpose of the new policy as being the projection of EU soft power into the former Soviet Union. "This partnership shows", gushed the president, "what could be called the power of soft power, the ability of the EU to attract others and bring about changes in societies."<sup>1</sup> At the same time the idea of the new partnership being, when compared with the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), itself often in the past described as a 'soft power policy', a "step change" in relations was strongly emphasised by the Commission President.

And yet, less than three years later, things have not exactly moved the EU's way. Instead of tying countries closer to it, the EU has seen its influence decline in Eastern Europe. Particularly in Ukraine, developments since the 2010 presidential election have been far from favourable. In other partner countries, the impact of the EaP has been limited at best. The EaP has therefore so far failed to live up to the hopes held of it, and the notion that soft power in itself would change societies has gone vaunting.

Such an outcome, however, was all too predictable. The very idea of basing a foreign policy strategy primarily on soft power is tenuous at best. Soft power only works in conjunction with hard power, and if the main policies are attractive. The EaP has from the outset been marked by the same ambiguity that also characterised the ENP. Thus the issue of potential membership has been consistently downplayed by the EU, and instead of providing the promised step change the EaP has been another slow-moving bureaucratic process. But in holding the EaP up as a policy aimed at projecting soft power, the EU has once again forgotten that soft power can never be separated from broader political goals. Nor can it work without the more tangible 'hard' policies that will meet the expectations of the partner countries. The lack of clarity on what the EaP really is for and what it truly has to offer undermines the impact of the Union's actually considerable reservoir of potential soft power.

This paper starts by describing the way the EaP came into being, and the compromises that undermined its effectiveness from the outset. It next turns to the role and efficacy of soft power as part of the EaP, and discuss what is still missing. The paper then proceeds to show how these inadequacies are showing; how the EaP needs greater clarity on its aims, how the soft power projection is dependent on what hard power the EU is willing to

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<sup>1</sup> Philippa Runner, 'Brussels to project 'soft power' in post-Soviet zone', *EUObserver* 03.12.2008

invest, and how the soft power is completely dependent on these shortcomings being addressed.

### **From ENP to EaP**

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was adopted as a response to the EU enlargement round of 2004 as a framework for conducting relations with the new neighbourhood countries.<sup>2</sup> The ENP was considered a novel policy at the time, since the EU's general policy between 1991 and 2004 had implicitly been to prepare European neighbours for accession negotiations and steering them in that direction. The ENP instead focused on coordinating and formally structuring relations with EU's neighbours without offering membership to these countries. As such the ENP was presented with a challenging task and high expectations from early on.

The central aim of the ENP as declared in the ENP Strategy Paper was to „share the benefits of the EU's 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries in strengthening stability, security and well-being for all concerned“.<sup>3</sup> The ENP was meant to address a wide array of issues from „shared values“ of the EU to concrete reforms in the fields of trade, security or economy. ENP was regarded as an instrument for bringing stability and security to the neighbourhood by promoting domestic reforms in the partner countries, providing financial and technocratic assistance, contributing to conflict management and enhancing contacts between countries but so far the measures have only given modest results.

The ENP was an ambitious policy but its shortcomings such as the lack of credibility, lack of coherence and unsuitable unified approach have decreased its degree of success. The fact that the ENP was designed on a similar basis as the enlargement process raised doubts about the effectiveness of this kind of approach now that the membership was not on offer but the EU still aimed to reinforce its position in the neighbourhood. The ENP as an „enlargement-lite“<sup>4</sup> or „conditionality-lite“ was widely debated: although the ENP was clearly modelled on enlargement policy, the incentives (also the „end prize“) for partner countries were vague and limited.<sup>5</sup> Compared to the enlargement process, conditionality in the ENP appeared to be a goal in itself, as a way of maintaining the EU's hegemony vis-à-vis the partners, rather than a method for achieving the objective.

