

Can the Discourse on “Soft Power” Help the EU to Bridge its Capability-Expectations Gap?

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Abstract

Recently, a new buzz word has appeared in official speeches in the field of the European Union’s external relations: “Soft power”. The notion was first coined for American foreign policy and is now at the heart of EU foreign policy discourses, especially the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP launched in 2003 for the new EU neighbours draws heavily on the experience of the past enlargements by exporting internal norms, values and policies abroad. The article explores the hypothesis that the discourse on “soft power” represents an attempt to go beyond a traditional understanding of foreign policy and of conditionality. By developing its own definition of “soft power”, the EU tries to position itself on the international stage by preferring civilian over coercive means and thus seeks to increase the ENP’s legitimacy through attraction instead of accession. Nevertheless, it will need to improve its internal consistency if it wants to avoid serious criticism of the ENP and bridge its famous capability-expectations gap.

Keywords: *European Neighbourhood Policy, soft power, capability-expectations gap*

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1. Introduction

A new buzz word has appeared recently in public speeches on the European Union, the (EU)'s external relations: "Soft power". The expression, first defined by Joseph Nye during a debate on United States (US) foreign policy (Nye 1990a, 2004), is now at the heart of discourses on the EU foreign policy and especially on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In 2003, the European Union designed this policy to foster similar democratic values and market economy reforms enjoyed within the Union for the neighbouring states of the enlarging EU. The policy was first addressed to countries of the Community of Independent States (CIS), and then to countries of the Mediterranean space and the three countries of the Southern Caucasus, which are also CIS countries¹. The importance of this policy has been emphasised since 2004 by the presence of a "Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy", a position currently held by the Austrian diplomat Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

Literature on the ENP is now flourishing (e.g. Wallace 2003; Lavenex 2004; Cremona 2004; Dannreuther 2004; Smith K. 2005; Goujon 2005). Scholars in the field of European studies and international relations mainly emphasise the strong economic links and geographic proximity between the enlarged European Union and its new neighbours: Common borders and all possible risks emerging from an instable neighbourhood incited the EU to launch tighter political, economic, and cultural relations with these countries rather than to build a new dividing curtain. Due to the asymmetrical relations that placed close economic partners in a situation of dependence to the EU, some authors felt that the ENP qualified as a form of empire or hegemonic state, with neighbouring countries becoming the EU's periphery (Cooper 2002; Stratenschulte 2004; Primatarova 2005; Marchetti 2006). For EU officials, the ENP is rather about exerting "soft power" over the EU's direct neighbourhood.

¹ The policy now includes following countries: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

Scholars still have not paid attention to the discourse on “soft power”, which is developing at the EU level as a way to legitimise the ENP. This discourse represents a specific approach recently developed to define the EU’s foreign policy identity on the international stage. In the ENP, it aims to include, rather than exclude the EU’s neighbours by resorting to similar policy ideas and philosophies present in the enlargement policy, without – paradoxically – proposing any perspective for accession. Thus, *can the discourse on “soft power” help the EU to bridge its capabilities-expectations gap²?*

This article relies on an analysis of speeches and discourses by national / European politicians, Commissioners and higher civil servants interested in shaping the EU’s foreign policy. It is complemented by interviews conducted between 2003 and 2006 at the European Commission with civil servants of the DG Enlargement, DG Relex and EuropeAid who have been involved in the early days of the European Neighbourhood Policy and still work in the framework of enlargement or neighbourhood. Factual information is traced in confronting these various sources with secondary literature on the topic. The method of discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1985; Milliken 1999; Fairclough 2003) is mobilised to highlight how discourses are constructed and conceived at the EU level³. Interviews are used to confirm what the notion of “soft power” exactly refers to, especially among European civil servants, and in practice. Eventually, the article shows that, policy adaptation took place mainly from enlargement to neighbourhood at the level of policy discourses. The article will show that the discourse on European “soft power” is, in the context of the neighbourhood, an attempt to go beyond the traditional understanding of foreign policy and conditionality.

² Christopher Hill defines the notion of capability-expectations gap as the discrepancy between the EU’s “ability to agree, its resources, and the instruments at its disposal”, on the one hand, and the increasing expectations within the EU and of third countries vis-à-vis the EU (Hill, 1993).

³ Discourse can be considered as “a structure of meaning-in-use”, which implies that discursive studies must empirically analyse language practices (or other equivalents) in order to draw out a more general structure of relational distinctions and hierarchies that orders persons’ knowledge about the things defined by the discourse” (Milliken 1999: 231). For an academic discussion on the methods of discourse analysis, see: Milliken (1999).

2. What is “soft power”?

As parallels between the ENP and the enlargement have shown, “soft power” mainly refers to the adaptation of the experience of enlargement in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy and represents a way for the EU to position itself on the new security agenda, which was launched after the events of 9/11. In order to understand the text, one first needs to know the context in which these discourses emerge (cf Van Dijk 1985). The discourse on “soft power” has been promoted thus far by members of the Commission, who have managed to mobilise their experience on enlargement and assistance policies to shape the ENP’s policy ideas and instruments.

