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Introduction: The rise of geopolitics in the EU's approach in its eastern neighbourhood

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Introduction: The rise of geopolitics in the EU's approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood

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Abstract

The article and the special issue aim to discuss and contextualise the recent rise of traditional aspects of geopolitics in EU foreign policy with a focus on the region on its eastern borders (that the EU has identified as its Eastern Neighbourhood) and Russia. Contributions evaluate the way recent events in the international arena (such as the Ukraine crisis, the Arab Spring or the rise of ISIS) have emphasised the need for the EU to engage with traditional aspects of geopolitics and strategic thinking in foreign policy. While, an initial reading of the EU's recent development and behaviour in the Eastern Neighbourhood might point to the increasingly salience of traditional geopolitical considerations, the articles in the collection highlight that the hybrid nature of the EU also translates into its approach to geopolitics. Acknowledging that elements of traditional geopolitics are salient forces in world politics adds to the EU's hybrid approach and has made it reframe its search for authenticity.

Introduction

The Ukraine crisis has deeply affected the European Union's (EU) understanding of its role in international relations. Diplomats in Brussels and other European capitals seem to have embraced the idea that the EU must have a more strategic and geopolitical approach in its foreign policy (Moergherini 2018; EUObserver 2017; Korteweg 2015; Costa 2018; Youngs 2017b). To a great deal of academics and analysts this shift should have occurred much sooner (Rynning 2011; M.E. Smith 2011, 2016; Tiersky 2010; Howorth 2010; Howorth and

Menon 2009). Scholars taking this stance have particularly focused on the EU's grand strategy, its strategic partnerships, the role of public diplomacy, geopolitics, the development of peacekeeping missions or the relationships between values, interests and strategic thinking. The special issue aims to discuss and contextualise the recent rise of traditional aspects of geopolitics in EU foreign policy with a focus on the region on its eastern borders (the Eastern Neighbourhood) and Russia. Contributions evaluate the way recent events in the international arena (such as the Ukraine crisis, the Arab Spring or the rise of ISIS) have emphasised the need for the EU to engage with traditional geopolitics and strategic thinking in foreign policy. While, an initial reading of the EU's recent development and behaviour in the Eastern Neighbourhood might point to the increasingly salience of traditional geopolitical considerations, the articles in the collection (up to the point that Raik's article does not explicitly use the term geopolitics) highlight that the hybrid nature of the EU also translates into its approach to geopolitics. Acknowledging that elements of traditional geopolitics are salient forces in world politics adds to the EU's hybrid approach and has made it reframe its search for authenticity.

Much of the development of the EU's foreign policy has been marked by the goal of creating a strong presence in international order, albeit one which is hybrid, authentic and different than those of traditional nation states, and draws on the Union's nature and capabilities (Allen and M. Smith 1998; Carta and Morin 2014; Nitoiu 2014). In this logic, geopolitics was perceived at the root of conflict and tension in the world politics, which led to the two world wars. The EU has framed itself as a project of peace which aims to transcend the traditional trappings of geopolitics and Realpolitik (Zielonka 2008). Nevertheless, the EU has always had geography (understood as geographical spaces) and power at the centre of its design. Not only does its membership have a strong geographical component, but its foreign policy tends to address different geographical areas around the world through distinct policies. The two regions on its southern and eastern borders (conveniently known as the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood) are a key example of geography directing the nature of EU external policies. While great power politics relegates the neighbourhoods of major international actors to mere spheres of influence, the EU's geographical delineation of its neighbourhood emphasises the need to help the countries in the region develop and learn from the EU's own recipe for success (Nilsson and Silander 2016).

