Multilateralism, Conflict Prevention, and the Eastern Partnership

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Abstract. Although the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) contains a conflict prevention dimension, the Russia-Georgia war demonstrated the extent to which this dimension was underdeveloped, at best, and completely ineffective, at worst. Through conceptualizing multilateralism, this article critically assesses the potential contribution that the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative can make to the European Union (EU)'s impact on creating a climate that is conducive to cooperation and long-term stability. It is argued that the multilateral approach within the EaP certainly offers 'new' potential for long-term prevention. However, it also asserts that to be effective it must address some fundamental weaknesses within its multilateral and bilateral governance processes.

I Introduction

The European Union (EU)'s identity as a security actor has evolved significantly in recent years. The European Security Strategy (ESS 2003) outlined a holistic framework for engagement, with an emphasis on addressing the root causes of conflicts and threats to Europe. As one part of this strategy, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was introduced in order to provide 'stability and security' through bilateral engagement and partnership. However, it has fallen short in many ways, with only partial success in transforming polities and with a minimal effect on the 'frozen conflicts' that exist in the East and South. Parallel policies such as the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative have been constructed in order to inject regional and multilateral dimensions into the EU's efforts for facilitating the movement to an environment where the desecuritization of conflicts might occur and where cooperation and confidence rather than competition and conflict constitute the main *modus operandi*.

The EaP, while initially conceived in May 2008 to strengthen the ENP, was imbued with added importance and urgency following the conflict that erupted between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia in August 2008. This conflict raised concern and many questions about the EU's ability to contribute to conflict

prevention and transformation in the neighbourhood. Moreover, it begged the question of not just how to engage with local conflicting parties but also on how to engage with Russia in such a way as to ensure a certain convergence and synergy of thinking between the EU's vision of a networked, cooperative neighbourhood underpinned by Europe's post-modern normative conception of community and that of Russia, which holds a view (albeit 'ontologically dislocated') of international society still very much embedded within the Westphalian notion of sovereignty, survival, and competition.[1]

The aim of this article is to explore and critically assess the potential contribution that the EaP initiative can make to the EU's impact on creating a climate that is conducive to democratization and confidence building, increased cooperation, reconciliation, and stability. In pursuing this line of enquiry, the emphasis is not on what the EU can do in terms of short-term crisis intervention and management but rather how it can contribute to creating a conflict-reducing milieu within which there is a diminution in the intensity and spread of conflict communication:[2] in other words, where it can contribute in terms of assurance and prevention.[3] The argument in this sense is that the EaP conceptually represents a positive mode of engagement that could lead to transformation in conflict dynamics in the neighbourhood. However, it is further argued that while the EaP represents a change in form (multilateralism), it is likely to suffer from the same problems as the ENP in terms of function because it is based on the same fundamental methods of engagement for inducing change and the 'multilateralism' within the EaP is poorly conceived. Furthermore, for it to be 'effective', the EU cannot simply assume that the linkages between the different dimensions of the EaP, or indeed between the EaP and other policies launched to the East, will grow organically. Indeed, some thought must go into how the EU will ensure an effective mode(s) of multilateral governance and how it will evolve and is eventually implemented, in particular if it wishes to observe any transformative outcome in the eastern neighbourhood. If not, the EaP is likely to suffer the same fate as the now moribund Barcelona Process in the South. The success of the EaP is crucial not only for the effectiveness of the EU as a security actor to the East but also to the evolution of the EU's security strategy that remains, in the words of the Report on its implementation, 'a work in progress'.[4]

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[1] A.S. Makarychev, 'Russia and Its "New Security Architecture" in Europe: A Critical Examination of the Concept, CEPS Working Document 310', <www.ceps.eu>, 2009.

[2] M. Albert, S. Stetter & T. Diez, 'Cycles of Intervention: The European Union and International Conflicts', paper presented at the Garnet Conference 'The EU in International Affairs' (Egmont Palace, Brussels, 2008).

[3] E. Kirchner & J. Sperling, 'Introduction', in *EU Security Governance*, eds E. Kirchner & J. Sperling (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 15.

[4] 'Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy, "Providing Security in a Changing World", S407/08 (Brussels)', <www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/reports/104630.pdf>, 11 Dec. 2008.

It must be made clear at the outset that the EaP (or indeed the ENP) was not conceived specifically to resolve conflict but that it has certainly been characterized as a policy that can contribute to long-term transformation with the aim of providing stability, security, prosperity, and conflict prevention. In the words of Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EaP will help to mitigate 'the economic and social disparities which fuel conflict … and to avoid new flash points'.[5] Indeed, the EU's main avenue of influence in conflict situations is through fostering cooperative arrangements across a plethora of issue areas and policy dimensions in order to build confidence and trust. Similarly, what must also be borne in mind when analysing the EU's role in the neighbourhood is that in an already overcrowded international mediation arena (the United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Russia, United States, and Turkey) the EU's added value is not just as another mediator but as an actor that can provide the necessary tools to cultivate an environment for peaceful change and transformation. In addition the EU's role in the eastern neighbourhood conflicts (Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh) varies according to the dynamics at play within each – that is, in terms of actors, levels, and transversal process.

This article will not attempt to analyse the minutiae of EU engagement in each case[6] but rather provide an overarching analysis of how the EaP can contribute more broadly to transforming the environment towards conflict transformation. Finally, while this article will focus on the EU's role through the EaP as a *multilateral* process, this is not without an awareness of EU action through multilateral organizations such as the OSCE, UN, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO; and indirectly in international financial institutions) in the neighbourhood conflicts. However, the primary focus here will be on evaluating the EaP in the context of the added value it brings to the ENP.[7] In this sense, it will involve conceptualizing the EaP within the broader multilateralism literature but, crucially, in an EU-specific context in terms of its mode of multilateral governance engagement in the East.

This article will proceed as follows. The second section will sketch the analytical framework – attempting to unpack the meaning of multilateralism, in order to arrive at certain propositions on effectiveness, in the context of the EaP. The third section will critically discuss the multilateral EaP initiative and the potential it has

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[5] B. Ferrero-Waldner, 'Eastern Partnership – an Ambitious Partnership for 21st century European Foreign Policy', Speech (20 Feb. 2009). Available at: <http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/eastern_partnership_article_bfw_en.pdf>.

