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Re-Negotiating Europe’s Identity: The European Neighbourhood Policy as a Form of Differentiation

Pertti Joenniemi*

Abstract: The contribution sets out to probe changes in the essence of the European Union through the lens of neighborhood. It rests on the claim that the advent of the concept of ‘neighbor’ in the context of the Union’s new policy of neighborhood (ENP) testifies to an altered EU-identity. It argues that approaching the concept as foundational rather than seeing it merely as something functional and instrumental reveals crucial changes not just in the EU’s vicinity but first and foremost in the EU itself.

Introduction

Moving towards the “Big Bang” enlargement of May 2004 compelled the EU to address new questions in regard to its proximity. It then quickly turned out—the dominant narratives asserts—that the various issues arising from the extension of the outward borders and decreased distance between the enlarged EU and the new, ‘troubled’ neighborhood could not be settled on their own merits. They were not to be handled, taking into account the formidable changes of the prevailing conditions, in isolation from much broader questions.

In consequence, a comprehensive “European Neighbourhood Policy” (ENP) became a new reality. It was, the story goes, coined in a rather pragmatic manner and was solely there in order to manage the EU’s relations with countries belonging to its geographical vicinity of post-enlargement.

This kind of down-to-earth, change-oriented, and rather functionalist reasoning constitutes the usual way of accounting for the policy’s emergence, and it does so both as to the official discourses underpinning the policy as well as most of the academic analysis. Arguably, the ENP was coined as a response to externally-given challenges, grew out of previous policies, and developed, in this sense, quite naturally.

My aim is, however, to challenge this account. This study is an attempt to go beyond the standard and instrumental explanations. To allow for alternative stories, the effort here is structured around the use of a constructivist and an identity-related approach. A similar approach has been utilized in other EU-related contexts, for example by Neumann (1998), Neumann and Welsh (1991), and Rumelili (2004).

A Formative Moment

Rather than perceiving the emergence of the ENP in isolation and purporting it as a kind of ad hoc-policy imposed upon the EU owing to changing circumstances, I

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approach the ENP as testifying to a radical shift in the EU’s essence. It neither represents—as often claimed—a mild reversal of well entrenched policies, nor does the initiative stand for a gradual extension of previous policies, but represents instead a formative moment and a rupture to the discourses underpinning the EU.

The constructivist approach applied here implies that the ENP should not be taken for a policy pursued by a ready-made actor within a given context of internal and external relations. The Union has not only grown out of an encounter with a broader and different external neighborhood following the “Big Bang” as if the Union itself had remained internally unaltered. It has not just reacted to outside changes by slight alterations in the established policies, including the one pertaining to openness vis-à-vis the exterior, and the background to the ENP does not merely consist of a reified EU’s Self dealing with a reified Other. On the contrary, some of the origins of the ENP have arisen, I will argue, from within the EU in a process where the Self and the other are reproduced in tandem. They pertain, as also noted by Jeandesboz (2005), to a considerable degree to changes in the essence of the Union as indicated by crucial alterations in the discourse that grounds the EU as to its identity, form, and borders, with the Union then projecting itself—in a performative manner—into its external sphere with increased vigor.

In essence, the ENP is probed here as an articulation of the EU’s counter-identities, of what the EU is not (as identity is always given through reference to what it is not). It stands, in the perspective outline above, for the Union’s constitutive ‘not-fully us’ and the ENP is consequently to be probed as part and parcel of crucial struggles pertaining to the Union’s identity. Moreover, the new policy—and the recent appearance of a neighborhood as part of the EU’s constitutive repertoire—approaches difference in a manner that starkly conflicts with the previous moves. Whereas the exterior was hardly there in a constitutive sense prior to the “Big Bang,” there now exist quite strong tendencies of bordering and of representing the difference of the “Other” in terms of discourses either focusing on an “obligation” to reach out, or premised on perceptions of “fear” and “danger.”

It also appears that while the previous moves of differentiation were predominantly temporal and remained internal to the EU (with one round of enlargement to be followed by yet another); the neighborhood initiative stands instead for an externalization of difference. The key identity-related moves gain, in this context, a strong spatial emphasis and they provide, in fact, territoriality and geography increasingly decisive roles in the efforts of outlining “what Europe is and where it ends.”

