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Where does Europe end? - The case of Georgia

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Master in International Studies

Supervisor:

PhD Urban Jaksa, Integrated Researcher CEI – ISCTE-University Institute of
Lisbon

November 2022

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SOCIOLOGIA
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

Department of History

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Acknowledgments

A lot happened from the beginning of this thesis until its end. From an amazing job, to the most competitive internship in the world, to my dream job. I got engaged, I lost people that were the backbone of my being. And, somehow, I did this.

I want to thank my friends Ana Luísa and Leonor, who supported me in ways they do not even realize. I want to thank my supervisor Urban Jaksa for being extremely patient and kind.

Resumo

O último alargamento da União Europeia (UE) ocorreu há quase dez anos atrás, a invasão da Ucrânia por parte da Rússia e a nova onda de candidaturas de adesão à UE colocam futuros alargamentos no topo da agenda. Tomando uma lente construtivista e intergovernamentalista, esta dissertação analisa discursos da Comissão Europeia sobre a Geórgia entre 2009 e 2022, com o objetivo de provar a predominância dos valores e do discurso na definição dos limites transfronteiriços da organização.

Palavras-chave: fronteiras; União Europeia; Política Europeia de Vizinhança; Georgia; alargamento.

Abstract

The European Union's (EU) last enlargement was almost ten years ago and with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the new wave of EU membership applications, its future enlargement is high on the agenda. Taking a constructivist and intergovernmentalist lens, EC communication on Georgia between 2009 and 2022 is analyzed to prove how values and discourse are more relevant than geography when it comes to shaping the outermost limits of the organization.

Keywords: *borders; European Union; European Neighbourhood Policy; Georgia; enlargement.*

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Glossary of acronyms

EU: European Union

TEU: Treaty of the European Union

CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy

CSDP: Common Security and Defense Policy

ENP: European Neighborhood Policy

IR: International Relations

EC: European Commission

EP: European Parliament

DGs: Directorate-Generals

NGOs: Non-governmental Organizations

DG NEAR: Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

EEAS: European External Action Service

EaP: Eastern Partnership

Introduction

“Europe was a word and an idea before it was geography” (Tavares, 2019, p.21). The European Union (EU) has a meaningful role in the international arena. Created in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome and in continuous expansion, this organization has changed our day-to-day and even our identity as Europeans. Carved by crises after crises, the EU has and continues to expand its competences and territory. This might make one wonder what is the future of this organization?

“The question is often asked: “What is Europe?” and the answer is: “Depends who you ask.” It is a geographical area, but again the definition of that depends on perspective. The majority of Turkey is in Asia, but some people regard it as part of Europe. East of the Urals is in Asia; but is Siberia in Europe, if Russian is European? What about Georgia? Iceland?” (Marshall, 2016, p. 64)

I argue that our idea of Europe has been changing throughout the decades, and even if it has geographical limitations, Europe is a dynamic concept that can shift through discourse. Would we consider Cyprus part of Europe a few decades ago? Geographically, no. But today is a EU Member-State. According to Tavares (2019, p.32), Europe is the only continent attached to another in thousands of kilometers of open geography, with no relevant natural divisions. For that reason, its limitations are up for discussion and transformation.

This research serves to reply to the question: What are the outermost limits of EU’s enlargement? Does discourse play an important role in shaping the EU’s borders? By looking at the EU’s discourse about and towards a specific country - Georgia, I intend to unravel its impact on how far the EU can get in terms of geographic enlargement. The Union’s values will be key during this research, their intention to disseminate such values and their sphere of influence. I expect to find out that values have more effect in shaping the EU’s foreign policy than its material interests.

The research will be focused on the EU’s point of view, however, one should note that it is unrealistic to eliminate all other variables such as geopolitical tensions and the interests of potential candidates to the organization. Of course, in practice, there are a lot of variables that

shape the organization's expansion, however the intellectual exercise here is, through the analysis of press releases and speeches, to see how discourse changes throughout time and I expect to find that discourse is more powerful than other variables like geography.

To understand its possible expansion I believe it is important to comprehend its influence in the international arena, understand its history of expansion and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Note that enlargement and expansion are used in this dissertation in an interchangeable form, stripping away all imperialistic connections to the word.

Specifically, regarding European integration theories, I will be using an intergovernmentalism perspective deducing that all Member-States maintain their national interests above the community's - I will bear in mind that my own beliefs and perceptions of the world and of international relations are not only what is observable in the international arena and will try to strip down all my Eurocentric and idealist/ holistic bias. I will strive towards objectivity as a goal. I believe my research to be relevant since it is under researched, most literature focuses on the study of the ENP or on the current negotiations and effects the candidate country would have on current Member-States when integrated in the Union. There is a lack of research on the intention of the EU and how its discourse is used when it comes to its enlargement. It is also feasible and realistic due to the extensive records that the EU has of their communications and speeches. These will serve as a basis, through MAXQDA, to analyze the Union's discourse towards Georgia throughout the years. This research is also relevant to understand the EU's foreign policy and how this can best be used, if the intention is indeed to expand this will change how we look at the ENP, its implementation and future. I argue, however, that even if called imperialistic by many authors, the EU is, in fact, trying to create a safer world for its citizens and it believes that this is done by the diffusion of values and standards.

When it comes to the theoretical framework besides the EU integration theory of intergovernmentalism, I will be using the International Relations' theory of constructivism by

looking at borders as socially constructed. Borders cannot easily change however discourse about them can. According to this theory, borders might be physical but our idea of what constitutes a border is dynamic. “A mountain becomes a border in the context of communicated narratives which tell of the Other behind these mountains and - at times - the Self before these mountains” (Eder, 2006, p. 266).

This dissertation starts with a literature review of key-concepts for our understanding of borders, EU discourse and impact in the international sphere, as well as the EU's foreign policy (Enlargement Strategy and ENP). These are relevant to understand the context in which enlargement occurs and the power the EU exerts over its neighbors. Next, chapter two will focus on the methodology used and theoretical framework, both IR and EU integration theories. Then, chapter 3 will expose the analysis done on the EC communication between 2009 and 2022, while chapter 4 will discuss the results of this study.

Future research would be beneficial to further corroborate the hypotheses on the importance of values and discourse in shaping the borders of the European Union.

Chapter 1 - Literature Review and Historical Overview

Before focusing on the analysis of discourse and in the specific case of Georgia, it is fundamental to go over key concepts and understand the reality and debate on different foundational aspects. In researching the EU's possible enlargements and the impact of discourse in the matter there comes the need to understand their importance as a global actor, their past, and some of their most important foreign policy tools. The literature review proves to be essential for this dissertation since it gives valuable information about the current conjecture and provides the foundational knowledge for this research. It will, also, show what is missing, what are the gaps in the literature and if this research is indeed relevant and novel.

First, an introductory section on borders and the limits of Europe. Afterwards, a brief overview of the importance of the EU as an international actor, delineating its different spheres of influence. Enlargements do not occur in a void, in a *ceteris paribus* situation where all that matters is the Union's intention of expanding. Since that does not happen it is fundamental to understand how relevant the EU is and why it is said that the possibility of enlargement is the best foreign policy tool. What do countries have to win by joining the Union? Why is it attractive for them to do so? Then, a historical look at enlargements and current candidates for accession make one understand the Union's past and possible future in a more comprehensive manner. Next, EU values are presented as the main uniting factor of the Union and its relevance is underlined. Finally, a section focused on the European Neighborhood Policy will show us an alternative for enlargement and the EU's interest in the wider region. Where does Europe end? What is the intention of enlargement of the Union? Is this shaped by geography and material interests or is it dynamic and based on more idealist factors? The present chapter aims to go through relevant literature and lay down the point of departure for the research ahead, helping to give shape to these questions.

1.1 - Borders. How large can the EU get?

“The border is not something that straightforwardly presents itself in an unmediated way. It is never simply “present”, nor fully established, not obviously accessible. Rather, it is manifold and in a constant state of becoming” (Parker & Vaughan-Williams, 2012, p. 728)

Notions of borders change throughout time. Discourse and perception of borders is, most of the time, more relevant than the geography of it. Throughout history, empires had different images of what Europe was - some included Russia in it, some focused on religion as a differentiator fact, some had no limits at all. What are the European borders? Where do they lay?

I follow the argument of some authors (Delanty, 2006; Eder, 2006; Rehn, 2005) that the borders of Europe are situated in Europeans minds. Institutionalized borders are, undeniably, physical, however they are socially constructed and discourse impacts them. Unity, be it national or regional, is created through narratives and with the creation of the EU, narratives had to be created to counter the national ones. Until 1989, the global narrative was West versus East, a fight against communism, hence borders in Europe made logical sense to its citizens, the common enemy was easily identified and, as a consequence, also common goals and common good. With the fall of the Soviet Union, new narratives were found. It became Europe defending itself from the threat of the “Other” (be it an African, Muslim or Russian Other). The importance of such narratives cannot be underrated, these also play a role in public opinion’s acceptance on new Member-States and on foreign policy tools like the ENP. For the human being, everything has to tell a story, and this story has to make sense.

“Thus, the borders of Europe not only depend on strong political institutions, but also and even more so, on shared stories about its boundaries” (Eder, 2006, p. 269)

Surely, being integrated in the EU changes the institutions of a country and this decision has to be supported by its citizens to work long-term. Becoming a Member-State is not an easy or speedy process, it takes years or even decades. But who are those that can be part of this process?

The South border of Europe seems to be completely set¹, as well as its North² and the West border, nonetheless, the East border is an open space for the construction of the European identity (Eder, 2006, p. 263) - which becomes clearer with the new request to join the Union by Georgia. Some might say that with the end of the Cold War, the EU has a limitless territory to expand to (Delanty, 2006, p. 185).

In the subchapters below, I discuss the Enlargement Strategy and the ENP and what differentiates them. The Union exists in the international arena in a specific context and plays, as debated below, various roles in it. Being a EU Member-States means sharing, following and complying with the EU body of law and values, but it also means sharing an identity. “Effective identities have cultural dimensions, including the feeling of belonging” (Andr n, 2020, p. 359).

