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***EU's relations with Eastern Neighbours as a showcase of the EU's Actorness***

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**Abstract**

Recent deterioration of the political situation in Eastern Europe against the background of the democratic revival in North Africa reinvigorated the question on the extent to which the EU can effectively meet its objectives in its Eastern neighbourhood and, consequently, boost its actorness in the region? In Belarus the European sanctions imposed against the human rights violation show little effects; while some member states choose to continue their business deals with Minsk. The EU campaigns promotion of human rights in the Russian Federation while simply 'taking a note' of the results of presidential elections in Russia, barely showing its solidarity with the wide opposition movements started in December 2011. In Ukraine, it seems that the EU opts for a policy of 'wait-and-see' showing lack of strategic vision. Only in Moldova developments seem to be pointing in the right direction, but whether this is a result of positive effects of EU policy remains questionable. An empirical analysis of the EU's immediate neighbourhood points out that the EU and its member states are balancing between the choices of values vs. interest-driven decisions, choices of solidarity or bilateralism and choices of geopolitical or rules-based approaches. Therefore, this paper examines EU's above-mentioned dichotomies in order to show how the EU can achieve its declared goals and maximize actorness in the Eastern neighbourhood.

**Key-words:** EU actorness, Eastern neighbourhood, solidarity/bilateralism dichotomy; values/interests dichotomy, geopolitics/markets&institutions dichotomy

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## Introduction

This paper starts from the premises that the legitimacy of the European Union also comes from the outside; from the EU's involvement in processes and institutions on the international arena. Whereas in its internal affairs the debate is about EU's legitimacy based on an evaluation of its democratic procedures (or what is conceptualized as input legitimacy [Scharpf, 1997; 1999]); externally the focus is on the EU's (effective) performance (or output legitimacy) that contributes to its legitimacy and credibility as an actor. Recent deterioration of the political situation in Eastern Europe against the background of the democratic revival in the North Africa reinvigorated some important questions about EU's external relations. Is the EU able to achieve favourable political outcomes in the Eastern Europe? To what extent can the EU effectively meet its objectives in its Eastern neighbourhood and, consequently, boost its actorness in the region? In Belarus the European sanctions imposed against the human rights violation show little effects; while some member states (MS) choose to continue their business deals with Minsk. The EU campaigns promotion of human rights in the Russian Federation while simply 'taking a note' of the results of presidential elections in Russia, barely showing its solidarity with the wide opposition movements started in December 2011. In Ukraine, it seems that the EU opts for a policy of 'wait-and-see' showing lack of strategic vision. Only in Moldova developments seem to be pointing in the right direction, but whether this is a result of positive effects of EU policy remains questionable. An empirical analysis of the EU's immediate neighbourhood points out that the EU and its member states are balancing between the choices of values vs. interest-driven decisions, choices of solidarity or bilateralism and choices of geopolitical or rules-based approaches. These challenges used to drive member states and EU institutions apart in the past and are not inherent only to the EU's relations with the East. And if today, as Steven Everts (2012) put it, 'we should move away from talking about a single EU voice in foreign policy to talking about delivering a single EU message', then the EU's Eastern neighbourhood presents itself as a capability test in formulating and delivering this message. Therefore, this paper examines EU's above-mentioned dichotomies in order to show how the EU can achieve its declared goals and maximize actorness in the Eastern neighbourhood.

In the next section, the three dichotomies: 'solidarity-bilateralism'; 'values-interests' and 'geopolitics-markets & institutions' are conceptualized and further discussed. The empirical data that outlines these dichotomies in practice is presented in the third section. It emphasizes how in Belarus interests-based decisions prevail over EU promoted values, how MS bilateral relations with the Russian Federation come first, how Ukraine is an arena of geopolitical games against the EU's initial rule-based approach and finally, how Republic of Moldova is being sold as a success case whilst the EU "lost

Ukraine” (personal interviews, March 2011). In the fourth section it will be argued that in order for the EU to fully exercise its actorness in Eastern neighbourhood it needs to narrow the gap between assumed dyads or find the right balance. The last section ends with a conclusion emphasizing how the EU can maximize its actorness in the Eastern neighbourhood through addressing the three dichotomies.

### **Towards an Analytical Framework and Research Design**

The international role and actorness of the EU has been discussed and debated scholars over time (Duchene, 1972; Bull, 1982; Allen & Smith, 1990; Manners, 2002; Hyde-Price, 2008; Hill & Smith, 2011 etc.). Researchers analyze the EU’s capacity to act as a real actor in international relations, i.e. to act as one block; as well as EU’s impact on third countries, its power to shape and influence behaviour of partner countries. It is incontestable that the EU has acquired a significant and in some areas a leading role on the international arena. The EU has shown its capability of influencing other non EU member states – several waves of enlargement and in particular the last one (2004/2007) proves this (Ginsberg, 2001). Enlargement has thus made the EU be an important economic and political power that consolidates its international role. Scholars have therefore discussed of a ‘civilian power’ EU that focuses on economic interests and goals and thus promotes legal principles and standards of multilateral cooperation into the international affairs (Duchene, 1972). The EU has been further portrayed as ‘superpower’ (Galtung, 1973), being attributed a high role in world politics; and later on as a ‘normative power’ EU (Manners, 2002) that diffuses norms on the international arena like peace and liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights, social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development and good governance. It has been also labeled as ‘soft power’ (Nye, 2004) due to the use of its culture, ideas and non-military policies and reliance on multilateral cooperation instead of the use of force. And in some instances it has been suggested that the best the EU should aim for is to become a ‘model power’ (Miliband, 2007; Zielonka, 2011).