Furthermore, and despite standing basically for a liminal move and in providing the ground for more strict bordering, the difference of the excluded “neighbor” remains relative in character. This is already evidenced by the fact that the label of a “neighbor” can easily be substituted with that of a “friend” but it may also be furnished with far more negative connotations. In fact, a “neighbor,” as an object of enquiry, can be assigned to more than one category of analysis. The in general rather mild form of alterity and exclusion characteristic of the moves of neighboring then clearly calls for a closer scrutiny of the variability embedded in the conceptualizations used as part of constructing difference.

Likewise, the plurality clearly entails that in coding the ENP as a platform of identity-construction there is not just one constitutive story around and a single as well as coherent narrative to be found underpinning the initiative. Instead, the ENP is to be viewed as a site of contest as already indicated that is some cases the argument ground-
ing the ENP consists of “duty” whereas it in other cases rests on “fear,” “danger,” and perceived “threats.” There are, it appears, several discourses simultaneously present. In some cases they tend to remain complementary in character but more often than not they clash and conflict quite explicitly with a rather incoherent policy as an outcome, with the incoherence then also reflected in the EU’s very being.

**Similar or Different?**

Notably, the simultaneous presence and tension between the various discourses that are part of neighboring may then also account for the peculiarities pointed out (but for the most part left unaccounted for) in some of the critical studies pertaining to the ENP. The ENP-critique presented by Missiroli (2007) is a case in point. In one of its aspects, the ENP aims at reducing the inherent otherness of the “partners,” constituted rhetorically in EU-speak as a “ring of friends.” The latter may, through the signing of ENP-related Action Plans, individually testify to a willingness to co-operate despite their given otherness.

Interestingly, the initiative purporting the “neighbors,” on the one hand, as being rather similar to the EU’s own image and hence quite eligible and assumedly willing to reproduce that image and, on the other hand, so different that they remain from the very start beyond the prospects of a future membership. Due to this latter aspect, being included in the category of EU’s “neighbors” nonetheless stands out as a recognition and confirmation of a considerable degree of difference. Inclusion hence amounts, quite paradoxically, to “Othering.” The advent of the category of neighbors as part of the EU’s constitutive vocabularies and with less talk about “Europe whole and free” or “Europe without divisive borders” seems to reveal, taken together, that EU’s identity has turned increasingly exclusive and rests on the recent creation of a category of “not-fully-us.”

This appears to be so as time is not expected to heal the inherent otherness of the ENP-partners. It may only remedy the “acquired” aspects of their identity (deficit of democracy, economic problems, bad governance, corruption etc.) but not their very otherness as the “neighbors” are taken to be unable to change their “true” identities. They therefore remain, despite their standing as “friends,” potentially troubling if not threatening to Europe’s identity. This then warrants—the argument goes—policies based on exclusion, i.e. the difference of the “neighbors” is not constructed as acquired (as used to be the case previously prior to the “Big Bang”) but as “inherent” and “permanent” in character. Yet it is assumed that the “neighbors” may—by joining the ENP as “partners”—be drawn (if treated individually) out of their acquired otherness. They are, through the ENP, offered the option of reducing some of their characteristics positioning them as the EU’s non-self and in this sense become almost like a mirror-image of the EU, albeit not as members as the core constitutive move remains one of boundary-drawing.

Giorgio Agamben (2002, 2) aspires to grasp this duality by claiming that “something is excluded by means of its very inclusion.” Slavoj Zizek (1999, 108), in turn, touches upon something similar, in trying to grasp the essence of neighborly relations, by coining the slogan “include me out.”

Both these articulations point rather perceptively to the paradox embedded in the concept of neighbor. Turning into ‘one’ appears to call for a transcending of the usual binary we/they type of modes of constituting subjectivity in the sphere of international
relations. Being categorized as a “neighbor” signals, on the one hand, inclusion in terms of a position inside the ‘family’ and on the other hand it entails exclusion within the constellation brought into being. This is so as a “neighbor” remains at a distance and is not really regarded as being part of the core of the ‘family.’

