1. Introduction

Fiascos are strangely compelling. They are to be avoided at all costs, and yet viciously, even gleefully seized upon by key actors when they do occur. Rarely embraced as instructive, fiascos constitute both public and private phenomena, which as effects, require swift responses. Their complex and polyvalent causes however, are not generally the stuff of intense evaluation. Fiascos are intriguing for precisely this reason, and constitute an absorbing theme for the LSE’s autumn 2015 conference on Failure and denial in World Politics. As illustrated by many of the papers at this conference, the concept of foreign policy failure is a tricky one, not least because of the sheer range of possible definitions and classifications, all of which are much needed in an area of foreign policy that can offer up endless decent case studies of low-level failure to full-blown fiasco, but not much in the way of an accompanying frame of reference. As such, this article concurs that foreign policy fiascos engender decisions, outputs and outcomes which are not only imperfectly undertaken involving ‘blameworthy failures and mistakes of the responsible decision-makers’, but suggests a structure by which the ‘plausible criteria and ingredients’ of such failures are methodically evaluated (Opperman and Spencer 2015: 3).

For some, approaching EU foreign policy for raw material on policies fiascos may seem unchallenging. Many view the EU as a foreign policy actor as of little ultimate consequence, or simply too varied and unfocused an entity to be representative of typical foreign policy outputs, either because of its multilevel governance composition, or its intangible soft power ethos (Lavenex 2009; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig). Others may suggest the EU is either too junior a foreign policy player to be compared in its policy actions to other long-standing actors in the international system, or indeed that EU foreign policy has frequently come to grief in key areas, but for reasons that remain opaque. Paradoxically, it is for all these reasons that the EU provides policy analysts with an excellent series of examples by which to approach both contemporary multilevel foreign policy action, and the specific assembly and deployment of a huge range of political, economic and social policies, most of which can be deconstructed against the phases of the policy cycle utilised in Public Policy Analysis (PPA).

In terms of policy fiascos, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) constitutes a hugely ambitious EU plan, one which contained undeniably high geopolitical stakes, and which in the past decade has witnessed marginal wins that are heavily outnumbered by substantive, repetitive and humiliating public losses. Constructed within the side-lines of the acknowledged success of enlargement via the accession of a dozen new members from eastern and southern Europe, the ENP represented a rather lacklustre attempt to roll out the principle of ‘enlargement lite’ (Hadfield 2009).
Instead of reconstituting the borders of Europe, the ENP tampered unhelpfully with the fundamentals of membership, overestimated the utility of common values in constructing neighbourhood governance while underestimating basic security principles, provided uninspiring incentives, conflated performance with progress, and in consequence came spectacularly unstuck in ways that can arguably be defined as a foreign policy fiasco.

This article provides an interface between definitions of fiasco that emerge from a phasic policy spectrum, and the problems manifested individually and collectively by the ENP. Rather than levelling judgement for the fiasco, the point to identify the cause of key problems that occurred at critical points in the construction, implementation and evaluation of the ENP.

1.1 Caveat emptor

A few final observations. First, as seen below, the very definition of fiasco comprises a range of inconstant and frequently oppositional dimensions, in which a decent idea is poorly implemented, or a poor objective is well implemented but badly evaluated, etc. Second, like all foreign policy strategies, the ENP is a work in progress; meaning its objectives under review, its modes of implementation subject to frequent alteration, and most importantly, its target areas in political flux. That the EU’s neighbourhood is a moving target may be the foreign policy understatement of the decade, but in analytical terms, it means that examining both successes and failures needs to be drawn against a sporadic history of north-south engagement stretching back to the 1970s (Pace, 2002; Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Aliboni 2005), the contemporary domestic upheavals of the Arab Spring (Pace 2009), and the uptake of political, national and religious extremism as a replacement for some of the dictatorial structures in North Africa. EU action in the area has routinely seen heavy criticism; with ‘European policy-makers seen to have equated stagnation with stability, choosing to cooperate with autocratic regimes pursuing a pragmatic self-interested approach [with] political reforms and human rights were sidelined, while issues such as combating terrorism and controlling borders to contain illegal migration dominated the Euro-Mediterranean policy agenda’ (Ayadi and Sessa 2013: 1). Accordingly, the ENP can arguably be interpreted both as a failure that perpetuated the preceding policy breakdowns, or an outright fiasco on its own merits. The former suggests that the EU as a policy-maker has historically failed to learn appropriate lessons regarding neighbourhood dynamics; the latter indicates a more chronic inability to grasp both the generic structure of policy-making, and the irreducible range of southern and eastern neighbourhood dynamics fundamental to a project like the ENP. The article concludes by suggesting that historical missteps will continue unless vital lessons from the latter perspective are swiftly learned. The EU needs in other words both to re-school itself in the fundamentals of foreign policy-making, before it can effectively re-tool the ENP with any hope of effectiveness.

2. Interrogating the Neighbourhood

Launched in 2003 as a post-enlargement structure to shore up potential geopolitical fault lines between itself, and neighbours old and new, the ENP offers measures to improve internal stability and external security of sixteen states spread across two large regions referred to as the Union of the Mediterranean comprising North Africa
and the Middle East, and the Eastern Partnership, including Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Belarus and Azerbaijan (Grabbe, 2006; Kelley, 2006). The Mediterranean subset represents that latest in a series of intermittent attempts by Europe to kick-start trade-based and political dialogue projects with North Africa, and latterly the Middle East, known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Zielonka 2007). Such efforts can be traced back to the 1970s but only took real shape in the form of the Euro Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), which utilised multilateral forms of engagement arising from the 1995 Barcelona Process with the goal of establishing by 2010 security, trade and cultural zones of engagement. To refine and galvanise such efforts in the broader context of the 2004 ‘Big Bang’ enlargement, the ENP added a bilateral element in the form of the Action Plans negotiated between the EU and a number of its Maghreb and Mashreq neighbours (replacing Association Agreements). These were then added to in 2008 in the form of the Union of the Mediterranean (European Commission 2008) which attempted to keep the Barcelona Process alive under the aegis of the ENP. Founded in July 2008 in Paris, the Union of the Mediterranean was the next step by which the EU aimed to enhance the broader strategies of the ENP, galvanising the region (with no little irony) under the political patronage of France. Even before the upheavals of the Arab Spring, outputs were uninspiring. As argued by Ayadi and Sessa, prior to 2010, ‘the prevailing ‘business as usual’ (BAU) scenario in EU-Mediterranean relations consisted therefore of a blend of state un-sustainability and bilateral and regional cooperation dominated by inter-governmental relations and increasing depoliticisation and securitisation’ (2013: 2).

To reinforce relations to the east, eastern European partners were designated a club of their own: the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (European Commission 2008, and European Commission and High Rep 2012), under the patronage of Germany, Sweden and Poland.