Geography plays a role in defining the borders of Europe but what about cultural identity? In the past decades, the EU has within itself different minority cultures, religions and languages. Historically, Europe has been a place of culture interchange and integration. For this reason seems unfounded claims of cultural and religious borders being set in stone between Europe versus the world (Forlenza & Turner, 2019). Islam is said to be complicated to integrate within EU values and borders, according to Andr n (2020), Islam is seen as a religion and related to terrorism while the EU is seen as a unique civilization, which excludes from our collective memory the historical presence of Islam in Europe. I argue there is no “us versus them”, EU

¹ Here the word “seems” deserves to be underlined since the territories of Spain - Ceuta and Melilla - are indeed EU territories situated in Africa. But this fact does not change the discourse on EU borders and does not open the doors to enlargement to the South.

² However, today the Ireland/Northern Ireland situation and the Scottish possibility of independence appear as prospects for EU enlargement.

values are open to everyone, but, of course, State institutions have to comply and fulfill an extensive criteria. However if there is determination, geography and cultural differences cannot stop international cooperation and EU membership. Nonetheless it seems too naive to call the EU borders soft, even if they are not hard and stagnated lines on the map they are also not a simple cultural border open to all.

On literature on EU borders some researchers underline other aspects of borders just like gender (Andr n, 2020) and how the Union deals with refugees (Pascucci & Patchett, 2018), accentuating the organization as a political imaginary that goes beyond state-thinking but how its institutions and policies are still so similar to Nation-States' and how there should be other responses to these issues.

When it comes to the future of Europe, authors (Andr n, 2020; Delanty, 2006) believe that talks of federalism or of disintegration are inadequate. With the possible incorporation of Turkey the outer border of Europe is, in fact, an expanding one. One can argue that geographical boundaries are overcome with the possible accession of new countries to the East, and that Europe can now, indeed, be limitless (Delanty, 2006, p. 196).

1.2 - The importance of the European Union in the international arena

The European Union (EU) is one of the most important international organizations in the world, it exerts an undeniable influence in world politics and global governance. According to Milit o Ferreira (2016, p.13), the EU is an "atypical international organization" with the goal of creating a true and cohesive bond between Europeans. EU institutions and the complex political system created by the combined efforts of Member-States relate and partly explain unity in the continent and the success of the organization. In this subchapter, the Union's foreign policy and its importance outside its borders is briefly looked at. Here I try to show the agency the EU has in shaping its own future, as well as describe the international reality the organization is inserted in.

By taking that as a framework one can begin to fathom how borders are constructed and deconstructed.

The European Union considers itself an important actor in the international arena and aims to “uphold and promote its values and interests; contribute to peace and security and the sustainable development on Earth; contribute to solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights; and strict observance of international law” (European Union, n.d.).

Vuskane (2011) and Zięba (2012) state the importance of the overlapping roles of the EU (cultural-and-civilizational, economic, political and security). For the purposes of this research I will add a small section on the normative power the EU wields. Having in consideration the roles the EU has in the international arena one can see the attractiveness of other States to join the organization, what enlargement actually entails, and what the Union has into account when thinking about adding new members.

Cultural-and-civilizational role

The European Union might not have any formal tools to exert a civilizational role but it does so by being attractive globally. Its attractiveness is based on its standard of living which is deeply connected with the values it defends (Zięba, 2012).

Building a common identity is heavily based on narratives of a common past. And what is peculiar about EU identity is that it does not rely on narratives of triumph and conquest, but rather on traumatic narratives (Eder, 2006, p. 267).

The perception of Europe as a continent impacts territories that are included in it, and the ones who are outside of it. Looking at the ENP, expectations are a key factor - if a territory perceives itself as European this will open the possibility of eventually joining the EU. I argue, however, that this perception of the continent is dynamic since discourse on the matter can and has shifted throughout time.

Nevertheless, the European Union still plays a cultural role in the sense that it is an enticing environment that allows for multiple identities and freedoms. Such liberty and openness shows the rest of the world the possibility of peace and acceptance.

Normative Power of the EU

Most of all, the European Union has a normative power imposing norms and regulations. Its influence is felt not only in EU's Member-States and its relations but also in all trading partners since they need to comply with strict European norms and standards. EU norms are absorbed by the Member-States through a sometimes-complex legislative procedure, by having the faculty to impose norms in its 27 Member-States, however, what is of importance here is looking how norms impact third countries.

Relevant literature on norm diffusion (Börzel & Risse, 2009; Manners, 2002) explain that this can be done through contagion or transference. Contagion is the unintentional propagation of ideas and can happen through informational or procedural diffusion: the first happens as a result of strategic communications by the European Commission whilst, the latter, materializes through a cooperation agreement between the EU and a third party. Transference is the result of the export of norms and standards to third countries by exchange of goods, services, aid or technical assistance.

EU's normative power elucidates how the absorption of regulations and norms is a big portion of the enlargement's consequences, but also shows how the organization can expand its sphere of control and influence outside its borders. Norm diffusion appears as an effect of enlargement but, also, as an alternative to it.

Economic importance

Militão Ferreira (2016, p. 25), describes the Union as “the result of contextual political decisions and the responses that the European decision-makers kept giving to the international challenges presented”. Before everything else, the European Union was one of economic character and it

does not come as a shock that this is still the more important role it plays in the international scene, and this explains its main alluring feature to third-countries - the accession to the Single Market.

A common union was built and with that a common market and, eventually, a common currency - the euro. The Single Market is a powerful promoter of EU standards and norms (Vuskane, 2011). The EU is not only a model of successful and comprehensive integration, serving as an example for other integration efforts around the world (such as MERCOSUR and Andean Community), but also a leader of sustainable development that is ensured by providing social protection and aiming to create a social market economy (Zięba, 2012).

The Euro is a strong currency used in EU territory outside the European continent but also by third countries and regions such as Andorra, Kosovo and Montenegro for example (European Commission, n.d.d). It is a reference currency and the second most active in foreign exchange markets.

Moreover, the EU is one of the largest stakeholders in global trade (EUROSTAT, n.d.). This position makes the Union an important and powerful actor in organizations such as the World Trade Organization. Furthermore, it is the provider of the largest development assistance (43% in 2021). This indicator serves to confirm the EU's leadership in the global agenda on sustainable development and its important role on achieving the 2030 Agenda (Council of the EU, 2022). The current situation in Ukraine shows us how the Union is determined to give financial, humanitarian and development assistance from the EU Budget, military assistance through the European Peace Facility and other solidarity initiatives (European Commission, 2022b). The European Union pursues their own foreign policy objectives through the provision of funds and assistance to third countries, helping them with democracy, trade and much more. Lastly, the EU is the largest donor of humanitarian assistance (European Commission, n.d.c). All these economic features, give the Union a substantial power over other States, giving the organization the upper hand in trade or even accession negotiations.

Political and Security relevancy

History in Europe has been marked with conflict and instability, the Union came as a solution. And, in that end, it has fulfilled its role. The Treaties provide the organization with the tools for preventive diplomacy and mediation not only within Member-States but also outside its borders.

However, the EU Member-States are yet to agree on a common army and defense so their ability to protect their own territory from threats is scarce and depends mostly on sovereign States (Vuskane, 2011), although the EU Strategic Compass adopted this year might represent a turn in this paradigm (Council of the EU, 2022). Also, the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) implemented in 2003 is worth noting. The CSDP undertakes civilian and military operations mostly focused on peacekeeping, conflict prevention and straightening international security. The Union sets a leading role in this type of operations (EU External Action Service, 2021b).

The high reputation the EU maintains when it comes to the defense of international law and, consequently, human rights³ gives to the Union a moral advantage and prestige when compared to its counterparts (example: the United States). The organization chooses to use multilateralism and act in joint efforts with other organizations and/or States, escaping being seen as self-seeking and neopaternalist (Zięba, 2012).

The EU keeps trying to fulfill this goal of keeping peace and security. As the ENP and Enlargement Strategy prove it so clearly, the Union looks at agreements and norm diffusion with other countries as a way of keeping its region and its surroundings safe.

1.3 - History and brief analysis of EU enlargements

³ One must note that the reputation of the EU in these topics was indeed damaged by the Union's handling of the Yugoslavian wars and the migration crisis, nevertheless, international public opinion on the EU remains as a defender of human rights.

Jean Monnet, considered to be the architect of the European Union, once said “People only accept change when they are faced with necessity, and only recognize necessity when a crisis is upon them”. The EU is based on a set of values like solidarity, nevertheless, this feeling emerged out of necessity, out of the need for peace and stability in the continent that seemed so unattainable in the 1950s.

Since its founding in 1957, the EU has expanded in seven different occasions: Denmark, Ireland and United Kingdom (1973); Greece (1981); Spain and Portugal (1986); Austria, Finland and Sweden (1995); Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia (2004); Bulgaria and Romania (2007); Croatia (2013) - (European Parliament, n.d.) and overall it has been considered a success story (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). After the fall of the Soviet Union, the EU used accession as a method for creating peace and supporting the newly independent Eastern European countries, the same *modus operandi* was used with the Western Balkans (De Ruyt, 2022), however, until now, only Croatia was deemed ready to adhere.

Conditions to join the European Union changed towards the years, becoming more and more restrictive as a protection of EU stability. How does the EU’s view of what Europe is shapes the accession prospects of countries aspiring to become members?

According to Article 49 of the TEU : “Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union ”. However, it is not the only necessary indicator. Today this criteria for membership is called Copenhagen criteria - set in June 1993 by the EU Council. Countries that want to join need to have stable and democratic institutions, respect minorities, human rights and the rule of law; have a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with the market forces in the EU; have the ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership encompassing the aims of the political, economic and monetary union (European Commission, n.d.b). Additionally, the EC also underlines the need to comply with EU standards and rules, the consent of EU Member-States and institutions as well as the consent of national citizens of the

candidate country. Fulfilling the criteria for membership allows a State to apply, however for this application to be accepted the EC has to assess if the criteria is indeed satisfied and the Council will decide on a negotiation mandate.