This obscurity and indeterminacy then also warrants a closer scrutiny of a number of questions pertaining to the basic nature of the ENP. In the first place, what accounts for the optimism, part of the new neighborhood policy, that the “neighbors” will be able to adapt to the conditions set by the ENP taking into account their inherent Otherness—or as articulated by Lynch (2005, 34): “can the EU transform a country while keeping it at arm’s length?” Does inclusion as a “neighbor” not—rather than bringing about stability and development—amount to rather risky policies as the ENP actually entails an opening of the EU’s gates for problematic if not threatening articulations through reference for example to lack of stability, internal conflicts, organized crime, uncontrolled migration, and corruption?

Moreover, why should the ‘neighbors’ succumb to policies that in the end also threaten to destabilize their own very identity? Can they live with the lack of determination of being neither “in” nor “out” once being positioned through inclusion into the ENP? After all, abiding to the ENP arguably implies that their acquired qualities will increasingly be in conflict with the inherent ones. Once invited to join the “ring of friends,” a configuration nowadays embracing fifteen countries in Eastern and Southern Europe, the ‘partners’ targeted by policies of neighboring can also refuse to provide the recognition of the EU’s Self that the Union is asking for in the context of the ENP. This was most clearly evidenced by Russia’s refusal, with Russia being initially invited to join the ENP, to ascribe to the new initiative. As outlined, among others, by Gromadzki (2008) and Lippert (2008), the neighbors have on numerous occasions expressed reservations in regard to the ENP. Despite having achieved the position of ENP-partners, countries such as Belarus, Libya, and Syria have largely stayed passive and the implementation of the ENP has also in general encountered a considerable amount of problems.

A Policy of Post-Enlargement

It may further be observed, on a more practical note, that the ENP is a rather ambitious, albeit still a relatively young policy. It was launched in March 2003 by the European Commission (COM 2003, 104) and endorsed by the Council. In May 2004 the Commission issued a strategy paper (COM 2004, 373 final) setting out in more detail the approach to be applied. In essence, the ENP endeavors at offering an alternative to enlargement. It raises the question whether the countries in the EU’s vicinity can occupy a position in-between membership and being wholly outside the EU, i.e. between “in” or “out” thereby injecting a rather specific logic into the discourse.

More particularly, whereas further enlargement is taken to signal “overstretching” and endanger the EU’s “absorption capacity,” the ENP stands for a regulatory effort that aims at “consolidating” and “unifying” the policies pursued. These two buzzwords tend to indicate that the aim of “exporting” integration towards the outside is, as used to be the case with all “European” countries being previously seen as qualified to apply for membership, still in some sense there. However, rather than accepting the emergence of “fuzzy borders,” the aim is now one of spreading EU-related “europeanness” across a far more clearly bordered space. The ENP marks, in this sense, something of a
departure from the previous, rather regionalized, “neo-medieval” and “post-Westphalian” path of European integration. It also seems to indicate that the Union has become more identity-conscious with questions pertaining to “who are we,” “how far does our essence reach” and “who are the non-us” increasingly on the agenda.

According to the official rhetoric, the ENP constitutes a strategic framework that provides, as argued by Director General for External Relations Eneko Landaburu (2006), the EU with “tools for engaging with the neighbors on wide-ranging issues which are of mutual importance and which can only be tackled together.” The policy aims at bringing together numerous instruments, (some have been there already for a considerable period of time and some are quite new) and it involves most of the sectoral policies of the Union. In broad terms the ENP stands for an attempt by the EU to design a strategy for relating to its post-enlargement vicinity without letting the new “neighbors” in (albeit following the enlargement logic) or, as declared by Romano Prodi (2002, 3), President of the Commission, “We have to be prepared to offer more than partnership and less than membership.”

In other words, whilst for much of the 1990s the EU’s “foreign policy”—to the extent that there was such a thing in the first place—hinged on enlargement, the ENP has been coined in order to fill the void created by the more recent “enlargement fatigue.” It also testifies, as noted by Balfour and Rotta (2005, 10), to the aims increasingly utilized by the EU of bolstering its “actorness” as “a regional and global power.”

