

United or Divided We Stand? Perspectives on the EU's Challenges

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‘United or Divided We Stand? Perspectives on the EU’s Challenges’

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Integration and disintegration trends behind the EU’s failure to stabilise its Eastern neighbourhood

Abstract This paper argues that the EU’s response to a resurgent Russia unveils its pitfalls in achieving the status of a fully-fledged stabilising actor in its (eastern) neighbourhood. After the annexation of Crimea, the EU did manage to provide a collective response. However, Brussels’ struggle to keep on board member states opposed to extending economic sanctions suggests that the EU still falls short of shaping an integrated security strategy, thus manifesting the reactive nature of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The need to accommodate conflicting national interests produces a vague political language, which reveals the superficiality behind ENP documents. The absence of a common security culture has two negative effects: i) it can be exploited by external actors interested in undermining the credibility and further expansion of the European project; ii) by crippling the EU’s confidence, it erodes neighbouring countries’ incentives to follow Brussels’ instructions. The first case is exemplified by Putin’s moral and financial support of Eurosceptic populist parties. The second one reflects the laggard moments of the reform-implementation processes in light of the EU’s decision not to pursue further enlargement shortly. In the first part, I outline the causal factors underlying the EU’s ineffectiveness as a successful security actor in its Eastern neighbourhood. In the second part, I present the negative backlashes in terms of potential trends of European disintegration. Finally, I conclude by suggesting alternative approaches through which these negative effects might be minimised.

Introduction

Measurements of success and failure of the EU's performance in establishing security and thus stability beyond its jurisdictional frontiers should keep in mind the *diversity of instruments* that the EU can put into service: "the debate is no longer about whether the EU is a security actor or not, but rather what kind of security actor it has become and how strategic it is".¹ This paper takes the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as a unique platform of policy action in order to evaluate the impact that the observable use of such diverse instruments can have on determining the EU's level of success in being a security actor towards its immediate geopolitical surroundings, with a particular focus on the Eastern branch of this regional policy framework. In other words, this paper supports the idea that "the ENP is undoubtedly a major capability test for European foreign policy".² However, I will argue that the process that has led to the latest developments in Ukraine points to the EU's failure to pass the test of establishing itself as a fully-fledged security actors in the region. I also argue that such deficiency is correlated with disintegrative backlashes within the EU's socio-political structure, partly fostered by external actors interested in undermining the European project altogether.

In order to better understand the shortcomings behind the EU's potential to be a security actor in its neighbourhood, we need some definitional clarifications. Bretherton defines as the *sine qua non* of an actor in international relations: i) "autonomy" from its external environment as well as from its internal constituent units; ii) a "capacity for purposive action".³

First, given the XXI-century interconnectedness, the idea of autonomy can be contested both in its empirical possibility as well as in its normative desirability. As a matter of fact, any separation between the domestic and the international

¹ Thierry Tardy, *CSDP in Action: what contributions to international security?*, Chaillot Paper, EU Institute of

² Laure Delcour and Elsa Tulmets (eds.), *Pioneer Europe? Testing EU Foreign Policy in the Neighbourhood*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2008, p. 3.

³ Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, Abington: Routledge, 2006, p. 16.

political dimension risks offering a distorted picture of the actual interactions occurring between the two. The absorption capacity of member states facing the migrant crisis, the terrorist threat represented by the Islamic state (including the danger of home-grown terrorism), and the destabilising factor represented by the Kremlin's appeal to Russian-speaking and ethnic Russian minorities in EU member states bordering with Russia are all relevant examples. As for the EU's internal constituents (i.e. its member states), while the requirement for unanimity in the European Council for the adoption of foreign policy decisions can represent an obstacle in terms of operability and timing, the search for consensus can also legitimise a decision at a deeper and more long-term level.

Second, arguably the definition of purposes depends on the constantly changing and often unpredictable circumstances of international politics. Notably, "foreign policy cannot be easily regulated through the use of forward-looking and detailed legislative instruments".⁴ As a result, the EU's capacity for purposive action should not be judged in one-dimensional terms: the diversity of instruments available is symptomatic of the complexity behind XXI-century security challenges. Significantly, the 2003 European Strategy Paper gives a crucial diagnosis for the new "dynamic" threats emerging in the XXI century (terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure, organised crime), emphasising that "none of the new threats is purely military; nor can any be tackled by purely military means."⁵

This is precisely the political-historical critical juncture at which the European Neighbourhood Policy originated. The inclusion of the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004, and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, has radically transformed the way the EU acknowledged its surrounding space. Crucially, "[t]he 2004 enlargement took place in a permissive international context, with Russia still debilitated by the end of the Cold War and

⁴ Christopher Hill and Michael Smith, *International Relations and the European Union*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 172.

⁵ European Security Strategy. *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, Brussels, 12 December 2003. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsupload/78367.pdf>.

where liberal democracy and western economic models were seen as a panacea for progress”.⁶ On the contrary, given that the new extended frontiers bordered with territories perceived as sources of potential destabilisation for the EU as a whole, the ENP was created as a tool to replicate the success of the 2004/2007 enlargement by exporting its internal model, i.e. stability, security and prosperity beyond the EU’s borders as an alternative to actual EU membership. As Prodi felicitously commented, the ENP would promise “everything but the institutions”⁷.

The declared objective was “to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the new borders of the Union”⁸, by creating “a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighbourhood - a ‘ring of friends’ - with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations”⁹. Crucially, it emphasises the aspiration “to provide a framework for the development of a new relationship, which would not, in the medium-term, include a perspective of membership or a role in the Union’s institutions”¹⁰. Such prospect is explicitly denied to Mediterranean partners, whereas “other cases remain open”. The latter formulation clearly leaves its neighbours to the East in a grey area of geopolitical positioning.

