The European Union as a Normative Power and Conflict Transformation in Moldova: A "Force for Good"?

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Abstract

European Union (EU) elites frequently refer to EU norms and values and tend to see the EU as a 'force for good' in conflict situations. The 'frozen conflict' between the Moldovan central state and the separatist Transnistrian region has caused 'soft' security problems in the EU's immediate neighbourhood and has increasingly engaged its attention. This article examines how the EU as a normative power can affect conflict transformation in Moldova. The theoretical framework that guides the analysis assumes that the EU can influence conflict transformation through the mechanisms of integration and association. The key argument is that the EU can have an impact on conflict transformation in the case of Moldova, but it does not use its full potential.

Keywords

Moldova; Normative power; Conflict transformation

THE 2004 AND 2007 EASTWARD ENLARGEMENT BROUGHT NEW CHALLENGES IN THE European Union's (EU) immediate neighbourhood. On the EU's eastern border, Moldova had been involved in a so-called 'frozen conflict' with Russian-backed separatists in Transnistria since 1992. A short civil war in Transnistria on the eastern Moldovan border took place. Although Transnistria declared *de facto* independence from Moldova, it has not been internationally recognised. The principal and decisive battle in Bender on June 19-21 ended with the intervention of Russian forces. In July 1992, the Moldovan president Snegur and Yeltsin signed an agreement in Moscow, providing for an immediate cease-fire and the creation of a demilitarized zone extending 10 km from the Nistru on each side of the river. Moreover, the agreement included a set of principles for the peaceful settlement of the conflict. The principle of withdrawal of Russian forces in Moldova was also acknowledged in the 1992 agreement. However, while the Russian forces in Chisinau were withdrawn within two years, the 14th Army stationed on the left bank remained. It has been contested ever since whether or not withdrawal should be linked to a political settlement. Numerous rounds of negotiations concerning the withdrawal have been held, but so far, Russia has refused an unconditional withdrawal of its 'peacekeeping' forces in Transnistria. Furthermore, the disagreement on fundamental questions and uncertainties in domestic Moldovan and Transnistrian politics have created a 'frozen conflict' situation (see Barbé and Kienzle, 2007; OSCE paper, 1994; Roper in Schmidtke and Yekelchyk, 2008; Vahl and Emerson, 2004).

Being situated less than 100 km from the border to Romania, the conflict is geographically the closest one to the EU and it poses a number of security challenges, especially non-military, 'soft' security issues. First of all, the separatist Transnistrian region has turned into a hub for organised crime, including illicit trafficking in arms, people and drugs (Popescu,

2005; Barbé and Kienzle, 2007). Secondly, the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria is controversial because it further complicates the conflict. The military presence of Russia in Transnistria is not welcomed by Moldova (Barbé and Kienzle, 2007: 523). Moreover, the Russian military involvement remains a locus of tension in the EU-Russia relationship, as Russia is eager not to permit the EU to become too influential in the region due to strategic and prestige reasons (Popescu, 2005; Barbé and Kienzle, 2007). Thirdly, Moldova is already one of the poorest countries in Europe and the unresolved conflict weakens its chances to make political and economic progress. A settlement of the conflict would both mitigate the soft security challenges and at the same time possibly assuage an irritant in EU-Russia relations (Popescu, 2005: 43). Due to the fact that the conflict in Transnistria has developed into a more or less non-violent, frozen conflict, there is no apparent urgency for the EU to become more involved and the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, the framework for EU-Moldovan relations, did not explicitly include a security dimension (Barbé and Kienzle, 2007: 523). Nevertheless, especially with the 2004 enlargement, the EU has shown an increased interest in the Transnistrian conflict. Although the Transnistrian conflict does not constitute the most salient problem for the EU, it has seen the greatest EU involvement, in comparison to other post-Soviet secessionist conflicts, such as the ones in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh (Popescu, 2009: 461).

Various studies have been carried out concerning the EU's lack of a stronger CFSP engagement in Moldova (see for example Popescu, 2005; Barbé and Kienzle, 2007). Yet little attention has been paid to the EU's involvement in Moldova from a normative power perspective and research on this topic is scarce. Niemann and de Wekker have analysed the extent to which the EU constitutes a normative power in its relations with Moldova (Niemann and de Wekker, 2010). This article focuses on how the EU as a normative power can affect conflict transformation in Moldova, and whether political conditionality as a primary modality of implementing normative power can be considered an effective tool of conflict transformation. Is the EU setting standards rather than using military or other force? EU actors tend to see themselves and the EU as a whole as a 'force for good' in conflict situations and, generally speaking, as a normative power in world politics (Diez and Pace, 2007: 2). In the ENPI National Indicative Programme for the Republic of Moldova it is stated that:

> [a]s a global player, the EU promotes its norms, values and interests through various instruments [...]. In particular, the EU strives to promote prosperity, solidarity, security and sustainable development worldwide (ENPI National Indicative Programme 2011-2013, Republic of Moldova: 7).