The EU's engagement with geopolitics in foreign policy

The EU has reified its geography and borders in order to legitimise its own existence in world politics, as well as in order to create a distinct identity (Huber 2015; Chaban et al. 2013; Ganzle 2007; Tonra 2010; A. Smith 2002, 2012; Watson and Zielonka 2013; Popescu 2008; Bialasiewicz 2011). In this way the EU's geography has been imbued with a deeply universal character, the basis for its claims to authenticity in the world order. Hence, the values and norms that have originated on the European continent have been framed as universal, with the EU having both the duty and the right to promote them in other geographical spaces (De Zutter 2010). The literature highlights that the EU's understanding of its own geographical dimension is also entrenched in a need to have a clear understanding of otherness (Gehring, Oberthür, and Mühleck 2013; Vieira 2015; Johansson-Nogués 2018). At first sight this might be a paradox, as openness and equality are one of the key values that the EU is predicated on. However, in practice the EU has applied a rather strict interpretation of geographical spaces when it comes to its own membership and the construction of political community. Outside its clearly defined borders, it has professed a more fluid approach, where embracing European (universal) values, rather than geography is a prime aspect that determines one's proximity to the EU (Ioannides 2014). Conversely, the more states reject EU values, the more their otherness is reified as geographical remoteness. Reifying otherness can be seen as part of the EU's ability to shape notions of normality in international relations (Berna 2013; Torney 2014). These range from normal behaviour, rules, values, as well as conceptualizations of how geography (should) underpin political communities. To that extent the EU has tried to set the boundaries of 'normality' when it comes to regionalism (Hajizada and Marciacq 2013; Hardacre and Smith 2009). Due to the success of its integration model, it has claimed that other regional integration projects should follow its example (both in terms of structures as well as norms and values). Conversely, alternative models have been ignored or even branded as undemocratic: e.g. the case of the Eurasian Union, which the EU does not recognise as a viable model of integration in the Eurasian space (Nitoiu 2017)

The literature on geopolitics and the foreign policy of the European Union has framed the Eastern Neighbourhood in three main ways (see Mamadouh 2015; Bialasiewicz 2011; Grygiel 2015). Firstly, studies have focused on the way in which the EU has created new spaces in the neighbourhood (Bialasiewicz, 2002; Van Houtum 2010; Scott 2011; Bechev 2015; DeBardeleben 2007; Edwards 2008). They primarily underline the impact of enlargement on the EU's understanding of borders and territory. Once the EU's borders move towards what is now known as the Eastern Neighbourhood it had to devise new strategies for dealing with the various challenges that come from the region: e.g. migration or cross-border

crime. The EU's response is seen in this strand of literature as a way of managing its borders and dealing with the ambiguity of its enlarged territory. While the former communist states from CEE legitimised their aspiration for EU membership through the righteous 'return to Europe' narrative, the neighbourhood states have been placed in state of limbo, being invited to be both part of Europe and outside it (as the membership perspective has been taken off the table for them). Secondly, studies have considered the EU's approach through the prism of regionalism, claiming that the Union has aimed to reorder the geographic space by promoting a certain notion of what 'good practices of regionalism are' (Hajizada and Marciacq 2013; Hardacre and Smith 2009; Agh 2010; Dri 2015). Various studies have focused in length on the EU's discourses towards the post-Soviet space, deconstructing meanings of regional integration, and the prospects offered by the Union to neighbours. A third strand of scholarship has analysed the neighbourhood through the prism of the EU's broader global approach, enquiring into the way in which the neighbourhood underpins questions regarding the Union's actorness and place in the world order (Börzel and Hüllen 2011; Korosteleva, Van Gils, and Merheim-Eyre 2017; Rynning and Jensen 2010).

The EU's primarily has at its disposal capabilities which can be classed as sources of soft power. Its international actorness and identity have thus been shaped by the lack of sources of hard power. The goal to build an EU army, as well as to assure strategic autonomy for the Union has experienced various up and downs in the last 60 years. Recently, the EU Global Strategy, as well as the narratives produced by the European External Action Service, has given increased drive behind the debate concerning the development of EU military capabilities (Tocci 2016). While this seems to be a long way from having practical consequences, it signals a shift in the way the EU envisages the role of more traditional forms of geopolitics. Contributions to the special issue approach this question through various avenues, some claiming that EU due to its construction as a political community cannot engage in traditional forms of geopolitics (see Raik's article); while others focus on the need to be true about the promotion of interests (see Pänke, Foxall, Cadier and Siddi articles).

