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Is the EU's Foreign Policy Identity an Obstacle? The European Union, the Northern Dimension and the Union for the Mediterranean

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Abstract

The impact of the EU policies on its borderlands has been highly varied. We will argue that a valuable addendum on Rationalist explananda for such varied impact, can be found by exploring how the EU constructs its international identity vis-à-vis neighboring countries. We will use the Northern Dimension and the Union for the Mediterranean to verify how the EU identitarian projection creates contradictions and/or dissonance with neighboring countries to illustrate the uneven impact of EU policies.

Keywords: *European foreign policy, Union for the Mediterranean, Northern Dimension, Baltic Sea, Identity.*

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1. Introduction

In the past decade the European Union (EU) has set about to elaborate and periodically upgrade a set of fairly sophisticated and, some would say, innovative framework policies for some of its non-candidate neighboring countries. First of would be the 1995 Barcelona Process – now subsumed into the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) – followed by the 1999 Northern Dimension.¹ These framework policies have been hailed by many as pioneering inter-state relations for different reasons. They have tried to put forth an ambitious and comprehensive agenda for economic, political and socio-cultural development in the Mediterranean and in the Baltic Sea area, thereby going beyond traditional schemes of cooperation. The different financial assistance schemes linked (directly or indirectly) with these framework policies also allot fairly generous amounts for cooperation projects and on many points allows for greater donor-recipient coordination compared to the average international aid scheme. Finally, these framework policies have been perceived as litmus tests for the Union's ability to “avoid drawing new dividing lines” in and around Europe (Council of the European Union 2002) by ways of creating inclusive multilateral frameworks encompassing the EU and all its partners in each region. For these reasons some analysts have hailed the European Union's approach toward its non-member neighbors as ‘postmodern’ (Smith M. 2003; Maull 2006).

Notwithstanding these innovative practices, it is surprising to observe that the EU has comparably had relatively scarce impact on the socio-economic development in neighboring countries in this same time period. What is more, it is astonishing to note that the perception of the Union in several of these partner countries is not overly positive. Why is this? How come some of the EU's neighboring partners do not hold more good-will toward the Union in spite of the latter's allegedly postmodern and pioneering ways?

¹ The Union for the Mediterranean was introduced in 2008 as the unitary label on, in part, a new set of policies and, in part, existing ones, such as the Barcelona Process and facets of the European Neighborhood Policy. The paper will use the new name UfM throughout, although the paper mostly refers to the pre-2008 policies.

The present work will look at this paradox from the perspective of ‘identity’. We will argue that the Union’s main problem has been the failure of its burgeoning foreign policy identity to resonate positively with its partners in these regions. We will therefore look at the specifics of how the EU constructs its international identity in relation with the countries in the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea area and how this identity has played out, by ways of the UfM and the Northern Dimension. The two case studies have been chosen for being central to the EU’s foreign policy ambition to have greater say and sway over countries bordering its territory. These case studies also hold potential for revealing key insights into the EU international identity which might be compared with the EU foreign policy discourse and action in other areas of the world.² The first section will outline some basic concepts and the profile of the EU’s identity construction in the Union’s discourse. The second section will look at how the EU’s identity has resonated with its southern Mediterranean partners. The third section will repeat the same exercise for the Baltic Sea area. The final section is reserved for some concluding remarks.

2. The EU’s international identity: concepts and practice

Identities have gained importance in the International Relations academia for the deeper understandings that identity-related research may provide in terms of inter-state relations. Studies of identities may, for example, shed additional light on why particular states facing global anarchy group together to create mutually reinforcing networks of collaboration (e.g. the EU). On other occasions, identities and identity constructions may unearth explananda for the dysfunctional relations between international actors which Rationalist explanations may overlook. A focus on identity as the principle research variable allows us, for example, to see that incompatible

² These areas have consistently been tagged as of special interest to the EU even before the Maastricht Treaty entered into force. They were mentioned as of key importance in the EC’s priority list for CFSP Joint Actions in 1992 and their importance have since been confirmed by a recurrent set of policies, and for being among those regions receiving the lion share of the EU’s global financial assistance.

identity constructions can generate profound tensions and undermine cooperative pursuits.

Identity can be said to be constructed as a consequence of a two-step process. First there is a formation of a 'Self.' Second, the Self is shaped in its relation to a set of specific and generic 'Others' in the social context in which the Self is inserted.