The EU's involvement in Moldova is especially interesting, because the accession of Romania in 2007 has brought the conflict close to the EU's borders Moreover, the Transnistrian conflict is claimed to be the most solvable one of the conflicts in the EU's neighbourhood, because the conflict is neither embedded in ethnicity nor history, but rather in contemporary politics (Popescu, 2005: 5; see also Roper in Schmidtke and Yekelchyk, 2008). Thus subject positions could be expected to be easily transformed. In this article, the link between the EU as a normative power and its conflict transformation strategies in the Moldovan region will be examined. The issue will be approached as follows: first of all, a theoretical framework combined of two concepts - *normative power Europe* and *conflict transformation* - will be presented. Secondly, a brief review of EU-Moldova relations will be given. Thirdly, the EU's approach towards conflict transformation in Moldova and Transnistria will be analysed. The empirical findings of this case study are mainly based on official documents and newspaper commentaries and are supported by secondary sources.

Normative power Europe and conflict transformation

The analysis of the EU's foreign policy and external relations has undergone a shift from a 'hardware' dimension focusing on military aspects to a 'software' dimension including norms and beliefs (Lucarelli and Manners, 2006: 1). A range of scholars have started to focus on the images, principles and values of the EU and the way in which they shape the discourse and practices of the EU's external relations (Lucarelli and Manners, 2006: 1). It is widely discussed if the EU can be conceived as a normative power and Manners' initial concept has become a target of extensive criticism. Yet, this article will not focus on the question whether the notion of the EU as a normative power is empirically accurate, but rather whether the self-construction of the EU as a normative power affects the EU's role in conflict transformation. In this context, it is more interesting to see to what extent the EU is regarded as setting standards rather than using military or other force (Diez and Pace, 2007: 4). The concept of normative power Europe, put forward by Ian Manners, implies the idea of a power that is able "to shape conceptions of the 'normal' in international relations" (Manners, 2002: 239). The normative power argument stems from the social constructivist tradition, as it focuses on the power of norms to influence actors' behaviour (Diez, 2005: 616). It is important to consider, that normative power can go alongside other forms of power, such as military or economic power (Manners, 2002; Diez 2005). Yet, the concept of normative power stands out through ideas and values and is neither military nor purely economic. Power in this case becomes an effect of norm leadership and persuasion (Diez and Pace, 2007: 1). Manners has identified five core norms which compose the normative basis of the EU: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights (Manners, 2002: 242). The notion of the EU as a normative power is a discursive construction rather than an objective fact and this discursive construction leads to a form of identity of the EU against the image of others (Diez, 2005; Diez and Pace, 2007). The discourse of the EU as a normative power constructs a particular self of the EU, attempting to change others through the spread of certain norms (Diez, 2005: 614). Power in this context is an ambiguous concept. First of all, power can be understood as a property of a relationship. Second, power can also be seen as a property of the entity associated with the stronger position in the relationship. Hence the EU can both exert normative power and be a normative power (Diez and Pace, 2007: 4). To shape conceptions of the normal and change others through the spread of certain norms are relevant aspects when it comes to conflict transformation efforts.

A conflict is defined as the incompatibility or antagonism of subject positions with different identities or interests (Diez, 2003:1). In the case of Moldova, the situation is often described as a 'frozen' conflict. The term 'frozen conflict' implies a violent conflict over secession, with the secessionist party being militarily successful. Yet, the military outcome is neither recognized by the losing party nor by the international community. Thus the conflict remains unresolved (Nodia, 2004: 1). The term 'frozen' conflict is often criticized, as the situation cannot be considered fully frozen, since there can occur minor changes, either concerning agreements or smaller acts of violence (Nodia, 2004: 1). Discourses of identity are often involved in border conflicts and these discourses construct an identity of a particular group against the Other (Diez, 2003). To achieve lasting peace, the perceived incompatibility of the parties involved needs to be transformed. Conflict transformation is defined as the *transformation of subject positions from incompatibility/antagonism to compatibility/tolerance* (Diez, 2003: 1). Despite a possible persistence of the conflict, successful conflict transformation implies that "the way in which actors see themselves and relate to each other will have been transformed to such an extent that they will not resort to violent means, and ideally will change their identity so that conflict is fundamentally altered" (Diez and Pace, 2007: 3). Thus, the conflict does not necessarily have to be resolved, but the opposing identities have to be transformed into a state of mutual acceptance.