Framing power politics and traditional forms of geopolitics (including concepts such as spheres of influence) as negative aspects of European history which have led to the world wars, has allowed the EU to claim a higher moral ground in trying to promote the use of soft forms of geopolitics as normativity in international relations (Zielonka 2008). Studies have shown that high levels of cultural and economic attractiveness shared by countries around the world are the main vehicles for the EU to promote its approach based on soft geopolitics (Youngs 2017a; Matlary 2006; Haukkala 2011). Moreover, one of the centre pieces of the

EU's global approach has been to frame itself as the most legitimate and successful promoter of effective multilateral governance (Jørgensen 2009; Abbasov 2014; Cardwell 2013). Multilateralism is seen to draw on the EU's strengths and capabilities, but also a way of promoting the EU's distinct form of soft geopolitics, where acting through multilateral forums is conducive to cooperation across countries and regions (Gehring, Oberthür, and Mühleck 2013).

The special issue includes contributions that highlight various aspects and understandings of the EU's approach to geopolitics. This emphasises the fact that much like its identity in world politics, international actorness, or foreign policy, the EU's approach is marked by hybridity as well as the search for authenticity. The literature presents a wide range of accounts of how the EU has developed hybrid structures, processes and mechanisms in various areas of its governance: e.g. the nature of its political community, the role of institutions, its decision-making process, or its international actorness (Risse-Kappen 1996; Zielonka 2007; Smith 2012). It is important to note, however, that hybridity is partly a result of the continuously evolving character of the EU as a political construction, which makes it both unsettled and contested. The rise of more traditional forms of geopolitics that recognise the role of power politics and hard power should be interpreted through the frame of continuous evolution, as it represented a stage in the development of the EU. On a broader level, scholars have also argued that the EU represents a hybrid type of empire, with the search for authenticity at its centre (Zielonka 2008, 2008; Marks 2011; Johansson-Nogués 2018). This entails a rather ambiguous (or hybrid) conceptualisation of the geographical spaces where the EU's integration project has legitimate and legal justification. Countries in the post-Soviet space (or the Eastern Neighbourhood) are located in the space where the EU's claim for legality and legitimacy collides with that of Russia (see Pänke's contribution). Consequently, the Ukraine crisis can be seen as a result of the unsettled evolution as a hybrid empire in the region. Russia has speculated the unsettled nature of the EU's hybridity, by acting swiftly based on traditional geopolitical means and using its hard power in Crimea and eastern Ukraine (Nitoiu 2016).

The recent rise of geopolitics

The last five years have seen the rise of traditional aspects of geopolitics in the vocabulary of EU policymakers (Juncker 2018; Mogherini 2017; Juncker 2017). While the EU has traditionally denied any type of geopolitical interest in dealing with other states and shied away from Realpolitik, its foreign policy has been partly influenced by a hybrid type of geopolitical thinking (Beauguitte, Richard, and Guérin-Pace 2015). Firstly, the EU occupies a certain geographical space, and seeks to export the values and norms that have developed in this space to other regions (Christou 2010). Actors that think and behave in traditional geopolitical terms tend to be straightforward regarding their interests (Cohen 2014), however the EU sees furthering its interests abroad going hand in hand with the promotion of its values and norms (Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011). This can be understood as a soft version of geopolitics, where space is important, but the EU's main aim is to expand its norms and values derived from its spatiality as a way to advance its foreign policy (Edwards 2008). At the same time, as the previous section highlighted, the EU has developed a hybrid approach to geopolitics in claiming authenticity in world politics. The special issue emphasises that the recent rise of more traditional forms of geopolitics in the discourse and actions of the EU, merely represents a revision of the hybrid approach (to include both soft and more traditional aspects) than a clear attempt to replace it.

