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To cite this article: James Wesley Scott & Ilkka Liikanen (2010) Civil Society and the 'Neighbourhood' — Europeanization through Cross-Border Cooperation?, *European Integration*, 32:5, 423-438, DOI: [10.1080/07036337.2010.498628](https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2010.498628)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2010.498628>



Published online: 24 Aug 2010.



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# Civil Society and the ‘Neighbourhood’ — Europeanization through Cross-Border Cooperation?

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**ABSTRACT** This collaborative study pursues a dual objective. On the one hand, it focuses on the actual and potential roles of civil society in developing new forms of political, economic and socio-cultural cooperation within the emerging ‘European Neighbourhood’. On the other hand, through this investigation of civil society networks it contributes to the ‘Europeanization’ debate with regard to the influence of the EU in civil society development in neighbouring states and on cross-border civil society interaction within the neighbourhood context. This will include a comparative analysis of perceptions of the EU and its role in empowering civil society as related by civil society actors. The rationale for this collection of essays is thus defined by the transformation of political relationships between the 27-member European Union and countries in its immediate vicinity. Based on research funded by the European Union’s 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme, the authors will perform this investigation by analysing cooperation processes, the multi-level contexts within which they operate and, perhaps most importantly, the role of the EU in conditioning civil society relationships within the Neighbourhood.

**KEY WORDS:** European Neighbourhood Policy, cross-border cooperation, civil society, Europeanization, EU external governance

## Introduction

With the historic enlargements of 2004 and the admission of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the European Union has extended its borders ‘eastwards’

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and ‘southwards’. The EU is now a direct neighbour of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova and has strengthened its presence in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions. As a result, the EU has embarked on a large-scale effort to look beyond its internal borders and to engage neighbouring states in a new process of regional cooperation. To an extent, the emergence of a European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) represents an alternative strategy to outright membership for ‘third’ countries, such as Ukraine and Moldova. However, as a process of regional cooperation, the Neighbourhood entails much more than this; it signals a potential move away from traditional centre–periphery relationships towards a new form of regionalism based on the recognition of mutual interdependence (Browning and Joenniemi 2008; Scott 2005). In addition, the EU has suggested that co-ownership of cooperation policies will allow all participating states to share equally in the benefits of greater economic, political and socio-cultural cooperation (Balfour 2009).

Understandings of ‘Neighbourhood’ are not strictly defined by specific policies (such as the ENP) but can also be interpreted in terms of a political, cultural and socio-economic space where the EU exerts transformative power beyond its borders. The very norms, values and ‘*acquis*’ that define EU-Europe (e.g. the virtues of cooperation, democratic ownership, social capital and general values such as sustainability, solidarity and cohesion) are thus being advanced as a basis for common values and a sense of political community. The EU has also insisted that its regional cooperation agendas are not only about ‘high politics’ in the traditional sense but also encompass social and cultural issues.

The concept of ‘Europeanization’ is complex and has many different connotations.<sup>1</sup> It has often been used in conjunction with the EU’s post-1989 enlargement in which formal conditions for EU membership established mechanisms of institutional and social convergence to EU norms. Based on an understanding of Europeanization as a process through which EU values, norms and policy concerns are diffused beyond its borders (see Jones and Clark 2008), we can interpret the ENP as a policy instrument that aims to profoundly influence political and social interaction between the EU and its regional neighbourhood.

One of the more striking elements of the EU’s emerging politics of regional cooperation is the actual and potential roles attributed to civil society. Civil society is understood as a political force central to the development of a wider community of values and societal goals; it is seen to have a modernizing and democratizing function within state–society relations. Civil society is also assumed to be a major political forum for the articulation — within and beyond the state — of social agendas and the promotion of human rights. In practical terms, civil society actor networks are rapidly developing between different communities of interest, often through concrete projects between the EU and neighbouring states. And, indeed, new and multifarious civil society networks are emerging between EU member states and neighbouring countries as diverse as Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Turkey and Morocco.