In the area of conflict settlement or conflict resolution, there are two different dimensions of a possible EU involvement. First of all, the EU can act directly as a third party mediator. Secondly, the EU's institutional context can provide a framework for conflict resolution in two ways - within the EU's institutional context, integration or association can be used as means to achieve conflict transformation. The EU with its multilevel system of governance could provide an institutional and symbolic framework, supporting the articulation of multiple identities (Coppieters et al., 2004; Diez, 2003; Miall, 2007). The institutional setting of the EU can serve as a model for resolving constitutional dilemmas related to secessionist conflicts (Diez and Pace, 2007; Coppieters et al., 2004). New institutional options and incentives offered by the EU could potentially lead to a redefinition of the interests and identities at the heart of the conflict.

Diez et al. (2006; 2008) have suggested four different pathways of EU impact on conflict transformation. The first possible pathway comprises a direct influence through the mechanisms of integration and association, also referred to as the carrot and stick model. Through its policy of conditionality the EU is able to put its norms and values at the centre of its relation with third parties. EU conditionality primarily follows a rationalist strategy of reinforcement by reward (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004: 661). Especially the prospect of membership, the EU's main carrot, can motivate the conflicting parties to change their policies. However, this path requires the desire of the conflict parties to become an EU member. The second path implies the idea that political actors within conflict parties can link their agendas with the EU. References to EU integration may justify desecuritising moves that otherwise may not be considered legitimate: "if EU membership or association is widely seen as an overarching goal, actors can use the legal and normative framework of the EU to substantiate their claims and delegitimise previously dominant positions" (Diez et al., 2008: 27). The third path focuses on strengthening the contact between the conflict parties, often through financial incentives. The aim of this path is to form social networks across conflicting parties and to stimulate identity change. Within the fourth path, it is suggested that the EU indirectly can contribute to a (re-) construction of identities through creating new discursive frameworks. The EU can serve as a model for multiple and overlapping identities.

Yet, these four pathways are closely connected to the EU's reputation among other parties and thus the self-construction of the EU as a normative power has to be taken into account when assessing the EU's influence on conflict transformation. If the normative power construction is shared by a conflict party, a positive effect can be expected, as it becomes more likely that the conflict party follows EU advice or takes integration experiences as an example (Diez and Pace, 2007: 4). If the construction is not shared by conflict parties, a negative effect can be expected, as the EU's role in international politics is challenged (Diez and Pace, 2007: 4).

The suggestions presented above pose some empirical difficulties. First of all, concerning the carrots and sticks offered by the EU, it is rather difficult to measure whether the conflict parties really are persuaded by EU norms or if they act driven by strategic interests. Sharing the construction could be used superficially to achieve more carrots, but this does not necessarily have to transform the underlying beliefs concerning the conflict. Hence, the direct involvement of the EU in form of carrots and sticks may only have short-term effects. Furthermore, when it comes to the impact of the EU as a normative power on conflict transformation and the normative power debate in general, the involvement of other actors is rarely taken into consideration. The relation between the EU and conflicting parties cannot be isolated from other states, such as the United States, or Russia, or other organisations, such as the UN or OSCE. The interests and positions of other third party mediators cannot be ignored when analysing the impact of the EU as a normative power on conflict transformation, and the international context has to be taken into account.

Since political conditionality enables the EU to put its norms and values at the centre of its relation with third parties, it can be seen as a primary modality of implementing normative power. In light of the 2004 enlargement, the EU Commission has developed a policy towards the EU's new neighbours - the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The ENP was designed as a framework for privileged relationships with neighbouring countries, without offering the prospect of membership. It is stated on the EU's website that

> [w]ithin the ENP the EU offers our neighbours a privileged relationship, building upon a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development) (European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy).

Thus, essentially, the ENP is a process of norm diffusion in the European "near abroad" (Parmentier in Laïdi, 2008: 105). The EU's norm diffusion within the ENP is mainly put into practice through the strategy of conditionality (Gstöhl in Orbie and Tortell, 2009: 72). As stated in the EU Commission's European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper: "The ENP will reinforce stability and security and contribute to efforts at conflict resolution" (ENP Policy Strategy Paper, 2004: 4). Yet, it has been argued that the ENP generally lacks a conflict resolution dimension (see Panainte, 2006; Popescu, 2005). While the ENP is a Commission-driven policy, crisis management falls under the scope of the Council (Popescu, 2005: 10). Hence the Commission's contribution to conflict resolution is restricted to conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation (Popescu, 2005: 10). Considering the ENP, it can be expected that the EU is setting standards rather than using military or other forces, and that the first path of EU influence has an impact on conflict transformation in Moldova. This article focuses on the mechanisms, especially political conditionality, through which the EU tries to transform conflicts based on its normative power. It is rather the potential than the actual impact of EU conflict transformation that will be analysed, because a range of initiatives have been recently launched and results remain still to be seen.