2.1 “Soft power” in the American context

The notion of “soft power” first became prominent in debates about the United States’ (US) foreign policy at the end of the Cold War, especially in the context of the *détente* when the US’s position in the world was qualified as being on the decline. It was defined by Joseph Nye, a professor at Harvard, and used as the main argument against Paul Kennedy’s thesis about the decline of American foreign policy (Kennedy 1987). In his book, “Bound to lead: the changing nature of American power”, Nye (1990a) argues that Americans have a right to be concerned about the changing position of their country in the world, but are wrong to see this change as a decline. The main idea is that, in the era of the information age and globalisation, the nature of power has changed, thus enabling the United States to remain present on the international stage, but in a different way.

“The sources of power are, in general, moving away from the emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. In assessing international power today, factors such as technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more important, whereas geography, population, and raw materials are becoming less important” (Nye 1990a: 29)

In Nye’s mind, “hard” and “soft” power are complementary: “Hard power” needs to be present in order for “soft power” to exist and to be credible in third parties’ eyes. Nye particularly promoted this position when he worked as the Assistant Secretary of Defence for In-

ternational Security Affairs under the Clinton government (1994-95). There, he took a position against the withdrawal of US troops from East Asia (Nye 1995)⁴. Nevertheless, in the context of the war in Kosovo and later the war in Iraq under the Bush government of the early 2000, Nye argued that “soft power” should be encouraged over “hard power” in order to increase the policy’s legitimacy abroad, as well as to favour mid- or long-term influence and stabilisation processes (Nye 2002, 2004, see also annex). Although used in various contexts, Nye’s definition of “soft power” did not change over time, it still represents:

“(...) the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. When you can get others to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction. Hard power, the ability to coerce, grows out of a country’s military and economic might. Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced” (Nye 2004: 256)

According to Nye, “soft power” means lower costs in the long run by avoiding the use of traditional coercive foreign policy tools like conditionality, sanctions and military interventions (“carrots and sticks”). “Soft power” cannot be separated from the presence of “hard power”: It can work only if economic and military might is present as a credible threat of sanction. But a policy will gain legitimacy if a country relies more on its “soft power” than on its “hard power”, i.e. on co-optive methods rather than on coercive ones (Nye 2004). Apparently, this is what inspired the new European discourse on “soft power”.

2.2 Does “soft power” retain the same meaning in the European context?

Security issues have become particularly predominant on the EU’s agenda since 9/11 (USA) and 11/7 (Madrid). They have also contributed to politicise issues such as immigration and border management. They nurture the debate on the nature of the EU’s interna-

⁴ I thank Pascal Vennesson for his comments on this and for attracting my attention to this aspect of Nye’s activities.

tional “actorness” and on its capacity to answer new security challenges. In the academic field, debates have structured around different terms reflecting the evolution of specific EC/EU foreign and external relations. One cannot understand how the notion of EU “soft power” is used in the context of the Neighbourhood without looking at the academic debate that started more than thirty years ago about the capacity of the European Community to become an international actor. After the failure of the European Defence Policy (EDP), François Duchêne (1973) described the EC as a “civilian power”, which Hedley Bull (1982) qualified as a “contradiction in terms”, as “power” alludes to “coercion” and “civilian” to “legitimacy” (Sjursen 2006a: 172). Given the large part of trade in the EC’s foreign relations, Richard Rosecrance has described the EC by analogy to a “trading state” (Rosecrance 1998). The debate on the EU’s foreign policy arose once again at the end of the 1980s and the EC started to use conditionality in its foreign relations: It began promoting norms in exchange for assistance and trade preferences with third states. Thus, in 2002, Ian Manners proposed the idea of the EU as a “normative power”, i.e. as capable of affirming itself on the international arena through the exportation of its own norms and values (Sjursen 2006a). This debate took on a new orientation after the launching of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) at Maastricht (1992) and of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in 1999. Some authors asked if this development would mean the end of the EU’s civilian power (Smith K. 2005), while others explained that the building of military capacities did not mean the end of civilian power, since the EU itself responds to security issues more in a civilian than military way (Stavridis 2001). For example, the war in the Western Balkans at the beginning of the 1990s revealed how weak the EU’s military capacities were. The EU preferred to get engaged in conflict prevention and crisis management activities rather than in hard military actions. This trend was intensified after a “softer” understanding of security was brought up by “neutral” member states (Austria, Finland, Sweden) and new forms of threats were defined after 9/11. The European Security Strategy of 2003 was elaborated on in reaction to the American security strategies issued after this event. It highlights the political will of the EU to rely on civilian means to resolve security issues (Solana 2003). The Barcelona report on the “Human security doctrine” handed out in 2004 to J. Solana proposed to adopt this

doctrine, inspired by the experience of the Organisation for security and cooperation in Europe (OSCE), to enhance the EU’s civil-military capacities in order to deal with conflicts (Barcelona report, 2004). In the context of the 2003 war in Iraq, the dominant positions of France and Germany, against military intervention, emphasised the different policy styles of the EU and the US when it came to responding to new security challenges and fostering democracy in their neighbourhood and abroad. Robert Kagan schematised the (trans-Atlantic) dispute as follows: The EU’s power, based on the diffusion of norms and values and characterised by poor military capacities, “comes from Venus”, while the more military and martial American approach clearly “comes from Mars” (Kagan 2002). The old debate between “hard” and “soft” power, originally risen by realists and institutionalists for the American foreign policy alone, now takes shape in trans-Atlantic discourse regarding the United States’ (hard power) versus the EU’s (soft power) foreign policy cultures.⁵