By emphasising various security issues such as immigration, crime, terrorism, border management etc., the ENP was criticised for considering the neighbours as „buffer

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<sup>2</sup> In Eastern Europe the ENP (and the EaP) covers Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and in the South Caucasus Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

<sup>3</sup> ENP Strategy Paper, p 3

<sup>4</sup> Popescu, N., Wilson, A. (2009) *The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood*, ECFR Policy Report

<sup>5</sup> Smith, K. E. (2005) *The Outsiders: the European Neighbourhood policy*, *International Affairs*, Vol 81, No 4, pp 757-773

zones“ and „potential threat sources“. <sup>6</sup> This attitude clearly did not contribute to avoiding „new dividing lines“ as declared in the ENP Strategy Paper, not to mention the detrimental effect it has had on the image of the EU in the neighbourhood countries. The EU's credibility was also influenced by the „more for more“ approach: the more deeply a partner would engage with the EU, the more fully the EU could respond. <sup>7</sup> According to this idea, partner countries prepared themselves for major reforms and changes, with no clear vision how the EU would reward them in return. As such there was little motivation for partner countries to undertake any uncomfortable reforms.

ENP was very much a result of different understandings and expectations of the member states and this was also reflected in the policy. Most partner countries in the Eastern neighbourhood and also some member states would have liked to see the ENP as an „insurance“ for the membership prospect and the AP as a lighter version of the enlargement *acquis*. The prevailing position inside the EU was clearly that the EU was not interested in further rounds of enlargement, even if pushed into distant future. This is a clear disappointment for those Eastern European countries that expected the EU to acknowledge their right to join the EU one day.

The relationships within the ENP were built on differentiated Action Plans (APs) agreed between the EU and each partner country which consisted of mutually defined set of priorities. Action Plans were central documents of the ENP declared to be in joint ownership although in reality the EU has remained the dominant actor in setting the goals. E. Korosteleva considered the major flaw of the ENP the „ill-defined concept of partnership“, because the asymmetry of the relationship was obvious. <sup>8</sup> APs reflected the EU's priorities with emphasis on values but also accentuating mutual cooperation against threats and necessary reforms for the partner countries. In reality, though, these aims remained largely declarative and did not offer concrete measures to improve the situation in partner countries.

By the time the project of Eastern Partnership (EaP) was introduced in 2008, it had become clear that the ENP was not able to cope successfully with challenges presented to it. Some member states and also partner countries had expressed dissatisfaction with the ENP, pointing out the shortcomings and making suggestions for deeper economic integration and political engagement. As a result, several regional projects within the larger ENP framework such as the Union for the Mediterranean, Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership emerged.

Eastern Partnership (EaP) was meant to improve the ENP by adopting a more specialised approach towards the eastern neighbourhood. This differentiation was a response to the critique that the ENP had not been taking into account the cultural,

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<sup>6</sup> Zaiotti, R. (2007) Of Friends and Fences: Europe's Neighbourhood Policy and the „Gated Community Syndrome“, *European Integration*, Vol 29, No 2, pp 149

<sup>7</sup> Taking stock of the ENP, p 2

<sup>8</sup> Korosteleva, E. (2011) The Eastern Partnership Initiative: A New Opportunity for Neighbours?, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Studies*, Vol 27, No 1, p 6.

political and economic differences between the partner countries. The EaP was designed to „create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration“ between the parties.<sup>9</sup> The impulse behind the initiation of the EaP was mainly coming from the new member states that were strong supporters of the integration between the EU and the eastern neighbours.

The development of the EaP was also influenced by relations with Russia. According to Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, these were Russia's recent actions with Georgia and Ukraine (conflict in Georgia in August 2008, gas disputes with Ukraine during 2005-2009) that forced the EU to react.<sup>10</sup> Although various member states and EU officials emphasised that the EaP was not directed against Russia<sup>11</sup>, the opposite could be read from the results of the extraordinary Council that assembled a month after Russian-Georgian conflict in September 2008, which gave the direct impulse for adopting the proposal of the EaP remarkably fast in terms of the EU decision-making.