[6] For analysis of the EU's role in the frozen conflicts in the East, see N. Popescu, 'EU and the Eastern Neighbourhood: Reluctant Involvement in Conflict Resolution', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 14, no. 4 (2009): 455–477; A. Akçakoca et al., 'After Georgia: Conflict Resolution in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood', EPC Issue Paper 57 (European Policy Centre, April 2009).

[7] For a review of the ENP as an instrument of conflict management, see C. Gordon & G. Sasse, 'The European Neighbourhood Policy: Effective Instrument for Conflict Management and Democratic Change in the Union's Eastern Neighbourhood?', Report Compiled for the FP6 Project 'Human and Minority Rights in the Life Cycle of Ethnic Conflicts' (August 2008).

to contribute to a conflict-reducing environment in the neighbourhood. The concluding section assesses the implications of the EaP for enhancing the EU's role in the conflicts to the East. It also reflects on the potential questions that arise from the EU's mode(s) of engagement in the eastern neighbourhood.

II The EU and Effective Multilateralism as a Process of Cooperation

The term 'effective multilateralism' has appeared in various EU documents as a core principle for resolving security problems – including conflict transformation – but without any clear definition or meaning as to what this means across different issue areas and themes. Indeed, the EU's concept of effective multilateralism as defined in the ESS[8] is embedded within its international organizational definition – with the UN at the apex as the key actor. The UN, with its universal mandate and legitimacy, is seen by the EU as uniquely placed to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. This is not to say that the EU does not have other dimensions to its multilateral ambitions[9] – indeed, it is these broader ambitions, in the form of the multilateral dimension of the EaP, that this article seeks to engage with and define in terms of form and function, if not direct implementation, at this very early stage of its inception.

The task here is, therefore, to reflect on how we can develop a deeper understanding of the EU's multilateral (EaP) initiatives in the context of governing security and, more precisely transforming conflict in the eastern neighbourhood. In this context, what is required is an analytical reference point that can guide and explain the potential of the EaP in terms of its multilateral mode of engagement (in parallel with the upgraded bilateral mode) in the neighbourhood. Moreover, such conceptual reference points will enable an analysis that allows us to clearly differentiate between the principles and components that underpin the EaP initiative and the governance methods that the EU has available to actually achieve them. In other words, it will enable us to assess if the multilateral EaP can be 'effective', that is, achieve its stated goals.

In order to achieve this, we must discuss how multilateralism has been defined and, indeed, what is meant by multilateralism as a political and transformative process in the context of the EaP. Furthermore, when analysing the EU specifically, we need to explain and understand not just the EaP process in terms of form but the EU's own internal multilateral process of constructing and implementing external policies. Contextually important is the fact that within the EU the meaning and function of multilateralism differs according to its 'variable identity' as an

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[8]   Council of the European Union, *A Secure Europe in a Better World – European Security Strategy* (Brussels, 12 Dec. 2003) and *General Affairs External Relations, 2518th Council Meeting* (Luxembourg, 16 Jun. 2003); Report on Implementation, see n. 4 above.

[9]   K.E. Jørgensen, 'The European Union and International Organizations: A Framework for Analysis', in *The European Union and International Organizations*, ed. K.E. Jørgensen (Oxon and New York*:* Routledge, 2009), 1.

international actor. For a normative and civilian power EU, the preference is on normative multilateralism whereby the multilateral option in its external relations is not simply a policy (functional) choice but rather part of the EU's normative make-up and it is seen as the most legitimate mode of engagement for resolving regional and global problems. For a military power EU, the preference is for functional multilateralism where multilateralism is legitimate precisely when it is seen to be effective.[10] In the case of the EaP, the *dominant* mode of EU engagement is clearly normative and civilian.

In this sense, multilateralism as a method is perceived to hold advantages for fostering cooperation and transformation – in particular in addressing the complex dynamics involved in conflict situations – as it is likely to produce better outcomes[11] through the creation of collaborative networks at different levels of governance. Moreover, it is seen as a mode that can imbue legitimacy and credibility into any process of conflict transformation or peace building – whether in its international organization variant (through the UN or OSCE, for example) or, indeed, its variant as a process in conflict environments (the EaP, for instance). Equally, there are many constraints on achieving an effective form of multilateralism in practice, for reasons primarily of ambiguous definition,[12] as well as coherence in form, coordination in functional processes, and indeed, the perceptions and strategies of the recipients of such policies.

So how can we understand multilateralism in the context of the EU and the EaP? The traditional definitions of multilateralism offered by prominent scholars such as Keohane[13] emphasize a state-centric form and define multilateralism as 'coordination of national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions'. Ruggie[14] defines it as the coordination of relations among three or more states 'on the basis of generalized principles of conduct', with three key principles that underpin it: (1) indivisibility (the notion of collective security, whereby an attack on one is an attack on all); (2) non-discrimination (all parties are treated equally); and (3) diffuse reciprocity (reliance on long-term assurances, not quid pro quo exchanges). Such definitions are embedded within

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[10]   B. Kienzle, 'Effective Multilateralism? The EU and International Regimes in the Field of Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction', paper presented at the GARNET Conference 'The EU in International Affairs' (Brussels, 24–26 Apr. 2008), 12.

[11]   M. Martin, *With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies? Human Security and the Challenge of Effective Multilateralism, International Policy Analysis* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, March 2009).

[12]   K.E. Jørgensen, 'Intersecting Multilateralisms: The EU and Multilateral Institutions', in *The European Union at the United Nations: Intersecting Multilateralisms*, eds K.V. Laatikainen & K.E. Smith (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); R. Gowan, 'The European Security Strategy's Global Objective: Effective Multilateralism', in *The EU and the European Security Strategy: Forging a Global Europe*, eds S. Biscop & J.J. Andersson (London: Routledge, 2008).

[13]   R. Keohane, 'Multilateralism: An Agenda for Research', *International Journal* 45, no. 4 (1990): 731–764.