The formation of the Self consists of processes whereby the actor assigns itself attributes and meanings. These designations contribute to the perception of the Self as individually distinctive and set the Self apart from others (Snow 2001). Collective identities are formed in similar processes. A sense of 'we-ness' is anchored in real or imagined shared attributes and experiences among those who comprise the collectivity. The feelings of a common bond, cause, threat, or fate that constitute the shared 'sense of we' motivate groups of actors to act together in the name of the collectivity, thus generating a sense of collective agency (*ibid*; Steinberg 1998). The collective agency is thus the tangible expression or output of the group identity in relation to non-group members.

In the second part of the process, the collective Self is shaped in its contact with Others. Identities can, in this sense, be said to only truly acquire meaning when they come into contact with Others inside a determined social context.³ Moreover, key to our argument here is the assumption that the 'we-ness' and its resulting collective agency can be said to be successful when Others accept and welcome such identity/agency. If on the contrary outsiders' balance sheet of that identity/agency is mostly negative, then this is a sign of

³ It is worth noting that we hold here that an identity is situational and specific, i.e. the identity may vary considerably in relations with different sets of Others. In essence, it is the *combination* of self-attributions, rather than the specific identity genres themselves, which changes in different social contexts. This is to say that the Self might choose to highlight or hide a particular identity trait as appropriate. For example, the Union may choose to dwell on its trade strength and competitiveness in the global economy in relations to China or the US (great powers and trade competitors), while in relations to a poor and underdeveloped country, e.g. Bolivia, the Union might rest importance from its commercial predominance and instead emphasize its credentials as a major donor of financial assistance.

that the Self is not adequately constructed for its social context and/or has not been adequately molded to fit into the environment in which it is inserted.

Finally, it is pertinent to point out that identities are essentially a seamless string of an indefinite number of more or less stable identity self-attributions. However, we have here chosen to highlight how two of the Union most frequently reiterated discursive genres of its identity – the EU’s founding myth and its organizational logics – underpin the Union’s collective agency both in the Mediterranean and in the Baltic Sea. The EU’s collective agency in relation to neighboring partners in these two areas take the form of three specific policy objectives: promotion of regional multilateralism, pursuit of multi-sectoral cooperation and interventionism.

2.1. Regional multilateralism

Regional multilateralism is one of the determining features of the EU’s collective agency in its relations with neighboring partner countries. The Union’s penchant for grouping countries into regional arrangements “is a striking and unusual feature of its foreign relations; no other international actor does this to the same extent” (Smith K. 2003: 70) and has, according to Whitman, become “the chief characteristic of the diplomacy of the Union today” Whitman (1998: 10). The Union’s promotion of multilateral policy frameworks is in part a reflection of the Western European integration experience since the end of the World War II. This foreign policy trait thus finds echo in the EU founding myth and the Union regularly attributes most of its current achievements (e.g. peace, prosperity) to that initial impulse of regional integration within the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and later the European Community (EC). The Union’s promotion of regional multilateralism is also in part informed by organizational logics. One might argue that there has been a will among EU members, but perhaps above all the European Commission, to organize the world order in an equitable manner, to neutralize the obvious pitfalls of ‘externalization’ (cf. Schmitter 1969) and partner countries’ competing claims of special favors. The trend has therefore been for the EU to offer fairly standardized relations to a set of countries grouped into a region. The logic which drives this particular collective agency is

the Union and its member states' staunch – and rarely questioned – belief that “efforts on the part of (usually) neighboring countries to address issues of common interest” is to the benefit for all parties involved (European Commission 1995). Another attributed advantage of the Union's regional multilateralist approach is that, in the words of one analyst, it “helps alleviate the feeling of inferiority in size and number that single states increasingly perceive” in a globalizing world (Regelsberger 1990: 14).

2.2. Multi-sectoral policies

A second prominent trait of the EU's collective agency in neighboring partner countries is the recourse to multi-sectoral policies, spanning a broad range of political, economic and socio-cultural fields of cooperation.⁴ The Union's promotion of multi-sectoral framework policies can be held as linked to the early days of the European integration, whereby the EU is looking “to apply the EC model of functional cooperation” (Bretherton, Vogler 1999: 161). In essence, the European own integration experience since the early 1950s point to that techno-bureaucratic (apolitical) management of transborder concerns foment “creative association in [...] problem-solving [which] provides a learning-situation in which participants are gradually weaned away from their [...] nationalistic impulses toward a self-reinforcing ethos of cooperation” (Pentland 2003). An organizational logic also informs the EU's collective agency in this regard. The UfM and Northern Dimension can be taken as unique ensembles of framework policies spanning different issue areas and competences among EU institutions. For the EU the use of framework policies has been necessary to providing a single, coherent frame within to coordinate different EU instruments. The result has been to enable “a greater consistency between the various pillars of the EU's external relations” and consequently “improved the EU's profile as a collective actor” (Alecú de Flers, Regelsberger 2005: 339; cf. Smith K. 2003). This stands in contrast to the EC's relative inability during the Cold War to engage in a multi-sectoral manner for its institutional disconnect between the EC economic instru-

