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The EU's Normative Power in the Eastern Neighbourhood: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Mafalda Inês Infante Pedrosa

Master in International Studies

Supervisor
PhD Inês Marques Ribeiro, Integrated
Researcher
ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

Co-Supervisor
PhD Luís Nuno Rodrigues, Full Professor
ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

November, 2021

Department of History

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Acknowledgements

Over the last year, writing this dissertation was a challenge, but also one of my greatest achievements. I have always dreamed of Academia and the possibility of creating social change through it, and I believe this is a good first step in this process.

This would not be possible without Nova University of Lisbon, my alma matter, where I learned a big part of what I know about Political Science and International Relations. Above all, it would have never been possible without ISCTE, the university that welcomed me with an open mind and the willingness to develop the critical thinking of its students.

Besides that, I have to thank my supervisor, Inês Marques Ribeiro, the person who made me actually enjoy learning and writing about EU Foreign Policy and whose support and knowledge was indispensable. I also thank Professor Luís Nuno Rodrigues, for being so supportive of the students of the Master in International Studies.

This would have not been possible without the amazing people I have in my life and that give me all the strength and motivation to follow my dreams. For that, I thank:

My grandmother, Eduarda Infante, who taught me that everything is possible.

My parents, the ones who gave me the foundations to make my dreams come true.

Daniel, for always believing in me.

Andreia, Catarina and Laura, for being my safe place.

Bia, Mariana and Maria, for the company and for listening to my ideas and doubts over the last months.

Finally, to the Young European Ambassadors from the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries, who gave me the chance to know young people from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, and who taught me so much about their countries, their dreams, and how they see the EU.

Abstract

In 2004 and 2007, the European Union (EU) underwent two of its most important enlargements, including countries from the post-soviet space, perceived as less stable, democratic, and developed. This momentum constituted a challenge for the EU, leading to several reforms in its foreign policy, namely the launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004, that included countries from the eastern and southern borders. This policy aimed to create a stable and prosperous neighbourhood, contributing, simultaneously, to the EU's security. The creation of this policy contributed to the debate on 'the EU as a different kind of actor', specifically, the EU as a normative power. Thus, the goal of this dissertation is to study the concept of Normative Power Europe applied to the ENP, more specifically to its eastern dimension, with a focus on democracy. With a post-structuralist approach, we conducted a critical discourse analysis to understand how the EU constructs, through discourse, representations of itself and others, perpetuating power relations. In order to do so, we analysed the main policy documents of the ENP and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), as well as press releases, statements and speeches about the situation in Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine, between 2003 and 2020. This work concludes that the EU discursively constructs representations of itself as a 'normative power', a 'democracy and human rights model', as 'responsible', and as 'truly European', and representations of the partner countries as 'non-normative', as an 'existential threat', as 'inferior', as 'entities that violate universal principles', and as 'non-Europeans'.

Key words

Normative Power, Critical Discourse Analysis, European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, European Union, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine

Resumo

Em 2004 e 2007, a União Europeia (UE) levou a cabo dois dos seus mais importantes alargamentos, que incluíram países do espaço pós-soviético, frequentemente vistos como menos estáveis, menos democráticos e menos desenvolvidos. Estes alargamentos trouxeram novos desafios para a UE e espoletaram mudanças na sua política externa, entre as quais a criação da Política Europeia de Vizinhança (PEV), em 2004, que incluiu países das fronteiras a Este e a Sul. Esta política tinha o objetivo de criar uma vizinhança estável e próspera, contribuindo, simultaneamente, para a segurança da UE. A criação desta política contribuiu para o debate sobre “a UE como um tipo de ator diferente”, nomeadamente, a UE como um poder normativo. Assim, o objetivo desta dissertação é estudar o conceito de “Normative Power Europe” aplicado à PEV, especificamente à sua dimensão oriental, com especial foco na democracia. Através de uma abordagem pós-estruturalista, conduzimos uma análise crítica de discurso para entender como a UE constrói discursivamente representações de si própria e de outros, perpetuando relações de poder. Para tal, analisámos os principais documentos da PEV e da Parceria Oriental, tal como comunicados de imprensa, tomadas de posição e discursos sobre a situação na Bielorrússia, Geórgia e Ucrânia, entre 2003 e 2020. As conclusões retiradas demonstram que a UE constrói, discursivamente, representações de si própria como “poder normativo”, “modelo de democracia e direitos humanos”, como “responsável” e “verdadeiramente europeia”, e dos países parceiros como “não-normativos”, uma “ameaça existencial”, “inferiores”, “entidades que violam os princípios universais” e “não-Europeus”.

