EU External Relations after the Eastward Enlargement:
Complications and Bypasses to Greater Engagement with the Eastern ENP Countries

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Introduction

In the literature on enlargement, a common theme that emerges is its use as an element of EU external relations, but that its use has feedback effects upon the union itself. Indeed, changes in membership alter the interests and priorities of EU external relations, as well as changing the structure of decision-making in the Union itself. With a growing emphasis in the academic literature upon the EU as an international actor with a distinct legal character, defined interests, and in possession of some substantial inducements for other international actors, such as access to the Single Market, these changes in its interests and priorities, as well as how it decides upon pursuing them are significant. Considering as well that the EU is often considered a transformative power, these changes in the focus of EU external relations may have important implications for countries in its neighbourhood.

Problematic in this literature, however, has been an inattention to some of the subtleties and asymmetrical effects of these changing dynamics. Indeed, much of the recent literature has focused upon how enlargement fatigue and the lack of credible accession prospects for European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) countries has limited the EU’s influence abroad. Certainly, enlargement fatigue has been an important consequence of the eastern enlargement, and the resulting absence of accession prospects certainly limits the tools available to the EU.

However, this obsession with enlargement becomes problematic when one considers that the stock of candidate countries is finite, with the implication that the academic literature must now engage with enlargement in more circumscribed terms, i.e. in terms of the few remaining ‘hopefuls’, rather than as a broad field. Similarly, while
the eastern enlargement has brought a distaste in the EU for further enlargement in
general, differences in the mix of interests, and decision making-dynamics as a result of
new membership can be expected to affect any future enlargement and relations with
different countries unevenly, a subtlety less prominent in the current literature.
Conversely, the portion of the academic literature concerned with detailed casework has
been insufficiently attentive to how the eastern enlargement has affected EU external
relations more broadly. This paper aims to address these gaps in the academic literature
by bringing together detailed casework on relations with the eastern ENP countries and
work on EU external relations and decision-making more broadly.

This paper will focus upon changes in members’ behaviour in the EU’s relations
with countries covered by the ENP following the eastern enlargement, with special
emphasis upon the role of Poland in the EU’s relations with Ukraine. Certainly, this
paper will touch upon issues with Belarus and Moldova, but Ukraine’s size, economic
weight, strategic importance, and stable, if sometimes unsavoury political system have all
made for closer scrutiny, with the implication that data on the country’s ties to the EU has
been more forthcoming than with Belarus and Moldova. For the same reasons, closer ties
to Ukraine would have larger implications for the European Union and for other countries
in the EU’s neighbourhood, making a study of EU-Ukraine relations more pressing than
with the other two.

On the other hand, while Poland is exceptional among the Central and Eastern
European Countries (CEECs) for its weight in the EU, its preferences for greater eastern
engagement, and the ways in which it pursues them are, by most accounts, typical of the
EU’s new eastern membership. At the same time, Poland has been the centrepiece of
collaborations with the other eastern members, as well as older EU members on relations with the eastern ENP countries, making it the ideal window into these interactions between members on external relations.

The paper is structured as follows: it will investigate firstly how a larger membership complicates decision-making on agreements with neighbour countries. In the second section, it will explore how these complications are less onerous in dealings with the EU’s eastern neighbours because of the influence of the CEECs, and how the focus of these decisions can be expected to shift eastward as a result. In the final section, it examines the ways in which the influence of the new membership on external relations, and hence their eastward focus, has much potential to grow, concluding with a discussion of the broader implications of this changed dynamic in EU decision-making.

This paper argues that as enlargement has shortened the list of countries to which the EU has made strong commitments on membership, the normative entrapment or rhetorical mechanisms that facilitated its dealings with accession countries will not be at work in dealings with other neighbours, nor address complications that arise in decision-making with a larger and more diverse membership. This results in strategic behaviour by EU members, coupled with more laboured decision-making that has come with the addition of more members, which can be expected, in general, to hinder and complicate the EU’s external relations.