This raises the issue of the EU’s impacts on civil society agendas in neighbouring countries and its ability to promote cross-border cooperation

between civil society actors with a Neighbourhood context. The nature of the EU's geopolitical influence has, of course, been actively debated and captured, among others, in terms of 'soft power', 'civilian power' and 'conditionality' (Manners 2002, Telo 2005, Bachmann and Sidaway 2008, Kochenov 2008). This debate concedes to the EU a considerable degree of 'normative power' (Tocci et al. 2008) but, at the same time, recognizes that this power is not only exercised through explicit policies but also through more subtle and informal channels. It has been suggested, for example, that processes of horizontal political socialization ('network governance') are increasing the overall societal significance of the EU '*acquis*' beyond its borders (Filtenborg, Gänzle, and Johansson 2002) and that civil society is a major channel through which these cross-border influences are transmitted (Raik 2006). It can thus be argued that Europeanization proceeds through the cooperation practices of civil society actors; these promote and develop values central to the EU's political identity (human rights, sustainability, citizen participation, gender equality, etc.) as well as create an informal institutional basis for their diffusion beyond the confines of the EU.

Within the context of the emerging regional Neighbourhood and ENP, the contributors to this volume have interrogated the EU's role in conditioning both civil society agendas and practices and the forms of cross-border cooperation that have developed between civil society actors in the EU and in neighbouring states. The authors thus contribute to the ongoing debate on Europeanization processes and EU 'external governance' by focusing on largely informal and non-hierarchical processes of organizational learning that promote new 'European' institutional and discursive practices. In doing this, they offer results from recently completed EU-funded research, the EUDIMENSIONS project in particular.<sup>2</sup> This project tested the concept of Europeanization primarily in terms of indirect EU influences and networks of social learning established by civil society actors. However, while recognizing the EU's considerable normative power, this power was also seen to be contested and subject to local interpretation. As Stewart (2009) has demonstrated in the case of Georgia, Ukraine and Serbia after their 'electoral revolutions', the interests of external actors such as the EU have partly supported but also competed with domestic civil society agendas of democratization. Furthermore, conflicts between cooperation and security imperatives, in which the enforcement of exclusionary borders have challenged the EU's self-image as a supranational 'force for good in the world', might also threaten the EU's ability to affect institutional change through grassroots democratization (see Barbé and Nogués 2008).

Recognizing the problems associated with 'contextually detached' approaches that aim at uncovering causality — particularly in terms of the EU's external policy impacts, the EUDIMENSIONS project followed a bottom-up research design sensitive to local (domestic) interpretations and implementation of EU norms. The contextually sensitive, 'ground-level' perspective of the EUDIMENSIONS project is reflected in its methodology. This is based largely on the perceptions of civil society actors of the EU's role in conditioning their agendas, organizational development, operating strategies and cross-border

cooperation activities. The project was comparative in nature and quantitative and qualitative interview methods were used for several different regional cases (Finland–Russia, Estonia–Russia, Poland–Ukraine, Hungary–Ukraine, Romania–Moldova, Greece–Turkey and Spain–Morocco).<sup>3</sup>

Based on questions raised by more general debate regarding the formal (institutional) and informal (social) impacts of Europeanization, four major arguments were developed within the scope of the EUDIMENSIONS project.

- (1) We give support to the hypothesis that the EU's normative power works in subtle ways beyond formal policy avenues. In the case of civil society cooperation between EU member states and neighbouring countries, external governance also manifests itself through informal networks and non-hierarchical institutional learning. This is evidenced by the changing domestic agendas of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in neighbouring countries; these reflect an incorporation of social objectives defined by EU-based CSOs and a gradual appropriation of EU norms.
- (2) The transfer of 'European' civil society agendas and values takes place within processes of contextual adaptation and through pragmatic strategies that de-politicize cross-border cooperation between civil society actors. Through such informal practices, issues such as gender equality, environmental awareness, transparent governance, social welfare and minority rights are translated and framed locally.
- (3) EU policies and programmes provide support for the cross-border cooperation activities of civil society actors. However, civil society cooperation also reflects tensions between the opportunities and constraints inherent within EU support mechanisms (e.g. the privileging of state-centred relations versus rhetorical support of civil society participation). These tensions have tended, for example, to work against a more formal 'politics of inclusion' (see Lavenex 2004) for civil society actors within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy.
- (4) Civil society organizations, nevertheless, represent a vast area of opportunity for enhancing the EU's influence and its soft power agenda of regional cooperation. One reason for this is that CSOs represent sectors of the population who seek alternative means to engage in social and political activity that support democratic change.