Here the geographical scope also plays an important role. What is Europe, where does it end? According to De Ruyt (2022), Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan can be considered Europe because of their geography and historical links. However, others might argue that historical links with the southern neighbors are stronger. There are the obvious sea borders of the continent, moreover, in the Eastern border the Ural Mountains (located in the middle of Russia), the Caucasus Mountains (located between Russia and Georgia), the Caspian and Black Sea. However, Malta and Cyprus are members of the Union and their “European” geography can easily be contested, so perhaps fulfilling other criteria, the lack of geopolitical tensions and support from old Member-States ends up being more relevant than geography. In a European Parliament briefing from 1998, the refusal of Morocco’s membership application in comparison to the acceptance of the Turkish is analyzed:

“In 1987 an application to become a Member of the Communities was received from Morocco. The application was rejected by the Council on the grounds that Morocco was not a European State. In the case of Turkey, Article 28 of the Association Agreement signed in 1963 includes the option of Turkey’s eventually acceding to the Communities. Turkey in fact lodged an application to accede on 14 April 1987. Historically, Turkey has formed part of the so-called 'European concert'. Although part of Turkey’s territory is located geographically in Asia, Parliament, the Council and the Commission have confirmed Turkey’s eligibility. This example shows that the term 'European State' need not be interpreted in a strictly geographical sense. It is at all events a criterion subject to political assessment.” (European Parliament, 1998)

This EP statement shows that political assessment comes indeed over geography. Even if Turkey was not considered in its totality European, being a candidate to EU membership means that it is now, at least in the eyes of the EU, an “European state” as contemplated in the Treaties.

The incentive to join the EU constitutes the most powerful external policy instrument available to the organization (Vuskane, 2011).

Looking at the candidate countries, Turkey presented its application for the Union in 1987 and was accepted in 1999. One should note that if Turkey is deemed as a candidate country it means

that the European Commission recognizes it as a European country - one of the main criteria for membership, as seen above. With Erdogan in power, Turkey started to align less and less with the Copenhagen criteria and in 2018 the accession negotiations were suspended (De Ruyt, 2022). North Macedonia's accession process was slowed due to its historical issues with Greece and Bulgaria (Bieber & Dimitrov, 2022), the same type of quandary delayed negotiations regarding Serbia and Montenegro. Bosnia Herzegovina and Kosovo are still scarred by war and very far away from reaching the criteria for accession, for that reason, they were not given the candidate status and stayed as potential candidates (European Commission, n.d.b). However, the problem also relied on "enlargement fatigue" (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). Internal tensions, the rise of euroscepticism and populism, public opinion and the refugee crisis made the EU afraid of expansion leading to its fragmentation. Enlargements mean little if the institutions are not strong, reliable and trusted.

The last country to join the EU did so in 2013, and after almost 10 years of territorial stagnation the EU changed its course. Just this year (2022) Moldova and Ukraine were offered candidate status and Georgia has a membership perspective (De Ruyt, 2022). Can this be a new approach on EU enlargement?

As seen above, EU enlargement is stopped not only by geopolitical tensions as well as tensions of existing Member-States with potential candidates. There are different arguments against and for the enlargement of the EU. On one hand, the expansion of the Union might lead to institutional overload, the richer Member-States cannot support any more poor countries in a sustainable way and Member-States have nothing to gain with more competition for EU funds; also a bigger Union does not mean a deeper one, dreams of a true political cooperation seem unattainable if the EU continues to enlarge since efforts will be focused on new Member-States policies, integration and cohesion with the rest of the Union. On the other hand, if a country fulfills all the criteria it is the Union's moral obligation to let them become a member; also, by adding more members the EU is ensuring stability, democracy and peace in the wider region (Debating Europe, n.d.), one can argue that here the ENP appears as an alternative.

According to Devrim & Schulz (2009), there are steps that can be taken to make enlargements possible such as better communication (key for regaining the increasingly important public support for enlargements) and reforming the EU institutions (making them stronger and more efficient).

1.4 - EU's values

“Democratic values may have a universal range, but Europe is their navel, their best interpreter and their most perfect expression” (Calligaro et al., 2016, p. 26).

Borders are, indeed, physical however borders are dynamic and can shift through time (Cooper & Tinning, 2019). They are polysemic in its nature , meaning that borders do not have the same meaning for everyone (Balibar, 2002). How is Europe defined? Is it territorially, normatively or in other ways? As mentioned above, values have played a role in it. We can connect to people with the same values as us, and diffusing these made possible sharing the same identity as Europeans. As Commissioner Rehn said in 2005, “geography sets the frame, but fundamentally it is values that make the borders of Europe” (Rehn, 2005).

Expansion of the EU means, undoubtedly, the spreading of its values and norms. Comprehending what are said to be EU values is fundamental to understanding why the diffusion of such would be beneficial for the Union's interests. And, perhaps, even more relevant to this research, does sharing the same values make countries more “European” through the EU's eyes?

In answering the research question of this dissertation values can take a critical role. How do values shape borders? Shared values do not create a hard boundary. As soon as these values are diffused - as the EU intends with its foreign policy - the boundary moves. So, despite being flawed when it comes to creating a EU unique identity, values show that borders are indeed adaptable.

Certainly, values are a big portion of our EU identity, what unifies all our differences are our beliefs. But how are values used by the EU institutions and through their discourse? The study of Calligaro et al. (2016) says that it is, in fact, an exaggeration to declare that the EU is governed by values, but values continue to be summoned in moments of crises as a way of legitimization of the European project and as a method to regain trust. Values are used as a uniting factor, convincing Member-States to be more solidary and to cooperate in times of need (for example, COVID-19 crisis, refugee crisis).

By uniting the EU internally it also, consequently, pulls away the EU from countries seen as having different values. Values are described as social bonds, holding our societies together. The European Union is based on the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and human rights. These are set down in the Treaty of Lisbon and in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (European Commission, n.d.). These values are, not only, enforced within its Member-States but also with third countries through bilateral and multilateral agreements. In addition to these core values, we can also identify four “minor” values - social solidarity, equality, sustainable development and good governance .

Mention of European values is frequent, especially among EU leaders. The Union promotes these values around the world and, undeniably, has constitutionalized the values of democracy and human rights in an unprecedented way (Balfour, 2021). Even if facing some trouble internally (as shown by the case of Poland and Hungary), the EU continues to attempt to spread its values through its foreign policy. Its goal? - a safer neighborhood that is similar to us, that believes in what we believe, that is, indeed, more European.

1.5 - The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) countries and prospect of accession

Geopolitical tensions have always played a role in the EU’s foreign policy and expansion, but not as much as they do today. With the Russian invasion of Ukraine the Union’s *raison d’être* became

even more pertinent - to have stability in the continent, to “promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples” (Article 3 TEU).

The invasion of Ukraine, indeed, changed completely the discourse on both countries involved - Russia became way less European, and, in the other hand, Ukraine, a country part of the ENP that was far from being a potential candidate to the Union, became extremely European and is today a EU candidate. The present conjecture shows how discourse and public opinion can change perception of friends and enemies, of common good, and, most importantly, of borders.

With this in mind and as a replacement for the traditional enlargement (Celata & Coletti, 2016), in March 2003 the European Neighborhood Policy was born⁴. This foreign policy tool is a common but flexible approach towards EU neighbors, with the aim of increasing security in the EU and partner countries through mutual cooperation:

“The Communication argues that enhanced interdependence – both political and economic – can itself be a means to promote stability, security and sustainable development both within and without the EU. The communication proposes that the EU should aim to develop a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighborhood – a ‘ring of friends’ - with whom the EU enjoys close, peaceful and co-operative relations.” (European Commission, 2003)

The ENP involves 16 diverse countries, some to the South of the EU border, some to the East: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia and Ukraine (EU External Action Service, 2021a). The EU has proven to avoid negative measures due to their lack of effectiveness and the stain they leave in economic and diplomatic relations (the recent Russian sanctions proved to be a change in course of action on the EU’s side), for that reason, the ENP is an incentive-based approach motivating domestic reforms on third countries in exchange for aid or prospects of future integration. The three joint priorities for cooperation are: economic development for stabilization; security; migration and mobility. It offers partners a greater access to the Single

⁴ see European Commission, 2003

Market, to internal agencies and programmes, exporting this way norms and standards and, even if only indirectly, values.

Values are one of the main pillars of this policy, putting democracy, human rights and the rule of law as a condition for institutionalized relationships with partner countries (Lavenex, 2017). The goal of the policy is not to exclude territories from accession but to bind countries to the EU - even those ineligible for membership (Devrim & Schulz, 2009). One of the strengths of this policy is the individual Action Plans of each partner country, bearing in mind their specificities and contexts instead of going for a “one-size-fits-all” strategy. Differentiation is key in the ENP, creating tailor-made partnerships with which country in question. Its major weakness is, undeniably, its relation to possible future accession to the EU and its similarity with the enlargement strategy, leaving some partner countries that wish to eventually join the Union, frustrated (Gstöhl, 2015).

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was created as part of the ENP in 2009, encompassing Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus⁵, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The EaP entails significant reforms that aim to bring the partner countries closer to the EU by aligning their legislation and standards to the EU ones (EU External Action Service, 2022). Even if not specifically written, as a way of avoiding creating expectations, the EaP is more focused on reinforcing the political association and economic integration of these countries than those at the South since these might become future members of the Union.

The ENP was revised in 2011 and afterwards in 2015. Today’s version is less eurocentric and less-based in the EU diffusion of values - the focus is security, mutual collaboration, creating a common ground and serving each other's interests (Cianciara, 2017; Costa, 2020).

However, some authors (Celata & Coletti, 2016; Gstöhl, 2015; Lavenex, 2017; Schumacher et al., 2020) show their discontent with the ENP, calling it a neocolonialist failed attempt of

⁵ Belarus suspended its participation in the EaP in June 2021 (Council of the EU, n.d.)

exporting values; others (Gylfason & Wijkman, 2012; Haglund-Morrissey, 2007; Jansson, 2018) describe it as flawed but believe in the possibility of the EU making it successful by giving more incentives to partner countries to reform their economies. Indeed, one can argue that the security of the region is being established at the expense of creating a bordering policy, a “Fortress Europe” (in Johan Galtung’s words), manufacturing “buffer” zones between the EU and the rest of the world. Nevertheless, and against imperialist accusations it is important to understand that EU enlargement and ENP agreements are made with the one and only goal of “reinforcing the stability of the continent” (De Ruyt, 2022), the EU has its own interests in mind. What can be perceived as an Eurocentric selfish move is, nothing more, than a realistic and rational calculation of international relations and external threats. Notwithstanding, the EU cannot ignore the moral implications and ethical connotations with its neighborhood (Jansson, 2018). Contrastingly, public opinion on the ENP is diverse, however, there is an overall positive perception of it and of its mutual benefits (Devrim & Schulz, 2009).

