PART III

European Neighbourhood Policy-making

Institutional dynamics, actors and instruments
Introduction

This chapter explores the extent to which cohesiveness, coherence and consistency of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) matter for its effectiveness. Much of the academic literature argues that a lack of coherence circumscribes the transformative power of the European Union (EU) in its neighbourhood (da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier 2014; Baracani 2009; Noutcheva 2014). We will argue, in contrast, that problems of consistency caused by conflicting goals undermine the EU’s capacity to promote democracy in the post-Soviet and the Southern Mediterranean space. Whenever the EU applies political conditionality as the key instrument of its external democracy promotion, we see a democratic breakthrough, or higher degree of democratic quality, in ENP countries. The problem is that the EU selectively sanctions non-compliance with its democracy standards. To account for the EU’s inconsistency, we identify the presence of endogenous democratic processes and low risks of political instability as two necessary conditions for the EU to apply political conditionality. If either of them is absent, the EU acts as a status quo power, prioritizing (authoritarian) stability over uncertain (democratic) change.

The chapter starts with outlining the conceptual differences between coherence, cohesiveness and consistency. The second and third sections explore the evolution of the ENP regarding its coherence and consistency, respectively. We will show that consistency, rather than coherence, accounts for the varying effectiveness of the ENP. The chapter concludes with a summary of the most important arguments on when and why the EU pursues a consistent approach in its ENP and how this affects the EU’s overall effectiveness in promoting domestic change in its neighbourhood.

Coherence, cohesiveness and consistency

In EU studies, coherence, cohesiveness and consistency are three concepts that are most commonly attributed to the EU’s foreign policy actorness. A clear differentiation between the three
is a complex task, not least because they are often used as synonyms, or as interrelated concepts, both in the academic literature and in the EU’s official documents (Thomas 2012, 458; Koops and Varwick 2011; van Vooren and Wessel 2014).

Many authors understand coherence as the capability of the EU to overcome institutional complexities and ‘speak with a single voice’ in the foreign policy arena (da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier 2014; Noutcheva 2014; Thomas 2012). For instance, Thomas speaks of ‘the adoption of determinate common policies and the pursuit of those policies by EU Member States and institutions’ (2012: 458). In this context, policy determinacy (clarity of articulation of EU goals) and political cohesion (unity among EU actors) are considered as two main dimensions of coherence (Thomas 2012: 459–60). Similarly, Jopp and Schlotter define coherence as ‘contradiction-free foreign policy’ (Koops and Varwick 2011: 123). Closely related to coherence is the term ‘internal cohesiveness’ introduced by da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier (2014). Internal cohesiveness refers to the ‘degree to which decision-making rules produce a single message spoken with a single voice’ (da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier 2014: 963).

Both coherence and cohesiveness see the complexities of institutional governance of the ENP behind the EU’s failure to transform its neighbourhood. Following this argument, “the institutional pluralism of EU foreign policy-making” (Noutcheva 2014: 21), which is often characterized as ‘a high number of actors with a low level of political power’ (Bicchi 2014: 320), weakens the actorness of the EU and, hence, the EU’s transformative power. In the Southern Mediterranean, for instance, the EU’s relative effectiveness in shaping the migration and trade policies of its southern neighbours, especially prior to the ‘Arab Spring’, is attributed to the unity of the EU Member States. The EU’s diminished influence on democracy and conflict, by contrast, is due to the disagreements among its Member States (Noutcheva 2014: 34).