A number remain on the outside of the ENP, and only tangentially active within their regional club: including Algeria, Libya and Syria and Belarus. In the east, recent changes in key ENP states are due to Russian hard-power provocation rather than EU soft-power enticement (Belarus and Armenia), or because these states misinterpreted from the beginning the enormously oblique nature of partnership, mistaking it for a long-term commitment to full EU accession (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia). In the south, the ENP is merely a policy ‘output’ of the EU, rather than a demonstrable part of any policy ‘outcomes’ catalytic of or even concomitant with their own domestic transformations: Lebanon, Jordan, Israel in particular, while for others like Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, national transformations either predated the ENP or have occurred largely irrespective of ENP structures.

Jean Monnet academics gathered in Brussels in 2002 were the first to hear European Commission Romano Prodi’s fateful suggestion that the EU ‘must provide something less than membership, but greater than partnership’ to its neighbours, in order to constitute a ‘proximity policy’ that would not only construct a ‘wider Europe’ but ensure ‘peace, security and stability’ for the region as a whole (Prodi 2002). Unfortunately, no single individual or institution ever fully defined what such an intermediary identity, or its manner of governance could constitute. Accordingly, the ENP has been beset from the beginning by an existential crises issue regarding its overall purpose. Riven by a severe disconnect at the very heart of its founding documents, the ENP remains torn between attempts to keep the volatile threats intrinsic to its peripheries at arms length as intimated in the 2003 European Security

The last decade has produced myriad internal confusions, and a plethora of external complications. Internally, the operative principle of ‘partnership’ at the centre of the ENP has ranged from low-level instrumental links fostering little real engagement with, or transformation within Mediterranean states; the external results have witnessed low-level and sporadic engagement in with various Mediterranean states in the wake of their own national and regional upheavals to all-out public campaigns demanding EU accession in Eastern Partnership states provocative enough to disturb the relations of an entire region. With no sharp understanding of why constructing a policy upon a phase-based timeline prevents such both procedural confusion and substantive dissipation, ENP architects must – a decade later – confront project outcomes that range from ineffectual or coincidental at best, to catastrophic at worst.

Assessing the ENP is therefore a tricky business. The approach needs to be more rather more forensic than merely asserting that ‘the ENP has failed on its own merits’, or that ‘the concept of neighbourhood was defined agnostically, and implemented ambiguously’ or even that the policy has ‘lurched from southern farrago to eastern fiasco’ (EEAS Interview, March 23, 2015, Brussels). How then do we approach, and ultimately learn from a policy ‘fiasco’ like the ENP? After engaging with the concept of fiasco, as outlined in section 3, and determining an appropriate structure (a combination of basic PPA structures with added FPA dimensions that can account for geopolitical as well as administrative actorness, as outlined in section 4), we can be rather more confident of arguing that the ENP appeared to have been badly handled in a minimum of three phases, including its original objectives, implementation and evaluation. This means examining the ENP’s initial objectives first on their own merits, and then from the perspective of the subsequent gaps between those goals and current neighbourhood dispensation of 2015; exploring the implementation problems via disconnect ‘between policy-makers and policy addressees’ (Knill and Tosun 2012: 149) in both the EU’s southern and eastern neighbourhoods on key aspects of the project (e.g. common values, joint ownership, partnership and transformation); and deconstructing the institutional chronology of ENP evaluation, from initial disquiet (raised for example by individual MEPs), to wholesale criticism (as seen in the European Parliament report of 2013) to acceptance that the policy requires a complete overhaul (witnessed most recently by the March 2015 statement by HRVP Federica Mogherini, examined in the conclusion).

3. A Taxonomy of Fiascos

Although assessing foreign policy adds a whole new level of complexity to the equation, the existing literature provides a useful starting point for such undertaking. The body of works concerned here, can be broadly divided into two groups – evidence-based case studies, where theory is tested (e.g.: Dunleavy, 1995; Gray, 1996), and much broader theoretical contributions proposing and honing ways of policy evaluation (e.g.: Edelman, 1977; Bovens and ‘t Hart 1996; Boyne, 2003;
Marsh and McConnell, 2010). Much like the policy itself, the literature dealing with its evaluation is subject to refinement. The 2000s saw a number of articles and books attempting to refine previous works and definitions, categories and methodologies contained within them.

A considerable proportion of the existing literature attempts to define, or re-define the constitution and composition of a policy failure, disaster or in our case fiasco, drawn against an ideal policy success, with a view to suggesting improvements. However, as Boyne (2003, p. 212) argues, ‘academic contributions to the definition of improvement [itself] are also, as yet, extremely limited.’ Moreover, as Marsh and McConnell (2010) observe, most works ultimately ‘fail to outline and discuss criteria against which success/improvement could be judged,’ leaving only loose frameworks of generic points rather than streamlined and testable modes by which to advance policy and subsequent advocacy analysis (Dunleavy 1995: 74).

Increasingly, the process of learning and the way politicians and, indeed, organisations learn from successes and failures and consequently how they use what they learnt or chose to ignore impacts future foreign policy and its outcomes is rising in importance (Knill and Tosun 2012). Similarly, there is a growing literature (Brändström and Kuipers, 2003; Boin, ’t Hart and McConnell, 2009) which focuses upon the situations that arise when policies and their makers are faced with critical incidents, and the impact this has on future policy-making. To give additional substance to this emerging canon, and to provide a workable background by which to examine the Euroean Neighbourhood, this section now examines work undertaken first within Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), and then more extensively within Public Policy Analysis (PPA) in which scholarship has produced some instructive understanding regarding fiascos.

3.1 Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)

FPA provides the widest series of dynamics and actors by which to deconstruct both the specific sources, and more general elements of failure (Smith, Hadfield, Dunne 2012). These can be categorised loosely as operating at individual, group-based and state-based units of analysis, and combines much US-oriented FPA scholarship that has arisen since the late 1950s. At an individual level, misperception and cognitive biases impair initial decision-making and impede subsequent judgement; the fault here being attributed to high level decision-makers who carve out policy blueprints, and revisit them periodically, but who rely large on civil servants for filling in the details, managing the implementation, and measuring the effects. This connects with the second unit of analysis, that of a group, whose on biases (e.g. a cabinet) or standard operating procedures (e.g. a Ministry or Department) may alter, challenge or simply fail to fulfil or implement key parts of the policy. Within a group therefore, bureaucratic socio-psychological dynamics erode the form or transform the content of a policy that they receive and then manage, or indeed co-own on behalf of the executive above them, and the receiving constituency of the policy itself. At the international level, state-to-state relations come unstuck for a variety of reasons, best explored qualitatively as the behavioural dynamics within IR theories, or quantitatively within the various matrices developed by FPA in terms of plotting quantified variables of power, security, interaction to arrive at scenarios that demonstrate failures to communicate, to trust, to progress, to cooperate, to coordinate,
and to integrate, etc. While FPA has proved instructive in suggesting a range of sources for policy-making problems, from individual bias to institutional ineptitude, and assists in deepening our reading of geopolitical projects that go awry as a result, FPA perhaps works best as a top-down dynamic in interrogating given types of problems, policy analysts need an additional frame of reference that can deconstruct both the linear and cyclical nature of policy-making itself to get a truer read on how problems flare into fiascos.