In the recent international climate, the EU's illusion of acting in a stable global and regional environment has been gradually shattered. The multiple crises that have erupted in the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood have transformed the region from a what back in 2003 was seen as a 'ring of friends' (Council of the European Union 2003) to a 'ring of fire' (Hahn, 2015). In the Eastern Neighbourhood the EU has become increasingly aware of the fact that other states see its foreign policy in deeply competitive rather than cooperative terms (Nilsson and Silander 2016; Korosteleva 2016). Conversely, in the southern neighbourhood, the Arab Spring underscored the impact that overlooking key underlying tensions in the region can have on the EU's efforts to promote democracy and stability (Dannreuther 2015; EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2011). Hence, EU policymakers have been constrained to recognise that not all states buy into the postmodern view of international relations, where sovereignty, spheres of influence, or the use of force are day to day occurrences – i.e. the whole Westphalian package (Juncker 2018, 2017; Mogherini 2018;).

With the recent shift a rather ambiguous wide set of ideas and principles have entered the EU's official documents and foreign policy practice (Mogherini 2017; frontnews.eu 2017; European Commission 2017; Juncker 2018, 2017) – this in turn has reinforced the EU's

hybrid approach to geopolitics. The most novel and rather unexpected (considering the normative power rhetoric) is the acknowledgement that the EU should have a pragmatic approach to foreign policy and put its interests first. To some extent this mimics the ‘America first’ catch phrase that has become staple of Trumps foreign policy. However, the EU still claims not to renounce its ethos of promoting universal norms around the world. While scholars and analysts of the EU’s external relations have played during the last two decades with the idea of the EU having a more geopolitical approach in foreign policy, very few have actually spelt out how this would look in practice. Would it take the form of classical geopolitics, would it include new forms, or would it be (as with many other aspects regarding the EU) a totally distinct and innovative new approach? Realist perspectives have emphasised the need for the EU to develop grand strategies that would allow it to pool most of its resources in order to promote its interests abroad (Smith 2011). This would mimic the grand strategy of the US and permit the EU to be more effective in promoting its interests. Other have claimed that the larger Member States should take on the burden of leadership in foreign policy and define the EU’s interests which would be then shared (or imposed on) by the other Member States (Tiersky 2010). Germany’s leadership during the migrant crisis of the conflict in Ukraine can be seen as an example of Member States engaging in their own brand of geopolitics and making their peers follow along. The *hybrid (sui generis)* nature of the EU is represented here by the rather ambiguous notions of soft geopolitics or hybrid geopolitics which have been presented in the literature during the last five years in order to capture the EU’s mismatch between limited capabilities and the need to act in an increasingly geopolitical international environment (Ademmer, Delcour, and Wolczuk 2016; Cadier 2014; Youngs 2017a).

Geopolitics and the Neighbourhood

In its quest for authenticity, the EU has ‘artificially’ delineated political space spaces in its geographically defined neighbourhood, but also in its broader international relations. In its neighbourhood the EU has created a new region through the development of its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The aims of the ENP reflect the hybrid approach of the EU. The initiative was primarily intended to stabilise the region (i.e. the neighbourhood) at the EU’s new enlarged borders in order to allow the Union to deepen its integration. At the same time, the EU sought to promote its values, norms and regulations, seeing them as a natural way to secure the region, but also making the neighbour countries more democratic and

developed (Biscop 2010). Nevertheless, the region building efforts of the EU in its neighbourhood were largely one-sided and reflected the EU's own view of self and other. Initially the southern and Eastern Neighbourhood were approached through a one size fits policy which did not distinguish between them (DeBardleben 2007). Later, the EU sought greater differentiation between the eastern and the southern neighbourhoods based again on its own perspective rather than the inherent characteristics of the countries in the region, as well as their agendas and interests (Schumacher 2015). Moreover, the EU became entrenched in the idea that its region building efforts in the neighbourhood were far from having a geopolitical agenda as they merely aimed to expand a series of universal norms and values. Regardless of the EU's own discourse both the neighbours and third party states with interests in the region perceived the EU's region building efforts as a deeply geopolitical move (Khasson 2013). This has been more evident in the Eastern Neighbourhood where Russia interpreted the EU's expanding influence and desire to impose a unilateral region building project as a geopolitical threat in its sphere of influence.