Eastern Partnership was promising in the sense that it initially included several updates compared to the ENP such as negotiating new Association Agreements to replace Action Plans (process currently in motion with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), establishing deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTAs) and visa-free travel (later replaced in more careful wording by “gradual visa liberalisation as a long term goal for individual partner countries on a case-by-case basis“)<sup>12</sup>, with additions on border management, energy security, and commitments to the rule of law and principles of democracy and human rights. The predominantly bilateral focus of the EaP was complemented by a multilateral track consisting of four thematic platforms “crucial to the objectives of the EaP”<sup>13</sup> - democracy, good governance and stability; energy security; economic integration and convergence with the EU sector policies; and contacts between people.

Eastern Partnership was welcomed by the partner countries and the EU alike, emphasising increased contacts between the partners (in the fields of trade, mobility, visa facilitation, education, research). Nevertheless, it was soon evident that the EaP was not free from shortcomings similar to the ENP: EU influence for reform remained limited and as such the EaP was not attractive enough for the partner countries that still expected clearer benchmarks and incentives from the EU. The EaP was still EU-centred, with partner countries expected to subject to conditionalities in order to fulfil goals set by the EU according to their own interests.

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<sup>9</sup> Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, p 6

<sup>10</sup> Ferrero-Waldner, B. (2009) Eastern Partnership – an ambitious project for 21<sup>st</sup> century European foreign policy, 20 February, p 2, available at:

[https://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/eastern\\_partnership\\_article\\_bfw\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/eastern_partnership_article_bfw_en.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Rettman, A. (2009) EU leaders soothe Russia over new eastern club, Euobserver, 7 May 2009; Pop, Valentina (2010) EU says not competing with Russia in eastern neighbourhood, Euobserver, 13 May 2010

<sup>12</sup> Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, p 7

<sup>13</sup> Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2010 Report: Eastern Partnership, p 6

Although the EU was expected to take a stronger stance in the neighbourhood through the EaP with assisting in negotiations in frozen conflicts and stepping up to Russian influence in the domestic affairs of the partner countries, it was soon revealed that the bureaucratic EaP could barely compete with more flexible and comprehensive Russian neighbourhood policy in its “near abroad”. Not only did Russia use a wide arsenal of measures to exercise its policy but the EU was almost incapable of offering any coherent response that could convince the neighbourhood countries of EU's supremacy.

The EU did not manage to use the more attractive aspects of the EaP such as visa liberalisation to motivate the partner countries for reform. Instead the EU was dominating the relationship by making potential benefits conditional on the partner countries' progress only. Respectively to the degree the progress was evaluated, EU could offer greater financial support, programmes for institution-building, greater market access and facilitation of mobility. This was not satisfying the partner countries that expected to be treated equally in their relationship with the EU with their interests acknowledged. The partner countries would see the EU running a firm and cohesive foreign policy in the neighbourhood, assisting in settling regional conflicts, and standing up to Russian influence and providing larger amounts of financial support. Partner countries still find that Action Plans and Association Agreements could be more individually tailored in order to take the partner's interests equally into account.

The fact that using conditionalities in the EaP was not effective was also reflected in the EaP Progress Reports which concede that commitment to the Action Plans vary from country to country and mention little progress on human rights issues, fight against corruption and organising free elections, among others. Unresolved frozen conflicts in the neighbourhood continue to hinder the development of partner countries and could pose risks to the EU's own security.<sup>14</sup> Last but not least, the issue of finding additional finances for the Eastern Partnership has been raised, because at this point allocations for the EaP have proved modest.<sup>15</sup>

Clearly the incentives offered by the EU have not motivated partner countries to take up the path of reforms that might shake the stability and welfare in these countries. The reluctance of the EU to offer a long-term membership perspective has had a strong impact on the EU-neighbours' relationship today and this is largely the reason why the EaP has not proved to be as successful as expected. The EaP in many ways replicates the problems present in the ENP but rather than demonstrating the EU's inability to learn from its mistakes it really seems to show that the EU is currently not interested in any other kind of solution to the problems of the ENP/EaP.