EU-Moldova relations

In the early years of independence, Europe and the European Union played only a limited role in Moldova's domestic political discourse, because the new state was preoccupied with other issues, such as the Transnistrian conflict and the transition to democracy and a market-based economy (Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 21). It was first in the late 1990s that Moldova expressed its interest in EU integration (Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 19). Yet, the EU has been unwilling to consider Moldova as a potential membership candidate and the Transnistrian conflict did not constitute a salient problem for the EU either. "The Transnistrian conflict remained far down the list of concerns of the EU and its member states in the early 1990s, and direct EU involvement was never seriously considered" (Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 18).

The 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the framework for EU-Moldovan relations which first entered into force in 1998, included mainly economic cooperation and did not comprise a political or a security dimension (Barbé and Kienzle, 2007; Vahl and Emerson, 2004). The PCA only encompassed vague commitments and a limited scope for the use of EU conditionality (Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 19). With the Eastern enlargement, bringing Moldova closer to the EU, the EU became more interested in Moldova and the Transnistrian conflict, as it could have a direct impact on the EU. It was first with the enlargement that the EU showed a greater willingness to enhance its engagement with Moldova (Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 20). The enlargement turned the Romania-Moldova border into an EU-Moldova border and the EU has "realized that conflict management in Transnistria may not only be in the interest of Moldova but affects mutually Moldovan and

European interests" (Barbé and Kienzle, 2007: 526). Thus, since the EU first got more involved when direct consequences for the EU became apparent, it could be argued that conflict transformation only becomes an important issue for the EU if strategic interests are involved.

Although Moldovan political leaders repeatedly applied a rhetoric of European integration, in practice Moldova did not introduce any reforms and the PCA commitments were not implemented either (Barbé and Kienzle, 2007: 22). After the 2001 parliamentary elections, analysts expected Moldova to further integrate into the Russian zone of influence, because the Moldovan Community Party (PCM), which had received more than 50 percent of the votes, outlined pro-Russia policy changes (Roper in Schmidtke and Yekelchyk, 2008: 80). Yet, a policy reorientation from Russia towards the EU could be observed and Moldova increased its diplomatic and economic relations with the EU. With this reorientation a steady increase in public support for EU membership has come along (Roper in Schmidtke and Yekelchyk, 2008: 80).

After the 2005 parliamentary elections, in which a PCM majority was returned, EU-Moldova relations have intensified and, in February 2005, the ENP Action Plan for increased economic and political cooperation was signed (Popescu, 2005; Roper in Schmidtke and Yekelchyk, 2008). On the official website of the Moldovan Government it is stated that "European integration is an irreversible strategic objective of the foreign and domestic policy of the Republic of Moldova" (Republic of Moldova, Official Website, European Integration). Thus, since EU membership or at least association is seen as an overarching goal by the Moldovan political authorities, it can be expected that political conditionality enables the EU to put its norms and values at the centre of its relation with Moldova and exert influence on conflict transformation.

EU conflict transformation in Moldova

As previously mentioned, the EU has expressed an increased interest in the Transnistrian conflict. The EU-Moldova ENP Action Plan foresees a "shared responsibility in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. One of the key objectives of this action plan will be to further support a viable solution to the Transnistria conflict" (ENP Action Plan: 1).

Yet, although further support for a viable solution of the Transnistrian conflict is one of the key objectives of the action plan, there are no concrete measures to be found and, apparently, references to a direct involvement of the EU are avoided. In the five-sided negotiations between Moldova, Transnistria, Russia Ukraine and the OSCE on the status of Transnistria the EU is only involved as an observer (Barbé and Kienzle, 2007: 532; see also Popescu, 2005). Even though the EU has appointed a Special Representative for Moldova in order to ensure a better coordination and consistency of external actions, it has been "very reluctant to use more forceful policy instruments at its disposal, in particular sanctions and crisis mechanisms" (Barbé and Kienzle, 2007: 532 f.). "This focus also results from the reality that direct crisis management is more controversial than prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation within the EU and with partners such as Russia [...] who are weary of greater EU involvement in conflicts where they have important interests" (Popescu, 2005: 10). Thus, as the EU is reluctant to use its CFSP dimension in the case of Moldova, the focus has to be shifted to conflict transformation from a normative power perspective.