⁴ We use the term ‘multi-sectoral’ here to denote ongoing cooperation in different sectors which are linked into a loose, global framework, but without necessarily implying any coordination among the sectors in question.

ments and European Political Cooperation (EPC) objectives (cf. Nuttall 1992, 1997). In sum, the Union's broad multi-sectoral collective agency means to pursue cooperation with and among neighbors in an apolitical, positive-sum game, where all stands to have their preferences satisfied, whether neighboring partners (socio-economic development) or the EU (inter-pillar actorness).

2.3. Interventionism

A third and final prominent feature of the EU's foreign policy in relation to neighboring countries is its propensity for interventionism. An interventionist foreign policy actor displays a decided will to supply political direction beyond its territorial confines. K. Smith (2003: 199) notes that the EU's collective agency on this point has even reflected an EU "reconceptualization of the practice of state sovereignty" in its willingness to shape the international environment through various instruments or mechanisms and to limit the freedom of states to do whatever they wish domestically and externally. Maull (2006) sees the EU's principle of interventionism as a trait of a cosmopolitan, postmodern actor. This characteristic of the EU foreign policy can be taken to have explicit roots in the European integration experience of 'pooled sovereignty' and of a supranational institution which is allowed intrusive monitoring of the domestic affairs of the participant members. The EU's collective agency is thus clearly informed, in the words of former External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten (2000), by the ambition "to reflect abroad what is best about our own [EU] model [... i.e.] the balance we seek to strike between national freedoms and common disciplines." This collective agency is also in part informed by organizational logics. Conditionality is the cognitive bridge which brings political objectives into dialogue with the Union's economic instruments and technical and financial assistance. One could also infer that this is part of the Union's particular quest to become a more active (as opposed to reactive) and, above all, profiled foreign policy actor. For this reason, EU financial assistance and bilateral agreements contain the inclusion of a human rights and democracy clause concluded between the EC and third countries since the early 1990s. Moreover, other types of conditionality are regular features in all major communitarian instruments regulating external financial or technical assistance. The formerly inward-looking Western

Europe that existed during the Cold War has thus seemingly been replaced by outward- or “a projection oriented actor, with increasing foreign policy responsibilities” (Charillon 2004: 252). To make its interventionism more palatable to its borderlands it has used concepts such as ‘partnership’ and ‘co-ownership’. Bicchi (2006: 288) has termed this ‘inclusiveness’ meaning that EU foreign policy-makers (in theory or in practice) permit a role in its policy making for neighboring partners actors affected by the Union’s sovereignty-intrusive regional framework policy. By appearing to be inclusive and provide equal standing among partners, it is supposed to take the edge out of the controversy of interventionism.

Having so described the EU’s discursive identity genres which underpin the EU collective agency toward neighboring partner countries, the remainder of the paper will now turn to the matter of how the EU’s framework policies have resonated with Mediterranean and Baltic Sea partners.

3. The EU’s collective agency at work in the Mediterranean

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership came into being in November 1995 and was thought to become an instrument to comprehensively settle many of the problems inherent in the Mediterranean basin and, at the same time, signal a higher European political commitment to this area. Hence, in a formula reminiscent of the Helsinki Process, the Barcelona Declaration divides the partnership into three chapters – political and security; economic and financial; social, cultural and human affairs (Barbé 1996: 26). It was quite widely held that such a holistic multilateral political and economic integration would be the solution to how to integrate the southern Mediterranean countries into the international economy, to provide some political anchorage, to deal with the majority of sources of instability in the region as well as to blur the suspicion and antagonism which had impeded a close relationship during the bipolar period. In addition, in 2004 the EU launched the European Neighborhood Policy which provides for a ‘deepened’ cooperation in many sectors (economic integration, JHA issues, etc.) and in 2008 the Union for the Mediterranean added onto these existing frameworks.

Nevertheless, the problems which have accrued in the Euro-Mediterranean relations since 1995 can be explained as a misfit between the EU's collective agency and the receptivity of the outsiders to EU's self-styled foreign policy identity. The EU has plainly failed to resonate with non-candidate Mediterranean countries on various levels.

