



## IS THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY A HEGEMONIC INITIATIVE? CASE OF UKRAINE\*

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Theoretical Article

### ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) until 2010s through a Neo-Gramscian lens, focusing on transnational power dynamics within Europe and uncovering the historically specific connections among economic, political, and civil societal developments, particularly in the context of Ukraine. The study seeks to illustrate how the EU's hegemonic initiative is constructed and implemented, while also investigating potential redefinitions of this project and questioning its sustainability. It argues that the neo-liberal approach of the European Commission is intended to reshape the region into an area where the unrestricted movement of capital, goods, and services is ensured, yet the free movement of individuals is significantly limited, with no assurances of full membership for its partners. This study examines the potential for the ENP to function as a hegemonic initiative that could create a historic bloc and assesses whether it can sustain itself with the approval of its partners. It emphasizes the dynamics of social power relations and their organization within the frameworks of the state and civil society at both national and transnational levels, aiming to analyze the extent and nature of the coercion and consent provided to the EU.

**Keywords:** European Neighborhood Policy, Hegemony, Ukraine.

**Legal Permissions:** The study is among the studies that do not require ethical committee approval, since it only uses publicly available information, and no data is collected from humans.

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\*This study was derived from doctoral thesis study of the author.

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## AVRUPA KOMŞULUK POLİTİKASI HEGEMONİK BİR GİRİŞİM Mİ? UKRAYNA ÖRNEĞİ

Teorik Makale

### ÖZ

Bu araştırma, 2010'lu yıllara kadar Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası'nı (AKP) Neo-Gramscian bir mercekten inceleyerek, Avrupa içindeki ulus ötesi güç dinamiklerine odaklanarak ve özellikle Ukrayna bağlamında ekonomik, politik ve sivil toplum gelişmeleri arasındaki tarihsel olarak özgül bağlantıları ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, AB'nin hegemonik girişiminin nasıl inşa edildiğini ve uygulandığını göstermeyi amaçlarken, aynı zamanda bu projenin olası yeniden tanımlarını araştırmakta ve sürdürülebilirliğini sorgulamaktadır. Avrupa Komisyonu'nun neo-liberal yaklaşımının, bölgeyi sermayenin, malların ve hizmetlerin sınırsız hareketinin sağlandığı, ancak bireylerin serbest dolaşımının önemli ölçüde sınırlı olduğu ve ortaklarına tam üyelik güvencesi verilmediği bir alana yeniden şekillendirmeyi amaçladığını savunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, AKP'nin tarihi bir blok yaratabilecek hegemonik bir girişim olarak işlev görme potansiyelini inceliyor ve ortaklarının onayıyla kendini sürdürüp sürdüremeyeceğini değerlendirmektedir. Sosyal güç ilişkilerinin dinamiklerini ve bunların hem ulusal hem de ulus ötesi düzeylerde devlet ve sivil toplum çerçeveleri içindeki örgütlenmesini vurgulayarak AB'ye sağlanan zorlama ve rızanın kapsamını ve doğasını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası, Hegemonya, Ukrayna.

**Yasal İzinler:** Çalışmada yalnızca kamuya açık bilgiler kullanılması ve insandan veri toplanılmaması sebebiyle, etik kurul izni gerektirmeyen çalışmalar arasında yer almaktadır.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The collapse of the Soviet Union initiated a new era in international relations, leading to changes in borders and a geopolitical realignment, especially within the European Union (EU). The 2004 enlargement expanded the boundaries of the EU into the 'still unstable' territories of the former Eastern bloc, prompting the EU to acknowledge the necessity of diversifying its policies. As potential challenges could arise from the member states of the former Eastern bloc, EU support became crucial for assisting these countries in transitioning to market economies and democratizing their political frameworks. Ignoring the conflicts stemming from these nations could threaten the stability of the EU. Therefore, the EU deemed it important to foster stability, economic growth, and democracy, essentially working to bring these countries in line with EU standards.

The foreign policy of the European Union seems to prioritize bilateral relationships, as evidenced by its wide-ranging agreements with countries in both Eastern and Southern Europe (Haukkala, 2008, 24). This tendency is clearly reflected in the accession process, which is perceived as an uneven and unilateral effort that depends on the EU's projection of its norms and values (Aggarwal and Fogarty, 2004). The reach of the EU's normative influence is confined to its member countries, along with the assurance of potential future membership. Furthermore, the EU has successfully negotiated and completed eleven Partnership and Cooperation agreements. In the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), agreements have been made with fifteen states, highlighting a notable difference: there is no obligation for membership.

Initially called the 'Wider Europe' and 'Proximity Policy,' the ENP was established as a means to build upon the regional and bilateral connections already created with non-EU countries in the Mediterranean through the Barcelona Process, as well as in Eastern Europe via various Partnership and Co-operation Agreements (PCAs). The aim of the ENP was for the EU to address specific challenges within these pre-existing agreements and to update them in accordance with the contemporary political environment. The EU sought to foster a prosperous area and a friendly neighborhood, described as a 'ring of friends,' marked by close, peaceful, and collaborative relations (Commission of the European Communities, 2003).

This study aims to analyze the ENP through a Neo-Gramscian perspective, highlighting the transnational power relations within Europe and revealing the historically specific links among economic, political, and civil societal processes, especially in relation to Ukraine. The research intends to demonstrate how the EU's hegemonic initiative is both formed and executed, while also exploring potential redefinitions of this hegemonic project and its long-term viability. It is suggested that the Commission's neoliberal strategy seeks to transform the region into one that ensures the free flow of capital, goods, and services, while significantly restricting the movement of individuals, with no guarantee of full membership for its partners.

In other words, this study examines the potential of the ENP as a hegemonic initiative to form a historic bloc and evaluates its sustainability in relation to its partners' contributions.

