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Regional Solutions for Regional Conflicts? The EU, the Neighbourhood and China

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1. The Neighbourhood as a Security Issue[1]

After the end of the Cold War, the security landscape has increasingly been dominated by security interactions (Buzan and Wæver 2003) and integration dynamics (Hettne 2003) on a regional level. A core concern in this respect is the perceived rise of sub-system violent conflicts, often discussed under the heading of "new wars" (Kaldor 1999; Münkler 2005). While their novelty and significance remains contested (Newman 2004; Melander *et al*. 2009), such wars have become a prominent case of "new security challenges" and an integral part of many security strategies. In the European Union context, the 2003 European Security Strategy identifies "regional conflicts" as one of five key threats (Council of the EU 2003: 4). They are seen as jeopardizing 'regional stability', 'minorities, fundamental freedoms and human rights', and to further 'extremism, terrorism and state failure', 'organised crime', and the 'demand for WMD [weapons of mass destruction]' (*ibid*.). Such conflicts are also often tied to an increase in migration, which in turn is then securitized as a threat to societal identities, political stability or welfare provision (Sasse 2005; Huysmans 2006).

To the EU, regional conflicts are particularly relevant if they persist in the EU's own neighbourhood. The wars in the context of the break-up of former Yugoslavia have therefore been seen as a major challenge to EU security policy, and both signified its failure and sparked its development (Kirchner 2006; Juncos 2005). While the build-up of military capacities in the form of battlegroups and the construction of the European External Action Service as a diplomatic force on the EU level have received a lot of attention, it should not be forgotten that the EU, while acquiring these statist attributes, is at the same time committed to the transformation of regional conflicts through civilian and political means. Core to this commitment is the promotion of regional integration. This is evident in the legitimisation of EU enlargement by reference to security concerns

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as a means to prevent the spillover of ethnic conflicts westwards (Higashino 2004), in the attempt to foster regional processes in the Mediterranean (Adler and Crawford 2006), in the pursuit of association agreements as an incentive to conflict transformation (Diez *et al*. 2006, 2008; Tocci 2007; Gromes 2009); and in the support of regional integration efforts further afield (Diez *et al*. 2013).

This paper outlines and assesses the EU strategy of promoting regional integration as a response to and as a means to prevent regional conflicts in the EU neighbourhood. The aim is to draw out the main characteristics of this policy, its successes and failures, and thus provide the basis for comparison with the strategies of other great powers, and in particular China, in their respective neighbourhoods. Because the EU is also promoting regional integration elsewhere, and as such has supported the development of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and is institutionally linked to ASEAN via the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), we are also interested in this promotion of regionalism in order to discuss the extent to which such a policy may interfere with or coalesce with China's policy in its neighbourhood.

In the next section (2), we will shortly outline a conceptual framework, with which we can then chart the development of the EU's regionalisation approach (3). We will then assess the successes and limits of this policy in the EU's neighbourhood (4), before discussing the EU's promotion of regional integration on a global scale and the possible prospects of this policy in Asia (5). In a concluding section, we will use our approach and findings to outline what the EU can possibly do to foster conflict transformation in Israel/Palestine, and the Ukraine. Our recommendations centre on a more consistent application of the policy dimensions that we have identified, and on persistence in the promotion of regional integration processes to build structures that can be drawn on if a window of opportunity arises within the conflict. However, we also stress that such a regionalisation approach needs to take into account the positions of other interested parties such as China and Russia, and should avoid antagonisation through clear cut either-or-scenarios. Instead, more effort needs to be spent on rethinking the relationship between regional organisations so that they do not replicate the security dilemma prevalent between states on a higher level.

2. Influencing the Neighbourhood: A Conceptual Framework

The EU's promotion of regional integration in its neighbourhood can be seen as part of its "normative power" (Manners 2002; Diez and Manners 2007; Whitman 2011). As such, the transformation of regional conflicts largely builds on a change of behavioural patterns or what Manners (2002: 253) describes as 'redefining what can be "normal" in world politics'. Integration is supposed to change interaction patterns, constrain actors in their conflict strategies, and alter identities through socialisation processes. Especially with an eye on the comparison with other actors, it would be wrong, though, to argue that such a policy of shaping conceptions of the normal is unique to the EU or that it is devoid of any interests (see Diez 2005). We therefore suggest treating normative power as a form of hegemonic power, in which there is a mutual reinforcement and conflation of norms and interests, and the attempts to promote regional integration and thus change the structure of international relations as parts of a hegemonic struggle (Diez 2013).