3.2 Public Policy Analysis (PPA)

Providing a specific policy cycle by which to interpret the goodness or poorness of fit of a given policy, public policy analysis is a viable bottom-up complement to FPA perspectives. Within Political Science, PPA includes three major phases. First, the study of institutionalism (1950s) in which institutions increasingly became understood as actors, whose acitivites producing constitutions, laws, policy statements comprised ‘outputs’. Second, the grand sweep of behaviourism (1960s onwards) in which the political motivations of individuals as actors were added to the institutional context, as well as providing a clearer sense of actors, agents, and agency. Finally, aided in no small part by multilevel actors like the EU itself, the post-Cold War rise of neo-institutionalism (1990s onwards) in which institutions were increasingly approached as architects of policies that had both ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’, and which operated both formal organisations and social ‘systems’ wherein individuals and groups of individuals interacted with each other to achieve goals via ‘rules of the system’. A comprehensive pantheon of individual, group-based and fully-fledged institutional units of analyses thus emerged as a substantial, and not unproblematic context from which policies (both public and foreign) emerged as blueprints to solve problems.

For more than half a century, the construction and implementation of public policy has been both a key mode of government, and a burgeoning area of political science (Dunn 2008). Defined simply as ‘the study of what governments choose to do or not to do, including studies of the policy process, policy implementation and impact, and evaluation’ (Birkland 2005: 10), Public Policy Analysis is a key research agenda within social science because of the enormous variety in the design and delivery of public goods and services by an hierarchy of official and unofficial public actors, and implemented via a combination of public and private actors.

Three characteristics gradually emerged from the PPA canon. The first is a phasic policy cycle, operating in five or six steps (Birkland 2005): (1) establishing the idea/objective; (2) agenda-setting; (3) formulation of options and alternatives; (4) policy design/actors and instruments/tools; (5) implementation; (6) evaluation. Phasic in nature and linear in method, the six-step cycle helpfully deconstructs the tortuously cyclical and overlapping dynamics of policy-making, and in doing so set a frame of reference that is assumed to be wholly objective in nature.

The PPA policy cycle in other words establishes a generic structure against which all policies can ultimately be drawn, whatever their pedigree or intent, as objective facts that could be critically approached, independently identified, and verified in an unbiased fashion. Policy failures are therefore easy to spot, as one of two types: either a single, ad hoc problem that could occur at any single point within the policy cycle and if unsolved, exacerbated both the problem itself, and undermined the policy with
each phase of the cycle; or, as a series of different and possibly unrelated problems occurring at each stage of the cycle.

How then to define the worst-case scenario of a policy fiasco? A policy fiasco obtains when a critical mass of serious failings occur during one or more phases of the policy cycle. To be considered a ‘foreign policy fiasco’ within the structure of the six-step policy cycle, the ENP must therefore demonstrate failings that (1) are substantial enough to undermine each of the six aspects of the policy cycle and therefore be considered one their own merits as phase-specific failures injurious to the content of the policy cycle; (2) further undermine the transitional dynamics entailed in moving from one phase of the policy cycle to another, thereby diminishing both the integrity of overall form of the policy cycle, and its internal transitional structure; (3) be illustrative of a general impoverishment of policy outputs of a given actor, and which are detrimental to its intended outcomes on the basis of both criticisms from within its own evaluatory structures, and arising from the intended policy recipients. These are harsh requirements indeed, and suggests that the ENP has for the past decade of its operation, been both discretely deleterious, structurally incapable, and the views of its architects generally unreflexive.

Yet sadly, at every stage of the six-part policy cycle, a single, or series of problems has arisen within the ENP to undermine each of the stages, and to make problematic the vital (and frequently unexamined) connection between each of the stages. As briefly illustrated above, the overall objectives of the ENP was riven from the outset between bipolar objectives; its agenda-setting distracted by the broader anxieties arising from the über-policy of enlargement; its formulation consequently a pale and unclear imitation of the two major dynamics of EU enlargement: transformation and integration. This rendered its policy design flawed from the outset, attempting to strike a bargain between ‘accessible’ partners and remote control neighbours, between a neighborhood encountered by accident of geography to the south, and by dint of disintegration to the east. Moreover, the ENP’s implementation was torn between enlargement templates that both promised and denied advantages in the same provision, under-funded at best and abstractly managed at worst. Its inbuilt evaluation was undertaken mechanically, rather than methodically, and with little genuine insight into the very dynamics the ENP was designed to highlight and transform.1

3.3 Problem-Solving Policy vs. Goal-Seeking Policy

The second characteristic to emerge from the canon of PPA was a distinction drawn between policies that operate as a problem-solving response designed to address a given issue, or goal-seeking in their ability to produce outcomes commensurate with the broader objectives of the foreign policy maker, relative to the intended receiver of the policy. Some policies may attempt both, operating as purposive and representative in equal measure. Such policies are designed with a degree of singular, preventative

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1 Is a foreign policy fiasco thus beyond redemption? Evaluation, if handled intelligently, can also serve to stop, salvage and save a policy. As examined in the conclusion, the ENP may recently have been granted a reprieve. In March 2015, HR/VP Federica Mogherini made clear use of policy cycle benchmarks to highlight ENP failings prior to a wide-scale consultation, arguing that ‘the sense of a process of review is evaluating what didn’t work, with partners and also internally. Self-criticism will be part of it’ (EurActiv 4 March 2015).
intent by which to deal effectively with a given issue; but to do so in a way that is
unmistakably commensurate - to both the policy provider and the receiver - with the
overall, political identity of a given actor, and its strategic culture of the moment. The
EU is both spectacularly adept at ensuring that swathes of its foreign policy is
increasingly emblematic of its normative foundations, and stunningly inept at making
such ‘soft power’ translate into the strategic ‘hardware’ of the Union in terms of
clear, comprehensible, feasible, and ultimately transformable practical objectives
(Pace 2007).