Up to this point, the research starts by outlining the historical experiences of Ukraine. It examines how the state develops its position in reaction to global shifts and investigates the methods through which Ukrainian policy is influenced and redefined. An exploration of political instability and its effects on the relationship with the EU will be carried out to pinpoint the moments and sites where dominant narratives surfaced. This study aims to assess the level of satisfaction among Ukrainians concerning the EU's incentives on a range of topics, such as energy issues and matters related to visas and asylum.

In addition to utilizing secondary sources such as published and printed materials, primary research was conducted to enhance the theoretical section. Brussels, recognized as the decision-making hub of the ENP, along with Ukraine, were chosen as key locations for effective fieldwork. The specific implementation of the ENP was the focus of this research. Primary research activities occurred in Brussels throughout 2006 and 2007. To achieve a well-structured and meaningful outcome, all in-depth interviews were arranged to facilitate the analysis of diverse perceptions, interests, priorities, and expectations from various viewpoints.

To summarize, the study's theoretical framework highlighted representatives from civil societies and business organizations as significant social influences. Consequently, insights were gathered from members of both national and transnational civil society who had formerly held senior positions as Eurocrats. This method allowed for the acquisition of important internal and external viewpoints regarding the dynamics of the ENP.

The research findings of the study originate from data mainly collected through interviews and documents during research trips to Brussels and Kyiv in March and September of 2007, respectively. Key interviews with Ukrainian policymakers, political party representatives, opinion leaders, academics, technocrats, journalists, and members of foreign diplomatic missions played a crucial role in confirming the initial research findings before they were included in the study.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Some traditional theories about European Integration might not apply to today's political and economic landscape. Differentiation, which is a key aspect of the twenty-first century, must be taken into account. Although consensus was the main foundation for agreements, reaching it among thirty States with diverse interests and distinct economies proved to be difficult, particularly without robust leadership. The movements of EU members have increasingly leaned towards greater diversity and distinction (Taylor, 2008).

Gramsci's theoretical approach to understanding social conflict can be expanded to encompass a range of social participants competing for dominance over the regulations, institutions, norms, and policies that influence markets and economic interactions. The neo-Gramscian perspective provides a theoretically grounded lens that incorporates material, discursive, and organizational dimensions of power, emphasizing the importance of strategy in effecting change within complex social systems. This framework presents a holistic approach that connects market and non-market strategies. By drawing on diverse theoretical insights, the neo-Gramscian perspective makes a unique addition to institutional theory by offering a framework that addresses specific tensions within the agency-structure dynamic. It also presents a notion of ideology that avoids problems associated with elitism and essentialism while incorporating internal dynamics. Additionally, the Neo-Gramscian framework introduces a strategic perspective on power, revealing how actors can attain at least a partial comprehension of and exert influence over complex social and political structures.

This study, therefore, analyzes the European Neighbourhood Policy through a Neo-Gramscian lens. By exploring the current evolving global order and regional integrations like the EU, IR Gramscians focus on the political and cultural arenas where the coercive and consensus-building aspects of a developing State are poorly defined and may remain so. However, in these spaces, both international civil society and any potential international State maintain a discernible and tangible relationship with one another (Murphy, 1998).

The framework conceptualized by Gramsci was rooted in the historical context of the State, particularly the Italian State, drawing from its political history during the period of Italy's delayed unification. His holistic viewpoint seeks to navigate the challenges posed by determinism. Both structural approaches and Marxist 'economism' share a mutual recognition that socio-economic changes do not dictate but rather establish the conditions for political social struggles (Bieler, 2002: 6). Their analysis underscores the class forces that new-Gramscians identify as emerging from the production process. This inconsistency is a commonality between both perspectives, forming the foundation of state power within class relations. According to Gramsci, international relations mirror fundamental social relationships, with States serving merely as sites where this overarching conflict unfolds. Realism essentially characterizes the international landscape as a system of states. The Neo-Gramscian theory challenges this notion by asserting that the primary elements of the international system are not States, but rather various other factors. This perspective goes beyond simply reconstructing the international system; it seeks to redefine it as a construct of social forces, governance structures, and global order (Morton, 2003).

Gramsci as a philosopher and political figure viewed that theory and practice should be united. This is the "Every action is the result of various wills, with a varying degree of intensity and awareness and of homogeneity with the entire complex of the collective will." The concept and structure held by Gramsci included the economic base, and he also saw how the political, legal, and cultural superstructures intertwined within a real historical process that expressed a social totality in a reciprocally corresponding way. The theory with which this notion is related would be a disparate and variegated assortment of jumbled and conflicting beliefs and viewpoints (Gramsci, 1971).

Gramsci reinterpreted the traditional Marxist understanding of the State's role within civil society, culture, and ideology by emphasizing the independence of political processes from the economic base. He posited that the ruling class's political dominance in advanced capitalist societies is not solely reliant on the coercive power of the State; rather, it is dispersed across various institutions and relationships within civil society. This concept of class rule, termed hegemony, is primarily based on the consent of the governed, with the coercive mechanisms of the State serving as a backup when necessary. Gramsci's insights highlight the complex interplay between consent and coercion in maintaining class dominance in contemporary societies (Moran, 1998).

What Gramsci observed was that the social and economic structures long withstood in such a contradictory and alienated form of twentieth-century capitalism because of something more than the direct coercive force of a small elite. Rather, hegemony rested on broad-based consent, which is based on Hegemony involves. A point that evades deterministic and economic strands in Marx from his discussion on the materialist concept of history, where superstructures are taken to be mainly grounded on the economic base (Levy and Egan, 2003). That is, alliances and compromises could provide some level of political and material accommodation to different social groups, along with shared-interest ideologies. Rather, he asserts that culture and ideology have an autonomous level.