The ENP is not a preparation for the future enlargement but it also does not rule it out (Devrim & Schulz, 2009), and Ukraine is a case and point of such. How does the ENP differ itself from the Enlargement? These are dealt by two different Directorate-Generals (DGs) in the EC, which might be determined as a strategy to create a full and obvious distinction between both. Whilst for a State to join the EU as a member has to be European, to join the ENP it has to be an EU neighbor - both have geographical limitations but here the question remains: who is part of Europe/ who are the neighbors? What does it mean to be European? Is being European that restrictive? Is the idea of being European shifting through time? Would we consider Ukraine as European a decade ago? I argue that there is no coordinated idea of Europe - not even between the EU institutions. The idea of what Europe is changes through discourse and by analyzing discourse on Georgia I expect to find just that - a dynamic border.

However, the ENP and Enlargement Strategy (enlargement guidelines for candidate countries) are somewhat intertwined both using positive conditionality and exporting standards, norms and values, forcing outside countries to reform politically and economically.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical framework and Methodology

2.1 - Theoretical framework

“The real world starts with the production of theory, even if the concerns of every researcher are the substantive questions” (Farias Ferreira, 2007, p. 166)

In this section, the theoretical framework used during this research is highlighted. The IR theory constructivism and the EU integration theory intergovernmentalism are the lens for the analysis in the chapters ahead. Here, it is explained the advantages and drawbacks of theories used as well as compare them to others in its fields.

IR Theories

When it comes to IR theories, constructivism will be used as a lens. Selecting a theory is basilar to a research since it allows one to give direction to its study by understanding the current debate and key concepts, connecting the research to existing knowledge.

The main theories of International Relations - idealism and realism - are immaterial as a theoretical foundation for this research due to their lack of complexity when it comes to the understanding of borders, international cooperation and regional efforts.

Idealism, created by Woodrow Wilson in 1918, underlines values, morals and ideas in the international sphere. Peace and harmony are seen to be the common goals of all States and, for that reason, national interests are not taken into account. I believe this to not be representative of reality, ignoring geopolitical tensions and conflicts between States. Indeed, quarrels between Member-States make accession of new ones to the EU more difficult or even impossible. And the interests of the organization are not only peace and security, but also power and economic inclined. When it comes to borders, idealism believes in the grouping of values and common culture inside the same territory missing to grasp the complexity of reality.

Realism is the extreme opposite but, nonetheless, is somewhat peripheral to this research. This theory, followed by a significant number of International Relations scholars, sees the State as the main actor in the international sphere. International anarchy is inescapable and international agreements and cooperation are always temporary. This theory does not believe in regional projects like the EU or that States can regard the common good as more important than their own interests. Power, according to realism, is the ultimate goal. This contradicts the preposition of this research that the EU is indeed an intergovernmental agency, composed by a growing number of Member-States, that pursue a common good for the region. Even a newer version of this theory - Neorealism - shows itself as flawed for this study since it focuses on a main power having the responsibility to manage the international system (which overlooks the importance of the EU in the international arena), and it does not recognize the relevance of non-state actors and the possibility of them having their own interests beyond the States' ones (de Caria Patrício, 2019, p. 280). Regarding borders this theory looks at borders as being shaped by power and geopolitical tensions - here I argue that values and discourse are primordial in the shaping of Europe.

Paving the way for the creation of the constructivism theory, the English school of International Relations appeared in 1959. Martin Wight is the first to theorize about State systems. He says that these can appear if there is a shared cultural identity between its members; this shared culture and religion creates a political morality that goes beyond the search for peace and State's interests (Wight, 1966). For this school of thought, international institutions appear as fundamental for the international arena and its demeanor. War, anarchy and the balance of power are ideas that shape international politics and not immutable phenomena as seen by Realism. States create international and regional institutions to create mutual benefits for its members. In these institutions, values and interests are shared as well as norms and behaviors - it is a socially constructed reality with its own processes and structures (de Caria Patrício, 2019, p. 197). Even if the idea of common identity is misled by the thought that religion would shape it, the English

school is still theoretically relevant as the first to contemplate shared identities as possible over national borders.

The interdependence theory of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye also appears as relevant for this research. The authors underline that even if the international system is one of conflict one can also see cooperation, coordination and collaboration between States driven by a cost-benefit analysis whereas States cooperate if they have something to gain from it. States are, in this sense, interdependent, however, even if both States have to gain from cooperation, these relationships are asymmetrical in its nature. The scholars predicted important behaviors for this study: interdependence will give citizens a new perception of reality, allowing them to compare their living conditions with those in other States; citizens have an increased power, public opinion increasingly matters in the conduction of politics; States are conditioned in their action when it comes to foreign policy; and, international organizations and other non-state actors are more significant in the international scene (O. Keohane & S. Nye Jr., 1987). This theory has, nonetheless, its incoherences with this research, it sees the State as fragmented, not taking into account that the sharing of power does not mean a fragmentation of such but an increased agency in the international sphere. Also, interdependence theory fails to predict the creation of State relationships beyond the cost-benefit analysis, not theorizing about common values and interests. Even so, Nye and Keohane introduce the concept of soft power which is fundamental in comprehending the importance of the EU and its enlargement.

The main reason for these theories to be minor in this research is the period in which they were developed. Realism and idealism appeared in the decades of 1920-1930, and the English school in the decades of 1960-1970. These were the embryonic times of IR theories, and the complex reality of the EU transcends the State level. Such complexity started being the object of in-depth studies only in the decade of 1980-1990.

Neoliberal Institutionalism appeared as a possible choice for this research. This theory focuses on expectations of States in the international arena, it says that international cooperation is

indeed feasible and works as a way of softening the anarchic reality of the global sphere (de Caria Patrício, 2019, p. 53). Sees the EU as an autonomous actor with a central role in the international arena. It is based on realism in the sense that highlights the State, its interests, the importance of power, and the vision of the international system as anarchic. In spite of that, cooperation is possible and likely to succeed (Keohane, 2002). Developed by Robert Keohane, is seen as a merging of neorealism and interdependence theories, turning its lens on the analysis of individual behavior, beliefs and ideas and how this affects the international society.

I follow Keohane's argument that it is necessary to include some elements of neorealism in any IR analysis, like the primacy of State's interests. However, introducing this idea in a wider theory - in this case, constructivism.

It is also crucial to look at theories from other areas of study. Taken from the study of Geography, critical geography helps situate this dissertation in a wider knowledge territory. Critical geographers focus on representations of space as a tool of power and have as a goal to unveil this power and the oppression structures created by it. These scholars stress the importance of social movements and activism in taking down imperial and colonialist representation of spaces. Even as this looks far from the aim of this dissertation, critical geography says human race have the power to change something as physical as borders and space, States, international organizations, NGOs, corporations, media and citizen groups are all agents that take part in this reimagining of borders (Bauder, 2011, p. 1135). Which is relevant in the conception of the EU borders as dynamic and malleable throughout time. Also, by being analyzed in an interdisciplinary way, an international reality has the possibility to be studied more in-depth, by different visions and outlooks. An interdisciplinary approach can go to more detailed and complex paths, redirecting the study to specific fields of knowledge.

Overall, in this research, a reflectivist approach is always seen as preferable to a rationalist one since the first focuses on the role of culture and identity in the establishment of the international society (Luleci & Sula, 2016). Ideas and values are looked at as relevant variables. It is in a

post-positivist approach that the focus is on ideas and how these shape the world we live in. Even the researcher is biased in its analysis since it becomes a product of how he or she views reality.

In the end, the theory that deems to be more coherent with this study is the one of constructivism. Constructivism is a critical IR theory that gives primacy to subjectivity, meaning that it is values, beliefs and what individuals perceive as reality that shape international politics (de Caria Patrício, 2019, p. 346). This is observable when studying the importance of discourse in the enlargement of the EU. Material power here is still relevant, however, its meaning and effect depends largely on the social structures created by agents.

For constructivism, the world and everything in it is continuously socially constructed, and by having this as a preposition the space for change is open. “Meanings are not fixed but can change over time depending on the ideas and beliefs that actors hold” (Theys, 2018, p. 1). Another important idea for this research, is the possibility that this theory gives to multiple identities and how our perception of ourselves and our roles (be it micro - as individuals - or macro - as a State in the international arena) condition and shape the way we act.

For these scholars, the agent-structure problematic takes a central role. The structure is a product of the agents, and the behavior of the agent is shaped by the structure (Wendt, 1995, p. 73). The structure provides the backdrop in which agents respond to and interrelate with one another. Therefore, to understand systemic change, it is necessary to look at all kinds of interrelationships that are established within the structure (de Caria Patrício, 2019, p. 81). This theory is, in this way, systemic, seeing the explanation of the international system possible through its structure instead of trying to explain it through the characteristics of its agents.

Like any other theory, constructivism has its strengths and weaknesses when applied to this research. Its drawback is that it is said to simply state the obvious, yes ideas and perceptions shape our reality but why is this theoretically relevant? I argue that constructivism helps us see the world in a more critical way, accepting that geography, economic wealth, or geopolitical

tensions that shape international relations are not “set in stone”, our perception, ideas, values and discourse change throughout time and this is, in the end, the variables that have more importance since they shape everything else.

Constructivism has an holistic and idealist vision of IR. Set in the first chapter of Wendt’s *Social Theory of International Politics*, the four ontologies of politics (idealism, materialism, holism, and individualism) are useful in understanding theories and separating them through its main concepts (Wendt, 1999). According to the author, for idealists the importance is given to the diffusion of ideas and knowledge and how these are shared through norms and institutions. These are seen as the basis for our reality, it is through ideas and norms that expectations are set, interests and identities are created. Holism answers the question of the importance of structure in social life. Holistic theories, such as constructivism, believe that structure changes the behavior of actors since it shapes the “rules” of interaction between them. Having more than one ontology, like the theory chosen does, is advantageous to understanding complex realities by giving different insights to the researcher and to the reader.