First, the *multilateralization* of EU-southern Mediterranean relations has been a contested exercise. It is possible to argue that the 'Mediterranean' as a region encompassing all its rim-states, would not exist lest the EU had taken the initiative to group this heterogeneous set of countries together after the Cold War. However, the Union's Mediterranean partners have come to resent the multilateral dynamic due to that, instead of finding strength in numbers, many of them have seen their individual politico-economic situations since the 1990s stall or weaken. In cases where their economic situation and leverage have improved since the 1990s, the evolutions are more often explained due to global conjunctures (e.g. raising energy prices, such as Algeria) or bilateral out-region relations (e.g. signing trade agreements with third countries, as Morocco and Jordan have with the US), than as a consequence of engaging in regional cooperation with the EU. Similarly, at the political level, the EU-driven regional multilateral arrangements have not helped to alleviate much the political marginalization of southern Mediterranean countries. The institutional frameworks developed have not proven solid enough for those countries which had hoped for that the Barcelona Process become a means by which to gain some leverage over neighboring countries. The Arab southern Mediterranean countries cautiously welcomed the 1995 Barcelona Process as an opportunity to sway Israeli policies or have a greater *droit de regard* over events in the Middle East. However, Israeli's reluctance to engage multilaterally to any significant extent, and the EU's concessions in this regard, have undermined the multilateral character of the cooperation.⁵ In overall, the EU has been highly reticent about allowing the Middle East conflict-related issues being discussed in the UfM (and earlier) framework, lest bringing the

⁵ Del Sarto (2003) has argued that Israel's unsettled national identity has made it an unlikely partner in Mediterranean region-building even if the peace process was placed on a better footing.

whole regional cooperation to a ground halt. It would thus seem that the EU's firm conviction that "regional cooperation is beneficial for others" (Smith K. 2003: 70) has thus (at least) not (yet) fomented a solid ground for multilateral cooperation among Euro-Mediterranean countries. Perhaps for this reason, Spencer (2000) has sustained that the vision of a Mediterranean region "is held more by European partners than by southern Mediterranean partners."

In terms of *multi-sectoral cooperation*, southern Mediterranean concerns have centered on a lack of, what Bicchi (2006: 288) has termed 'institutional reflexivity', i.e. the capacity of EU foreign policy makers "to critically analyze the EU's policy and adapt it according to the effects the policy is expected to have on the targeted area." In the Mediterranean, the EU's partners have expressed misgivings on the EU's multi-sectoral approach due to that many of the proposed measures did not appear to suit the neighboring partners' political, economic and culturally specific circumstances.

In the political sphere, for example, the principal problem is that the comprehensive EU formula is perceived as discursively framed by the European Union in a biased manner which is closer to European security needs than the partners. While in theory European security and partners' socioeconomic development are highly compatible, the complaint of the Mediterranean partners has been that the EU-provided socio-economic cooperation has seemed too instrumentalized to guarantee intra-EU security against terrorism, migration, etc. than to provide genuine, positive-sum cooperation. The EU-promoted economic development, environment, culture and education in third countries appear more subordinated to the logics of European security and stability than to the actual needs of the partner country. Habib Ben Yahia, Tunisia's Foreign Minister, has sustained for example that despite the launch of the Barcelona Process with its emphasis on economy and culture nothing has essentially changed since the end of the Cold War in that "the north's [i.e. the European] interest in the southern shore has always been about security" (as cited in Gomez 2003: 26).⁶ Southern Mediterranean per-

⁶ The cultural basket of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was, for example, put there to foment 'confidence building mechanisms' (i.e. security overtones).

ceptions are thus that the efforts to build a European identity are increasingly being linked to the issue of security whether “with the ulterior motive of creating a larger European regional security order” (Charillon 2004: 254) or fear that external insecurity could represent risk to the whole European project (Waever 1996: 123). Hence, this generates southern Mediterranean doubts about the genuineness of the Union’s wish to help in their struggle for transition and/or socio-economic development. In contrast, most Arab southern Mediterranean citizens feel that the security matter is most urgent, i.e. to renew efforts to find a solution to the Middle East conflict. But this appears to receive no more than a lukewarm support from European capitals (Barbé, Johansson-Nogués 2008).