What therefore went wrong? The ENP was not necessarily incorrect in attempting a
problem-solving approach to the increasing number of very real challenges in its post-
enlargement neighborhood; nor obviously wrong to retain the idiographic
particularities of its normative foreign policy template (Manners 2002; Manners
2006) much of which was openly welcomed and supported by key ENP partners from
2004 onwards. In terms of problem-solving, the ENP’s failings are simply that no one
problem typifies any one region, or any one sub-group within the neighborhood.
Equally, not all problems as evinced in the 2003 European Security Strategy (Aliboni
2005) as one of the two guiding documents occurred in each and every state. The
ENP is paradoxically too broad in its initial vision, and too limited: too far-flung in
assuming regional generics that could be tackled with reproducible socio-political
engineering of ‘enlargement lite’, and too narrow in assuming cultural specificities
could in any sense be deconstructed by bespoke Association Agreements or Action
Plans. From the perspective of goal-seeking, the EU is culpable not in the
intrinsically content of its foreign policy method (Manners 2006). The majority of
contemporary states and regimes after all possess similar if not identical values-based
templates by which the measure their own progress and their relationships with third
parties.

The EU naturally has continued on the soft-power trajectory of promoting democracy,
human rights, the rule of law, good governance as the hallmark of its engagement
with states both viable and volatile; within the ENP, these norms operate as an index
of ‘owner-operated’ reform across the sixteen states to the south and east of the
Union. The problems of the ENP arise because the EU has first largely assumed a
goodness of fit between its own normative index and the values-based indexes used
by a host of states, many of them radically unlike each other and the EU itself
(Manners 2006; Lucarelli and Manners 2006). Second, in focusing devoutly upon
perceived degrees of commonality, and the necessary modes of conformity by which
to obtain such commonality, the EU has patently failed to appreciate importance of
the differences between these two indexes in indicating the overall likelihood of
reform, and the sheer variability of its subsequent shape and the range of its timing.

3.4 Policy Domains

Third, PPA provides us with the concept of the ‘policy domain’, as the overarching
area of policy in which policy-makers compete and compromise in offering problem-
solving alternatives. The policy domain, with its myriad actors and dimensions, and
not the form of the policy cycle itself nor the content of a given policy, is the
appropriate environment in which to appreciate, but if necessary, abjure the range of
inter-subjective construction and the subjective perception that accompanies the
activity of policy-making. Domains, in other words, provide a surface area wherein all
manner of ideational and subjective dynamics can be examined. The interdisciplinary
church of constructivist approaches has brought home in less than subtle modes what
behaviorism first flagged up, namely the individuated nature of given political culture,
the wholly individual approaches of individuals, groups and states, the
incommensurability of generating like-to-like cases, the undeniable need to
acknowledge, even cultivate a *verstehen*-based approach to the sheer uniqueness
accompanying each policy input and output, as well as the narratives that each policy
itself represents against the context of key national scenarios, plots, and actors. Of
such stuff is cultural and constitutive theory made (frequently at the expense of
identifying both the key phase-by-phase problems, and the causal challenges that arise
therein). Such perspectives grow from observations that ‘the way in which policies
and policy makers become represented and evaluated in the political arena’ is key to
understanding both the policy and its context (M Bovens et al 2001: 10). Edelman
argues similar that ‘a policy failure, like all news developments, is a creation of the
language used to depict it; its identification is a political act, not a recognition of fact’

3.5 Strategic Culture: The EU Policy Domain?

There is much to be said for these approaches. The identity-building intrinsic to goal-
seeking and the political agendas and cultural expectation inherent in problem-solving
can arguably only be deconstructed as a series of multilayer discourses. Indeed, one
could argue that *strategic culture* provides an eminently suitable mid-range context
which includes both the instrumental imperatives that inform policy-making as a
practice and the broader value-based constructs that engender the context from which
such policies arise. Operating as a ‘set of beliefs, assumptions, norms, world views
and patterns of habitual behaviour held by strategic decision-makers regarding the
political objectives of war, and the best way to achieve it’ (Biava, Drent and Herd,
2011, p. 1228), strategic culture tells us much about hard power calculations through
the context of the socio-culturally belief-system of the decision-makers themselves.

As an instrumental blueprint, and indeed as a motivational catalyst for group work,
EU strategic culture is still emerging (Hadfield 2015); equally, its analysis has
naturally begun by identifying low-level challenges such as the institutionalisation of
the military options within the CFSP/CSDP, uplift of external responsibilities such as
conflict prevention and management, and the use of the ‘Civilian Power’ concept to
enforce a permanent degree of hybridity in EU CSDP activities. EU actorness
however clearly encompasses a whole host of other inputs, including market power,
currency stability, climate change attitudes, humanitarian aid responsiveness, energy
security, and even institutional legitimacy, all of which flow from the alleged body of
common ‘traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, symbols,
achievements and historical experience’ that, have since the end of the Second World
War, and certainly the Cold War, dramatically affected both the EU’s ‘strategic
behaviour and actual policy making’ (Toje, 2008, p. 11).

The problem is the ENP itself is a product of the enormously wide policy purview on
offer via strategic culture, and thus comes to inhabit greater, rather than fewer
objectives, interpretations and consequently problems. EU strategic culture may well
increasingly embody the complex multilevel political culture and normative attitudes
of the EU, as well as the policy discourses that flow from it. But it also offers an
unhelpfully wide foundation for a policy like the ENP, setting up simply unworkable polar goals of arms-length security and integration, of normative convergence and cultural differentiation, for geopolitical exigencies that may swiftly overrun the niceties of civilian and value-based nexus, sacrificing sheer clarity for the sake of being comprehensive (Lucarelli and Manners 2006; Sjursen 2006).

The paradox is an unhappy one. EU strategic culture may increasingly represent the ethos of the EU’s policy domain, while Member States and institutions like the Council, EEAS and Commission continue to represent the key actors within that terrain. Yet this consummately ‘European ethos’, flowing from EU strategic culture to provides extant and prospective EU foreign policies has in the case of the ENP proved so unworkable in term both goodness of fit, qua policy form, and appropriateness of goals, qua policy content, that it is rendered neither strategic in the original design of the ESS, nor successful in the acculturation of even the most basic norms of governance for the majority of its sixteen neighbours (Gänzle 2009).

Domains may therefore be the most ambiguous element to grasp within the PPA pantheon. Scholars are encouraged (particularly those with a decent grasp of IR theory) to acknowledge the range of different epistemological approaches flowing from equally disparate ontologies of policies as either emphatically objective and testable as facts, or as subjective voices to be approached for their discursive content. PPA assists by laying before us a six-phase cycle as an indicator by which to ascertain goodness of fit between a given policy and its frame of reference, a canon of scholarship on the basis of work undertaken by Ingram and Mann (1980) that has engaged - if somewhat sporadically – with the idea of fiasco that deconstructs the problems facing policy-makers, as well as the issues intrinsic to policies themselves. These are now briefly explored below, to deepen our understanding of the ENP. The conclusion will then offer up its own spectrum of ENP fiascos and remedies.