It does this by trying to understand the structural change at the global and European level that gave rise to the process of the current neo-liberal global order, which in turn also signifies changes in the modes of integration at the global level. Our paper argues that there is a need to be very clear and accurate about the changes in the global political economy, together with the concomitant historically specific forms for a given period, of both neighboring countries and the EU. According to Gramsci's analysis of Western advanced countries, the ruling class's

political power is dependent not only on the force of its control over the state apparatus but also by diffusing this influence over a wide range of institutions and relationships in civil society. Indeed, what Gramsci calls hegemony presupposes consent as a foundation for political power; coercion relying on the state comes into play only as a last resort to maintain this power. A social group's leading position is revealed by two basic types of manifestation: one being 'domination,' and the other is 'intellectual and moral leadership.' The usual exercise of hegemony within the established framework of the parliamentary regime is marked by a reciprocal balance of force and consent. When applied to the European Neighborhood Policy, this study contends that hegemonic initiative towards neighboring countries also embodies a blend of coercion and consent.

This EU policy toward new neighbors represents the hegemonic initiative of the EU as understood through the Neo-Gramscian perspective. Compliance with this aspect of Gramsci, where realistic thinking perceives the theoretical process as a dynamic, practical, and ongoing endeavor directed at revealing social reality, runs parallel with the rationality of the European Neighbourhood Policy of the EU as a hegemonic initiative. From the perspective of Gramscian reasoning, hegemony denotes the dialectical bond between domination (consent=support), comprising persuasion and modes of governance viewed as relatively legitimate. The notion of domination also involves the provision of intellectual and moral leadership that is influenced by different political and cultural groups or organizations (Hoffman, 1984).

The hegemonic orders as postulated by Gramsci find their support in his conceptions related to 'historic bloc' and 'passive revolution'. The strength of any historic bloc relies on its hegemony, while the very idea of 'passive revolution' seems to present an ideological challenge to a hegemonic order. Passive revolution is the term used to describe the process by which one hegemonic order is contested and finally replaced by another. A hegemonic social structure in Gramscian terms may also be called a 'historic bloc'. This concept of a historic bloc is premised on three factors: a particular combination of social groups, economic systems, and related ideological structures. At the heart of this bloc's maintenance of hegemony is its bureaucratic and coercive rule over the state, its control of the economic sphere, and legitimacy ascribed to it by civil society. In his own term, 'historic bloc,' Gramsci speaks of alliances between various social groups and, more broadly, the alignment of material, organizational, and discursive frameworks actively spent in forming views of the shared interests involved (Levy and Egan, 2003).

What we shall do in the following is analyze the dynamics of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine from the argument pursued above by Gramsci. Organic crises result as modern social forces mature and pressurize the sovereign nation-state both inside and outside its legal framework. The place of national economies in a global economy reduces the ability of such economies to autonomously manage investments. This is because the legitimacy of a state deriving from a national community is threatened by multicultural society formation. Due to the fact that societies change, and variations create a situation where not only are conflicts within moral traditions but also between them. The concepts of hegemony, political society, and civil society, together with the historic bloc and hegemonic project can be reformulated to correspond with the altered conditions of contemporary societies. The concept of hegemony remains central to an understanding of politics, because politics involves gaining consent as well as coercion. A more Neo-Gramscian approach is interested in mapping transnational power relations in Europe and making sense of these relationships. The particular historical articulations of economic, political, and social processes bear weight. The European Union and its principal initiative 'ENP' can be most fruitfully unpacked through a lens informed by Gramscian theory. This is because hegemony is not exclusively a matter of coercion but rather is force and consent in a

complex combination. The attention is thus directed to the power dynamics of society emphasizing which channels and forms of articulation in the state/civil society dimension on national, international, and super-national levels.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore the descriptive analysis of impacts, which are particularly evident in the ENP have settled. The study focuses on ENP from different areas which are related to social structure. By analyzing ENP; this discussion aims to create a common future with Europeans and embracing a culture of diversity. The data for this study will mainly be gathered from gazettes and articles in various journals. This approach is chosen due to its cost-effectiveness, allowing for the collection of information from a sizable literate sample quickly and at a lower expense compared to alternative methods.

#### **3.1. Data Collection**

The data for this research was gathered through gazettes and texts of several publicly available journals. Publicly available data on gazettes and texts were reviewed to assess the situation of ENP. Information from interorganizational websites and social media was also incorporated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ENP issue. Furthermore, additional data was sourced from industry reports and academic studies related to ENP issue practices in the world.

#### **3.2. Analysis**

The research analyzed a variety of the importance of examining the relationship between ENP and these social structural elements and the interactions produced by these relationships emerges. Similarly, the social acceptance and social adaptation of ENP and the different societies in the world has also revealed the critical situation of the permanent population. This research is a part of social reality and is a multidimensional sociological assessment and analysis of ENP in the last decade. On this basis, analyze and evaluate the extraordinary problems. Suggestions will be made for the solution of the problem.

#### **3.3. Procedure**

This study will use primarily the data collected using gazettes and texts from various journals. This method will be used because they are a cost effective way of collecting information from a large literate sample in a short span of time and at a reduced cost than other methods.

### **4. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ENP AS A HEGEMONIC INITIATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The European Union exemplifies regional integration; however, its reluctance to extend similar initiatives to neighboring regions creates a notable paradox. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is often misinterpreted through the lens of the enlargement process, despite their fundamentally different objectives—enlargement seeks full integration, while the ENP aims for association. A more appropriate comparison for the ENP is the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which serves as a precursor to the current policy. The relationship between the EU and its neighboring states reveals both continuity and transformation, highlighting the complexities of regional dynamics and the challenges of fostering domestic change in adjacent countries.

