

# The EU Enlargement Policy

## Possibilities and Frontiers



Edited by Jarolím Antal

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|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Preface</b> .....  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>1. The EU Enlargement in the Terms of Past and Future Perspectives</b><br>(Boris Navrátil, Eva Minarčíková) .....                                    | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>2. Between the frontier and the boundary: Geopolitics and geostrategies<br/>of the EU's further enlargement to the East</b> (Jarosław Jańczak) ..... | <b>15</b> |
| <b>3. Enlargement as a Tool of Foreign Policy of the European Union:<br/>The Case of Turkey</b> (Martin Hrabálek) .....                                 | <b>29</b> |
| <b>4. New horizons for Regional Trade Cooperation between the EU<br/>and The EaP countries</b> (Svitlana Musiyenko).....                                | <b>39</b> |
| <b>5. Impact of the eastern enlargement on new member states</b> (Šimon Buryan) .....   | <b>53</b> |
| <b>6. REACH implementation in the Western Balkans</b> (Ondřej Filipec) .....  | <b>65</b> |

## Between the frontier and the boundary: Geopolitics and geostrategies of the EU's further enlargement to the East

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### Abstract

Further enlargement of the European Union is no longer determined only by the internal debate fueled by the argument of absorption capacities. The changing international environment introduced a new factor – actors trying to prevent the EU from further territorial expansion. To investigate this issue, the concepts of geostrategies and geopolitics of the EU are introduced, revealing various patterns of both the internal organization of the Union, and also structuring its relations with the surrounding environment. Recognizing the normative power of the EU and its expansion to the East, the concept of counter-Europeanization allows one to understand the system Russia is offering, or imposing as an alternative to the states in the EU's eastern neighborhood.

### Keywords

borders of Europe, EU geostrategies, Russia

### Introduction

Can and should the EU enlarge further to the East? This question is neither only a problem of internal debate on absorption capacities, nor of the border(s) of Europe, but also, especially recently, there has been the matter of a geopolitical contest with Russia (re) constructing its imperial position in the central and eastern part of the continent. The aim of this paper is, consequently, to propose a new approach to understanding the enlargement debate. It will attempt to explain European-Russian border dynamism employing classical approaches in studying borders. The author claims that the changing political and geopolitical circumstances in this part of Europe have undermined the already dominating paradigms in studying enlargement and are consequently forcing scholars to look for new instruments. As these new relations are based on competition, confrontation and even conflict, instead of collaboration, they recall the border situation which dominated Europe before the end of the Cold War. Consequently, the analytical approaches prevailing at that time, especially the concepts of boundary, empire, expansion, and so on, applied to the European Union can be useful in understanding the current situation and predicting further enlargement.

Consequently, the author firstly presents the *old* paradigms of enlarging the Union, based on neo-functional linearity. The criticism of these paradigms results in a new model, debating the concept of geopolitics and geostrategies of the European Union, and revealing the polycentric nature of various integration initiatives in contemporary Europe and its surrounding area. Finally, the concept of counter-Europeanization allows one to

understand who is preventing potential new candidates from deepening their integration with the EU and how, and what categories of neighbors there are and how they are affected by the new circumstances.

## **1. The logics of European Union enlargement**

The European Union's territorial dynamism has recently been considered (similarly to the internal developments) through the perspective of linearity. Fueled by the nonfunctional perception (Haas 1964), it has been marked by a *spill over* mechanism (Lindberg 1963). The longer the period of integration, the more states decided to join the Communities/ Union. *Spill around* was marked by rare events when there was a temporary lack of progress in accession negotiations (as in the case of the division into the Helsinki and Luxembourg group). *Spill back* situations (as proved by the two negative Norwegian accession referenda or Greenland's exit) were rare and considered as absolute exceptions in the landscape of the spatially expanding Union. Additionally, regress (or lack of progress) in the enlargement process was, in all cases, internally caused and resulted (almost) exclusively from domestic debate.

