

Research proposal

Launching the new European neighbourhood policy (ENP) was not an easy task for the EU: in order to anticipate the consequences of the big-bang enlargement of 2004 in the East and more importantly, of the moving far away eastwards of the external border of the EU, the EU decided to create a new policy devoted to its near abroad, *i.e.* those third countries which remain outside the EU. The perception of a deep interdependence with this neighbourhood, situated at the core of a troubled geopolitical landscape, pushed Chris Patten and Javier Solana to ask in a conjoint letter in 2002 for a Wider Europe initiative¹. The ENP's creation in 2003 was the result of the awareness of this necessity to maintain good and close links with the neighbourhood. Indeed, the ENP's enforcement tackles anew the questions of management of EU's external relations and of methods used to cooperate with countries geographically close to the EU and particularly bounded to it from historical, cultural and economical point of view. Since its beginning, this policy has not satisfied every European member states, and most especially the new European member states situated at the Eastern border, like Poland, which have the impression that it was launched just before their formal accession to the EU in order to avoid their much more voluntary point of view on the Eastern neighbourhood question². But, even if such dissension occurs between member states, the ENP has been presented as quite innovative with unprecedented ambitions. As a consequence, the ENP has from its very beginning seized the attention of scholars and has remained high ever since on the academic agenda. One of the reasons for such an accurate attention is that the ENP deals with the new European neighbours of Europe, and thus with the difficult question of the EU's external border. The moving eastwards of the EU external border have put it in the middle of an interdependent landscape, with very dense informal regionalization processes occurring. In the zone where the current new external border of EU is now situated, the movement of people between Poles, Ukrainians, or international and labour migrants is due to, among others factors, existing ethnic and family ties, cross-border trade profiting from price differences and shortages to face the economic difficulties have made this region high-connected. This made this border a high challenge for Europeans, especially since the Schengen area enlargement of December 2007. Moreover, the external border of the EU is now in a region shaped by the vagaries of European history, very important for the rest of Europe, where the shadows of the past remain important: ties between populations are sometimes fragile and mutual understanding between states hard to achieve. The Eastern border is situated not only in a interdependent region from economical, political and cultural point of view; but also situated at the core of a still troubled geopolitical landscape. For all those reasons, Eastern border is a topic of current interest for the EU and remains in top of its agenda, as the current Georgia crisis reminds it to us.

In this context, studying how European decision-makers see the Eastern border of the EU since the 2004 enlargement is very interesting and makes more explicit the relationship between the EU and the Eastern neighbourhood. Indeed, the way borders are described in documents relative to European public policy dealing with the borders and neighbourhood management, is thus quite positive: borders are not "security fences" but represent a "frontier zone". Those policies, *i.e.* the ENP and the new Eastern Partnership, aims at promoting the Eastern border as a place where a high degree of interdependence of populations and economic activities is the vector of an extension of peace and where stability should be

¹ Chris PATTEN, Javier SOLANA (2002), *Wider Europe*, Letter addressed by the Commissioner for External Relations, Chris Patten and the High Representative for CFSP, Javier Solana to the Council of Ministers.

² Interview made by the author, Warsaw, August 2008.

supported. If the texts also mention border as a security fence which may preserve the EU from external dangers, the representation of border as a zone is more accurate and systematically put forwards, since texts insist on the free-trade *area*, “a *zone* of prosperity”³, “a *ring* of friends”⁴, “common *spaces*”⁵, while even the term “border” is absent. Moreover, principles of external governance, which assume that there is some continuity between internal and external structures and policies of the EU, convey the picture of an EU without exclusive borders. According to this representation, borders seems to be more open and “fuzzy”⁶ because of the development of European standards and internal policies outside the circle of member states and formal EU. As a consequence those policies blur the line between what is inside and outside the EU: Eastern border should be regarded as a porous zone not as exclusive security fence.

This main representation of the Eastern border in European decision-makers minds is worth studying in order not only to figure out what are the deep-core beliefs⁷ underlying them but also to understand the consequences of this representation in the way of managing the border and the relations with the Eastern neighbourhood remaining outside the EU. To that aim, we focus on the European public policies at the border: the ENP and its efforts to build an Eastern Dimension that failed, and the new Eastern partnership launched in may 2008 by both Poland and Sweden. Based on theoretical contents and practical experience (interviews with Polish decision makers, scholars and experts), we try to understand how such an image of the Eastern border as a zone of cooperation and development where the EU standards should be promoted, has been promoted and become dominant in every European decision-maker’s mind. To that aim, we should follow the process by which inside the EU they have converged on this subject, and therefore focus on the role of the leader country, *i.e.* Poland.