Yet these conceptualizations of EU actorness in world politics are insufficient as they do not grasp the complexity of EU’s external relations and the nature of its influence in neighbouring countries. The framework proposed for research in this paper, thus attempts to bridge a gap between several strands of the literature - on institutionalization of a European foreign policy, on the external policies developed by EU and their impact, and on the theorization of EU’s power<sup>2</sup>. In this research, the examination of EU’s actorness is done based on its overall performance in the region and not based on

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<sup>2</sup> These strands of literature have been categorized by Petiteville (2006).

the evaluation of the success or failure in one policy area or another. Especially since scholars have outlined the importance of EU's capacity to influence its external environment (Allen & Smith, 1998; Hettne, 2011; Wunderlich, 2011); this paper focuses on the external dimension of conceptualization of EU international actorness. Therefore, in this article we conceptualize EU actorness based on the Fritz Scharpf's (1999) notion of 'output legitimacy'. According to Scharpf (ibidem), it is worthwhile to assess EU's democratic legitimacy against the criteria of its performance, e.g. an ability to deliver outcomes tailored to proclaimed policy objectives beyond focusing just on democratic participation and representation ('input legitimacy') (Scharpf, 1999). Similarly, Ginsberg (1999) conceptualizes EU's international actorness according to its result-oriented characteristics. He argues that "without outputs that are effective in meeting their objectives and influencing international outcomes, the EU would lose internal confidence and outward influence as an international actor" (ibidem, 1999, p. 444-445). Moreover research defines actorness itself as the 'purposive ability to act' emphasizing that in the absence of EU's actorness, "[its] presence itself will diminish, leaving a power vacuum" (Hettne, 2011, p.30) From this perspective, EU's ability or failure to link means and ends in a specific external context feeds back the notion of EU international actorness. This approach is thus tied to a specific external context and allows us to focus in-depth on the patterns of EU's actions on the ground, rather than on the policy-formulating process.

Based on this conceptualization, when examining EU's performance in its neighbourhood, three dichotomous paradigms, each representing contradictory tendencies in the nature of EU actions abroad, are at the core of analysis. They indicate the dynamics of the EU's relationship with its neighbours and have explanatory power in relation to EU's actorness. These paradigms represent three main dichotomies in EU external relations that provide the framework of analysis in this research. The three dichotomous paradigms partially correspond to Carlsnaes (2002, 2008) research. He proposes to analyze foreign policy of an actor from a three-tier perspective: (1) structural dimension, i.e. structural environment of external action, (2) intentional dimension, i.e. actor's preferences and policy goals, and (3) dispositional dimension, i.e. psychological-cognitive factors underlying actor's intentions. Subsequently, the first dichotomous paradigm discussed below explains structural characteristics of the EU international actorness, the second and the third one - teleological and ontological characteristics respectively. Hence, the extent to which the EU can act effectively in its neighbourhood is explained through the following dichotomies:

- (1) *Solidarity vs national self-interest*. The focus of this paradigm is on member states approaches to a region. In this sense a common vision (a vision channeled in terms of actions) towards the

region in the perspective of minimization of the negative effects of the bilateral relations is crucial. Although the idea of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) recently upgraded by the Lisbon Treaty was to spur convergence of MS' interests within a spirit of solidarity between them, the reality often proves the opposite. When important national interests are at stake member states often opt to avoid EU-level instruments and act unilaterally in external relations (Hill, 1998; Rummel & Wiedermann, 1998; Keukeleire & MacNaughtan, 2008; Thomas, 2011; Hill & Smith, 2011). Moreover, in their bilateral policies towards third countries member states might even find themselves in competition with each other (Youngs, 2009; 2011; Casier, 2011). Bilateral policies and divergent approaches towards the third countries may significantly undermine the common EU policy and, consequently, EU's actorness in those countries. In the context of Eastern Europe, EU MS may well be entrapped into 'solidarity-self-interest' dilemma given the high economic and security interests implied largely by a geographic proximity of the region.

- (2) *Values vs interests*. This paradigm is straight-forward in the sense that it explains the necessity of finding the right balance between normative and material dimensions of EU's external relations towards a region. EU's external relations with a third world might be viewed not only through the lenses of supranational-intergovernmental discourse. Classical (neo)liberal-(neo)realist debate in IR might shed a light on another dichotomy in EU's external relations pertained to the goals of its policies (Carlsnaes, 2008). While the EU more often than not defines objectives of its external policies as promotion of the principles of democracy and rule of law, effective multilateralism and cooperation, when it comes to an action those normative principles are frequently downplayed by competing economic and security concerns (Carothers, 2003; Youngs, 2004; Lappin, 2010). The tradeoff between value- and interest-based considerations might severely damage credibility of EU's actorness in the third countries. This is especially important in the Eastern neighbourhood, as the EU justifies its policies in the region with a discourse of 'shared values' and 'joint ownership'.
- (3) *Markets and institutions vs geopolitics*. The last dichotomous paradigm is very much related to the previous and implies patterns of understanding of the region and regional dynamics. It is argued that in its dealings with external actors the EU is balancing between a pragmatic, even technical cooperation driven by economic considerations and legalistic approach and an increasing necessity to accommodate its geopolitical interests if the EU wants to be influential in a certain region (Youngs, 2009; Bosse & Schmidt-Felzmann, 2011). The paradigm implies EU's engagement with big powers in the world politics. It is hypothesized that EU's inability or

unwillingness to assume its geopolitical role might negatively affect its credibility among partners in the region. Although examples may be found elsewhere (for example, China's natural resources policy in Africa), Eastern Europe represents a particular showcase of a region with geopolitical actors constellation.

According to the proposed framework EU actorness is defined in terms of its performance in a region and more specifically in terms of deliverance of effective outputs. For the analytical purposes of this research, it is important to explain what these outputs represent. When it comes to EU acting on the international arena, the outputs can be identified through the foreign policy objectives that the EU pursues - promotion of regional cooperation, promotion of human rights, promotion of democracy and good governance, prevention of violent conflict and last but not least the fight against international crime (Smith, 2008). In relation to Eastern Europe, the main output is consolidating democracy and good governance in the region. This output is strongly interrelated with the Eastern enlargement when the EU has embarked on a crusade of democracy promotion with the launch of the Copenhagen criteria in 1993 (stability of institutions, rule of law and human rights and a functioning market economy), a trend that became a major focus of EU foreign policy especially Eastwards in its immediate neighbourhood.

The empirical analysis, which is introduced in the following chapter, incorporates four Eastern European neighbours – Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. The EU strategy of cooperation with these countries which outline its output (democracy & good governance) can be traced down in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP). Permanent changes and developments in EU's Eastern neighbourhood represent a test-case for EU's actorness in the region. On the one hand, countries belonging to the EaP are involved in an enhanced relationship with the EU: superior economic cooperation, visa liberalization and some of them - new association agreements negotiation (EEAS, 2011a). On the other, these countries deal with human rights issues, market liberalization and energy security issues, political instability and strong Russian influence and/or dependency. It is noteworthy that unlike most studies on EU-Eastern Europe relations, we also include Belarus and Russia in our analysis. Belarus is often omitted from the research on the Eastern neighbourhood due to its status of the last dictatorship in Europe. While Moldova and Ukraine are the traditional case-studies, taken as most likely cases (Freyburg et al, 2009; Gänzle, 2009; Dimitrova & Dragneva, 2009; etc.), than Belarus is a traditional outlier. Acknowledging that until recently the EU policy towards Belarus was mainly nonexistent, the EU sets a general goal of democratization of Belarus (European Commission, 2006). Russia as well as other post-Soviet republics in Eastern Europe was included in a 'Wider Europe' initiative in 2002, which was later transformed into the European

Neighbourhood Policy. Russia's refusal to participate in the ENP and demand for a 'special' status was accepted by the EU, sending ambiguous signals to other countries in the region. Moreover, it is more difficult to understand the dynamics of the region and a potential extent for EU actorness without taking into account the role played by Russia in the post-Soviet space.