Consistency means that EU policies in one area should not undercut policies in other areas (da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier 2014: 963). The concept is generally used in the literature in combination with ‘conditionality’ – the main instrument of the EU to promote democracy and good governance in third countries in exchange for certain incentives (Luckau 2011; Schimmelfennig 2008). ‘Accession conditionality’ links the EU’s ‘golden carrot’ of a membership perspective to compliance with the Copenhagen Criteria (democracy, human rights, rule of law), on the one hand, and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*, on the other. Since the ENP does not entail close institutional integration, it must offer neighbouring countries other incentives in return for domestic reforms, such as advanced access to the EU’s single market, liberalization of visa regimes and increased financial aid (Langbein and Börzel 2013). In the context of this ‘neighbourhood conditionality’ (Borell et al. 2012: 75), consistency presupposes that the promotion of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the fight against corruption are not compromised by other foreign policy goals of the EU, such as stability, energy security or trade. The most prominent example of ENP inconsistency is what Jünemann described as the democratization-stability dilemma (Jünemann 2004; cf. Youngs 2002). Since most of the EU’s neighbours are non-democratic countries, democratization is likely to trigger instability, leading to the failure of state institutions or even to the state’s erosion, at least in the short run, which is exactly the opposite of what the EU intends to achieve in its neighbourhood. Thus, promoting democratic governance, on the one hand, and effective governance aiming at securing peace and stability, on the other, may become conflicting objectives of the ENP (Börzel and van Hüllen 2014a; Grimm and Leininger 2012). The consistency of the ENP tends to fall victim to the democratization-stability dilemma (Börzel and van Hüllen 2014a; 2011).

To summarize, whereas coherence and cohesiveness describe the quality of the EU as a unitary foreign policy actor, consistency refers to the degree to which different foreign policy goals of the EU may contradict each other. While coherence and cohesiveness are virtually
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synonymous, consistency is a distinct concept and builds a second analytical dimension of the
effectiveness of the EU.

In the remainder of this chapter, we analyse how the coherence and consistency of the ENP
evolved and how they have affected the effectiveness of the EU in transforming its southern and
eastern neighbourhood.

**ENP South**

For decades, the EU maintained a ‘Faustian bargain’ with autocratic rulers from its southern
neighbourhood. Non-democratic regimes in the EU’s southern neighbourhood have worked
with the EU on fighting illegal migration, combating terrorism and maintaining peace and
stability on the southern flanks of the EU (Dandashly 2014), although often they could not
achieve more than a ‘façade of stability’ (Lynch 2013: 63). The EU reciprocated by offering
increased economic incentives while its attempt at democracy promotion remained feeble
(van Hüllen 2015). The strategic interaction of the EU with southern ENP countries before the
outbreak of the 2011 Arab uprisings indicates the EU’s prioritization of security and stability
interests over democracy promotion.

The EU has tried to position itself as a democracy promoter in its southern neighbourhood.
Its official discourse has been consistent in emphasizing the mutually reinforcing and comple-
mentary objectives of achieving democracy, security and economic prosperity, both before and
after the ‘Arab Spring’ (Noutcheva 2014). The ENP Action Plans negotiated between the EU
and southern ENP countries, based on the principle of joint ownership, included many vaguely
defined references to issues of democracy, human rights and the rule of law (Börzel and van
Hüllen 2014a). However, there has been a big discrepancy between official discourse and the
actual level of implementation (Noutcheva 2014; Börzel, Risse and Dandashly 2014). In practice,
the primary focus was on the EU’s security concerns, while issues related to democracy and the
rule of law were ‘deprioritized’ (Dandashly 2014: 40).

In the wake of the Arab uprisings, the EU promised to review its policy framework. The
‘short-termism’ of supporting authoritarian regimes as the only ‘guarantee of stability in the
region’ (Füle 2011) was to give way to the EU’s promotion of ‘deep democracy’ by providing
the so-called ‘three M’s’ – money, market access and mobility (Ashton 2011). The EU launched
several new programmes including ‘A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with
the Southern Mediterranean’ (European Commission 2011) and stepped up its financial assist-
ance for the region (European Commission 2014).