Such lack of determinedness marked the ENP as a constantly open “Pandora toolbox” for the bilateral relations between former Soviet countries and Russia. The five-day Georgia-Russia war in August 2008 exemplified this in the most explicit way, and prompted the need to differentiate the identification of priorities and correspondent allocation of resources for partner countries to Europe’s East

⁶ Ana E. Juncos and Richard G. Whitman, ‘Europe as a regional actor: Neighbourhood lost?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 53, Issue Supplement S1: 200-215, September 2015, p. 208.

⁷ Romano Prodi, ‘A Wider Europe - A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability’, Sixth ECSA World Conference. Jean Monnet Project, Brussels, 5-6 December 2002. Available at: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/02/619&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

⁸ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework For Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM(2003) 104, p. 4. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

and those to Europe's South. As a result, in 2009 the Euro-Mediterranean Union and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) were created.¹¹

From now on, I will focus on the EU's action within the EaP framework. The goal of this essay is to demonstrate that the EU's failure to *predict* and *respond* in a coherent and efficient manner to the revisionist intervention of the Russian Federation in the international order reveals its contingent, but also structural shortcomings in achieving the status of a fully-fledged security actor in its eastern neighbourhood.

In the first part, I try to unpack the causal factors that might explain the reasons underlying the EU's *contingent* and *structural* deficiencies in ensuring stability in its Eastern neighbourhood. In the second part, I analyse negative recoil effects of this lack of a common security culture in terms of possible disintegration processes within the EU socio-political fabric. On the one hand, it can be exploited by external actors interested in undermining the credibility and further expansion of the European project, as exemplified by Putin's moral and financial support of Eurosceptic populist parties; on the other, by crippling the EU's confidence, in light of the feeble EU membership perspective offered in exchange for radical reforms, it erodes neighbouring countries' incentives to follow Brussels' instructions. In the third part, I will briefly suggest alternative approaches that might minimise the current state of affairs in our region of interest. Finally, I will summarise the main arguments of the essay and draw concluding remarks.

Why is the EU ineffective as a security actor in its Eastern neighbourhood

In order to answer this question, we need first of all to outline how the ENP actually works.¹² To start with, key-documents are the Action Plans or Association Agendas. These are bilateral agreements that set out the strategic policy targets for

¹¹ The Union for Mediterranean includes the following partner countries: Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (suspended), Tunisia, Turkey, and Libya as an observer. The Eastern Partnership includes six Eastern European and South Caucasus partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine.

¹² http://ceas.europa.eu/enp/documents/index_en.htm

the reform process in the partner countries, by which progress can be thus evaluated over the medium term. Once these targets are met, an Association Agreement is to be signed. In exchange for the implementation of reforms demonstrating commitment to democracy, human rights, the rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development (which would correspond to the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*¹³), the EU offers:

- Financial support;
- Access to the EU internal market;
- Visa facilitation;
- Technical and policy support.¹⁴

Hence, Progress Reports outline the extent to which observable progress has been achieved in the key-areas of reform and against agreed targets.

It is well-known that the ENP has been modelled on the enlargement instruments: “[i]n structure and content the individually tailored bilateral Action Plans between the EU and each ENP country resemble the Accession Partnerships with the candidate countries; the Commission’s ENP Country Reports are similar to the Commission’s Opinions on potential candidate countries; and the ENP Progress Reports echo the Commission’s Regular Reports on the candidates, albeit without the same amount of detail.”¹⁵ In this respect, while it would be inaccurate to consider the design of the ENP as “an *alternative to membership*”, it should nonetheless be interpreted as a “*surrogate to enlargement* in the sense of attempting to reproduce the transformative power conferred by this policy”.¹⁶ Such transformative power is considered to be derived from a conditionality-based approach to policy-making (also called “carrots-and-sticks method”): the latter

¹³ These are all key-requirements embedded in the Copenhagen criteria, i.e. the EU accession criteria. For further details, see: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/accession-criteria_en.htm.

¹⁴ http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/about-us/index_en.htm

¹⁵ Gwendolin Sasse, ‘The European Neighbourhood Policy: Conditionality Revisited for the EU’s Eastern Neighbours’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60(2): 295-316, 2008, p. 297.

¹⁶ David Cadier, ‘Is the European Neighbourhood Policy a substitute for enlargement?’, in *The Crisis of EU enlargement*, LSE IDEAS Report, November 2013, p. 55.

follows a cost-and-benefit logic, whereby the incentive to endure the costs of implementing radical reforms stems from the prospect of obtaining the “golden carrot”, that is, EU membership.

However, given the lack of an explicit membership option in the text, several commentators have raised their doubts on the extent to which the ENP can actually preserve the transformative power envisaged by the enlargement policies, and thus guaranteeing “stability, security and well-being for all concerned”.¹⁷ In this respect, enhanced interdependence between the EU and partner countries is stressed as “a *means* of stability, security and sustainable development”.¹⁸ The clarification is important, as it attempts to specify the incentives for partner countries, without actually solving the fundamental ambiguity of the text.

This leads me to a more systematic explanation of the causal factors underlying the EU’s failure to assert itself as an efficient security actor in the region. We can identify three types of deficiency affecting the EU’s action within the framework of the EaP:

1. Lack of long-term strategic vision of security;
2. Lack of appropriate tools to maintain a comprehensive view of security;
3. Lack of coherent understanding of the security strategy of alternative regional actors (i.e. Russia).

I will now unpack these three levels and clarify the observable implications of the posited deficiencies. The first indicates a structural limit; the second one represents a circumstance of potential transition from a structural limit to a contingent deficiency, which thus can become more manageable; the third one symbolises the massive scale of those negative consequences that can derive from a negligent attitude to an arguably contingent deficiency, which could have been otherwise treated in a preventive intention.

¹⁷ European Commission, 2004, p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4, emphasis added.

1. The chronological contextualisation presented in the introduction does have a weight here. As a matter of fact, when the EaP was introduced, there was a clear political climate of enlargement fatigue. This element, combined with the intergovernmental character of European foreign policy, has impeded the formulation of a coherent long-term strategy in the region.

