

## Who's My Neighbour?

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### Abstract

*The EU is approaching bordering countries offering them “neighbourhood relations”, but it fails short of taking into consideration how this concept may be perceived by its partners. This paper will propose a reconsideration of the term “neighbour” in the conviction that this operation is of fundamental importance in order to solve any eventual misunderstanding on its meaning and to define, in the context of the ENP, what the nature of a relationship of neighbourhood may imply. In particular, it will look at the literature to show that this term, far from being uncontested, fundamentally implies an “othering” practice which transcends the Christian teaching to “love one’s neighbour as oneself”. Then, it will underline that this word may have different connotations in partner countries which may go beyond a neutral indication of geographical proximity and which may not correspond to the meaning consolidated in the Anglo Saxon tradition which basically refers to a neighbour as to a “fellow”. Finally, the paper will underline that the same fundamental ambiguity which marks the term here considered lies at the very core of the ENP. As a matter of fact, this policy shows persisting uncertainties on how to substantiate the relationship with neighbouring countries, whether in terms of fellowship and integration or in terms of an “other than me” who still represents a security threat.*

**Keywords:** *Neighbourhood, ENP, integration-security dilemma.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The EU is approaching bordering countries offering them “neighbourhood relations”, but it falls short of taking into consideration how this concept may be perceived by its partners. As a matter of fact, the term “neighbour” has developed over time, acquiring in different cultural contexts a wide range of sometimes diverging connotations. In particular, if in the Anglo Saxon tradition a neighbour is basically a fellow, other countries targeted by the ENP have nurtured another understanding of the concept under scrutiny. In this context, the appreciation of the offer made by the EU has been filtered by different and often not fully aware perceptions of the notion of neighbourhood and, ultimately, of the nature of the relationship to establish with the new policy. This has been tempered by an effort to adjust the name of the ENP in local languages, but it will be argued that this has changed only a bit the overall understanding of the inner character of the “ties” proposed by the policy, being rather the evidence of the difficulty to adapt the concept under examination to the tradition of target countries.

The reconsideration of the term “neighbour” is, thus, of fundamental importance in order to clarify any eventual misunderstanding on the meaning of this word and to launch a debate on what the nature of a relationship of neighbourhood may imply. To address these issues, this paper will first of all consider the origin of the term under examination. In particular, it will underline that this notion has been central to both Jewish and Christian traditions and it will describe the different interpretations which have been given of the injunction to “love one's neighbour as oneself”. Secondly, it will rapidly go through the literature to show that different authors have remarked that this term fundamentally implies an “othering” practice. Then, this paper will scrutinise the experience of Eastern European countries, showing why the term neighbour has acquired in this area a rather negative connotation. Finally, it will underline that the same fundamental ambiguity which marks the term here considered relies at the very core of the ENP. As a matter of fact, this policy shows persisting uncertainties on how to substantiate the relationship with neighbouring countries, whether in terms of fellowship and integration or in terms of an “other than me” with whom it's compelling to make an agreement, but who is still representing a potential menace.

## 2. Love one's neighbour as oneself

The term “neighbour” is of West Germanic origin and it is a compound of the words "near" and "dweller, especially a farmer". A neighbour, then, is originally a near dweller. The Old English descendant of this West Germanic word, as well as its descendants in Middle English and in Modern English, have all retained this literal notion. The extension of this word to mean "fellow" is probably to trace back to the Christian teaching which imposes to love one's neighbour as oneself in the presumption that everyone is part of a single community of fellow humans.