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) does not signify a transformative change in the European Union's (EU) external relations but rather reflects the longstanding objectives of its

foreign policy, which include promoting security, stability, and shared values through established mechanisms like aid and economic integration. The ENP distinguishes itself primarily through its emphasis on differentiation, contrasting with the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), which focuses on multilateralism. While both policies aim to foster a zone of peace and prosperity among the EU and its partners, they share similar incentives centered on political dialogue, trade, and technical cooperation. The ENP is intended to complement the EMP rather than replace it, as both policies work in tandem to enhance the EU's relationships with neighboring countries.

The decision made in Thessalonica by the EU in 2003 to initiate new relations with its neighboring countries indicates that the EU recognizes the necessity of assuming a more significant role in ensuring peace and prosperity across the European continent, following years of inactivity. Undoubtedly, the most apparent rationale for the establishment of the ENP is the Eastern enlargement.

The European Union (EU) is perceived to be pursuing a form of external governance through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), aimed at managing its extensive borders. This initiative is analyzed through a Neo-Gramscian lens, suggesting that the EU's approach to its neighboring regions is a hegemonic project. The ENP is the result of complex interactions among various social forces within Europe, which contribute to its development. These social forces encompass moral, intellectual, and material dimensions, all of which are crucial in shaping the EU's hegemonic aspirations in relation to its neighbors.

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) has gained significance in the context of the EU's influence on the international stage, particularly following the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005. This policy's potential to uphold the EU's hegemonic project is critical, as it affects not only the EU and its neighboring regions but also the wider international system. However, challenges such as inadequate funding and a lack of coherent design hinder the ENP's evolution into a historic bloc. Furthermore, the application of conditionality has struggled due to insufficient incentives for partner countries to adopt EU norms, with membership being viewed as the primary reward for compliance with the EU's reform agenda (Schimmelfenning and Sedelmeier, 2005).

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is likely to be sustained temporarily with the consent of its partners; however, its evolution into a historic bloc appears improbable. Currently, two competing hegemonic projects are emerging: the EU's 'Integrated European Economic Space' and Russia's 'Single Economic Space.' The former focuses on the EU's economic ties with neighboring countries without pursuing further enlargement, while the latter aims for a customs union among Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan to re-establish Russia's regional influence through deep regulatory convergence. The conflicting nature of these strategies is expected to exacerbate existing challenges, with Ukraine exemplifying the potential to either stabilize or polarize the region, leaving its future direction uncertain.

## **5. CASE OF UKRAINE**

The European Union has faced challenges in defining clear strategic objectives related to Ukraine. It is apparent that the EU primarily recognizes what it opposes in terms of Ukraine's actions, utilizing its support as a tool to discourage Ukraine from forming ties with any new Russia-aligned coalitions. However, this method is insufficient (Kuzio and Moroney, 2001). The authors refer to it as "half a policy." This incomplete strategy does not tackle the more essential question of Ukraine's role within the developing European framework. The EU's lack of clarity regarding Ukraine's strategic aims mirrors a similarly vague foreign policy in Ukraine,



which is characterized by “multi-vectorism.” It is suggested that Ukraine acts as a focal point in the competing hegemonic strategies. In the context of EU-Russia relations, the EU seeks to build greater self-assurance to shift existing power dynamics into a state of tension, while Russia strives to maintain its current supremacy by establishing a ‘Single Economic Space.’ With the launch of the neighborhood policy in March 2003, the EU aimed to formulate a new analytical framework for the wider European context. Outlined in March and June 2003, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) aims to create an 'Integrated European Economic Space' near the EU rather than focus on further expansion. Unlike other strategies, the EU has emphasized the importance of free and fair elections, the encouragement of democratization, and the maintenance of the rule of law within the region. While this strategy was advantageous during Ukraine's 'colored revolution,' it later experienced a decline in momentum after that time. As a result of the interaction between external and domestic influences, Ukraine did not witness the emergence of any political leadership regarding European affairs under the framework of the ENP.

The potential for the current strategies employed by the EU and its partners to evolve into a historic bloc appears limited, despite some agreement among them. The EU has primarily concentrated on transitional issues, paralleling the actions of various international organizations and Western NGOs in facilitating regime changes in Ukraine. This approach reflects a continuation of neo-liberal restructuring, which seeks external reinforcement through the EU and other international entities. Furthermore, the ambiguous and open-ended nature of the awards under the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) raises critical questions regarding the use of conditionality, as it suggests a framework where incentives may be offered in exchange for compliance with certain standards (Epstein and Sedelmeier, 2008).

Ukraine is acknowledged not just as the largest country and an important state to the east that attracts the attention of the ENP, but also as the nation that has shown the greatest discontent with its relationship structure with the EU, having expressed desires for membership since the 1990s. Jacoby notes that the extent and speed of transformative change in Ukraine have been more gradual and constrained in comparison to countries seeking accession. In contrast to the impact of enlargement on reform initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Jacoby, 2006), this policy has not effectively guided Ukraine's political leaders toward the necessity of enduring reforms. Although the EU's Hegemonic Project aimed to induce societal change through promises of transformation, the only significant alterations have been observed among the elite, where the old nomenclature has been replaced by new NGOs.

The launch of both the Orange Revolution and the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) at the same time greatly influenced expectations for Ukraine's ties with the European Union. The optimism sparked by the Orange Revolution made the ENP's emphasis on practical cooperation, which lacked clearly defined objectives, inadequate in fulfilling these hopes. Furthermore, the political turmoil arising from the competition between Viktor Yanukovich and Viktor Yushchenko, who served as prime minister and president respectively, intensified the difficulties faced by Ukraine in 2006 and 2007. This struggle for power, along with the sidelining of parliament in decisions related to the EU, led to chaotic law-making and a disconnect between Ukraine's legislative goals and its commitments under the ENP.