A discussion of the EU's neighbourhood has to consider the concept of the spheres of influence the issue of the return of spheres of influence in world politics (and the EU's neighbourhood) has been recently discussed by a collection published in *Geopolitics* (Ferguson and Hast 2018; Ferguson 2018). Contributors present a series of critical perspectives on the nature of spheres of influence in the current world order. The focus is on the way Russia's recent actions have brought to the forefront its claims of having and maintaining a sphere of interests in the post-Soviet space. According to the collection of articles, Russia is generally framed in the literature and media as a villain, with its approach towards its neighbours pointing to a time of darkness. The special issue previously published in *Geopolitics* claims the concept of spheres of influence has evolved from the way it was interpreted and employed during the Cold War. Rather than conceptualising spheres of influence as geographic spaces of unilateral hegemony, these are understood as the result of overlapping claims towards legal, political and administrative authority (and jurisdiction) held by different powerful actors. Consequently, the concept is still useful, but it is important to note that different international actors define it according to their own understandings of geographical spaces. It is this very clash of interpretations, as well as the presence of overlapping authorities, that have contributed to conflicts between Russia and the EU in the post-Soviet space, rather than the need to assure hegemony.

While it is fair to argue that the neighbourhood has been a laboratory for developing and refining the EU's foreign policy, the Union's engagement in the region has also been

motivated by the need to promote its interests and ensure stability (European Commission 2015b). The most appropriate way to archive the latter was seen to be extending the EU's mode of governance in the region, and thus its legitimate jurisdiction for action. The neighbourhood countries share the common experience of having been part of the Soviet Union, but differ in many regards, due to their various cultures and political systems. The literature has emphasised the salience of the region-making approach to the EU to the neighbourhood, whereby in order to legitimise its authority and jurisdiction the EU has reified the political space, giving it a much more coherent structure than it has in reality (Hajizada and Marciacq 2013; Agh 2010). The ENP and the (Eastern Partnership) (EaP) initially grouped together the neighbourhood states and provided a one size fits all approach to the adoption of European integration (Delcour 2015). Throughout the years, due to the demands of the states in the region, the EU has moved to providing tailor made programs to each country and more recently to offering them a menu from which they could choose the most appropriate steps for achieving their desired level of integration. This fits with the move towards a more pragmatic and detached engagement in the region (Moregherini 2018), as it signals that the EU is ready to prioritise the promotion of its interests over its norms and values. Some analysts argue that it is a clear result of the rise of more traditional forms of geopolitics and the EU acknowledging its importance (Ostrowska-Chałupa 2016; Theuns 2017).

In this context, the key argument in this special issue is that the recent transformation towards more disorder in the regional and global arenas have made the EU more conscious about the salience of more traditional forms geopolitics and more willing to think and act along these lines. Contributions focus critically on the at the way the rise of traditional aspects of geopolitics has translated in official discourse, policies initiatives (both material, ideational and symbolic) – nevertheless, they also question whether these changes in EU foreign policy can be understood in essence as geopolitical. These changes do not equal the embracing of a traditional geopolitical approach, but rather the transformation and revision of its hybrid approach. The most obvious shift has occurred at the level of rhetoric where the EU has increasingly started thinking in realist terms about power and competition. At the same time, the crises in the neighbourhood have prompted the EU to revise its security strategy, which now highlights the fact that world politics are increasingly ruled by geopolitical considerations. Moreover, the revision of the ENP in the autumn of 2015 for the first time in EU official documents argued that the neighbourhood is a geopolitical space and the need for the EU to engage in conflict resolution in the region (European Commission 2015a). As was

mentioned earlier, the EU has more or less unilaterally shaped a certain understanding which it sought to impose on the countries in the neighbourhood. Most of the contributions to the special issue draw on the post-Soviet space as a key geopolitical area where the EU has gradually embraced a hybrid form geopolitics with traditional geopolitical aspects becoming recently more salient. Nevertheless, contributors also take a broader stance and enquire into what the shift towards geopolitics means for EU's foreign policy as a whole, and for the future of the European project and offer a rich collection of insights