However, the Arab uprisings of 2011 heightened the threats of instability, uncontrolled
migration and the prospects of long-term power struggles between different groups in the EU’s
southern neighbourhood countries. Thus, the EU quickly switched back to its business as usual
approach (Teti, Thompson and Noble 2013). Although the EU had adjusted much of its
rhetoric, its goals have remained ‘security and stability-driven’, prioritizing ‘security concerns’
over uncertain democratic openings (Dandashly 2014: 38). Migration is a case in point. Arab
protests in 2011 resulted in the abolition of the migration control deals the EU had struck with
the toppled dictators (Noutcheva 2014). Accordingly, the first objective of the EU in the post-
‘Arab Spring’ southern neighbourhood was to re-establish border controls and pacify its southern
flank. Rather than a lack of coherence, it is the inconsistency of the ENP that undermines the
EU’s effectiveness in bringing change to its southern periphery. The ‘Arab Spring’ has signifi-
cantly heightened the risks of instability, while not bringing more democracy to the region.
Except for Tunisia, the protests have ended up in state erosion (Libya), civil war (Syria) or
authoritarian backlash (Egypt). With endogenously driven processes of democratic change
being weak in most of the Southern Mediterranean countries and their statehood being challenged by rivaling factions, transnational terrorist networks and competing regional powers, the EU has become even less inclined to engage in democracy promotion (Börzel and van Hüllen 2014a; cf. van Hüllen 2015). With its ‘well-established political parties, strong unions and highly educated middle class’ (Dandashly 2014: 41), Tunisia has been the only country where the constellation of domestic actors was favourable enough to meet EU political conditionality. Thus, probably also due to cooperation between old and new elites, which allowed former regime members to re-occupy influential power positions, Tunisia has remained sufficiently stable, has had some ‘governance capacities’ and has possessed pro-democratic domestic agents that external actors could empower (Börzel, Risse and Dandashly 2014: 151). Accordingly, Tunisia has been the main target of the EU’s democracy promotion. But, even there, support for democratic reforms has been limited and the main areas of cooperation remained economic development and migration control.

To conclude, the consistency of the ENP’s southern dimension has been challenged by low levels of political liberalization and, after the outbreak of Arab uprisings, also by limited degrees of statehood in the Southern Mediterranean. Not only does the political and economic situation in Southern Mediterranean countries generate illegal migration and asylum seeking, but also the incumbent regimes are no longer willing to control, or capable of controlling, their borders to stop the refugee flows from all over the African continent (Dandashly 2014). Border security and maintenance of stability have become the single most important concern of the EU in its southern neighbourhood. While the EU has been consistent in prioritizing stability over democracy, Member States at times disagree on how to cope with the risks of instability challenging the coherence of the EU. The EU failed to speak with a single voice either on the issue of military intervention in Libya or the debate on possible no-fly zones in Syria. Overall, however, the effectiveness of the ENP in the EU’s southern neighbourhood is undermined much more by problems of consistency rather than coherence.

ENP East

The effectiveness of the ENP in the post-Soviet space has been equally as limited as in the Southern Mediterranean. Not only have most of the eastern ENP countries not made much progress towards democracy (Börzel 2014); they have also experienced a high degree of political and social instability, as well as military conflicts with Russia or with each other. The presence of secessionist enclaves has further undermined their statehood. Instead of becoming a peaceful, stable and prosperous ‘ring of friends’, the region has ultimately ended up in another ‘ring of fire’ (Speck 2015).