In the economic sphere, the EU has promoted macro-economic stability, reliance on export and the gradual opening up of domestic markets by ways of joining global economic institutions. However, by doing that the Union is often accused of promoting a liberal formula – only infrequently questioned in the West for its correctness – but which is perceived as unfit for or threatening in some countries outside the West. Moreover, outsiders take issue with that the EU seems to promote one *specific* formula of embedded neoliberal economic development and growth, while EU members are obviously allowed many different approaches to market management or state-society relations, such as the role of the state in sustaining social development (Nicolaïdis, Howse 2002: 774). For these reasons many southern Mediterranean partners have come to question if the EU formula is the correct developmental recipe for them. Successive Arab UN Development Program Reports (cf. Arab Human Development Report 2005) have, for this reason, advocated that Arabs should cherry-pick the best of the Western economic model while not renouncing on autochthonous developmental methods.⁷ Finally,

France and Spain wanted to use the cultural dialogue to diffuse a widespread anti-Western stance in the Maghrebi societies and the increasing tension between Arab identities and Western ones which had surfaced in and around the Gulf War.

⁷ Such as for example the linking up with trans-European transport networks, maritime cooperation, energy interconnections and cooperation through the information society, while abstaining from other areas. The most extreme form of this search for autochthonous formulas is perhaps Algeria. Darbouche and Gillespie (2006: 18-9) note that “Algeria appears to be opposed to any initiative

perhaps the most serious shortcoming of the EU formula is that the embedded liberalist approach entails a bargained reduction of trade restrictions by ways of dealing with the influence of protectionist, rent-seeking interest groups, and more generally paying off the 'losers' from trade liberalization (Nicolaidis, Howse 2002: 776). However, EU financial assistance has, in many cases, been arriving late and in too small quantities to really off-set the sectoral conversions where they have been attempted.

Finally, in the cultural sphere, the European-centered approaches have also been resented. The lack of enthusiasm for the European approach stems from its bluntness and lack of adaptation to Southern Mediterranean societal constructions and mental imaginary. The EU has had important difficulties in adapting its formulas in non-EU contexts. Some Arab Mediterranean observers, for example, find the notions of 'civil society' or 'decentralized cooperation' problematic (Baroudi 2004). As directly transposed concepts onto the current Arab world these concepts have little meaningful resonance. Indeed, their argument is that voluntary, non-profit associative networks are alien to many Arab societies, in which traditional structures of society such as the family and especially the religious institutions are the natural outlets of social organization (*ibid*; cf. Johansson-Nogués 2006). The EU's associative formula, seen from such a perspective, becomes an artificial implant in, or even a threat for, the existing culture and models of society and hence rejected from the instinct of wishing to preserve the distinctive traits of these societies. Moreover, the reluctance of the European institutions to finance cooperative ventures involving religiously affiliated Muslim organizations, even moderate ones, together with certain diplomatic incidents (e.g. the 2006 'Cartoon Crisis') have spurred a sentiment among Muslim Arabs that Europeans are disdainful of their religion and identity. Some civil society activists in the southern Mediterranean have, for this reason, resisted their European homologues' overtures for cooperation to a greater extent than what occurred in Central and Eastern Europe because of "a widespread suspicion that

pretending to affect its political identity particularly given that its leaders believe that home-grown experience is worth more than any form of imported model regardless of the price to pay", especially as it is buoyed by high energy prices.

EU democracy and human rights promotion has a subtext in the Mediterranean of undermining the Islamic identity of societies” (Gillespie 2004: 6).

The last element which will be examined here is that of EU’s collective agency taking the form of *interventionism*. The Barcelona Process, in particular, would raise hopes in Algeria, for example, that “the preoccupations of the south were finally taken into consideration by the Europeans” and that the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership marked “the end of a relationship between the north and south of the Mediterranean based on dictated cooperation” (Darbouche, Gillespie 2006: 15). These sentiments were revived with the launch of the UfM and its joint Secretariat and co-Presidency. However, while the verdict on the UfM’s institutional innovations is still out, experience has so far rather revealed the EU’s reluctance to ‘share’ its sovereignty with others. Intra-EU organizational constraints may be one of the main culprits in this regards. The EU is such a cumbersome entity that its foreign policy cannot truly reflect outsiders’ input to a large extent. The Byzantine negotiations between Council and Commission are so complex and time-consuming that adding input from external partners could potentially make the process interminable. The trend has rather been that the Commission has told partner countries: ‘this is the offer, take it or leave it’ (cf. Gomez 2003) and basically insisting on the application of the EU’s own existing departures – understood as the only conceivable basis for commonly agreed norms (Gomez 2003).

In sum, the EU’s collective agenda – multilateral regionalism, multi-sectoral cooperation and interventionism – have had a hard time resonating with southern Mediterranean countries. The formulas employed by the EU have been perceived as serving European preferences and as too blunt and too ‘European’ for local circumstances and mindsets. Moreover, little on the EU’s offer has managed to address the principal concerns of the countries in the Mediterranean area.