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Great powers are always engaged in such struggles, and they tend to try to influence their near- abroad to bring it in line with their own standards. This is because such powers benefit from spreading their norms because this ought to make relations more peaceful and enhance mutual, including economic, exchange. Yet it is also because foreign policies are always part of broader discourses through which they become meaningful and through which identities are reconstructed (Campbell 1998; Hansen 2006). Manners has insisted that one of the main differences between the EU and other normative powers is the degree to which the EU has bound itself to international law (Manners 2006). This may be the case, but it shows that the real difference between hegemonic policies does not consist in the pursuit of norms as such, but in the variations in the actual pursuit of norms. More specifically, and following Tocci (2008) one may distinguish normative power engagement along three dimensions:

a) the exact content of the norms promoted;
b) the means with which norms are being promoted;
c) the effects that such norm promotion has "on the ground".

In our analysis of EU policy to deal with regional conflicts in its neighbourhood, we are particularly concerned with the second dimension of means and instruments. The promotion of regional integration as a conflict transformation policy can thus be seen as following a set of pathways that are characteristic for EU foreign policy. Simplifying the literature on this issue (e.g. Diez *et al*. 2006, 2008; Tocci 2007; for an overview see Diez and Cooley 2011), we suggest distinguishing two dimensions:

a) whether any foreseen transformative influence is the effect of active policies or of the mere existence of the EU as a regional integration project (or another great power as something else; "passive" policy);
b) whether the policy relies on interest calculations or socialisation processes.

Integrating these two dimensions, one arrives at four principal policy dimensions or options (see Table 1).

Table 1: Forms of EU/great power influence on conflict transformation

EU/Great Power Involvement **Logic of Influence**	**Active**	**Passive**
Rationalist	Carrots and Sticks	Competitive Model
Constructivist	Engagement	Normative Model

Carrots and Sticks policy tries to have an impact on conflicts through offering incentives or threatening the imposition of sanctions. In the EU case, the classic incentive in the near

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abroad is the offer of EU membership, and therefore not only unconstrained access to the single market, but also a say in the further development of this market. Traditionally, however, new members were also seeking reputational and security gains, evident for instance in the Baltic states' drive to "become European (again)" (Pavlovaite 2003). Association agreements, including the Stability and Association Agreements currently in place in the Western Balkans as well as more loose free trade agreements, are weaker forms of this incentive. Beyond integration and association, the EU has, of course, classic incentives at its disposal, including financial support. Sanctions, in contrast, tend to largely consist in the withholding of these benefits or in the classic interruption of relations.

Engagement policy is aimed at changing the basic worldviews, identities and patterns of behaviour through various forms of involvement. These include participation in common institutions (of which membership is of the strongest version), the promotion of other regional institutions, twinning arrangements between bureaucrats and policy-makers and societal exchanges (including Erasmus exchanges and involvement in multilateral research projects). Engagement policy works through a mix of socialisation processes and social learning.

The two passive policies may be "passive" but they can nonetheless be seen as policies to the extent that EU policy-makers are well aware of their existence. Both rely on the EU as a model for other states and regions to follow, even if this will hardly ever be a one-to-one imitation. We can see such model-setting in the adoption of specific policies in non-EU states without EU pressure, including the adoption of the Euro as the main currency – as in the case of Montenegro – and in the construction of regional institutions following or in explicit differentiation from the EU model, evident both in the African Union and in ASEAN. This model-setting can follow either of the two logics of influence: in the case of the *Competitive Model*, the EU is seen as an example to guarantee security and economic welfare, and it is thus in the interest of other actors to follow this model in order to improve their international position. In the case of the *Normative Model*, the organisation of societies in territorially distinct states is seen as outdated and the EU therefore becomes a model to follow. Both logics lead to a normative change, even though in the first case, the logic is instrumentalist. In practice, one would expect both to be intertwined and that it will thus be difficult to differentiate them empirically.