The contributors to this volume tested these hypothetical arguments from different geographical and contextual vantage points. The overall results of our investigations are summarized in the final section of this essay.

### **'Regional Neighbourhood' — a Contested Arena of Europeanization?**

Because of geographical proximity, long-standing (e.g. post-colonial) economic, social and political interrelationships and deepening mutual interdependencies, the EU is keen to assume a stabilizing role in Post-Soviet, Eurasian and Mediterranean regional contexts (Browning and Joenimmi 2008). The geopolitical vision that underlies this ideational projection of power is that of 'privileged partnership' — that is, of a special, multifaceted

and mutually beneficial relationship with the EU, in some cases in place of concrete perspectives of EU membership.<sup>4</sup> With this geopolitical vision, principles of (EU) European governance are being extended well beyond the borders of the EU (Sasse 2008; Scott 2009).

The ENP is the most explicit form of geopolitical integration between the EU and its immediate region, it is a policy framework that aims to structure relations between the EU and its neighbours according (ostensibly) to jointly agreed criteria.<sup>5</sup> As has been documented elsewhere (Wallace 2003; Commission of the European Communities 2004a), the ENP is thus a means by which to maintain the momentum of Europeanization and promulgate the values of the EU without actually offering direct membership to third states. The countries involved are: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the considerable geographical reach of the EU's Neighbourhood is not limited to the ENP. Russia, for example, is not part of the ENP process as such but participates in the cross-border programmes funded through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). In the case of Turkey, membership negotiations, although controversial, have been initiated. However, the long-term and ambivalent nature of the process dictates that Turkey will be subject to similar geopolitical agendas as ENP member states.

Ultimately, one of the central objectives of the ENP is to create a wider security community in Europe; illegal immigration, human trafficking, terrorism and cross-border organized crime remain issues where intensified coordination between the EU and its neighbours is envisaged. However, the ENP's scope is complex and multi-layered; it encompasses a wide range of economic, political and socio-economic issues (Scott 2005). This is also due to the EU's broad definition of security as being environmental, economic and social (and not only military) in nature, as well as a realization (not always translated into practice) that security concerns must be shared rather than imposed externally.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the EU suggests that cultural understanding and the recognition of mutual interdependence are means with which to establish a common political dialogue (Commission of the European Communities 2004a, 2004b). Within this context, the achievement of co-ownership of basic policy areas affecting the EU and its neighbours must also be emphasized. In the words of the EU Commission (2003, 3):

Interdependence — political and economic — with the Union's neighbourhood is already a reality. The emergence of the euro as a significant international currency has created new opportunities for intensified economic relations. Closer geographical proximity means the enlarged EU and the new neighbourhood will have an equal stake in furthering efforts to promote trans-national flows of trade and investment as well as even more important shared interests in working together to tackle transboundary threats — from terrorism to air-borne pollution. The neighbouring countries are the EU's essential partners: to increase our mutual production, economic growth and external trade, to create an



enlarged area of political stability and functioning rule of law, and to foster the mutual exchange of human capital, ideas, knowledge and culture.

Furthermore, it is not only the enhancement of the EU's international influence that is at stake but also the strengthening of its identity as a stabilizing element in the world system with 'exportable' (i.e. universal) democratic values (see Guterres 2001; Emerson 2004). Indeed, the EU pursues the objective of achieving community through shared values (such as human and gender rights, commitment to an open market economy, democratic participation, etc.), common goals and intensive cooperation on a broad range of EU internal policies.<sup>8</sup>

Arguably, therefore, the ENP facilitates an ideational projection of power that — at least in theory — marks a decisive departure from traditional state-centred geopolitics. A further indication of this are the roles attributed to civil society and cross-border cooperation. In particular, the strengthening of a 'civil society dimension' within the ENP is promulgated by the Commission, the Council of Europe and the Parliament. According to the Commission (2007a, 11): 'Civil society organizations have a valuable role to play in identifying priorities for action and in promoting and monitoring the implementation of ENP Action Plans'. It seems to be widely understood that a civil society dimension is vital in order for the EU's policies to boost links with its 'ring of friends' and, thus, to deepen the integration between the Union and its neighbours.