The injunction to “love one's neighbour as oneself” was first articulated in Leviticus 19:18 and it was then elaborated in Christian tradition. Love of neighbour is at the core of both Jewish and Christian ethics where it is conventionally paired with love of God, as two essentially linked imperatives which represent the moral principle *par excellence* (Reinhard 2005: 12). Although shared by the two traditions, this injunction has also marked their diversity. In Judaism, there has been a long debate on whether the neighbour to be loved includes also non-Jews. Originally, Jewish exegetes interpreted this concept in a restrictive way. Only later on, in the Middle-Age, some commentators incorporated also fellow monotheists among the neighbours, but some others continued to apply a very narrow definition of the term which in some cases took into account only observant Jews. The emergence of Christian universalism definitely marked the distance from Jewish ethics, establishing that everyone has to be intended as a neighbour. The parable of the Good Samaritan exemplifies this transition: while the Levite and the Cohen pass by a man who has been injured in the middle of the road, the Good Samaritan stops by and provides its help (Žižek, Santner, Reinhard 2005: 4).

In Christianity, the injunction to love one's neighbour as oneself has been at the core of the thought of people like Augustine, William of Ockham, Catherine of Siena and Luther who tried to provide an answer to an apparently eternal question: who is my neighbour? Answers have been diverse. The debate which has stimulated many intellectuals throughout the centuries has revolved around some main questions: how good is love of neighbour for

me? Is the neighbour to be loved only the one who looks like myself? Moreover, what if I love a particular neighbour? Am I preferring this neighbour over another? Does this choice imply the failure to love another neighbour? What kind of love should I devote to myself and to my neighbour in order not to incur into the danger of making any preferential treatment? All these questions may seem unrelated to the ENP, but they are not. The issues at stake are still the same. Rephrasing, one could ask: why should the EU be concerned about its neighbours to the point to allow them, in the words of Romano Prodi, to “share everything with the Union, but institutions”? Will the EU be able to take care of bordering countries only as far as they will look like itself? If the ENP is promoting the principle of differentiation, isn't it finally preferring some particular neighbours over others depending on the degree of their resemblance to the EU itself? Is this harming the conceptual unity of the policy or is it rather a strong incentive to get neighbours look like member countries themselves? What kind of love (relation) is the EU devoting to neighbouring countries?

The transposition of this set of questions to the context of the ENP is particularly interesting as far as it allows to shed light on the way in which the European Union intends to apply the injunction to love its neighbours. The efforts to “Europeanise” bordering countries and to convince them to adopt entire chapters of the *acquis communautaire* seem to prove that the EU is ready to “love” its neighbours only as far as they look like itself. Love of neighbours is, in this perspective, not universal, but it depends on some specific conditions. The European Union does not intend to act like the Good Samaritan who is ready to love any neighbour. On the contrary, it promises its “devotion” only to those who are willing to adopt its core principles and norms. One could say that the EU is not “loving” its neighbours as itself, it rather loves itself in its neighbours. Only at this condition, the European Union is ready to take charge of them.

### **3. A fellow or an “other than me”?**

Different authors have examined the concept of neighbourhood, highlighting a fundamental ambiguity which lies at the very core of

the concept under examination: is a neighbour a fellow or an “other than me”? In a series of reflections in “Civilisation and its discontents”, Freud (trad. 1989) expressed a sense of “surprise and bewilderment” when confronted with the commandment to love one’s neighbour:

“My love is something valuable to me which I ought not to throw away without reflection: it imposes duties on me for whose fulfilment I must be ready to make sacrifices. If I love someone, he must deserve it in some way [...] He deserves it if he is so like me in important ways that I can love myself in him; and he deserves it if he is so much more perfect than myself that I can love my ideal of my own self in him”.

Freud argues that if someone loves any neighbour, it is an injustice one does to one’s own people as far as love is a sign of preference which is addressed to someone over another.

“But if I am to love him (with this universal love) merely because he, too, is an inhabitant of this heart, like an insect, an earth-worm or a grass-snake, then I fear that only a small modicum of my love will fall to his share”.<sup>1</sup>

Freud underlines the permanence in human beings of a fundamental inclination towards aggression and he concludes that neighbours are not likely to have the least trace of love for us, having thus more claim to hostility and even hatred than love.