## **EU Actorness in Action**

As explained in the previous section, EU's output in Eastern Europe is traced back in the ENP and the EaP as well as the instruments attached to it. While this paper does not focus on the evaluation of these policies, it uses these policies as instruments of analysis of EU's performance that explain the essence of its output. After the enlargement in 2004, the EU aimed at creating a so-called 'circle of friends' in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Southern Mediterranean via the ENP. This policy came in place to reinforce the existing relationship between the EU and its neighbours. The policy refers to EU's relations with all partner countries in all the above-mentioned regions where the EU wants "to make a particular contribution to stability and good governance in our immediate neighbourhood [... and] give new impetus to cooperation with the EU's neighbours" (Commission, 2004, p. 6). In order to implement the policy, there have been Action Plans developed for each country. The Action Plans incorporate a set of priorities that cover a number of key areas to be fulfilled by partner countries. Through these Action Plans, countries commit to implementing reforms or taking specific actions thus coming closer to EU standards. Through implementing the steps foreseen by these Plans, EU's neighbours confirm their dedication to shared values like democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law etc. Till 2007, the EU offered support to partner countries via different financial instruments such as technical assistance and twinning that have then been integrated into the ENPI. As specified in the ENP Strategy Paper, ENPI focuses on promoting sustainable development; cooperating through joint actions in areas of environment, public health and the prevention and fight against organized crime; cross-border cooperation as well as promoting 'people-to-people' cooperation (Commission, 2004). After several years of the neighbours' implementation of Action Plans, the EU has designed an Eastern dimension of the ENP, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) that will further seek to deepen relations with its [Eastern] neighbours. This will be done on a bilateral and multilateral level. On the bilateral one, depending on the country's approximation to EU standards reflected in national practices and policies, a more enhanced relation with the EU assumes upgrading the contractual relation with it. The multilateral level features a framework where common issues of all Eastern neighbours belonging to the EaP can be addressed. This level has been modeled into four policy platforms and several flagship initiatives (EaP, 2008).

## **Belarus: business as usual or a real breakthrough?**

While Moldova and Ukraine have been included in the ENP from the very beginning, Belarus was not included in the ENP. Due to the authoritarian regime of president Lukashenko in Belarus, who rules the country 'by decree' since 1994, the EU-Belarus (official political) relations were mainly inexistent. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)<sup>3</sup> remained frozen since 1996 and 10 years later the EU presented a 'Non-Paper' that comprised 12 points for Belarusian essential reforms to which the Lukashenko regime had to comply with (Commission, 2006). After pursuing a policy of isolation (but occasionally maintaining trade relations) and then adopting several restrictive measures towards the undemocratic leader of Belarus, the EU now 'is ready to deepen its relations with Belarus' (EEAS, 2011b) with opening in 2008 a EU Delegation in Minsk and with including Belarus, in 2009, in the Eastern Partnership activities. This looks as a step forward in unfreezing EU-Belarus relations and according to some, "marked the peak of the EU's policy of 'pragmatic engagement' with Lukashenka" (Democratic Belarus, 2012). So far, this looks like a solo bright moment in the EU's performance.

As in the case of Moldova and Ukraine, the relationship with Belarus is built by the EU based on adopting European values through political, social and economic reform that will in turn allow building a region of security, stability and prosperity (Commission, 2006). These values being mainly defined via the Copenhagen criteria – stable institutions, guarantee for democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights (Bosse, 2007). While these values are central in the European political rhetoric and represent key elements in the ENP and EaP (to the latter Belarus being a participant), research highlights that the "security threats emanating from Belarus" have been a central theme to reinvigorate relations with Belarus (Bosse, 2009, p.217). A major tool of promoting its values is through supporting civil society (CS), independent media, offer humanitarian assistance and therefore achieve democratization. Assistance on this dimension came through the ENPI, however as scholars note, "major projects aim to improve border management" (Bosse, 2009, p.221). While EU political reasoning argues in favor of values, EU decisions and subsequently actions denote the '*value-interest*' dichotomy. Contrary to expectations of significant funding of CS through the EaP CS Forum (personal interviews, September 2010), beneficiaries did not receive funding to their projects. Outside of the Forum, Belarusian CS received small amount of funds supporting democracy and HR projects, yet again, mainly projects related to diminishing the effects of the Chernobyl disaster were funded (Dura, 2008). Furthermore, the

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<sup>3</sup> Such agreements have been signed with almost all ENP countries

EU chooses to work solely with the pro-European civil society representatives or with major European donors in neighbouring countries, being slow in reacting to real cases of human rights infringement (Kapustina & Bosse, 2011). Instead of “enlarging all-round assistance to civil society” as some local analysts suggest (Fedarau, 2011), the EU, out of all its funding spends only 2% for Belarus (Kapustina & Bosse, *ibidem*).

Moreover, even if the democratization of Belarus is EU’s goal, the efforts the EU undertook towards Belarus till 2008 “were mostly limiting and punishing” (Fedarau, 2011). And again, after the presidential elections in 2010, the EU’s performance is in downturn resulting in a quasi cold-war. The 2010 elections had been won again by Lukashenko. The protestors against once again rigged elections had been imprisoned (cca 600), out of which several are today political prisoners (personal interview, 2012a). Whereas the local population called upon and expected the EU to take a stance against the brutally crushed protests, no economic sanctions were introduced, while MS continuing to trade with Belarus with Germany being Belarus’ main European partner (Kapustina & Bosse, 2011). Whereas in February 2011 the EU applied travel restrictions, assets freeze and created a blacklist of Belarusian officials, the democratic standards in Belarus did not increase. In spring 2012, after a metro explosion in Minsk the police detained two random young men, accused them of terrorism, quickly sentenced them to death and then executed the two behind closed doors without the right of appeal (personal interview, *ibidem*). This episode created the opportunity for the diplomatic war between the EU and Belarus to escalate, with both sides recalling their ambassadors.