As we will now show in our short and rather sketchy overview, the EU has relied on all of these forms of involvement in its neighbourhood, although to different degrees.

3. The EU's Regionalisation Approach

The geographical areas that constitute the EU's near abroad are the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe and the Baltic Sea. In all of these, regionalisation has played a central role in EU policy, although in different forms and to different degrees.

Because of the Cold War context, the EU was first engaged in the Mediterranean. Initially, relations were based on bilateral association agreements with the primary aim to facilitate trade. These agreements were signed from 1962 onwards, and while they differed in their exact wording, they generally contained an association council with representatives from

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both the EU and the partner states, and in some cases also a joint parliamentarian committee (Schimmang 2014). Thus, EU policy towards the Mediterranean from the beginning involved incentives and engagement measures. However, the benefits of an association agreement were not yet tied to political conditions, and thus were not explicitly used as carrots, and the policy was largely bilateral. This changed with the development of a General Mediterranean Policy (GMP) in 1972, which introduced the idea of political conditionality, which for instance delayed an agreement with Spain. While agreements were still done bilaterally, the GMP's idea was to streamline agreements and link them up with each other so that we can now at least speak of an "extended bilateralism" (*ibid*.).

The regionalisation approach was then pushed much more openly and forcefully after the end of the Cold War in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), or what is often referred to as the Barcelona Process, since the founding declaration was signed in Barcelona in November 1995. While the EMP continued to be based on bilateral association agreements, in included a distinctly regional approach through common meetings organised around three "baskets": Political and Security Dialogue, Economic and Financial Partnership, and Social, Cultural and Human Partnership. Political conditionality was maintained, but the focus was now clearly on multilateral dialogue (Bicchi 2006: 138), which persisted even after the bilateral association agreements came under the umbrella of the strictly bilateral European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) after the 2004 enlargement (on the change to bilateralism, see Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005: 21). In the ENP, the experience of the previous membership negotiations led to a copying of conditionality through the application of action plans and regular reports (Kelley 2006) and therefore a more open carrots and sticks policy. Partly as a response to criticism that the multilateral character of the EMP had been sidelined in the process, the EU under French leadership launched the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, with common institutions such as a secretariat, common ministerial meetings and a co-Presidency. While the engagement path was therefore strengthened, the carrots and sticks path was reduced in importance, and projects under the UfM are less openly political and concentrate mostly on technical issues such as infrastructure and education.

At the same time, the EU has used the prospect of membership as a policy tool for stabilisation (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005). This is by no means a policy of the new millennium; rather it was first pursued in the Southern enlargement of the 1980s, when Greece, Portugal and Spain joined the EU as new democracies. However, the stabilisation rationale of enlargement was most visible in the 2004/07 Eastern Enlargement as well as the 2004 entry of Cyprus. The threat of a deterioration of ethnic conflict in the East and the prospect of solving a long-standing dispute to the Southeast through integration became a core legitimisation of enlargement (Higashino 2004). Other countries were offered association agreements either under the ENP or in the form of Stabilisation Association Agreements where future membership was seen as a realistic prospect, primarily in the Western Balkans. One of these countries, Croatia became an EU member in 2013.

While the EU policy in the Mediterranean has therefore been focused on constructing region-ness, the approach in Central and Eastern Europe has focused on bringing states either into or associating with the existing regional framework of the EU. In both cases, the EU relied on a mixture of carrots and sticks on the one hand and engagement on the other,

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and benefitted from the fact that the EU was seen as an economic model. While the EU promoted its region-ness normatively in both cases, it was less successful in the Mediterranean, where there are principled political and cultural differences (Azhar and Louis 2014). In the case of Central and Eastern Europe, it benefitted a lot from the attempt of many states to dissociate themselves from Russia and the former Warsaw Pact and therefore to regard the EU as the "true" Europe (Browning 2003).