4.0 Failures or Fiasco? Structuring Explanations for the ENP

Three decades later, the ten suggestions propounded in 1980 by Helen Ingram and Dean Mann in their seminal text Why Policies Succeed or Fail, provides an instructive reference by which to further contextualise the initial queries emanating from the six-phase policy cycle. Simply arguing that the ENP failed on one or more of the six-phases of the cycle may point to intrinsic flaws in each or any of the phases, and even broad failures within the cycle itself. As outlined above however, the requirements for proving a foreign policy to be a fiasco are considerably higher. Accordingly, where one problem constitutes a misstep, and several presage a failure, a structure in which virtually every point results in a debacle suggests a policy framework so manifestly unfit for purpose that it is best incompetent and at worst downright damaging. The following ten points thus illustrate a critical mass of failures evidenced across the objectives, implementation and evaluation of the ENP such that its output simply cannot obtain in terms of outcomes.

(1) Alternatives to policies tried

As the geopolitical stakes of enlargement became apparent, there was no ‘do nothing’ option for the EU. Avoiding the Mediterranean had already produced poor-quality north-south relations, and ignoring the states now touching the newly-extended
borders of the EU could not be countenanced from a geopolitical, economic or even cultural perspective. Other options however could have been explored, in which either multilateral or bilateral approaches on their could have been set out, with a clearer sense of state-specific rejuvenation. Crucially, making use of development, rather than enlargement, as a foreign policy template was not well though through.

(2) The impact of changing circumstance

Even the most artfully crafted policies cannot outflank future developments; but given the nature of each of the states, and the regional dynamics of the area, far more thought could have been given to two outstanding forces that - even with the benefit of hindsight – were evident from 2004: fundamentalist forces of a political or religious nature in the Mediterranean exacerbated by chronic poor governance, and the increasingly pugilistic attitude of Russian attitudes regarding its own neighbourhood. ENP decision-makers (both within the Commission, and leading Member States), despite decent policy engagement with some of these countries, failed at a minimum to spot the basic likelihood of major change in the area emanating from these two sources, and more broadly, the regional split it would create, within the ENP itself, and between the EU and its new-found partners.

Dealing with policy change has much to do with the ‘boundary question’ by which both policies, and the general terrain of change that they inhabit are implicitly bound up with as many challenges as forms of assistance. Equally however, policy responsiveness in terms of a policy that is either flexible enough tactically to deal with short term changes, or robust enough strategically to adapt to long term alterations is the *sine qua non* of successful foreign affairs. And in this respect, the EU, and its various neighbourhood projects continues to be caught on the back foot time and again.

Foreign policy comparators like the ECFR’s annual European Foreign Policy Scorecards are a helpful, if rather abbreviated method by which to assess policy responsiveness against the backdrop of changing circumstances. A number of such examples may be seen in the chaos of the EaP Vilnius summit in December 2013 when both Armenia and Ukraine changed tack and failed to sign their respective Association Agreements and DCTFAs with the EU (Emerson 2014). The EU not only failed to see the negative consequences for other states in the region, but how the eastern neighbourhood as a whole would erupt into ‘a key area of conflict with Moscow as its pressure on Armenia, Moldova, and Ukraine undermined the EU’s integration policy’ (ECFR 2014: 68). The EU was temporarily baffled by the turn of events, and then further unable to prioritise its assistance for popular uprisings in Kiev, the release of Yulia Tymoshenko, broad compromises with the ever-shifting governmental structure, ‘modernisation of the Ukrainian gas-transit pipeline’, the policy of *divide et imperium* enacted by Russia upon EU member states in the form of agreements for natural gas supply, or the issue of negotiating ‘reverse flow of gas to Ukraine’ (ECFR 2014: 69). The EU proved even less capable of dully understanding Russian commitment to construct a Eurasian customs union between itself, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Thus, according to the ECFR, the EU entered 2014 as a foreign policy entity ‘yet to find a way to respond to this pressure and [with] no strategy on how to deal with the Russian-led customs union – a direct challenge to the EU’s DCFTAs’ (ECFR 2014: 69).
(3) Relationships of one policy to another

Policies are interrelated, and none more so than the web of external affairs emanating from the EU and its matrix like the Comprehensive Approach. As suggested above, the ENP carried from the outset a bipolar disorder between remote-control security of the ESS in which integration flowed from a stabilised neighbourhood; and the dynamics outlined in the 2004 Neighbourhood document, in which long-term forms of variable integration were themselves a precondition for subsequent durable security. Poor interrelationships in the very founding document of the ENP were one thing. Integration and security however, still largely at odds in a substantive sense, had yet to be fully articulated in any EU foreign policy: development had not by 2004 clarified this relationship, nor had enlargement guaranteed it (Gänzle 2009). More importantly, some key definitions, each of which flowed from various other EU foreign policies, had yet to be worked out relative to the EU itself: neighbourhood itself, partnership (as a non-accession status), joint ownership, common values, and the ultimate onus for the ENP’s responsibility (partners, Commission, EEAS or the Council and ‘patron’ states). This early failure continues to bedevil the overall point of the ENP, the modes by which the south and the east are increasingly distinguished, and the modes by which key states had either advanced or regressed.

(4) The boundary question

At its heart, the ENP is intrinsically a boundary-setting project. But the simple logic as to whether the EU wished to define itself in opposition to its volatile borderlands as a preventative measure, or in relation to its newly-designated partners as a protective attempt, was never clear. Major states including Turkey and Russia seemed wholly disconnected from such a seemingly ambitious project (Pridham 2005). Additional boundaries appeared to be only sparsely considered: labour and currency market boundaries, legislative boundaries, and keenly, cultural and civilizational boundaries demarcating senses of European selves vs. neighbourhood others. Boundaries have now arisen with a vengeance. The neighbourhood space that used neutrally to explain both NATO and EU enlargement during the 2000s was then, and remains perceived by Russia as a boundary too close to its own borders in terms of the strategic depth of both these entities to be tolerated (Lavenex and Schimmelfenig 2009). Territorial incursions, trade embargoes, energy supply spats, and even media wars, as well as rather ironic attempts to construct a Eurasian trade union amongst various Black and Caspian states (with varying degrees of success) have all formed part of Russian-led attempts to reassert both a psychological and substantive presence in the erstwhile neighbourhood.

Again, it should not have been beyond the realms of intelligent policy-making in the EU (as well as the echelons of NATO) to foresee a degree of Russian sensitivity arising from both the transformational ethic of the ENP as a whole, and the decidedly attitudinal changes engendered in the domestic governance of states the length and breadth of the EU’s its newfound border zone (Mayer and Vogt, 2006). Underestimation of the current deadlock in which Brussels now finds itself vis-à-vis the Kremlin is not only itself something of an under-statement but has roots that can be traced to the unclear endings of the Cold War, and the equally ambiguous beginnings of post-Cold War boundary making. Nor should it have been particularly difficult to
foresee the knock-on effects from the global financial crisis upon key regions like North Africa in terms of enhanced ‘radical domestic political and socio-economic changes’ uncoupling states both within the region, and between the region and the EU itself (Ayadi and Sessa 2013: 2). On this basis, the EU, as ‘the key economic partner of the region’ would naturally have been expected to radically recalibrate its Med policies if the current crop had proved ‘suboptimal [by which] to steer the region into a sustainable future’ (ibid).