The policies of enlargement and of the Neighbourhood represent the first external policies of the European Union where the notion of “soft power” was explicitly formulated in official public discourses. The Commissioner for External Relations and the ENP, Ferrero-Waldner, clearly mentioned in her speeches on EU foreign policy in January 2005 the importance of the EU’s “soft power” in the world as an answer to R. Kagan’s critique (Ferrero-Waldner 2005a). More recently she stressed the role of the ENP as a way to use and improve this “soft power” (Ferrero-Waldner 2006b). In 2003, the Commission had already formulated arguments about the EU’s capacity to deliver, writing that the fifth enlargement was the “EU’s most successful foreign policy” (EC 2003a: 5). When Macedonia was granted the status of a candidate country at the end of 2005, the Commissioner for enlargement, Olli Rehn, stated that enlargement was “the most powerful political instrument” that the EU had at its disposal to stabilise and transform third countries into “stable and prosperous democracies”, and that this was due to the specific “soft power” approach adopted during the fifth enlargement of the EU (Agence Europe 2005). Eneko Landaburu, the previous director of the DG Enlargement and now the Director General at DG External

⁵ For more details on these debates, see Sjursen (2006a) and appendix.

Relations, has used the expression “soft power” several times since his speech entitled, “From Neighbourhood to Integration Policy : are there concrete alternatives to enlargement ?” (Landaburu 2006). Like the European Security Strategy suggests, it is a way for the EU to present itself as an important, influential and legitimate actor, despite the weak state of its defence policy (Solana 2003).

3. A policy, which attempts to answer internal and external expectations

At the Commission, the ENP is seen as the “EU’s newest foreign policy instrument” (Ferrero-Waldner 2006b). Enlargement created a strong justification for the launching of this new “umbrella policy”, which overarches various sub-regional ones:

“The enlargement of the European Union on 1 May 2004 represents a historic step for the entire European continent and presents a unique opportunity to strengthen cooperation with its neighbours to the East and to the South” (Council General Affairs 2004)

But all the interviews conducted at the Commission between 2003 and 2006 systematically emphasise the contextual difference between enlargement and the Neighbourhood: “The EU has no means to impose norms to sovereign states actually not in the position or not able to become a candidate state” (Interview, DG Relex, February 2006; also EC, 2003a). The only way out for the EU is to rely on its power of attraction and persuasion or “gravitational power”, like Benita Ferrero-Waldner and Eneko Landaburu clearly stated in their speeches. As already mentioned, the EU uses its internal norms and policies to secure its environment. It tends to avoid coercive means like military or economic sanctions. During enlargement, the question of security was solved by extending abroad the policy of justice and home affairs, imposing the Schengen regime to the East and supporting the parallel accession of EU candidates into NATO. The redefinition of cooperative and stable relations with the EU’s new neighbours is more challenging. As a matter of fact, several countries are struggling with internal crisis or linked to regional ones and their geographical proximity is perceived as a danger for the EU’s stability and security. In its strategic documents, the

Commission mentions the tense situations in Transdniestria (Moldova), between Morocco and Western Sahara, in the Middle-East and in the Southern Caucasus (EC 2004a). Therefore, the ENP must grasp more experiences than just that of the enlargement in order to ensure peace and stability, e.g. the experience in the Western Balkans.

3.1 A policy designed to answer the EU’s own expectations

Like Marchetti shows in this issue, the internal crisis that the EU faces, along with discussions about the constitutional treaty and further enlargements, justified the creation of a policy aimed at securitising the EU’s borders and supporting stability around the enlarged EU. However, the legitimacy of European issues has been weakened and should be elaborated under the context of the failed constitutional treaty, which was rejected in 2005 by referendum in France and the Netherlands. According to the literature on securitisation, the EU also needs to construct potential threats in order to justify its policy to public opinion (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde 1995; Bigo 2000; Balzacq 2005). During the enlargements, public speeches helped to foster the acceptance of internal EU reforms: The communitarisation of the third pillar in 1997 was possible because, for public opinion, enlargement would imply new internal threats (immigration, traffics, terrorism) if the new EU borders were not secure. The first speeches about Wider Europe, and then on the ENP, clearly point towards a necessity to answer similar expectations within the EU (Prodi 2002; Ferrero-Waldner 2005b). Potential threats – terrorism, illegal traffic, instability in bordering regions – listed in these speeches also contributed to the justification of growing financial expenses for the period of 2007-13 towards the ENP countries. The discourse on the EU’s “attractive” and “transformative power” is a way to answer these expectations and to inform the EU’s public that, the policy will have to last some decades if it wants to achieve results in a peaceful and non militaristic way.

In the mind of Commission members, this discourse at the EU level is another way to make the public understand why it is necessary that the EU become a global player and to justify the Commission’s central role in the management of the policy. In 2002, R. Prodi explained that the Union must take the necessary measures in order to

answer to its growing global responsibilities: “If we want to satisfy the rising expectations and hopes of countries abroad and the peoples of Europe, we have to become a real global player. We are only beginning to act as one” (Prodi 2002). In the Commissioner’s mind, the EU has to act as an *attractive* “global player” and to position itself on the international stage in a different manner than the US or Russia (Ferrero-Waldner 2005a; Interviews, DG Enlargement, DG Relex, 2006). But this can only take place through a process of adaptation and constant learning.