As indicated by the Freedom House report, the human rights situation in Belarus continued to deteriorate throughout 2011 (Freedom House, 2012). Against continuous human rights violations in Belarus the EU continues to resume to applying sanctions. Sanctions like visa-ban and targeted economic sanctions might be the instrument to opt for in achieving effective output in Belarus (democratization). However, it seems that while officially supporting EU political rhetoric and condemning the severe human rights violations in Belarus, MS choose to act in a different manner, one that suits their individual state interests. MS, through their decisions and actions leave room for criticism regarding that ‘single message’ Everts (2012) was referring to thus widening the *solidarity-self-interest* gap (that has been conceptualized in this research as solidarity-national self-interest dichotomy). EU MS continue to trade with Belarus and keep its economy afloat<sup>4</sup>: “Belarus declared a €2.5 billion trade surplus in 2011 after trade between the two sides shot up by 76 percent in the first

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<sup>4</sup> EU mainly imports non-agricultural products from Belarus such as fuels and mining products and exports machinery and transport equipment (DG Trade, 2012)

nine months alone” (Nielsen, 2012a). As the Commission’s trade report shows, in 2011, the EU 27 became the main trade partner of Belarus (DG Trade, 2012). Moreover, some MS (Slovenia) choose to veto EU’s decision of including one Belarusian business or another to the so-called black list based on important ongoing business/trade deals (personal interview, 2012a) or strongly oppose economic sanctions (Lithuania). And as the Independent reports, some European banks (the Royal Bank of Scotland, BNP Paribas and Deutsche Bank) continue to invest in the Lukashenko government in sum of more than \$800m (€551m) in Belarusian government bonds (The Independent, 2011).

Whereas EU’s technical approach is less perceived in relation to Belarus, the case of Belarus can be interpreted in geopolitical terms, Belarus representing a buffer zone between EU and the Russian Federation. Or, to extend the argument, the re-launch of the relations with Belarus and MS actions confirm EU’s accommodation of its geopolitical interests in opposition to a technocratic approach, a dichotomy conceptualized in this research as *‘markets & institutions vs. geopolitics’*. Earlier in August 2011, the leading human rights (HR) activist, Ales Bialatski is being imprisoned for 4,5 years on grounds of tax evasion, a case built by the Belarus authorities based on the information achieved from the Lithuanian and Polish authorities who released financial information of the ‘Vesna’ HR NGO, headed by Bialatski<sup>5</sup> (personal interview, 2012a). Being first of all preoccupied about assuring oil flow to the main Lithuanian port it was no surprise that the Lithuanian officials were ‘playing dumb’ when inquired about the incident, not to omit that just before presidential elections in 2010, the Lithuanian president stated that “Lukashenko is a guarantor of economic and political stability in Belarus, its independence” (Nielsen, 2012b). Research on EU-Belarus relations as well outlines that in contrast to the emphasis on human rights and democracy, this relationship is driven based on security interest, namely energy security and geopolitical ones based on the dynamics of Russia-Belarus relations (Dura, 2008; Bosse & Korosteleva-Polglase, 2009; Bosse, 2009). Or, the sudden revival of democratization of Belarus talks through the ‘2006 non-paper on Belarus’ was about EU’s main concern over a possible “disruption of Russian energy supplies transiting through Belarus to Europe” with main destination countries: Poland, Germany, Lithuania (Dura, 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> Most civil society organisations in Belarus are registered abroad in Lithuania, Poland or Czech Republic as they are usually declined registration by local authorities. Vesna HR Centre (where Ales Bialatski is leader) opened bank accounts in Lithuania and Poland in order to continue its HR activity. Vesna, as other CSOs operate based on received grants. The Lithuanian and Polish authorities released to Belarusian authorities information about the amount of money available in the bank account of the Vesna Centre, information which was wrongfully used against Bialatski. The charges brought to Bialatski claimed that the money of the Vesna account are personal funds (cca 1 mil EUR) out of which taxes were not paid (personal interview, March 2012).

## Moldova: EU in need of a success story

Moldova is lately sold as a success case in terms of achieving certain democratic standards. In 2009, a new leadership replaced the older communist one, after 2 years of political deadlock Moldova has finally elected a head of state, since 2010 Moldova became full member of the Energy Community Treaty and negotiates an Association Agreement and visa facilitation with the EU. These positive developments are indicators of EU's performance. All of them refer to the EU's output in the neighbourhood of democracy and good governance, as the Agreement 'can also be seen as a reform agenda for Moldova' concerned with governance, economic development and sector cooperation (EEAS, n.d.). This could imply that the gap between *values and interests* is rather narrow. But how real or effective is EU's output when it is ready 'to turn a blind eye' in relation to some HR and democracy issues in Moldova, in particular after the EU 'has lost Ukraine' (personal interviews, 2011a)? Moldovan HR nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) have been astonished to find out that the EU diplomatic community is aware of the fact that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) forwards back to the Moldovan government cases of HR violations sent in by the NGOs to the Court, without registering them and unofficially prompting the Government for a solution at a national level (personal interview, 2011b). One need to take into consideration that one of the indicators under the 'good governance, rule of law and fundamental freedoms' priority areas of the national indicative programme (NIP) on Moldova is the decrease of the number of cases against Moldova at the ECHR (European Commission, n.d.). This takes place in parallel with the EU's push for more democratic standards in Moldova, as emphasized by the Commission ENP progress report the state of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights are areas where Moldova is expected to show more progress (Commission, 2009).

As mentioned earlier, a new direction to achieve EU's output is the support offered to CS is visible through launching the EaP Civil Society Forum. In EaP countries this also happens through the support offered by the EU donor community (MS embassies and the EUDs). In Moldova research shows that the EU donor meetings witness a problem of clustering between big and small EU donors that makes cooperation and collaborative action problematic<sup>6</sup>. The issue of coordination between EU and MS highlights the '*solidarity-self-interest*' dichotomy presented in the analytical framework. Under some circumstances the EU donor meetings become an arena for marketing of individual actions and interests without 'a political will to strategically coordinate'. Furthermore, while rhetorically portraying coordination and unity, due to clustering one or another interest is being strongly promoted during the

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<sup>6</sup> The empirical data was collected during the field trip to the EU Delegations and MS embassies in Moldova and Ukraine in March 2011