The underlying lack of a common security culture can be seen in the vague political language of the ENP documents. Fundamentally, such vagueness is instrumental as it leaves enough space for the various member states' preferences towards membership perspectives of EaP countries. While Central Europe and the Baltic states have been traditionally staunch supporters of the membership prospect for countries such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, member states that have bilateral relations with Russia based mainly on mutual benefit (for example, in terms of dependence on Russia's gas supplies), such as France, Italy, and Greece, have tended to be less prone to sympathise to such prospect for fear of Russian retaliatory actions. Hence, these differences create the incentive for the "institutionalisation of ambiguity"¹⁹ in ENP key-documents.

There are also more fundamental factors. As a matter of fact, "[t]he nature of the EU - neither a state nor a military alliance - inherently limits the development of a strategic culture".²⁰ As a result, it fortifies the EU's tendency to be *reactive* rather than proactive in security issues. For example, while Brussels' introduction of individual restrictive measures (i.e. assets freezes and travel bans) and more wide-ranging sanctions against Russia's annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions in Eastern Ukraine, were meant with a view to de-escalating the conflict, the timing of their implementation, that is, at a point when the situation had been already escalated to the military level,

¹⁹ Cadier, 2013, p. 53.

²⁰ Tardy, 2015, p. 32.

reveals the fundamental reactive nature of the EU's presence in its Eastern neighbourhood as a promoter of stability.²¹

Crucially, “the High Representative/Vice-President [of the European Commission] and the EEAS were bystanders to this diplomacy as the Member States, via Germany, drove the EU's diplomatic response”.²² However, while obtaining consensus from all member states was a decisive achievement on behalf of the EU, Brussels' struggle to keep on board member states opposed to extending economic sanctions reinforces the idea that the EU still falls short of shaping an integrated security strategy.²³

In this respect, while summarising the main arguments in favour or against the actual impact of sanctions²⁴, Popescu has offered an insightful comment on Russia and Europe's timing in the Ukrainian crisis: “Russia has acted like a sprinter, and Europe, a long-distance runner: the sanctions are about turning the confrontation over Ukraine from an unwinnable dash into a winnable marathon”.²⁵ This perspective would undermine the EU's reactivity as a structural shortcoming and rather stress its effort to enact a strategy with long-term implications, however slow.

²¹ For a timeline of how sanctions came into place and the subsequent rounds of renewals, see: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/ukraine-crisis/history-ukraine-crisis/>. See also Juncos and Whitman, 2015, pp. 205-7.

²² Juncos and Whitman, 2015, p. 206.

²³ For example, see Greece's objection to extend Russia sanctions: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/11373136/Greece-objects-to-EU-call-for-more-Russia-sanctions.html>, and Italy's attempt to delay sanctions renewal: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/15/world/europe/italy-delays-eus-renewal-of-sanctions-against-russia.html?_r=0.

²⁴ The arguments in favour of the sanctions as effective tools have pointed to the idea that their enactment showed to Russia that such behaviour is deemed inadmissible by the international community; they deterred Moscow from seizing further territories; they signalled to other actors that revisionist ventures with military implications would come at a cost; they broke Putin's social contract with the Russian people, as collective prosperity is no longer in place as a trade-off to be used for the justification of the Kremlin's authoritarian rule. On the contrary, criticism over the sanctions emphasises that the latter did not coerce Russia into withdrawing, while uniting Russians around Putin's personality at all levels of society. See Iana Dreyer and Nicu Popescu, *Do sanctions against Russia work?*, EU Institute for Security Studies, December 2014, p. 3. Available at: http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Brief_35_Russia_sanctions.pdf

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

More in general, a recent report from the EU Institute of Strategic Studies analyses the EU's use of (economic) "sanctions as security policy tools"²⁶. The assumption behind this strategy is that, since the EU lacks significant traditional state-like coercive measures of military kind, it can leverage power in a credible way by exploiting its position as the world's largest trading entity, the largest global aid donor, and one of the most active global investors. Crucially, this report suggests that in order to judge the extent to which this use of sanctions can be considered successful in solving the Ukraine-Russia war, there are "three levels of analysis" that should be taken into consideration, i.e. "Russia's *strategic* objectives with Ukraine, its *operational* goals on the ground in the conflict, and its *tactical* means".²⁷ Although differentiating these alternative levels can be useful theoretically, it is precisely such differentiation as a means to identifying at least a minimal success that actually confirms the reactive nature of European foreign policy towards its Eastern neighbourhood. In particular, its being successful merely on the tactical level suggests that the whole policy scheme has lacked a long-term coherent strategy that arguably could have enhanced the likelihood of overcoming member states' changing stances towards the EU's stronger presence in the region on the one hand, and of pre-empting Russia's direct military intervention on the other.

2. The above-mentioned pitfalls are simultaneously cause and consequence vis-à-vis the second causal factor, i.e. the lack of appropriate tools to maintain a comprehensive understanding of security in the region.

An important step for judging the instruments available to the EU is the changes introduced by the Lisbon treaty.²⁸ It established the new position of the President of the European Council; an updated version of the High Representative

²⁶ Iana Dreyer José Luengo-Cabrera (eds.), *On target? EU sanctions as security policy tools*, Report n. 25, EU Institute for Strategic Studies, September 2015, p. 8. Available at: http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Report_25_EU_Sanctions.pdf.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁸ For a detailed analysis of the major novelties introduced, see Astrid Boenig, Jan-Frederik Kremer, Aukje van Loon (eds.), *Global Power Europe: Theoretical and Institutional Approaches to the EU's External Relations*, vol. 1 Berlin-Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, esp. pp. 100-105.