4. The EU collective agency at work in the Baltic Sea

The Northern Dimension was introduced as a concept on the EU agenda by Finland in 1997. The Finnish ambition behind the First Foreign Minister Meeting in Helsinki in 1999 had been to create a sort of Barcelona Process for the Baltic Sea, but this idea did not prosper. The much more modest Northern Dimension instead centers on seven issue areas, ranging from freedom, justice and security, economic cooperation to culture and health. Still, the Northern Dimension was portrayed as sufficiently broad and multi-dimensional both draw the Baltic Sea closer to European structures as well as to provide a clear political added value for dealing with the majority of sources of instability in the area.

In 2006-07, the Northern Dimension Initiative was given a new procedural footing in the form of a 'Northern Dimension Policy Framework Document' which is a permanent agreement, drawn up with the full participation of the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia. The Northern Dimension now grants all four parties the same rights of agenda-setting, supervision and decision-making, and the framework policy can only be amended by consensus of the four partners. Although the Northern Dimension is now considered the 'regional expression' of the EU-Russian Four Common Spaces, the initiative does not dovetail fully with the four spaces and thus remain autonomous in at least two sectors (environment and health). Moreover, the Northern Dimension does not count on its own budget-line, but obtains EU funds for its activities and from a number of sources. Iceland and Norway have not experienced greater problems in fitting into the Northern Dimension framework. Russia, in contrast, has had clear difficulties in responding positively to the EU's collective agency in the Baltic Sea area at different levels.

The *multilateralization* of Baltic Sea relations precedes the launch of the Northern Dimension and has its origins in the different Baltic Sea cooperation initiatives launched in the late 1980s to early 1990s. However, it is important to note that without the European Union's

involvement and support, the region would not have coalesced.⁸ Russia would at first welcome the multilateral cooperation in the area, seeing it as a regional stabilizing element for the domestic and foreign policy changes it was undergoing after the fall of the Soviet Union.⁹ However, instead of finding strength in multilateral cooperation, the Russian Federation has increasingly found it debilitating. The other Baltic Sea states' economies grew at spectacular rates from the mid-1990s until the global financial crisis set in, much as a consequence of the opening up of the region as a trading space. In contrast Russia's economic recovery was during the same period uneven and economic growth would only set in when global energy prices soared between 2003 and 2008. Moreover, the 1999 Northern Dimension, as well as other EU-supported political initiatives in the area (e.g. the Council of the Baltic Sea States, CBSS), exposed Russia to the multilateral dynamics of coalition-building and negotiation among partners, something which Russian officials were relative newcomers to in the 1990s. The Russian expectation of the Northern Dimension had been to be able to decisively influence the terms of cooperation given its condition as the largest player. However, instead Russia has had to share the agenda-setting of the various Northern Dimension Action Plans with the EU and its smaller Baltic Sea neighbors. The result of such dialogues has not always been according to Moscow's preferences and Russia has for this reason felt more constrained than helped by the multilateral framework. Moreover, on strongly held Russian preferences, such as for example the situation of the Russophone population in Estonia and Latvia, as well as the status of Kaliningrad, Moscow has not always felt the support it has been looking for from the EU and its Baltic Sea partners. The result, in the view of Russia, has thus been more a situation where the other Baltic Sea states have found regional multilateralism beneficial to alleviate their politico-economic inferiority of size and number vis-à-vis Russia, but regionality has proved to provide little added value for resolving the more deep-seated problems with northwest Russia. For this reason Russia has had a hard

⁸ The EU was a founding member of the various regional initiatives linked to northern Europe, such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States or the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.

⁹ Russia would, for the same reason, itself propose the launch a host of smaller regional cooperation formats elsewhere in the fringes of the former Soviet space from the mid-1990s on.

time to concur with the Union's firm belief that regional cooperation is beneficial to all parties involved and no solid ground for regional multilateralism involving has thus ensued. Perhaps for this reason, observers note that the vision of a dynamic Baltic Sea region is more a question of non-Russian cooperation in the region, a notion which lies behind the 2009 strategy to launch a Baltic Sea Initiative involving only EU-members (Pabriks, Bildt 2007).