EU meetings based on formal groupings (Visegrad, Nordic+ etc) or non-formal groupings (big MS as France, Germany and the UK were identified by interviewees as often clustering). In contrast, the EUD from Chisinau tries to be the main coordinator of the EU donor meetings which is perceived positively as long as this leadership role is not over-taking by image making. Hence, according to some, “donor meetings became an arena for promotion and marketing of each other’s activities, and on top of that, there is lack of political will to strategically coordinate” (personal interviews, 2011). Moreover, the downside of claiming leadership has the potential of excluding some major EU donors while developing projects on sensitive issues. Of relevance in this case is the case of the EUD in Moldova working on a project on the region of the separatist region Transnistria, where as some emphasized “the EUD wants a leading role”; a role that was fulfilled by the UK previously (ibidem). The EUD developed a project without consulting the UK, a leading donor on the conflict region of Transnistria. It was the UK’s initiative to approach the EUD and to offer their expertise on the matter. Since then a permanent contact has been established between the two; without, however, further common cooperation (ibidem). Additionally, as interviewees argued, ‘as long as the purpose (of the project) is being reached’ not so much joint programming takes places, but rather a showcase-ing of one’s unique expertise takes place (personal interviews, March 2011)

Another issue that remains open on the good governance agenda is the unsettled conflict of Transnistria, which portrays the necessity of *EU assuming a geopolitical role* in the region, as suggested by the third dichotomy. Moldova has no control of the region, Russian troops being present there as peacekeepers. The opening of EU Delegation in Moldova and EU Border Monitoring Assistance Mission (EUBAM) both in 2005 and became part of the negotiation process in 2006 are envisioned as positive change by EU-Moldova Action Plan monitoring reports (ADEPT & Expert-Grup, 2008). In practice, at negotiations, the EU plays the role of a mere observer in conflict-settlement, while Russia remains influential in exercising its power in the region. Whereas retaking negotiations in February 2012 looked promising, they did not address the main issues in the region from a good governance perspective - illegally detained persons, useful instruments to guarantee HR for local inhabitants (Promo-Lex, 2012). The EU is encouraging a settlement and has a strong stance, but mostly on paper. The presence and the interference of Russian Federation on Moldovan territory hamper EU’s performance in this matter. One of Russia’s policies in the region was one of handing out Russian passports -in the Transnistrian region there are 80.000-100.000 holders of Russian passports (Popescu & Wilson, 2009). Therefore, Russia keeps its 1300 military troops to guard its citizens which it does not intend to withdraw (idem). On top of that, as mentioned in the previous section, Russia is using embargoes as political tools (on Moldovan wine), is investing in energy infrastructure and thus inhibits the economic development of the country.

Even though there is a EUBAM mission established, it facilitates fighting smuggling networks and thus making Transnistrian trade operations more transparent; still, it is not complemented with a political strategy that would “replace the dysfunctional Russian-dominated peacekeeping force or to push Russia to respect its commitments on troop withdrawal” (ibidem, 2009, p. 49).

### **Ukraine: untying the Gordian knot?**

After the last presidential elections in January 2010 a number of important changes occurred in Ukrainian politics, which profoundly shifted the trajectory of the country’s development. After defeating Yulia Tymoshenko in the presidential campaign, the new president, Viktor Yanukovich, and his team set an objective of altering the foreign policy course of their ‘Orange’ predecessors. In less than a year Ukraine was ready to discard its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, extend the presence of Russian naval base on Ukrainian territory for the following 25 years and announced a new ‘pragmatic’ cooperation with the EU. Moreover, the new ruling class proceeded to the centralisation of political power across the legislative, the executive and even the judiciary sector with amending the Constitution and thus reintroducing the semi-presidential system in the form it has existed before the Orange Revolution. Anti-democratic trends of the new government became crystal clear. In its resolution in November 2010, the EP, commenting on Ukraine’s constitutional reform and local elections, was ready to express its ‘regret’ (European Parliament, 2010). This resolution on Ukraine was only one among six, in which MEPs were prompted to react to the shaking grounds of political freedom and liberal order in Ukraine.

Yet, hardly anyone in Brussels could anticipate how far and how fast these trends could develop. The EU hardly was prepared to face the tough challenge provoked by the decision of Pechersk Court in Kyiv to sentence Tymoshenko to seven years of imprisonment. The way in which the EU and its MS’ governments responded to the problem, less to say crisis, serves as an illustrative showcase of the ‘*solidarity-bilateralism*’ dichotomy of the EU actorness outlined in this paper before. From the outset of the court trial against Tymoshenko and several other politicians, the EU highlighted unacceptability of ‘political trials’ and instances of ‘selective justice’. It also signalled that the trial could impede the finalisation of Association Agreement (AA) negotiations between Kyiv and Brussels. However, it was not until Tymoshenko was sentenced that a need for stronger messages and drastic measures arose, when the divergences between the MS became apparent with subsequent negative effects for EU’s joint action. In fact, the perception of the problem was similar among the key MS. This was confirmed in the joint article written for New York Times by Foreign Ministers of Germany, UK, Czech Republic, Sweden,

and Poland (Bildt et al., 2012). Indeed, Germany, Sweden and Poland were the most active MS in commenting on the Tymoshenko case. Still, their positions on how to handle the problem were divergent. Germany started to plead for the idea of boycotting the EURO Cup 2012 football competition. This idea was supported by the European Commission and backed up by Italy, Austria and Belgium. Poland was on the other side of the extreme, rejecting the idea of the boycott and pushing for further engagement with Ukraine. Sweden seemed to find a middle ground neither supporting actively the rapprochement with Janukovych, nor seeing “attendance or not attendance at football games as an instrument of EU policy” (EurActiv, 2012). Similar pattern of divisions was observed in relation to the summit of Central and Eastern European countries, scheduled to take place on May 11-12 in Ukraine. While the majority of the invited countries eventually refused to attend referring to Tymoshenko’s case, among which Germany, Italy, Austria, the Baltic States, others pledged their participation (Poland, Slovakia and Romania) (Novostimira, 2012). As a logical result, at the ministerial meeting on May 15, MS failed to agree on a common line with regard to boycott of the football competition and further actions (AECR, 2012).

