

A GEOPOLITICAL AND GEO-STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE OF POST-NATIONAL POLITICS IN THE EU AND ITS BORDERS: EUROPEANISATION AS A CULTURAL PHENOMENON IN TRANSCAUCASIA

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1. Introduction

How realistic is it to speak of a post-national politics in Europe today, and how authentic are the post-national *demos* and *ethos* in today's EU? Then, whether and how can it be projected towards Transcaucasia?

The global uncertain security environment and the vital necessity to meet transnational and asymmetric challenges and threats, make the answers to the above-mentioned questions truly crucial for the effectiveness of the EU policies given their particular decision-making mechanisms. Furthermore, uncertainty over the use and potential of CFSP and ESDP in the process of an appeasement of one of its most dangerous peripheries – Transcaucasia persists.

The EU is shaped by rather revolutionary transformations: the May 1st enlargement and the Constitutional Treaty. The latter is posing not-so-easy-to-overcome problems. In the light of these difficulties and of a bitter division over the war in Iraq, considerations of a European Union beyond the nation-state seems to carry with it a breath of idealism rather than realism. The cynicism of Robert Kagan's vision of Europe as a de-territorialised "post-modern paradise" unable to match the raw territorial might of American power (Kagan, 2003) is rising some affirmative echoes even in the EU.

However, things are changing, and in order to succeed in its growing ambition and self-confidence as a security actor, the EU, has to address issues determining its very nature, the nature of its actual and potential borders and the peculiarities of its neighbours. Today, the EU is an inter-state system acting through a multi-level and networked governance (L. Hooghe and G. Marks, 1996) operating above and below the state, rather than a post-national stability guaranteeing and security projecting grouping. We also have to acknowledge, that a proliferation of interest groups annihilating the traditional distinctions between public and private interest, as a core feature of these emergent governance practices is growing. Whereby, the technocratic allocation of "values" seems to become the primary target for policy-making (Kohler-Koch and Eising, 1999) at an internal level.

On the other hand, in Europe, the nation was never mapped fully, nor absolutely onto the state, even at the apogee of modernity, and the very possibility of integration policies in modern western societies has been practicable by "forgetting" the contingent and always partial nature of such a "fit" (Anderson, 1995). For this very reason, an attempt to craft policies independent of nation-state territoriality highlights the natural status of Europe as a community of shared destiny, pointing out the dynamic nature of its future external boundaries. In this perspective the definition of borders by Ratzel as "scars of the history" (Ratzel, 1897), which necessitate to be overcome can still be useful.

Since the primary aim of this article is the geopolitical and geo-strategic analysis of the shifting nature of the EU borders, the importance of Gottmann's circulation/iconography relations (Gottmann, 1952) in the core state ideology and societal trends of its neighbours, and particularly those in Transcaucasia, it is necessary to focalise on different theoretical models, as well as, empirical initiatives, that are or should be carried out by the European Union. While state borders remain the main crossing lines within geopolitics, regional groupings are also seeking for frontier characteristics. A need of understanding the function and identity of such frontiers is emerging.

The nature of the European borders is a multifaceted one. In fact, it combines issues linked to migration flows, refugee, asylum and citizenship norms, European integration models and last but not least, security concerns. We can identify an ongoing debate about the EU frontiers from the perspective of the EU as an emerging geopolitical and cultural gravitational model in

the world arena. There is a comparison between the EU and a Westphalian state, which is expected to have fixed borders delimiting its territory and a single sovereign centre. In contrast, according to some observers, the EU evokes a post-Westphalian and post-modern political and territorial model, which is moving away from a strong emphasis on bounded territory (Axford and Huggins, 1999).

2. EU territorial identity and its border models

According to John Agnew, political space is organised like a field of forces, that is, a world in which the relationship between states is purely external (Agnew, 1999, pp. 499-521). Always according to Agnew, sovereignty regimes exhibit distinctive combinations of central state authority, described as legitimate despotic power, and territoriality, intended as the administration of infrastructural power (Agnew, 2004). Thus, the question of how territory, identity politics and particularly sovereignty fit into the European idea of borders and the nature of the interactions between EU and its neighbours become central in the general debate over European identity *tout court*.