## **EaP as soft power projection**

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<sup>14</sup> Taking stock, p 4

<sup>15</sup> Implementation of the ENP in 2010 Report, p 12

By stating the ambition of the EaP as being to effect political change in the former Soviet states, and influence these countries in the direction of the EU, Commission President Barroso was implicitly talking of ‘milieu goals’. As opposed to ‘possession goals’, by which an actor seeks influence by direct control, often by some form of overt or latent force or the threat thereof, milieu goals are about influencing one’s external environment by political and diplomatic means and without direct intervention.<sup>16</sup> This shaping of the external environment is essentially what is meant by the frequent reference in the ENP and EaP documents to countries “effectively sharing” the EU’s norms and values. Countries that are more like the EU are more likely to be stable, hence enhancing the EU’s own security. The means by which the EU exerts the influence are partly through conditionality and partly by positive inducements, mainly economic. The DCFTA, if implemented, would orient the partner countries’ trade towards the EU and place them in a position of dependence on the EU market, but also able to benefit from closer integration with it. All this is very much in keeping with the EU’s traditional role and self-perception as a civilian power, favouring technocratic processes and contractual politics. However what Barroso referred to was the EU’s ability to secure positive outcomes through its ‘soft power’, and the EaP being tailored towards the projection of such soft power.

The term soft power was coined by Joseph Nye who defined it as “the ability to get others to want the same as you want”, not through coercion and inducement, but through attraction and co-option.<sup>17</sup> It is thus distinct from ‘hard power’ – whether the military or economic sort – which is about bringing direct pressure to bear, or providing direct incentives for certain courses of action. The sources of soft power are culture, when seen as attractive and positive; societal and political values, when seen as being applied without hypocrisy; and policies, when seen as being legitimate and espousing the actor’s political values.<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is about projecting an image and ‘a brand’ and shaping the perceptions others are holding of one’s aims. Successfully doing so can help align other actors with a certain agenda or position, without having had to ask for it. The effective use of soft power in foreign policy can therefore reduce the costs in carrots and sticks of securing beneficial outcomes. However it shouldn’t be considered as existing completely separately from hard power. On the contrary, the two will frequently support and reinforce each other, and a policy based on only one will rarely be effective over the long term. The tools of projecting soft power can be varied, typically including cultural exchange, as well as information campaigns and public diplomacy.

For the European Union its sources of soft power are varied. Its past achievements in delivering economic integration and prosperity through the single market and the well-

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<sup>16</sup> Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1962), p. 73-75.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p.x.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

regulated, prosperous and balanced market economy are one such source; its leadership by example in both development and global environmental policy another example; similarly its commitment to democracy, human rights and good governance.<sup>19</sup> The historical narrative of peaceful cooperation, integration, and contractual re-ordering of relations has been an additional source of soft power for the EU. The challenge has been to craft policies that would effectively project these values to the world, and make others come to share them and follow the EU's agenda. Traditionally, this has been considered the case with the enlargement process, where the lure of membership made countries automatically adapt towards both the EU's legislative basis and the EU's political norms. Although coupled with conditionality in negotiations, the soft power of the EU was what made the process acceptable, since the EU's goals were attractive to the candidate country and some that it wanted to share.

The EU's rhetoric about the ENP - erasing dividing lines in its neighbourhood, and preventing the emergence of new ones - can be viewed as trying to build on the positive narrative of openness and inclusiveness since the Cold War's end, only this time without actually offering the perspective of membership.<sup>20</sup> As far as the ENP and the EaP are about projecting soft power, the thinking behind seems to be that by letting other countries get a better glimpse of the EU and what it is, they would wish to align on the basis of the *acquis*. The attraction of closer ties would make them willing to do so, and soft power would thus perform a milieu shaping function, having helped impart the EU's vision of economic and social order on the neighbourhood, thus contributing towards enhancing the EU's own security and well-being.<sup>21</sup> The rewards offered by the EU would naturally be in the increased access to the single market etc., but would not primarily rest on direct inducements. Thus EU soft power can be said to have reduced the costs of the EaP in the 'carrots' to be offered for compliance.