for the Union in Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (which now combines the positions of High Representative and Commissioner for External Relations, while covering also the role of Vice-President of the European Commission); and a completely new institution, the European External Action Service (EEAS). Given the fact that the High Representative now chairs the Foreign Affairs Council, the intention of this institutional resettlement was to foster a more coherent cooperation between external relations policies and the CFSP framework. In this respect, Tardy notes that a more integrated “culture of coordination” can be found in the EU foreign policy, exemplified at: the institutional level (for instance, with the Commission participating more in EEAS-led CFSP-related planning and working groups, or with the creation of coordination bodies or processes, such as crisis Platforms or CSDP Lessons Management Group); at the idealistic level (with the growing understanding of the interdependence between development and security); or at the level of more targeted strategic planning (with the creation of regional strategies).²⁹ Hence the EEAS, which now finds among its ranks officials from the Commission, the Council Secretariat and the member states, is now acting in association with the European Commission in matters related to the ENP. As a result, in theory it could facilitate a better coordination with the CFSP instruments made available to the Commission by the Lisbon Treaty. The incorporation of restrictive measures within the group of CSFP instruments is a good example.

However, the language translating the different sectors of cooperation remains vague, preventing the EU from acquiring a satisfactory level of coherence as a security actor.³⁰ A yet unclear transformation can be found in the level of institutional coherence reached between the EEAS and other Commission agencies, particularly the Commissioner for the ENP and Enlargement (currently Johannes Hahn). As Cincā stresses, while the EEAS managed to include CSDP structures as well as officers from EaP services, the ENP overall focuses on long-

²⁹ Tardy, 2015: 29.

³⁰ See Simon Nuttall, ‘Coherence and Consistency’, in Hill and Smith (eds.), 2005, pp. 91-112.

term technical issues rather than short-term challenges. As a result, “[t]he lack of coherence between the two policies meant that both the Council and the Commission, through their specific activities, failed to formulate a general strategic plan for the EU’s involvement in the region”.³¹

Yet, the biggest challenge remains the achievement of vertical coherence between EU policies and member states’ foreign policies.³² While the ENP has been so far successful as far as technical cooperation is concerned, issues that involve security and foreign policy decision remain ultimately within the *manoeuvre* of nation states. As Wessels and Bopp note, in the area of Security and Defence Policy, while the role of the Commission remains marginal, the Lisbon Treaty has not modified the unanimity rule and the right to initiate proposals is shared between the High Representative and the member states. As a result, “the modifications of the available instruments do not correspond to the enhanced list of objectives and aims [...] [t]hus the term *Common Security and Defence Policy* can still be regarded as somewhat misleading.”³³

How do these institutional re-arrangements affect the ENP framework? As a matter of fact, the Arab Spring in 2011 and the new available instruments offered by the Lisbon Treaty in dealing with security issues have encouraged the EU to upgrade the ENP strategy with a new approach, based on “mutual accountability and a shared commitment to the universal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law”. Most crucially, it strengthens the conditionality-based policy approach through the principle of “more for more”, by introducing a more

³¹ Sanda Cincă, ‘The Eastern Partnership and the New Dimensions of European Security’, in Valentin Naumescu and Dan Dungaci (eds.), *The European Union’s Eastern Neighbourhood Today: Politics, Dynamics, Perspectives*, London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 67-96, p. 85

³² See also Clara Portela and Kolja Raube, ‘(In-)Coherence in EU Foreign Policy: Exploring Sources and Remedies’, Paper presented at the European Studies Association Bi-annual Convention, Los Angeles, April 2009. Available at: [http://aei.pitt.edu/33122/1/portela_clara_\(2\).pdf](http://aei.pitt.edu/33122/1/portela_clara_(2).pdf)

³³ Wolfgang Wessels and Franziska Bopp, ‘The Institutional Architecture of CFSP after the Lisbon Treaty – Constitutional breakthrough or challenges ahead?’, Research Paper N. 10, CEPS, June 2008, p. 29. Available at: <https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/book/1677.pdf>

differentiated approach towards each partner country “on the basis of its needs, capacities and reform objectives”.³⁴

However, the availability of these instruments does not seem to have improved the EU’s capacity to provide efficient conflict management. Popescu offers an insightful overview of the EU’s performance in conflict management situations across the post-Soviet space. There is a clear reason why the EU’s foreign policy in its Eastern neighbourhood has to be evaluated in relation to the availability of its instruments: “[t]he fact that EU institutions have greater autonomy in the low-politics of conflict resolution left its imprint on the EU as a crisis-management actor as it skewed EU conflict management toward relatively uncontroversial, risk-averse aspects of conflict management”.³⁵ His analysis of the conflicts in Transnistria, South-Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh are taken as three case studies indicating the externally-driven logic of the EU’s engagement in the region as a conflict management actor. His conclusion is that “the EU’s decisions concerning when, how and where to get involved in conflict resolution are often more influenced by local conditions than by EU strategic pursuit of its strategic interest and/or values”.³⁶ For the author, the insufficient synergy between diplomatic, security and economic sanctions available has led to the situation whereby the EU “often equated ‘success’ with ‘presence’ in certain conflict zones or ‘unity’ on problematic issues, rather than achievement of policy goals”.³⁷

The latter specification seems to be of particular relevance to the sanction regime imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea. Most crucially, while this unity might be reached at the EU level, it is also worth acknowledging the fragility of such unity. I will get back to this point in the second part.

³⁴ See European Commission and External Action Service, ‘A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A review of European Neighbourhood Policy’, *Joint Communication by the High Representative of The Union For Foreign Affairs And Security Policy and the European Commission*, Brussels 25/05/2011, p. 3. Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf.

³⁵ Nicu Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy and Post-Soviet Conflicts: Stealth Intervention*, London and New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 121.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 0. 133.