Making sense of the rise of geopolitics in EU foreign policy

Nikki Ikani's article explores the issue of change and continuity in the EU's hybrid geopolitical approach to the Eastern Neighbourhood. She criticises explanations that focus on historical institutionalist perspectives and contends that looking at critical junctions and long periods of continuity cannot provide a full account of change in foreign policy. Ikani tries to go beyond the dichotomy between change and continuity in explaining the EU's approach towards the neighbourhood. In this way she draws on historical institutionalism, but refines it in order to understand the various types of change and continuity that have appeared in the EU's hybrid geopolitical approach towards its Eastern Neighbourhood. Significantly, she finds that even though continuity in general terms can be seen as the driving factor behind the ENP, slight changes geopolitical have indeed occurred after 2015. Nevertheless, these changes cannot be classed as major geopolitical transformations (from a traditional perspective), even though they have been partly brought about by various external and internal shocks such as the Arab Spring, the Ukraine crisis or the migrant crisis. Based on Ikani's analysis, it is fair to argue that the EU's search for authenticity and its subsequent hybrid approach to geopolitics have undergone only minor revision due to the crisis in the neighbourhood.

The perspective of the EU as having a hybrid approach it compounded by the following article in the collection. Raik's article tends to side with the view that the EU professes a soft approach to geopolitics (that is beneficial for the neighbours), even though she does not clearly state the emphasis on the role of geopolitics. In her article Kristi Raik shows that the EU's actions and policies in the Eastern Neighbourhood have not been dominated by a traditional geopolitical mindset, understood as a zero sum contest over influencing the region. In contrast to Russia, the EU's approach goes beyond the idea of spheres of influence and empowers the small states in the neighbourhood to develop and choose their own fate. As Russia aims to completely monopolise the domestic and foreign

policies of the countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the EU has the duty to step in and promote norms such as democracy and the rule of law. The article also points to the fact that Russia and the EU share opposing views of the security order on the European continent which can be understood along three lines: politics, economy and security. This has put both actors on a path towards confrontation which culminated with the 2014 Ukraine crisis. On its part, the EU failed to address the security concerns raised by the conflict in Ukraine, and thus has not lived up to its normative commitments. Raik argues that in this context the EU should not give up its norms based approach in favour of a more pragmatic stance but instead to XXXX.

Taking a rather opposite stance to Raik's views, David Cadier argues that the EU has made clear moves since the start of the Ukraine crisis to include traditional aspects of geopolitics in its discourse and policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood. This is particularly visible in the fact that Russia is now seen as a key threat, while geopolitics also allows the EU to have legitimate grounds both internally and externally for acting in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Moreover, the article also identifies a rather long-lasting tendency in EU foreign policy to view the actions of rival powers through a competitive and geopolitical mindset. Even though the EU's policies in the neighbourhood have always been motivated by its own interests, the move towards more pragmatism and the explicit acknowledgment of the precedence of the EU's interests in foreign affairs is only recent. Cadier notes that while the effects of the *geopoliticisation* of EU foreign policy discourse in practice should not be exaggerated, it has indeed provided the Kremlin with increased grounds for criticising European hostile expansionism in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, it creates a zero sum game in the neighbourhood where the small countries in region are locked between choosing two mutually exclusive alternatives. Cadier, in turn, recommends that EU foreign policy should pay closer attention to developments in Russia's foreign policy and thus try to go beyond the enemy/friend dichotomy.

Pänke's article focuses on the EU's imperial paradigm in order to highlight the causes and effects of the tension between interests and norms based behaviour in world politics. He contends that the EU has had to focus on developing two seemingly opposed strategies in order to serve and advance its imperial policies. These two strategies both compete and reinforce each other in defining and recreating the EU as a liberal empire. Nevertheless, tensions between the two strategies are bound to appear, and the success of intertwining them into a dual comprehensive strategy depends on the nature and evolution of the world order. The rise of traditional forms of geopolitics might seem to have put more emphasis on interest

based strategies, but it should be noted that Union has not completely abandoned a more liberal approach. This has had important consequences on the Eastern Neighbourhood, where the EU's impact has somewhat diminished but also became more targeted and pragmatic, focusing on both interests and norms following the revision of the ENP and 2016 Global Strategy. Moreover, unlike Cadier, Pänke contends that interests should not be at the forefront of the EU's geopolitical approach, as they run the risk of further dividing the Member States, or alienating other major power such as Russia, and giving false expectations to the neighbourhood states.