Furthermore, the current deadlock and the prior negotiations of the AA between Ukraine and the EU serve as a valuable example of the *‘value-interest’ dichotomous paradigm*. As mentioned previously, the EU has made a final ratification of the agreement conditional on the improvement of overall situation of the democratic standards, highly deteriorated by the Tymoshenko case. The last EP resolution on Ukraine clearly stated that “the signing and ratification the Association Agreement and its effective implementation will require an improvement in the human rights situation, including decriminalisation of political decisions under a reformed penal code, in the rule of law and in deep democracy, with an end to the stifling of the political opposition and with free, fair and transparent elections” (European Parliament, 2012, p.5). Yet, Ukrainian politicians often doubt the EU’s commitment to democratic values as it comes to Ukraine, arguing instead that the EU is concerned more with its economic interests (Shumylo-Tapiola, 2012). While this argument is frequently be used by Yanukovych and his administration in order to rhetorically counterattack rising EU’s criticism and to win some domestic support, it is not entirely groundless. Ukraine’s Prime Minister Azarov quite frequently pointed out to EU’s unwillingness to compromise on higher quotas for Ukraine’s agricultural products, sweets and other commodities (Glavred, 2012). Despite the rhetoric of ‘deepness and comprehensiveness’ attached to the Free Trade Agreement included into the AA, there is some evidence that may point into the opposite direction. In the comments on the EP’s draft recommendation regarding the finalisation of the negotiations between Kyiv and Brussels, the EP’s Committee on International Trade acknowledged “very limited achievements of the DCFTA in areas such as investment, services, agriculture, energy and

export barriers” (European Parliament, 2011, p. 13). Certainly, this result may be explained by a poor domestic business environment in Ukraine, and the lack of political will to reform crucial sectors of Ukrainian economy. However, in EU’s desire to protect its domestic agricultural producers from the competitive Ukrainian goods there is a EU unwillingness to open a ‘pandora box’ regarding Ukraine’s gas and oil trading schemes as well as EU’s preoccupation with Russia’s reaction to the enhanced European integration and other kinds of ‘material’ interests. If the latter is the case, than EU’s image and actorness in Ukraine might be severely damaged.

Finally, the discussions about the finalisation of the AA with Ukraine also reflect the risks of the third dichotomous paradigm defined in the previous section of the paper. Much of the debates within the EP were focused on the possibility of ‘loosing EU to Russia’ (EurActiv, 2012) should the EU decide not to sign the AA and continue to isolate Kyiv. In their last resolution on Ukraine, the MEPs explicitly stated that “the Russian Federation is exerting excessive pressure on Ukraine not to establish a DCFTA with the EU but instead to join a customs union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan” and this situation “is unprecedented in the history of the EU’s relations with external partners” (European Parliament, 2011, p. 6). Indeed, in almost each of its resolutions adopted within the last three years, MEPs did not hesitate to highlight Ukraine’s “strategic importance to the EU” (European Parliament, 2010, 2011, 2012). While the EP is not always united on that how to comprehend Russia’s geopolitical role in the region and the projection of EU’s geopolitical stance in Eastern Europe as a response, it seems to be more prone to do so in principle, unlike the Commission and the Council. The Commission usually favours traditional approach of exporting EU’s rules and norms as a solution to Russian geopolitical projection. As regards MS, some these cultivate a ‘special relationship’ with Moscow prioritising over the relations with other Eastern European states including Ukraine (Youngs, 2009; Hadfield, 2008). It is interesting to note that in the time of the peak rhetoric on boycotting Ukraine’s football competition, it was only Martin Schulz, the President of the EP, who agreed to meet with Ukraine’s Prime Minister during his visit to Brussels, while Presidents of the Commission and the European Council explicitly refuse to do.

The overall outcome of these contradictory tensions in approaches on how to handle Ukraine resulted so far in complete EU inaction. As a lowest common denominator, the EU has adopted a ‘wait-and-see approach’ (referring to Ukrainian parliamentary elections in October 2012) significantly undermining its actorness in the country.

## **Russia: 'new is well-forgotten old'**

What makes Russia a peculiar case is that the country is both a Eastern neighbour and also a regional player and a global actor (Delcour & Tulmets, 2009). Initially, the EU has approached Russia with the same instrument of PCA as in the cases of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Yet, as Russia started to conduct increasingly assertive foreign policy with a domestic situation reflecting growing authoritarian tendencies of President Vladimir Putin, Brussels came up with additional policy instruments. Agreement on four 'common spaces' and, more recently, Partnership for Modernisation represent the EU-Russia relationship. These are accompanied by a number of issues-specific and region-specific initiatives, such EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, EU-Russia Human Rights Dialogue, EU-Russia Partnership Cooperation Council, Northern Dimension etc (European Commission, 2007).

Despite a high density of institutional links and a wide range of cooperation activities, EU relations with Russia can be regarded as "the most divisive factor in EU external relations policy" (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2008, p. 170). Due to the reasons of geographic proximity, historical legacy or dense economic ties, EU MS often prefer to develop bilateral relations with Moscow in detriment to the common EU policy (Youngs, 2009; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2008; 2011). Scholars further argue that some MS are playing a 'two-level game', engaging into pragmatic bilateral cooperation on matters of high economic and strategic interest while leaving normative-related, 'low' politics issues, to be decided upon within the CFSP forums (Smith, 2006; Youngs, 2011). Also, the tendency of 'instrumentalising the EU' – using the Council and working groups in Brussels as a playground for resolving bilateral disputes with Moscow is pointed out (Roth, 2009; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2008). Moreover, Russia itself is very interested in exploiting differences between MS and therefore deliberately advances its national interest inside the EU (David et al., 2011). A decision to build the Nord Stream pipeline, which delivers Russian gas directly to Germany avoiding transit countries, is typically referred as a clear manifestation of the '*solidarity-self-interest*' dichotomy. The project was perceived as a 'betrayal' and was harshly criticized by Poland and the Baltic States. Similarly, simultaneous participation of Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria in the competing South Stream (Russian-backed) and Nabucco (EU-backed) pipeline projects of the Southern Gas Corridor is interpreted as yet another example of breaching solidarity rules in favour of national needs (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2011).

The Russian case further presents itself as a vivid case that fits the '*values-interests*' dichotomy. A new framework of Russia-EU relations called Partnership for Modernisation already through its title implies a focus on pragmatic cooperation in the spheres of mutual interest (trade, energy, investments).