The EU and its possible contribution to a solution of the Transnistrian conflict have become increasingly prominent in the Moldovan political discourse. In a speech to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in September 2003, President Voronin stated that:

> [w]e believe that moving towards the European Union and introducing European standards is also the main way of integrating our society, a method of uniting the country and resolving the persistent Transnistria problem (Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2003).

According to Voronin, it is only on the basis of European principles and the best traditions of European integrity that Moldova will be able to restore its state integrity and to overcome the serious consequences of nationalism and separatism (Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2003). Voronin refers to characteristic European principles, such as linguistic and cultural diversity, and the protection of minority rights. Joining the EU is not merely based on the geographical claim that Moldova belongs to Europe, but "our main premise is that our country's place is with those who share fundamental European values of human rights and freedoms and of proper social and national development" (Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2003). As suggested in the theoretical framework, the EU with its multilevel system of governance provides an institutional and symbolic framework, supporting the articulation of multiple identities. In an interview conducted by Euronews, Moldova's Prime Minister Vlad Filat also refers to Moldova's commitment to European values: "We aim to put ourselves in the unique sphere of the European Union's values" (Euronews, 2009). According to an EU-funded Opinion Polling and Research Project carried out across countries benefiting from the ENP, 83 percent of the interviewed opinion leaders and 81 percent of the general public found that the EU helps the promotion of democracy. Moreover, a strong majority of the interviewees think that the EU can help to bring peace and stability to the country and the region. The main finding of the survey – a baseline study of 103 opinion leaders, followed up by an opinion poll questioning 400 members of the general public, was a "strong affinity of values with the European Union" (ENPI Info, 2010). Core norms, such as democracy, peace and human rights, as identified by Manners, are referred to as being European values by Moldovan officials. The self-construction of the EU as a normative power is shared by Moldova, since European norms have become the main standard to strive for, and a positive effect of EU involvement can be expected, as it becomes more likely that the conflict party follows EU advice or takes integration experiences as an example. According to the political discourse in Moldova, in which the importance of 'European values' is stressed, EU integration can contribute to conflict transformation, as it will make Moldova more attractive and thereby catalyze reintegration. The Deputy Prime-minister of the Republic of Moldova, Victor Osipov, has recently presented Moldova's approach towards Transnistrian conflict settlement in a lecture held at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington D.C. In his lecture, Osipov emphasised the importance of European integration for Moldova's reintegration:

> Achieving economic growth and welfare and cardinal democratic transformations through the European integration of Moldova will increase, without doubts, the attractiveness of the right bank for the left bank population and thus catalyze reintegration (Victor Osipov, 2010: 5).

The combination of European integration and state reintegration is also to be found in Moldova's foreign policy objectives, and in the priorities for medium term development recently published by the Moldovan government (see Republic of Moldova, European Integration; Government of Moldova, 2010). Thus, European integration is used as a strategy towards conflict resolution. This strategy arises from Moldova's weakness as a state and its lack of attractiveness. The ideological support for Transnistrian independence is mainly based on economic arguments, as there is no ethnic argument to the conflict (Popescu, 2006: 9). The Transnistrian economy benefits especially from trade, legal but mainly semi-legal and illicit (Popescu, 2006: 3). Transnistria's claims to have a stronger economy than Moldova does not reflect reality, but it is an instance of 'imagined economy' (Popescu, 2006) The belief that the "entity lives better, or would live better than the state it

wants to secede from, and not actual economic facts, mobilises populations in favour of secessionism" (Popescu, 2006: 10). In reality, Transnistria is slightly poorer than Moldova. However, Moldova does not offer an attractive alternative for the Transnistrian population to support reintegration. Following the first path of EU impact on conflict transformation, mechanisms of integration and association have set standards that, first of all, have transformed Moldova's policies, and, secondly, are expected to transform Transnistria too, as soon as results in form of a more attractive Moldova can be seen. However, this underlying assumption in Moldova's strategy towards conflict resolution is problematic, because it is not given that a more Europeanised Moldova will become an attractive target for Transnistria. Moldova shares cultural ties with Romania, while Transnistria is strongly influenced by Russia (Vahl and Emerson, 2004: 6). Thus the relation between the EU and conflicting parties and its impact cannot be isolated from other states, in this case Russia, and it could be argued that the EU's ability to shape conceptions of the normal and change others through the spread of certain norms is dependent on at least a certain degree of cultural affinity.