For Søren Kierkegaard, things are even worse. In Chapter 2.C “You shall love your neighbour” of his *Works of Love*, he claims that the ideal neighbour, whom we are allowed to love, is a dead one. As a matter of fact, he says that only if we forget all distinctions, we can love our neighbour and that it is only in death that all distinctions disappear (Kierkegaard 1974: 74-75). This kind of love, which is based on indistinctiveness, is opposed to the love of poets and lovers, which is founded on the outstanding qualities of the beloved (Žižek, Santner, Reinhard 2005: 4). Adorno underlines that, in so doing, Kierkegaard reduces any neighbour to an abstraction, without specificity or peculiarity, thus acknowledging a situation which is peculiar to modernity where relations of men have been reified

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<sup>1</sup> The text has been taken by the translation of Strachey 1989: 66-69.

and where neighbour relations are ultimately impossible (Adorno 1939-40: 417-419).

These considerations are in line with the argument developed by Hannah Arendt who also devotes her attention to the concept of neighbourhood in modernity and, in particular, in totalitarian regimes. In her "Origin of Totalitarianism", she contends that both fascism and communism are characterised by the collectivisation of individuals who become a mass in modernity, with the paradoxical effect of increasing social isolation. The plurality of people disappear into One Man of gigantic dimension which removes the possibility of a social relationship by fostering paranoid structures of suspicion and mutual surveillance. This mechanism produces totalitarian loneliness which, according to her, is not simply the disappearance of the traditional relationships of neighbourhood, but which paradoxically results from an overwhelming presence of the neighbour (Arendt 1973: 478).

As highlighted by Hannah Arendt, totalitarian regimes have nurtured a particular understanding of the concept of neighbourhood. This touches in particular those countries in Eastern Europe which have been under Soviet domination and which are now the target of the ENP. Here, the use of the term neighbour is particularly problematic as far as it is linked with recent memories which have deeply marked many generations. This has posed problems in the understanding of what the EU was offering with the ENP, which haven't been considered if not marginally. As Freud would have put it, the acknowledgement of the less comfortable connotations of this word - which have been apparently removed with an effort to adjust the name of the policy in recipient countries - may reveal problems which are still latent and it may represent a first step to overcome them.

#### **4. Neighbours are watching you**

Even though the roots of the word neighbour in Slavic languages may induce to think to something very similar to the "near-dweller" of West Germanic origin (in Russian, *so-sed*), culture added a lot to this term which has ultimately acquired a negative connotation. The

neighbourhood as a concept of space of relation is absent in these countries. There are relatives, friends and close friends, but neighbours are not necessarily in relation and, if they are, it means they are no more defined as neighbours, but they've acquired the status of friends.<sup>2</sup> Neighbours are not always in positive relation, as far as they may control you and, eventually, refer to the competent authorities. Blood and kinship relations in general are key-concepts for the social organisation in Eastern European countries, but neighbourhood is not.<sup>3</sup>

The experience of *kommunalky* or *kommunalnye kvartiry* - that is the apartments shared by several families with services in common which were so widespread in Soviet times - has reinforced the negative connotation of the word. This is why, in Slavic languages, the ENP is normally translated as "Policy of Good Neighbourliness" (in Russian, *Politika Dobrososedstva*). The use of the adjective "good" undoubtedly adds a positive connotation, but it changes only slightly the overall meaning of the term. Rather to the contrary, it represents an obvious evidence of the difficulty to adapt this concept to the cultural traditions of Eastern European countries.<sup>4</sup>

On its side, the European Union is indeed a very intrusive neighbour, who's more and more interested in what's happening in the domestic context of border countries. The ENP is asking to neighbours to take on considerably deeper and broader obligations aligning with Community legislation and, in particular, with the

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<sup>2</sup> If two neighbours become friends, they don't normally call each other "my neighbour" as far as there is now a relation of trust which is not incorporated in this term.

<sup>3</sup> Slavic countries speak of their relation in terms of Slavic brotherhood. The attention paid to language in diplomatic relations has been showed by the preoccupations provoked by Mr. Putin's allusion to Ukraine as a Slavic friend and not as a Slavic brother. This has been interpreted as a downplay of the relation which has followed the Orange revolution.