The post-big bang developments made further enlargement less probable. On the one hand, it was caused by the old members being tired with the two decades of "pumping up" the European project. The argument about absorption capacities was to justify (temporary) hesitance towards further enlargement. On the other hand, the factors started to determine slow progress in accession negotiations with further candidates: many of them failed to successfully implement the required reforms, revealing at the same time deficiencies in the process of Europeanization. But more importantly, some were prevented from fast and effective integration by other, external actors that began to shape the new geopolitical environment in Europe.

This has resulted in the fact that the old logics of enlarging the Union no longer explain the dynamism of the process, due to the changing nature of the political environment in Europe. This situation requires a search for a new paradigm, allowing us to understand the current state of affairs, but also to construct convincing predictive means in this field.

## **2. Towards a new enlargement paradigm – geopolitics and geostrategies of the European project**

The argument about the changing nature of the geopolitical environment in Europe as a new context for the enlargement process results in the necessity of categorizing it. The externally imposed limits for further enlargement are determined by the way the EU's external borders are organized, which has significant consequences for the nature of the EU, as well as the policies addressed to its neighbors. Both are defined by the geopolitics and geostrategies of the EU.

### **2.1 Geopolitics of the EU**

The approach to further enlargement says a lot about the nature of the European project itself by defining the character of the interior and its relations to the external environment. Conceptually, Christopher Browning and Pertti Joenniemi (2008) offer a model describing

the geopolitics of the Union. They propose three ways of describing it: Westphalian, imperial and neomedieval (Figure 1).

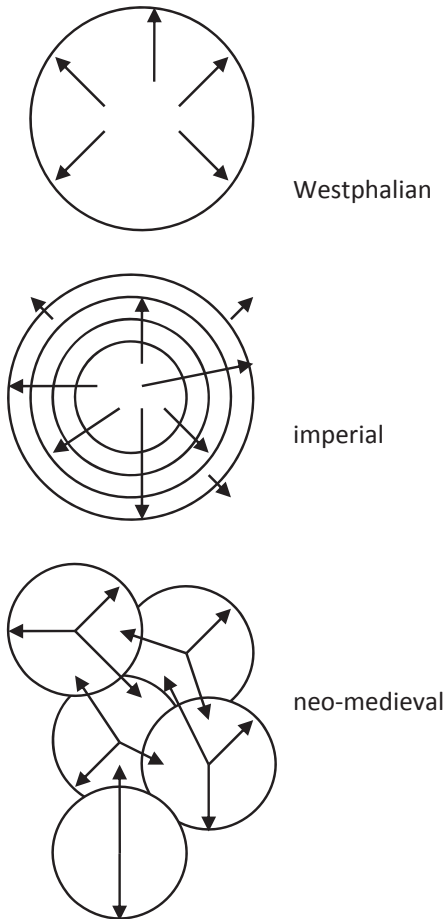
The model described as Westphalian is characterized by precisely defined territory, and – at the same time – by clear boundaries enclosing it. Its appearance was linked to the process of creating the modern nation-state. Everything that is outside the boundaries does not belong to the entity. Everything that is inside is similarly influenced by the norms, values and power of the center. Internal standardization is contradicted by the otherness outside the borders. If considering the European Union as being built according to this model, one should assume that it is a semi-state (Caporaso 1996). Its territory is limited to that of the formal member states where the *acquis communautaire* is in force in a uniform manner everywhere. This can be illustrated by the same rules of the single market regulating economic life and determining the circumstances under which economic processes take place, as well as the normative catalogue of Western values, including human rights, liberal democracy and so on. The political center of the EU at the same time concentrates power, which results from the transfer of competences from member states (Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 522–526).