Soft power, if one has it, would thus seem a naturally integral part of a milieu shaping strategy, making countries want to conform. But the key point of a policy strategy is the direction one wants to guide others in; what one wants to influence them towards; what one wants from them, and what one is willing to offer in return. This all considers the tangibles of foreign policy. Typically, the ends, or the purpose, of policy are defined first, the appropriate means then considered, possibly leading to re-evaluation of goals in light of the resources available, and so on and so forth. Soft power, if one has it, is one of the means one can bring to bear. But it is also a far less tangible asset, one which may shape perceptions, reduce the costs of the policy in carrots and sticks, but also one which works only in an indirect way. Describing the policy as being aimed above all at projecting soft

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<sup>19</sup> Eneko Landaburi (2006), 'Hard Truths about EU Soft Power', *Europe's World*

<sup>20</sup> Benita Ferrero-Waldner (2006), 'The European Neighbourhood Policy: The EU's Newest Foreign Policy Tool', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 11, pp. 139-142.

<sup>21</sup> Adrian Hyde-Price, 'Normative Power Europe: A realist critique', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13(2), 2006, p. 227.

power, as Barroso did at the launch, seems slightly unusual. It is to divorce soft power from any wider policy goals.

For the EU to offer its soft power, but little else of substance, is to forget an important aspect of soft power influence: That how soft power is derived and how it is used are often one and the same thing. Policies - when the objectives are viewed as legitimate and desirable, and they are pursued with consistency and without hypocrisy - can be considerable sources of soft power. With the enlargement policy, the goal was not in doubt, and was widely viewed as desirable by all involved. However, as noted above, the EaP is rather vague and ambiguous on what exactly the purpose is, and a certain mismatch exists between the ambitions of the EU and some of the partners. If the idea of tying countries closer to the EU had actually been to prepare them for eventual membership, the EU's soft power could have been what made them want to pursue that goal and accept the process. Several of EaP countries have publicly professed their aspiration in that regard. But with the EU having virtually taken membership off the table - declaring only that the EaP is a framework "without prejudice" to the European wishes of the participants<sup>22</sup> - that grander goal isn't there to provide the motivation. So what the EU offers instead is something much less, and even that only with much hesitation and with many additional requirements attached. The visa free travel agreements that the partners rank as one of their highest priorities are bogged down in negotiations, and even the DCFTAs are only progressing slowly. The EU, of course, prospers in such a mode of interaction, being particularly geared to bureaucratic negotiations. How one can, on the other hand, call the exposing of the EaP partners to such an off-putting aspect of the EU's being 'projection of soft power' is anybody's guess.

Similarly, in not wanting to antagonise Russia in its 'Near Abroad', the attraction that could accrue to the EU from truly presenting an alternative centre of gravity in the region is neglected. A full four of the six EaP countries have frozen conflicts on their territory, and have all at different times requested greater EU involvement in working towards a solution. All are to various degrees and in different ways feeling subjected to periodic Russian pressure or meddling in their domestic politics. In this context EU soft power - if derived from its values of conflict resolution, peaceful cooperation, as well as respect for territorial integrity in accordance with international law - would seem best bolstered by trying to craft proactive policies reflecting these values. Yet EU soft power is not backed with anything more substantial in standing up to Russian pressure on these countries. Russia, though, is not relying exclusively on its hard, coercive power; in a number of softer policy field it is more effective than the EU in offering popular carrots. Whereas the EU's financial package for the ENP and EaP is quite stingy considering how far and wide the money has to be spread, Russia has been fairly generous in providing various

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<sup>22</sup> Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit

kinds of financial assistance.<sup>23</sup> It is also far easier to get work permits and visas to Russia than it is to the EU, something which does much to improve its image in the region.<sup>24</sup> And while the EU is slow in finalising these agreements, Russia has been far more nimble. The soft power Russia accrues through such policies is utilised to keep them close. The EU shoots itself in the foot from the outset by firmly placing the EaP partners outside of the ‘charmed circle’, rather than as natural parts of the European family.