EU Integration Theories

International Relations theories were not enough to explain why Member-States cooperate on such a deeper level as they were starting to with the deepening of EU integration, for that reason political scientists started to formulate theories on the matter. Until the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 the debate was well-marked by the dichotomy between neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism.

Neofunctionalism was developed in 1958 by Ernst Haas. He claimed that EU integration started with the formation of supranational elites (governments, political parties, bureaucrats), these elites were the engine of integration. Haas believed that international cooperation occurs since the maximization of the social well-being of the population is more efficiently materialized at a supranational level (Militão Ferreira, 2016). The concept of spillover is also introduced here as a

basal point; they can be functional (interconnection of various economic sectors creates a learning process that results in the transference of activities and loyalties from the national elite to the supranational entity - EC - resulting in a deeper integration), political (the national elites perceive a deeper integration as an easier solution for emerging problems and crises) or cultivated (supranational institutions seek to expand their powers and, consequently, become agents of integration). This theory believes that supranational institutions will develop their own political agenda that would, eventually, overlap the Nation-State interests (Canas Mendes & Pereira Coutinho, 2014).

This theory fails in explaining why the integration process stagnates (da Conceição, 2016), since it takes as guarantee that integration will deepen and the decision-making power will shift from the Nation-State to the supranational institution, gradually eroding national sovereignty until the eventual creation of a “Regional State”. EU crises weakened this theory, however, it continues to remain one of the most relevant in its area.

Contrastingly, there is the theory of intergovernmentalism - heavily based in the IR theory of realism. Founded in 1966 by Stanley Hoffman, this theory puts national interests in the center. Intergovernmentalists consider that Member-States use the integration process to maintain and increase their power in the international arena (Torres & Vila Maior, 2013). The concept of power and of national interests are fundamental in this theory. Against the spillover hypotheses, Hoffman states that the functional expansion only happens in the “low politics” areas (trade and economy for example) and not in the “high politics” sphere (defense and foreign policy). The power of EU institutions only grows stronger if the Member-States believe that would be in their best interest, and that it will not hurt their sovereignty or national identity. The EU is, according to this theory, the way of adapting the Nation-State to the contemporary world (Canas Mendes & Pereira Coutinho, 2014).

Like all theories have their weaknesses, so also does intergovernmentalism. Intergovernmentalists have been criticized for oversimplifying the European project. Critics gave room for the improvement and, subsequent, creation of new variants of this theory. The most

relevant one is Andrew Moravcsik's liberal intergovernmentalism (1990) that describes the EU as an international regime of policy coordination.

We can also consider federalism as a main theory of EU integration. This theory is opposed to intergovernmentalism since it puts the supranational in the center of decision-making but also denies neofunctionalism considering that the spillover does not affect integration, however, integration happens because of the Member-States will (Costa, 2020).

After 1991, the multilevel governance school of thought shifted the discourse by analyzing the EU as a political system with different decision-making levels (da Conceição, 2016). Here the theories of rational, historical, and sociological institutionalism take shape. Moreover, post-functionalism came together in this period defending that the Union became more politicized after this Treaty and an increasingly euroceptical public opinion became a concern, restraining the deepening of EU integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009).

Additionally, it is worth mentioning the constructivist look towards the EU which looks at the supranational reality as socially constructed. This study explains how European institutions shape behaviors, preferences and identities - be it from Member-States or EU citizens (Costa, 2020).

In this research, I take an intergovernmentalist approach taking Member-States as rational actors that put their interests before the common good of the Union. I believe multiple identities to be possible but that national identity is always put before the European one. The EU, nevertheless, is also a rational global actor with its own interests and strategies.

Methodology and theory are deeply interconnected and have to be coincidental with each other. The next subchapter underlines the methods used during this research and the reason for their choice.

2.2 - Methodology

After having set, through the chapter above, the ontology and epistemology of this study, the focus is now shifted to the methodology.

The methodology used will be qualitative focusing on the behavior, values, attitudes and opinions of the European Union towards Georgia. I will be using this type of methodology because quantitative methodology would not be able to capture and analyze intention, values and beliefs which are my main goals. By behavior, values and opinions of the EU I mean how the organization itself portrays them - this can be observed through press statements and decision-making. The information I need to capture is expressive and non-material.

By analyzing qualitative data the research is enriched and a much more profound perception of reality is reachable. This study seeks the understanding of borders and the discourse on them and not the statistical analysis of a problematic. By choosing this methodology over quantitative, the discovery of unknown parts of this topic is facilitated.

I will use the method of case study in my research since it seems impossible and time-consuming to analyze all the Union's neighbors and for that reason, I will be focusing on Georgia.

According to Gerring (2004), a case study is "an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units". The author also highlights that a country may function as a case study depending on how macro our research is. In the case of my research and following Gerring's (2004) argument for case studies a cross-unit analysis will involve greater difficulties in identifying and coding cases, and opting for a case study in my research will provide firmer evidence and factual accuracy that would be able in a cross-unit study. A case study is not epistemologically distinct from the cross-unit analysis - they are interdependent (Gerring, 2004). Also, (Yin, 1994), predicts the importance of case studies in the 21st century

and explains how case studies were looked at as an especially qualitative method. A case study is considered an investigation strategy and not a method itself, nonetheless, it is a strategy that seems inescapable when it comes to the study of a complex problematic such as the EU borders.

Looking at the DG NEAR's map of EU Member-States, EU candidates and potential candidates for accession and ENP partner countries⁶, one can underline the volatility of the Eastern EU border. The choice of Georgia comes as an attempt to prove what Delanty (2006, p. 196) states about the limitless possible enlargement of the EU to the East. Choosing a case study is not an easy task, Seawright & Gerring (2008) refer to four different types of case-studies - typical, diverse, extreme, deviant, influential. In this case, the choice of Georgia is seen as typical. Typical in the sense that there are other countries in a similar geographical situation.

Diving into possible choices, I argue that looking at the Southern ENP partners would have little impact on understanding how dynamic borders are; on the other hand, the Western Balkans since 2003 are described as part of the enlargement agenda. As stated by Commissioner Rehn in 2008: "The EU's consolidated enlargement agenda covers South-Eastern Europe, i.e. the Western Balkans and Turkey, which have the prospect of EU membership once they meet the conditions." (European Commission, 2008) - Turkey is also part of this agenda. Moldova and Ukraine should be analyzed with a more security related approach, focusing on geopolitical tensions and conflict. This leaves as options the ENP countries geographically after Turkey and Belarus. Since Georgia is a potential candidate for the EU and due to the novelty of it, it's deemed to be the best approach for this study.

When it comes to data collection techniques I will be using document analysis and this will be the main technique used throughout the whole research since it is based on EU's official documents and reports. I will be extracting documents from the official website of the European Commission. I chose the following since the EC is the voice of the Union's interests which means it is the most relevant institution when looking at discourse on its neighbors, the

⁶ See (European Commission, 2022a)

Commission is in control of the organization's strategies; and DG NEAR specifically which is the department within the Commission that is in charge of enlargement procedures, negotiations and the ENP. The European Commission press releases are the most appropriate data to analyze since it is this institution that represents the interests of the organization itself (instead of a specific Member-State's or citizens'), therefore, its discourse is more representative of the Union's policies and, for that reason, more relevant for this research. I will be looking at statements and speeches from high-level staff of the EC and the time-frame set is May 2009 until today. There is no point in looking before that period since the EaP was created only then. What comes as relevant is understanding how the discourse about Georgia changed throughout the time, I expect to find out it was seen as a partner country and only recently the discourse changed.

When it comes to data analysis I am expecting to use mostly content and discourse analysis when looking at official reports, documents and speeches. (Berg, 1989, p. 240) describes content analysis as a technique "for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages". This analysis will be done through the program MAXQDA.

Content analysis is seen as a "transport to listening to the words of the text, and understanding better the perspectives of the producer of these words" (Berg, 1989, p. 242). I will be looking at both manifest and latent content, meaning, not only at the surface but also at the deep structural essence of the data studied.

In the use of this method there comes the need to set categories. Open coding appears as the best option. Looking at such diverse data like press releases, statements and speeches from a long period of time (2009-2022), and with such an impalpable goal in mind like the measurement of the impact of discourse in shaping the EU's borders, setting categories before analyzing the data is impractical at best.

Open coding involves asking the data specific and consistent questions, analyzing the data exhaustively, frequently interrupting the coding to reanalyze it and to continuously ask: what was the original goal of the study? Keeping the original study in mind is key for a successful content analysis, however, one should remain open to unanticipated results that emerge from the data (Berg, 1989, p. 252).

This is, indeed, a blend of qualitative and quantitative analysis. This research requires a combination of different content analytic elements such as words, themes, paragraphs and concepts. By immersing myself in the data I will try to identify such elements that seem meaningful not only to the producers of the message nor to the audience but, especially, to the construction of a common political imaginary of European borders.

The choice of this method has various benefits compared to other methods. It is cost effective, in the sense that the materials necessary for conducting the analysis are easily accessible, even more since the European Union keeps available and reachable to the public all its press material since 1974. It is also a method that, according to Berg (1989), “provides a means by which to study processes that occur over long periods of time or that may reflect trends in a society” (pag.258). Also, it does not depend on the interaction with other subjects, no need for questionnaire or interviews⁷. The downside of content analysis is, undeniably, the difficulty of locating the relevant messages to the research questions at hand.

But basing research on available official documents comes with issues, there is sometimes a lack of policy-relevant research evidence, and political context, personal interest and resource constraints (El-Jardali et al., 2014). However, I am confident in the transparency of the European Union’s bodies and agencies and in the amount of data and information obtainable.

⁷ I will, nevertheless, note that interviews would make this study more robust. By interviewing EU officials one could observe if press statements and speeches go in the same tendency as internal ideas on what Europe is within EU staff structure. Time was a constraint here.

I will seek objectivity, but as commonly accepted with qualitative methods the investigator inserts him/herself in the situation meaning that the research will never be unbiased in its totality. When studying borders from a constructivist perspective one must have in mind that reality is shaped by ideas, values and discourse, and by being an individual in a specific national context, with a specific professional and academic background, being inserted in a social context, and having my own perceptions of the EU, it is unfeasible to profess complete impartiality. Nonetheless, I will aspire to such and attempt to not let my perceptions of the topic cloud the results found through this research.