Palavras-chave

Poder Normativo, Análise Crítica de Discurso, Política Europeia de Vizinhança, Parceria Oriental, União Europeia, Bielorrússia, Geórgia, Ucrânia

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Acronyms

AA - Association Agreement

CoR – Committee of Regions

CDA - Critical Discourse Analysis

DCFTA - Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

EaP - Eastern Partnership

EP - European Parliament

EU - European Union

EUGS - European Union Global Strategy

EESC – European Economic and Social Committee

HR - High Representative

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NPA - Normative Power Approach

NPE - Normative Power Europe

OSCE - Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

UN - United Nations

US - United States

Introduction

The main goal of this dissertation is to study the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) applied to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), more specifically to its eastern dimension, focusing on the case studies of Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine. With a post-structuralist critical discourse analysis (CDA), we aim at understanding how the EU constructs, through discourse, representations of itself and others, while perpetuating power relations.

In 2004 and 2007, the EU underwent two of its most significant enlargements, that comprised countries from the post-soviet space. Following these, the borders of the EU faced an important change, with its eastern neighbours being considered less developed, less democratic, and less stable countries (Wessenlink and Boschma, 2016: 4). In light of these new challenges, there was a clear need to create a policy that would unify the already existing instruments and partnerships, including both the eastern and southern neighbours (Ibid.). Thus, in 2003, the European Commission produced the “The Wider Europe Neighbourhood - A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours”, a communication that aimed to create a unified policy, promoting friendly, stable, and prosperous neighbours (Ibid.: 5).

Considering the evolution of the EU’s foreign policy, in which the 2004 and 2007 enlargements played a crucial role that led to the creation of the ENP as an alternative, the debates around ‘the EU as a different kind of actor’ became even more important. In fact, when we talk about this debate, it is difficult not to mention the contributions of Ian Manners (2000) and the concept of ‘Normative Power Europe’. According to Manners (ibid.), the EU is a normative power with an ideational nature, which is characterised by common principles, in contrast to the concepts of civilian power or military power, in which the use of civic and economic or military tools in foreign policy play a more fundamental role. Through its normative basis, that includes treaties and declarations, Manners (ibid.) identifies five core norms, namely peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights, which define the EU’s identity and are then diffused to other parts of the world.

The concept of NPE is, indeed, fundamental to the debate, but it is not free from contestations from several EU foreign policy scholars. Thomas Diez (2005) criticised the concept, focusing on the ‘power’ dimension. He considers that the NPE discourse perpetuates power relations between the EU and other groups, while creating representations of the ‘self’ and ‘others’. Thus, Diez suggests a reconsideration of NPE that includes a deconstruction of the ‘power’ it entails, through CDA.

Thus, this dissertation will study the EU's discourse towards the Eastern neighbourhood countries between 2003 – the year of the first communication, 'Wider Europe', about the creation of the ENP –, and 2020, focusing on how this discourse constructs representations of the EU as a normative power and of the selected eastern partnership countries as non-normative, i.e., as entities that do not follow nor prescribe EU norms and values (Vukasović and Matić, 2019: 305). Considering the core norms defined by Manners (2000), we will look specifically at democracy, which, throughout the analysis, often also includes human rights protection, considering that these two norms are closely related. We will do so through a CDA based on the framework proposed by Norman Fairclough (2001). Thus, in a first part, we will analyse the main documents that define ENP, more specifically its eastern dimension, and, since 2009, the Eastern Partnership. In a second part, we will look closer at three countries that the policy targets, namely Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine. The choice of these case studies has to do with the observation of major pro-democracy movements that were stronger or weaker depending on the circumstances, but that are important to take into account, especially considering the EU's discourse in light of this tendency towards democratization. These three case studies are relevant for our analysis due to being embedded in the same EU foreign policy framework yet having responded differently to EU democratization efforts. Their differing degree of willingness and institutional flexibility/rigidity, and differing levels of political (in)stability and overall domestic dynamics necessarily condition the EU's approach and discourse towards each of them. This diversity, in turn, renders our analysis of the EU's discourse towards the ENP more encompassing and thus richer. This analysis will help us define and describe the policy, as well as identify the main representations constructed by the EU through its discourse in perpetuating power relations with these countries.

Thus, we will start by describing the state of the art in terms of the academic debate, looking specifically at the main contributions around the concept of NPE. Having established how the concept will be used in this dissertation, we will present our methodology, focusing on a post-structuralist inspired CDA. Following that, we will move into presenting and discussing the results of our analysis, largely based on Fairclough's (2001) work, followed by concluding remarks.

Chapter 1 – Literature review: critiques and adaptations of Normative Power Europe

Within the academic debate about the European Integration Project being ‘a different kind of actor in world politics’, several power-related role conceptions were developed which can be divided into two main lines of thought: one that sees the project as having a power that is primarily civilian with strong ethical considerations, and another one that focuses more on its military elements and potential.