(5) Excessive policy demand

Demand pertains both to requirements of the EU in terms of its own security and self-interest; as well as needs (both perceived and articulated) by its various members. Should the ENP operate as a remote-control method of installing a series of buffer zones, following the ethos of the ESS, or attempt a novel mode of extended integration, requiring a host of changes in concepts as fundamental as membership, in locations both remote and proximate, with tools as oblique as partnership? Much was expected from the ENP at the outset, yet it was unclear how the ENP itself should operate as a catalyst for EU-inspired, but effectively ‘DIY reform’ on the basis of the EU’s template of good governance, democracy, human rights, rule of law and more. The sheer carrying capacity demanded by the concept of partnership, the differentiated modes of reform that ultimately proved too complex for both the EU and partner state alike, and the unclear forms of governance ranged across vastly unlike states and dissimilar regions all count as excessive in terms of policy demand (Treib, Holger and Falkner 2007). Russian ambitions have forcibly stripped the ENP itself of its initial anxieties over neighbourhood and replace them with a far clearer series of demands, from full membership articulated by an increasingly restive Ukraine to more sharply defined forms of, and rewards for progress by increasingly competitive, even impatient Black Sea states.

Apart from the obvious need for a period of post-uprising civic restitution and political consolidation, EU-Med demands of its own neighbourhood remain oblique. Arguably, by mid-2013, ‘the ENP no longer provided a useful framework for engagement in North Africa. EU states had little confidence in their influence in tackling severe backsliding in the political transition’ of key states like Egypt and subsequently have ‘failed to win the [] leverage to really impact on the emerging situation in Egypt’ and elsewhere (ECRF 2014: 84).

(6) Realizable policy expectations

Revising the original dilemma of post-enlargement Europe may clarify the expectations of a more realisable ENP. As Emerson argued in 2004, the EU had two choices: to accelerate its own ‘powers and institutional development to the point that it enhances its capacity to accept further enlargement’ in a manageable manner and workable timetable (1). Second, to attempt ‘something really significant under the name of the new European Neighborhood Policy, blurring the frontiers between ‘in’ and out’, to the point that the Union might achieve beneficial leverage on developments in the periphery without rushing ahead with further accession negotiations’ (ibid). Attempting to combine an ambitious strategy with a holding pattern-cum-placebo, the ENP morphed uneasily into both top-down EU transformative ambitions fusing security and enlargement, and a range of bottom-up
requirements from national reform packages to restorative good governance schemes, to cross-border endeavours incorporating political, economic and cultural connections. EU expectations flowing from the success of enlargement were generally high; and were likewise optimistic for a number of Eastern Partnership states, principally because for them, the internal logic of the ENP clearly intimated full-blown, if long-term, accession. Scepticism however was the trademark of many of the Mediterranean states, or at any rate a pragmatism that understood the convenience of Action Plan templates coinciding with pre-existing national reform plans.

Still unclear, even a decade later, is whether the ENP was a plan or a panacea; designed to ‘induce innovation’ as per its ‘stated purpose’, or whether its ‘actual purpose’ was more closely connected with the symbolism of neighbourhood rather than the substance required to transform it into a region both tolerable and functional (Birkland, 2005: 191). What began as a fissure between EU ambitions and realisable policy expectations in 2004, had by 2009-10 produced a yawning chasm betwixt both the southern and eastern flanks regarding the lack of clear objectives, and the profound need to deploy redefined tools in light of rapidly changing neighbourhood needs. After a decade, the gap has widened markedly for the Mediterranean club, and been severely shaken but not dislodged in the east. For Med states, the ENP currently represents a fiasco because the spectrum has shrunk to an inoperable series of steps between unreliable EU rhetoric at one end and dashed partner expectations at the other (Pace 2009). For some EaP states, the ENP is an acknowledged policy failure, in which the EU failed to foresee or forestall the Russian backlash within a neighbourhood abidingly perceived as zero-sum (Pridham 2005). For others, it represents a significant but variable, even capricious policy in which EU demands veer from trade agreements to normative demands, from attempting top-down reforms of governance to relying instead on bottom-up initiatives.

(7) Accurate theory of causation

A range of implicit causality is one of the hallmarks of the ENP; ownership of causality operates as the dynamic by which partner states bring about their own reform and transformation, while the EU institutions operate as the architecture of such causal potential. But a ‘sound causal theory’ regarding either the origins of the neighbourhood’s problems, or how they could in turn be caused by the ENP to transform into solutions, was then, and is now, fundamentally absent. This is a problem for two reasons. First, the positive spill over prompting phases of state-based modernisation, institutional progress, and normative transformation is inherently causal in principle, yet the causal steps by which any of these transformation occurs has always remained vague in the majority of ENP blueprints, from the guiding Neighbourhood documents emerging periodically from the Commission or Council².

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the Joint Communications of the Commission and the HRVP and accompanying staff working documents\(^3\), and the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council\(^4\). The causality is therefore assumed from within, rendering it unclear and functionally challenging to implement from without. Indeed, close readings of the ENP’s founding ethos illustrate that it operates on the basis of an ‘owner-onus’ in which states who transform themselves on the basis of ‘common values’ are pulled into the ‘joint ownership’ structure in which, alongside the EU itself, state-specific progress on the wider basis of true ‘partnership’ is established.

Second, the ENP is itself a cause-based project, providing a foundation to two subsequent, region-specific projects: the Union of the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership (EaP). Both projects are assumed to roll forward on the basis of ‘owner-onus’ that drives the ENP itself, a process in which both logically, and ‘logistically, as posited by its founding documents, the EaP foresees a number of positive changes to ensure the eastern neighborhood’s deeper integration into the EU’ (Korostoleva 2011: 244). However, this is too oblique a policy formation to produce a clear idea of structure, incentives and rewards. The attempted changes to the EaP in particular including suggestions for a ‘fast track’ framework, as well as four thematic platforms (political, economic, energy security and civic reforms) and five potential flagships ‘to be developed on a needs-serving basis’ do not yet count as refinements (ibid). Instead of providing ENP states with a clearer idea of which values best suit which objectives, how achievements in these four platforms strengthens joint ownership in real terms, and subsequently enables the construction of partnership, such additions merely lengthen the middle phases of the policy cycle by expanding the number of actors and tools involved, and complicating the methods of implementation.