The imperial model is built on different principles. Norms and values differ, as well as their understanding and interpretation, depending on the distance from the center of the political-territorial structure. The center and peripheries can be identified. The former radiates to the latter. For any location, the distance from the center determines how strong the center's influence is. Consequently, the model can be presented as a set of concentric circles with a center, and inner circles followed by the further peripheries. The power of the center diminishes as the distance from it increases. Consequently, the outer circles are less influenced by the center than the inner circles are. This model assumes, however, a specific level of dynamism, with new circles appearing on the edge and inner circles being absorbed to the core. Applying this model to the European Union, one needs to pay attention to the complex nature of the relations between the various actors involved in the project. On the one hand, the member states do not display integration homogeneity. A hard core of the EU can be identified, containing those member states that at the same time are in the euro zone and the Schengen zone. Then there are those who are less integrated because they do not participate in the last two areas (or one of the two). The space outside the EU is also marked by various types of dependence on the center. The circle of candidate states is followed by potential candidates (Zielonka 2007), then partner states associated with the EU (and exposed to external Europeanization efforts) as well as those falling under the European Neighbourhood Policy (Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 522–526).

The neo-medieval model assumes that a center can hardly be identified. The polycentric environment of mutual influences dominates the political landscape, being additionally marked by a dense network of mutual interdependences (Wind 2003). Instead of one-dimensional flows of ideas from the center to the peripheries, here their multidimensional exchange is dominating (Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 522–526). Understood from this perspective, the European Union is characterized by the absence of a single center, being a polycentric entity with several local centers interacting with each another.

The models presented not only try to describe the European Union, but also reveal a lot about the nature of previous and future enlargements.

**Figure 1: Geopolitical models of the European Union**



Source: Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 523.

## 2.2 Geostrategies of the EU

One of the elements revealing the nature of the relations of the European Union with its neighbors is the way in which its external borders are organized. In their analysis, Christopher Browning and Pertti Joenniemi (2008) present a categorization of the geostrategies of a territorial political entity, enumerating the *networked (non)border*, *march*, *colonial frontier* and *limes* (Figure 2).

A *networked (non)border* describes a situation where the diminishing role of a state boundary results in increasing flows, including individuals, goods, capital, and so on. At the same time, cross-border interactions are structured by the involvement of numerous actors, creating a dense network of relations and contacts. A *march* constitutes more



a space than a line, being a zone between two territorial-political structures. Being no-one's space, it contains influences of both neighbors, at the same time separating them (Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 527; Walters 2004). A *colonial frontier* can be illustrated as a line demarcating belonging to one of the entities. Their relations are marked by asymmetry, and consequently the dominating party exports ideas, goods, solutions, and so on, through this border to the weaker one. The stronger partner is expanding and this type of border is undergoing a constant process of being pushed further away, absorbing the territories under its influence. Finally, there are *limes*, which are also represented by a line, also separating asymmetric structures. In this case they are, however, a final border which is static and marks the territorial ends of a given territorial unit. Often they are a defensive line, where the structure on the other side is a source of threat (Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 529; Walters 2004).

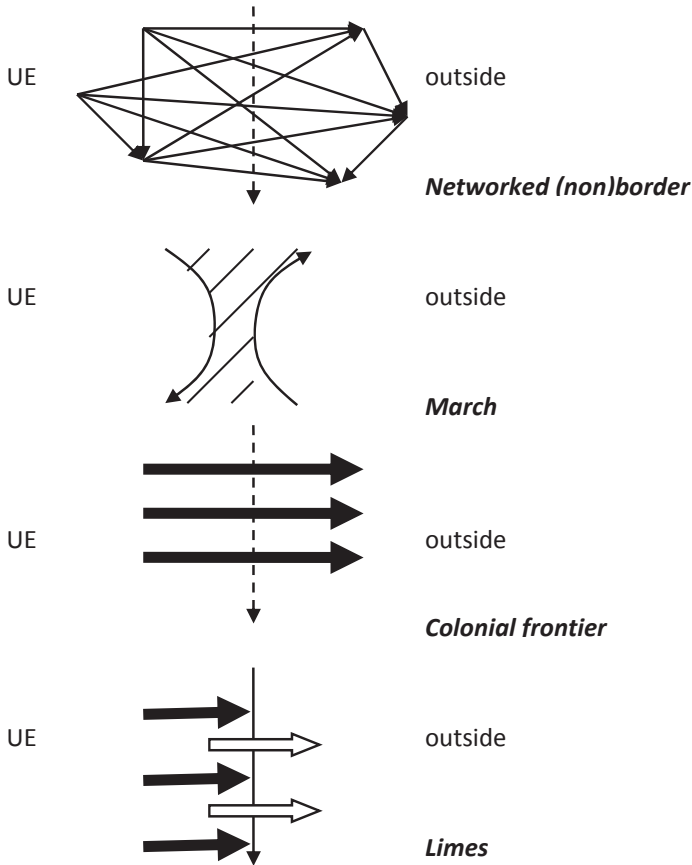
Classically understood enlargement, as has been implemented by the European Communities and the European Union, tends to follow the model of the *colonial frontier*. Most of the EU enlargements, especially those from 1981, 1986, 2004, 2007 and 2013 were marked by significant asymmetries, where the candidates represented poorer standards than the EU both economically and politically. Accession was marked by a typically long-lasting Europeanization process, determined by implementing conditionality mechanisms. Norms, values, solutions and so on, originating from the Communities penetrate the systems of candidates, saturating them with the *acquis communautaire*. This also demonstrated the unidimensional character of the flow leading to accession, which meant a further shift of the EU border. But behind this border existed yet another state, being treated according to the same paradigm.