In terms of *multi-sectoral cooperation*, Moscow has set off alarm bells in regards to the EU's lack of 'institutional reflexivity' (Bicchi 2006: 288). The Union's use of 'roll-around model' in interaction with virtually all neighboring partner countries (Flaesch-Mougin 2001: 69) has been disturbing to Kremlin. Russia has, in particular, come to rebel against the Europeaness of the multi-sectoral formula alleging that the EU-promoted political objectives, economic development and culture serves the Union's interest more than Russia's own.

In the political sphere, the Northern Dimension tried to foment a pragmatic, technocratic sectoral cooperation among the countries of the Baltic Sea region. Nevertheless, the Union has still not been able to overcome inter-state friction in the region to put cooperation on a solid footing (Browning, Joenniemi 2004). Instead Baltic Sea partners have grown increasingly testy in their relations to each other since 1999. Russian bilateral tension with Poland (whether over beef or missile defense), the Baltic States (borders, minorities and a Baltic foreign policy critical of Russia) or with Sweden (for Swedish Foreign Minister Bildt's critical remarks in the aftermath of the August war) remain an obstacle. Such negative stereotyping has slowed ongoing cooperation in the area and undermined the needed confidence-levels to embark on new collaborative pursuits. Arguably, while the EU's effort of breaking down traditional negative Self-Other depictions between the Baltic Sea states is to be welcomed as such, what the Northern Dimension experience indicates is how difficult functionalist distension is to achieve in practice. Thus, although the Northern Dimension is a staple on the EU's agenda and likely to remain so for some time, some of the more profound aspirations pertaining to the initiative have made scant progress, and to some extent have perhaps even been sidelined altogether.

In the economic sphere, the EU has promoted in its relations with Russia through the Northern Dimension the same liberal formula as it has with Mediterranean partner countries. However, the profound disagreements between the EU and Russia in this regard have frozen attempts at greater economic cooperation in the Baltic Sea area. On its part, a self-assertive Kremlin has defended its 'right' to economic specificity, whereby the modernization of the Russian northwest is increasingly seen as necessarily passing through a stage of increased state interventionism into the Russian economy. The Russian government currently does not link the economic development with social prosperity (as the EU would), but rather with the country's economic greatness and global power ambitions. Moreover, Putin's government has put the Russian ambition to join the World Trade Organization on hold, and has argued that "[t]he [Western] developed countries were dominating the institutions of world trade in an 'inflexible' manner, even as their own share of the global wealth is diminishing." The then Russian President, now Prime Minister, has also alleged that the world needs a "new architecture of international economic relations based on trust and mutually beneficial integration," which Putin envisions to be based on regional economic areas – rather than on global institutions – centered on emerging market economies like Russia, China, India and Brazil (International Herald Tribune 2007). Whatever the merits and feasibility of such proposals, the statement starkly reflects the Russian unease with the EU approach.

In the cultural sphere, it can be argued that the launch of the Northern Dimension per se has not made much of a notable impact on these pre-existing patterns of cultural referents and identity markers in the Baltic Sea region. In terms of Russia the Union's collective agency is tempered by the noticeable pride over the Russia's heritage. This Russian sentiment is perhaps further stimulated by the nationalistic discourses which have emanated from Kremlin in recent years with aspirations to recover the historical greatness of their nation. This could perhaps explain the noticeable irritation in Russia when faced with discourses of the EU, or one of its member states, where the Union sets itself up as a model for Russia to be emulated (Emerson *et al.* 2005). As Wennersten (1999: 280; cf Neumann 1999) has noted, in such a narrative Russia is seen as the student, learning from the Western states in order to become one of

them. Adding to the Russian exasperation is the fact that certain EU discourses seem to entail that the European Union equals 'Europe', i.e. that the EU somehow has a monopoly on deciding who is European and who is not and has assumed the political direction of the European continent. The EU appears to imply that Europeaness, alongside notions of geographical and cultural affinities, requires the fulfillment of certain political and socio-economic conditions as well. Wennersten (1999: 280-1) notes that "[t]urning its back on communism and embracing capitalism has not automatically made Russia either Western or European", for want of fulfilling requisites in terms of the implementation in full of market economy and democratic principles, as well as human rights being honored in practice as well as in principle. The implications of it all is that the EU seems to consider itself at a higher state of social evolution from where it looks down on Russia, much to the latter's dismay. Such polarized identity constructions hence impede close cooperation on many cultural (and other) fronts.