(8) Choice of effective policy tools

Flowing from observations arising from the policy cycle itself, Ingram and Mann (1980) suggest that after the initial drafting of objectives, appropriate levels and actors, the most fundamental choice to be made is the range of tools. Failing to design the right arsenal, as well as funding and deploying it, ‘will likely yield policy failure’, while even the best choice is often ‘a function of compromise or ideological predisposition’ (in Birkland 2005: 191). One of the central problems of the ENP is its conflation of means and ends, and of the goals of progress and the methods of assessing performance. Should the programmatic structure of Action Plans and

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Association Agreements constitute the overall benchmarks, and thus the most tangible form of assessing transformation? Or are they a tool to a far more wide-reaching aim?

The latter seems to be the case, as identified by the European Parliament (2013), which argued that ‘Association Agreements (AAs) are not a goal in themselves but an instrument for promoting profound and sustainable reform, systematic transformation and closer alignment with the Union and its founding values and standards’; but this observation does not necessarily render the country-specific plan an effective policy tool in achieving goals for key states. The broad value-sets, and specific benchmarking of each national ENP plan has been less than ideal, first in establishing a decent intermediary terrain upon which both sides agree their ‘mutual commitment to common values’ and a clear sense of how, as a policy instrument, country-specific plans act as a means to genuinely, visibly, viably ‘promot[e] profound and sustainable reform’ within the state, and consequently ‘strengthen the partnership between the EU and the countries and societies of the neighbourhood’ (European Parliament, 2013).

(9) The vagaries of implementation

Continuing the observations of the previous point, the tools on offer within the ENP were not necessarily poorly crafted in and of themselves, but rather suffered from poor quality implementation. Based on a series of frameworks, protocols, benchmarks and schedules flowing from the project of enlargement, much in the ENP could have operated as viable instruments for either a security-oriented integrative approach to the neighbourhood. One the one hand exist broad, multilateral tools designed to encourage systematic transformations in a like-to-like method, where states advanced in comparable and even, if not necessarily commensurate and equal fashion. This was boosted by the overarching regional sweep of the southern, and eastern clubs, as discrete geopolitical neighbourhoods within the ENP. On the other, the rise of differentiated foreign policy, necessitating bespoke approaches to drafting, managing, even owning respective Action Plans and Association Agreements.

For EaP countries for example, policy innovations simply serve to confuse the issue: presenting states with a “two-track approach by adding multilateral cooperation, with a regional focus on conventional bilateral relations with the EU” (Korostoleva 2011: 244). Confusing its own inhouse mechanics of deepening and widening, the EU attempts to widen partnerships that have never fully taken root, and deepen relations that are already too wide and unwieldy. There is simply no sense as to why the choice of tools bears on the output, or enhances the outcome. Thus the four thematic platforms (political, economic, energy security and civic reform) and its five flagships have both so much in common that they risk duplication and overlap if envisaged as cross-state and regional cooperation and confusion if tackled alongside the differing provisions of the Association Agreements. The vagaries of implementation are worsened if subsequent evaluation of the project concentrates only on that single phase of the policy cycle, without breaking down the entire structure to appraise where single and collective problems have arisen. Thus, while a variety of opportunities to overhaul the ENP arose during its initial cycles (for example in 2006 with the Commission’s document ‘Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy’ (COM(2006)0726), or again in 2010: ‘Taking Stock of the European Neighbourhood Policy’ (COM(2010)0207) these were focused on enhancing the take-up of ENP methodology within key sectors by specific actors rather than examining
top-down and bottom-up connections between Brussels, national ENP capitals, key ENP stakeholders and the intrinsic problems encountered with the benchmarking structure of the first set of ENP Action Plans. These early failings ‘buried problems, overlaid issues and ultimately delayed our ability to react when serious problems arose (EEAS Interview, 24 March 2015, Brussels).

(10) Failure of political institutions

Institutional turf war within the European Commission, between the Commission and the EEAS, and the Ministries of lead member states, plus the poor governance of many of the ENP partnership states all contributed to a fundamentally lacklustre policy that has dissipated in terms of its goals from the outset. The learning dynamics that must perforce be acknowledged by key EU institutions in the final policy phase of evaluation are a crucial component, and are further explored below.

5.0 Learning from Crisis: Evaluation or Exploitation?

Crises, as they unfold, tend to be regarded as existential. The generic body politic (whether administration, state, international organisation, etc.) crisis is inevitably scrutinized for its role in the crisis, whether as cause or catalyst. This can muddy the waters in terms of the blame game, yielding endless narratives of decision-making gone awry. Equally however, reflective dynamics which parallel political crises, and the existential disquiet that arises from a fiasco (as the severest form of crisis) provide the requisite opportunity for identifying where along the policy cycle things began to go wrong, and, upon the basis of these understandings, distinguishing them from the initial structure of assumptions and strategies which have proved erroneous or undoable. While the policy cycle is not always capable of clinically separating out its respective phases, the requirement within the evaluatory phase for acceptance of a failure, by both principals and agents is a necessary precursor to understand the accompanying demand for change, and to galvanising subsequent efforts to recast, redesign, or even abandon the policy. Rounding out observations made in the introduction of this article, attention to the evaluatory phase provides an additional remedy for the general corpus of ‘fiasco theory’, by forcing a reconciliation between the objective benchmarks of phase-specific policy dynamics (as found within the six part policy cycle) and the equally critical subjective perceptions and framing of such goals, while reducing the emotive impact inherent in terminology such as fiasco, failure, scandal or crisis.

Within the European Union, this process has been complicated and tardy in the extreme. The framing of failings within, and by the EU is a touchy subject at the best of times, and tends to pit institutions against each other, or demonstrate the flowering of the scrutinising powers of European parliamentarian. The terms ‘failed’, and ‘fiasco’ can emerge at any point within the policy cycle, but are generally concomitant with the latter stages of a policy’s development. This can include instances when an agreement is not reached among actors on how to move ahead: ‘…the Council had failed to reach agreement on the minimum rates of excise duty on alcoholic beverages’ (Commission: 6 December 2006)\(^5\), when implementation has

gone awry: ‘the Nabucco fiasco has therefore exposed the weakness and ineffectiveness of EU foreign policy’ (Parliament: 11 July 2013), or in a particularly colourful example relating to EU-Russia trade relations, ‘our policy brought about a fiasco and ended in failure’ (Parliament, 25 October 2012), when evaluations have not proved robust enough, as on the topic of Kongo development aid: ‘has the Commission not learnt from the fiascos in the previous programming period?’ (Parliament: 6 March 2014).