The primary obstacle was the insufficient political will and the lack of policy-making capabilities needed to tackle domestic opposition to change, especially due to the evident absence of effective leadership regarding European matters during the era of the 'Orange' elites. The regulatory frameworks that shaped the EU-Ukraine relationship were both unclear and outdated. For instance, the Strategy that had been in effect for ten years pinpointed crucial areas

for integration and anticipated that by 2007, the necessary conditions for Ukraine to attain full European Union membership would be in place. The three-year Action Plan drove policies that were poorly coordinated and lacked a unified strategy. While acting as deputy prime minister, Rybachuk assumed the responsibility of coordinating European integration and oversaw the development of the first annual report. The document referred to as the 'Road Map on the Implementation of the AP' was officially adopted, detailing 177 measures that identified the institutions accountable for executing the Action Plan's priorities, along with the timelines and strategies for their execution.

In 2006, under the leadership of Viktor Yanukovych, the pace of implementation significantly diminished when compared to 2005. The absence of decisive political guidance regarding European matters, coupled with an ineffective coordinating mechanism within the government, resulted in the execution of the Action Plan being largely managed by middle-level civil servants, who were entrusted with its oversight.

In contrast to enlargement, the EU has not clearly outlined the actual award or the specific criteria necessary for obtaining it, nor does it provide a clear perspective on membership. The Orange government viewed Ukraine's involvement in the ENP as a transitional phase, leading to significant decisions that facilitated the 'domestication' of EU conditionality. In Ukraine, the ENP has notably empowered various stakeholders beyond just the political elite, particularly within the state administration. This situation stands in stark contrast to the experiences of countries seeking accession, where the political elite emerged as the primary 'coalition partners' of the EU (Jacoby, 2006).

The influence of the ENP on domestic policy outcomes in Ukraine has been minimal, a situation resulting from both internal and external factors. As an initiative of the EU, which is inherently hegemonic, the ENP is unlikely to evolve into a historic bloc since neither Ukraine nor the EU is inclined to pursue that path. For both parties to assume their respective responsibilities, it is essential to implement polity reforms, particularly those concerning policy conditionality that fundamentally requires the adoption of the *acquis*. This process necessitates the establishment of various institutions and a political will that is currently absent in both Ukraine and the EU regarding the Project.

## **6. THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY**

The 2015 review of the ENP underscored the significance of the EU's involvement with neighboring regions by emphasizing the Union's "own interdependence with its neighbors" (European Commission and High Representative, 2015, 428). While the goals of the ENP to promote security, stability, and prosperity in the surrounding areas were reaffirmed, the primary focus of the ENP was identified as stabilization. This emphasis was particularly evident in the heightened attention given to enhancing cooperation within the security sector alongside neighboring nations, a priority that arose from a public consultation held prior to the formulation of the 2015 review. At this juncture, however, it remains ambiguous how the 2015 ENP aligns with the security collaboration anticipated within the European Political Community framework. The EPC primarily concentrates on hard security measures to support Ukraine during the ongoing conflict. Additionally, the EPC addresses the broader implications of various soft and hybrid threats, as well as non-traditional security issues stemming from Russia's escalatory actions concerning energy supplies and different economic sectors.

The anticipated revision of the Strategic Compass, expected to be completed by 2025 but to be developed over the next few years, presents an opportunity to elucidate the future configuration of this multifaceted approach. This revision should build upon the significant framework

agreement and advancements made during the European Political Community (EPC) meetings scheduled to occur in Moldova, Spain, and the United Kingdom throughout 2023 and 2024. Such efforts will aid in understanding the role of the EPC within the broader framework of the EU's international partnerships and the ongoing securitization of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which has been in progress since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014 (Cadier, 2019). A critical inquiry arises regarding the additional value that the EPC can ultimately offer to the EU in its pursuit of stabilizing and enhancing the resilience and absorption capacities of the EU27. The response to this inquiry hinges on the political decisions to be made regarding the modalities for managing administrative, financial, in-kind, and other contributions necessary to sustain the EPC and ensure its strategic relevance in light of the current array of EU strategies and initiatives. These decisions will, in turn, be shaped by the shifting security dynamics in ENP hotspots, which are influenced by Russia to varying extents.

As of fall 2022, the circumstances in Ukraine can be viewed as part of a wider array of persistent governance shortcomings and military engagements impacting the European region, thereby presenting both direct and indirect security threats to the EU. The trajectory of this conflict in the forthcoming months will shape the responses of major powers to instability in global politics moving forward (Melvin, 2022).

The relationship between the foreign military presence in Ukraine and the geopolitical and military tensions in neighboring regions is, to some extent, associated with the activities and presence of Russian fighters and auxiliaries in various conflict-ridden and unstable areas, including Libya. This insight goes beyond the broad characterization of the current circumstances presented in the Strategic Compass, which refers to “a dangerous mix of armed aggression, illegal annexation, fragile states, revisionist, and authoritarian regimes” (Council of the EU, 2022). Russia's military involvement in multiple countries adjacent to the EU reflects an increasingly dedicated strategy by the Kremlin to cultivate poorly governed regions susceptible to outbreaks of conflict and socio-economic instability. The worsening conditions in these neighboring regions complicate efforts to bring them closer or achieve deeper integration within European institutions and intergovernmental organizations.

The pattern of Russia's involvement in both regional and international forums, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), reveals a tendency to prioritize its great power ambitions over the security concerns of others (Burns et al., 2020). In the European neighborhood, Russia leverages its economic and military assets to influence the preferences and strategic alignments of nations, steering them away from the collective values and aspirations associated with Europe as a framework for lasting peace and sustainable prosperity. This behavior poses serious risks to the trust within the 'international system' (Ku and Mitzen, 2022). For instance, a skewed interpretation of self-defense leads to a sustained deterioration of socio-economic conditions in regions impacted by Russian military presence and activities across various locations in the European neighborhood (Schmitt, 2022). Such actions are inconsistent with the principles and ideals that underpin cohesive and peaceful development in Europe.