[14]   J.G. Ruggie, *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

the 'institution of multilateralism tradition',[15] with the added notion that collective, rule-based action in this way avoids accusations of imperialism and provides a normatively legitimate way of promoting ethical goals.[16]

However, such notions have more recently been questioned by Keohane[17] on the grounds of the assumed legitimacy of such multilateral organizations, which he argues is based, problematically, on a deeply statist normative theory. Important here is the implication of this challenge, namely that multilateralism is not simply about state interaction. Indeed, he argues that the 'old' multilateralism 'is one of limited cooperation – mutual adjustment of policy – rather than of governance'.[18] He also points to a fundamental contradiction in the multilateralism (international organizational form) of the twenty-first century, which is its 'profoundly undemocratic nature'. Indeed, he goes on to argue that multilateralism can only be legitimate if it meets the three fundamental standards of inclusiveness, decisiveness, and epistemic reliability. Inclusiveness refers to the effective representation of all valid interests (i.e., through indirect means); decisiveness refers to the ability to take effective action; and epistemic reliability, ultimately, refers to the ability of a multilateral organization to 'revise' the rules of the game on the basis of internal and external criticisms.[19]

While work on the EU and multilateralism has become prominent in recent years,[20] the focus here is on the EU as a multilateral organization and the EaP as a multilateral process. The two, of course, are intimately connected but can be unpacked separately for conceptual clarity and purpose. In this context, it is clear that the internal EaP process, as with the ENP, is complex, cutting across multiple policy actors and dimensions. When we talk of decisiveness, therefore, we must take into account the ability of the EU to act coherently in projecting external governance – that is, horizontally (between different policies), institutionally (between different bureaucratic apparatuses), and vertically (between the EU and Member States)[21] – and to ensure that, at the very least, there is a connectedness within the internally constructed policy domain and between that and its external projection and implementation.[22] While the intention of the Lisbon Treaty is to add

[15] See Martin, 2009, n. 11 above.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] R. Keohane, 'The Contingent Legitimacy of Multilateralism', GARNET Working Paper 9, no. 6 (2006).

[18] *Ibid.*, 7.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Jørgensen, 2009, n. 9 above; O. Elgström & M. Smith (eds), *The European Union's Role in International Politics* (London: Routledge, 2006); R. Whitman, *The EU and International Regimes – Effective Multilateralism in Action?* (Centre for the Study of International Governance (CSIG), Loughborough University, 27 Apr. 2007).

[21] S. Nuttall, 'Coherence and Consistency', in *International Relations and the European Union*, eds C. Hill & M. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[22] M. Lerch & G. Schwellnus, 'Normative by Nature? The Role of Coherence in Justifying the EU's External Human Rights Policy', *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 304–321.

to EU coherence, the formative nature of the 'new' foreign policy regime does not make it clear if this will, in practice, be the case in terms of the administration and projection of the EaP.

Nevertheless, the EU's legitimacy does rest on this coherence. If EU actors, once a policy has been constructed and agreed upon, or indeed because of the way it has been constructed, do not pull in the same direction discursively or in terms of required material resources, then policy legitimacy deteriorates with the consequence, in most cases, that the EU is less effective in terms of delivering its stated policy aims. Beyond this, and equally important in terms of legitimacy and effectiveness given that the EaP is modelled on partnership and joint ownership (similarly to the ENP), is what 'local actors make of it'. Thus, even if the EU is internally coherent across all dimensions, its outcome will very much depend on how the policy is perceived by intended recipient actors and indeed, beyond that, other significant actors with an interest in the country or region that the EU is attempting to influence (Russia in this case). The extent to which recipient actors identify politically and economically with an EU policy and where they locate themselves in terms of identifying with EU norms[23] are critical factors in understanding how the multilateral EaP will influence conflict transformation to the East.

Likewise important in terms of effective multilateralism are the key characteristics and types of multilateral processes that can be identified, that is, the design of the process in terms of underlying principles, methods, and organizational tools. Here, Richmond[24] has attempted to define multilateralism beyond its state institutional form (and state focus) in the context of the liberal peace. This work is intuitively germane to the task here as it introduces the idea of complexity in the *multilateral process* in recognizing the important role of non-state actors and the salience, within what he calls 'new multilateralism', of recognizing the linkages between all actors in the peace-building process and 'building capacity in civil society emerging from conflict'. This, therefore, is a broad conceptualization of 'inclusiveness' and one that calls for 'marginalized populations within conflict zones to have a voice in the conflict transformation process'.[25] Beyond this, he also delineates the concepts of horizontal and vertical multilateralism operating at different levels of governance. Horizontal multilateralism refers to 'the relationships between official actors, states, and diplomats, and relationships between a broad range of unofficial and private actors'. Vertical multilateralism, however, is defined 'by any relationship between an official and "private/unofficial" actor'.[26]

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[23] C. Browning & G. Christou, 'The Constitutive Power of the Outsiders: The European Neighbourhood Policy and The Eastern Dimension', *Political Geography* 29 (2010): 109–118.

[24] O. Richmond, 'Horizontal and Vertical Multilateralism and the Liberal Peace', in *Multilateralism and Security Institutions in an Era of Globalization*, eds D. Bourantonis, K. Ifantis & P. Tsakonas (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

[25] *Ibid.,* 164.

[26] *Ibid.*

Unpacking this further, his central argument is that norms constructed within the horizontal dimension can be replicated within the vertical dimension, with added 'ownership' and thus sustainability of the conflict transformation process by local actors. Moreover, he posits that sophisticated forms of multilateralism are needed, driven by wilful communities in order to bring about peace. Furthermore, such multilateralism is not simply defined by the formal or horizontal but also the vertical and informal, if transformation rather than instrumental adaptation is to take place in conflict situations. Important in the EaP context is not just that a wider array of actors and dimensions are at play in the multilateral process but that there is a consensus on how transformation should be constituted and, second, that coordination and cooperation within the multilateral process is then able to deliver some form of transformation, security, and peace at the variant levels of governance that exist.[27] Moreover, in the EU context, it is ensuring that there is at least a 'thin' agreement at the outset that the principles, rules, or norms upon which cooperation, integration, and indeed transformation are based are agreeable to actors within the multilateral (EaP) process.