However, because the new membership brings ties to eastern non-EU members, specifically Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, and crucially, votes, consults, and builds coalitions in favour of closer ties to these eastern neighbours, complications from enlargement should be far less pronounced in the EU’s eastern policy than in its dealings
with other ENP countries. Finally, while a number of authors have cited the relative weakness of EU’s contingent of CEECs in external relations, as compared to older members, such as France, a number of the limiting factors that they cite may well be transitory, rather than permanent. This means that while their influence over external relations has much potential to grow, so too does the eastern focus in external relations that they so favour. In closing, this paper discusses the broader implications of this eastern bias in EU external relations, arguing that while greater attention on its eastward neighbours should not be conflated with greater receptivity on the neighbours’ part, the presence of the CEECs may help alleviate some of the inconsistencies in the EU’s approach to these countries that have traditionally limited its effectiveness.

**Heterogeneous Membership and Laboured Decision-Making in External Relations**

Firstly, while a number of authors explain the Eastern expansion as the result of prior EU commitments, following the accession of the eastern members, the EU has no such commitments outstanding with most ENP countries. This section will argue that at the same time as clear norms and rhetorical action will not be present to facilitate integration with ENP countries, new membership diversifying the EU’s interests complicates the resulting strategic behaviour by members on external relations. This has the effect, in general, of making EU decision-making more laboured.

Elaborating his concept of rhetorical action into ‘rhetorical entrapment’ (2001), Schimmelfennig argues that states still pursue national interests, but channel them through EU norms (2009, 502), which can favour closer ties with non-members whose behaviour and past EU commitments resonate with EU norms. This may serve to commit
norm-bound member countries to courses of action that may defy a more narrow reading of their interests. However, this entrapment requires favourable external conditions, and EU norms that are determinate, i.e. that are clearly stated, providing unambiguous prescriptions, and that are ‘relevant’, or salient in the EU’s dealings with a given country (Thomas 2009, 346). In his earlier work, Schimmelfennig (2001) argued that these norms and the resulting rhetorical entrapment were crucial to explaining the opening of accession talks with what are now the EU’s eastern members, despite the incongruence of expansion with the preferences of several member governments.

As Youngs points out, however, no such norms exist in the EU’s dealings with most ENP countries. Indeed, in most cases, no clear commitments on EU membership were ever made to ENP countries, which, as Youngs (2009, 371) points out, results in strategic behaviour by member governments towards these countries, rather than the norm-bound cooperative behaviour that resulted in closer ties to several CEECs and their eventual accession. Certainly, normative entrapment played a role in EU support for Orange Revolution in Ukraine, but Youngs insists that this spoke to EU norms on promoting democratization, which does not extend to closer ties, to say nothing of accession (2009, 373). He notes elsewhere that openings such as the Orange Revolution have been rare in any case, and hence, that decision-making by Member States on EU policy towards Ukraine have been driven by strategic calculation, and not constrained by EU norms (Youngs 2011, 45)

Moreover, the short time since the accession of Poland and the other CEECs has not been sufficient to affect EU norms on external relations (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 305). All of this is to say that towards the EU’s eastern neighbours, and most of the ENP
countries besides, the sorts of norms that helped facilitate closer ties and eventual membership for the CEECs are either absent or ill-defined. This carries the implication that for the foreseeable future, members’ decision-making will continue to be bound by strategic calculation, rather than facilitated by norms.

At the same time as the pre-requisites for rhetorical entrapment are not present in the EU’s dealings with most of its neighbourhood, the recent rounds of enlargement have complicated the decision-making process governing the EU’s external relations. Indeed, where new initiatives, such as partnership agreements and the like require Council approval, absent the catalyst of rhetorical entrapment, a larger and more diverse membership makes gaining this approval far more difficult. With this in mind, Zimmer, Schneider, and Dobbins point to more complex voting patterns because of the more heterogeneous interests represented in Council votes. They also point to the more ad hoc nature of Council coalitions on matters of external relations as a result of a larger membership (2005, 415). Also complicating matters are the sheer number of possible coalitions for various initiatives. Where member consent is a necessary condition for EU action, one can expect decision making in general to be more fractious, inconsistent, and labour as a result of the eastward expansion. Indeed, as members can be expected to behave strategically (Youngs 2009, 371), these considerations become especially pertinent in the EU’s dealings with its neighbours.