Strengthening civil society can also be seen as a means of spreading 'western' values of democracy, the rule of law, and the free market. In this respect, civil society is seen as a tool for a deeper European integration, democratization and promotion of liberal economic markets. CSOs are considered key actors in the promotion of good governance. To be more precise, the role of civil society is noted in the ENP strategy paper with reference to a number of different spheres: youth work, science and education, culture and cross-border cooperation, the environment, the fight against corruption, local administration. The Commission (2006a, 7) has suggested that civil society participation should go beyond exchanges and cooperation programmes: 'We must encourage partner governments to allow appropriate participation by civil society representatives as stakeholders in the reform process, whether in preparation of legislation, the monitoring of its implementation or in developing national or regional initiatives related to the ENP'. This aim is reiterated in the Commission's (2007a, 11) attempts to strengthen the ENP: 'The Commission will encourage a wide range of stakeholders to engage in monitoring the implementation of the ENP Action Plans, will promote dialogue in the partner countries between governments and local civil society and seek to bring more stakeholders into the reform process'.

In addition, the practice of cross-border cooperation, a long-standing tradition within the EU, is a key priority both in the European Neighbourhood Policy and in the EU's Strategic Partnership with Russia. As the Commission's *Strategy Paper on Cross-Border Co-operation* states (2006a, 8):

A key objective of the EU in general and of the ENP is to enhance the EU's relations with its neighbours on the basis of shared values and provide opportunities to share the benefits of the EU enlargement, while help avoid any sense of exclusion which might have arisen from the latter. CBC is certainly an important means of addressing this, helping enhance economic and social links over borders as they now exist, by supporting co-operation and economic integration between regions.

The goal of this research has been to contribute to the body of research on Europeanization by critically interrogating the EU's impact on civil society cooperation between EU member states and neighbouring countries. Europeanization can be understood in terms of a diffusion of norms regarding political agendas and procedures, social values and societal self-definitions (see, for example, Diez, Agnantopoulos, and Kaliber 2005). While more often used in reference to institutional convergence within the European Union (see Olsen 2002), the accelerating dynamics of regional cooperation spear-headed by the EU suggest that Europeanization is also taking place in terms of new forms of 'external governance'. Among others, Bosse (2009), Gawrich, Melnykovska, and Schweickert (2009), Lavenex (2004) and Lavenex and Wichmann (2009) understand the ENP as an element of external governance through which the EU exercises political, social and economic influence. The implications of this argument are far reaching; they suggest, in fact, that Europeanization contexts originally associated with European integration and enlargement are at least in part expanding territorial notions of political community beyond the EU's borders.

Generally, debate on Europeanization in terms of governance has been focused largely on public policy analysis, or on the study of institutional mechanisms of Europeanization. In addition, the external governance perspective has been developed primarily in terms of formal external policies of the EU (Lavenex 2004; Bosse 2009). However, the impacts of Europeanization go beyond formal institutional 'convergence' and/or compliance with pre-defined norms. The experiences of post-socialist democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, many of which became EU members by 2007, are revealing. The Hungarian political scientist Maté Szabó (2004, 12–14) argues that Europeanization ('Európaizálódás') has induced processes of new identity formation: engagement with and ultimately accession to the EU has forced Hungary (and the other post-socialist states) to break out of a 'parochial' and introverted mindset and reflect its specific situation against the wider European political, economic and social context. Similarly, it is also clear that much of what is seen as the EU's 'normative power' is institutionally indeterminate — it does not depend on treaties, a military presence, a security doctrine or even distinct policies (Bachmann and Sidaway 2008). As Ian Manners (2002, 252) has suggested: the EU influences, '... not by what it says or does, but by what it is'. The 'idea' of (EU) Europe as a common political space with guarantees of personal liberty and freedom of movement is thus in itself a powerful force for change in inter-state relations (Henderson 2005; Scott and van Houtum 2009).