3. The most surprising factor is the EU's failure in detecting Russia's self-understanding as an alternative regional actor and, in particular, in overlooking the evidence on the fact that Moscow's strategy towards its near abroad has remained quite consistent from 1991 onwards.³⁸ In addition, European leaders have maintained a deaf attitude towards long-standing observers of Russian politics, who had been warning about the likelihood of Crimea becoming the next hotspot after the Georgia-Russia war in 2008.³⁹

A very insightful report by Pomerantsev and Weiss analyses the role that Russia has in contributing as an external actor to fostering disintegration dynamics within the EU. The key-argument is that the Kremlin "weaponises" information, money and ideas⁴⁰, that is, exploits the latter as instruments to push forward its own foreign policy objectives.

The combination of Moscow's success in instrumentalising these three tools on the one hand, and the EU's failure in counteracting the Kremlin's hybrid war on the other, compromises the EU's confidence in being a reliable stabilising actor in the region. This can have significant implications for its self-image as a

³⁸ For a detailed analysis of the continuity of Russia's tools to compete with Western governments, thus rejecting the idea of a fundamental novelty in Moscow's aggressiveness in terms of foreign policy, see Keir Giles, *Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power*, Russia and Eurasia Programme, London: Chatham House, March 2016. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-03-21-russias-new-tools-giles.pdf>. See also 'The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine', The European Union Committee, House of Lords, February 2015, esp. pp. 24-5. Available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldecom/115/115.pdf>.

For a very rich analysis of the evolution of Russian foreign policy, see Lo Bobo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the post-Soviet era: Reality, Illusion and Myth-making*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2002; Lo Bobo, *Russia and the New World Disorder*, London: Chatham House, 2015; Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011; Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Plymouth: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing House, 2013 (3rd edition).

³⁹ Keir Giles collects an extensive list of such warnings: Mikhail Barabanov, 'Ukraine, NATO and Russia', Moscow Defense Brief, No. 4, 2008; Jakob Hedenskog, *Crimea After the Georgian Crisis*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, November 2008; Aurel Braun, 'NATO and Russia: Post-Georgia Threat Perceptions', French Institute of International Relations, May 2009; Leon Aron, 'The Georgia Watershed', *Russian Outlook*, Fall 2008; Tomislava Penkova, 'Russia's attitude towards the post-Soviet space after the war in Georgia', *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, No. 111, December 2008; Steven Pifer, 'Crisis Between Ukraine and Russia', *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 2009; Timo Kivinen, 'Russia's National Interests and Ukraine: What Policies Might Russia Adapt [sic] In Pursuing These Interests', Royal College of Defence Studies, 2008 course. See Giles, 2016, p. 47, note 261.

⁴⁰ Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, 'The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money', A Special Report presented by The Interpreter, a project of the Institute of Modern Russia. Available at: http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf.

successful exporter of its own model of governance to its immediate neighbourhood.

More concretely, the EU's launch of a pan-European operation to counter Russia propaganda⁴¹ has been activated too slowly and on the basis of inaccurate assumptions as to what can be an effective counteractive strategy. On the one hand, the failure to publicly declare the presence of Russia troops on Ukrainian ground for almost a year confirms the EU's inability to defy the Kremlin's strategy of framing events *ad hoc*, thus preventing the EU from formulating a coherent common plan of action in response.⁴² However, such operations fail to grasp the actual function of propaganda, that is, to offer "subtle imitations of objectivity".⁴³ Rather than offering utter lies, the weaponisation of information consists of multiplying different versions of the same facts, tailoring the content depending on the target audience, and aiming at confusing the international community, which is thus prevented from the possibility of taking a swift assertive course of action.

Moreover, Pomerantsev and Weiss talk about how the Kremlin "employ[s] money, commerce and energy as foreign policy weapons" as well as of "Western capitals' acquiescence to sheltering Russian corrupt money." In this regard, Edward Lucas, senior editor at *The Economist*, in a written testimony to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, suggested a range of strategies that Western countries should adopt, including the application of "much tougher money-laundering laws to keep corrupt Russian officials out of the Western payments system and capital markets". He also stressed the need to "intensify investigations of Russian energy companies which have mysterious origins, shareholders or business models [...] [and] tighten rules on trust and company

⁴¹ <http://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/eu-launches-operation-to-counter-russian-propaganda/>

⁴² Andrew Rettman, 'EU breaks taboo on 'Russian forces in Ukraine'', *EUobserver*, Brussels, 16.2.2015. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/foreign/127667>

⁴³ Giles, 2016, p. 30.

formation agents to make it harder for corrupt Russian entities to exploit and abuse our system”.⁴⁴

Finally, Russia manipulates historical facts and exploits civilisationist ideologies as foreign policy instruments, and spreads them through a subtle network of shady non-state actors. In a recent very resourceful research paper, Lutsevych advances evidence on Kremlin-funded pseudo-NGOs which engage in spreading ideas on *Russkij mir* (Russian world) meant to undermine the social cohesion of neighbouring states by appealing to Russian minorities, thus encouraging ethno-geopolitics, but also to paramilitary groups that could act as destabilising forces. In doing so, not only they promote anti-Western, conservative Orthodox and Eurasianist values, but they also engage in spreading alternative discourses in order to create confusion among Western decision-makers.⁴⁵

Last but not least, Russia’s destabilising effect goes as far as threatening a EU member state (Sweden) that Moscow is ready to implement new military measures should Stockholm decide to join NATO.⁴⁶ From this point of view, the EU’s failure to stabilise countries immediately beyond its frontiers could have unpredictable repercussions within its own borders.

Potential trends of European disintegration as a negative backlash effect of the EU’s failure to be a security actor in its Eastern neighbourhood

First of all, it is important to be cautious with the terminology. In light of the 2008 financial crisis, several scholars have pointed out the need to come to grips with something that no theory on European integration is capable of properly addressing, that is, European disintegration. The common argument is that the conceptual, normative, and predictive material offered by these theories is

⁴⁴ Edward Lucas, Written testimony to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, September 3rd, 2014. Available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nLdiU4jRMYIVgtrX6jXs4L8vxwlN2NpVh8ndUgbYH94/preview#>

⁴⁵ Orysia Lutsevych, Agents of the Russian World Proxy Groups in the Contested Neighbourhood, Russia and Eurasia Programme, London, Chatham House, April 2016. Available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-04-14-agents-russian-world-lutsevych.pdf>

⁴⁶ <http://europe.newsweek.com/russias-lavrov-warns-sweden-nato-membership-453890?rm=eu>

insufficient (if not inadequate) to analyse the centrifugal/disintegrative phenomena expressing the current European crisis.