Similarly, Zimmer, Schneider, and Dobbins add that at the same time as decision-making has become more complex for the European Union, the new members have tended to favour greater protectionism in trade, which often manifests itself in a preference for more regulation (2005, 415), a point echoed by Elsig (2010). This means
that the larger acquis that results makes legal harmonization far more challenging for countries seeking to deepen their ties with the EU. It also means that one of the more enticing incentives available to the EU in its dealings with non-members, i.e. access to the Single Market, is less appealing to target countries than it might be otherwise, while the protectionist impulses at the root of this development mean that it will be offered less willingly by the EU in any case.

In sum, the eastern enlargement greatly reduced the number of external countries with whom the EU has well-defined norms. This means that the rhetorical entrapment that so facilitated dealings with the new members is largely absent, while the additional members themselves have also made the strategic behaviour that has resulted far more complex. Indeed, the heterogeneity of new interests introduced into Council voting, as well as a preference for more and increasingly elaborate regulation complicates both the EU’s ability to make decisions about its external relations, and makes the harmonization that is so central to EU conditionality increasingly difficult.

**CEEC Preferences and Bypasses to Enhanced Eastern Ties**

Secondly, while the complications and lack of favourable norms governing EU external relations following enlargement may be a hindrance to EU external relations in general, the new membership brings preferences and a willingness to collaborate that alleviate some of these difficulties in the EU’s dealings with its eastern neighbours, but not necessarily with other ENP countries. This section will argue that while the addition of new members has made EU decision-making more cumbersome in general, these
difficulties are far less pronounced in its dealings with the eastern ENP countries in particular.

Certainly, a number of authors are correct to point out that the eastern expansion has been a key contributor to recent enlargement fatigue (e.g. Ganzle 2009, 1717), and still others for pointing out that the lack of credible accession prospects limits compliance with EU conditionality. However, not only does the eastern enlargement bring fresh geopolitical considerations for the EU as a whole, but the EU’s new members also bring with them a specific, and crucially, a shared interest in greater engagement with the western Newly Independent States (NIS), specifically Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova (Dangerfield 2009, 1739). This means that to the extent that they pursue these goals consistently, and are willing to collaborate in pursuit of them, the more laboured decision-making that can be expected to accompany a larger membership should be less pronounced on issues relating to the EU’s eastern neighbours. Indeed, under these conditions, the heterogeneity of interests and weak, fractious coalitions that hinder EU decision-making more broadly should be less salient in its eastern policy, and hence, less of an impediment to it.

For instance, trade ties to the EU’s eastern neighbours are particularly strong among the Baltic countries, Poland, Slovenia, Romania, and Hungary (Dabrowski 2011, 188). In addition to deep trade ties with its non-EU neighbours, particularly Ukraine, Poland’s poorest regions are in the east, and would be the largest beneficiaries of closer ties with its neighbours (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 312). Indeed, although this dynamic is particularly pronounced with Poland, this is also the case with some of the poorer regions of Romania and Hungary (Eurostat 2012, 2). Similarly, while several of
Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria’s other poor regions border Serbia (Eurostat 2012, 2), its potential accession means that in the longer term, at least in external relations, they will not compete with eastern border regions for policy makers’ attention. With all of that said, Fritz cites in particular limits on cross-border activity under Schengen as being especially restrictive to economic growth in these border regions (2005, 205). With this in mind, where deeper trade ties are one of the objectives of their dealings with their eastern neighbours, one expects the protectionist impulses that the CEECs display in the EU’s dealings with other ENP countries to be far less acute as well.