Accordingly, social, cultural and political ideas of EU-Europe are being diffused not only by formal institutions but increasingly by civil society groups through processes of de-centralized political 'socialization' (see Warleigh 2001; Filtenborg, Gänzle, and Johannson 2002; Raik 2006). Nedergaard (2006) has argued that Europeanization within the EU also takes place in the form of civil society-driven policy learning outside formal institutionalized channels. In his analysis, policy learning (as perceived by civil society actors with similar agendas) is promoted by 'best practices' rather than by economic-political commonalities between actors. Similarly, Nielsen, Berg, and Roll (2009) argue that civil society organizations in neighbouring countries potentially represent effective mediators of the EU's external policies. One reason for this is the general appeal of the EU's agenda to many CSO activists in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and elsewhere. The EU provides a platform for consolidating democracy, promoting human rights, increasing environmental awareness and focusing attention on the rights of specific groups — and thus a means of transcending local political constraints in advancing these agendas. The EU is also attractive as a partner because of the prospects of mobility, career advancement, public and political recognition and the general international networking it offers to motivated civil society advocates (Raik 2006). According to Nielsen, Berg, and Roll (2009, 255):

... the EU seems to be in a position to influence political decisions from below, and become a major partner for organizations working for change. As the same time, CSOs can in many cases be seen to be agents of Europeanization working from the 'bottom-up' as they are pursuing visions of good governance, same as the EU. Thus civil society can contribute to the sort of milieu shaping that the EU typically favours as external relations strategy.

However, if the EU's external influence can be measured partly in terms of 'enticing' new partners to adopt its political agendas, values and world view, it would be a mistake to view it as a unilateral process: the EU's commitment, among others, to 'functioning market economies', civil society development and security concerns are subject to local interpretation and acceptance. This fact is often lost within contextually insensitive approaches that are orientated towards predetermined policy results and thus preconceived empirical frameworks (e.g. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004). As Brusis (2005, 301) has noted, top-down studies that focus on compliance with rather than the interpretation of EU policies 'tend to be static and are not systematically interested in the dynamics and interplay of political, institutional, and policy changes ...'. Furthermore, Brusis points out that it is misleading to infer a causally effective conditionality of EU policies that fails to take into account the more subtle processes of diffusion and local framing — the 'cultural filter' postulated by Manners (2002) — that are involved in policy adaptation. These caveats also apply to less formal modes of policy diffusion. Accordingly,

EUDIMENSIONS followed a bottom-up research design sensitive to the domestic interpretations and implementations of EU norms.

### **Structure of the Analysis**

Based on the hypothetical arguments defined above, two major questions were pursued by the EUDIMENSIONS consortium. The first addressed the direct role the EU has played in influencing the agendas, strategies and cooperation behaviours of CSOs: to what extent has the EU provided opportunity structures and increased the political leverage of civil society actors? Have the EU's policies themselves been influential or has the EU's influence extended itself rather through bottom-up processes of engagement within civil society networks? Alternatively, do formal and informal aspects of the EU's engagement with civil society complement each other? The second question related to the ability of the EU's externally orientated policies to create a sense of 'neighbourhood'. To paraphrase Smith (2005) and Lavenex (2004): to what extent is the EU promoting a 'politics of inclusion' with regard to civil society actors? Related to this question was a critical reflection on the state-society relations that condition the European orientations of local civil societies. Among the contextual issues brought out by the consortium were that of asymmetry in terms of institutional capacities and resources, different understandings of the role of civil society as well as different perceptions of the EU as a political actor in regional cooperation. These have created difficulties for CSOs to engage in Cross Border Cooperation (CBC). However, pragmatic strategies have been developed to circumvent problems stemming from these issues.

Our collaborative study of civil society networks within the wider European Neighbourhood is made up of largely empirical but theoretically informed contributions. The collection begins with Iwona Sagan's discussion of whether the EU, either through its policies or a more indirect influence on cross-border cooperation, provides an opportunity structure for promoting civil society networks within Central and Eastern European contexts of organizational and institutional asymmetry. Evidence from Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Russian (Kaliningrad) civil society cooperation suggests that the EU plays a vital role here in mediating between very different socio-political relations and providing resources for inter-state cooperation. However, the EU's more specific role as a promoter of civil society-based cross-border cooperation is less clear. As concrete EU (as well as national) assistance is limited, the onus lies with civil society actors themselves who, by and large, create depoliticized and pragmatic environments for cooperation. In concluding, Sagan makes the claim that the EU could be missing valuable opportunities to promote communities of values and shared political agendas. By privileging traditional realist politics of 'interest' and neglecting the role of civil society and cross-border cooperation, the EU, at its peril, is excluding social forces necessary for multi-level and multi-faceted regional partnerships.