The constitutive stories underpinning the ENP clearly pertain to a practice aiming at mediating the assumed otherness of the “neighbors.” Importantly, it teases out the sphere of the “foreign” as opposed to the “internal,” and endeavors at strengthening the line between these two, thereby making it more distinct than used to be the case before.

Temporal and Spatial Changes

At large, the birth of the ENP appears to resonate with a number of other discourses in the context of the EU, previously largely off-limits, that aim at providing the Union not only with more distinct territorial boundaries but also its finalité politique.

Notably, in 2002 Great Britain sent a letter to the Commission (Straw 2002) pointing out that the political significance of the post-enlargement neighborhood was bound to increase. The question that had to be addressed, it was stated, was whether a shrinking of the spatial distance to a set of new neighbors implied that there was also a narrowing of the temporal gap before these neighbors were to be accepted into membership into the EU. It was claimed that the challenges ahead could not be settled this time by further enlargement, and that the effects of exclusion and moves of temporal delineation had to be mitigated in some manner. This new bordering necessitated, it was held, a more substantial strategy vis-à-vis the EU’s prospective neighbors.

As noted by Jeandesboz (2007, 397), the prime British concern in the context of neighbor-making was that of security rather than shared values or various other unifying elements (with the latter being emphasized in a Swedish letter on the same matter, Lind 2002). Above all, there was the worry that various negativities in the new neighborhood could potentially spill over into the EU. This danger, it was thought, called for the creation of a “special neighborhood status” to be established.

Overall, the letter had a formative impact with the focus on security opening up wider issues of neighborhood. A similar approach was then also applied in the EU’s new security doctrine (ESS), a document endorsed by the European Council in De-
cember 2003. Enlargement was, as such, viewed rather positively in the ESS. Yet it is also noted that it “brings the EU closer to troubled areas.” The conclusion was then drawn that “Neighbours who are engaged in violent conflicts, weak states where organised crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders, all pose problems for Europe” (ESS, 7). A central aim of neighborhood policy is then established with the statement that “it is in the European interest that countries on our border are well governed” (ESS, 1).

The EU’s Commission took a similar approach when devising the European Neighbourhood Policy in March 2005. In effect, the ENP was described “as a response to a new situation” and seen as offering a framework for developing a closer relationship with the new post-enlargement neighbors. The aim, however, is not their inclusion in EU membership, at least not in the medium-term. In fact, practical questions posed by proximity and neighborhood should be seen, the Commission stated, as separate from the question of accession. Thus a rather crucial line was drawn between the political (institutional) aspects and benefits of integration and the more ‘practical’ (economic, administrative, and transactional), benefits on offer to most of the neighbors.

In terms of substance, the ENP rests on promises to upgrade political and economic relations with the partner countries in return for tangible progress in implementing internal reforms. The previous logic behind enlargement therefore remains intact, except now it is emphasized that everything is possible bar institutions (i.e. membership).

Importantly, however, it is the reliance on the conditionality mechanism that has enabled the Commission to stress, in its Strategy Paper (COM 2004, 373, 3), the ENP as being open to “differentiation,” as being founded in ideas of “partnership” and as a process of “joint ownership” “based on the awareness of shared values and common interests” between the EU and its partners. Although the established institutional borders are to remain untouched without the option of any further enlargement, the approach outlined by the Commission is presented as rather inclusive with the stress on making borders fluid and mobile. In short, the conditionality mechanism implies that some states will integrate further than others. In this respect, the conditionality mechanism is designed to enable the Union to extend parts of the acquis communautaire to the non-member states. This process is then formalized with the partner countries signing Action Plans as a basis upon which their performance can then be evaluated through country reports covering progress on implementation.

However, despite notions of “differentiation,” “interdependence,” and “joint ownership” the ENP rather seems to be driven by a desire for “standardization” and “homogeneity” and for asserting the EU’s “hierarchical” position. These points can be seen in at least two respects.