The final aspect to be considered is *interventionism*. Most EU neighboring partners are essentially opponents of any evolution of international society which involves a dilution of the concepts of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination. Russia, in contrast, favors the principle of interventionism. However, there is a crucial difference with what the EU stands for in this regard. If the Union sees its collective agency on interventionism as universal and as legitimized by the international order and the UN, Russia strongly advocates the idea that interventionism should be a matter left to coalitions of regional players. Along this vein, Russia would be at the apex of the regional order deciding what type and under what circumstances interventionism should be applied. This was one of the strongest rationales for Russian advocacy for revamping the Northern Dimension in 2006. Henceforth, the Union's insistence on political standards derived from alleged universal values (e.g. health or environmental norms) can in other words only be legitimate in Moscow after having been object of negotiations in the Baltic Sea area or in bilateral EU-Russia relations. Russia has, in other words, no understanding for the dynamics of the EU's "this is the offer, take it or leave it" and wants to be in full control over the developments within the Northern Dimension. Nevertheless, it is also worth noting that, on the whole, Russia would like the Northern

Dimension to stop trying to ‘pool sovereignty’ on normative matters altogether. The Russian government has therefore set in a diplomatic offensive “to reduce the issue of values in the framework of negotiations with Europe. It is about avoiding that these moral and political concerns take up the majority of [EU-Russian] discussions, to the detriment of the mass of economic and commercial interests, mutually bearing substantial benefits” (Vinatier 2006: 12; Nikitin 2006). Russia would, in other words, like the Union to abstain from its insistence on values and norms given that such conditionality are seen in Kremlin as “being overly intrusive and basically demanding Moscow’s full capitulation in the face of Europe” (Haukkala 2005).

It can therefore be argued that the EU’s collective agency – regional multilateralism, multi-sectoral cooperation and interventionism – has failed to resonate positively with Russia. The EU’s offer of leadership, as well as imposition of standardized, multilateral relations, has not been welcome in Moscow. Moreover, to Russia, many of Russia’s most urgent concerns with its northwestern oblasts have not received satisfactory attention from the Union and its member states.

5. Conclusion

The EU’s foreign policy identity in relations to neighboring countries is constructed on a set of positive self-attributions – stemming from the EU’s own integration experiences and organizational logic – of what the Union and its member states can contribute to in international relations. However, the argument here is that the EU has failed to resonate with its neighboring partners as a consequence of a lack of successful adaptation/modification of Self to fit the social context. The EU’s international identity stems, in other words, largely from a self-styled identity construction which inserts itself in the two regional contexts discussed here with little reference to, or social communication with, the preferences and identities of its partners. This raises the specter for that the EU’s foreign policy identity in the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea stem more from the EU and its member states’ enthusiasm for the abstract idea of a common European foreign policy than providing a solid base for collective action. The lack of identity fit is at the heart of the ques-

tion of why the Union does not enjoy more good-will from these countries in spite of its allegedly innovative, postmodern ways. This also explains why the EU's international identity has become an obstacle for cooperation with these neighboring countries.

Neighboring partners' grievances on the EU's collective agency in the past decade can be summed up as being too utilitarian, too European and too intrusive. The regional multilateralism is resented for its failure to look after the best interest and preferences of the individual, rather than assuming that the utilitarian group-logic is at all times superior. The lack of individualized attention has meant that many partner countries have not experienced the much needed improvement in their political or economic situation in a globalizing world. The multi-sectoral approaches appear to EU's partners as more about looking after European interests, especially security and trade protection, and favor European cultural practices, rather than a positive-sum game for all. Finally, the EU's penchant for interventionism into the internal affairs of a neighboring state is a sensitive matter for partner governments for how it limits on a state's freedom to act and for its implications on the sitting regime's legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.

The EU's collective action is thus controversial with neighboring partner countries. The pertinent question then becomes: are there then any short term hopes that the EU may reform its collective agency and better adapt its identity to neighboring Others and consequently ease the obstacles for today's cooperation? The institutional innovations inherent in the UfM and in the Northern Dimension Framework Document point to attempts to modify the Union's way, in particular in reference to allowing the neighboring partners a greater say over agenda and evolution of the framework policies. However, there are also underlying structural factors which might make this more egalitarian partnership propositions tenuous. The EU will still have to concert its views internally, lest the notion of a European foreign policy is completely abandoned, and hence the 'take-it-or-leave-it' dynamics of the past decade is going to be difficult to overcome. Moreover, in terms of the EU's promotion of regionalism and its conditionality whether in terms of democracy and human rights or insisting on environmental standards have become such pillars of the EU's international identity that compromising

much on these principles might unravel the whole concept of the European collective agency and an EU foreign policy. The EU will, for these reasons, probably continue to experience difficulties in making true headway in cooperative relations with non-candidate neighboring countries in the Mediterranean and the Baltic Sea in the short term.

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