In her contribution, Elena Belokurova argues that normativity with regard to understandings of civil society's role within Russia's context of

transformation can generate misconceptions of the actual influence of the EU. In the case of Russia, Belokurova argues that the EU maintains a powerful but subtle presence — in the background, so to speak — that provides orientation and support for civil society actors in Russia. However, the direct political influence of the EU has waned, perhaps naturally, with the strengthening of Russian policies of nation-building and consolidation. One important question regards the internal and external consequences of contemporary Russian discourses on civil society and, in particular, their political consequences for EU–Russia cooperation — both at ‘high’ political levels and within civil society itself. Definitions of civil society and its role have been broadened significantly in an attempt to mobilize wide-scale public participation in a project of state consolidation and social welfare enhancement. While the role of ‘partner of the state’ may be problematic to some extent, it nevertheless marks a significant development in the evolution of an empowered civil society in Russia. As Belokurova suggests, understandings of these contextually contingent settings for civil society activism are necessary in order to promote better mutual understanding and dialogue between Russia and EU countries.

Gulnara Roll deals with a rather different context of civil society cooperation. Post-Soviet relations between Estonia and Russia have not been good. Ethnic conflict, disagreements over border treaties and deep geopolitical divergences have made official contacts cumbersome. Despite these difficult conditions, however, civil society cooperation between Estonia and Russia has been able to develop in several important areas, thanks in great measure to international support. Roll identifies the main civil society actors of cross-border cooperation in the Estonian–Russian border region, their motivations and the main factors that affect the dynamics of their cooperation. In addition, Roll also characterizes the perceptions of civil society actors with regard to the role of the EU in promoting cross-border cooperation on the EU external border and engaging CSOs in the implementation of its policies for cross-border cooperation.

Daniela and Contiu Șoitu explore processes of Europeanization in the context of Romanian–Moldovan civil society CBC. Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, relations between Romania and Moldova have oscillated between friendship and near hostility and the European Union plays a crucial role in promoting cooperation. The EU’s influence is particularly vital given the fractured nature of the Romanian–Moldovan borderland. Despite the considerable linguistic, cultural and historical ties that exist between the two countries, socio-economic disparities, different paths of post-socialist political transformation, geopolitical tensions and everyday issues of security — particularly in terms of human trafficking, illegal immigration and smuggling — are some of the issues that impact on cooperation across this border. Taking their cue from the EU, civil society organizations, which have been increasingly involved in cross-border cooperation, have begun to advocate CBC best practices and promote the application of democratic principles in law and government.

Ayca Ergun debates Europeanization from a rather different case study perspective. Since the Helsinki Summit of 1999 when Turkey's candidacy for membership was accepted, the EU has exercised considerable transformative power over the development of Turkey's civil society. Ergun demonstrates how Turkish civil society can be seen both as an agent of the 'internationalization' of domestic social agendas and as a reflection of more general Turkish perceptions of the EU and Turkey's prospective membership. The first part of her article offers an analytical account of Turkish civil society development in order to portray the domestic context in which the interaction between local and international actors takes place. The second part deals with the nature of the relationship between the EU and domestic CSOs, concentrating on the peculiarities of this relationship. The last section of her contribution investigates the perceived impact of European actors, namely governmental and non-governmental organizations, on the development and evolution of Turkish civil society. Ergun also discusses the meanings and values attributed to the contribution of European players in domestic political and social transformation.

In the final contribution, Bohdana Dimitrovova explores three domains of civil society endeavour in Morocco — women's rights, human rights and socio-economic rights. Activism in these areas has triggered different responses of the Moroccan state and the international community. Using three empirical examples, Dimitrovova illustrates the complex dynamics of state-civil society relationships in Morocco. She also investigates cooperation mechanisms and the partly contradictory opportunity structures for the development of civil society activism that have emerged as a result of the EU's policies and within the context of the ENP.

## Conclusions

The essays in this journal issue indicate some of the ways in which 'Europeanization' is taking place through informal networks: civil society actors who engage in cross-border cooperation between EU member states and neighbouring countries are adopting new institutional and discursive practices that are widening the political landscape from the local to the national and European level, and thus participating in a bottom-up diffusion of 'Europe' beyond EU borders. However, this is not taking place in terms of convergence to normative models but rather occurring as a complex process of accommodation and adaptation. Nor is this Europeanization process taking place as a wholesale appropriation of EU norms and values but rather selectively; civil society actors are attempting to build bridges between states and very different societal contexts to define common agendas in the area of social policy and in the pursuit of social equity.