This scheme led to the self-perpetuating and never-ending plan of expansion, where the end points of the European project were not set. To the west and north they were determined by geography. On reaching the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean and the Barents Sea, no more candidates can be found. To the south, the rejected Moroccan application in 1987 politically determined the limit of Europe there. The east, however, has represented an open space with no clear concept of a boundary.

When reflecting on enlargement, one should not forget, however, about the non-EU western European states, Norway, Switzerland and Iceland. Being highly integrated with the Communities, but remaining outside the formal structures of the EU, they represent the case of a *networked (non)border*. Their integration with the EU is opposed by their citizens and most of the political parties. Attempts to join the club have been either rejected by public opinion (as in the case of Norway), or implemented as a strategy of overcoming current economic difficulties, which resulted in a u turn when the problems were gone (as happened with the Icelandic application).

The European Neighbourhood Policy offers another field where the geostrategies of the EU can be observed. After its creation in the north-east, the *networked (non)border* was the dominant form of relations. In the east, it was the *colonial frontier*, aiming, in the view of some of the member states, to eventually let the neighbors in, in others, to keep them out by offering a new form of interaction which in practice is an equivalent to membership, visible in attempts to stabilize and Europeanize some of the neighbors (and possibly accept them in the more distant future). In the south, due to the final character of the border, *limes* seems to best describe the implemented geostrategy (Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 544–545).

**Figure 2: Geostrategies of the European Union**



Source: Browning and Joenniemi 2008: 528.

### 2.3 Towards a polycentric perspective

Most of the presented approaches, regardless of the specific model under investigation, reveal, however, at least one structural weakness. They assume that the EU is surrounded by a sort of vacuum, a no-man's land allowing unlimited expansion. So in practice, all three geopolitical models imply the geostrategy of a colonial frontier as the one characterizing the EU's relations with its neighbors. They can be allowed in as soon as they fulfill specific conditions. Successful (external) Europeanization makes it possible to enlarge the Union and accept new members. Of course, the position of the current members has to be unanimously positive on enlargement. This approach does not recognize, however, other competing centers of attraction that could offer an alternative to the candidates, or force them to resign from integration into the European Union. Overcoming this ignorance about developments in the EU's surroundings has led to replacing the monocentric

perspective with a polycentric approach. It recognizes the environment where the Union is no longer the exclusive center of attraction, but is one of many existing on the continent.

The model applied by the European Union in structuring the enlargement policy addressed to its neighbors is based on the concept of normative power. The Union’s superiority is a superiority of norms and values that are considered to be influential enough to change the environment of the candidates, making them more similar to member states, and consequently more acceptable.