Similarly, a number of authors cite common experiences in the 20th century as contributing to Polish preferences for closer ties with the NIS. Indeed, Dabrowski highlights the common experience of communism in the 20th century, but also the common experience of inclusion in the Russian empire prior to the First World War, along with cultural and linguistic linkages between several eastern EU members, Poland chief among them, and some of their neighbours (Dabrowski 2011, 186). Thinking along these lines, Szymanski finds common experience behind Polish promotion of Bulgarian and Romanian accession despite questions over the extent of their compliance with the convergence criteria (Szymanski 2007, 553).

Furthermore, while she sees them as overblown, Fritz cites concerns among the CEECs that their divergence from the NIS may constitute a new partition of the region (2005, 193), while Dangerfield adds that in security and border control in particular, new members bear the worst of ill-considered eastern policy (Dangerfield 2009, 1739). This dynamic is particularly acute in migration policy, for instance. Indeed, as migration across the EU’s eastern border has grown substantially, contra concerns in mature
Members States about immigration, many irregular and illegal migrants from the EU’s eastern neighbours, for geographical, cultural, and linguistic reasons settle in its eastern members (Dabrowski 2011, 189). This has the implication, firstly, that these countries bear the worst of the EU’s limited success in collaborating with the CIS on migration, and, secondly, that these countries have a strong, and crucially, a shared interest in pursuing visa agreements and other avenues for legal migration with these countries (Dabrowski 2011, 189).

With all of this in mind, Szymanski points out that Polish elites tend to favour Ukrainian accession more than older members (2007, 549-50), while Dangerfield adds that many of the new members share these preferences (Dangerfield 2009, 1739). In other words, with their goals of deeper ties and the opening of accession talks with the EU’s eastern neighbours, the CEECs certainly add a new flavour to the interests acting upon EU external relations.

All of this creates compelling incentives for active involvement in EU foreign policy making, as well as concertation to that end by the new members. Crucially, a number of authors have cited these preferences behind Polish Council voting and coalition-building on external relations. Indeed, Poland has been extremely active in Council in promoting ties with Ukraine, even if this has become more challenging after the 2006 Ukrainian elections (Szymanski 2007, 551), and doubtless more difficult still following the most recent presidential election. Nonetheless, Poland has responded to these setbacks by pushing for greater incentives for compliance and the opening of membership talks with Ukraine as a means of consolidating the gains of the Orange Revolution (Youngs 2011, 45). Indeed, Youngs notes that while these proposals meet
with strong opposition from Germany, the compromise solution saw Ukraine being offered more of the acquis (Youngs 2011, 42). Similarly, while they have been far less active in promoting closer ties to Turkey and the Balkan states (Szymanski 2007, 556), in fact, Poland in particular has attempted to use the Turkish accession talks as a precedent for opening similar discussions with Ukraine (2007, 552).

Just as importantly, the new member states’ shared interest and willingness to collaborate on deepening engagement with eastern neighbourhood countries defies the fragmentation that would otherwise be expected with a larger membership. Indeed, contrary to the fractiousness that might be expected among member governments on relations with other ENP countries, the new members have had a degree of success in collaborating among themselves to influence the EU’s external relations. Thinking along these lines, Dangerfield, for instance, cites the example of the Visegrad group, which was originally created by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia to coordinate their progress towards EU accession, but which has been converted to promote closer ties to other NIS countries (Dangerfield 2009, 1737-8). This group has been found pushing for closer eastern ties than envisioned under the ENP, as well as encouraging the accession aspirations of Ukraine in particular (Dangerfield 2009, 1741), and pushing for enhanced incentives for these countries, such as greater access to the Single Market, and fewer travel restrictions. This push to allow a large neighbour such as Ukraine greater access to the Single Market is even more striking when one recalls the more protectionist bent of most CEECs. Interesting as well is the fact that proximity and trade ties mean that offering these incentives alone serves the interests of the EU’s eastern members.
Moreover, Dangerfield points to the Visegrad group’s facilitation of the Eastern Partnership as one of its most important achievements (2009, 1742), notable in particular for its inauguration despite French and German uneasiness. Furthermore, at the same time as the group has lobbied for a more comprehensive eastern strategy, it actively collaborates with NIS countries, with information sharing and bilateral exchanges intended to facilitate compliance with EU conditionality.