This above-mentioned subject of research constitutes my research proposal for the Eighth Mobility Call of the Garnet network. As a PhD student in the Institute of Political Studies in Bordeaux (France), I am a member of the Garnet network, registered in the joint executive research program on “The EU and Eastern Europe”(JERP 5.1.2), but I have not yet had any opportunity neither to contribute to the JERP nor to collaborate with scholars working in its research program. Doing a Garnet mobility in a European research unit specialized of this JERP’s subject could be a very fruitful collaboration with mutual intellectual profits not only for the host institution and myself but also for the JERP research activity. Indeed this JERP aims at providing new studies on the consequences of the enlargement of 2004 and on relationship between the EU and its near abroad. In the scope of issues tackled by the JERP, it proposes to focus on the “Outer Space” dimension, meaning “the EU, its Foreign and Security Policy, Neighbourhood-Policy and problems of regionalism”, and on the “Inner Space” dimension, *i.e.* “decision-making in the enlarged EU”. Both themes are at the deep core of my proposal to study the European decision-makers’

³ Commission of the European communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament*, “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours”, p.4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁵ Commission of the European communities (2004), *Communication from the Commission*, “European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper”, Brussels, COM(2004) 373 final, p.4 and p.6.

⁶ Thomas CHRISTIANSEN, Fabio PETITO, Ben TONRA (2000) “Fuzzy Politics Around Fuzzy Borders: The European Union’s Near Abroad”, *Cooperation and Conflict: Journal of the Nordic International Studies Association*, vol 35, n°4, pp.389-415.

⁷ This notion has been developed by the cognitive approach of public policy theories, in particular by Paul Sabatier. On this topic see: SABATIER Paul (eds) (2007), *Theories of the Policy Process*, new edition, Boulder CO: Westview Press.

representation of the Eastern border, as I work on the way borderlands and neighbours are regarded inside the EU by European decision makers (*i.e.* the theme of “the challenges of a neighbourhood policy”) but also on the way this representation has become dominant through an European process of convergence (*i.e.* the theme of “decision-making inside the EU”). That is why my current work is definitively fitting with the JERP field of research and could offer a significant contribution to its activities by improving, on the one hand, our understanding of the perception of Eastern border inside the EU and of the role of the new member states in the spreading of such a perception and, on the other hand, our understanding of its consequences for the border management.

Besides, doing a Garnet mobility in the Institute of International Relations at the University of Wroclaw (Poland) could be very beneficial both for this hosting institution and for my own research. First of all, I am eager to collaborate in a deep and fruitful interaction with scholars working on the same subject as mine. As a consequence, the University of Wroclaw seems to be the perfect place where doing a Garnet mobility, as this institution is studying among others issues concerning research on European Union - its development, policy, co-operation with other states and regions as well as research on their member states. Polish foreign policy, including questions of relations with neighbouring countries, European integration and security constitutes another important research area of this institution. And as my research proposal makes it explicit, Polish foreign policy and the relationships between the EU and Eastern Europe are very central in my work, which proves the perfect suitability of Wroclaw as a host institution. Moreover, being a European scholar imposes to know other Europeans’ research interests and that is why it seems to me of paramount importance to learn about ongoing projects of Polish scholars at Wroclaw, especially senior scientists like Ms Elzbieta Stadtmüller and her team. To top it all, the mobility would offer direct and concrete outcomes for my research proposal by allowing personal and direct contact and common work with those scientists, very specialized in the field of EU and Eastern Europe. From an empirical point of view, it would also permit a better insight in the Polish way of dealing with Eastern Europe and in the realities of the EU’s Eastern border. More particularly it would be a concrete mean to follow on a day-by-day basis the development of the new “Eastern Partnership” by a close observation of Polish decision-makers role in its implementation. Indeed, being in Poland at the beginning of 2009 would be an exceptional opportunity to fit with the European agenda as the Eastern Partnership is expected to be launched at the end of 2008 and is going to be strongly supported by the Czech Presidency of the EU during the first half of 2009.

Every argument presented here entails me to truly believe that a Garnet mobility in the University Wroclaw could be a very fruitful collaboration with mutual intellectual profits, from an European point of view. It would contribute to establish (personal) contacts among European researchers and is obviously going to provide important outcomes for the European Research Area through the JERP activities. Hence, understanding the main principles of a convergence process of Eastern border’s representation throughout the circle of European decision-makers as our research proposal, helps not only to put forwards how Europeanization occurs inside and outside the EU, but also to figure out what are the main beliefs inside the EU concerning the Eastern border. Thus, it makes no doubt that a common work stemming from a Garnet mobility will have strong added-value for the European Research Area.