Similarly, the previous proliferation of financial instruments (TACIS, MEDA etc.) will be ended with their amalgamation into a single financial instrument—the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI)—operational from 2007. Importantly, even though Russia is not formally within the ENP—as a result of its preference of maintaining a “strategic partnership” with the EU and to build this relationship on the basis of creating the four common spaces, an agreement which was signed in May 2005—the ENPI will also be applied to funds directed at Russia. This raises questions as to whether the conditionality principles of the ENP will be applied to EU-Russian relations through the back door (see below).

It should, moreover, be stressed that the ENP is premised on “bilateralism” rather than multilateral or regional approaches. That is to say the new neighbors are targeted
individually instead of being encouraged to coalesce as a group in negotiating with the EU. The justification for such an approach is that it enables the Union and its partners to tailor cooperation to the specific needs of individual countries. However, from a more Realpolitik perspective the emphasis on bilateralism accentuates the power asymmetries that exist between the Union and its weaker neighbors and makes the stress on “bilateralism” appear little more than a cover for EU “unilateralism.” As such, bilateralism seems premised on hierarchical structures that may undermine the possibilities for de-centralizing governance by stressing local and regional endeavors.

**Structuring the Sphere of Chaos**

The prime argument underpinning the political and cultural border-drawing between “us” and “not-fully-us” is that of security, i.e. a process of “othering” that rests on the narrative of the EU as an island of security and stability as opposed to a disorderly outside world. One might argue, along the lines of Pardo (2004) that the ENP is basically about drawing a line between “chaos” and “cosmos,” with chaos being understood as consisting of a sphere that does not reflect the essence of the EU itself.

This is to say that security now looms large as a constitutive factor providing the EU with a distinct identity. Two rather crucial changes are to be noted here. Firstly, the security argument appears to have moved away from the EU’s interior. A key constitutive argument no longer seems to consist, as it did until recently, of the danger of the EU itself sliding back to classical power politics. The approach to security used to be more self-investigating in the sense of major threats to be averted consisting of the self’s own past (Wæver, 1998). A major shift in both temporal and spatial terms appears to have occurred—as indicated by the ESS—that the argument of security is now geared towards the “present” and the “future” and applies to the *exterior* rather than the EU itself. Secondly, it follows from the assumed success experienced within the internal sphere that the Union is now seen as being entitled—if not obliged—to pursue similar policies towards its exterior through export of its own image. It becomes engaged in spreading its own success, and the change is well reflected in the increasing labeling of the EU as a “normative power” (e.g. Manners 2006).

Consequently, the very success singles out EU’s internal sphere from its exterior and strengthens the argument that the Union’s vocation consists of drawing its vicinity into the same pattern. Having achieved a superior self through success and through leaning from past errors, the Union has experienced a formative moment by becoming eligible to impose its own experience into the inferior outside. The dominant narrative becomes one of the EU having to impose change in order for the difference created by EU’s success to be eliminated via top-down measures that bolster reform in the form of democracy, human rights, good governance, etc.

This is to say that security has only recently been elevated to apply to the exterior. Previously the emphasis was on EU’s interior, and the very endeavor of trying to be reflexive and self-critical was taken to suffice as a model for others. Actorness was less crucial as a measure for the EU’s being. The heterogeneity and difference that was there could, no doubt, be problematic, but if this was the case, it was assumed to invite dialogue rather than call for efforts of exporting EU-related norms and imposing the EU’s own image upon others. In the first place, the Union’s image was taken to remain so heavily burdened by Europe’s past that the justification was not there. And with the EU having the legacy of having been inferior rather than superior, security could not be
approach in a top-down fashion and hence neighboring along the lines of the ENP did not exist as an option.

This seems recently to have changed as indicated by the advent of the ESS as well as the ENP. Security now works as an argument underpinning differentiation, although not in the form of endeavoring to prevent a relapse to a classical Realpolitik as to the EU’s inside, nor in terms of applying the concept of common security (premised on a dialogue between equals and negotiations to foster mutual understanding) in regard to the external environment (if allotting the EU any external security-related role at all). The new division, as reflected in the ENP, appears to be premised on the EU itself representing an ordered and de-securitized cosmos whereas the rest of Europe is taken, in not being a reflection of the EU and what it stands for, to represent a “threat-infested chaos” to employ an expression coined by Pardo (2004, 735). EU enlargement, in this context, moves a number of countries from one sphere to the other, whereas the ENP is there to deal with some of the residual cases still part of the zone of ‘troubles’. They are invited, as “neighbors,” to form a “ring of friends” in order to mitigate the effects of chaos encroaching on cosmos.