Similarly, while new member states have been keener to engage with Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova, and keen to collaborate among themselves, Youngs points out that Poland in particular has had a degree of success in building coalitions in favour of enhanced eastern engagement with older members (2009, 362-3). Indeed, despite a high-profile split with Germany over a 2006 veto of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 313), on policy towards Ukraine, Poland has had success in coordinating with Austria and the UK, as well as the Nordic countries (Youngs 2009, 362-3). All of this means that not only has enlargement brought new interests and pre-made coalitions in favour of greater eastward engagement, but that they do also resonate with the interests of some existing EU members. Indeed, one wonders whether these interests of these older members would have found expression in EU policy absent the support of the EU’s eastern membership.

In brief, defying the fragmentation and laboured decision-making that would be expected to mark relations with other ENP countries, the common interest in greater eastern engagement among the CEECs redresses some of the challenges in Council voting and coalition building that have accompanied enlargement, at least when addressing relations with the EU’s eastern neighbours. With respect to Ukraine, these
countries have enjoyed a degree of success in collaborating both with each other, and with older EU members on deepening ties. All of this means that the challenges of an expanded membership should be less pronounced in relations with Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus than with other neighbourhood countries. This has the implication that they can be expected to be the focus of more EU external agreements than other partner countries than would be the case absent the EU’s eastward enlargement.

The CEECs and their Relative Influence Upon EU External Relations

Finally, at the same time as the CEECs’ preferences for greater collaboration with the NIS and ability to collaborate towards this end have helped avoid fragmentation on the EU’s eastern policy, a number of the limitations upon the eastern members’, particularly Poland’s influence upon EU external relations may only be transitory. To the extent that these are redressed over time, this has the implication that the eastward focus of EU external relations stands to grow. As Zimmer, Schneider, and Dobbins point out, in influencing EU policy, the status of a member in the union is a key consideration, with their status as a net contributor or net recipient of funding playing a role (2005, 417), as well as the member’s relative voting weight, intensity of preferences, policy capacity, and ability to collaborate with other members.

As Copsey and Pomorska have noted, Poland in particular benefits from its relative size and voting weight in the EU, as well as the high intensity of its preferences on eastern external relations (2010, 311). By many accounts the latter is common among the CEECs. Furthermore, all of the major Polish parties favour deepened ties with eastern non-members, making for only small changes in Poland’s position between
elections (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 312-3). At the same time as the preferences of the major Polish parties on eastern external relations have been very consistent, Copsey and Pomorska point out that this is not necessarily the case between elections in countries cooler on engagement with the east. Indeed, they find Poland often at odds with Germany and France, although they are also quick to note that Sarkozy had been far more sympathetic than his predecessor, for instance (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 319). Similarly, Polish public opinion mirrors elite views on both Ukrainian accession and deepening ties between the EU and its eastern neighbours (Szymanski 2007, 556), which would seem to suggest that there is electoral advantage for Polish political parties in opposing closer engagement with Ukraine.

However, a number of authors have noted that in influencing the EU’s external relations, the CEECs, Poland chief among them, struggle with building coalitions with France and Germany, as well as with weak administrative capacity. Indeed, the experience of accession and the implementation of the acquis have not improved the efficiency of Polish bureaucracy as expected, while the interactions of the Polish bureaucracy and the European one has been described as a case of ‘culture shock’ (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 314-15). Similarly, poor coordination between Polish line departments also limits its administrative capacity (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 315), along with chronic staffing issues, notably a generation gap between new staff and remaining pre-1989 hires (316-7). These difficulties coincide with challenges in recruitment (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 316-7), and the slow absorption of Polish administrators into the Brussels bureaucracy (Peterson 2008, 771). At the same time, Poland has struggled with framing its preferences in terms of community interests.
(Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 317), while others’ lack of experience in dealing with it, and an overly adversarial style of the previous Polish government have served to isolate the country at times (2010, 318). Indeed, Copsey and Pomorska conclude by arguing that on all these measures, an older member such as France is likely to be far more influential, pointing to its success in promoting the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as a for instance (2010, 320).