Thus, apart from the slightly vacuous statement of wanting to promote democracy and good governance, Barroso’s rhetoric of soft power’s centrality to the EaP almost divorces it from any broader goals. It is as if the entire strategy is to be an attractive partner, without considering what the elements of attraction might be. Or rather, it is almost as if the strategy is to seek whatever can be achieved through soft power alone but without any substantial follow-up necessarily forthcoming from the EU. Of course, the kinds of reforms envisaged for partner states under the EaP, e.g. market economic initiatives, are in themselves beneficial and should be undertaken. But to imagine that countries will act in that way purely because of EU soft power is to assume that they could accomplish such reform processes on their own with little outside help. That is not necessarily true. Economically, the short-term costs of large-scale reforms can be high, and the positive benefits only showing over the medium term. In terms of political reform and realignment, the difficulties can also be significant. Soft power contains nothing tangible to address such issues. It may help solidify and lock in gains achieved through ‘hard’ policies, whether through direct support or inducement, or it can contribute to the basis for change through concrete policies. But EU soft power doesn’t translate directly into political outcomes, and is only a small source of support for partner states when faced with reform-resistant forces, both internal and external.

The question therefore remains, whether the EU can really be a pole of attraction without offering something more concrete than soft power? The record of the EaP, to which we will now turn, is not encouraging.

### **Is something still missing?**

Considering the expectations at the EaP launch, one must ask, why aren’t things moving more clearly the EU’s way? Rather than gaining influence through its milieu shaping policies, the EU seems to have been losing it in the past three years. This would seem to call into question the efficacy of the EU’s soft power projection.

Ukraine, which after the Orange Revolution looked the most promising of the Eastern neighbours, has moved back towards its traditional position of equidistance between Moscow and Brussels since the election in early 2010 of Viktor Yanukovich to the presidency. Since then Ukraine has scaled back its EU ambitions, while not completely

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<sup>23</sup> According to one Ukrainian official, the amount of EU funding received only equals the amount Ukraine lost when lifted visa fees for EU citizens in 2005 (Popescu & Wilson (2009), p 20).

<sup>24</sup> Popescu & Wilson, 2009, *Limits of Enlargement-Lite*.

abandoning them, but nonetheless being noticeably cooler. A number of concrete initiatives have been pursued, both a DCFTA and discussions of visa relaxations. But showing how Ukraine is playing both sides, it has been threatening Brussels with developing closer relations with Russia in case the EU does not offer “real deliverables.”<sup>25</sup> EU soft power therefore seems to not be enough, and the actual inducements rather limited. According to one Ukrainian official, the amount the EU has used in Ukraine has barely equalled the amounts Ukraine decided to forego when lifting visa fees for EU's citizens in 2005.<sup>26</sup> If soft power is to be successful in the ways Barroso spoke of, the EU will need to be more active in supporting political pluralism and civil society, and will have to be better at delivering on its promises on visa-free travel and the DCFTA.<sup>27</sup>

With Belarus, the issue is rather barely any change at all. The Lukashenka regime remains, and hasn't changed its authoritarian ways. Belarus matters for the EU for at least two reasons: as a transit country for Russian gas and as a non-compliant and hence potentially threatening neighbour.<sup>28</sup> Yet EU efforts over time have been intermittent at best, for a long time leaving it an open question whether the EU even sought change in that country.<sup>29</sup> Only in 2009 did the EU re-open a proper representation in Minsk, but made clear that it sought partnership with *both* the government and the people, thus potentially lessening the soft power impact. Since then, relations have been a see-saw of rapprochement and refreeze. Belarus' economy is strongly dependent on Russia and the ENP does not offer a realistic alternative (few incentives, conditional on reform, little economic gain compared to what Russia offers). In that situation, as long as the EU is unwilling to provide meaningful funding to wean Belarus' economy off its reliance on Russia, seeking stability in relations makes sense from a realist perspective. But favouring stability, however, would undermine the EU's soft power appeal.

Both Moldova and Georgia have continued suffering with frozen conflicts, and both remain highly vulnerable. The EU has been ineffective in dealing with them both, and it is not easy to see that the EaP has brought about the promised ‘step change’ in relations. Questions still exist about Moldova's longer-term viability as a state, while Georgia may have drifted slightly backwards in its push for democracy. In neither case is it not obvious that EU soft power has brought about deeper change for the better in the way Barroso envisaged, nor drawn them closer to the EU than they would otherwise have been.