However, while the overall logic of this judgment seems correct, there seems to be a deeper reason behind the theoretical shortage of integration theories in terms of their ability to address different aspects of European disintegration. As a matter of fact, none of the integration theories posits that European integration is to be understood as an unstoppable and irreversible process.

The deeper reason is that such integration theories consider uniquely the *formal* aspects of European integration. As a result, the *informal* aspects are denied an appropriate theoretical dimension, which is actually fundamental for a comprehensive study of the scope and reasons behind European (dis)integration.

Specifically, by informal aspects I mean elements such as collective identity construction, shifting mental maps of Europe's geography, and everyday social practices, but also narratives constructed by the media, geopolitical fears, external actors' interventions. These elements tend to represent *conditional factors* rather than determining elements. However, their silencing risks preventing us from accessing a more comprehensive understanding of the obstacles behind the EU's widening and deepening processes. Given that this essay focuses on the EU's foreign policy towards its Eastern neighbourhood, I will approach the analysis of European disintegration trends in terms of the last factor listed.

In particular, I argue that the EU's failure to assert itself as a fully-fledged security actor in its Eastern neighbourhood has two major consequences:

1. It can be exploited by external actors interested in undermining the credibility and further expansion of the European project, as exemplified by Putin's moral and financial support of Eurosceptic populist parties;

2. By crippling the EU's confidence, it erodes neighbouring countries' incentives to follow Brussels' instructions. This can be spotted in the laggard reform-implementation processes of EaP countries in light of the EU's decision not to pursue further enlargement any time soon.

I will now unpack both consequences separately.

1. Müller talks about two subtle forms of possible gradual European disintegration. The first one is detected in Europe's "normative disintegration", embodied by the rise and integration of populist parties within European institutions. Equally important, he talks about the EU's "normative disengagement" towards its neighbourhood, referring to the EU's inability to address the Russia-Ukraine war efficiently and to its strategic regression in setting stabilisation rather than democratisation as a priority along its southern Mediterranean border after the post-Arab Spring.⁴⁷

Significantly, the assumption that the most optimal approach to deal with today's challenges is through technocratic decision-making organs has generated what Chantal Mouffe calls "post-politics"⁴⁸. In other words, due to its consensus-seeking diktat, technocratic governance has eliminated the classical agonistic platform of running politics. In particular, given the assumption that political modes of identification and affiliation require this agonistic dimension, the EU's mode of governance alienates European voters, who then tend to shift their sympathies to parties at the extremes of the political spectrum. As Margaret Canovan explained, populism exploits "the gap between promise and performance in democracy"⁴⁹, which is now associated with any failure attributed to Brussels' mismanagement of problems perceived as common.

As a result, the artificial dichotomisation of the political space along moral lines between "the pure people" vs "the corrupt elite"/the "Other" is highly evident in Eurosceptic rhetoric across Europe. Significantly, the mediatisation effect tends to emphasise Eurosceptic invectives rather than improvements achieved at the negotiating tables in Brussels. Experimental designs in audience

⁴⁷ Jan-Werner Müller, *Europe's twin dangers: Normative disintegration, normative disengagement*, Eurozine, November 2014. Available at: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2014-11-14-muller-en.html>

⁴⁸ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2005.

⁴⁹ Margaret Canovan, 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies*, 47(1): 2-16, 1999.

research indicate that such repeated exposure to news coverage focusing on strategic power games in the EU produces political cynicism, hence a lower readiness to support the EU.⁵⁰

Crucially, the analysis of the disintegrative potential of such Eurosceptic parties often underestimates the role of external actors. In this regard, the Political Capital Institute has produced a report on the different affiliations that the Russian government has established with different extremist Eurosceptic parties *across* the whole political spectrum and with varying degrees of closeness.⁵¹

In particular, Anton Shekhovtsov has been a long-term observer of the connections between Putin and the European far right. It is worth stressing that links between Russia nationalists and the European far right date back to the 1990s. However, as of 2004 it was no longer merely individuals and groups with ideological affinities to cooperate: the Russian state became involve directly. In this sense, apart from the superficial reference to traditional Christian values at a declarative level, in a more subtle way Moscow and far-right agendas overlap in terms of constraining the transformative power of the EU: “Preventing the West from stopping the most brutal regimes is presented as promoting multipolarity, but this multipolarity is a sham: its only aim is to undermine democracy globally. In Putin’s Russia, European right-wing extremists see a force that can indeed hamper the world’s democratic development. Less global democracy means less global security, and weakened global security may be interpreted as an excuse for enforcing the anti-immigration agenda.”⁵²

However, Moscow does not engage in mere moral support of such parties. The case of the €40 million loan from the first Czech-Russian bank to *Front National*, with the blessing of Russia’s President is telling.⁵³

⁵⁰ Claes de Vreese, “The Effects of Strategic News on Political Cynicism, Issue Evaluations, and Policy Support: A Two-Wave Experiment”, *Mass Communication & Society*, Volume 7, Issue 2: 191-214, 2004.

⁵¹ http://www.riskandforecast.com/useruploads/files/pc_flash_report_russian_connection.pdf

⁵² <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/anton-shekhovtsov/kremlin%E2%80%99s-marriage-of-convenience-with-european-far-right>

⁵³ <http://www.interpretermag.com/russia-and-front-national-following-the-money/>

Here the theoretical shortcoming of neglecting the *informal yet direct* impact of external actors on the internal disintegrative mechanisms of the EU generates a two-fold consequence. On the one hand, at the normative level such parties refer to a regime that explicitly undermines all the principles on which the EU claims to be founded. Hence disintegration can assume the shape of Eurosceptic parties *integrated* in European institutions, calling for the destruction of the latter from within. In the name of *les peuples d'Europe*, statements such as Marine Le Pen's "I want to destroy the EU, not Europe!"⁵⁴ are symptomatic.