Meanwhile, the regionalisation approach was also pursued in the Baltics in the form of the "Northern Dimension". The EU has thus supported the Council of the Baltic Sea States and launched a Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership in 2002 (see Browning and Joenniemi 2003: 465-70). With Russia being one of the states concerned, the approach of the EU here has been much more based on engagement than on carrots and sticks. While this is a region often forgotten in EU foreign policy analyses, it is important to keep the Baltic Sea in mind when looking at regionalisation as a peace and conflict transformation strategy, not least because its emphasis on engagement has led some observers to qualify it "a policy of peace" (*ibid*.: 468) in an area which is by no means without its conflicts (viz. Kaliningrad, Russia and the Baltic states).

4. Successes and Limits

The EU's regionalisation policy to transform regional conflicts has had a rather mixed success. Historically, of course, integration has consolidated the transformation of the German state. The platform that the EU has provided for UK and Irish politicians to meet after membership together with efforts by the European Parliament have made a major long-term contribution to a peace settlement in Northern Ireland (Hayward 2006). However, Ireland is also a case that shows that EU policies of carrots and sticks as well as engagement, here in the form of the PEACE programmes, lead to mixed results and are often dependent on facilitating conditions (Hayward 2007). In the case of Southern enlargement, most analysts agree that integration has contributed to a lasting transformation.

One of the conflicts where the EU impact has widely been debated is Cyprus. This is partly because EU membership was initially promoted by Greek Cypriot politicians as a "catalyst" to a solution, an argument later taken up by the EU side (see Diez 2002). However, in the Cyprus case the carrot-and- sticks approach was hardly used. The decision to assess progress in the membership negotiations independent of the conflict development, together with the historical narrative of the conflict in both UN Security Council resolutions and European Court of Human Rights rulings (see Özersay and Gürel 2009), meant that the EU undermined any possibility to bring the conflict up as a conditionality in the negotiations. Policies were therefore reduced to engagement, promoting the EU as a model and possibly long-term socialisation effects. Engagement in turn has continuously been hampered by the fact that technical cooperation in bicommunal projects or confidence-building measures have routinely been limited or undermined by questions of sovereignty and recognition (Constantinou and Papadakis 2002), although the EU served as a crucial reference point in the Turkish Cypriot regime change following a banking crisis (Diez and Pace 2011: 217). Indeed, it may well be that the present gas explorations in the Eastern Mediterranean for economic and technological reasons may do more to foster a solution

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than EU membership of the Republic of Cyprus has done so far. If that is the case, however, the EU context will provide a framework that can, just as in the Greek, Spanish and Portuguese case, provide support for a lasting solution.

Even less successful has been the attempt to influence the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through regionalisation, even if the creation of a zone of peace and stability had been one of the aims of the Barcelona Process (Peters 2006: 215). For one thing, the lack of a realistic integration perspective meant that the carrots-and-sticks approach had been limited to start with (Yacobi and Newman 2008: 201). The influence on the Palestinian side, while in principle stronger because of the material and ideological support of Palestinian state-building, has suffered from the exclusion of Hamas and the one-sided endorsement of Fatah (Asseburg 2009; Pace 2009). This has undermined the credibility of the EU and has contributed to the isolation and consequent further radicalisation of Gaza, even if the concerns over Hamas' own exclusionary policies cannot easily be dismissed. While the EU, and High Representative Catherine Ashton in particular, have subsequently pushed for and later welcomed the 2014 unity deal between Hamas and Fatah, the Gaza war in summer 2014 has not made EU policy easier. On the Israeli side, the historical legacy and current practice of anti-Semitism has limited the range of policy choices (Tocci 2007: 125), even though the EU had relatively early advocated a two-state solution in its 1980 Venice declaration (Pardo and Peters 2010: 7-9). Furthermore, the idea that one could transform the conflict through engaging both sides in a Mediterranean regional context failed because of a lack of clear conflict transformation instruments, and because in the absence of a recognised state, Palestinians could not be drawn into such a project, while Israel had no particular interest to become involved (Asseburg 2009; Azhar and Louis 2014: 20).