Since the first flood of criticism arising from the European Parliament’s scathing 2013 critique of ENP failures, commentary on neighbourhood fiascos have been plentiful. Criticism has been levelled the implementation procedures of the project: “[t]his outcome represents yet another example of EU eastern policy fiascos following the implementation of the misguided principle of ‘more for more’ (Parliament, 4 October 2013), at the politicisation of its internal logic: ‘despite the fact that the Barcelona objectives ended in a fiasco precisely because they were mere numbers dictated centrally by the EU to the individual Member States’ (Parliament, 12 May 2011), and more generally on the bizarre conflation of means and ends, of tools and goals found across a decade of ENP documents resulting in a wholesale inability of the ENP to instill any real change, and worse, to identify, record, and build on it. The 2013 Parliament Resolution on the ENP ‘working towardsa a stronger partnership’, based on an in-depth survey of the 2012 ENP progress reports made clear that much of the project was simply not fit for purpose (European Parliament, 23 October 2013). Procedurally, the Parliament

‘regrets that, in most cases, the reports, as well as the events that followed, present a mixed picture of progress, stagnation and regression and describe the national situation without evaluating the programmes carried out by the Union or making concrete recommendations regarding the allocation of funds under the EU external instruments or development cooperation and its influence on policy-making in the partner countries’ (European Parliament, 23 October 2013).

Substantively, the ENP emerged even further battered. Conflating ‘performance and progress’ and confusing its ‘more for more’ and less for less’ policy, the ENP

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represents a policy in which country progress and ‘goals set in common with the EU’ were not coherent in terms of common values, consistent in terms of generating joint ownership, or capable of constructing progress-based partnership (European Parliament, 23 October 2013). As a foreign policy, the ENP has produced ‘slow or non-existent dynamics of political and social change in the partner countries’ on an individual basis, and regionally, complicated partnership and membership to the extent that it has invoked ‘double standards’ into its internal logic (European Parliament, 23 October 2013).

Despite this searing critique, some leeway may need to be considered, however. The crises and even fiascos created by the ENP have been unhelpfully protracted by institutional stasis partially brought about by the Eurozone crisis, and additionally by the complex requirements of implementing the Treaty of Lisbon. Many exogenous factors were also beyond the scope of the EU to wholly predict, and beyond their ability to contend with substantively, including the Arab Spring in North Africa, flashpoints in the Middle East involving Israel and Palestine, as well as the Syrian civil war and the myriad fountainheads of ISIS attacks, drawn against pugilistic Russian foreign policy that gradually and deliberately drove strategic wedges into every EaP state from Georgia onwards.

Each of these cases must therefore be acknowledged as pivotal geopolitical dynamics that now characterise the EU’s various neighbourhood regions, and however painful, as well as accepting that the EU bears responsibility, either directly or indirectly, for many of them, as a result of its action or non-action. Subsequent ENP structures cannot wait for the restoration of a priori structures or attitudes; policy learning at this stage must be swift and robust, not tardy and lacklustre. The first step has been a recognition of the institutionalisation of the failures of the policy, primarily as a result of the European Parliament report of 2013, the EEAS’ own reflections of 2014, and the March 2015 statement by HRVP Federica Mogherini of the various shortcomings of the policy. Mogherini has been both lauded and roundly condemned for offering either an ‘honest appraisal of the ENP’s incapacities’ (EEAS interview, March 25 2015, Brussels), or a ‘timid ‘mea culpa’ for its failings (EurActiv 4 March 2015). Mogherini’s view of the ENP appears to suggest that at best, the policy (conveniently badged as ‘the neighbourhood policy of the Barroso Commission’) was ‘naïve’, and at worst ‘confrontational’ (ibid). From a procedural perspective, a clear understanding of the role played by the sixth phase, that of evaluation, and its necessarily symbiotic relationship in producing refined, more workable policy objectives for a renewed project is crucial. Institutional best practice tends to launch reviews as part of the phase of evaluation, and the EEAS has done precisely this, with Mogherini arguing that ‘the sense of a process of review is valuating what didn’t work’ (ibid).

In substantive terms, admissions of the naivety and confrontationalism inherent in the ENP’s southern and eastern flanks respectively can no longer be ignored, resulting in further admissions that the new Commission and the EEAS itself can now ‘clearly see the negative limits’ of the ENP, rather than assuming that its framework possesses automatic benefits for all (ibid). The public confessional of a joint ENP press conference in March 2015 comprised tough admissions first by Mogherini that the former approach had had ‘been very much based on the judgement [..] on the evaluation of the progress in our relationship’ and needed now to cultivate ‘a more cooperation oriented approach between equal partners’, based on ‘listening and
working together’ (EEAS Press Release 4 March 2015). Mogherini’s observations were followed by those from ENP and Enlargement Negotiations Commissioner, Johannes Hahn. A charitable reading of Hahn could interpret his remarks as a pithy decree of the key flaw of the ENP, namely that ‘the ENP has not always been able to offer adequate responses to the changing aspirations of our partners. And therefore, the EU’s own interests have not been fully served either’ (ibid).

Less benevolent observers could be forgiven their disbelief at hearing the evaluatory phase of the ENP’s first full policy cycle summed up, after a decade of full-frontal external failures and excoriating internal criticism, as the need ‘to recognise that our partners are very diverse’ (EEAS Press Release 4 March 2015). Ethnocentric institutionalism prevailed in the suggestion that future ENP projects need to be less ‘condescending, patronising or preaching’ in tone and less pathologically comprehensive in nature: ‘we need not cover every sector with every partner’. Hindsight perhaps prompted the fourth and final point that the EU, in all its forms, ‘need[s] to be more flexible’; but an appreciation that the neighbourhood itself, as an emergent but fragile series of concentric polities, is far more than merely the sum of its individual partner states, and their differentiation-driven plans may go a long way in the next decade to reducing the chances of further fiasco.

The second step will come in the form of the announced ENP consultation where the current and future challenges to both the Eastern Partnership and the Med Region will need to be outlined. Can the EU now exploit both the range of crises in its southern and eastern flanks, and the failures endemic in its ENP to produce a series of local and regional packages both beneficial in the short-term and progressive in the long-term? If foreign policy actors are enjoined not to waste a good crises, the EU can draw on various policy ‘crises, disasters [to] note their potential agenda-setting effects’. In this respect, the challenges for the east and south are not dissimilar. While Russia dominates in the east, profound volatility still disturbs much of the Maghreb and Mashreq. The key will be to inject short-term crisis response alongside the ENP’s long-term reformatory structures, probably via the Comprehensive Approach which blends security and development into the ENP itself. Eastern DCTFAs need to mesh in regulatory harmony with perceived contours of the offers flowing from the Eurasian Economic Union, while more in the way of ‘merit-based approaches’ need to reward eastern frontrunners, and galvanise laggards (Blockmans 2014). Aquis-based templates and EU standards may also replace norms and common values, at least in the short-term. Lastly, the abiding ethos of maintaining unity within diversity upon which both the EU and ENP are founded, means striking a balance between the increasingly asymmetric progress yielded across the ENP in the next decade with the uneven support for the ENP amongst EU member states.
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