On the other, at the predictive level the failure to take seriously the Kremlin's ideology, while fostering supposedly harmless business relations, left the EU unprepared to cope with the Ukrainian crisis at its doorstep. And the long-term implications of this tend to emerge through shady figures within the European political scene. In particular, French MP Thierry Mariani recently passed a resolution in the French parliament that opposed the extension of sanctions against Russia.⁵⁵ Interestingly enough, Mariani co-chairs the French-Russia dialogue association and has participated in a delegation of French MPs who visited Crimea after the annexation to supervise and confirm the legitimacy of the local referendum.⁵⁶ More in general, "[e]lections in Kremlin-backed breakaway states such as Abkhazia or Transnistria [...] would be observed and validated by far-right politicians from the EU."⁵⁷ Researchers like Anton Shekhovtsov and Andreas Umland focus on identifying such connection between the Russian government and Western actors promoting the Kremlin's interests.

While these representatives epitomize a clear minority within the European political elite, they still do contribute to blurring the European "marketplace of ideas" with interpretations that attempt to give legitimacy to the destabilising conflicts in the European neighbourhood, thus indirectly becoming part and parcel

⁵⁴ http://www.politico.eu/article/migrant-crisis-refugees-the-10-most-apocalyptic-warnings-of-the-eus-demise/?utm_content=buffer1c382&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer

⁵⁵ <https://www.rt.com/news/341216-france-drop-sanctions-russia/>

⁵⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-33633874>

⁵⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/16/russian-resurgence-how-the-kremlin-is-making-its-presence-felt-across-europe>

of the Russian propaganda machine. The problem is that many Westerners do not understand that a trumped-up justificatory pretext is part of a very sophisticated ideological framework.⁵⁸ Moreover, this misunderstanding is somehow entrenched in the way our brain works, and our social constructions make it even deeper.⁵⁹

2. Russia's hybrid warfare is very efficient in fostering disintegrative dynamics within Western communities and political leadership. As a result, the EU loses confidence in its capacity to counteract Russia's revisionist actions that propaganda first tries to cover, and then strives to justify.

This lack of self-confidence, combined with the absence of a clear membership perspective, risks of denying to EaP countries sufficient incentive to endure the costs of the reforms required. For example, in analysing the most recent developments in Ukraine's reform process, Andrew Wilson commented that "[t]he carrots aren't juicy enough and the sticks aren't big and threatening enough".⁶⁰ In this sense, the gap between the high adoption costs and the lack of membership perspective can play a highly destabilising effect, as the country's political stagnation can be exploited by Moscow to mingle in Ukrainian domestic politics. Compared to the willingness of the Central European and the Baltic states' elites to endure the costs behind the implementation of harsh reforms due to their actual prospect of European membership, the same adaptation is not so clear for EaP countries, as the expected legal approximation and political-economic reforms are being expected by EU bureaucrats in a non-negotiable way and often without taking into consideration the partners' needs and domestic dilemmas in a

⁵⁸ "Propaganda is thus not a flawed description, but a script for action. [...] [It] is part of the action it is meant to justify." Timothy Snyder, *New York Times*, 7th March, 2014. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2014/mar/07/crimea-putin-vs-reality/>.

⁵⁹ As psychologist Kahneman explains, an efficient method to convince people in falsehood is repetition, thanks to which "familiarity is not easily distinguishable from truth." Yet, this activates the human need for "cognitive ease". Russian State-controlled media reflects precisely the function of spreading such need in society for the sake of political support. See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011, p. 62.

⁶⁰ Andrew Wilson, 'Survival of the richest: How Oligarchs Block Reform in Ukraine, ECFR, April 2016. Available at: http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/survival_of_the_richest_how_oligarchs_block_reform_in_ukraine6091

sophisticated way that tries to deviate from one-size-fits-all approaches.⁶¹ Such an ambiguity as to EaP membership perspectives has been labelled as “politics of the half-open door”.⁶² Yet, this half-open door facilitates Russia to slip through, thus intervening in the domestic politics of those countries that it has a vested interest in preventing from strengthening their ties with the EU and NATO.

At the same time, the EaP has been accused of setting up an asymmetrical relationship with its partner countries, employing a “discursive power over eastern applicants”⁶³, modulated through the conditionality policy. As a result, Zielonka detects a “conflict of spirit and purpose”⁶⁴ between the idea of an enlarged Europe, which suggests an inclusive narrative, and the Schengen regime, which establishes an exclusionary scheme, perpetuating asymmetrical patterns in the perception of belonging to the European space. An excessive asymmetrical bargaining position deprived of the “golden carrot” reward might over time debilitate the EaP countries’ reforming attempts.

Of course, we should be cautious in putting all the blame for the lack of reform progress on European leaders’ ineffectiveness or faulted strategy. As a matter of fact, there are domestic structural obstacles (such as sky-high levels of corruption) on which the EU can have only a limited impact. In this sense, the last revision of ENP strategy seems to acknowledge the need to provide not only a more differentiated approach, but also one that is capable of ensuring more flexibility (so that the Union can respond more rapidly to unexpected circumstances), deeper focus on mutual interests, and greater ownership of the process to the local actors. In so doing, it encourages the need to design and implement policies according to the idiosyncratic needs of the individual EaP

⁶¹ See Elena Korosteleva, ‘The Eastern Partnership Initiative: A New Opportunity for Neighbours?’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Volume 27, Issue 1, pp. 1-21, February 2011, and Elena Korosteleva, ‘Evaluating the role of partnership in the European Neighbourhood Policy: the Eastern neighbourhood’, *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, Volume 4, Issue 2, pp. 11-36, December 2013.