With its eastern neighbours, the EU has remained as coherent in formulating an official discourse of transformation as it has in the case of its southern neighbours. It has also managed to preserve its unity in periods of crisis or during important decisions. This resulted, however, in the EU taking a rather reactive approach, trying to adjust its policies to events unfolding on the ground, on which it had no considerable influence due to its overall low profile in the region. For instance, during his 2004 visit to the South Caucasus countries, European Commission president, Romano Prodi, declared that the EU would not act as a conflict mediator in Georgia or between Armenia and Azerbaijan (RFE/RL 2004). In the following years, the EU ignored multiple requests from Georgian leaders for the internationalization of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia through deploying an EU monitoring mission, at least on the borders (Börzel and Lebanidze 2015). Similarly, except for a few trust-building programmes with moderate funding, such as the European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the
Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh (EPNK), the EU avoided direct involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and instead supported the OSCE Minsk Group (Babayan 2011). With the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, the EU became one of the main Western security and political actors in the South Caucasus region (Ashton 2010). It increased the conflict-related financial support to Georgia and quickly deployed the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to oversee the fulfilment of the ceasefire agreement between Russia and Georgia, which was negotiated by the then French President Nicolas Sarkozy who at the time of the conflict held the rotating EU presidency (Friedman 2008).

A few years later, another military conflict erupted in the EU’s eastern neighbourhood, this time between Ukraine and Russia. In early 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and supported and supplied the secessionist movements in Eastern Ukraine. Due to its geographic proximity and Ukraine’s close relations with several central European EU Member States, the Ukrainian conflict has been attracting much more attention in the EU than the Russia–Georgia War (Corboy, Courtney and Yalowitz 2014). The destabilizing role of Russia in the shared neighbourhood has provoked a harsh response by the EU (EurActiv 2015b). Similar to the Russia–Georgia war, the EU has played an important role in temporarily ending the fighting by negotiating two ceasefires (Minsk I and Minsk II) between the conflict parties, helping to stabilize the conflict zones. The EU has also increased financial support to Ukraine and signed the Association Agreement (AA) with the Ukrainian government. Finally, the EU, together with the US, imposed financial and economic sanctions on Russia, a step that would have been unimaginable a few years earlier due to diverging opinions among EU Member States regarding the treatment of Russia (EurActiv 2015a).

Overall, the EU has been keener to engage in unfolding political-security processes in its eastern neighbourhood compared with the southern neighbourhood countries – despite greater challenges to its coherence. Eastern and Central European EU Member States, many of which are known for their hawkish position towards Russia, have often been at odds with more reluctant Western European Member States – with Germany trying to reconcile the opposing camps. In some cases, the EU blatantly failed to speak with one voice. For instance, conciliatory remarks of the Energy Commissioner and representatives of Member States praising cooperation with Azerbaijan on energy (EEAS 2011; 2015) have often overshadowed the criticism of Baku’s democratic record in official documents and resolutions adopted by the European Commission (2015) and the European Parliament (2014; 2015). This may be less an issue of coherence, but a self-assessment of the EU as lacking the transformative power vis-à-vis energy-rich Azerbaijan (Kobzova and Alieva 2012). To avoid jeopardising its energy and security interests, the EU has paid no more than lip service to the promotion and protection of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. By contrast, where the EU has felt capable of making a difference, it has usually managed to reach a compromise between Member States and the EU institutions and speak with a single voice.

In terms of the democratization-stability dilemma, the EU has been pursuing a more balanced approach vis-à-vis eastern ENP countries than its Southern Mediterranean neighbours. While still prioritizing stability, political conditionality has played a more prominent role due to more favourable domestic conditions. First, although the eastern neighbours have not been necessarily more stable than Mediterranean ENP countries, the large inflows of migrants due to other geographic, but also demographic and political, conditions have been far less of an issue (cf. Fargues 2013). Second, according to most democracy indices, on average, eastern ENP countries have been more democratic than the southern neighbourhood countries (Börzel and van Hüllen 2014a). Third, as most of the EU’s eastern neighbours consider themselves European, the EU’s external legitimacy has been higher in eastern ENP countries than in the southern neighbourhood countries (Börzel and van Hüllen 2014b; Techau 2014).
Despite these more favourable domestic conditions, the EU has not consistently applied political conditionality to encourage democratic change. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EU has consistently prioritized security over democracy. For energy-rich Azerbaijan, this is hardly surprising, since EU officials deem political conditionality unlikely to make a difference (Kobzova and Alieva 2012). So why hurt the EU’s economic and security interests? Armenia, in contrast, is a country suffering from structural poverty, with no possession of mineral resources. It has a vibrant civil society and some of the largest anti-autocratic mass protests in the whole eastern neighbourhood (Levitsky and Way 2010). Yet, despite the presence of a strong domestic demand for democratic change, the EU has never invoked political conditionality against Armenia’s semi-autocratic government. Rather, its focus has been on the normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey or the preservation of the frozen state of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (RFE/RL 2010).