Overall, an order has been established premised on a new form of self-understanding. It rests on an increasingly strict dividing line between the two spheres of “us” and “non-us,” with EU-membership then standing out as the key temporal dividing line employed to impact European space. The ENP aims, in this perspective, at differentiating the sphere of chaos through the establishment of the category of “neighbors,” with these positioned as not too close and not too far. Pardo (2004, 736) concludes that the best option with respect to the vicinity consists of keeping it separate but friendly. In short, it appears that the EU imposes itself—as the ghosts of the past have now been dealt with and put finally to rest—on its external environment more freely and forcefully than was the case before with openness in terms of space (everything but institutions being on offer for the “neighbors”) being traded for crucial temporal restrictions (no more members).

At large, the master discourse of the EU appears to have changed drastically. It has done so with arguments pertaining to security now void of a constitutive impact within the EU but coloring instead strongly views on the external sphere with calls for joint and uniform policies to be pursued. Moreover, with the EU having now reached—according to the discourse underpinning the ESS—its ideal self in the sense of the Union being no longer compelled to focus primarily on preventing its own power political past from returning, it may now direct its attention almost exclusively towards the external sphere. Moreover, it may do so from an increasingly superior position. The move of aiming at increasingly uniform and explicit policies in the external sphere might be described as one of trading the previous self-denial for self-reproduction vis-à-vis the EU’s outside, with these changes then to be reflected also in the way the policy of neighborhood has been devised.

The new strategic doctrine is very explicit about the change: “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure and free” and the document adds: “Large-scale aggression against any member state is now improbable” (ESS, 1). It follows that for outsiders to be eligible for inclusion, they have to allow themselves to be subjugated to a rather strict set of conditions. The most probable case is that they have to remain outside (in not matching even in long term the EU’s new, ideal self), but even so they are induced to abide by criteria set by the Union as a community of values (i.e. “normative power Europe”) and its liberal, rather value-premised discourse. They have to do so in
order to qualify for inclusion in the category of “friends.” In other words, the EU is not merely using its “magnetism” provided by potential membership to influence potential members, it now also feels “obliged” as well as “entitled” to reach out further to influence and convert these “friends.”

Conclusion

The new policy of neighborhood, in constituting a regime of meaning and power, is very much part of the effort to furnish the EU with a more distinct identity as well as a singular shape. It is there in order for heterogeneity to be ousted from the inner core of an EU, depicted as a sphere of “cosmos.”

The formation of a concentric singularity grows out, in one of its aspects, of security being reconfigured and provided with a different, more value-oriented and externally-oriented meaning but it also reflects other changes in the constitutive discourse. The relationship to norms appears to have altered in the sense that the EU no longer aims at conforming to a set of pre-given norms. Instead, owing to success in the processes of repentance and learning from the past, the Union has become exemplary in normatively. It is no longer talked into being, in standing for maturity and having reached what it initially set out to aspire for, as inferior to other actors on the international scene. The Union has, in other words, reached time zero. Rather than focusing on healing and critical self-reflexion, as used to be the case, it has become entitled to engage itself in the export and projection of norms and in setting an example, it may purport itself as a “a force for good.”

The advent of “neighbors” as part of the EU’s constitutive repertoire is, it appears, indicatory of these changes. In being there, the concept invites for inclusions and exclusions in a new manner. Constructing a “ring of friends” through the ENP gives the impression that the EU-proper will, once the new neighborhood is fully in place, be encircled by an in-between space occupied by countries elevated to the category of special partners.