⁶² Karl H. Timmermann, ‘Die EU und die “Neuen Nachbarn” Ukraine und Belarus’, SWP Studie, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2003, p. 8.

⁶³ Melinda Kovács and Peter Kabachnik (2001), p. 172 and p. 230. Quoted in Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 56.

⁶⁴ Jan Zielonka, ‘How New Enlarged Borders will Reshape the EU’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 39 (3): 507-36, September 2001, p. 524.

countries.⁶⁵ In addition, this revision stresses the need to communicate more effectively to civil societies in partner countries the benefits of the ENP. This could contribute to filling the gaps among the “enclaves”⁶⁶ of pro-European reformers, which due to the lack of a systemic cooperative network embedded in the governing institutions, often provide incoherent or ineffective implementation of the reforms.

How can we cope with these these negative effects?

At this point, we should be careful not to speak in terms of what should have been done, but rather of what can be done now, while the dominant discourse over the future of Europe is framed with rather apocalyptic tones.⁶⁷

When it comes to security, although the EU’s autonomous role is limited (as it relies on the military assets of NATO and the UN), it is exceptionally well-equipped in terms of civilian, economic, diplomatic, and democratising tools. While one could argue that crisis management is impossible without military capability and long-term peace consolidation requires a plurality of actors, it is inaccurate to take the EU’s lack of autonomy as a measure for its failure in playing the role of a regional security actor. Rather, we should judge its failures or lack thereof on the basis of how it coordinates with other actors, and the extent to which such coordination follows a reactive pattern or can be inserted in a consistent long-term vision of how to establish its presence in its immediate neighbourhood.

By acknowledging the positive impact of the EU’s inter-institutional coordination attempts regarding capacity building on the one hand, and by endorsing a more complex understanding of security involving the use of civilian,

⁶⁵ European Commission, “Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy, November 2015. Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015/151118_staff-working-document_en.pdf

⁶⁶ Kateryna Wolczuk, ‘Adjectival Europeanisation? The Impact of EU Conditionality on Ukraine under the European Neighbourhood Policy’, *European Research Working Paper Series*, No 18, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, European Research Institute, pp. Available at: <http://is.cuni.cz/studium/predmety/index.php?do=download&did=30506&kod=JPM522>.

⁶⁷ http://www.politico.eu/article/migrant-crisis-refugees-the-10-most-apocalyptic-warnings-of-the-eus-demise/?utm_content=buffer1c382&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer

diplomatic, and economic instruments in the long-term on the other, the EU indeed has the potential to contribute effectively to regional security (with more far-reaching global implications). Moreover, despite the fact that the intergovernmental approach is still taken as a structural condition for failure to act as a coherent security actor, it is also hard to deny that shared threat assessment exercises and collective decision-making overtime re-shape national security policies.

However, a recent ESPAS report analysing the role of the EU facing global challenges up to 2030, explains that we will be witnessing a long-term weakening of the multilateral system, leading to a renovated reliance on a “precarious balance of power, rather than on processes to settle conflicts and lay down common rules and disciplines.”⁶⁸

Despite all these challenges, a note of optimism reminds us that the EU will continue to “learn by doing’ and then institutionalize these lessons into its existing system for foreign policy”.⁶⁹ In this sense, while the EU is now facing multiple crises at the same time, it should consider them as opportunities to i) design a long-term strategy, whereby its transformative power has to be re-invented by clearly stating the division of workload between the EU and member states; ii) adopt instruments that would be in harmony with the strategy adopted; iii) maintain a confident and coherent position towards Russia, thus lowering the probability of member states’ temptation to act unilaterally according to their short-term national interest. The combination of these steps would allow the EU to minimise the pitfalls identified in the current state of affairs by re-shaping the concept of security, adopting the instruments necessary to translate it into coherent collective European foreign policy, and thus presenting itself as an identifiable international actor vis-à-vis Russia, who might transform its own foreign policy to respond to Europe’s diminished ambiguity.

⁶⁸ ‘Global Trends to 2030: Can the EU meet the challenges ahead?’, European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS), 2015, p. 65.

⁶⁹ Hill and Smith, 2008, p. 192.

The positivist assumption of describing what the reality of European integration *actually is* prevents integration theories from equipping us with the intellectual material necessary to predict and tackle what European disintegration *might look like*.

For example, Webber (2012) relates European disintegration to “a decline in (1) the range of common or joint policies adopted and implemented in the EU, (2) the number of EU member states, and/or (3) the formal (i.e. treaty-rooted) and actual capacity of EU organs to make and implement decisions if necessary against the will of individual members.”⁷⁰ Similar definitional attempts suggest that it seems to be inaccurate to conceptualise European disintegration in binary terms, since the EU is a constant self-transformative process, re-adapting its commitments and institutional arrangements in light of informal internal and external pressures.

This feature can be found in the dichotomy of a strong disunion (i.e. exit of a member or total collapse) and a weak disunion (i.e. minor dissent arranged in some policy-package) articulated by Hayward and Wurzel.⁷¹ Such dichotomy crucially draws our attention towards those phenomena that could be potential symptoms at a micro-level of latent disintegrative large-scale dynamics, thus enabling us to take a coherent action in response.

To conclude, whenever a judgment on the EU’s performance focuses on its failures rather than its successes, then disintegration can be portrayed as a positive outcome. Yet, the implications of the EU’s failures explained here, and the suggested guidelines for potential solutions, are meant to remind us about what the European project could (and should) still be about.

⁷⁰ Douglas Webber, ‘How likely is it that the European Union will *disintegrate*? A critical analysis of competing theoretical perspectives’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Volume 0, Issue 0: 1–25, 2012, p. 2.

⁷¹ Jack Hayward and Rüdinger Wurzel (eds.), *European Disunion: Between Sovereignty and Solidarity*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 2.