Richmond's analysis[28] implies that transformation through governance is dependent on a consensus between actors and between vertical and horizontal forms of multilateralism. This is not an entirely unproblematic concept in terms of achieving, in this case, conflict transformation, as the method of achieving this can vary between and within regional and international organizations involved in the process. Thus, the principles and organizational dynamics that underpin the relationship in any multilateral process are important as they vary from top-down coercive to bottom-up partnership approaches – with different modes of conditionality attached to each in terms of forcing or indeed inducing change. More broadly, the most conducive (ideal type) model of multilateralism is one that incorporates a top-down and bottom-up approach to conflict transformation – with clear visibility of both horizontal and vertical multilateral processes at work. This allows a functional culture of cooperation to develop within the consensual, multi-layered relationships that exist,[29] as well as control and ownership of the process not just by the intervening state or multilateral organization (the EU in this case) but also the regional and local actors involved. As Martin notes, within this context, 'it appears easier to create an effective division of labour as well as sustainable results'.[30]

Thus, what we must explore further to inform our analysis of the multilateral EaP are the methods and mechanisms of engagement that underpin the policy and the organizational tools it possesses to potentially create a climate of settlement through reducing economic and social disparities. That is, we need to unpack exactly how the governance tasks of prevention (building or sustaining domestic,

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[27] *Ibid.*, 168–169; see also Martin, 2009, n. 11 above, 5.

[28] Richmond, 2008, n. 24 above, 169; O. Richmond, *The Transformation of Peace* (London: Palgrave, 2005), 69.

[29] Martin, 2009, n. 11 above, 5.

[30] *Ibid.*, 7

regional, and international institutions that contribute to the creation of order) and assurance (confidence-building measures and post-conflict reconstruction)[31] can be understood in the context of the EaP. Much work has focused on the lack of EU leverage through the ENP to transform the countries of the eastern neighbourhood and the conflicts that exist therein because it does not offer the 'golden carrot' of accession as an incentive.[32] However, more recent work on the ENP is also instructive for the analysis here, as it provides a nuanced way of understanding the EaP as multilateral governance, beyond traditional, top-down (hierarchical) modes of engagement that induce change through strict conditionality.[33] In other words, it explores the conditions through which a networked model based on cooperation and coordination can be 'effective' in transforming polities, and thus conflicts, within a horizontal logic of engagement. The suggestion in this literature then, and the main implication for this work, is that transformation occurs not only through direct policy enforcement but by networked interaction – where 'external governance becomes a form of extended governance or flexible horizontal integration'.[34]

Within such a model, EU influence is 'constituted' through the extension of the dynamics of integration – creating joint structures of cooperation and coordination through different functional networks: (a) informational (to diffuse policy-relevant knowledge, best practices and ideas); (b) implementation (enhancing cooperation among actors to cooperate in enforcing rules and laws; (c) regulatory (formulation of common rules and standards in any given policy dimension). Such a transformative governance process is multi-level, transgovernmental and transnational in nature, and includes actors from the public and private sectors, International Organizations (IOs), and governments. In other words, it is inclusive, underpinned by vertical and horizontal multilateralism, process-oriented, and voluntary, allowing 'for the extension of norms and rules that goes along with participatory openness'[35] – in this case, in the wider policy areas that can spillover into creating a conducive climate for conflict prevention. More precisely, there is a possibility under this mode of transforming not only legal/regulatory borders but also political and identity borders in the long term. This is not to say that multilateral networked governance is a panacea for conflict transformation: it is challenging and problematic in many ways. Indeed, such a mode requires a certain degree of organizational resources, decentralization, civil society empowerment, and norm convergence – not something that is clearly visible within the countries of the EaP or, indeed, the main regional actors involved in the conflicts within the EaP countries.

[31] Kirchner & Sperling, n. 3 above, 15.
[32] See G. Sasse, 'The European Neighbourhood Policy: Conditionality Revisited for the EU's Eastern Neighbours', *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 2 (2008): 295–316.
[33] S. Lavenex, 'A Governance Perspective on the European Neighbourhood Policy: Integration beyond Conditionality?', *Journal of European Public Policy* 15, no. 6 (2008): 938–955.
[34] *Ibid.*, 940.
[35] *Ibid.*, 941.