In fact, 'modernisation' became a label which substituted the 'good governance' tag much more used in rhetoric towards Ukraine, Moldova and Ukraine. On a similar note, an expert commenting on the diffusion of EU norms and standards within the four 'common spaces' indicated that the common spaces were "as empty as the word "space" implies" (cf. Youngs, 2009, p. 85). After the last presidential elections in March 2012 the EU politicians took quite a weak stance in reacting, simply 'taking note' of the results (Ashton, 2012; European Parliament, 2012a). MEPs, though, came up with an idea of visa-ban and other sanctions against 60 Russian officials involved in the Magnitsky case<sup>7</sup>, which was supported by the UK and Swedish parliamentarians (ibid.; Euobserver, 2012). So far, this initiative did not find support in the Council. In addition, the parliaments of Italy and Germany, who share the biggest business ties with Russia, remained silent regarding such an initiative. It did not prevent them, though, from actively pushing a boycott of the European Football Championships in Ukraine on the grounds of violations of the rule of law and human rights. Finally, the last EU-Russia summit held on June, 3-4 this year, failed to mention explicitly the Magnitsky case while issues of international security took over the agenda (European Council, 2012).

When the EU has completed the 2004/2007 enlargement rounds and its borders were moved even more eastward, an increasing number of questions were raised about the relations with and between new Eastern neighbours. The EU decided to design a Neighbourhood policy pushing for economic and political reforms in the region through the promotion of liberal democratic norms and practices. In contrast, Kremlin, which at that point of time has already started to implement its course on Russia's revival as a great power, challenged the Western European policy exporting its model of 'sovereign democracy' and building Moscow-centred economic and security alliances with former Soviet Union countries. As a result, countries, such as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, became a playground of the two contrasting models, with energy at the centre of the clash and serve as an illustration of the '*markets and institutions-geopolitics*' dichotomy in the EU's external actions.

Throughout the history of EU-Russia energy relationship, the EU was hesitant in acknowledging the link between energy and security pretending the hydrocarbons trade is nothing more than a commercial activity governed by market rules of supply and demand. Yet, as Hadfield (2008) puts it, "anything in which vital interests and third parties are involved is automatically an aspect of foreign policy. Neither the EU-Russia relationship nor the content of energy cooperation can remain value-free" (p. 239). As well, policy makers acknowledge that the export of market rules and norms is "only part of

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<sup>7</sup> Sergey Magnitsky was a lawyer who was forcefully detained and tortured to death in Russia in November 2009.

the answer” (Solana, 2006). It was not until the January 2006 gas crisis when policy makers in Brussels realized an importance of external (foreign policy) aspects of the Union’s energy policy.

Brief comparison of Russia-Ukraine-EU gas disputes in 2006, 2009 and 2012 allows drawing several observations about EU’s geopolitical role in the region. Firstly, rhetoric and perception of the conflicts as a ‘bilateral dispute’ and ‘business dispute’ prevailed in 2006 and 2009 in the speeches of the Commission and the EU Presidency representatives. When in winter 2012 Gazprom decreased its deliveries to European countries due to cold temperatures and, on top of that, did not hesitate to accuse Ukraine in siphoning the gas, no statement was released by Brussels in defence of Ukraine as full member of the Energy Community. Secondly, although a major decision to invest in Ukraine’s gas transport system was adopted by the European donors in March 2009 (Baltag & Romanyshyn, 2011), little practical steps followed. So far, EU players show constant irritation and unwillingness to invest into Ukrainian gas infrastructure referring to domestic economic problems and thus ignoring strategic and geopolitical risks of such inaction (personal interview, 2012b). As a result, an increasing number of scholars point at the EU’s ‘missed opportunities’ in exercising its leverage and pushing for restructuring energy relations between the producer, consumer and transit states of the region (Grätz, 2011; Sherr, 2010; Belyi, 2012).

## **Discussion of Findings**

The empirical data analysed in this research emphasizes that the EU’s performance in Eastern neighbourhood does not witness deliverance of effective outputs and thus leaves room for the EU to be labeled as incoherent or embracing double-standards. The dynamic of the relationship between the EU and Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia emphasize that at present moment EU is stuck in the three dichotomous paradigms presented in the analytical framework of this paper.

Scholars emphasize the importance of EU collective international action for the “European states to make an effective impact on the shaping of global politics” (Federal Trust, 2009, p.6) and bring evidence regarding EU’s potential for collective action and success in maintaining solidarity (Smith, 2006). However, empirical evidence on EU’s Eastern neighbourhood questions this potential and shows that EU is in a ‘*solidarity-self-interest*’ dilemma and highlights the EU quest for coherence. In Belarus, the EU decides to apply targeted economic sanctions while some MS continue to continue trade and therefore keep its economy afloat; in Moldova the EU donor community (both MS embassies and the

EUDs) cluster and use the meetings as an arena for marketing individual interests and instead of achieving coordination; in Ukraine MS, instead of following EU joint action in the case of Tymoshenko, embrace divergent positions.

It becomes obvious and crucial that in order to deliver effective outcomes, MS need to tailor actions in partner countries in a way that strengthen all forms of coherence. Despite the fact that “the EU has considerably improved its ability to formulate coherent policies” (Portela & Raube, 2009, p.24), its actions challenge EU’s opportunity of portraying unity. While EU promotes a common position towards the Eastern neighbourhood, it yet does not achieve sending out a ‘single message’, MS often choosing to act according to their respective economic (mainly energy & trade) or security interests. But, given the fact that from the Single European Act onwards MS have committed “to act with consistency and solidarity in order more effectively to protect its common interests and independence” (EC, 1986, p.2), more coherence in external actions is vital. One step forward narrowing the ‘*solidarity-national self-interest*’ dichotomy is through addressing this issue of coherence in actions externally (what Tulmets (2008) recognized as external coherence or a policy’ implementation) hence creating a balance between the political rhetoric and action. In external relations, based on the empirical analysis, the major issue of coherence to be addressed is between two different MS foreign policies and namely the actions based on it (what Keukeleire & MacNaughtan (2008) defined as interstate coherence) as well as coherence between the EU and national level (what Nuttall (2005) conceptualized as vertical coherence)

The mix and mangle between *values and interests* that the EU applies in exercising its actorness externally seems to pose more challenges for the EU in Eastern Europe. EU’s policies are designed based on the so-called ‘shared values’ between the EU and its neighbours; however, evidence speaks rather of EU interests than values that are promoted externally. In explaining the ways in which the EU shapes boundaries with ‘the outsiders’, Smith (1996) argues that “the EU is a powerful community of values, those values can be expressed or written in such a way as to make others a threat, or to extend to others the benefits of the EU culture” (p. 17). Evidence shows that in action, the EU is following its output of good governance and democracy in Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and even the Russian Federation, embracing an image of value promoter while de facto masks EU material interests in the region. Scholars highlight that despite placing democracy and good governance at the core of its political rhetoric towards the Eastern neighbourhood, the EU has not been exactly at the forefront of the democratic revolutions in these countries, on the contrary, it “has tended to be a little behind the game” (Emerson et al, 2005, p. 36). Whereas research explains that the EU *value-interests dilemma* is due to the path dependency shaped ENP (Kelley, 2006; Bosse, 2007), others have explained it through EU’s

reluctance to pursue enlargement Eastward in combination with some MS' position towards Russia (Emerson et al., *ibid.*).