The EU's promotion of civil society cooperation can be understood as a project occurring at three interrelated levels, the transnational, the inter-state and the local/regional, each of which has its own specificities. As the authors indicate, civil society actors are subject to the competing, often conflicting territorialities operating at these levels. Thus, we find:

- (1) at the supranational level addressed by the EU and the ENP: a Neighbourhood Agenda of regional and *inter-state* cooperation as well as policies and practices targeted at creating a supranational community of values;
- (2) at the national level: post-Soviet nation-building, positioning within EU policy agendas, democratization agendas (Turkey and Morocco), identity politics and often cautious policies towards civil society's cross-border activities?;
- (3) and at the regional/local level: an articulation of local interests, social issues and specific community rights (linguistic, cultural, etc.).

The perceptions of civil society actors reflect these different territorialities and shed light as well on Europeanization processes that take place at all three levels, highlighting contradictory aspects of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy. The results of the EUDIMENSIONS project confirm that the supranational level is the most problematic in terms of the inclusion of civil society. On the one hand, the EU insists that it is pursuing a new quality of non-exploitative and multidimensional regional relationships in which the neighbours and civil society in neighbouring countries are treated as partners. On the other hand, the EU's desire for a state-like political authoritativeness and its focus on security issues has promoted bureaucratic practices and policies of conditionality that tend to complicate these partnerships. Thus, and similar to the observations of Darbouche (2008), Klitsounova (2008) and Kostadinova (2009), our research suggests that despite the EU's strong rhetorical commitment to facilitating transnational civil society networks, this goal is often subordinated to the dictates of geopolitical 'realism'. Furthermore, while an East–West/North–South dialogue on the role of civil society is undoubtedly taking place, it is structured largely on Western terms. CSOs have criticized a decided lack of access to the regional level of political debate, both in the case of the EuroMed Partnership (and the Union for the Mediterranean) which up to now has tended to marginalize social issues from its agenda) and the Eastern Partnership.

At the national level (and the level of binational relations between the EU and neighbouring states), the picture is more complicated. Here, no generalized pattern can be discerned, but there is much more space for civil society activism and participation. The implementation of concrete civil society projects can partly be understood as an 'inter-state' phenomenon. Despite its strong transnational dimensions, the EU acts as a quasi-state in forging mainly bilateral relationships with neighbouring states. As a high profile actor, the EU has contributed to promoting the political profiles of major voluntary organizations — both within the EU and in neighbouring states. This is more in evidence in the case of Turkey, a candidate country, but also applicable to countries such as Ukraine and Moldova. On the other hand, the EU's impacts are rather ambivalent in the sense that they privilege well-organized CSOs located in major centres.

The EU has, for example, developed a systematic framework for implementing cross-border civil society projects that involves a bureaucratic process of implementation and that channels support for civil society

projects largely through state structures. Here, the EU demands certain types of bureaucratic discipline, which includes budgeting (including matching funds), auditing, monitoring and evaluating civil society projects, and which often subordinates CSOs to state agencies at the national, regional and local level. This approach largely determines the types of CSOs that are capable of practising such discipline and of accessing EU financial support. It also contributes to the emergence of a privileged CSO elite — particularly in the neighbouring countries — that is separate from other CSOs and from its potential constituents and whose agenda and priorities may differ from those of the EU and other Western donors. This was very much emphasized in virtually all cases of cross-border cooperation and particularly in the cases of Moroccan, Turkish and Russian civil society organizations. Such an outcome is far removed from the dissenting and critical stance adopted by civil society movements in East-Central Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.