Practically, the spread of norms is implemented through political conditionality. The main priorities identified in the Action Plan cover sustained efforts towards a viable solution to the Transnistrian conflict; the strengthening of institution guaranteeing democracy and the rule of law; ensuring respect for the freedom of media and the freedom of expression; reinforcing administrative and judicial capacity, and cooperation on economic and regulatory issues aimed at poverty reduction, to strengthen private sector led growth and for fiscal sustainability (ENP Action Plan). Although Moldova has made substantive progress in most areas of the Action Plan, weaknesses with regard to the state of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights including media freedom and minority rights, the fight against corruption, and the issue of trafficking in human beings are repeatedly highlighted (ENPI, National Indicative Programme 2011-2013: 5). As stated in the Commission's National Indicative Programme for the Republic of Moldova (NIP), "[t]he last Country Evaluation and experience on the ground since 2007 suggest that Moldova has not always been an easy partner when it comes to technical and financial cooperation" (ENPI, National Indicative Programme, 2011-2013: 10).

Although EC assistance has helped to advance policy formulation in key Action Plan areas, there are hardly any tangible outcomes to be observed. The Commission has identified a disappointing private sector development, underdeveloped export potential to Europe, growing but modest Foreign Direct Investment, and the persistence of corruption (ENPI, National Indicative Programme, 2011-2013). According to the NIP, "Moldova made no or only limited progress in the effective implementation of key priorities under the EU-Moldova Action Plan" (ENPI, National Indicative Programme, 2011-2013: 6). Thus, the rhetoric of EU integration is not properly followed up in practice. The commitment of the Communist government to Europeanization remained largely declaratory (Vahl, 2005: 6). This can be explained by the fact that conditionality within the framework of the ENP does not include the prospect of membership - the EU's golden carrot. EU conditionality towards ENP countries is more permissive than it was in relations with the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) that had the prospect of membership: "if the EU wants to reward partial progress in certain areas, the country may infer that lack of progress in other areas is acceptable" (Kelley, 2006: 36). Moreover, it could be argued that, in the absence of a membership perspective, adaptation costs might be too high and the incentives offered by the EU, on the other hand, not appealing enough for the Moldovan authorities to comply with EU conditions (see Schimmelfennig, 2005). Thus, although political conditionality is theoretically considered to be an effective tool of conflict transformation, in practice, in the case of Moldova it is rather ineffective. It has been argued that the Action Plan is too 'thick' on Moldova's commitments and too 'thin' on EU responsibilities (Popescu, 2005: 38). Additionally, the rewards offered by the ENP in

response to compliance with EU rules are long-term and vague (Panainte, 2006: 29). While the EU is able to put its norms and values at the centre of its relation with third parties through its policy of conditionality, it runs the risk of conjuring the image of a normative hegemon imposing its values and principles if it hardly takes any responsibilities. In order to make political conditionality more effective and to avoid the normative hegemon image, the EU needs to show a stronger commitment to Moldova. It should be recognized that EU-Moldova relations are increasingly intensified. During the Swedish Presidency in 2009, Moldova has been at the centre of EU attention. At the Cooperation Council between the EU and the Republic of Moldova, intentions to launch negotiations on an EU-Republic of Moldova Association Agreement in January 2010 have been confirmed (Swedish Presidency of the EU, se2009.eu). According to a Joint Statement of the EU and the Republic of Moldova, the two parties "reiterated their vision of the new agreement as an innovative and ambitious document going beyond the established framework of cooperation and opening a new stage in their relations, notably by enhancing political dialogue and deepening sectoral cooperation" (Joint Statement, EU-Republic of Moldova Cooperation Council, 2009).

The transformation of a country through political conditionality in the absence of a membership prospect may not be as effective as in the case of the CEECs that joined the EU in 2004. The process seems to be more protracted, showing hardly any immediate outcomes. Nevertheless, Moldova has made significant progress and with a new agreement going beyond the established framework of cooperation political conditionality may become more effective. Thus, from a long-term perspective, political conditionality can be considered to constitute a complement to other conflict transformation measures aimed at achieving a sustainable solution to the Transnistrian conflict. Yet, the first path of EU influence through political conditionality gives rise to doubts whether it really is the normative power construction that has an impact on conflict transformation. Although the normative construction of the EU is shared in Moldova's political discourse, it is difficult to measure whether this is due to true conviction. Norms may only be accepted in order to receive material benefits. Kwarciak (2006: 13) points out the danger of EU conditionality: "after a relatively short period of intensive socialization, having received all rewards available, the state may lack incentives to integrate itself more deeply into the normative framework of the community".