Chapter 3 - Data analysis: The impact of discourse towards Georgia in its perception as European

In the European Commission's Press Corner website, with the set time-frame of 1st May of 2009 until November 2022, 208 results of high-level speeches⁸ with the mention of the word “Georgia” appeared. After careful selection⁹ 167 speeches were set as the sample for this research.

Communications have three elements: the sender; the audience and the message (Berg, 1989, p. 240). To comprehend the content of a message one should note who is transmitting it and to whom, and these two variables plus the date of the speech are key in understanding how discourse on borders impact them.

Firstly, let’s analyze the variables. Who is the sender of the message, the audience and the year? Regarding the year a frequency chart tells that 2020 had solely one speech mentioning Georgia and 2021 had zero, which is explained by the pandemic taking over as the most pressing issue in the European Union’s discourse. A recent boom in 2022 is justified by the Russia invasion of Ukraine and by Georgia’s application for EU membership. A highlight is also given to 2014 with the upcoming ENP review and Russia emerging as an opponent of the policy and as a geopolitical threat.

⁸ Those speeches are considered “high-level” since they are made by important EC figures: President, Vice-President, Commissioners, and other Senior Management.

⁹ Repeated speeches were removed as well as those where the mention of “Georgia” had a different meaning than the country this dissertation focuses on.

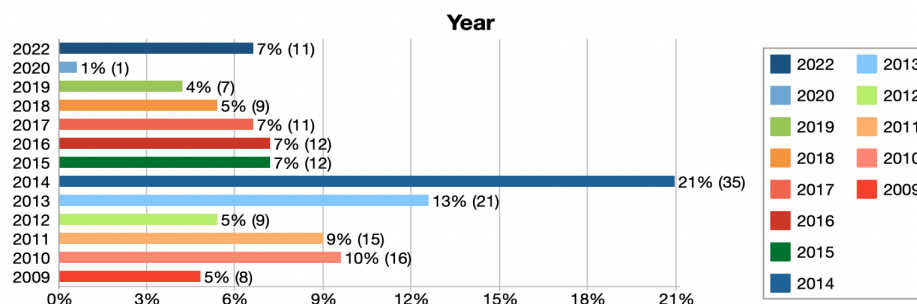


Fig.1 - Frequency bar chart - Speeches' year

Secondly, the sender of the message¹⁰ might tell us relevant information on the importance of it. The majority of the speeches are done by a Commissioner, and most of them by the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement specifically. Nevertheless, the European Commission's President was the sender of a good percentage (26.3%) of speeches on Georgia.

	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage (valid)
Commissioner	96	57,5	57,5
EC President	44	26,3	26,3
EC Staff	17	10,2	10,2
EC VP	10	6,0	6,0
TOTAL (valid)	167	100,0	100,0
Missing	0	0,0	
TOTAL	167	100,0	

Fig.2 - Frequency table - Speaker profile

Finally, regarding the audience, the EC talks about Georgia mostly to a public audience. After the analysis of speeches, it can be highlighted that public speeches are more clear and concise since EC staff tries to explain to an unfamiliar audience a complex system of international relations and governance.

¹⁰ Note that EC speeches without a concrete sender identified before and within the message the sender is labeled as EC Staff.

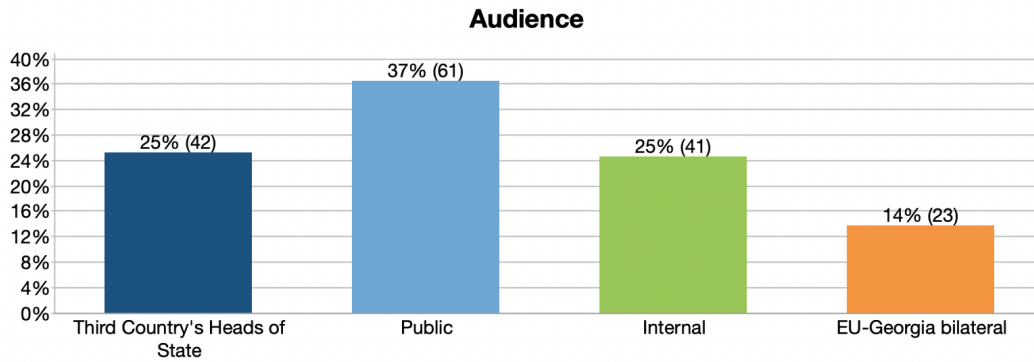


Fig.3 - Frequency bar chart - Audience

Regarding the content of the speeches analyzed, to answer the research question there was the need to look beyond manifest content. In each speech three questions were systematically asked: What is the *goal* of the EU-Georgia partnership? What is the *relationship* between the two countries? And is Georgia described *geographically* in this message? If yes, how so?

In the sample there were a total of 593 coded segments as seen in figure 4. This frequency table shows the recurrence of the mentioning of the same goal, geographic description and type of relationship in the data analyzed for this study.

Code Frequencies: Segments with code

	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture/ Marine ...	2	0,3
Transport	10	1,7
EU values	51	8,6
Digital	6	1,0
Strengthening Georgia's security	21	3,5
Energy cooperation	20	3,4
Strengthening EU's security	16	2,7
Cultural/scientific/education ...	27	4,6
Judiciary reforms	27	4,6
Visa Liberalisation - Home an...	47	7,9
Trade benefits	84	14,2
Improvement of Georgians life	28	4,7
Improve attractiveness for E...	7	1,2
Together against a common ...	11	1,9
Enlargement	1	0,2
Neighbours	13	2,2
European	20	3,4
EU as a conflict mediator	13	2,2
EU as a donor	40	6,7
Part of the Union	2	0,3
EU path	54	9,1
Friends	14	2,4
Partners	79	13,3
TOTAL	593	100,0

Fig.4 - Frequency table - Codes

As a goal of the EU-Georgia partnership, it is underlined, as shown in figure 5, the trade benefits, the spreading of EU values which are sometimes described as common/shared values, core values and even one time as universal values, and the visa liberalization to Georgian citizens. Not surprisingly, the relationship between the EU and the country in question is more often described as a partnership, nevertheless, 54 segments were found where the EU describes Georgia as being in a path to integration with the Union or in a “European” path.

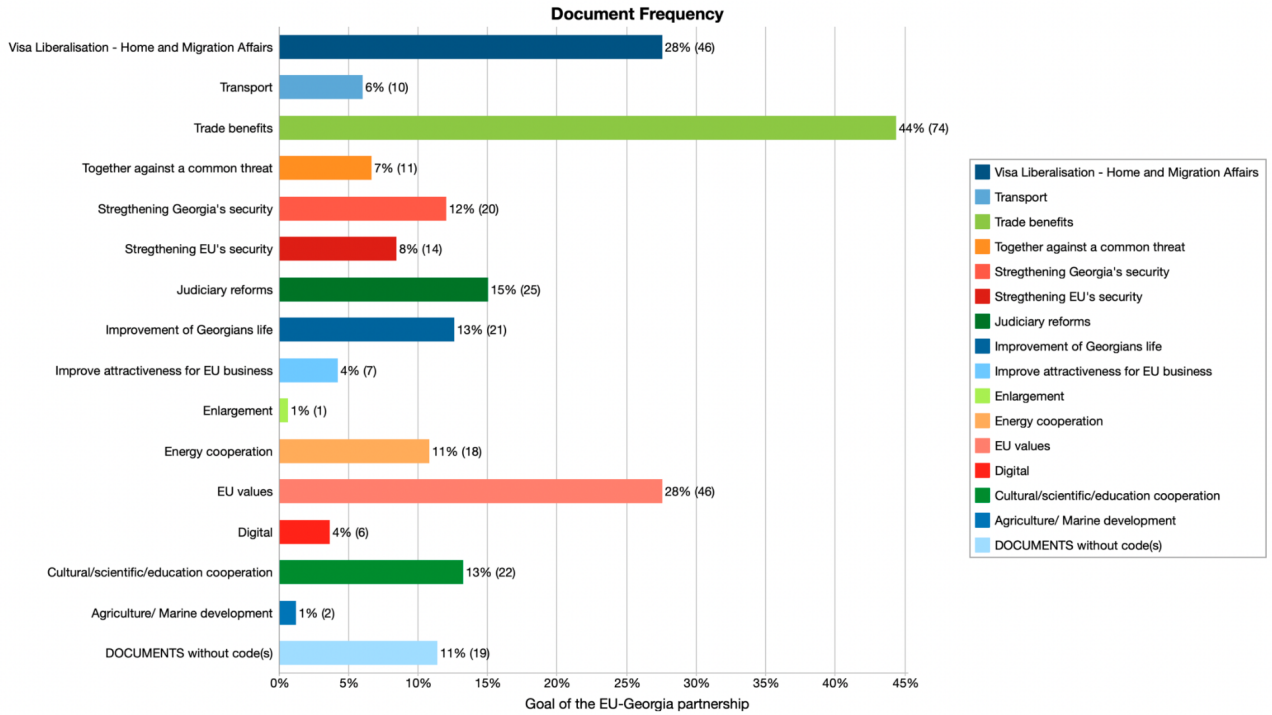


Fig.5 - Frequency bar chart - Goal of the message

On the other hand, discourse against Russia is not frequent. The spotlight is given to the benefits the relationship between the organization and Georgia will bring on both sides, security accounts for a percentage of such benefits (20%) but overall the discourse only identifies Russia as a threat directly in 7% of the coded segments.