While the launching phase of the ENP, in 2002-2004, corresponded with a process of limited rationality, it seems that the ENP is now slowly entering a second phase of learning based on its past failures and adapted for this new political context. As described by C. Lindblom (1959), limited rationality implies that civil servants reproduce or imitate in a different context what they can do best. In the first speeches, “soft power” referred to the EU’s specific way of building stability through enlargement: “The ENP is an opportunity for us, and our partners, to share the benefits which we have derived from half a century of peaceful integration” (Ferrero-Waldner 2005b; see also EC 2003a). But recent interviews at the Commission reveal that the experience in the Western Balkans now also plays a major role in the context of neighbourhood. EU officials do not want to replicate what is often considered as a “failure” in the EU’s external policy on European territory. Multiple conferences highlighting the weaknesses of the ENP, as it stands now, also push EU civil servants to reflect on past learning to perfect the ENP. This is done especially in the field of conflict prevention and crisis management, which still represents a major weakness in the EU’s capacity to deliver.

3.2 Attraction instead of accession: A policy that falls short for the ENP countries

The new policy discourse also aims at answering the expectations of the ENP countries. At least three groups of countries can be identified according to their governmental, political positions (presence or absence of expectations *vis-à-vis* the enhanced cooperation with the EU) and/or to their perspective of accession (presence or absence of expectations linked to accession):

- a) A first group of countries is not participating in the ENP, as a result of political decisions on the side of the neighbour state (e.g. Russia, Belarus, Algeria) and/or the lack of political consensus on the side of the EU (e.g. Belarus, Libya, Syria). Depending on the political situation and will of the neighbour countries (e. g. Belarus) and on the evolution of political discussions within the EU, these countries could become an active part of the ENP.
- b) A second group is the countries which negotiated the Association Agreement (AA) or Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) and are interested in enhancing their relations with the EU in various policy fields through the negotiation of more precise and politically engaging Action Plans. These countries are part of the ENP but have no perspective of accession or have not expressed interest in EU membership so far (e.g. Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). Differentiation among this group is important as the degree of cooperation with the EU varies greatly.
- c) The third group is composed of countries motivated by closer ties to the EU, in particular because they have a right – and expressed the wish – to become candidate countries to the EU (e.g. Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova). But at the moment, the ENP clearly represents an “offer”, a “concrete alternative” to enlargement, (e.g. Landaburu 2006) which tends to take the shape of a policy with variable geometry (Tulmets 2006).

What the concept of “soft power” entails – and the academic notions of civilian / normative / civilizing power does not address⁶ – is the will of the EU to become a *pole of attraction* for third states.

“How can we [the EU] use our soft power, our transformative power, our gravitational influence, to leverage the reforms we would like to see in our neighbourhood? (...) We are a ‘pole of attraction’ for our region – countries along our borders actively seek closer relations with us and we, in turn, want closer relations with these neighbours” (Landaburu 2006: 2, 3)

One of the main lessons learned from enlargement is that the adoption of the EU norms was facilitated by the incentive of accession and the political will of third countries to do so. Without the per-

⁶ For an academic discussion of these terms, see Sjursen (2006a).

spective of accession, the only option for the EU is to be attractive so that third states comply with its norms and take recommendations seriously:

“The goal of accession is certainly the most powerful stimulus for reform we can think of. But why should a less ambitious goal not have some effect? A substantive and workable concept of proximity *would* have a positive effect (...). It must be attractive, it must unlock new prospects and create an open and dynamic framework” (Prodi 2002).

In various speeches, “soft power” also means the ability of the EU *to persuade* third states to comply with its norms and values:

“It is true that our principal source of power – our power of attraction – is “soft” rather than “hard”. But it is no less potent. (...) If we are to preserve an international order based on the rule of law and respect for those values we hold dear – human rights, democracy, good governance – we need to be using all means at our disposal to persuade emerging powers to sign up to it now” (Ferrero-Waldner, 2006a).

These elements have also been stressed by Robert Cooper, a British diplomat working at the Council, and Eneko Landaburu, the Director General of DG Relex. Ferrero-Waldner further made references to Chris Patten’s expression of “soft power” as a “weapon of mass attraction”, a quotation that comes from the previous Commissioner’s book, “Not quite the diplomat” (Patten 2005).⁷ For B. Ferrero-Waldner, “soft power” does not exclude the complementary use of “hard power”, i.e. the use of military means or economic sanctions: “We need to link intelligently firm action to soft influence, ‘hard power’ to ‘soft power’” (Ferrero-Waldner 2005a; 2006a). In absence of credible military means, conditionality is considered to be the EU’s “hard power”; it means that the EU can rely on various instruments like the suspension of economic agreements when engagements are not respected. In the context of the last enlargement, conditionality particularly “worked” because of the incentive of accession. Without this incentive, the EU’s “hard power” loses legitimacy. Interviews at the Commission revealed that persuasion through negotiation in committees or in forums as well as shaming through annual

⁷ I thank René Vandermosten, European Commission Fellow at the EUI in 2005-06, for alerting me on this point.

reports were considered more efficient ways to shape relations with third states than the traditional (negative) conditionality (interview, DG Enlargement / Western Balkan, April 2006). The mutually agreed Action plans (a sort of "political contracts") should represent a way to answer criticism about the asymmetry of economic agreements (association agreements, Partnership and cooperation agreements) as well as about the unilateral character of conditionality.

Speeches about "soft power" are also representative of a clear demand to shape the *EU policy style* on the international stage and to differentiate it from the American style in the eyes of the neighbours:

"If we look at the likely shape of the world in 50 years, the ability to deploy considerable soft power will be vital. Today the EU and US have unrivalled influence in terms of relative wealth and power. But power relationships may look rather different in the future" (Ferrero-Waldner 2006a).