To summarize the discussion thus far, the purpose here is not to provide distinct or indeed definitive types of EU 'effective' multilateralism in terms of the organizational or process-oriented form. Rather, it is to provide analytical benchmarks for enhancing our understanding of the potential within the EaP to transform conflict in the neighbourhood through addressing the wider policy environment. Thus, the argument is not that networked governance is more conducive to achieving effective multilateralism and thus sustainable conflict transformation – indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that the EU's hierarchical model and the strict conditional model that accompanies it is much more effective for transforming polities to the East.[36] However, it does suggest that in the absence of the leverage afforded to the EU through the membership perspective to formally transform conflict, we need to identify the conditions under which EU 'multilateral' governance, of which the EaP is an important example, can be effective in providing a climate that can lead to the desecuritization of conflicts. We must note, importantly, that while the EaP exhibits key features of networked governance in theory, this does not actually exclude 'hierarchy' as a method of implementation, where conditions dictate. Indeed, Lavenex[37] has shown how this can be the case across different sectoral dimensions of the ENP. Of course, it will be some time before we can make this judgment on governance practice in the case of the platforms and initiatives within the EaP (in areas of high and low politics), but the key point is that it does not exclude the possibility of direct and indirect forms of hierarchical governance within the EaP process.
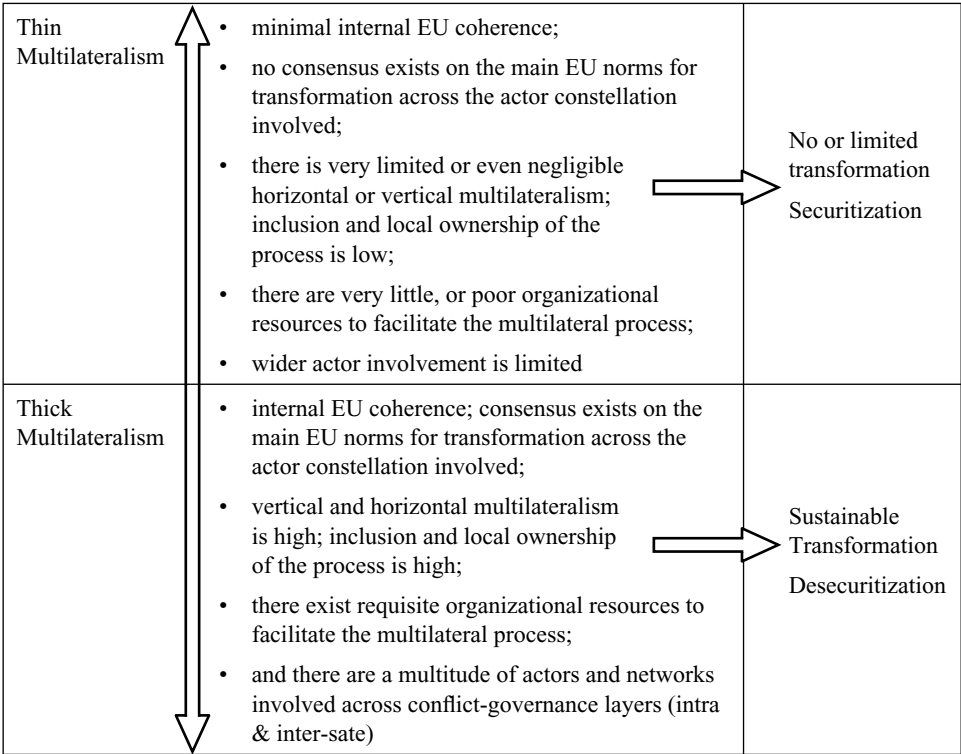
So where does this leave us with 'effective' multilateralism and the EaP? It is suggested here that 'effective' multilateralism is *more likely* under conditions of 'thick' multilateralism[38] and *less likely* under conditions of 'thin' multilateralism (see Diagram 1). The categorizations of thin and thick multilateralism by no means represent static notions of understanding transformation in the East – in fact, precisely the opposite. They simply represent the two polar extremes – with many variations existing in between and indeed at the margins of such conceptualizations. It is not to suggest either that there is any automaticity involved in achieving conflict transformation in the long term if thick multilateralism is dominant – simply that there is a higher probability of achieving a stable and sustainable transformation if this is the case. In addition, the effectiveness of the

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[36] F. Schimmelfennig & U. Sedelmeier, 'Governance by Conditionality: EU Rule Transfer to the Candidate Countries of Central and Eastern Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 661–679; F. Schimmelfennig & U. Sedelmeier (eds), *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[37] Lavenex, n. 33 above.

[38] In terms of the inclusive dimension, the opposite argument has been made in relation to multilateralism in its international organization form: that 'big N' and inclusive multilateralism is far less 'effective' than 'minilateralism', see L.L. Martin, 'Interests, Power and Multilateralism', *International Organization* 46, no. 4 (1992): 765–792. Obviously, this is context- and issue-based, and in the case of conflict resolution, the evidence does suggest that inclusive multilateralism in terms of *process* is more effective. Whether this is the case in relation to the EaP is a matter for further empirical investigation.

Diagram 1. The EU and Effective Multilateralism
Thin Multilateralism and Thick Multilateralism

Thin Multilateralism	• minimal internal EU coherence; • no consensus exists on the main EU norms for transformation across the actor constellation involved; • there is very limited or even negligible horizontal or vertical multilateralism; inclusion and local ownership of the process is low; • there are very little, or poor organizational resources to facilitate the multilateral process; • wider actor involvement is limited	No or limited transformation Securitization
Thick Multilateralism	• internal EU coherence; consensus exists on the main EU norms for transformation across the actor constellation involved; • vertical and horizontal multilateralism is high; inclusion and local ownership of the process is high; • there exist requisite organizational resources to facilitate the multilateral process; • and there are a multitude of actors and networks involved across conflict-governance layers (intra & inter-sate)	Sustainable Transformation Desecuritization

EaP multilateral process is very much dependent on the governance principles and model(s) on which it is premised. In this sense, the task is not to suggest some sort of linear-causal model to relate specific governance models to multilateralism but to create a more nuanced understanding of how and under what conditions effective multilateral governance can prosper through the EaP.

III The EaP, Multilateral Governance, and Conflict Prevention: Added Value?

The EaP was officially launched in Prague on 7 May 2009 with the aim of affecting transformation across a number of governance levels and thematic platforms of engagement, which included: Democracy, good governance and stability; energy security; economic integration and convergence; and contacts between people.[39] The countries involved, that is Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, were to be offered through the EaP 'more concrete support than ever

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[39] European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document (SEC (2008) 2974/3) Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and Council, Eastern Partnership, COM (2008) 823 (Brussels, 2008).

before to encourage reforms that are essential to build peace, prosperity and security, in our mutual interest'.[40]

The EaP aims to enhance the bilateral nature of the ENP and to introduce a multilateral framework for engaging with the eastern neighbours. In this sense, it is a complement to and innovation beyond the ENP, as well as more regionally oriented initiatives such as the BSS. More concretely, it was designed to reinforce the ENP, without offering the prospect of membership. While the main goal is to 'create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the EU and interested partner countries',[41] it also recognizes the need to 'promote stability and multilateral confidence building'[42] in order to induce peaceful settlement of the conflicts that exist and that constrain cooperation and integration with the EU and within the region.

In governance terms, the principles that underpin the EaP remain the same as those of the ENP: it is guided by differentiation, joint ownership, and conditionality – the latter related to progress and reward conditional on agreement and implementation based on EU norms and values. In addition, the EaP references *legal* and regulatory approximation but not the wholesale adoption of the EU *acquis.* There is an aim to facilitate the movement to approximation through institutional and administrative capacity building at bilateral and multilateral levels of governance, and the commitments of partner countries will be reflected not in Action Plans but rather in Association Agreements (AAs; legally binding), which will offer added incentives in the thematically prioritized areas of the EaP. The macro-governance framework,[43] therefore, resembles that of the ENP and points towards horizontal joint structures of governance.

The central question for this article is whether the EaP is reflective of the thick multilateral criteria set out below in order to maximize its chances of being effective.

