

Introduction

ANDRÉ BARRINHA¹

Is the European Union (EU) a civilian power, a military power, or is it a normative power? What exactly is the European Union? Many authors have been trying to answer that question especially in the last few years with the increase in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) activities. One of the major cornerstones in this development was the approval of the European Security Strategy in December 2003, which establishes the basis for EU action in the world within a securitised framework.

As developed in the chapter written by Ana Isabel Xavier, Daniel Pinéu, and João Reis Nunes, the EU's approach to its security is more than an attempt to solve paramount problems; it is an attempt to define its own identity. The stability of its neighborhood comes, therefore as a fundamental step to promote its own security. In order to accomplish that, the EU needs to develop a whole range of relationships with different actors in different countries. Relationships which might cut across different interests and have contradictory goals. For instance, how can

¹ Co-ordinator of the 'Conflicts, Peace and Democracy', Circle of Social and Political Reflection (CIRES), Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Lisbon).

stability be promoted hand in hand with the EU's normative vision of human rights and democratisation promotion? Which should come first?

The goal of this book is to contribute to these discussions with some new critical insights, focusing on the EU 'actorness' issue, especially in regard to its relationship with the neighborhood². With the exception of the first chapter and the conclusion, the most of the authors does not directly approach the 'actoners' issue. Nevertheless, one way or the other it will be present in all the chapters. In effect, the basic argument that runs through the whole book is that whatever the EU is or wants to be in the world, it is in the relation with its closest neighbors that it must assume its position first.

Russia and the European Neighborhood Policy

Russia was chosen as the first case study of this book, for a specific reason: it is the EU's biggest and most powerful neighbor. In "Two unequal partners: the EU and its Russian neighbor", Maria Raquel Freire highlights the ambiguous relation between Brussels and Moscow. A relation that is seen as one of increasing cooperation but where mutual (in)security perceptions occasionally bring back old fears and resentments. The 1990s idea of a strong Europe enlarging its zone of influence to areas previously under the tight control of Moscow, in face of a weak and defeated Russia, is increasingly losing ground to a relationship between two less-unequal actors. In any case, the common interest in a stable, shared vicinity is a strong factor that obliges both the EU

² Here understood as the geographical space surrounding the EU and not necessarily just the countries that participate in the European Neighborhood Policy.

and Russia to work together, eventually towards a strategic partnership.

An issue further complicating the relationship between both actors is the European Neighborhood Policy, as it stretches all the way to the Russian borders and includes several countries previously under the close control of Moscow. The European Neighborhood Policy was developed in 2004 to promote stability and democracy among EU's neighbors. This policy involves countries from Eastern Europe (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus), South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), and South Mediterranean (Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria). The basic tools of this policy are the Action Plans, documents defined between Brussels and each partner country. Each document provides a tailor made program that includes a broad range of issues, from economic measures to the fight against terrorism.

In this book, there will be three chapters related to the ENP: one related to South Caucasus, another one related to Western Sahara, and a third one focusing on the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

In the chapter on the South Caucasus, Licinia Simão discusses the new EU strategic priorities for Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, underlining the reasons that led Brussels to increasing the attention given the South Caucasus: instability, frozen conflicts and energy resources.

In a text written by Rui Novais, the conflict in Western Sahara will be offered as a good example of how the EU image of a common policy for its neighborhood sometimes collides with distinct interests of its member states, making it look weak and incapable of responding to conflict situations that should be a priority, in order to make its security policy minimally coherent.

When talking about EU inaction, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes as a case in point. The most intractable and relevant conflict in its vicinity has been used for years as the ultimate proof

of the EU's 'non-existence' as a prominent international actor. In this chapter, Ana Santos Pintos will explore the consequences of that 'secondary role' both for the conflict and for the EU's own identity.

Outside the European Neighborhood Policy, inside the EU?

The Balkans and Turkey were not included in the ENP as it was thought they would be able to join the EU in a relatively short time span. As a consequence, the EU's influence has in both cases been more largely felt than in other already mentioned examples.

The Balkans are usually presented as the ultimate example of EU's foreign policy activity. Nonetheless, as Pedro Caldeira Rodrigues explores in his chapter, the current problem regarding the Kosovo status could be the beginning of a new period of instability in the Balkans, placing the EU at the centre of a new crisis which it might not be able to deal with. In that case, the 'Balkans example' could end up as another foreign policy disaster for Brussels.

Though far from being a disaster, the EU relationship with Turkey is turning into a strong headache for both sides. In the only chapter dedicated to a EU candidate state, the focus will be on the EU's export of security practices and discourses to Turkey within the accession process. Turkey's reaction in face of those external pressures and the consequences for the relationship between Ankara and Brussels will also be explored.

Beyond the near neighborhood

Moving beyond the EU's vicinity, Laura Ferreira-Pereira, focuses on the implications of the EU strategy for Africa. Following

the pattern applied to its 'near' neighborhood, the EU seems determined to promote Africa's stability as a way of promoting its own security. Africa comes as the next step in the EU increasingly affirmative role in the world. Finally, in the concluding chapter, Bruno Cardoso Reis discusses how relevant that role is and how relevant it is for the EU to play a significant role in world affairs.