Furthermore, the importance of material benefits becomes also apparent when considering other actors being involved in Moldova, such as Russia. As soon as the EU does not offer appealing economic and political benefits anymore, there will always be the possibility that Moldova might return to a pro-Russian foreign policy (Roper in Schmidtke and Yekelchyk, 2008: 94). The opportunity of the EU to diffuse its norms and thereby have an effect upon conflict transformation in Moldova is limited by the influence and interests of other actors, in this case Russia. If there is cross-conditionality, implying that the target government has alternative sources offering benefits, EU conditionality becomes less effective (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004: 666). Russia has a significant influence on Moldova. In 2006, for example, Russia banned wines from Moldova. The wine industry is estimated to account for almost 25 per cent of Moldova's GDP, with 80 per cent of the wine exported to Russia (Kennedy, 2007). Observers criticized the ban as a political punishment for Moldova's intensifying relations with the West (see Chivers, 2006; Kennedy, 2007). Furthermore, Russia uses its energy resources to exert influence on Moldova (Panainte, 2006: 33). Although this does not really correspond to cross-conditionality, "Moldova finds itself entrapped in a highly dependent economic relationship with Russia" (Panainte, 2006: 33). Hence, material benefits trump norms and it becomes more difficult for the EU to diffuse its norms and contribute to the transformation of the country.

Nevertheless, although norm diffusion and transformation is a difficult and slow process in Moldova, it has been shown that the EU as a normative power does have an impact on the country. In the political discourse, the Europeanization of Moldova is considered to be the main way of resolving the Transnistrian problem. Thus, political conditionality is a useful approach towards durable conflict transformation. Yet, it needs to become more effective. Panainte (2006: 33) suggests that "the EU has to increasingly open its market to Moldova and update its institutional ties with the country, which will enhance the effectiveness of its policies and Moldova's Europeanization". Negotiations on a new agreement may be the first step towards this.

The EU's approach towards Transnistria

In the case of Transnistria, the EU hardly applies political conditionality, since "Russia is the only recognized paymaster for the secessionist region" (Panainte, 2006: 32 f.). Nevertheless, in February 2003, the Council adopted a Common Position concerning restrictive measures against the leadership of the Transnistrian region (see Council Common Position 2008). This travel ban on 17 separatist Transnistrian leaders was a response to their unwillingness to support efforts aimed at conflict settlement (Moldova Azi, 2010). In August 2004, the travel ban was extended to a number of people who were responsible for a campaign against the use of the Latin alphabet in Transnistrian schools (Government Offices of Sweden, sweden.gov.se, 2010). In 2009 and 2010 the sanctions were extended for additional 12 months each time. In response to the sanctions posed by the EU, the Transnistrian leadership started to prohibit the entry into the region for Moldovan leadership representatives (Moldova Azi, 2010). Furthermore, in March 2009, over ten EU and other officials were not allowed to enter Transnistria (Moldova Azi, 2010). In 2010, the Council agreed upon to suspend the sanctions for seven months in order to invigorate the settlement process (see sweden.gov.se, 2010; Moldova Azi, 2010). In late September 2010, the Council will evaluate the effects of the suspension and decide whether to continue the sanctions or cancel them (Moldova Azi, 2010). In light of the travel ban, there is a growing scepticism about the EU in the Transnistrian political discourse (Emerson and Vahl, 2004: 24). The Transnistrian Minister of Security controls a range of social organisations and newspapers that is dominated by a discourse of the Moldovan threat (Lynch, 2001:11). "The Ministry of Security conflates an imaginary Moldovan threat with the so-called aggressive Western alliance and the revanchist fascist regime in Romania" (Lynch, 2001:11). Hence the travel ban as an attempt to apply conditionality to Transnistria reinforces the incompatibility of subject positions rather than contributes to their transformation. However, as Popescu argues, sanctions are necessary in order to break the deadlock and make the status quo unattractive. At the same time, incentives are crucial to create a basis for a sustainable solution (Popescu, 2005: 41). As stated in the NIP, "[d]epending on developments during the programming period regarding the settlement of the Transnistria issue, the EC will provide specific assistance, within the overall resources available, for all aspects of conflict settlement and consolidation of the results" (NIP 2011-2013: 12).

In 2009, the EU launched, on a pilot basis, confidence-building projects involving CSOs from both conflict sides (NIP 2011-2013: 11). Funds are allocated to small-scale projects bringing together right-bank and left-bank implementers around shared objectives. These projects aim to increase the access of Transnistrian communities to basic social and economic services, as well as to objective and diversified sources of information (United Nations Development Programme, Republic of Moldova). According to local experts, the Europeanization of business rules, norms and standards in the Transnistrian zone is the most suitable way for reconciliation (Center for Strategic Studies and Reform, 2006). The EU has taken up this approach and confidence-building projects are also aimed at the development of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Transnistrian region. At the