Overall, the regionalisation approach as a conflict transformation strategy on the neighbourhood has had limited success. The assessment of the Northern Dimension, for instance with regards to the Kaliningrad and Karelian issues, has been rather positive (e.g. Joenniemi 2008). The integration strategy in Central and Eastern Europe has certainly helped to mitigate and even transform some conflicts, but it has not prevented continuing discrimination of Roma and violations of the freedom of speech for instance in Hungary, laying bare the limited availability of sticks once the carrot of membership has been eaten. In the case of the Stability and Association Process in the Western Balkans, the literature also agrees that the results are mixed. On the one hand, state building has proceeded as much as to open membership negotiations with Serbia and having taken up Croatia as a member state. On the other hand, the conflicts over state structures and identities continue to hamper good governance in many Western Balkan states (e.g. Bieber 2011; Elbasani 2013).

In the two Mediterranean conflicts discussed above, the EU has had little impact. Even though it has instigated the idea of the Mediterranean as a region (Bicchi 2006: 138-44), the practices of regionality have so far been limited, and there has been little transformation of the conflicts as a result of integration as such. Hegemonic effects may be seen in the influence of the EU on Palestinian state-building, but Israel has continued to align itself much more closely with the United States (Del Sarto 2006: 303), and in Cyprus, both sides have used the EU too often to bolster their position in what one may call "reverse Europeanisation" (Diez and Tocci 2010: 181).

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Overall, regionalisation has hardly ever been the cause of conflict transformation, neither within the EU nor as a strategy on its neighbourhood. Whenever it was successful, this was on the basis of a window of opportunity created by developments outside the EU's own influence. It therefore depended both on the willingness of local actors to let themselves be regionalised, following events as diverse as war (in the German case), domestic revolutions and fundamental changes in the international system (in the Central and Eastern European case) or banking crises (as in the Turkish Cypriot case). Furthermore, it depended on other global actors not obstructing regionalisation attempts (Beeson 2005), either through active policies or offering alternative models and therefore contesting the EU's hegemonic claim to "shape conceptions of the normal".

Nonetheless, regionalisation attempts have not been futile. On the one hand, the existence of a regional framework has allowed civil society actors to legitimise their transformative policies, such as in the Turkish Cypriot case, and has provided a stable institutional context once reforms took place. On the other hand, even though wholesale identity changes within an integration process seem unlikely even in the long run, the socialisation processes through engagement have changed state practices and at least led to more diverse identities in the EU (e.g. Risse 2003) and the Northern Dimension, and may do so in the Mediterranean, where at least an alternative identity conceptualisation is now available.

5. Promoting regionalisation in the far abroad

5.1. The promotion of regional integration as a global strategy

Based on its experience in the neighbourhood, the EU also promotes regional integration as a strategy in order to overcome regional conflicts in other world regions (Smith 2008: 76). However, there is one central difference to the EU´s approach towards its close neighbourhood: the perspective (and thus the carrot) of EU membership is lacking. This narrows the policy choices available to the EU. Nonetheless, the cooperation with different world regions and their regional institutions is an important instrument of EU external relations with Africa, Latin America and Asia (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005: 535). As early as the 1970s, the EU has put forward regional integration as an objective for its interaction with other world regions and has in the following years promoted this goal by the negotiation of several interregional agreements and regional strategy papers, accentuating the benefits of regional integration (Diez *et al*. 2013: 2). In its self-conception of an 'unavoidable reference model' for worldwide regional initiatives (Commission of the European Union 1995: 8), the EU seeks to reach 'prosperity, *peace and security*' by means of regional integration (Commission of the European Union 2012a). In this context, a number of authors refer to the EU´s role as an 'external federator' for the partner regions (Gilson 2002: 102f., Hänggi *et al*. 2006: 10, Rüland 2001: 8, Santander 2005; Lindholm-Schulz 2010: 14). This notion implies that the interaction of the EU with other world regions has a consolidating effect on the partner regions` regional identity. Whether the logic behind this 'federating' EU impact is rationalist (Rüland 2002: 208) or constructivist (Malamud 2010: 648) in nature is contested.