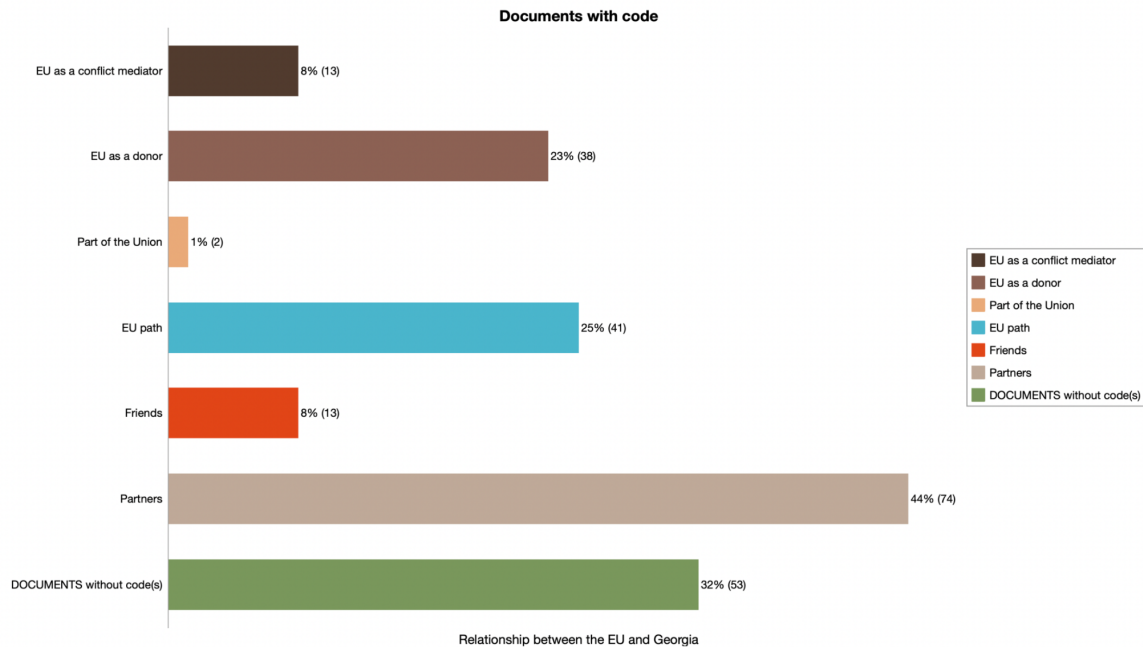


Fig.6 - Frequency bar chart - EU-Georgia Relationship

Regarding the type of bond between the organization and Georgia, one can note that there are a good number of speeches where no relationship is implied (32%). Georgia is often described as a partner and very often as a receiver of aid. The code “EU as a donor” serves to identify the cases where the relationship implied is a one-sided/ non-collaborative one, of the EU as having the agency and of Georgia as a simple beneficiary. Only in 34% of the data analyzed is the relationship between the two entities identified as more developed, and Georgia is either seen as in the European path that would eventually lead to the level of integration the country desires (25%), as a friend (8%), or even as part of the Union (1%).

However, codes and variables will provide more relevant results if looked at simultaneously. A typology table between the codes and the date, sender, and audience would be able to show if, indeed, discourse has shifted in the EU throughout the years.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Goal															
Agriculture/ Marine development						1	1								2
Transport			1		4				3		2				10
EU values	1	6	4	3	8	11	5			2	2			2	46
Digital							1		1	2				2	6
Strengthening Georgia's security	3	6	3	3	1	1				2				1	20
Energy cooperation	2	3			1	3		3	3	1				2	18
Strengthening EU's security	1	3	2		2	1	2		2	1					14
Cultural/scientific/education coope				1		1	1	4	5	7	3				22
Judiciary reforms	1	4	2	3	5	4	1	1	2		2				25
Visa Liberalisation - Home and Mig		8	8	5	5	4	3	4	5	2	2				46
Trade benefits	1	9	8	4	15	23	4	1	6	2	1				74
Improvement of Georgians life		3	2	2	2	7	1		3	1					21
Improve attractiveness for EU busin		1		1		4		1							7
Together against a common threat		1				1	3		2			1		3	11
Enlargement														1	1
Geography															
Neighbours	2	2		2		1	1	3	2						13
European	1			1	1	8				5	1			3	20
Relationship															
EU as a conflict mediator		1	2	1	2	6	1								13
EU as a donor	1	5	6	2	6	7	3	1	3	2				2	38
Part of the Union						1								1	2
EU path	3	1	2	3	6	12	4		1	3	1			5	41
Friends	1			2	1	2			2	3				2	13
Partners	1	6	8	4	12	15	6	8	3	4	3	1		3	74
SUM	18	59	48	37	71	113	37	26	45	37	17	2		27	537
# N = Documents/Speakers	8 (4,8%)	16 (9,6%)	15 (9,0%)	9 (5,4%)	21 (12,6%)	35 (21,0%)	12 (7,2%)	12 (7,2%)	11 (6,6%)	9 (5,4%)	7 (4,2%)	1 (0,6%)	0 (0,0%)	11 (6,6%)	167 (100,0%)

Fig.7 - Typology table - Codes/Date

Looking at the EC's discourse during the years 2009-2022: 2009, the year of the creation of the EaP, the goal highlighted is energy cooperation and the increasing of Georgia's security (explained by the events in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008); in 2010 discourse on security continues but the concerns evolve, the number of speeches triple and start to be focused on a partnership with trade and travel benefits; in 2011 discourse is more directed to visa liberalization talks and trade benefits; and while 2012 shows a decrease in cooperation efforts, 2013-2014 are intense years where trade and values have predominance, in 2014 the relationship reaches the point of the description of the country as part of the EU. In reality, and with the events in Crimea in 2014, the EU-Georgia relations become less intense and discourse on the country decreases substantially. A timid growth is seen in 2017-2018 and a complete stop is observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, discourse is focused mostly not in goals of the partnership but in the nature of the relationship between the two entities.

	Commissioner	EC President	EC Staff	EC VP	Total
Goal					
Agriculture/ Marine development	2				2
Transport	9			1	10
EU values	29	12	4	1	46
Digital	3	1	2		6
Strengthening Georgia's security	8	7	1	4	20
Energy cooperation	10	5	3		18
Strengthening EU's security	9	3	1	1	14
Cultural/scientific/education coope	10	4	8		22
Judiciary reforms	15	7	1	2	25
Visa Liberalisation - Home and Mig	34	7	3	2	46
Trade benefits	41	24	5	4	74
Improvement of Georgians life	14	6		1	21
Improve attractiveness for EU busi	4	3			7
Together against a common threat	4	4	1	2	11
Enlargement		1			1
Geography					
Neighbours	8	2	3		13
European	6	12	2		20
Relationship					
EU as a conflict mediator	7	5		1	13
EU as a donor	24	7	4	3	38
Part of the Union		2			2
EU path	23	14	3	1	41
Friends	4	9			13
Partners	41	23	7	3	74
SUM	305	158	48	26	537
# N = Documents/Speakers	96 (57,5%)	44 (26,3%)	17 (10,2%)	10 (6,0%)	167 (100,0%)

Fig.8 - Typology table - Codes/Sender

Examining the sender of discourse on Georgia within the European Commission, even if Commissioners are the most common speakers it is the President that makes the most references to Georgia as European.

	Commissioner	EC President	EC Staff	EC VP	EU-Georgia bilateral	Internal	Public	Third Country's Heads of State	Total
Part of the Union	0	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	4
Friends	4	9	0	0	8	0	4	1	26
SUM	4	11	0	0	9	0	5	1	30
N = Documents/Speakers	96	44	17	10	23	41	61	42	334

Fig.9 - Crosstab - EU-Georgia Relationship/Sender and Audience

Even if EU-Georgia bilateral speeches are the least common in the sample, it is in these speeches that the relationship is most often described as a friendship, as seen in figure 9. Additionally, the fact that it is the figure of the EC President that conveyed most of the messages can be interpreted as a politically relevant sign of intention of further integration from the Union's end.

	EU-Georgia bilateral	Internal	Public	Third Country's Heads of State	Total
Goal					
Agriculture/ Marine development				2	2
Transport	1	1	3	5	10
EU values	12	7	15	12	46
Digital			5	1	6
Strengthening Georgia's security	9	5	4	2	20
Energy cooperation	4	1	7	6	18
Strengthening EU's security	3	3	7	1	14
Cultural/scientific/education coope	5	1	9	7	22
Judiciary reforms	9	5	7	4	25
Visa Liberalisation - Home and Mig	9	11	16	10	46
Trade benefits	15	20	20	19	74
Improvement of Georgians life	11	2	4	4	21
Improve attractiveness for EU busi	5	1		1	7
Together against a common threat	1	1	7	2	11
Enlargement			1		1
Geography					
Neighbours	3	3	6	1	13
European	7	4	5	4	20
Relationship					
EU as a conflict mediator	4	5	2	2	13
EU as a donor	11	6	11	10	38
Part of the Union	1		1		2
EU path	12	8	12	9	41
Friends	8		4	1	13
Partners	16	17	22	19	74
Σ SUM	146	101	168	122	537
# N = Documents/Speakers	23 (13,8%)	41 (24,6%)	61 (36,5%)	42 (25,1%)	167 (100,0%)

Fig.10 - Typology table - Codes/Audience

EU values discourse and the declaration of Russia as a common threat is most frequent within public audiences. The improvement of Georgians' lives as well as Georgia's security is highlighted within EU-Georgia bilateral speeches while EU security is expressed with the public. Regarding borders, EU enlargement was described as a goal only once to the public and Georgia is seen as European and as a friend mostly in bilateral speeches.

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Part of the Union	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Friends	1	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	2	13
SUM	1	0	0	2	1	3	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	3	15
N = Documents/Speakers	8	16	15	9	21	35	12	12	11	9	7	1	0	11	167

Fig.11 - Crosstab - EU-Georgia Relationship/ Year

When exploring the connection between the year and the use of more amicable and integrative expressions to describe the relationship with Georgia, we see two waves 2012-2014 and 2017-2018. I argue that the first one can be explained by the ENP review and the attempt from the Commission's end to shift the nature of the relationship between itself and its eastern neighbors to a more collaborative one. The second wave seems like a natural growth of the bond with Georgia that was also a consequence of the reforms made by the country and the seeking of a closer integration with the Union, this momentum is broken in 2019 and with COVID-19, enlargement discourse sees a complete stop and regains focus in 2022 due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and, consequently, the application for EU membership from Georgia.

Moreover the connection between geographic location and the relationship show that when described as a neighbor, the link between the EU and Georgia is not even mentioned, however, when described as European in its majority Georgia is seen as in the course to be a EU country.

Code System	Neigh...	Europ...
<input type="checkbox"/> EU as a conflict mediator		
<input type="checkbox"/> EU as a donor		1
<input type="checkbox"/> Part of the Union		
<input type="checkbox"/> EU path		3
<input type="checkbox"/> Friends		
<input type="checkbox"/> Partners		1

Fig.12 - Code relations browser - EU-Georgia Relationship/Geography

Word Cloud: 167 Documents



Fig.13 - Word Cloud

A word cloud easily shows the topics of focus in these speeches. Security concerns, EU values, energy cooperation are main topics but also I was impressed by the amount of attention given to civil society and to citizens' well being.