Georgia and Ukraine provide some evidence for the EU’s use of political conditionality, which has not always been consistent but rather effective. During the electoral revolutions in the early 2000s, the EU and the US empowered opposition movements, youth groups, and civil society actors through various capacity-building measures and criticized the corrupt and authoritarian regimes for flawed elections (Börzel, Pamuk and Stahn 2009; Wilson 2007). In Georgia’s 2003 ‘Rose Revolution’, the EU even employed financial sticks, postponing the disbursement of new credits, which caused the budget crisis that helped bring down the Shevardnadze regime (RFE/RL 2002a; 2002b). A few years later, the EU and the US again stepped up their democratizing pressure in both countries. In Georgia, the EU managed to persuade the incumbent regime to participate in the electoral power transition (Börzel and Lebanidze 2015). In Ukraine, the EU criticized the authoritarian roll-back of democratic reforms by newly elected president Victor Yanukovych, and used the negotiation process on the AA to address the lack of democratic change – especially the issue of selective justice. President Yanukovych refused to bow to EU pressure and turned towards Russia instead. However, his decision sparked the large-scale pro-European protests that came to be known as ‘Euromaidan’, which resulted in a power change with Victor Yanukovich fleeing the country in early 2014 (Marples and Mills 2015).

To summarize, Ukraine and Georgia are the only eastern ENP countries where the EU has repeatedly applied political conditionality. We should not overestimate the influence of the EU in the ‘Colour Revolutions’ and during the ‘Euromaidan’. Yet, the critical position of the EU, with other Western actors, has empowered pro-democratic reform coalitions in Georgia and Ukraine (cf. Wilson 2007). This points to the importance of endogenous democratic processes as a major scope condition for consistency of the ENP and its effectiveness. In Ukraine and Georgia, mass mobilization pushed for democratic change or supported political elites with pro-European reform agendas. In Armenia, the democratic opposition has not been strong enough to override security concerns regarding Nagorno-Karabakh, which orients political elites towards Russia (Babayan 2015). In Azerbaijan and Belarus, finally, political opposition has been weak and the incumbents have never shown any interest in democratic change (Wilson 2011; Kobzova and Alieva 2012). Like its Southern Mediterranean neighbours, the EU’s potential to empower democratic forces has been largely absent or circumscribed by the EU’s own interest in stability and security in the countries.

Next to the democratization-stability dilemma, the asymmetric dependency of neighbouring countries on the EU has also mitigated the ENP’s consistency and effectiveness. The EU notoriously failed to trigger democratic change in Belarus, even though Belarus has been the only country in both neighbourhood spaces that has been under consistent democratizing pressure of the EU since the inception of the ENP. The main factor, which has undermined the application of political conditionality, has been the role of Russia, which has been
bolsiering the autocratic regime of Belarus and has made it largely immune to EU pressure (Ambrosio 2009; Tolstrup 2009).

Table 17.1 looks for correlation between the consistency and effectiveness of the EU in the ENP countries. As we can see, in most cases, the EU has prioritized stability and security over democracy, stabilizing rather than transforming the authoritarian structures. However, in the few cases in which the EU decided to invoke political conditionality in response to authoritarianism, democratic forces have prevailed. Countries that have been targeted by EU political conditionality are considered today as having more democratic development in both regions (post-'Arab Spring' Tunisia in the South, and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in the East). Belarus and Egypt are two exceptions that confirm the rule. In both countries, the effects of EU political conditionality were mitigated by the weakness of democratic forces, the threat of political instability and the role of illiberal regional powers.