However, a number of these hindrances to Polish influence upon EU external relations are described as ‘variable’ by Copsey and Pomorska. Indeed, at the same time as Poland’s lack of economic clout limits its influence (2010, 311), both its economy, as well as those of a number of CEECs have tended to post far higher growth rates than the mature economies of the EU’s older members. This point has been underlined since 2008, where despite challenging circumstances, the Polish economy has consistently outperformed those of more mature EU members, and where the outlook on its sovereign debt has been far more flattering.

Furthermore, brisk economic growth among the eastern members, Poland chief among them, has deepened German integration with these eastern economies, and brought with it greater German interest in the east (The Economist, February 4 2012). Certainly, while Germany's position on further enlargement has not changed, this does suggest that it will at least be more sensitive to some of the economic implications of the EU's eastern policy, which are felt particularly acutely by the very economies with which its trade ties are deepening. Indeed, stagnation in several economies to its west and even graver economic conditions to its south seem likely to accentuate this trend.
Similarly, Copsey and Pomorska highlight a number of reforms, both completed and attempted upon the Polish bureaucracy intended to improve coordination. At the same time, they cite staffing issues, rather than administrative culture as one of the chief limitations upon Polish administrative capacity, with the implication than many of the current issues surrounding generation gaps in its upper ranks will be addressed by retirements in the coming years. Furthermore, while they note that Polish administrators have had difficulty dealing with the Brussels bureaucracy, they attribute this to 'culture shock', rather than incompatible administrative cultures (2010, 315), which does strongly suggest that these administrative linkages likely stand to improve with time. Indeed, overcoming this 'culture shock', as well as the gradual movement of recent Polish additions to the Brussels bureaucracy into more senior positions also stand to deepen these administrative links.

Furthermore, at the same time as Germany has been a consistent opponent of further enlargement, bearing the brunt of its financial outlays, being squeamish about resulting immigration, especially under the CDU, and bearing far fewer costs from troubles on the EU’s eastern borders now that they no longer coincide with Germany’s own, much blame for low Polish credibility with Germany is placed upon the Kaczynskis. Indeed, Copsey and Pomorska note a marked degradation in Polish relations with Germany in particular during their time in office (2010, 318). Certainly, this is not to dismiss the role of policy legacies, but the tone of the Kaczynskis' successors has been more conducive to collaboration with other Member States on the EU’s eastern policy. Similarly, while a number of authors have noted Polish struggles in framing issues persuasively, i.e. in terms of community interests, they have also observed that Polish
representatives are beginning to improve in this respect (Copsey and Pomorska 2010, 317).

In short, while a number of authors have identified traits that limit the influence of the CEECs, particularly Poland, upon the EU’s external relations, a number of these traits, such as economic weight and administrative capacity are considered variable. Indeed, rapid economic development in the CEECs should begin to address the former, while changes to the public service in Poland, and to the Polish contingent of the Brussels bureaucracy, although proceeding slowly, all favour greater influence by eastern members over EU external relations. At the same time, party preferences and public opinion consistently favour deeper eastern engagement in Poland, which now has a government which is less erratic in acting on these preferences. This has the implication that while these shortcomings have traditionally hampered the influence of the CEECs upon the EU’s external relations, they also leave much scope for redress, with the likely effect of increasing the eastern focus of EU external policy.

**Implications**

Thus far, this paper has argued that the changes that the eastern enlargement brings to decision-making in the EU should contribute to an eastward shift in its external relations. This section argues that the eastward enlargement and the resulting attentiveness to the NIS are likely to deepen the EU’s differentiated approach to its neighbours, and may also help redress the EU problems with ambiguous goals, and the weak incentives it extends to achieve them. Certainly, this is not a guarantee of success
in its dealings with its neighbours, but these changes do help redress some of the self-imposed limitations upon the EU’s eastern relations.