It is, of course, often difficult to separate national- from local-level civil society actors and agendas. However, there is a difference. CSOs with a more developed national profile and managed by an internationally orientated and educated elite are generally more involved in wider political debate at the national level and communicate with EU representatives and participate in fora organized by the EU and major European civil society organizations. Regional and local CSOs tend to be marginalized from this level of political interaction but, ironically, it is the level of locally embedded cross-border networks between local civil society organizations where Europeanization as an 'ideational' projection of social values is most palpable and where the influence of CSOs is greatest. To an extent, cross-border learning processes within these networks often appear uni-directional, e.g. West to East and North to South. However, the EUDIMENSIONS project has demonstrated that in areas such as social policy, welfare, health and gender equality there is great potential for common agendas that transcend geopolitical and inter-state tensions. Social policy has been a major victim of neo-liberal ideology and economic reforms that have privileged economic growth and liberalization. Thanks to civil society networks between the EU and neighbouring countries, shortfalls in public provision of social services have been partially compensated for, while notions of social equity, welfare and group rights have been reframed as public policy concerns in new member states and neighbouring states, such as Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Morocco. As CSO representatives interviewed within the scope of EUDIMENSIONS research confirm, their activities have been highly influenced by social values central to the traditional social democracies of Europe and that are embodied by EU policies.

As a final note, the contributions to this journal issue suggest that a more open understanding of civil society as a contextually contingent force for change could release potential that is as yet 'underexploited' by the EU within its ambitious project of regional cooperation and partnership. The EU appears indeed to ignore small, community-based voluntary organizations, many of which do maintain active relationships with partners in EU countries. However, it is these civil society actors that embody local political and



social contexts; they are intermediaries *par excellence* between community concerns and more global processes that increasingly impact on everyday life. Civil society based within the EU and in neighbouring countries also has the rather clear potential of improving mutual cultural knowledge and understanding. In agreement with Raik (2006), Nielsen, Berg, and Roll (2009) and others, we argue that civil society can be understood as an area of opportunity for a socially inclusive and responsive Neighbourhood Policy. Through civil society networks, the influence of the EU can be enhanced in social, cultural, political and even economic areas beyond the scope of formal state-centred politics. This can increase the overall acceptance of the EU in ways that are more substantial than the application of EU norms through conditionality alone.

## Notes

1. Radelli, (2004, 3) provides a comprehensive definition of Europeanization as a process that includes the: ‘... a) construction, b) diffusion, and c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, “ways of doing things” and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies’.
2. Reference is made here to the international research project EUDIMENSIONS: Local Dimensions of a Wider European Neighbourhood: Developing Political Community Through Practices and Discourses of Cross-Border Co-Operation (contract: CIT-CT-2005-028804), financed by the European Union’s Sixth Framework Programme for Research (see: [www.eudimensions.eu](http://www.eudimensions.eu)).
3. The method mix entailed quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews of a selected but considerable number of stakeholders and experts as well as newspaper screenings and content analysis. For each of the nine case studies approximately 100 CSOs were identified for short qualitative interviews during the initial phases of the project. From this initial group, approximately 40 CSOs were chosen for in-depth qualitative interviews. Even if only a limited cross-section, this number was considered sufficient to understand and interpret dynamics of civil society organizations actively involved in cooperation. The selected CSOs represented all different levels from the local to the supranational and distributions according to activity sectors (i.e. cultural, social, environmental and economic) reflected the overall share of the respective sector in the total number of identified CSOs.
4. According to the ENP strategy paper (Commission of the European Communities 2004, 3): ‘the privileged relationship with neighbours will build on mutual commitment to common values principally within the fields of the rule of law, good governance, the respect for human rights, including minority rights, the promotion of good neighbourly relations, and the principles of market economy and sustainable development’. It then states: ‘The level of ambition of the EU’s relationships with its neighbours will take into account the extent to which these values are effectively shared’.
5. Above and beyond ENP, the Europeanization of the Neighbourhood is being promoted through other means, such as research and education (priority 2.6 in the EU–Ukraine Action Plan as ‘people to people contacts’). The EU’s Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technology (FP7), for example, contributes to the envisaged construction of a European Research Area (ERA) by promoting networks of universities and research teams not only within the EU but also internationally.
6. While formally included in the ENP, no agreements have been established to date with Belarus, Libya and Syria.
7. The EU’s security policies with regard to the Neighbourhood are targeted at enhancing public security through combating environmental hazards, terrorism, organized crime, smuggling and other illegal activities (Vitorino 2004). At the same time, peace and stability are to be achieved through closer economic cooperation and the avoidance of divisive gaps in living standards.
8. As defined in Commission of the European Communities (2004a, 11–12).

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