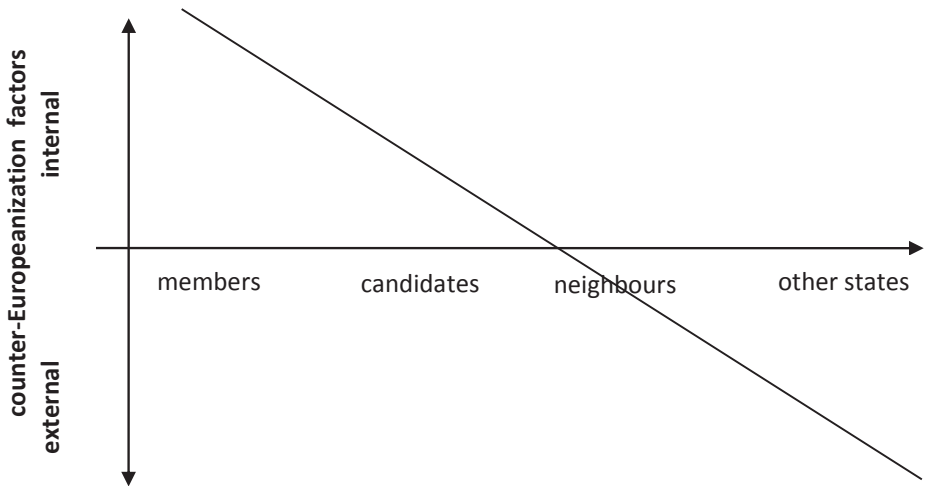
In recognizing another center’s existence, the question of the nature of their influence has to be posed. Is it also a matter of civilian tools implemented to create another offer to the EU’s candidates? Or is it also framed by tools of classical international relations, including military means?

### 3. External limits to further enlargement: de-Europeanization and counter-Europeanization

Assuming that the new situation results from the external limitations on Europeanization, a short reflection on its understanding seems necessary.

Eduard Soler i Lecha (2008, 2) stresses in his paper, that “little attention has been paid to the process of <<de-Europeanization>>”. This has happened despite the fact that the “Europeanization process can be followed by de-Europeanization phases” (Amiya-Nakada 2008: 3–10) which means it does not develop linearly. This situation can result from the fact that Europeanization developments continue to prevail over de-Europeanization, which is only accidental. But also from the academic involvement in promoting integration at the expense of a neutral and scientifically objective view.

Figure 3: Shift in counter-Europeanization



Source: The author

Unfortunately, due to the character of this paper, a wider debate on the concept of Europeanization is not possible. I decided consequently to signalize only two dimensions of its understanding. First of all, using top down logic, following Roberta Ladrech (1994: 69–88), it can be defined “as a process where EC political and economic dynamics [become a] part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making”. Johan Olsen (2002: 3) sees it as a bottom-up process, where “Europeanization (...) implies adapting national and subnational systems of governance to a European political center and European-wide norms”.

De-Europeanization can be defined as “a process in which previous impetus to converge with EU norms and the willingness to get involved in EU policies slows down and can even take an opposite direction. The most radical form of de-Europeanization would imply that (...) country, not only decides to stop complying the EU *acquis* and stops any reform in that direction but e.g. even uses its assets in order to hamper the elections” (Soler i Lecha 2008: 2–3). Here, two reasons can be determined. First of all, the rational calculation of the balance of costs and benefits, when the latter do not match the former. The second is a set of alternative norms that are preferred.

It is important here to determine the difference between de-Europeanization and counter-Europeanization.

We shall start with the semantic role of the two prefixes, *de-* and *counter-*. The former “indicate[s] privation, removal, and separation” (The Random 1987: 551), stressing that something is opposite or reduced in comparison to the previous state. The latter emphasizes that something is “contrary to the right course; in the reverse or opposite direction” in the meaning of “in opposition or response to” (The Random 1987: 4611). This concentrates on the fact that a given element is “done or given as a reaction to something, especially to oppose it” (Longman 2009). It focuses on reducing the effect of something by causing an opposite effect.

Consequently the *de-* prefix suggests that an already achieved state of art is under erosion (for example de-Russification (Bychkov Green 1997) or de-Sovietization (Rindzeviciute 2009)). The prefix *counter-* stresses a reaction and its direction. It at the same time includes opposition to a specific action (for example, counter-revolution (Morrow 1974)).