opening ceremony of a Business school in Bender, the Head of the EU Delegation, Ambassador Dirk Schuebel, said that the EU attaches great importance to promote fruitful dialogue and cooperation between Moldova and Transnistria. The EU is not only involved on a political stage, but also at a technical level with very concrete initiatives (EU Co-operation News, November 2010). 15 per cent of the NIP budget is allocated to conflict resolution/confidence-building measures. However, rather than identifying these measures as a priority in themselves, it is suggested in the NIP that they are treated under the other priorities, such as good governance, rule of law, social, human and sustainable development. Funds are allocated to actions under sectoral or capacity-building priorities specifically for the inclusion of Tiraspol de-facto authorities (NIP 2011-2013). These initiatives are recent and their efficiency remains to be seen. Nevertheless, these measures show that the EU's conflict resolution approach in Transnistria is based on setting standards rather than using military force. With its carrot and stick strategy, putting norms at the centre of the relationship with other parties, the EU aims at transforming incompatible subject positions through confidence-building measures.

It has been claimed that the EU could apply a more effective conditionality to Transnistria, since the EU is an important trade partner for Transnistria (Panainte, 2006: 33). The self-proclaimed government in Tiraspol relies heavily on export-oriented production (Vahl, 2005: 3). However, some of the big and older Member States of the EU are not willing to challenge Russia (Barbé and Kienzle, 2007: 534). As Socor has described the EU's style of progress in Transnistria: "too little, very late, inhibited by a Russia-first approach, and with a mandate that seems likely to be restricted by Franco-German objections" (Soco, 2005). This leads us back to one of the main points of criticism in the normative power Europe debate, put forward by Hyde-Price, namely that Member States only allow the EU to act normatively as long as it does not concern their core national interests (Hyde-Price, 2006). Vahl also stresses the willingness of the EU and, especially of some of the large Member States, to sacrifice basic European values in order to facilitate a rapprochement with Russia (Vahl, 2005: 7). Thus, in the case of Transnistria, the EU undermines its own self-construction as a normative power and does not use its potential influence to transform the subject positions. Referring back to Hyde-Price, the structural distribution of power is neglected in the normative power argument and thus the social constructivist approach cannot fully account for the EU's role in conflict transformation.

However, although the EU's involvement in Transnistria may not be so obvious at first glance, it has to be taken into account that normative power instruments in the context of conflict transformation are less bold than military measures. Subject transformation, according to certain norms and values, and confidence-building are a slow processes that require time. The outcome remains still to be seen.

Conclusion

To sum up, due to the EU's institutional setting, the EU is not directly involved in the Transnistrian conflict settlement, because the ENP, the EU's framework for the relations with Moldova put forth by the Commission, lacks a conflict resolution dimension. However, the main hypothesis of this article was that the EU can exert influence on conflict transformation with its normative power. The normative construction of the EU has been adopted by Moldovan political leaders and can be found in Moldova's political discourse. References to further EU integration and the EU's principles and values are even used as a strategy towards Transnistrian conflict settlement. The aim is to make Moldova more attractive and thereby to stimulate a reintegration of the country in order to achieve a sustainable solution. Yet, the rhetoric of EU integration is not properly followed up in practice. Despite some remarkable progress that Moldova has made, there are still considerable weaknesses to be observed when it comes to the implementation of the

Action Plan. This gap between rhetoric and practice shows that political conditionality, the EU's main tool for norm diffusion, is less effective than expected, especially without the prospect of EU membership. Furthermore, considering the conceptualization of the normative power argument, the EU is often presented as isolated from the international context. However, the EU is not the only actor involved in Moldova and, as shown in this article, Russia's influence on Moldova impedes the EU's norm diffusion. In Transnistria the EU does not use its full potential, as it hardly applies political conditionality, even though trade relations with Transnistria provide an opportunity to exert influence. This is, once again, due to Russia's prevalence in the region. Some of the larger member states prioritize their relationship towards Russia over EU principles and values and, thereby, undermine the EU's normative self-construction. Nevertheless, the EU supports important confidence-building measures that aim at bringing together actors from both conflict parties.

As shown in the analysis, there are a number of different factors that exacerbate the norm diffusion and make it a long process. It is not even given that Transnistria will be approaching Moldova, once it has become more attractive. Nevertheless, this is not to discard the transformative power of the EU, as it still has some important value. The EU is setting standards rather than using military or other force. If the EU used its full potential to contribute to the transformation of Moldova and Transnistria, and the first path of EU influence was combined with more active short-term measures directed towards conflict resolution, the EU might become an important actor when it comes to durable conflict transformation in Moldova. Yet, this requires a degree of reflexivity to avoid the normative hegemon image, as well as a comprehensive and consistent position on the country.

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