This is also stated openly in interviews, where mid- and long-term processes are stressed: "Like Prodi said, the ENP is not about hard security, it has to be seen in terms of soft security, we don't want any big bang strategy, like the Americans have, where everything is first destroyed and then you have to rebuild the country, the EU has a more patient approach" (Interview, DG Relex, February 2006). The ENP also aims at positioning the EU in the regions that Russia developed its policy of "near abroad" in: "Countries in the Caucasus or Eastern Europe are asking the EU to offer an alternative to the Russian or the American presence on their territory. (...) The Russian policy of 'near abroad' is not going to help the ENP; we will have to take the Russian factor in our bilateral negotiations. [If] Russia wants to see that there is only one winner, [then] there will be no possibility to share cooperation in Eastern Europe and Caucasus" (Interview, DG Relex, February 2006). More than ever, the discourse on the EU's "soft power" is undermined by the fact that the EU still faces the difficult task of clarifying the nature of its Trans-Atlantic relations, especially after the war in Iraq, which revealed differences among member states, and of redefining its relations with Russia, who refused to be part of the ENP.

The way the term “soft power” is used in speeches on the ENP apparently confirms the thesis that “the EU still prefers positive civilian to coercive military measures” (Smith 2003: 111; Sjursen 2006b: 237). Even cooperation in the field of crisis management emphasises the civilian dimension of such projects and missions (Solana 2003). In absence of military “hard power”, European “soft power” cannot be compared with the American one: The background on which it relies is not a military, but mainly an economic one (economic sanctions)⁸.

However, the financial means mobilised to answer the neighbours’ expectations are not very high. The Commission proposed to adopt a budget of €15 billion for the period of 2007-13 (EC, 2003b), though the Council only agreed to provide €12 billion. While the new budget represents an augmentation of 40% compared to what was allocated previously to TACIS and MEDA together, the €12 billion of the ENPI are to be shared among 16 countries plus Russia for a period of seven years. Officials of the Commission explained that they now have “to manage the expectations of the partner countries (...) and explain to them that a golden shower will *not* come with the ENP” (Interview, DG Relex, 2006).

4. What is the EU’s “soft power” capable of?

Speeches at the EU level and documents from the Commission on the ENP show that many elements of the enlargement policy have clearly been taken over and adapted to the context of neighbourhood (EC 2003a, 2004a; Del Sarto, Schumacher 2005; Tulmets 2005b; Kelley 2006; Harasimowicz 2006)⁹. However, both policies have opposite purposes: Enlargement aims at including countries while the ENP insists on maintaining a certain distance between the

⁸ I thank Pascal Vennesson for his very useful remarks on this point. On economic sanctions, see Wilde D’Estmael (1998).

⁹ Harasimowicz lists following similar policy instruments (2006: 340): “The ENP is based on the set of policies and instruments adopted in last enlargement process: common values, market opening, legal and institutional adjustment, a diversified approach, conditional and targeted assistance, structured political dialogue, including security, cultural cooperation, benchmarking, etc.”.

EU and the neighbours¹⁰. Nevertheless, specific policy ideas, concepts and methods have been shaped to export internal policies abroad and to implement the ENP on the basis of the experience of enlargement to build an “over-arching” policy, which should, ideally, be able to exert a “soft power” on its neighbourhood.

4.1 Common values as guidelines

Like in enlargement, the ENP aims to export the EU’s values and norms by extending its internal policy networks abroad. Policy discourses on the ENP are clearly constructed around three main issues – security, stability and prosperity (Prodi 2002; EC 2003a; Landaburu 2006; Ferrero-Waldner 2006b) – which are then detailed in the Action plans (EC 2004b):

“These Action Plans cover a wide range of elements, from judicial and administrative capacity building to cooperation on energy issues; from discussions on human rights to transfer of know-how on regulatory issues; and from involvement in EU internal programmes to detailed information about our standards and norms” (Ferrero-Waldner 2006c).

The politicisation of these various sectoral issues clearly corresponds to the creation of foreign policy by the exportation of the EU’s internal norms and values abroad, in addition to classical foreign policy tools. This process was made possible when policy adaptation of internal policies took place in the ENP, *via* enlargement, a process which is often seen as an answer to globalisation:

“We already have an impressive range of policy instruments, including development aid, diplomacy, trade policy, civilian and military crisis management, and humanitarian assistance. We also need to do more to recognize and utilise the external dimension of the EU’s internal policies. Thanks to globalization, most internal policies now have an international element” (Ferrero-Waldner, 2006a)

As a matter of fact, these policies are as diverse as agriculture, competition, environment, fisheries, justice and home affairs, etc. Enlargement has always represented a strong incentive and window

¹⁰ I thank Helen Wallace for her comments on this point.

of opportunity for the European community/Union to reform itself and thus, to export its own norms abroad. The deepening which runs parallel to the fifth enlargement played an important role in helping the EU define its own identity, especially through the two Intergovernmental Conferences (conventions), which were aimed at constitutionalising the EU's norms and values. The Charter of Fundamental rights, although un-constitutionalised as long as the constitutional treaty of 2005 is not ratified, already serves as a normative reference in decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Communities. The Commission also referred to this document during quite often during the accession. This was done in order to put more pressure on accession countries and give consistency to accession criteria. In this sense, it is difficult to separate deepening from enlarging, as both play a role in linking internal policies to external ones, thus externalising the EU's policies, norms and standards¹¹.