Correlation does not equal causality. It could be that the EU only applies political conditionality where the risk of failure is low, given the presence of strong democratic forces and a low risk of political instability.

Conclusions: the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy – inconsistent or Machiavellian?

This chapter discussed the ENP in terms of its coherence and consistency. We argue that the EU’s transformative power in its neighbourhood is curbed by a lack of consistency rather than coherence. Whereas the EU has maintained a relatively stable degree of coherence, the inconsistency stemming from the pursuit of conflictual goals has often undermined the effectiveness of the ENP. The democratization-stability dilemma also explains the inter-regional differences we observe. In its southern neighbourhood, except for Tunisia, the EU has hardly applied political conditionality. During the 2011 'Arab Spring', the EU reluctantly accepted the changed environment and committed itself to supporting democratic change. However, the change in discourse has not resulted in a real policy change. The EU continues to prioritize stability over democracy. Despite the formal suspension of dialogue under the ENP, its tacit acceptance of the coup d’état by the Egyptian military against the democratically elected government of President
Morsi in Egypt in 2013 is a case in point. In its eastern neighbourhood, by contrast, the EU has sought to strike a better balance between preserving stability and promoting democratic change. The inter-regional differences are related to differences in domestic structures. First, the endogenously driven processes of democratization have been more pronounced in the East than in the South. As a result, the potential for incumbent elites trying to lock-in democratic change and for the EU to empower democratic opposition parties, is greater. Second, the EU enjoys greater public support in the East than in the South. Most of the social protests in eastern ENP countries, including the so called ‘Colour Revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine and the recent protests of ‘Euromaidan’, were inherently pro-European in nature. The protesters aspired to an increased role of the EU in domestic matters and, ultimately, for EU membership. In contrast, the 2011 Arab uprisings did not call for a clear foreign policy orientation. Moreover, protesters in Arab countries made it clear from the beginning that these revolutions were ‘theirs’ and that external actors had better stay out (Techau 2014). As one author has observed, in contrast to the protest movements in Central Europe and the former Soviet space, ‘for Arabs, the ouster of decades-old dictators did not go hand-in-hand with a return to Europe’ (Asseburg 2013: 57). Thus, unlike in eastern ENP countries, the EU’s soft power in its southern neighbourhood has been more limited and the preconditions for democratization less straightforward, which further decreased the EU’s appetite for applying political conditionality.

Overall, we draw the following conclusions regarding the ENP’s coherence, consistency and effectiveness. First, in terms of policy formulation, the EU has been a coherent actor in setting foreign policy goals and asserting itself as a transformative power (Anderson 2008). This is not to say that the decision-making process has always been easy, but the EU has been able to balance different positions and achieve compromises among the Member States, for instance by simultaneous launching the Union for the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership. Second, in terms of policy implementation, the EU has also been consistent in pursuing its goals of stability and peace in the neighbourhood. Third, the democratization-stability dilemma has been the main reason behind the much-criticized inconsistency of the EU – which has often resulted in a large discrepancy between policy formulation and policy implementation. The EU has acted as a transformative power supporting democratization by applying political conditionality, but only under certain conditions: the presence of an endogenous democratic process and the absence of any serious risks of instability and political disorder. Otherwise, the EU consistently prioritized security and stability over democratization. Since domestic conditions are unfavourable in the EU’s eastern and even more so in its southern neighbourhood, the EU tends to be a stabilizing rather than transformative power, supporting authoritarianism instead of promoting democracy. Yet this inconsistency does not result from a lack of coherence or other malfunctions in the process of EU’s foreign policy making: rather, it stems from a deliberate trade-off between pursuing short-term stability and security goals and promoting long term domestic change.

Note

1 EPNK stands for European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh: www.epnk.org/.

References


Coherence, cohesiveness and consistency