The following two papers focus more specifically on the interface between energy policy and foreign policy. Marco Siddi analyses the case of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) as an example of the EU's geopolitical approach in external energy policy. The confrontation with Russia coupled with the need to reduce dependency has forced the EU to take a more pragmatic and geopolitical approach to its external energy policy. This is primarily meant to secure its energy supply and avoid suppliers that are seen as unreliable such as Russia. However, Siddi's article highlights the fact that the SGC supported various projects that may prove not to be economically viable and which investors consider to carry too many risks. Siddi ultimately advocates for the EU to adopt a market-based approach to its external suppliers (with particular focus on Russia). Even though the Ukraine crisis has caused a major rift between the EU and Russia when it comes to security and political cooperation, its energy trade with Moscow has not been severely affected.

The Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and the EU's geopolitical approach to external energy policy are also analysed in Alexandra Bocse's paper. She argues that hybrid geopolitics and diplomacy tend to dominate the EU's approach in energy relations towards countries like Azerbaijan and Iran. The paper provides an empirical account of the way hybrid geopolitics has infused the development of the EU's energy diplomacy in relations with Azerbaijan and Iran. She finds that the EU has put significant effort through its diplomacy to highlight that the Southern Gas corridor has can play an important geopolitical role for Azerbaijan. Both Baku and Teheran serve as alternative sources of energy (to Russia) which might help the diversification strategy embraced by the EU. To that extent, the aim to diversify suppliers can be understood as part of the EU's hybrid geopolitical approach, as it seeks to limit the geographical monopoly of countries like Russia or companies like Gazprom. This monopoly has not only affected the geopolitical configuration of Eurasia, but has also increased competition between the EU and Russia. Siddi and Bocse' analyses of the EU's approach to energy security provide important insight into the way the EU's hybrid

nature shapes its behaviour in a key issue area in its foreign policy. Both articles highlight that the EU's hybrid geopolitics extend to area of energy security, as its approach is constrained by the constellation of national interests of the member states (since some are highly dependent on Russia for their energy and others not at all) as well as the hybrid nature of its capabilities and decision-making processes.

The special issue concludes with analyse how external actors (namely Russia) have interpreted the EU's hybrid approach to geopolitics. Russian geopolitical discourse paid during Putin's presidency significant attention to the EU. Andrew Foxall's article shows that the EU's hybrid approach to geopolitics has been gradually interpreted by the Kremlin through the frame of traditional geopolitics. This has led the Kremlin to view the EU's hybrid approach as a threat to its vital security interests Foxall traces the discursive shift in Russian foreign policy, whereby in the early 2000s Moscow aspired towards becoming again part of Europe and was even contemplating the prospect of European integration. Starting with 2006, with the strengthening of the authoritarian regime in the Kremlin, Russian foreign policy discourse began to increasingly integrate geopolitical aspects that emphasises differences and competition with the EU and the West. Particularly, the EU's promotion of liberalism and democracy in other countries became framed as a major threat to Russia. Putin's third term in office beginning in 2012 marked in the context of the Ukraine crisis the portrayal of the EU as an enemy. Part of the Kremlin's geopolitical strategy to rival the EU has been the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union as an alternative to the European integration project offered to the post-Soviet states. Foxall contends that the resurrection of 19th century ideology concerning Eurasianism has also been meant to highlight the fact that Russia maintains its great power ambitions. Politicising its rivalry with the EU and turning it into a zero sum game has thus been a staple of Russian geopolitical discourse.