4.2 The diffusion of a philosophy based on conditionality, partnership and differentiation

In the 2003 communication about the Neighbourhood, the Commission had already insisted on the specific philosophy the ENP should adopt to complement the already existing policies in its neighbourhood, namely “a differentiated, progressive and benchmarked approach” (EC 2003a: 15). By this, it is meant that “the new neighbourhood policy should not override the existing framework for EU relations with [third] countries (...), instead, it should supplement and build on existing policies and arrangements” and respect the rhythm of each country coming closer to the EU (EC 2003a: 15,16). The Commission proposed that benchmarks “should be developed in close cooperation with the partner countries themselves, in order to ensure national ownership and commitment” (EC 2003a: 16); thus, to counter-balance the unilateral approach of conditionality, benchmarks should “offer greater predictability and certainty for the partner country than the traditional ‘conditionality’” (*Ibid*).

¹¹ This process of externalisation is quite similar to what authors have called a process of transnationalisation within (Hassenteufel, 2005) and outside the EU (Stone 2004; Lavenex 2004) which in praxis takes the shape of sectoral “network governance” (Filtenborg, Gänzle, Johansson 2002).

After 1997, the asymmetrical and unilateral character of relations between the EU and the candidates was replaced by a philosophy of *partnership* and *negotiation*, not only for the first six countries accepted for the accession negotiations in 1997, but also for all other candidates, including Turkey, that were accepted later in 1999 to negotiate. Traditional conditionality was therefore complemented by a negotiated approach based on socialisation, which coincided with the opening of accession negotiations (Tulmets 2005a, 2006). Drawing on this experience, policy discourses of Commissioners for Enlargement have reiterated the importance of the EU’s specific conception of conditionality for the diffusion of European norms and values in the framework of enlargement (EC 2005). Analogies have also been drawn with the ENP. As the Polish Commissioner for Regional policy, Danuta Hübner, recently highlighted in her discourse entitled, “The essential role of Community conditionality in the triumph of democracy and market economy”:

“The European Union can only gain by integrating progressively with neighbouring European countries. The conditionality embedded in the Action Plans with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus will gradually extend the space of democracy and peace” (Hübner, 2006).

But the European Union has also learnt from negative experiences with conditionality in Eastern non-candidate states. The speeches of B. Ferrero-Waldner highlight the EU’s preference for positive rather than negative measures: “Diplomacy requires carrots as well as sticks, whether we are talking about weapons of mass destruction or promoting stability and prosperity in our neighbourhood. (...) Access to the world’s biggest internal market and our sizeable assistance programmes are considerable carrots” (Ferrero-Waldner 2006a). As pointed out by Lynch (2004), the design of the new ENP strategy, in particular, has stemmed from the shortcomings of the EU existing policies. Traditional (negative) conditionality imposed on Belarus’s authoritarian state has yielded little, and the EU has had little influence over the Transdniestria conflict in Moldova.¹² Officials of the Commission have thus learnt lessons similar to

¹² Previous economic sanctions toward the USSR, South Africa and Iran also offered negative experiences for the European Community (Wilde D’Estmael 1998).

those from the enlargement but in a different context: Success or failure of negative and positive conditionality is mainly linked to the national context and to the political will of third states to cooperate and to introduce national reforms (interviews, EC, DG Enlargement, 2004; DG Relex, 2006). Like Günter Verheugen explained in 2004:

“One basic principle behind the ring of friends we are forging is joint ownership. Of course, we cannot impose the policy on any neighbour. We are offering closer co-operation across the broad spectrum of our relations, from political dialogue to economic integration” (Verheugen, 2004).

The rather coercive approach of conditionality – as it is often described in the literature (e.g. Dolowitz, Marsh, 1996) – was therefore completed by more voluntary measures like new policy ideas (commitments to common values), a philosophy based on differentiation, mutual agreements or joint-ownership (partnership), participation and deconcentration/decentralisation as well as by innovative ways of controlling and evaluating the meeting of accession criteria or commitments. These have been tested in a more extensive way by the EU enlargement reforms and the EU development policy, before it was adopted by the ENP (Tulmets, 2003, 2006).

4.3 A new method as a way to build an over-arching policy

On the basis of various empirical elements collected between 2000 and 2005 (cf. Tulmets 2005b), I argue that a new method that was introduced during enlargement (“Agenda 2000”), has many similarities to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) that was created for employment and social politics. Since the method was created to coordinate the member states’ policies in policy fields where there is no European *acquis* and where intergovernmental procedures are a rule (Trubek 2002; Dehousse 2004), it is not surprising that it could be adapted to foreign policy issues (Tulmets 2005a,c). The innovative working documents and procedures have the same function; they hold different names and labels in order to differentiate the context of their usage.