On the one hand, the partner countries have become more selective in what they want from the EU, sensing that they're not on a fast track to membership. This shows particularly in political reforms, which tend to stall the easiest. On the other hand, one

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<sup>25</sup> Pop, Valentina (2010) EU gives Ukraine fresh blueprint for reforms, *EUobserver*, 28 April 2010

<sup>26</sup> Popescu, Wilson (2009), p 20

<sup>27</sup> Natalia Shapovalova, ‘Ukraine's managed democracy’, *EUObserver.com*, 10.08.2011.

<sup>28</sup> Korosteleva, E. (2009) The Limits of EU governance: Belarus's Response to the European Neighbourhood Policy, *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p 236

<sup>29</sup> Ian Klinke (2007), ‘The EU's Strategic Non-Engagement in Belarus: Challenging the Hegemonic Notion of the EU as a Toothless Value Diffuser’, *Perspectives*.

must wonder, if the EaP has enough to offer in order to be attractive for partners? It would seem not. Several of the partners would like to view the partnership as a prelude to accession negotiations, and have repeatedly sought to include statements to that effect in official documents – something which the EU has so far resisted, leading to significant disappointment. That the EU treats the EaP, which is after all with other European states, at the same level as relations with the Southern Mediterranean members underlines the careful distance the EU has chosen to adopt towards the partner states to the east. Former president Vladimir Voronin of Moldova, for one, has mockingly referred to it as CIS-2.<sup>30</sup> And the supposed ‘step change’ has certainly been more impressive on paper than in reality, calling into question the EU’s sincerity and commitment. The progress that has been made regarding both visa liberalisation and DCFTAs has been painfully slow in coming. Faster progress might have boosted the EU’s image in the region, and would have lessened the political and economic costs to the partners. But that is to assume that the EaP is concerned with the needs of the partner countries. It is rather the case that similarly to the ENP, it is primarily the EU’s needs that are considered, with partners invited to adopt the *acquis*, but without being offered even a long-term perspective to membership, which is the most attractive the EU has.

A related problem is that the EaP has too little consideration for the appropriate mix of hard and soft power. Or rather, as noted, the soft power of the EU is virtually all that’s on offer, with no explicit statement of broader objectives, and too little additional effort to make the partners want to align. Or put differently, by emphasising the soft power is almost for the EU to have made a strategic choice “to be attractive” – but doing so without considering what the attractiveness might consist of, i.e. divorcing soft power from the general policy. Soft power could be expected to have an impact if the policy in question is considered attractive by the target audience. That is not the case with the EaP, witness the scorn heaped on it from many sides. Producing an unattractive policy is, to be sure, a way of creating an image, but not one likely to generate soft power. And residual soft power cannot be expected to compensate for very long for an unattractive policy. Enlargement is not the objective, already blunting the soft power appeal. But as importantly, soft power isn’t a tool for crisis management. Such troubles as the EU’s neighbourhood faces cannot be solved by soft power alone. More traditional policy tools are needed there. This would suggest a better linkage with other EU policies, most notably the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

Already early assessments of the ENP argued that the new policy would involve the EU in more problematic policy issues than hitherto, and would eventually require the strengthening of the CFSP too.<sup>31</sup> That assessment holds equally true for the EaP today. As mentioned, the expectations from the partners towards the EU are of it playing a role

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<sup>30</sup> Popescu, & Wilson (2009), p 20

<sup>31</sup> See Roberto Aliboni (2005) ‘The geopolitical significance of the European Neighbourhood Policy’, *European Foreign Affairs Review*.

in solving their frozen conflicts. However if soft power projection is the purpose of the EaP, the failure of the EU to act in these contexts is not helpful. Quite the contrary, acting purposefully to bring an end to these conflicts would strengthen the EU brand, and thus reinforce EU soft power. The strengthening of its soft power might in turn make the gains all the more sustainable. Failing to act projects only weakness; hardly the image of choice. And the EU's record in these matters speaks for itself: The flat-footed reaction to the Russian-Georgian War in 2008; the non-stance (until the crisis was full-blown) during the repeated Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes; and the slowness of the response to the 2009 Moldovan post-election crisis.<sup>32</sup> All suggest that the EaP, if it is to be successful and effective, will need to be backed by a stronger CFSP. At least the EU can't sit such issues out if it is to be influential.