Four geo-strategic models can be proposed: networked (porous) borders, march, colonial borders and limes. Each of these introduces a particular way of territorialising the space as well as a certain idea of “inside” and “outside”, and of the risks and problems that the border poses.¹

Networked borders are by definition porous ones. The neo-liberal thought, which removes obstacles to the free movement of people, goods and services, leads to a kind of de-territorialisation and to a borderless world. In the European experience this model led to the Schengen Treaty. It removed border controls from fixed positions along the borderlines of the most EU states. This approach determined stronger internal interactions between member states. In this process the management of the external borders became the result of co-ordinated efforts among member states. In this dimension frontiers are losing their function in a Westphalian and spatial sense. On the other hand, the entire Schengen space can be seen as an expanded frontier.

To a relative removal of the internal borderlines, corresponded, however, a strengthening of external ones. We should not consider the de-territorialisation of borders without posing the question of new territorialisations. The representation of EU borders only through the concept of networks would not correspond to the real trends. Indeed, networked borders have to be seen alongside other models shaped by the external dynamics of the *Schengenland*. The first of these models is represented by the march.

The march is an archaic term meaning “a neutral strip or belt of severance” according to Lord Curzon (Lord Curzon, 1908, p. 28). But the definition of march by Pounds as an inter-zone between powers (Pounds, 1951, pp.146-157) fits better into contemporary, post- Berlin Wall, geopolitical situation. While the march could be found in any places, it has a very long, historical association with Central and Eastern Europe. The precise meaning of the word Ukraine is “march” or “border area”. The march is returning in the Central Europe giving birth to *Mittleeuropa*, expanding from the Baltic to Black and Adriatic Seas and including EU member states, candidate states, as well as non-EU states.

This idea of Central and Eastern Europe, certainly pre-existed Cold War segmentation of Europe. At the end of the XIX century Sir Halford Mackinder was referring to the Central Europe as a strong buffer zone between Germany and Russia. Since it is not the invasion by hostile armies that the EU fears, but the permeation of terrorist and/or criminal networks, *Mittleeuropa* is fulfilling the role of a buffer zone insulating the EU from the threats generated in the former Soviet space. The May 1st enlargement touches most of the States of Central and Eastern Europe. Hence, it might be argued that this geopolitical area would cease to serve as a buffer zone. However, the EU needs a belt of states insulating it from a direct exposition to the above mentioned threats. So, the Central and Eastern European march is likely to move eastwards.

¹ For a detailed and excellent analysis of de-territorialisation and border models in the EU, which partly inspired this article, see Walters, 2004.

There are other aspects of the EU frontiers that are captured neither in terms of the networked borders, nor the more archaic march. These aspects can be displayed by using the categories of colonial borders. The complexities of post-Cold War geopolitics have led an increasing number of scholars to look to models and metaphors of “empire”. With the likelihood of further enlargement, and of an asymmetrical and multi-speed integration project, “both NATO and the EU may begin to look more like traditional empires, with a distinction between centre and periphery... becoming almost as important as the distinction between members and non-members” (Tunander, Bayev and Einagel, 1997).

If we apply this concept to the European Neighbourhood Policy area, a hegemonic relationship between Brussels (centre) and new neighbours (periphery) is likely to emerge. As Bruno Coppieters argues, “hegemony includes the acceptance of the domination of subordinate powers by the centre as legitimate” (Coppieters, Lynch ed., 2003, p. 166). In this framework there is a transfer of public goods from centre to periphery, such as security and economic growth in exchange of, primarily, the acceptance of the complex of European normative and cultural values, then material goods, such as raw materials etc.

This centre–periphery approach can be applied to the EU-European Neighbourhood relations only if the EU accepts to sustain the huge burdens demanded by this ambitious vision. Since security is among the public goods needed by a part of New Neighbours, and insecurity is very likely to be projected by or through these states, the likelihood of such a relation depends strongly on the further transformation of CFSP and ESDP. While in the case of networked borders a strengthening of external borders was registered, the colonial border is likely to be a more dynamic one. If the space of the march is an area between potentially antagonist powers, and that of the modern frontier a finite line demarcating territories, *limes* is an edge, a limit. *Limes* is the line separating power and its outside: “un monde et son contraire”, between the Empire and the barbarians (Rufin, 2001, p. 149).

While an expansionary frontier is always in motion, *limes* is more permanent and is based on shared values and interests. That’s why Rufin argues that *limes* is to create around the Empire a zone of stability and peace (Ruffin, pp. 145-151).