<sup>4</sup> Italian is another clear example of a language which shows the possible controversies around the term neighbourhood. For extrovert Italians, the neighbourhood is indeed a space of socialisation, but it is also a privileged place for quarrels. The ENP is, thus, translated in Italian as Proximity Policy (*Politica di Prossimità*), replacing the term neighbourhood with a word which is a much more neutral indication of geographic closeness and which is not likely to be confused with a space of relation which is sometimes also a source of disturbances.

core chapters of the *acquis communautaire*. The *acquis* offers a well established model on which to build functioning markets. Yet, the phenomenon at stake is impressive. In particular, why should neighbouring countries engage in a very expensive process of legislative approximation if they do not have at the moment any clear perspective of entering into the European Union? When the Copenhagen Council of 1993 defined the famous three criteria, it made explicit in the formulation of the third requirement that legislative approximation was strictly linked to accession and it referred to the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* as to the capacity to assume the “obligations of membership”.

The ENP is an effort to replace the membership / *acquis communautaire* grand bargain with a “market access for reform” proposal. However, very limited efforts have been dedicated to the definition of what the economic offer – a “stake into the internal market” in the wording of the ENP – might mean for neighbouring countries. The ENP Action Plans (APs) have been designed so as to provide a series of rewards essentially in terms of a preferential access to the single market. However, the offer from an economic point of view does not go further than an FTA+ (Free Trade Area plus). That would be a case of negative integration<sup>5</sup>, which *per se* would not necessarily require much of an effort in terms of legislative approximation, at least not on the scale pleaded by the ENP (Meloni 2006). As a matter of fact, adopting the core chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, neighbouring countries would not simply abolish contrasting norms and regulations to ensure a “single level playing field” for economic activities (market-making measures), but they would choose to integrate namely into the EU’s constellation (mar-

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<sup>5</sup> Traditionally, economic theory defines 4 different steps of integration depending on the depth of the process at stake and on the quality of the links between the parties: 1. Free Trade Area; 2. Customs Union; 3. Common Market; 4 Economic and (eventually) Monetary Union. Up to Tinbergen, the first three moves can be interpreted as examples of “negative integration” as far as they aim at the realization of the four freedoms, while the fourth step- which beyond that provides the conditions for the introduction of common policies in different economic sectors - is a case of “positive integration” (Tinbergen 1954). If negative integration has a deregulatory or “market-making” nature, positive integration is “market-shaping” because it tries to intervene in the economy and it involves a broader institutional adaptation to a specific European model at the domestic level (Scharpf 1999: 45).



ket-shaping measures), making a “positive” rather than a “negative” choice (Tinbergen 1954; Scharpf 1999) and taking, thus, a political rather than a purely economic decision (Meloni 2006).<sup>6</sup>

In this context, the EU should formulate better its offer, not only elucidating the economic benefits which may derive from the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, but also making clear how far it is ready to go in the relation with border countries. As a matter of fact, if the EU is asking to neighbours to engage in a far-reaching process of legislative approximation which has not irrelevant political implications<sup>7</sup>, it should also be ready to give them a comparable reward which, in this perspective, should relate not only to the economic, but also to the political sphere. This has not necessarily to do with membership, but most probably with the capacity to give content to a “share everything, but institutions” project – using the words of the former President of the EU Commission, Romano Prodi – and with the willingness to engage into a complex exercise aimed at finding new solutions for the governance of the European continent. If, on the contrary, the EU will continue to downplay the