An alternative explanation, however, is that the ENP/EaP is subordinated to the goals of the CFSP as expressed in the 2003 European Security Strategy. Many of the threats outlined in that document are potentially present in the neighbourhood states. The ESS' emphasis on "preventive engagement" is essentially a call for milieu shaping strategies, of which the ENP/EaP is an example. In this analysis, the EU is working to secure its own interests – the states exercising a collective hegemony vis-à-vis the neighbourhood - with the normative element being second-order concerns.<sup>33</sup> In any clash between interests and values, the former will win out. Whatever the truth of this, the policy remains structured to the advantage of the EU, not the partners.

Or is the real problem of the EaP that it isn't really a policy at all, but mainly an attempt to mask internal EU divisions on Eastern policy? Such disagreements are well known and long-standing, over whether to extend a membership perspective or over what alternative relationship to aim for. The general tendency has been for the newer members to favour further enlargement, partly in alliance with the Nordics, while older member states, led by France, Germany and the Mediterranean states, have been far more sceptic. European public opinion is also sharply divided on the issue. Russia is another 'elephant in the room', with particularly older members taking a more 'understanding' attitude than the newer ones towards Russia's designs in the "Near Abroad". Such disagreements have also manifested themselves in the EU's responses to disputes and conflicts in the neighbourhood. The EU sought to dismiss the gas dispute of 2009, since not all members were equally affected, and those who were not didn't wish to create trouble. During the 2008 war in Georgia, France and Germany were instrumental in watering down the EU's stance, not wishing to isolate Russia. Lastly, the EaP has suffered by being treated on the same level as the Mediterranean Union. Reflecting the compromise between the different interests of the members, funds are being matched strictly between the two policies, so that one will not get more than the other; this with little regard to what the end-state of

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<sup>32</sup> Popescu, N., Wilson, A. (2009) *The Limits of Enlargement-Lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood*, ECFR Policy Report, p 18-19

<sup>33</sup> Hyde-Price, 2006, 'Realist critique of NPE'.

relations might be. The EaP is thus reflects a number of different concerns, balancing some very different views of the existing member states – further enlargement, the ‘Russia factor’, not letting the East become more important than the South – and the policy is a compromise between these positions.

In that case, however, is the EaP EU actually soft power in action at all? Or is it in reality proof of a failure to produce a more coherent policy?

### **Conclusion**

The EaP fails for a whole number of reasons, chief among them that it replicates the main weakness of the ENP too much. And it has been obvious all along that this might become a problem. From the outset it has simply offered too little, and hasn’t been what the Eastern Europeans are looking for. Conditionality is never likely to be an effective policy tool, when the grand price for compliance is off the table; especially not when other powers offer more tangible rewards for maintaining the status quo. The talk of EU soft power projection in the absence of anything more concrete can therefore seem attractive from an EU perspective. But the EU’s soft power is undermined by the weakness of the overall policy, and cannot possibly halt the slide in EU influence in the Eastern neighbourhood.

Soft power must co-exist with hard power to be effective, and there has to be something very tangible to support it with. This is of course not an EU problem unique to its presence in the Eastern neighbourhood. Its limited ability to bring hard power to bear in general is one of the biggest obstacles to the EU matching its economic clout with a corresponding political influence. But it is also a question of clarifying the political objectives it seeks to achieve and applying its resources towards meeting them. Concretely in this case, it means the EU will have to figure out for itself what it really wants in Eastern Europe. Does it want to integrate, and does it want to take responsibility? Or does it want to keep the partners permanently at arms’ length? And either way, what inducements is it willing to consider? The EaP is an inadequate framework without this clarification and as long as some partners think they may have a potential claim to membership. The current EU compromise on the issue pleases nobody, and is more a policy failure than a soft power strategy.