When adapted into the EU’s external relations field, the new method presents the following characteristics:

- 1) Policy objectives are adopted by the European Council, based on the Commission’s proposition.
- 2) The rights and duties of the third states are inscribed in the agreements concluded between the EU and each third state (contractualisation of relations, soft law). Thus, the third state has to define its responsibilities in more detailed, public documents. It is constantly (re)negotiating with the Commission and the member states the conditions for which these reforms must be implemented (negotiation chapters in the process of enlargement) in bilateral committees, created in the framework of its economic agreement with the EU.
- 3) The Commission manages the monitoring process at its headquarters in Brussels, through its delegations abroad and bilateral committees.
- 4) The Commission and the member states assist the implementation process through financial and technical assistance. The member states facilitate the exchange of good and best practices through European programmes coordinated by the Commission and national assistance measures.
- 5) The actors concerned by the policy can be consulted during a phase of negotiation and agreement with the EU, through the elaboration of national documents or by implementation at the level of the member states and/or of the Commission.
- 6) Experts from the member states and other regional organisations (OECD, Council of Europe, and OSCE) participate in the peer-review process. The Commission publishes annual evaluations, which are transmitted to the Council and the European Parliament.
- 7) The policy objectives are readjusted at the European level on the basis of evaluations and the proposition of the Commission. They are accepted by the European Council and are the basis for further adaptation in the foreign policy process.

Interestingly, this new method also has the potential to bridge the gaps between the three pillars of the European Union. This is because the policy objectives (constantly renegotiated) are adopted at the European Council, the main common institution of these three

pillars. It therefore allows for the definition of the European “umbrella” or “over-arching” policies and thus, abolishes the logic of “pillarisation”, as the Constitutional treaty of 2005 has proposed to do. The method was also introduced to make sure that the third states would agree on the norms that should be exported abroad, especially in fields like administrative or judicial capacity where there is no *acquis*, and EU norms and values will be implemented and enforced.

However, in practice, the new method already presents some shortcomings. Although it should involve the partner countries in the negotiations, of the Action Plans, and in the monitoring phase, participation of the ENP countries remains low and is often limited to governmental actors. Common values and benchmarks are not always easy to negotiate because the Commission often defines the agenda before the bilateral meetings (interviews with Georgian and Ukrainian experts, April 2007). Furthermore, the benchmarks are sometimes not precise enough to design aid projects according to the neighbours’ needs or to allow for objective evaluations on the Commission’s side.

5. Can the notion of “soft power” bridge EU’s capability-expectations gap?

5.1 Consistency and expertise are a necessary source of legitimacy

If implementation and evaluation fall short, will the discourse on “soft power” (exporting EU values in a legitimate way) represent a sufficient reason for the EU’s public opinion to support this policy? Will it be attractive enough for the neighbouring countries to comply with EU values? Certainly not! – Especially if promises and expectations are too high. Thus the EU has to work further on finding the right balance between input and output legitimacy (as defined by Scharpf 1999). When looking at output legitimacy, the ENP is not perceived as equally attractive for all neighbouring countries and it is still uncertain whether or not it can respond to the very heterogeneous expectations of its neighbours (Interviews, DG Relex, 2006). Given the current lack of input legitimacy, in the debate on

EU’s Constitutional treaty, the EU’s task to increase internal consistency and thus external coherence will not be facilitated. At present the main priority of the ENP is to achieve a minimal internal consistency and to enhance its expertise about neighbouring countries in order to keep and increase its legitimacy and external coherence.

Since it was launched in 2002, the ENP has been subject to various criticisms: Authors characterised it as a “new liberal imperialism” and the EU as a “soft form of hegemony” (Cooper 2002; Straten-schulte 2004; Primatarova 2005). The will of becoming a pole of attraction can also be considered as a form of discursive coercion, which seeks for the adoption of EU’s norms by third states (Bially-Mattern 2005). There are two ways for the ENP to avoid further criticism. Enhanced consistency would represent the first way for the EU to gain internal as well as external legitimacy. Enhanced dialogue and further differentiation would represent the second way to increase ENP acceptance abroad.

Since the EU’s foreign policy has been best characterised as a multi-level one (Smith M. 2005), the question of consistency is central in external policies, especially if the EU wants to become a “pole of attraction” and a global actor. Consistency can be defined around three issues: (a) horizontal consistency between the three EU pillars and EU policies; (b) institutional consistency between community and intergovernmental processes of policy decision; (c) vertical consistency between EU and member states’ policies, especially in the phase of implementation (Nuttall 2005 : 97). Nevertheless, the means of achieving consistency are still debated. We have already pointed to some of the shortcomings of the new method, inspired by the open method of coordination. However, these new forms of cooperation, which have emerged over these last years within the EU (benchmarking, enhanced cooperation), are more voluntary and less binding because there is a lack of legitimacy. Thus, there is still hope that they may help to leave the bottleneck of intergovernmentalism in the field of foreign policy. Therefore, the Commission should improve its method. This is particularly important because it could build a way out of the re-nationalisation debate, which exists in the field of external relations regarding competencies between the member states and the Commission, especially after the failure of the constitutional treaty. Although participation is a

key notion in the ENP, the means that allow for better participation within the EU's agencies and the enhanced "people-to-people" contacts have been accepted only recently by the Council, although the Commission had already proposed them in 2003.

Further, lessons on the use of these new discourses and methods could be drawn on the experience of enlargement or other foreign policies. Better expertise about the countries would allow for better differentiation, for example in the Action Plans. As expertise is lacking in Brussels, regular consultation with local partners is central. Thus, the role of the delegations of the Commission abroad needs to be increased (Interview, DG Relex, 2006). While some member states already have lasting contacts with specific third states, many officials at the Commission consider the idea of a *European external service*, as proposed in the constitutional treaty of 2005, to be an important solution for the consistency and lack of local expertise issues. The process of deconcentration as experienced during enlargement has given a growing and more political role to the delegations of the Commission. Delegations, in fact participated in the undertaking of crucial tasks such as monitoring reforms and evaluating the meeting of the benchmarks as "guardians" of accession conditions. A similar process is envisaged for the ENP (Interview, DG Relex, April 2006). The launching of the European external service would see the creation of "European embassies" abroad on the basis of the delegations of the Commission, which would also include diplomats and experts from the member states. It would thus add more elements of consistency, i.e. between pillars, between the Commission and the member states, and between the member states themselves. Thus, the ENP – the "EU's newest foreign policy instrument" (Ferrero-Waldner 2006b) – represents a way for the EU to test its capacity to become a consistent and coherent international actor, at least in its own neighbourhood.