1. Internal Coherence and Resource

The EaP is a policy that cuts across many policy dimensions and, therefore, blurs the line between EU external governance and EU public policy, with the involvement of different Directorates General (DGs) in the process of engagement and implementation. However, there is evidence to suggest that the EU approach within the EaP process is not coherent. Horizontally, this takes the form of how the EaP fits with other similar initiatives, such as the BSS, launched in April 2007. Indeed, the question remains as to the added value of the EaP given that it replicates the BSS in terms of countries involved (excluding Belarus), as well as the thematic areas that

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[40]   Ferrero-Waldner, n. 5 above.
[41]   Council of the European Union, Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, 8435/09, *Presse* 78 (Brussels, 7 May 2009), 5.
[42]   *Ibid.*, 5.
[43]   Lavenex, n. 33 above.

it targets, namely those of trade, democratization and good governance, energy, and migration, and the broader issues it wishes to address, such as conflict resolution, transport, environment, etc. While the EU assures that the BSS and the EaP are complementary, it does not clearly spell out the links between the regional focus in the former and the multilateral focus in the latter – and indeed how these will function together beyond some sort of organic coming together of initiatives and policies.

There is also the issue of funding and resources for the EaP. Here, evidence suggests that the lack of institutional and vertical coherence in existing initiatives is a concern. First, the EaP does not address the issue of delays in funding many European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) programmes that already exist; and second, it does not address the difficulty in releasing funds to the relevant Commission DGs in order to operationalize programmes for the relevant ENP/EaP countries. This matter is only likely to get worse before it gets better given the post-Lisbon ambiguity surrounding which EU actors will take responsibility for the financial cycle and implementation of such programmes.[44] This does not bode well for the credibility of the EaP in the partner countries involved if there is a clear gap between what the EU officially commits and what it actually releases to achieve the goals of the EaP, especially in terms of promoting the transnational and multilateral elements. Moreover, while for the 2010–2013 period EUR 600 million have been allocated as part of the ENPI, only EUR 350 million have been allocated to EaP (i.e., extra money, as the rest has come from re-programming).[45] This is clearly not enough to implement the EaP goals in the short to medium terms, with the negative perception exacerbated by the uneven distribution of the funding in each programme year.[46]

In terms of vertical coherence, there is an issue relating to the division between Member States on geographical priority in the EU's external governance – that is, between those that support the eastern dimension led by Sweden and Poland and those that support the Mediterranean dimension led by France, Italy, and Spain. This has implications across different dimensions. First, on the debate on incentives and eventual membership of those to the East – the EaP, once again, represents a fragile compromise between those that support the offer of membership and those that do not. Such ambiguity is a consequence of the unresolved debate on 'absorption capacity', but it also has negative consequences in terms of the credibility and efficacy of the EaP, especially where the partner countries consider themselves to be European 'like' EU Member States rather than simply 'with them'

[44]   More specifically, it is uncertain at the time of writing how much responsibility the External Action Service will take in relation to financial and policy control (confirmed by conversation with a Senior Commission Official, December 2009).

[45]   Of course, there is also the possibility that Member States will make bilateral contributions, and there is also the potential for contributions from International Financial Institutions (IFIs) donors, and private sector investors.

[46]   J. Boonstra & N. Shapovalova, 'The EU's Eastern Partnership: One Year Backwards', Working Paper 99 (FRIDE, May 2010), 8, <www.fride.org>.

as neighbours. Second, there is also the issue of diverging Member State interests and discourses across the thematic platforms and issues that the EU aims to influence within the EaP process. This is particularly salient in relation to areas of high politics, such as energy and migration, where: (a) Member States pursue their own bilateral policies that contradict or constrain EaP aims; (b) Member States block or disagree on the extent to which policies to the East should be liberalized because of politicization or indeed securitization of these issues. The consequence of this is the contradiction that emerges, as with the ENP, between the rhetoric and evolving policy practices – and the effect this has on the credibility of the EaP.

2. *Inclusiveness/Actors and Networks/Vertical and Horizontal Multilateralism*

The EaP is certainly more inclusive than the ENP, which only sought to enhance the relationship between the EU and individual partner countries and was minimal in terms of its attempts to engage civil society, non-state, and private actors in the transformation process. Moreover, the bilateralism that underpinned it did not create an environment within which cooperation and trust between the actors within the region could evolve alongside the relationship with the EU. The EaP, on the other hand, provides for a multi-level, multi-actor, and multi-platform approach and, in this sense, provides an innovation beyond the ENP, while allowing for the evolution of not just horizontal but also vertical multilateral processes crucial to transformation and peace building in the East.

   However, the major omission here is the more obvious and automatic role for the alternative centres of power that are also key stakeholders in terms of the platforms the EU is attempting to influence and the conflicts in the neighbourhood. The BSS, for example, at least allows direct engagement with and the participation of Russia and Turkey, without which conflict transformation or indeed approximation to EU rules and regulations is not possible, given their own interests, norms, and agendas in the eastern neighbourhood. The EaP, on the other hand, while not excluding the possibility of third state participation, does so on an ad hoc, case-by-case-basis – and only where relevant to meeting the objectives of the EaP. This raises several issues that need to be resolved if the multilateral element of the EaP is to be effective. First, even though Russian participation is crucial, it will be subject to the various and diverse logics at play in the partner countries. As such, Georgia is unlikely to support Russian participation across all cases: and it would be deeply problematic for certain partner countries in the context of the democracy platform.[47] Second, there is a question of how Russia would want to cooperate and participate even if invited (and it was interested). Here, it is clear that it wants to be treated as an equal partner within any EaP framework. This is an issue that the EU must resolve if it is

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[47] Georgian officials have rejected proposals from the Commission for Russian participation in certain civilian projects, although they have subsequently agreed to such participation elsewhere (author's interview, 2010).

to ameliorate rather than exacerbate the Russian government's opposition to what it clearly perceives as another EU policy to influence its own sphere of influence.