At the same time, these developments do suggest a deepening of the EU’s differentiated approach to its neighbours. Indeed, while the CEECs have been most keen to indulge and promote the accession aspirations of eastern neighbours, chiefly Ukraine, some of the more substantial advances in European external relations with other neighbourhood countries, particularly the Union for the Mediterranean explicitly rule out eventual membership, a point that some authors find has soured relations with these southern neighbours (Ozcurumez and Bolukbasi 2011), and which do suggest limits on the degree of possible integration between the EU and this set of neighbours. Recalling Dangerfield’s point that the CEECs’ continued interaction with western NIS countries serves to strengthen bilateral ties (2009, 1744), and the reluctance of the CEECs to explicitly rule out eventual accession by these countries suggests that closer eastern relations driven by the new members may have feedback effects which would encourage still further engagement with eastern ENP countries, but which are not present in relations with southern ENP members. Considering how several Mediterranean countries’ prospects for making progress on the democratic and human rights indicators stressed by EU conditionality have improved dramatically as a result of the Arab Spring, in contrast with developments in Ukraine and Belarus, the irony is cruel indeed.

Furthermore, while the EU has deliberately avoided making commitments on accession in its dealings with ENP countries, one wonders whether these deepening ties to the east, as well as active support by the CEECs for opening membership talks with the eastern ENP countries might make the opening of talks more likely, the Balkans excepted,
in the east than elsewhere. With this in mind, while the European Neighbourhood Policy initially took a similar view of future expansion as the UfM, Dangerfield also points out that this was because it was designed by the EU-15 prior to the eastern enlargement, and doesn’t reflect the influence of the new members (2009, 1739). At the same time, the fact that the Visegrad group, for instance, in drawing a distinction between ‘neighbours of Europe’, whose integration with EU it does not promote, and ‘European neighbours’ who it does, suggests that very different assumptions about the ‘neighbourhood’ underlie EU-12 sponsored initiatives (Dangerfield 2009, 1741). This is especially striking in light of this paper’s argument that these initiatives stand to be relatively more prominent in the EU’s external relations.

Furthermore, the policy implications of these differing assumptions may have crucial and unintended consequences for the EU’s response to current events. Indeed, the EU-15’s explicit ruling-out of accession for Mediterranean neighbours would seem to suggest limits to the depth of its willingness to engage with them, and the credibility of its long-term commitments to them. By contrast, the unwillingness of the EU-12 to rule out accession for the eastern neighbours would seem to suggest that despite the gravity of events in North Africa, these changes seem unlikely to alter this pattern of greater eastern engagement in EU external relations.

Moreover, while the EU struggles with credibility problems and with limited receptivity by neighbourhood countries because of a lack of clear accession prospects for these countries, Dangerfield in particular has pointed out that the bilateral ties between the CEECs and these eastern neighbours have helped redress problems with receptiveness, particularly with respect to Ukraine (2009, 1744). Interestingly, these exchanges have
helped to deepen the sort of bilateral ties between the CEECs and their eastern
eighbours (Dangerfield 2009, 1744) that help account for their interest in deeper
engagement in the first instance. In other words, this interest in deepening ties with the
eastern ENP countries, and the ways that the new members pursue them are mutually
reinforcing. This would seem to suggest room for further strengthening of both CEEC
preferences for closer ties with their neighbours at the expense of engagement with other
ENP countries.

Certainly, none of this is to suggest that holding the continued attention of the EU
necessarily alleviates the internal problems, many of them quite substantial, which have
hampered the progress of these eastern neighbours on EU conditionality in the past.
Indeed, needless to say that successful deepening of formal ties through the meeting of
EU conditionality depends very much upon factors outside of the EU’s direct control, and
even authors with the most optimistic outlook on Ukraine’s compliance, for instance,
note the significant internal complications working against compliance with EU
conditionality (E.g., Fritz 2005, 207). Indeed, despite the optimism immediately
following the Orange Revolution, halting progress on compliance with EU conditionality
and erratic balancing of relations with the EU and Russia are more the rule than the
exception for a succession of Ukrainian governments (Pentland 2007). The same may be
said of Belarus, whose internal and external politics perpetually leave it closer to
sanctions than closer cooperation with the EU (Pentland 2007: 130), despite growing
interest in engagement on the part of the European Union since 2008-9 (Bosse 2009, 216).
Such is the lack of receptiveness on the part of Belarus that Bosse go so far as to suggest
that it challenges the hitherto accepted notion in the academic literature than the EU’s ability to extend its rules and norms is a given (217).