Considering the aforementioned context and the fundamental premise of the Strategic Compass (Council of the EU, 2022), which asserts that we are currently experiencing an era characterized by “growing strategic competition, complex security threats and direct attack[s] on European security,” it would be prudent for the EU to reassess the principles that have guided the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since its last evaluation in 2015. This reassessment should also encompass the security and defense objectives outlined in the 2021 Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (‘Recovery, Resilience and Reform’) as well as

the peace and security goals articulated in the 2021 Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood ('a new Agenda for the Mediterranean'). There is a pressing need to reinvigorate attention towards the interconnections between various hotspots and their cumulative effects on the EU's capacity to endure significant shocks and enhance its resilience in the face of an expanding array of diverse and unpredictable risks and threats.

This evolution in the broader context of the conflict in Ukraine emphasizes the necessity of integrating the EU's geopolitical stance—outlined in the Strategic Compass—into the current execution of the ENP and the EPC in a coordinated manner, while carefully considering the avoidance of redundancies between the actions of the ENP and those of the Political Community. Concurrently, Iran's involvement in Ukraine extends beyond the geopolitical role ascribed to it by the Strategic Compass within the regional boundaries of the Middle East and the Gulf. This involvement indicates that Iran poses a challenge to stability not only in the Southern neighborhood but also along the Eastern flank. Given its significant role as a 'risk multiplier,' Iranian power projection must be incorporated into the upcoming revised threat assessment, anticipated in 2025, as well as the updated Strategic Compass. Additionally, the influence of other 'neighbors of the neighbors,' particularly the Central Asian nations, warrants careful examination.

## **7. OVERVIEW**

The European Union has struggled to define coherent strategic objectives concerning Ukraine. Its understanding is primarily based on what it opposes regarding Ukraine's actions, using its support as a mechanism to dissuade Ukraine from joining any new alliances backed by Russia. However, this approach is deemed inadequate and is characterized as 'half a policy.' Such an incomplete strategy fails to address the more fundamental issue of Ukraine's place within the evolving European framework. The EU's ambivalence toward Ukraine's strategic goals parallels an equally ambiguous foreign policy from Ukraine, which is marked by 'multi-vectorism.' Ukraine is considered a pivotal point in the competing strategies or hegemonic ambitions of both the EU and Russia. The EU seeks to assert itself more confidently to shift the power dynamics into a state of tension, while Russia aims to preserve its current dominance through the establishment of a 'Single Economic Space.' Initiated in March 2003, the EU's neighborhood policy was intended to provide a new analytical framework for the broader European context. As articulated in March and June 2003, the goal of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) is not to pursue further enlargement but rather to establish an 'Integrated European Economic Space' within the EU's vicinity. In contrast to other strategies, the European Union has concentrated on promoting free and fair elections, democratization, and the rule of law within the region. This approach proved beneficial during Ukraine's 'colored revolution'; however, it subsequently lost momentum following the transformation process.

As a result of the interaction between external and internal factors, Ukraine did not develop any political leadership regarding European affairs during the ENP.

Any strategy may be maintained temporarily with the agreement of its partners; however, it is improbable that such a strategy will evolve into a historic bloc. Thus far, the EU has concentrated on transition-related matters. Similar to many other international organizations and larger Western NGOs, the EU has engaged in supporting regime changes in Ukraine. The strategy of the EU appears to be an extension of neo-liberal restructuring, which is intended to be achieved externally through the EU and various international organizations. As noted by Epstein and Sedelmeier, the ambiguous and open-ended characteristics of the rewards under the ENP raise an intriguing question regarding whether the policy utilizes conditionality in the form of granting rewards in return for compliance.

The European Union serves as a primary illustration of regional integration, and its lack of pursuit of regional integration within its neighboring regions could be regarded as a paradox. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in fostering domestic transformation within neighboring nations is influenced by a deceptive comparison with the enlargement process, due to their distinct objectives. While the aim of enlargement is to achieve integration with the Union, the objective of the neighborhood policy is to establish an association with the Union. A comparable neighborhood policy, along with the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, suggests that viewing the EMP as a precursor to the ENP is a more rational approach. Furthermore, it is feasible to discern the aspects of continuity and transformation within the relationship between the EU and its neighboring countries.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) does not represent a transformative shift in the external relations of the European Union (EU). Rather, it mirrors the traditional objectives of European foreign policy, which include the promotion of security, stability, and shared values, while utilizing established instruments such as the promise of aid and economic integration. The ENP does not introduce innovation in either its objectives or its methodologies. Its primary distinction lies in its focus on differentiation, setting it apart from previous initiatives. While the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) underscores 'multilateralism' as the dominant approach, the neighbourhood policy prioritizes the principle of differentiation, whereby the extent of cooperation and association with the Union is determined by the nature of bilateral relationships between the Union and each neighbouring country. Despite these differences, the two policies share significant similarities. Both employ the rhetoric of establishing a zone of peace and prosperity that encompasses the Union and its partners. Furthermore, they adopt a comparable set of incentives, placing considerable emphasis on political dialogue, trade, and technical cooperation. The ENP succeeded the EMP, and the Commission has explicitly stated that the ENP does not replace the EMP; rather, the two policies are designed to complement one another.

It is contended by some that through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the European Union aims to create a system of external governance to render the extensive territory beyond its borders more manageable. This discourse posits that the EU's approach to the policy concerning its new neighbors is perceived as a hegemonic endeavor, as interpreted through the lens of the Neo-Gramscian perspective. Results from intricate and dynamic interactions among various social forces within Europe characterize this phenomenon. The focus lies on the development of a hegemonic project shaped by social forces that play a prominent role in the EU, encompassing moral, intellectual, and material dimensions.