Beyond this, there is also the issue of how to engage with the conflict parties in each of the partner countries – South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Transnistria, and Nagorno-Karabakh. If broader transformation is to actually occur, then such conflicts must be resolved. Conversely, if the EaP is to help resolve these conflicts, then a way of bringing such parties in without formal recognition needs to be found. The EaP needs to build on the EU initiatives introduced into the conflict zones in the eastern neighbourhood through grants and aid, Special Representatives, civilian missions, and border missions such as European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) (Transnistria), which have, to date, only had a moderate impact in terms of engaging with conflict parties and reducing the conflict dynamics on the ground.

3. Consensus on EU Norms for Convergence/ Organizational and Institutional Resources

The EU is only willing to offer AAs to those 'who are willing and able to comply with the resulting commitments', implying some form of 'thin' recognition of EU norms from the outset. However, we cannot assume that all actors involved in the process perceive EU norms for convergence within the EaP in the same way – or that they wish to progress beyond a 'thin' (i.e., instrumental) reading. Indeed, the credentials and (record of) the leadership, certainly in Belarus, but also in Armenia and Azerbaijan, do not suggest that there is a common understanding or a desire to move towards EU democratic and human rights norms. In Belarus, it is clear that President Lukashenka's enthusiasm for engaging with the EU through the EaP is not based on a desire to 'democratize' in western terms – for this would put at risk the authoritarian Belarusian model that he has spent many years constructing.[48] Beyond this, Azerbaijan, in March 2009, made constitutional changes that abolished any limits on presidential terms, despite protest from domestic opposition voices and much criticism from the international community; the prospect of an unlimited presidency for Ilham Aliev, alongside its insistence on 'equality' in its communications with the EU, certainly does not bode well for longer term change through the EaP (about which it is not very enthusiastic). In the Armenian case, political freedom was restricted and opposition forces suppressed after the post-electoral crisis of March 2008,[49] with further restraints in civil liberties and the participation of the public evident since then. While Armenia has reacted positively towards the EaP initiative, it has done so in a selective way – with a focus on the potential economic gains rather than any political transformation.[50]

[48] Browning & Christou, n. 23 above.
[49] N. Shapovalova, 'The EU's Eastern Partnership: Still-Born?', *Policy Brief* 11 (2009): 3, <www.fride.org>.
[50] Boonstra & Shapovalova, n. 46 above, 11.

Clearly, there is a question here about how the EaP, through its multilateral and indeed bilateral dimension, can incentivize a change of policy towards EU standards of good governance – especially in Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which do not see themselves as 'with' the EU (inside). This becomes even more problematic if one considers that the incentives offered through the bilateral element of the EaP, and the governance principles that underpin it, are reliant on certain institutional and organizational prerequisites, of which there is minimal evidence in these countries. Feasibility studies conducted by the Commission show that Armenia and Georgia (World Trade Organization (WTO) members) are not ready for the liberalization entailed in deep and comprehensive trade areas[51] – with Azerbaijan and Belarus also constrained by the fact that they are not WTO members, and the Russia-Belarus Customs Union clearly a challenge to the offer of access to the EU's internal market, not to mention WTO rules.[52] For the most advanced states in the EaP, it is also difficult to see how there is 'added value' in the bilateral dimension – the Ukraine is already at an advanced stage in its AA negotiations,[53] while Moldova's relationship with the EU has developed purposefully since the election of the more internationally and EU-oriented Alliance for European Integration (in the second, repeated election in 2009), culminating in the beginning of negotiations for an AA in 2010.[54]

The main point here is thus twofold. First, that the bilateral element of the EaP might only act as an incentive for 'deeper' engagement with the partner countries that perceive that it adds value to their existing relationship. Even then, however, it is difficult to foresee how in governance terms this will be implemented and sustained without the requisite norm convergence and organizational resources. Of course, one of the main multilateral elements of the EaP, which is comprehensive institution building, might very well provide an additional resource for 'Europeanization' in these countries, as might the dialogue through fora such as the EU-Neighbourhood Parliamentary Assembly[55] (Belarus is excluded) and the Civil Society Forum (first convened November 2009). However, this will only be the case if in the short and medium terms more funding is provided for the EaP

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[51] European Commission, 'Trade: South Caucasus', <www.ec.europa.eu/trade/creating-opportunities/bilateral-relations/regions/south-caucasus>.

[52] Although now that Russia has actually commitment itself to WTO accession, it might be assumed that any such Customs Union would have to be compatible with WTO rules.

[53] While there has been a rebalancing of Ukraine's foreign policy back towards Russia since Victor Yanukovych was elected as President and Mykola Azarov appointed as Prime Minister, this has not dampened the enthusiasm for pursuing European integration.

[54] Prior to this, Moldova upgraded its status with the EU through: the additional autonomous trade preferences that came into force on 1 Mar. 2008; the activation of the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements on 1 Jan. 2008; and the opening of a common visa application centre in Chisinau in April 2007. It also, in June 2008, signed a pilot mobility partnership with the EU for the purposes of providing a single framework for managing migratory flows.

[55] Although the record so far for the Parliamentary Assembly suggests not, as it had not even begun by the end of 2010.

initiative, the dialogue that is created is, in practice, open to all actors, and indeed, most importantly, that governments in partner states see it as beneficial for the political process, so that such bottom-up influence is not simply a superficial add-on within the multilateral process. On a final point, the bilateral and multilateral processes at play in the EaP must reinforce each other in terms of goals, coordination, and commitments and the conditionality, albeit 'lite', must be applied consistently at all levels of interaction and within all thematic dimensions. This is important if the problems associated with the Barcelona process to the South are to be avoided, in particular the reluctance to prioritize and discuss democratic and human rights standards and infringements.