Consequently, “the semantic meaning of de-Europeanization (...) stresses the reduction of Europeanization (often to a previously existing state, sometimes to a new one) as a process and expresses transformation from an already existing European level towards a non- or less European one” (Jańczak 2010a). The author has decided in this text not to continue exploring the field of de-Europeanization and to concentrate on counter-Europeanization. The set of arguments presented above, related to the changing nature of European geopolitics that led to the reappearance of alternative gravity centers, has resulted in the necessity of concentrating on how they react to the enlargement plans of the EU and accession plans of the areas of their interest. Counter-Europeanization will be consequently the operationalized reaction of the opponents to further EU enlargement. It determines further enlargement possibilities.

The key question in the case of counter-Europeanization is who the actors initiating and executing the counteraction are. Two categories of them can be identified: inter-system and external (Jańczak 2010b: 104–105).

Inter-system actors dominate in member states and candidate states (being less visible in the case of neighbors and other states). In the first two, one can detect Euro-sceptical (Beichelt 2004) institutional and non-institutional actors, including political parties (Schmidt 2006: 216), religious organizations, lobby groups or individuals. Normatively and identity driven arguments tend to be visible here (often related to the threat of losing sovereignty), although sometimes it is opposition towards a specific solution that originates from the EU, which is implemented locally but does not fit the local conditions and is based consequently on mindless imitation (Dimitrova 2002). Candidates can additionally experience dissatisfaction with the pace of negotiations. The case of Turkey shows how the long knocking at the European door has resulted in deep disappointment and a renaissance of their own regional normative system. In neighboring states, counter-Europeanization results from anti-western and anti-European legacies. Russia represents the case here.

External actors are the second category, being the most present among the EU neighboring states. They tend to oppose the Europeanization process in areas considered to be “their” ones, as zones of influence or cultural zones, which can be both normatively or interest driven. The territorial and conceptual framework for this is provided by Samuel Huntington and his concept of civilizations clashing at the edges (Huntington 1997). Consequently, Orthodox and Muslim civilizations can be considered as the ones offering alternative normative systems and opposing further expansion with the West, embodied by the European Union.

Since the end of *smuta* in Russia, the EU has been competing there, especially with Moscow, which has been trying either to strengthen counter-Europeanization movements (supporting pro-Russian political parties, religious movements, and also promoting a specific language policy, etc.), or to stop the process of Europeanization by force, using military intervention, support for separatist movements or outright war (Larsen 2014). Moreover, Russian elites see the Europeanization of bordering states as a part of Western imperialism and a way of oppressing weaker neighbors that do not (*originally*) belong to the West or the Western sphere of influence.

This categorization allows us to establish a wider perspective on the negative reactions to Europeanization. If the external or internal character is considered, as well as the four categories of states, a model can be drawn (Figure 3).