Ukraine stands as not only the most significant state and the largest nation in the east that draws attention within the framework of the ENP, but it is also the country that has exhibited the greatest dissatisfaction with its relationship with the EU, having voiced aspirations for membership since the 1990s. Jacoby contends that, when compared to accession countries, the transformative impact in Ukraine has been both slower and more constrained. This policy has not effectively directed the political class in Ukraine toward the necessity for ongoing reforms, which contrasts sharply with the role that enlargement played in the reform processes of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). While the EU's Hegemonic Project aimed to transform society with the promise of change, the only notable transformation has been among the elite, as the old nomenclature has merely shifted into new NGOs.

In Ukraine, the ENP has not resulted in any significant transformation of domestic policies, attributable to both internal and external factors. The European Union's ENP, viewed as a hegemonic initiative, is unlikely to evolve into a historic bloc, primarily due to the

unwillingness of both the EU and Ukraine to fulfill their commitments. Implementing the polity reforms specified by the EU, particularly those related to policy conditionality, which essentially entails the adoption of the *acquis*, necessitates coordination among various institutions and a political will that is currently absent in both Ukraine and the EU, the key participants in the Project.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

This study defined the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as a hegemonic initiative rooted in neoliberal principles, underscoring the notion of neighborhood policy as a socially constructed reality that includes elements of conflict, contradictions, and power relations, alongside efforts to resolve these disputes in order to create a social order. It utilized insights derived from Neo-Gramscian theories to critique the limitations inherent in traditional methodologies, emphasizing the crucial interrelationship between global influences and internal dynamics within a dialectical framework. From a Neo-Gramscian perspective, the European Neighborhood Policy emerged as a result of complex and evolving interactions among diverse social forces within Europe, as well as the European Union's approach toward its "new neighbors," which was framed as a hegemonic undertaking.

The study examined the decision-making dynamics of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the influence of social forces on this process. The ENP has been instrumental in facilitating neo-liberal restructuring within the region, reflecting a broader trend of global restructuring characterized by a trans nationalized production system. This transformation has been significantly shaped by the emergence of transnational corporations, which have redefined the role of states, relegating them to a subordinate status in relation to the demands of these entities. However, this shift does not indicate a decline in state power; rather, it signifies a reconfiguration of state roles, with the European Union acting as a crucial agent in the evolving relations among neighboring nations, promoting Foreign Direct Investment and trade as vital components of development.

The study employed a Neo-Gramscian perspective to investigate the transformations and redefinitions. An examination of Ukrainian history proved beneficial in understanding how hegemonic projects have been maintained over time, with the consent of their partners; however, the issues at hand could only lead to a transformation of the pre-existing problems.

Viewed through a Gramscian lens, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine can be interpreted as a significant impediment to Russia's aspirations for hegemony. The notion of 'contradictory consciousness' effectively describes the Ukrainian people, who displayed a degree of indifference, apathy, and unawareness regarding their situation. Thus, the 'consent' provided by the populace was not a conscious decision but rather an example of 'unconscious compliance.' Nonetheless, the Orange Revolution catalyzed profound changes within Ukrainian society. One of the most prominent developments was the emergence of civil society, which constituted an essential component of the social forces at play.

The push for membership in the European Union by pro-European political groups suggests that, to some extent, neoliberal reforms have been integrated into the apparatus of the Ukrainian state amid the domestic economic decline. In the framework of globalization, newly formed organizations, such as the Confederation of Professional Employees, have supported the quest for EU membership. However, historical ties have hindered some non-profit organizations within Ukraine's national social movements from reducing their connections to Russia.

The Commission's neo-liberal strategy is presumed to aim at reshaping the region into an area where the unrestricted movement of capital, goods, and services is ensured, while simultaneously imposing significant limitations on the mobility of individuals, with no assurance of full membership for its partners. Consequently, although the European Neighborhood Policy strategy may persist temporarily with the agreement of its partners, it is improbable that it will evolve into a historic bloc.

The study aimed to examine the extent of satisfaction among Ukrainians regarding the European Union's incentives related to various issues, including energy challenges and visa and asylum matters. A noteworthy advancement for both parties is Ukraine's removal of visa restrictions for EU citizens, leading to a significantly favorable situation concerning the movement of individuals. Negotiations have begun to facilitate visa processes for Ukrainians wishing to travel to the EU. However, the EU's strategy to retain Ukraine within the Neighborhood Policy involves conditionality and monitoring, which entails offering certain concessions while still withholding the free movement of people. Conditionality, which should not be interpreted as a route to 'membership,' has been instrumental in reshaping state-society dynamics and the social institutions derived from state socialist systems. Regarding membership, the politics of conditionality has been essential in associating specific incentives with reform processes, thus profoundly affecting the restructuring of states. Nonetheless, within the framework of the neighborhood policy, the lack of membership incentives reduces its overall effectiveness.

The research highlights the importance of global restructuring, which reflects a transnationalized production system shaped by evolving material capabilities, ideas, and institutions amid ongoing struggles. A key focus of the study is the role of transnational corporations, particularly those linked to European capital, such as the European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT), Business Europe (UNICE), and the European Movement International (EMI). The analysis also includes the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which represents European labor. The findings reveal differing perspectives on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) among these institutions, with ERT supporting the policy for its potential to create a stable business environment, while Business Europe raised concerns about competition and the impact on small and medium-sized enterprises, and ETUC adopted a critical view of the ENP.

The investigation explores the dynamics of Ukraine's geopolitical positioning amid the competing hegemonic ambitions of the European Union (EU) and Russia. It analyzes the ways in which these two powers' initiatives undermine each other, with the EU's economic relations framework contrasting sharply with Russia's efforts to reassert its influence through the 'Single Economic Space.' This initiative aims to create a cohesive bloc involving Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, focusing on regulatory convergence and the establishment of a customs union. The study concludes that Ukraine will continue to be a focal point in the ongoing struggle between these conflicting strategies.