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<sup>6</sup> The notion that countries which have increasing volumes of trade should harmonise their law emerged between the '80s and the '90s as a result of the emphasis given to the necessity to limit non-border measures as an obstacle to trade and relied on the presumption that differences in national policies become more significant as a comparative advantage when trade barriers are low. This is an issue which has to do with the distinction between “deep” and “swallow integration” developed by Lawrence (1996) who advocated the choice to engage in processes of deep integration in terms of concern for “fair trade”. As Pomfret has underlined, “the simplest equivalence between a tariff and a domestic policy has little relevance” to the analysis of the discrimination in international trade because “other domestic policies may have equivalent effects to discriminatory trade policies” (*ibid.* 1997: 215). Thus, if the “spectre of unfairness” (Brittan 1995: 763) can be ignored or must be addressed is a political rather than an economic issue (Pomfret 1997: 215). In this view, the decision to adopt the *acquis communautaire* and, thus, in Lawrence’s terms, to embark in a process of “deep integration” is more political than economic. For further elaboration of this argument, see Meloni 2006.

<sup>7</sup> The engagement in a far-reaching process of legislative approximation implies not only a political choice, but also important political costs on the side of neighbouring countries. As a matter of fact, the adoption of rules which border countries haven’t contributed to approve and, eventually, the adaptation to the changes which will intervene in the EU’s legislation would automatically imply a partial loss of sovereignty on their side.

importance of the decision of border countries to align with its legislation, not only would it risk to put on the table an offer which is not sufficiently attractive and which, thus, won't produce the expected results, but also to behave like those intrusive neighbours who ask a lot, but give not that much in return.

## **5. Conclusion**

The biblical commandment to love one's neighbour has proved controversial in its historical realisations. In this situation, is the EU able to propose something new and to add original connotations to this term or, naming border countries as neighbours, is it simply meaning that they are not in-club members? The insistence on that neighbours will "share everything with the Union, but institutions" may induce to think that the ENP is actually an attempt to find new "affinities" with them and to establish an innovative form of "fellowship", but the ways in which this relation has been set up is not yet clear. An enduring ambiguity as to the main objectives of the ENP is likely to put in danger the credibility of the policy and to reduce its potential to promote a wide programme of reform inside neighbouring countries. This is why a clear definition of the main goals of the ENP and, consequently, of the nature of the relationship seems more and more urgent.

The fundamental ambiguity which lies at the very core of the term "neighbour" seems to persist in the ENP. As a matter of fact, it's not yet clear from the analysis of the text of the policy if border countries have to be intended as fellow partners or a potential security menace, whose integration is only an instrument to achieve a security goal. Of the three main objectives which pervade the policy discourse on the ENP, which comes first? Which is the correct order: Stability, Prosperity and Security? Or is it rather: Stability, Security and Prosperity? The order marks a substantial difference. If stability is indeed one of the priorities of the EU and it is comparatively better defined in its components, the other two goals are still under debate. If the participation of neighbouring countries into the EU's Internal Market is only an instrument to achieve a security goal and it is not an objective in itself, this strategy may lose credibility over time and it may, thus, not be sustainable. If, on the

contrary, these two objectives are really the two poles of a pendulum (Tassinari 2005: 1), the EU should be consistent in pursuing both.

It has been noted that the security dimension is “fundamental to the policy as a whole”, but that security is a “broad concept” in the ENP which extends beyond the purely military to include broader political, economic, social and even environmental aspects (Cremona, Hillion 2006: 4). “Security is linked to stability and prosperity which are not only objectives in their own right, but are designed to lead through political and economic development to security” (ibid. 2006: 7). In this sense, “it has become a cross-pillar policy in its own right, creating a potentially more coherent EU external action” (ibid. 2006: 5). However, at the moment, the ENP seems to address the neighbourhood only by “oscillating between the two end of the integration-security spectrum” (ibid. 2005: 1), without taking a more definite stand in the definition of a sound perspective for the integration of neighbouring countries into the European constellation. In this context, the possibility to bridge the incommensurable “otherness” of countries which, at present, do not have any perspective of entering into the European Union represents the real challenge posed by the new neighbourhood. The approximation of these countries to EU’s norms and standards is a way to do that, but it requires also the capacity to devise a more ambitious project for the governance of the European continent in whose context neighbours have to be clearly recognised as fellows.

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