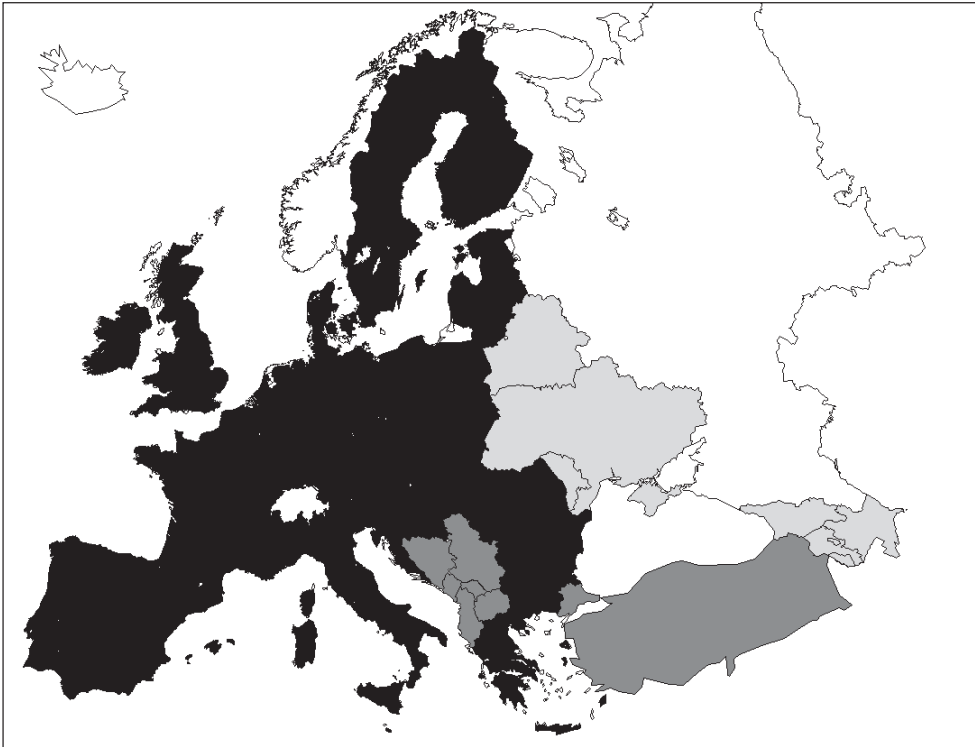
Counter-Europeanization that was internally driven tends to dominate among the member states and candidates. In the case of neighboring states, both internal and external opposition has been visible. Other states have usually been externally driven in their positions. However, together with the changing geopolitical environment in Europe, where strongly EU centric policies (assuming – as already discussed – the EU was surrounded by an empty zone for potential territorial and political expansion) clashed with the other integration initiatives that reappeared in the immediate neighborhood (namely Russia), this model also changed. The line of counter-Europeanization shifted downwards, which is reflected in the more visible and active external involvement in stopping progress in making the EU’s surroundings more European. This opposition is aimed at preventing further states from entering the EU or becoming involved in deep and intensive interrelations.

#### 4. What about further enlargement? – a new model of integration is needed

The hitherto dominating linearity in territorial expansion has been undermined by both the internal debate within the EU and the external developments, marked by Russia reentering the global game and trying to reconstruct its own zone of influence. Assuming the confrontational character of mutual relations will continue, one of its consequences is the disappearance of the geostrategy of the colonial frontier as the normal and unlimited way of regulating the EU's relations with its immediate neighbors.

Consequently, the question of further enlargement is simultaneously a question about the universalism of the European project. Europeans have tended to believe that the model they have developed is globally applicable. Both with regard to its normative dimension (containing liberal democracy, human rights, minority protection, etc.) as well as its institutional-organizational part (containing multi level governance, a free market with its four freedoms, supranationality, etc.).

**Map 1: Territorial dynamism of the EU's enlargement**



Source: The author

Testing the spatial dynamism of the European Communities and of the European Union, the model of absorbing further territories around the territorial “hard core”, built around

the Franco-German tandem, can easily be noticed. The subsequent enlargements added peripheral regions to this group in 1973, 1981, 1986, 1995, 2004, 2007 and 2013, creating the north-western, southern, north-eastern and eastern flanks of the European Union.

The current spatial situation can be characterized by three categories of states in the immediate neighborhood of the Union. These can be identified on Map 1 in different colors. The black space marks the 27 member states of the European Union. The dark gray is the candidates and potential candidates. The light gray is the Eastern Partnership states. Finally, other states are left white as are the western non-candidate neighbors.

Firstly, there are the western neighbors (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland). Due to their policies, stability and economic prosperity, their membership in the European Union would be warmly welcomed there. However, sovereignty considerations prevent them from formal membership, despite previous accession attempts. The current form of de facto involvement in the integration is reflected in formal connections (European Economic Area, Schengen zone, etc.) as well as functional interrelations (highly mutually dependent economies, social and cultural contacts). Their absence from the EU, however, results from internal actors, with no factors resulting from the geopolitical situation.