Ukraine faces a critical decision regarding its economic integration strategy. The country can either pursue closer ties with the European Union through a comprehensive Free Trade Area while maintaining existing free trade agreements with CIS nations, or it can opt for deeper integration within the Common Economic Space (CES), which may involve a customs union. Should Ukraine choose the latter, its trade relations with the EU could be limited to benefits derived from World Trade Organization regulations, potentially hindering further advancements. Notably, Ukraine's political stance since the Orange Revolution has firmly

rejected the idea of joining the CES customs union, indicating a clear preference for European integration over deeper ties with CIS countries.

The unrestricted mobility of individuals is closely linked to free trade, particularly in the context of service trade and investment. Ukraine's recent abolition of visa requirements for EU citizens marks a significant step towards enhancing tourism, business relations, and interpersonal connections, while ongoing discussions about EU visa facilitation for Ukrainians indicate further potential for progress. Despite the necessity for improved working conditions in various Ukrainian industries, there is limited justification for Ukraine to align with EU labor market regulations within a Free Trade Agreement framework. The EU's approach to visa restrictions, influenced by concerns over illegal migration and security, may lead to more stringent entry policies in the future, underscoring the need for the EU to develop better travel and visa systems for neighboring countries while fostering cooperation through the relaxation of certain travel restrictions.

The European Union offers various justifications for its inability to meet commitments regarding Ukraine, which is characterized by extensive state ownership and an oligarchic economic structure dominated by a few industrial clans. The country also struggles with an ineffective bureaucracy and widespread corruption, complicating its ability to navigate the competing hegemonic initiatives of the EU and Russia. The research indicates that these hegemonic projects are not necessarily incompatible, yet Ukraine has failed to establish deeper ties with either entity. While a free trade agreement with the EU does not preclude economic integration with Russia, more significant forms of integration, such as a customs union, may force Ukraine to make a definitive choice between the two.

Interviews conducted in Brussels reveal a strong interest among the European business community in expanding the EU's Single Market to encompass neighboring non-member states. This potential expansion is anticipated to enhance trade and investment opportunities while creating a business environment that aligns with European regulatory standards. Although Russia is the largest neighboring market, Ukraine is perceived as a more cooperative partner in adopting EU standards, particularly due to its political commitment to a 'European choice.' This alignment could significantly benefit both the EU and Ukraine by fostering closer economic ties and integration.

The internal complexities of the European Union (EU) significantly hinder its external influence, as neighboring countries receive inconsistent messages from various EU institutions and member states. This lack of cohesion is exemplified by the conflicting communications between the Commission and the Council, which leads to confusion regarding the EU's demands. Additionally, the EU's failure to implement suspension clauses related to human rights and democracy in its agreements further undermines its credibility. In the context of Ukraine, the nation's desire to align with the West is complicated by its need for internal reforms and its strategic position in the energy market, placing it in a challenging position between the competing interests of the EU and Russia. In particular, the examination of both national and transnational organic intellectuals in relation to Ukraine reveals their interactions with the government, illustrating how the challenges posed by counter-hegemonic forces to existing institutional and political structures complicate the attainment of hegemony within a specific social context.

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) seeks to create distinct relationships and agreements with neighboring nations, having developed from the European Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). This policy is viewed as a hegemonic effort that has not substantially altered the EU's external relations, instead aligning with traditional foreign policy goals such as security,



stability, and shared values. Although the ENP stresses differentiated cooperation based on bilateral relationships, it bears resemblances to the EMP, especially in its aim to cultivate a zone of peace and prosperity through political dialogue, trade, and technical collaboration. Rather than replacing the EMP, the ENP serves to complement it, illustrating the EU's acknowledgment of the necessity for a more proactive approach in promoting regional peace and prosperity, particularly in light of the Eastern enlargement.

This paper contends that the European Union's approach to its policy concerning new neighbors is interpreted as a hegemonic initiative, as illuminated by the Neo-Gramscian perspective. The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) emerges from intricate and evolving interactions among various social forces within Europe. Attention is directed toward the formation of a hegemonic project, which is shaped by social forces that play a pivotal role within the EU, characterized by moral, intellectual, and material dimensions.

The sustainability of the European Union's (EU) Hegemonic Project is closely tied to the effectiveness of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which has significant implications for both the EU and its neighboring regions, as well as the global international system. However, several challenges hinder the ENP's potential to develop into a historic bloc, including insufficient funding, a lack of coherent strategy and implementation, and inadequate incentives for partner countries to adopt EU norms and modify their behaviors. Since the mid-1990s, the EU's approach to conditionality has been predominantly associated with accession preparations, fostering the perception that EU membership is the only legitimate reward for compliance with its reform demands. This perception undermines the ENP's ability to engage effectively with non-member countries regarding necessary state structure and policy reforms.

Ukraine plays a pivotal role in the geopolitical landscape of the Black Sea region, acting as a fulcrum for the competing interests of the Russian Federation and the European Union. The complexities of the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which includes six nations—Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia—highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of each country's unique historical and socio-political context. While these nations share geographical proximity to Europe, they differ significantly in their relationships with Russia and their individual challenges. This dynamic is exemplified by the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, which underscores the precarious position of these countries caught between the hegemonic aspirations of the EU and Russia.

The Neighborhood Policy's strategy is likely to persist in the short term with the cooperation of its partners; however, the potential for it to develop into a historic bloc appears minimal. Currently, the European Union's hegemonic initiatives, represented by the 'Integrated European Economic Space,' and Russia's 'Single Economic Space' are evolving as separate entities. The European Union engages economically with neighboring countries without pursuing further enlargement, focusing on a core group that includes Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. This group aims for significant regulatory alignment and the eventual creation of a customs union, which would enable Russia to regain its previous regional influence, although these strategies remain unresolved and open to interpretation.

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