A secondary problem in relation to shared norms is, of course, that there is no consensus between the EU and the regional actors that have been excluded but are, nevertheless, a significant influence, directly and indirectly, on the transformation that can take place in the eastern neighbourhood – and in particular the frozen conflicts. Although the issue of EU-Russia relations cannot be given the coverage it deserves here, it is important to understand the logics at play between Russia and the EU in their broader relations, as it also points to certain pragmatic answers for engaging with Russia through the EaP process. Russia has, particularly following the war in Georgia, approached its relations with the EU predominantly through a sovereign rather than integrationist logic – through a decisionist (systemic) rather than normative (rule-based) conception of international society.[56] It is through such a lens that Russia has interpreted the EaP as an additional mechanism within which the EU is attempting to transform and influence what is considered its own zone of privileged interest. That is, Russia considers the EaP as another vehicle to create an order that is bound by legal rules and norms that excludes the arbitrary exercise of political power.[57] The dilemma here is, therefore, that the multilateralism in the EaP will ultimately prove ineffective, in particular within the energy dimension and in relation to its conflict transformation ambition, if Russian perceptions towards the EaP do not change and, second, if no common culture of cooperation, if not overall understanding, can be found within which the EaP can function. This is not just an issue between the EU and Russia but also Turkey, the partner countries involved, and the many other multilateral organizations and actors that the EaP foresees contributing to peaceful transformation in the neighbourhood through increased communication, cooperation, and coordination of actors within and between different governance layers. A (minimal) starting point is to identify and agree at the outset within the logic of mutual interest, benefit, and practice, if not norms, where and how it would be beneficial for Russia to contribute within the EaP framework as an equal partner.

[56] Makarychev, n. 1 above, 4.

[57] P. Aalto, 'Russia's Quest for International Society and the Prospects for Regional-Level International Societies', *International Relations* 21, no. 4 (2007): 459–478, 463.

IV Conclusion

This article has sought to critically assess how effective the 'multilateral' EaP can be in transforming the conflicts in the neighbourhood through the creation of a more peaceful, stable, and prosperous environment. As such, the aim has not been to provide a systematic analysis of the EU's interventions and policies in the conflicts to date but rather to determine how the EaP, as an EU 'foreign policy for the twenty-first century', can contribute to reducing the conflict-enhancing dynamics in the eastern neighbourhood space. Obviously, such an evaluation has its limitations and will require additional systematic empirical research in evaluating not just EaP multilateral governance practice in the future but that of other actors and organizations in the conflict transformation process. However, even a cursory look at the EaP framework in terms of its multilateral character-istics and the principles that underpin it suggest that the notion of 'epistemic reliability' will be paramount if it is to evolve into a more effective mode of multilateralism.

While the innovations within the EaP process are positive, with certain elements reflective of 'thick' multilateralism, it is clear that familiar problems and omissions associated with EU external governance in general, and the ENP more specifically, have not been addressed in terms of process. Most significant here is the question of how a functional culture of cooperation and coordination is to emerge through the EaP, given the problems of internal coherence, actor exclusion, local condi-tions, and indeed, what local and regional actors make of it. It is not clear at this stage how the incentives, funding, and broader processes introduced, bilaterally and multilaterally, can be effective in promoting transformation across the partner countries and the thematic areas selected – or indeed, the neighbourhood conflicts in the long term.

The issue of Russia is the most difficult to resolve, although there is some evi-dence to suggest that a more positive climate now exists for the EU and Russia to 'reset' their relations and move towards a strategic partnership based on the language of modernization, mutual benefit, and a community of practices, not val-ues. Another difficult issue is that of bringing 'local' conflict actors in – without their inclusion, economic and democratic transformation will not be sustainable in a broader milieu that is perennially unstable. Beyond this is the issue of external coherence: how the different regional initiatives at work will complement each other; how the platforms, processes, and initiatives within the EaP will reinforce each other; and how the broad actor constellation involved will 'effectively' func-tion at the different layers of governance envisaged. Internally, there is also an issue of (in)coherence – between different advocacy coalitions supporting East and South, between Member States with variant policy priorities and interests to the East, between Member States and the Commission, and finally, within the Com-mission itself – with issues of competition and control clearly problematic for many of the programmes to be implemented in the East.

One could argue that it is much too early to form a judgment on the EaP. However, it is clear that while EU officials have taken many lessons on board in the construction of the EaP, they need to further reflect in the short and medium terms if this process, with its multilateral innovation, is to move towards a thicker and more effective form of engagement than the ENP before it. Beyond the empirics of the process, the EaP has implications for understanding and explaining the EU as a security actor in the East through long-term transformation – and indeed the conditions under which EU thick multilateral modes and horizontal governance mechanisms can contribute to the construction of a conflict-reducing milieu in the regional space to the East. In addition, there is the question of what type of regional(ism) space is being created, how (and by whom) it is being created, and the underlying dynamics of such a process not just through the EaP, but the plethora of other regional initiatives and security processes at play.

Ban-Ki Moon recently appealed for a 'new multilateral approach to ensure sustainable progress in disarmament' arguing that the solution can be found in a 'new multilateralism' where 'cooperation replaces confrontation, where creativity replaces stalemate'.[58] The EaP process certainly provides something of the 'new' in its multilateral process, but unfortunately, it also preserves much of the old in its lack of multilateral coherence and depth. The EU must, therefore, not only be more reflective but also more creative in its thinking if the EaP is to provide a platform for a more effective transformation of the eastern neighbourhood and the frozen conflicts that exist therein. Indeed, this creativity must stretch beyond the EaP, as the EU must also consider, through its broader foreign and nascent diplomatic policy, how it can complement any such multilateral process in order to promote the conditions for cooperation in the short and medium terms and in order to assure that the EU, as one of many significant actors in the region, engages in a constructive, comprehensive, and coordinated way in order to create the dynamics necessary for sustainable conflict transformation in the long term.

It is too early to predict the impact of the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the issue of coherence and coordination with regard to the EaP. Even though it became operational in January 2011, we cannot adequately assess its practice on such matters; indeed, it would be premature and unfair to do so when it is still in the midst of getting itself up to speed on matters of strategic planning and management. However, given that responsibility for the ENP/EaP has been incorporated within the EEAS, the extent to which this serves to provide a more coherent, consistent, and visible approach will very much depend on how its relationship with the Commission evolves in this area. If the 'integrated' (or double-hatted) approach embedded with the EEAS results in a common working culture rather than increased tension and rivalry between the EEAS and the Commission, then it might very well be a vehicle for more effective delivery of policy to the East.

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[58] B.-K. Moon, 'New Multilateralism Necessary to Achieve Disarmament Ban', *UN News Centre*, <www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=30840&Cr=disarmament&Cr>, 19 May 2009.