6. Conclusion

This article has highlighted the fact that the discourse on "soft power" represents a specific approach recently developed by the European Union in order to co-opt rather than to coerce third countries in its neighbourhood. It refers to a combination of policy dis-

courses on the attractive power of European values and norms, and of a philosophy based on partnership, differentiation and participation. Enlargement and other sub-regional experiences offered innovative policy ideas and policy tools so that the EU was able to propose a "new vision" to its neighbours (EC 2003a). Contrary to Nye's conception of the US's "hard power" referring to military and economic might, the EU's "hard power" only relies on conditionality, i.e. on shaming and potential economic sanctions. As the ENP has just recently been implemented, the question is now regarding how seriously the discourse on European norms and values will be taken abroad and what methods the EU will use to control compliance and reinforce conditionality on the ground. This will be complicated because the EU intends to find its own foreign policy style by exporting its norms, culture and values, yet it is still unsure about how to define itself.

It seems that the EU is now embarking on an ideal and Kantian way – at least at the level of discourse – which is proving to be more fruitful than previous EU or US policies. Nevertheless, if the EU wants to do so it must work on the definition of its own internal consistency and external coherence, and be ready to adapt its policy to the perceptions and reactions of its neighbouring countries. If not, the European Union and its member states could be accused of hiding a new "imperialist", "unilateralist" or "hegemonic" agenda (Cooper 2002; Stratenschulte 2004; Primatarova 2005) underneath their notion of partnership.

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Appendix:

Academic definitions of EU’s international role

Wording	Author(s)	Object/Context	Definitions	Criticism
<i>Soft power</i>	Joseph Nye (1990b)	<u>Object:</u> American Foreign Policy (USA) <u>Context:</u> Post-Cold War	„power means an ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not” (p. 154); “power diffused from government to private actors” (p. 162); “soft co-optive power is just as important as hard command power. If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of the others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow. If it can establish intentional norms consistent with its society, it is less likely to have to change. (...) it may be spared the costly exercise of coercive or hard power” (p. 167).	<i>Robert Kagan (2002)</i> USA is not a soft power (context: war in Afghanistan, in Irak)
<i>Civilian power</i>	François Du-chêne (1972, 1973)	<u>Object:</u> Foreign Policy of the European Community (EC) <u>Context:</u> Cold War, EC enlargement to UK, IRL and DK	A civilian power is “a civilian group long on economic power and relatively short on armed forces” (p. 19); “The European Community will only make the most of its opportunities if it remains true to its inner characteristics. These are primarily: civilian ends and means, and a built-in sense of collective action, which in turn express, however imperfectly, social values of equality, justice and tolerance. (...) The European Community must be a force for the international diffusion of civilian and democratic standards or it will itself be more or less victim of power politics run by powers stronger and more cohesive than itself. In the long run, as Jean Monnet has said, there is no statesmanship without generosity”. (p. 20-21)	<i>Hedley Bull (1982)</i> EC cannot be a power if it stays a civilian power, i.e. if it has no military power <i>Karen Smith (2000); Treacher (2004)</i> The EU is not a civilian power anymore, since a CFSP and ESDP was launched in the 1990s
	Hanns Maull (1990) Kirste/Maull (1996)	<u>Object:</u> German and Japan Foreign Policy after WWII <u>Context:</u> Cold War, post-Cold War	Civilian power is a state “whose conception of its foreign policy role and behaviour is bound to particular aims, values, principles, as well as forms of influence and instruments of power in the name of a civilisation of international relations” (1996, p. 300) Five inter-related policy dimensions: 1) Constrain and monopolize use of force/promote peaceful settlement of conflict; 2) Promote rule of law and institutions; 3) Promote culture of non-violence; 4) Promote social fairness/distributive justice; 5) Promote participatory decision.	<i>Zielonka (2002)</i> The 1997-98 militarization of the Union weakened its “distinct profile” as a civilian international identity <i>Stelios Stavridis (2001)</i> The use of military force does not mean the end of the civilian power (ex. of civil-military actions)
<i>Normative power</i>	Ian Manners (2002)	<u>Object:</u> External relations of the European Union (EU) <u>Context:</u> Introduction of conditionality in EU external relations, reforms of EU external policies (1997-2001)	“Conceptions of EU as either a civilian power or a military power, both located in discussions of capabilities, need to be augmented with a focus on normative power of an ideational nature characterized by common principles and a willingness to disregard Westphalian conventions. This is not to say that the EU’s civilian power, or fledgling military power, are unimportant, simply that its ability to shape conceptions of ‘normal’ in international relations needs to be given much greater attention”. (p. 239). Therefore, normative power is neither military nor purely economic, but one that works through ideas and opinions.	<i>Sjursen (2006a)</i> (special issue) <i>Thomas Diez (2005)</i> Questions the meaning of “power” in the expression “normative power”