How can *limes* be applied to the EU? While the modern borders have a re-generative and preservative function, *limes* has a conservative role. It is much more crystallised and exclusive, rather than inclusive. The concept of *limes* can be applied to the Mediterranean dimension, but the approach of the EU policy-makers is certainly not based on Huntington’s cultural fault-lines (Huntington, 1993, pp. 22-49). It is rather a question of sharing formal political values and standards. The same can be said about the EU-Turkey, or EU-European Neighbourhood relations. *Limes* represents the EU as a relatively gated community.

The current European tendency displays regionalism as a specificity of the EU moving forward in order to overcome the Westphalian, realist approach to the international relations, and to reach a genuinely neo-functionalist, thus post-Westphalian posture. In this path a lot has been achieved, as the impossibility of wars between EU states. However, the EU is, for the time being, unable to overcome completely the State and its sovereignty. Hence, a bivalence between communitarian and inter-governmental policies persist. It is particularly paralysing a factor in the field of security and foreign policy vis-à-vis its immediate neighbours, because of a reluctance of member states to transfer more sovereignty, still perceived by Westphalian categories, to the Euro-structures.

Once again, citing Agnew’s thoughts, this time about the unfitting functions of the Westphalian model of State sovereignty in a completely transformed reality is of a critical importance. He suggests, in fact, that the Westphalian model of state sovereignty is increasingly inadequate for analysing international dynamics because it ignores hierarchy in the international arena and is mistakenly emphasising on the “geographical expression of authority (particularly under the ambiguous sign of “sovereignty”) as invariably and inevitably territorial” (Agnew, 2004).

3. State models, in-security paradigms and Europeanisation in Transcaucasia

Transcaucasia displays two models from a sovereignty point of view: a pre-Westphalian one, applied to the three *de facto* independent, but *de jure* non-state actors (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorni-Karabagh) and partly to Georgia and Azerbaijan, since they are still

struggling to restore control over their formal state territories; and a Westphalian one, which better describes the state of affairs in Armenia. A common characteristics of all state and non-state actors in the region is that all they have missed a Westphalian experience of state when it was a dominant tendency in the rest of Europe. In fact, before 1991, at least in the last six centuries, their only and merely formal experience of an independent statehood, limited to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, has lasted only from two to three years in the period between 1918-21. Another common feature is that after more than seventy years of Soviet experience, characterised by a forced pan-Soviet Gottmannian *circulation*, at least from an economical and scientific viewpoint, their independence in '91 led to an immediate destruction of the metanarrative of *homo sovieticus*, and brought about the *iconographies*, which still prevail in the region.

Paradoxically, nationalism fills the role of a sort of a catalyst, even for democratic reforms in order to be covered by the umbrella of the EU limes and leave the *enemy*, the barbarian, outside it. In fact, since 1991, the three South Caucasus states are undergoing huge transformations regarding institution-building, state-building, identity-building, border strengthening and setting up of effective foreign and military doctrines. It is not the case of a transition period observed in the southern Europe in the 1980s or in Latin America since 1960s (Lynch, 2003, p. 11), since the meaning of transition is too soft to be applied to these states (Brown, 1997). After more than a decade since their independence, these states have managed to build up democratic institutional façades, however they are still unable to stimulate and maintain fully participatory *poliarchies*, in a Dahlian sense, and fill the gap between the governments and their electorate.

The endemic state weakness, conceived both as a lack of institutional capacities of a state (Kalyuzhnova and Lynch eds., 2000), as a lack of genuine legitimacy, as a polarisation of the political arena combined with lack of governance as well as a Max Weber's lack of state monopoly over the legitimate use of force, is another common trouble of the South Caucasus societies.

The above described state weakness was a key factor, at the end of the '80 and the beginning of the '90, in determining secessionist claims in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorni-Karabagh. The goal of the local political leaders was not a power change in Tbilisi and Baku, but the total disagreement with the idea of a Georgian or Azerbaijani State and the firm willingness to secede. Furthermore, by using J. Anderson's categories, we can state that also in these cases, due to the state and minority engineering of Stalin in '20, nations did not fit into the artificial state structures and their territoriality.