Conclusion

Embracing elements more traditional geopolitical approach might please proponents of a more realist EU foreign policy, but it is ultimately a sign of retreat from the EU's previous ambitious stance of trying to shape the rules and norms of the world order. The Global Strategy of 2016 is evidence of the fact that the European Union is recognising its fault and limitations in foreign policy (European External Action Service 2016). Coupled with the various internal and external crisis that have recently affected the inclusion of geopolitics on

the foreign policy agenda is a sign that the EU has switched to survival mode, and has moved away from a progressive approach to international relations. At the same time, countries like China or Russia have directly challenged the EU's model of governance or influence in the neighbourhood, with the Union not really able to mount a convincing reply. However, the special issue highlights that including various elements of traditional geopolitics and recognising its salience has not meant the abandonment of hybrid geopolitics, but merely its revision.

As the EU's neighbourhood was seen during the 2000s as a testing ground for the Union's ability to attain a significant presence in the world order, it is likely that the effects of the rise of traditional aspects of geopolitics will be primarily experienced in the region. This might mean for example that the EU will relax its application of conditionality and start dealing with states that do not really fulfil even the basic norms and values shared by the Union (such as Belarus). Moreover, the bad habit of turning a blind eye to illiberal behaviour is likely to become the norm in the EU's dealing with its eastern neighbours (Moga 2017). According to principled pragmatism, the EU will push the neighbours into accepting its mode of integration, but will collaborate to the extent that they are willing to accept.

The shift towards traditional aspects of geopolitics has deep implications for the EU's identity in the world order. For much of the last two decades the Union has been engulfed by a quest for authenticity and framed itself as a distinct type of actor in international relations, developing distinct modes of interaction with other actors, as well as novel forms of global governance. Hence, trying to carve out a space for traditional geopolitics and the acknowledgement of the EU's self-interests seem to negate the main characteristic of the Union's recent identity in world politics. The EU's reply to this challenge has been to argue that it now employ principled pragmatism in foreign policy, seeking to promote its values and norms, but not at the expense of its interests. This mirrors a crisis of identity in EU foreign policy, where the Union is torn by opposing tendencies, which force it to have a rather ambiguous strategy. A decrease in the EU's level of ambitions and presence in world politics has indeed occurred during the last five years, and the on-going identity crisis is likely to further damage the Union's ability to shape international relations (and potentially make it slip into irrelevance).

In this context, the special issue opens up a series of insightful avenues for future research. Firstly, the recent rise of traditional aspects of geopolitics in EU foreign policy might prompt future studies to enquire into the way these processes have impacted the construction of its political community and understanding of geographical spaces. Various

studies have already highlighted that the EU has become more entrenched during the last years as a result of these external shocks, putting more emphasis on stabilising its borders and defending its sovereignty (Cianciara 2017; Schumacher 2015). Secondly, future research might further delve into the way in which the rise of traditional interpretations of geopolitics have shaped in the medium to long term its processes of othering and the search for authenticity. We have already experienced a shift from hybridity based primarily on soft forms of geopolitics to a deeply problematic (and rather contradictory) emphasis on acting pragmatically whilst promoting principles. This contradiction might very well mirror the tension between norms and interests highlighted especially in Pänke's article, but future research can shed more light on how the framing of hybridity has transformed. Similarly to contributions to this special issue, future studies could focus on various policy areas ranging: e.g. energy security, trade, or migration.

Thirdly, the recent rise of traditional aspects of geopolitics has prompted transformations not only in relations to the EU's approach towards Russia or the neighbourhood, but also its more global approaches. Consequently, future studies might focus on the relationship between traditional forms of geopolitics and the EU's approach to multilateral governance or its range of strategic partnership. Forth, one of the main puzzles that arise in this new situation is whether the EU actually has the capabilities, willingness and commitment to develop and deploy a working strategy that contains a geopolitical dimension. The normative power approach as well as the whole debate about the uniqueness of the EU was born out of the need to make sense what kind of foreign policy the Union can construct given its limited capabilities, cumbersome decision-making system, and divisions among the member states. To that extent, the EU was seen as lagging behind traditional nation states in trying to engage in traditional geopolitics and a focus on norms and values was more appropriate given the nature of the EU. Given the fact that the EU's nature has not changed, it is thus highly unlikely that the EU will be able to successfully carry out a more geopolitical approach in foreign policy and the normative focus might remain its more credible claim to authenticity.

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