The group of candidates and potential candidates contains seven states today. Turkey, Montenegro and Serbia are in the phase of accession negotiations. Macedonia and Albania have official candidacy status. Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Kosovo, are considered potential candidates that in the future can become official candidates. Two cases are especially interesting here. First, Turkey, which applied back in 1987 and, after decades of being a *never-ending candidate*, has been gradually reorienting its policy. Together with its growing economic and political position, the Turkish elites and society replaced the status of a poorer relative that is only tolerated in the family, with a concept that can be reduced to a form of neo-Ottomanism. Based on their own historical and normative legacies, Turkey is not only opposing the one-dimensional adaptation of the European model, but is becoming a center for states in its own sub-region. Serbia, on the other hand, is torn between a pragmatically based Western orientation and historically and normatively pro-Russian attitudes. A stronger and more active Russia is providing assistance to this orientation, playing the anti-Western card.

The eastern neighbors belonging to the Eastern Partnership contain six states. The idea of the Eastern Partnership is based on not offering prospects for accession to the eastern neighbors, but still keeping them within the direct influence of the European project. That sort of construction arose from the dilemma of whether the policy offered to them should allow “to keep them in [the European project] or to keep them out [of the European Union]”. It should be stressed, however, that the word “or” could be replaced with “and”, especially under the changing nature of the geopolitical order in Europe. If the old member states clearly neglected the idea of inviting partners to the club through formal membership, many of the new members have strongly insisted on leaving this possibility, or at least believing that the special relations confirmed by association agreements have to bring in the more distant future the possibility of membership.

However, those plans have clashed with the Russian recovery from its difficulties and the formulation of its new doctrine of a *near abroad*, assuming an exclusive zone of influence in the post-Soviet territory. The 2008 war in Georgia represented the first signal of Moscow not allowing the West to absorb the spaces that used to belong to the Soviet empire. The next one was marked by the Vilnius Summit and preparations for Ukraine



signing the Association Agreement. Russian pressure prevented president Yanukovich from doing so (Larsen 2014). Bloody protests in Kiev resulted in a power change and also led to the Russian intervention in the East aimed at changing the pro-western orientation of the central government.

## Conclusion

The changing geopolitical environment in Europe is forcing the previously implemented models of enlarging the Union to be revised. It additionally undermines the way in which relations with the neighboring space can be organized, as well as the nature of the Union itself.

First of all, the European Union no longer exists as a dominant actor surrounded by a no-man's land, with unlimited possibilities for expansion. Recognition of the fact that there are alternative integration projects has to lead to a more traditional approach to the understanding of territoriality and the political nature of the EU. Its universalism is not as obvious as it used to be, and can be limited by other centers' influence, manifested in the form of normative power, as well as through military power. Consequently, the problem is that there is a limit on enlarging the Union, and this limit is not only a matter of internal debate, but primarily results from where other actors (for example Russia) set this limit. The EU can expand as long as this expansion is not stopped by counter-action.

Secondly, the geostrategy of the colonial frontier cannot be implemented in the way it has been in recent decades. The other side is trying to do the same, which results in clashes. This means that the other two geostrategies will tend to dominate. On the one hand, the *march*, where both sides agree to create a zone separating them, belonging to neither of the projects, on the other, by giving up the concept of normative power and using the regulatory role, the EU can be forced to establish limes in the Eastern part of the continent. This will be a final line, marking the territorial end the Union, and also the final limit on the exercising of European norms, values, solutions and laws. The space behind this line would be assumed to *eternally* belong to the other project. Another question resulting from this set of assumptions is where this line should be located, namely, where the EU would like to set this line, and where it will be allowed to establish it. Will the whole of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia be inside, or will they have to remain in the gray zone?

Finally, the very nature of the European Union can be determined by the above described dilemmas. The hitherto forms of enlarging the Union have been based on formal membership and all the steps leading to it. Maybe, however, due to these new limitations, another formula has to be found. The imperial model has to be replaced, consequently, with the Westphalian model. Various forms of participation in the European project are becoming more and more difficult, so possibly a final borderline has to be drawn. It can consequently be claimed, that "the European Union's role in international politics cannot be seen primarily as an exporter of norms and values, but as a collective actor whose primary concern is to secure its survival under the conditions of international anarchy" (Meimeth and Jańczak 2015: 4–5).



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