The region is crowded with frozen conflicts, and the military spending of the state actors doubles year by year. There is a critical absence of security. At this point one should define state security by offering a comprehensive theoretical framework. In such an effort Barry Buzan's approach (Buzan, 1991, Buzan, Waever, De Wilde, 1998) can be useful. He argued that a comprehensive understanding of state security cannot any more ignore non-traditional challenges to states (i.e. social and economic turmoil, democratic gaps, economic threats etc.) as well as external traditional military ones, dominant in Cold War studies. The theoretical shift introduced by Buzan is particularly important for the analysis of security perceptions of Transcaucasian countries. By stating that "security is a relational phenomenon" (Buzan, Waever, De Wilde, 1998), Buzan argues that both in the case of traditional and non-traditional challenges to state security the membership of a state to regional or sub-regional security and economic groupings is extremely relevant.²

The South Caucasus has no regional institutional structures enabling its actors to define common policies and explore ways out of the stalled conflicts and their efforts are directed more on a search of external support rather than on direct talks. Not even at a bilateral level there are significant achievements implying regional integration. Indeed, they are heavily dependent on external aid not only from an economic and military point of view, but also, at some extent, in terms of political legitimization.

² For an analysis of Armenian foreign policy through Buzan's analytical framework, see Petros, 2003.

It goes without any doubt that the degree of regional integration in Transcaucasia is critically low, thus the patterns of insecurity are critically high, at least by applying Buzan's assumption.

The EU policies toward the region had to face several exogenous and endogenous challenges during the last decade. The EU had to act in an extremely polarised geopolitical environment where the influence of external power politics sources as the Russian Federation, USA, Turkey, and Iran paradoxically prevails over sources of social and economic development models as the EU. It seems to assist also in this region to some kind of competition between Hobesian and Lockean approaches to the security.

Even if traditional threats to the state security persist in the region, non traditional ones are increasingly challenging the region with all their corroding potential. That's why the secondary role of the EU in the region seems to be paradoxical.

Given the above cited preconditions, and the fact that an EU hard power projection is unlikely in the nearest future, the Union has to use alternative means, since a military escalation in Transcaucasia would pose direct threats to the European security architecture.

Since the EU is currently unable, or unwilling, given the high risks, to project a combination of soft and herd power toward the region, it can diversify its projection by avoiding the use of the ESDP and using socio-cultural and normative models. This kind of projection will confer an added value to the European policies in the region.

This normative corpus can certainly include classical fundamental principles (freedom, democracy, human rights) up to the Copenhagen criteria, in a long term, and the use of the accession conditionality as the most adequate means for final radical changes. Furthermore, the use of Europeanisation, meant as a complex of core socio-cultural values, already formally shared, and potentially enforceable by stronger ties with the Union can be a winning strategy. In fact, Europe is already a gravitational centre for an important share of local élites. The promise, even in a long term, of a common European political belonging would certainly emerge as the main antidote against the proliferating nationalism.

4. Conclusions

This brief analysis has demonstrated that:

- at an institutional level the EU decision making has not completely overcome the barriers of the Westphalian State. Rather than post-national, it is intergovernmental,
- the intergovernmental nature of the EU decision making could constitute an obstacle for a genuine and effective European foreign and security policy,
- a greater transfer of sovereignty and a further internal de-territorialisation is crucial to overcome the above mentioned obstacle,
- there are different empirical initiatives regarding the definition of external borders. These initiatives correspond to different models of borders; networked (porous) borders, march, colonial borders and *limes*,
- each of the above mentioned models is applied, or should be applied to a particular dimension of the interactions between the EU and its neighbours based on a proximity-distance paradigm.

To sum up, it is necessary to stress that given that the EU is facing global and multi-dimensional security challenges, it has to generate global and multi-dimensional responses. It is producing pragmatic threat assessments and projects soft power. May be in the nearest future soft power might no more be enough and a combination of soft and hard power be necessary. However, such operations need the endemically lacking largest possible consensus among its members and the implementation of the provisions of the new Constitutional Treaty regarding foreign and security policy.

The combination of these two means, with a stronger soft power component (i.e. projection of normative models and Europeanisation), if properly applied to its troubled peripheries and upheld by a perspective of a future integration, not only can lead to a reactivation of peace efforts generated endogenously, but will also counter regional endogenous and exogenous hegemony.

Such a process will undoubtedly strengthen the EU stance on a more frequent use of soft power for conflict resolution and international advocacy for multilateralism.

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