As claimed by Emerson (2003, 1), one of the roles of the new neighborhood program is “to define the EU’s new outer edges,” or to state it differently, to form the EU’s constitutive outside. It delimits the “cosmos” and borders it vis-à-vis the encircling “chaos.” Furthermore, it is performative in aiming at differentiation between the “ins” and the “outs,” but also in aspiring for a hierarchisation of otherness. The ENP does this by creating, on the one hand, special partners regarded as less “foreign” in terms of the underlying values, while excluding others seen as more fully “foreign.” In order for the EU to be kept apart from the assumed external “chaos,” the ENP partners remain externalized in the context of an EU which used to be open to indefinite expansion without pre-established limits.

Notably, with the EU now standing for articulations premised on closure rather than openness, the “camp” established through the ENP as on the outside also gains an increasingly permanent character. It does so both in terms of time and space. The partners are induced to position themselves around the EU—and also to be treated individually by it—through their preparedness to abide by the benchmarking of ENP-related and bilateral Action Plans. These plans are there in order for an all-encompassing buffer to be created against those who would contravene the norms set by the EU and by actors located elsewhere in Europe and beyond. The ENP thus amounts to an inversion of drawing a group of “friends” closer to the EU by at the same time defining them
as “foreign” in varying degrees. Consequently, a variable geometry—Tassinari (2005, 9) speaks of “diversified ‘hub-and-spoke’ geometry”—comes into being with the discourse underpinning the ENP; it does not only create a category of adjacent “friends,” it also creates through further differentiation another category of countries implicitly defined as “non-friends” and “geographical others.”

Being a new initiative, the ENP is often purported to be a policy designed to meet the challenges that emerged with enlargement and as such to be innovative and visionary. This is undoubtedly the case. Having an EU premised on mild forms of “othering” and boiling down spatially to a radial centre-periphery type of model is surely more progressive than being devised along the lines of a “Clash-of-Civilizations” type of paradigm, or some other articulation premised on the division between Friends and Enemies. The latter modes of constitution would call for the drawing of quite categorical borders and undermine the coining of in-between type of concepts such as those of “friends” and “neighbors.”

It may, however, also be claimed that the ENP represents regress rather than progress. It hardly stands for a step forward if it is seen as representing a selling out of the “Global Village” or “Global Network” models. These two are sometimes associated with the EU and its core being, and are seen as spatio-temporal endeavors which aim in general at mediating heterogeneity and allowing for further development on the path to what has been characterized by Ruggie (1993) as a “multiperspectival” Europe, i.e. a Europe which allows for considerable flexibility. This is so because, among other reasons, security does not stand out as a key constitutive consideration premised on pre-given and self-evident values. There is regress in the sense that in addition to some de-bordering at the edges in order to differentiate degrees of “foreignness,” the main aim of the ENP, and a key aspect of the concentric shaping of the EU as a closed configuration, is above all about bordering and keeping out in temporal terms.

The ENP, in aiming simultaneously to attract and repel potential partners, is not about overcoming and crossing the divide between insiders and “neighbors.” It aspires, instead, to reject and eliminate in the name of an “EU-Europe.” There are, with the ENP, increasingly limited prospects for non-members (not yet in the sphere of accession) to make their own choices as to whether they want to join the EU or not. The choice is to some extent already made for them in the sense that the optimal position on offer is that of becoming an “enhanced partner.”

Arguably, the metaphor of “Fortress Europe” seems in some sense gain added weight despite the contrary aspiration, part of the ENP, of blurring the distinction between the “ins” and the “outs.” It does so both in temporal terms by pushing the prospects of membership into an uncertain future as well as spatially by carving out a new territorial borderline between EU member states and the ENP-related “special partners,” and a borderline between the “special partners” and the rest. Seen in this light, the ENP does not function as an insurmountable wall. It rather works as a “European sieve” in sorting out between friends and non-friends. It simultaneously makes use of two different discourses, one of inclusion, the other of exclusion in pinning down what the EU is and where it is located. It impacts on the whole character of the EU by re-defining the underlying spatio-temporal matrix. It stands for a crucial boundary-producing move altering the EU’s location in time and by outlining the Union’s outer edges and its “inside/outside” architecture more strongly and clearly than has previously been the case.
References