In order to maximize its actorness potential vis-à-vis the '*values vs. interests*' dichotomy, the EU must find the right balance between the two. Acknowledging that this is not an easy task, it is not an impossible one. The emphasis is on the fact that despite the general tendency of MS may agree on general and common EU goals such as democracy or human rights, fundamentally they may disagree on the mechanisms of achieving them (Smith, 2011). Although it can be argued that EU can "[perform] effectively in the pursuit of some material interests or despite divergent normative commitments among member states" (Thomas, 2010, p.3); the pursuit of these interests should not discredit or prevail over the values. Furthermore, in order to find the balance between values and interests, the EU should not act based on a 'one size fits it all' approach. This tactics has already proved inefficient in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. If high standards of democracy and good governance is a priority for the EU than it should seek for the balance between normative and material dimension of its external relations towards each country separately. As the EU is now in a quasi cold-war relationship with Belarus it should define the use of sticks and carrots and be consistent in applying them, identify its geopolitical position in relation to Russia and narrow the 'solidarity/self-interest' dichotomy. In the case of Moldova, but as well in that of Ukraine, as researcher suggests, the "EU should be more consistent in its application of conditionality" (Bosse, 2011, p.6). But even more importantly the EU must prioritize the resolution of the frozen conflict of Transnistria, a key component in achieving good governance and higher democratic standards in Moldova. When it comes to the Russian Federation, democracy and good governance should receive more attention; otherwise the disbalance is created by EU's pursuit of material interest of energy, trade and to some extent security.

Within the '*markets and institutions vs geopolitics*' paradigm of the EU's actorness in the Eastern Europe, an advantage so far lies on the first part of the dichotomy. As it was shown in the case of Belarus, EU's geopolitical interest of keeping the country in its sphere of influence can be compromised by more straight-forward energy security interest. Similarly, the EU rarely adopts a geopolitical stance towards Ukraine and Moldova, trading off stronger policy for a better relationship with Russia, and, thereby, undermining its performance in these countries. As regards Russia, the EU only recently departed from the 'business as usual' approach towards greater politicization.

Why does the EU need to embrace something which it always tries to avoid? Some scholars argue that notwithstanding many profound differences and given resources the EU posses, it is comparable to other global powers which act according to their grand strategies (Zielonka, 2008; 2011;

Venessan, 2010; M.E. Smith, 2011, Howorth, 2011). By acknowledging high geopolitical stakes in Eastern Europe and its role as a power comparable to that of Russia, the EU can win more friends in Ukraine, Moldova and even in Belarus by showing a real commitment to the future of these countries. Similarly, by assuming greater geopolitical role and tying its energy relations with Russia to its foreign policy objectives can the EU resist Russia's 'energy weapon' (Smith Stegen, 2011). Moreover, through engaging in *realpolitik* the EU can send the right signals to Moscow that when it comes to issues of strategic importance, it is Brussels, and not member states' capitals, which Kremlin needs to negotiate with. It is not to propose that the EU should abandon or underplay its wide and beneficial cooperation with Russia. It is to say that rather than constantly looking at Eastern Europe through the lenses of Russia, the EU needs to shape its actions in the region according to assumed perceptions of states in-between the two powers - Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.

## **Conclusion**

This research is about EU's external actorness in Eastern Europe. EU's years-long engagement with the region did not prevent recent anti-democratic developments in its Eastern periphery to unfold. Therefore, we addressed the question to what extent can the EU effectively meet its objectives in its Eastern neighbourhood and, can consequently, boost its actorness in the region. Our understanding of EU actorness departs from the current literature strands in combination with the identified need to grasp the complex dynamics of the region under study. The novelty of this approach is that it builds a bridge between these different strands of literature on EU actorness and tries to integrate into a single analytical framework some assumptions of the studies on institutionalization of a European foreign policy, the theorization of EU's power and the impact of EU external policies. An added value is that the proposed framework for analysis is not aiming at conceptualizing the EU as a new type of actor, but it accounts for power-based aspects of EU's behavior. Moreover, the analytical framework is not centered solely around norms and values diffusion, but also highlights in a greater manner material and geopolitical aspects of EU external action. And finally, instead of focusing on the policy-formulating process, EU's actorness was examined based on the patterns of EU's actions on the ground. Thus, EU's performance in Eastern Europe is evaluated according to its outputs, i.e. actions which effectively meet the actor's objectives.

The analysis of EU actorness in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia, was based on the examination of three proposed dichotomous paradigms. The first paradigm,

*'solidarity vs. self-interest'*, investigates patterns of convergence and divergence between MS' and EU external action; the second one, *'values vs. interests'*, focuses on the trade-off between normative values and material interests in EU's actions abroad. Finally, the third dichotomy, *'markets and institutions vs geopolitics'* examines the patterns of EU's understanding of the region and broader regional dynamics. As findings indicate, EU actorness in Eastern Europe can embrace actions that would improve EU's output-based, result-oriented actorness through addressing the mentioned dichotomies. Empirical evidence suggests that the EU may boost its performance and improve its actorness through narrowing the gap and finding the right balance between the identified components of the dichotomies. Hence, on a structural level of EU's external action the EU needs to narrow the gap in favor of solidarity; on an ontological level the EU needs to recognize a greater geopolitical role in the region and act accordingly; and finally, on the most difficult, teleological level, EU's actions needs to take into account a neat balance between normative values and material interests in relation to the particular context of a specific state. In addressing the identified challenges and hurdles one could expect a qualitative shift in the EU's performance in Eastern Europe.

In addressing the identified challenges and hurdles one could expect a qualitative shift in the EU's performance in Eastern Europe. This is more likely under conditions that, first, the EU finds a way to overcome divisions among member states and accommodate the risks of their bilateral policies for EU's unified message; second, the EU is non-apologetic in pursuing their values in the region and linking its rhetoric and practice; third, the EU abandons looking at the region through the lenses of Russian interests. When these conditions are satisfied the EU may expect growing credibility and legitimacy of its actorness in Eastern Europe. In the end, fulfilling these conditions may also help meet the requirements of the Lisbon Treaty in upgrading EU's foreign policy role worldwide.

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