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The EU has actively worked through carrots and sticks in terms of regional conflict transformation in Africa and Latin America. It has, for instance, supported the African Union´s *Peace and Security Architecture* (Africa-EU Partnership 2013) and promoted capacity-building of ECOWAS in terms of conflict resolution and good governance (EU-West Africa Regional Indicative Programme 2008) in order to approach regional conflicts for instance in the Sahel zone, the Great Lakes region and West Africa. However, some authors qualify the EU´s promotion of norms in the African context and its use of strong conditionalities, e.g. in the Cotonou agreement, as indicative of the economically driven self-interest of the EU and speak of the potential exercise of 'hegemonic control' (Farrell 2005: 271) in the case of African 'norm violations' or even of 'hegemonic dominance' (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005: 546, referring to Hurt 2003).

The looser form of carrots and sticks is visible in the Latin American context where good governance norms are inscribed in a number cooperation agreements e.g. with the Andean Community (CAN), Mercosur and Central American countries. In the latter case, the Association Agreement of 2012 is used as carrot in order to 'strengthen confidence and security building at the regional level' (Commission of the European Union 2012b: 46).The funding of several projects dealing with different regional security issues is another example of these active EU use of *carrots*. In both regions *engagement* has played a role, as the EU has (successfully) promoted a common security vision among ECOWAS members (Piccolino and Minou 2014) and has worked through experience-sharing e.g. in cross-border issues, in order to change perceptions favouring a regional approach to Latin American challenges (Interview 2013, October 28).

In terms of passive *model setting* in both regions, although the set-up of regional organizations has strongly been influenced by the EU model, the EU does not seem to have an impact as a central model for regional security cooperation. African interest in the EU seems to have declined due to the EU´s financial crisis and due to competitive model-setters for the region (e.g. China); in Latin America, a lack of commitment by regional actors to deeper regional integration in the European way has occurred (e.g. CAN, Mercosur) (Scherwitz and Faleg 2014).

5.2. The Asian context and Chinese encounters

Without any doubt, the most important partner for the EU in dealing with regional conflicts in the Asian context is ASEAN. Security issues of the Asia-Pacific are discussed in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), of which the EU is a member, and EU officials feel that the institutionalization of the ARF needs to be strengthened (Interview 2013, October 23). The participation of Catherine Ashton in the latest annual ARF meeting, the EU accession to the *Treaty of Amity and Cooperation* in 2013 and the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan for strengthening the enhanced EU-ASEAN partnership 2013-2017 (Council of the European Union 2010), with its inscribed support of ARF and ASEAN mediation and peacebuilding capacities, are indicative of this EU aim. However, the EU is excluded from other relevant regional security forums, such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting plus (ADMM+) and the East Asian Summit (EAS). The EU tries to counter this by strengthening the security link within the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (Interview 2013, October 23).

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In terms of regional security, the EU is especially encouraging a common position of ASEAN members with regard to the territorial disputes of the South China Sea. This is done in the awareness of China´s rejection of a regional (rather than bilateral) solution to the conflict (Interview 2013, October 29 Think Tank). Sharing EU experience 'in relation to the consensual, international-law-based settlement of maritime border issues … and … security cooperation in sea areas with shared sovereignty or disputed claims' is a central EU concern (Council of the European Union 2012a: 20). The EU has therefore exchanged its views and experiences on maritime border disputes with affected ASEAN members as well as with China.

The EU is, however, aware of the challenges that Chinese policy poses for its engagement towards regionalisation. On the one hand, EU officials see that it is unlikely that China will abandon territorial claims in the name of integration (Interview 2013, October 29, October 22, October 25). On the other hand, together with the US, the EU has included the South China Sea disputes as well as maritime security and piracy as a central concern in the 2012 Joint EU – US statement on the Asia-Pacific region (Council of the European Union 2012b), in which ASEAN and China are encouraged 'to advance a Code of Conduct and to resolve territorial and maritime disputes through peaceful, diplomatic and cooperative solutions' (Council of the European Union 2012b: 2). In addition, the EU directly insists on ASEAN to adopt a common approach and to sign a regional Code of Conduct with China (on the South China Sea) (Council of the European Union 2012a). Furthermore, the EU tries to socialize Asian partners through engagement maritime border seminars.