In the next chapter, the results are discussed close together with the research questions of this study.

Chapter 4 - Discussion of results

The main goal of this research was to prove that discourse plays a key role in the borders of the European Union and by doing it to show that borders are indeed dynamic and shaped by way more than geography and geopolitical tensions.

Georgia has been a ENP partner country since its creation in 2004 and, specifically, part of the EaP since its beginning in 2009. Looking at the map of the world it is not common to describe Georgia as part of Europe, however, it is now given the potential candidate status and geography is not described as an obstacle in the way of accession but the need for further reforms are.

Analyzing the European Commission's speeches between 2009 and 2022 proved to be a time-consuming task and, at a first glance, an exercise with discouraging results. I observe that political events and geopolitical tensions end up shaping the discourse and not the opposite as expected. The European Commission uses a very neutral and diplomatic discourse and rarely makes statements that go beyond what the present conjecture expects it to. This is shown by, not only the number of speeches throughout the years but, also, by the thematic of such messages.

As a goal of the relation between the EU and Georgia there is an expected focus on the trade advantages (14.2% of overall coded segments) the closer integration with the Union brings. Moreover, the emphasis given on the importance of EU values (8.6% of overall coded segments) proves that the organization sees the spreading of values as a major objective in its foreign policy and as a basilar pillar of the European project. If a country shares the same values as the EU it is, indeed, looked at as more European (in 2014, the mentioning of values reaches its higher point as well as the mentioning of Georgia as an European country). Sharing an European identity passes by, inescapably, sharing the same values.

Another relevant result of this research is the decreasing trend of discourse on the Union as a conflict mediator and a donor. The ENP Review in 2015 had the goal of changing the relation of the EU with its partners to a more collaborative one, where partners decide the level of

integration desired and where differentiation is key. It is, in fact, observable in the data that this review came to shift the discourse on the relationship of the EU with its partners, specifically, with Georgia.

Furthermore, the EC President's importance is highlighted in this analysis. This figure throughout the years makes speeches to all audiences and it is the one with the power to go beyond technicalities and make politically relevant statements - describing Georgia as part of the EU (in 2014 and 2022) and as a friend on multiple occasions.

Also, it is in EU-Georgia bilateral speeches where Georgia is most often described as being an European country. Regarding the focal point of this research, it was expected to find that Georgia has been increasingly seen as European, however what was observed was not the case. Georgia was consistently described as European in 2014. The 2014 pike could be explained by the Russian invasion of Crimea in Ukraine, the instability of the area led to the EU identifying its eastern neighborhood as European as a way of protecting their borders - with a noticeable focus in Georgia due to the 2008 events. However, 2018 and 2022 were also years where the country has been given the European connotation. Even if the pause of discourse between the two dates is justified by the COVID-19 pandemic it seems, nevertheless, uncorroborated to declare that 2018 marked a shift on how the EU looks at Georgia geographically.

It can also be highlighted the connection between stating Georgia as geographically situated in Europe and as being in the path to EU integration. I argue that geography is, then, looked at as dynamic and it is used with a political connotation, serving the purposes of the speaker in question.

For future research on the impact of discourse on the shaping of EU borders I believe surveys made to the European public, Georgia's citizens and EU officials might give us captivating results, especially, if this could be done in different years and then the results compared to the analysis of EU internal and public discourse.

European borders are in European minds. This research has shown that values are paramount in shaping our borders, and that discourse is more relevant than borders in doing so. The analysis of discourse shows us a unignorable fact - the importance of a narrative in the shaping of borders. I expected to prove that discourse towards Georgia shifted in a linear way throughout the years but what data as shown are waves, such waves are justified by geopolitical tensions and events. Such events give Europeans a common enemy, a common narrative, and this narrative seems to have a uniting factor in Europe.

Answering the research questions: What are the outermost limits of EU's enlargement? Does discourse play an important role in the shaping of EU's borders? This research did not serve to prove that discourse shapes directly the Union's borders, however, it is indeed used in a political way where geography is not a fundamental variable. The outermost limits of the EU are whatever the circumstances need them to be, indeed, they are not limitless, but they are dynamic. Additionally, the research shows us that the narrative of a common threat unites territories and expands the EU's border.

The results of this study came as a surprise, the research questions and hypotheses were not directly answered, nevertheless, even if the importance of discourse was not proved, the importance of narratives and perception of threats in the shaping of borders were. Georgia is European when Russia is seen as the Other, the threat on Europe and our neighbors. I believe the results mean that geography is indeed relatively malleable and shifts throughout time, additionally, it is used with a political purpose and to serve someones' interests. It is worth emphasizing that the EU is not alone in the international arena, and their discourse on borders might clash with that of other powerful actors.

Looking at the existing literature, this research comes to connect separate topics of existing studies: borders and how they are created and maintained, the ENP and its goal, and the importance of values in the Union's foreign policy. Values were proved to be seen as one of the main goals in the EU-Georgia relationship, and I believe this research comes to add to Calligaro et al. (2016) argument that values are used as a method to legitimize the European project. By

constantly reinforcing the importance of values in this partnership the Union is justifying internally its relation with this Eastern neighbor. On the other hand, I believe the discourse on values serves not only to justify our actions internally in the organization and to Member-States but, also, to EU citizens. Here, and as Andr en (2020) states, a common identity is relevant as well as the feeling of belonging. Discourse on values demystify Georgia as an “Other” and will make it increasingly European.

Additionally, this discourse analysis proves, as stated by Cooper & Tinning (2019) and Parker & Vaughan-Williams (2012), that borders are dynamic and shift through time. The political use of the notion of European depending on the speaker and audience goes hand in hand with Balibar’s (2002) statement that borders have different meanings for different people.

My results on the importance of narratives and the political use of discourse on borders should be generalizable to other Eastern neighbors, especially those that seek further EU integration such as Ukraine and Moldova. The relationship with Russia proved to change how the EU looks at its Georgia and this should prove to also be true regarding Ukraine and Moldova. During this analysis, discourse on Georgia was mostly transmitted together with discourse on Moldova. However, since 2015, the ENP has been focused on differentiation and on developing tailored relations with each partner country. For that reason, only a similar research on the specific country could determine the validity of that generalization.

During this study analyzed data was easily accessible and organized. What proved difficult was the literature review since this research involved different key areas and fields of study such as borders, values and the understanding of EU’s foreign policy as well as the organization’s importance in the international arena. This problem was solved by the tentative search for an equilibrium - there was an attempt on my end to paint a comprehensive picture of the issue at hand and enrich such a picture with the lens of different theoretical approaches.

Content and discourse analysis on the EU's discourse is key in unraveling its intentions. Similar studies were not found, for that reason, I believe this research helps shed light on an under researched perspective of the ENP and borders.

On its outermost limits, after this research, I am more secure in following Eder (2006) and Delanty's (2006) statement that the EU has a limitless space for enlargement in the East. I believe all EaP partners are looked at as possible members of the Union in the future, but, the persecution of this is only made, not only when the partner country is deemed ready, but most importantly, when it serves the EU's interests.

Nevertheless, this study has its limitations, the main one being that it did not serve to answer the research questions proposed in its beginning. However, my research was relevant in highlighting the importance of discourse and perceptions of a common threat in the perceptions of borders, and did show that geography is not the most relevant variable when it comes to setting the outermost limits of Europe as a continent and of the Union as an organization.

Conclusion

Borders play a big role in the way we look at the world. It is through them that we make sense of the international reality and relations between countries, it defines our national and regional identity and, consequently, part of who we are and where we feel that we belong. Nevertheless, such as identities, borders are also dynamic and can change throughout time.

“Borders can be arbitrary: the Bosphorus is supposed to separate Europe from Asia, and the Straits of Gibraltar mark a border between Europe and Africa, but the larger Black Sea does not separate the Caucasus from the general idea of a geographical Europe. The Ural Mountains are in fact low-lying hills that had no natural function and were considered by the Romans to be insignificant” (Delanty, 2006, p. 188)

The European Union currently has 27 Member-States but it once were solely 6. For a while the EU was identified as a failing project, but overcoming crisis after crisis, strengthening its institutions, gaining more powers and, in accession negotiations with 7 candidate countries, one must wonder what are the outermost limits for its enlargement? To be part of the Union, a country has to be European. So, where does Europe end?

Through the analysis of 167 speeches on the country of Georgia made by the European Commission between the creation of the Eastern Partnership (2009) and today (2022), it was shown that perceptions of geography are malleable, and used with political implications and intentions. The diffusion of values shapes the EU’s foreign policy and it is shown to be its ultimate goal. Through this study, the importance of narratives as a uniting factor, discourse, and common values was shown as primordial to geography.

Borders play, indeed, different roles. Borders are symbolic, functional and geopolitical. In the literature review I sought to talk about such roles. Looking at the importance of the EU in the international arena, history of past enlargements and glancing at current negotiations, theorizing on EU values and the ENP gives this research a more substantial relevance. Understanding that

enlargements do not occur in a void and understanding the reality on which they are integrated is fundamental to grasp the limits of Europe and the role the EU takes in shaping them.

Future research using different methodological approaches could enrich these hypotheses, by involving EU and non-EU citizens' perspectives of borders, as well as EU officials and comparing such with the EC's discourse one could have a more clear understanding on the real impact of discourse on borders.

So to answer the question on the limits of Europe, political conjecture and discourse shape where Europe ends. The complexity of international relations creates our reality - if we decide to take a realist look towards it, geopolitical tensions, power, military threats, all these shape our borders. However, looking from a constructivist perspective, ideas, beliefs, values, this is what truly shapes our borders. Also, this theory shows that there is not one actor in charge of defining the borders of Europe, this definition is, in fact, a result of the interaction of several actors - it is a collective social construct. In the end, everything is socially created and it can and will change throughout time and discourse.

“The border should be seen as a reflection of the historical contingent situation, and is an on-going process, as opposed to being fixed or territorially determined by the physical facts of geography” (Delanty, 2006, p. 188).

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