**Relational aspect of “normative power Europe”**

Abstract

In my paper, I focus on contrasting theoretical approaches to conceptualise the nature of the EU as an actor and its role in its neighbourhood, with special attention to the Eastern Partnership countries. Proceeding both from positive theorizing of the EU (based mostly on Ian Manners´s concept of the normative power) and the critics of the EU´s neo-colonial, hegemonic power practices and its (in)ability to transform its neighbourhood, I argue that these conceptions are not able to explain sufficiently neither the role of the EU nor the transformations in the partner countries, as they miss the *relational* aspect of the power.

I propose that the relational nature of power, which enables reflection of the perceptions of the EU in the partner countries causes the differentiated power dynamics in EU´s relation to the six Eastern Partnership countries and offers more precise tool for analysis of the dynamics of the Eastern Partnership policy.

Extended abstract

This paper will consist mostly of the theoretical part of my PhD thesis, where based on thorough review and analysis of different theoretical approaches I identify the main research problem, the research question and the hypothesis. Subsequently, the paper will discuss various possible methodological approaches and techniques how to answer the research question in the most appropriate way.

In my PhD thesis, I research the normative power and potential of the EU in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and how its efficiency and success is determined by the reflection and acceptation of the EU and its norms in these countries.

**The research problem, theoretical background and research questions**

EU’s engagement in the Eastern Neighbourhood has been one of the most ambitious politics of its EU´s external governance after the enlargements in 2004 and 2007. Although not offering a membership perspective, it offers the countries free trade agreements and visa free regime if they comply with the extensive amount of the *aquis communautaire* requiring serious reforms in the domestic politics.

However, the partner countries have responded very differently to EU’s offer –some limit their cooperation to economic cooperation, some of them aspire to more than is offered. Projecting EU’s norms, values and policies of democratic governance, which are proclaimed to be the sources of the EU’s attractiveness have thus not been successful everywhere. The theories of the “normative power Europe” (Ian Manners 2002) and external governance approach (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009) have failed to identify reasons for the varied (and often negative) response of neighbours to the ENP (Korosteleva 2010). This opens the floor for a different approach in the analysis of Europe´s normative potential beyond its borders.

In my research, I argue that theoretical approaches that focus either on norms (EU as civilian, normative, transformative, soft power, force for good) or on power (EU as regional normative hegemon, reluctant empire, soft imperialist, neo-colonial actors) miss crucially important aspect of power as such - the fact that power is neither substantive, nor possessive, but relational. (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963) This means that the power can exist as only in relation to someone else and cannot be possessed but it is relational and dependent upon perception of the recipient. (*Ibid*.)

This approach clarifies more appropriately the reality of the different power dynamics of the EU towards the countries of the Eastern Partnership and in consequence, their response to EU´s offer, too. Currently intensifying process of differentiation in EU´s approach vis à vis partner countries also demonstrates that the EU´ s normative potential and engagement differs according to expectations and needs of the partner countries.

Based on these theoretical re-conceptualisation of the relational aspect of normative power Europe, my research question is as follows: **What are the effects of the perception of the EU by the partner countries on their mutual relations and on the level of acceptance of the EU´s norms?**

My ambition is to answer the question by creating the model of indicators, which will measure the perception and level of adaptation of these countries to EU norms (sources of data I will use are mostly European Neighbourhood Barometer for opinion polls about the EU, EaP index and EC Annual Reports to cover the progress of the countries in priority areas and intensity of mutual relationship (accepting EU standards, frequency of meetings, etc.).

My preliminary hypothesis will be: **The perception of the EU in partner countries determines the acceptance of normative authority of the EU and level of cooperation between the two and result in differentiated relationship to every particular country.**

From six partner countries, I have selected three of them for comparative case study – currently the most ambitious Ukraine, very pragmatic Azerbaijan and country of limited interest in cooperation with the EU – Belarus. I believe that the variety of their relations with the EU will ensure the increased relevance of the selected approach.