In terms of the general influence of the EU model, although the set-up of ASEAN institutions follows that of the EU in many aspects (Garelli 2011, 2012), Asian principles, which include non-interference, shape the interaction among ASEAN members (see Garelli: 2011). Wong (2012: 671) therefore qualifies the EU as a rather 'passive reference point', while Maull (2010: 204) emphasizes the importance of the reference to the EU´s way of problem solving for the region.

In 2012, China and the EU agreed on a regular dialogue on security and defence policy, on regular meetings between special representatives and envoys as well as on a high-level seminar on security and defence issues (Council of the European Union 2012c). In this context, the South China Sea issue has been addressed together with the successful cooperation in terms of counter-piracy (Council of the European Union 2013). The *China-EU 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation* explicitly mentions the importance of regional forums (particularly ASEM and ARF) in the field of peace and security (Commission of the European Union 2013: 3). Both sides agree on the usefulness of an EU participation in the East Asia Summit (*idem*). However, only one sentence indirectly refers to the South China Sea dispute, mentioning in a somewhat superficial way the development of 'joint activities to promote maritime safety and security' and expertise-sharing 'in relation to relevant international law' (*ibid*.: 4). Since the European regional engagement for a common ASEAN approach is not embraced by the Chinese (Reiterer 2014), the issue is barely mentioned in any EU-China statement. This is indicative of the rather cautious EU approach, which works without pressuring China towards the acceptance of a common regional solution, but rather by strengthening the ARF and constantly offering to share EU experience (EU-Asia

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centre 2012). Whether a departure from this rather neutral position is necessary in order to conserve the EU's credibility towards this territorial dispute can be questioned (*ibid*.: 15). Critics demand a clear positioning of the EU, addressing openly the perceived increasing Chinese "assertiveness" in this dispute (International Crisis Group, cited in Reiterer 2014: 15; see also Singh 2013).

Challenges for a common ASEAN solution with EU support are further posed by the alleged lobbying by China of other ASEAN members (Cambodia, Laos) not to adopt a common approach on the issue (EU-Asia centre 2012; Interview 2013, October 22) and by the Asian perception of non-interference as a central Asian principle. In an EU-Asia relationship marked by 'symmetry and respect' (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005: 548), the EU cannot ignore such principles. However, it struggles to find a way to move between 'diplomatic pragmatism' (*ibid.*) towards China and the danger of sacrificing its principle of regional integration as *the* tool for conflict transformation.

There is therefore some evidence of model-setting, even in relation to the South China Sea conflict, but it is rather weak and hazy. To some extent, this demonstrates that even the passive paths of EU influence weaken with geographical distance, not to speak of the traction of active policies. Perhaps more importantly, however, the East Asian experience reinforces the argument that integration is not the cause of conflict resolution, but instead provides a framework for further conflict transformation if a window of opportunity arises from within the conflict or from an external shock. If at all, a regional conflict approach is the effect of a *long-term* learning process (Diez 2011: 67). On both accounts, whether a "stand-by" strategy for post-conflict stabilisation or as a strategy for a more distant future, it seems reasonable for the EU to continuously insist on its preference for a regional approach of ASEAN and on a regional solution for the South China Sea issue.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Summary of findings

The conceptual framework applied in this paper has allowed us to retrace and distinguish between different types of EU influence on regional conflicts in the near and far abroad. The model has been especially useful in order to highlight the shortcomings in using these influence paths in a consistent way. With regard to the use of *carrots and sticks*, the examples have shown that the asset of the membership perspective is not yet used as a true conditionality directed at regional conflict transformation. This has failed for different reasons in both the Cyprus and the Israel-Palestine case. The overview has however also shown that there are cases in which carrots in terms of financial incentives have successfully been used even in the EU's far abroad (e.g. in the development of the African Security Architecture).

The effectiveness of the *engagement pathway* towards the near abroad risks to be undermined by the lack of mutual recognition among conflict actors. A deeper engagement of the EU in terms of "socioemotional reconciliation" among conflicting parties therefore seems to be desirable not only in the context of the EU's approach towards the Western Balkans (Luteijn and Matias 2012: 42). While this pathway risks to be undermined by deep-

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rooted conflicting perceptions of actors in the near abroad, it has nevertheless been preferably used with regard to regions in the far abroad where the EU lacks the carrot of the membership perspective. Engagement in terms of societal exchanges and the establishment of dialogues has in this context played out as a 'soft path' through which the EU is able to stick to its norm of the promotion of regional conflict transformation, without risking to directly affront the interests of third actors (such as Chinese interests in the South China Sea case).