Nonetheless, while increased attention should not be conflated with increased cooperation and successful engagement, the influence of the CEECs does help redress some of the pathologies in the EU’s approach towards its eastern neighbours. For example, Pentland notes that weak membership prospects have consistently placed limits on Ukraine’s receptiveness towards the EU’s overtures, even before the 2004 enlargement (Pentland 2007, 140). Similarly, Dabrowski summarizes the position held by many in the field that the effectiveness of the ENP has long been limited by weak incentives and exacting expectations placed upon NIS countries for reforms and cooperation (Dabrowski 2011: 195). Bosse notes as well that, Belarusian intransigence aside, relations with Belarus have been hampered by an incoherence in the EU’s goals, with persistent clashes between its strategic-economic goals and its normative-ideational ones (219), and nor are relations with Belarus unique in this respect. Certainly, the opening of accession talks with Ukraine, or Belarus and Moldova for that matter, seems unrealistic in the foreseeable future. However, it is noteworthy that the CEECs have consistently worked in favour of opening talks, and show no signs of relenting on EU membership for these countries.

Furthermore, short of open accession talks, the CEECs have pushed consistently for greater incentives to be offered to their eastern neighbours. Certainly, offering incentives such as improved market access and concessions on visas likely benefit these members as much as their neighbours. Nonetheless, where they succeed in translating this impulse into EU policy towards their eastern neighbours, the CEECs’ influence may
help address the problem of weak incentives offered to the eastern ENP countries. At the same time, where for the rest of the EU, integration with these countries is seen as a means towards confused ends, the CEECs’ preference for closer ties as an end of itself does lend an element of clarity in the EU’s eastern policy that would otherwise be absent.

Briefly, the changes in EU decision-making dynamics as a result of the eastward enlargement carries the likely implication of deepening the EU’s differentiated approach to its neighbours, with its eastern neighbours being the beneficiaries of greater EU attention at the expense of its southern ones in particular. Moreover, while greater attention by the EU should not be confused with greater success in its eastern policy, greater coherence and a preference for more generous incentives do help address some of the traditional shortcomings of the EU’s eastern policy.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, while the eastern expansion can be expected to complicate the EU’s relations with neighbour countries because of more complex interactions between members, and because it has explicitly avoided the sort of commitments that might lead to rhetorical entrapment, this can be expected to be less of a hindrance to the EU in its dealings with Ukraine in particular, but also Moldova and Belarus, than with other ENP countries. Indeed, the CEECs bring a strong preference for enhanced ties to these countries, and have had a degree of success in collaborating amongst themselves to this end. This simplifies the strategic behaviour necessary to facilitate ties between the EU and these countries, while a number of the shortcomings faced by the CEECs in
influencing the EU’s external relations are classed as ‘variable’, suggesting far more scope to influence policy in future.

All of this means that the preferences and collaboration of the new members bypass a number of difficulties that they introduce into the EU’s external relations, so long as they centre upon its eastern neighbours. Hence, the eastward enlargement of the EU encourages an eastward shift in EU foreign relations by introducing complications that hamper decision-making in general, but not in dealings with the eastern neighbours in particular.

In closing, while this paper has argued that attempts at deepening engagement will be more frequent as a result of the eastern enlargement, this is not necessarily to say that these engagements will be fruitful. Nonetheless, it does suggest that more generous incentives will be applied to encourage compliance with EU conditionality, that the measures of its success will be more clearly defined, and that greater scrutiny and responsiveness to its failures will characterize the EU's external relations with its eastern neighbours in future.
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