Finally, the overview has suggested that while the EU's radiation as a *normative* integration and peace *model* continues to impact on other world regions, the financial crisis has harmed the EU's charisma as a *competitive model*. However, while the EU has been and continues to be a reference point for conflict transformation in the near and far abroad, reference to the EU is sometimes used in order to legitimize the interests of one conflict party (e.g. Cyprus, Israel, Western Balkans; see: Börzel 2011: 15), and thus to reproduce conflict structures.

6.2. Policy implications: Middle East and the Ukraine

A final snapshot of the current challenges to the EU's regional conflict transformation approach further underlines the necessity to use the influence paths in a much more consistent way:

The recent rocket attacks of the Hamas towards Israel and the military reaction of Israel are painful reminders of the critique towards the EU's doubtful attitude with regard to the Hamas. Promoting a regional solution to the conflict should hence in the view of Azhar mean "(…) backing and facilitating an enduring Fatah-Hamas reconciliation" (Azhar 2014: 19) and thus using the *engagement pathway* more effectively. The EU's concentration on economic integration within the region would in addition need to include a "firmer carrot and stick policy, particularly with Israel" (Azhar 2014: 19). The current events may hence work as a wake-up call for the EU to stop its policy of accepting the status quo, but to rather work towards a regional approach in a leading role (Azhar 2014: 15). In order to structure this new approach, the EU (who is a central donor and trade partner for the region) needs to consistently apply an (economic) carrots and sticks approach towards both Israel and Palestine. While the promotion of a regional context for a transformation of the conflict has so far been futile, the EU should nonetheless continue working in favour of tying both Israelis and Palestinians to a Mediterranean regional process. As we have argued, this will help to build structures to be drawn on in a future peace process and will leave the possibility of continued engagement intact. At the same time, cooperation with other regional organisations such as the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council needs to ensure a transregional set-up.

Another recent example of EU policy failure is the Ukraine. One of the reasons for the current difficulties within the region is seen in the insufficient conceptualization (MacFarlane and Menon 2014: 96) of the EU's Eastern Partnership. The importance of the EU's Eastern neighbourhood and the changed perceptions of how to bind the new neighbours more closely to the EU are obviously motivated by the EU's Eastern enlargement of 2004. One of the motors for establishing the EU's Eastern Partnership of 2009 had been security concerns on the part of the EU after the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008

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(MacFarlane and Menon 2014: 96). Consequently, there was an obvious overlap in the European and Russian interests towards the countries of the Eastern Partnership, which however was disregarded by the EU throughout the establishment of the Partnership.

In this context, the Russian project of a Customs Union within the region, including Ukraine, is just one expression of the regional ambitions of binding Ukraine to the Russian neighbourhood (MacFarlane and Menon 2014: 97). The EU seemed to have forgotten that a policy towards its 'near abroad' also meant interference, if not threat, towards what the regional power Russia perceived as its "near abroad" (MacFarlane and Menon 2014: 97).

Consequently, the EU's offer of an association agreement to the Ukraine is seen as one of the reasons for the current crisis with Russia over the Ukraine. Although the President of the European Council van Rompuy rejects the argument that the EU has been seeking an 'either or' decision of the Ukraine through the Association Agreement (FAZ, 2014), the crisis has made clear that the EU has not thought through the implications of its regional association policy in terms of potential conflicts with Russian interests (McFarlane and Menon 2014). 'Differential expectations regarding neighbourhood' as well as 'clashing understandings of integration' (Hadfield und Fiott 2014: 9) between the EU and Russia are thus rightly referred to as central factors fostering the EU-Russian crisis over the Ukraine. This seems to indicate that if the EU wishes to adopt a promising regional conflict transformation strategy, it should use the engagement pathway in terms of communication and trust-building with *all* affected regional actors before offering a membership perspective and replicating the either/or boundaries of a world of states that integration is supposed to transcend.

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