Duchêne (1972, 1973) argued that the European Communities were a civilian power, since their economic power prevailed over military power. This concept was further developed by authors such as Twitchett (1976) or Maull (1990), who presented three main characteristics that, according to Manners (2000), are the foundation of international cooperation: the use of diplomacy to solve international conflicts; the importance of economic power to reach national interests; and the use of ‘legally binding supranational institutions’ to foster international progress. The notion of civilian power was criticised by Bull (1982) due to its ineffectiveness and dependence on military power. According to Bull (*Ibid.*), the European Communities should pay more attention to military power, due to the divergence of interests with the US, to balance military power with the USSR and to renew itself through an independent military posture. Against this concept, Duchêne (1972) stated that Europe could not be a major military power, considering the questionable values in using nuclear weapons, which would need the control of a ‘European President’. Considering the international system at the time, the contestations against the concept of civilian power grew, with some authors, such as Stavridis (2001) later trying to find a compromise between both concepts (e.g., *Militarised yet Civilian Power Europe*).

Another fundamental concept, which is the cornerstone of this dissertation, is Normative Power Europe, proposed by Ian Manners (e.g., 2000; 2002; 2015). The concept was not entirely new, since Russel (1938) proposed the idea of ‘power over opinion’, while Galtung (1973) brought up the concept of ‘ideological power’. Simultaneously, this approach is also linked to the ‘actorness debate’ (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006; Jupille and Caporaso, 1998), in the sense that it tries to overcome ‘the tendency of measuring stateness’ (Manners, 2000: 28-29). Thus, Manners (2000) suggests that the EU is neither a civilian power nor a military power, because, if it were a civilian power, it meant that it would have an intergovernmental nature, using economic tools, and, if it were a military power, it would mean that it would be a supranational entity, using armed force. Conversely, Manners considers the EU as a normative power ‘of an ideational nature characterised by common principles’ (*Ibid.*: 29). While trying to overcome

this 'supranational-intergovernmental dichotomy', Manners (2000) suggests that the EU is 'an example of co-integration', with components from both sides. Thus, the author explains that what matters to civilian power is 'the degree to which international economics are domesticated into concerns about distributive justice', and that what makes normative power different from military power is that, from a normative perspective, it is important to pacify international violence and transform it into 'concerns about mutual problems' (Ibid.: 30).

Henceforth, the normative power approach (NPA) is described as having a 'positivist quantity', since 'the EU acts to extend its norms into the international system', and a 'normative quality', because the EU should act to extend its norms into the international system' (ibid.). This approach combines utilitarian (maximizing utilities), social (identity) and moral (moral or immoral actions) norms. However, a new type of norm is added – the narrative/legitimation norm, since, according to Florini (1996), a norm needs legitimacy to be considered as such. Thus, considering the combination of these types of norms, normative power is 'the ability to *shape* what passes for normal in international relations' (Manners, 2000: 31-32).

Furthermore, Manners (ibid.: 32) describes the EU's normative basis included in 'treaties, declarations, policies, criteria and conditions'. Manners identifies five core norms, related to peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as other four minor norms, including the fight against discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance. According to the author, these are the norms that make the EU 'more than a state' and a normative power (Ibid.: 33). Thus, this normative power has several sources, related to factors that contribute to norms diffusion, such as 'contagion', when the EU diffuses its norms in an unintentional way; strategic and declaratory communications; procedural factors, related to the institutionalisation of relationships, through cooperation agreements; 'transference', including the 'exchange of benefits' between the EU and third parties; 'overt', linked to the 'physical presence of the EU in third states and organisations'; and the 'cultural filter', related to the 'cultural diffusion and political learning in third states and organisations'. All these factors work because they are linked to the EU's common interests, such as peace and security, democracy, human rights, development aid, and environmental protection (Ibid.: 36)

Hence, the author concludes that the EU is 'a different kind of actor', that is, a normative power, since the EU is based on the idea of flexible sovereignty, and so, it is not a state; it is incorporated in a solidarist society, and, thus, might intervene in domestic matters; it does not wish material benefits from its actions; and it faces the opposition of 'unusual suspects', such

as the US, China, or Saudi Arabia (Ibid.: 36). For these reasons, Manners (2000) affirms that the EU is able to shape the notions of normal.

In a similar approach, Nielsen (2013) brought up the concept of ‘Soft Power Europe.’ As defined by Nye (2004), soft power is ‘the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments’ (Nielsen, 2013: 727). To Nielsen, the main difference between normative power and soft power is that the latter ‘is something you have, not something you are’, and so, it is not inherent (Ibid.: 728). Also considering that normative power is not inherent, Aggestam (2008) proposed the conception of ‘Ethical Power Europe’, highlighting the EU’s agency (‘what it does’) – which should follow ethical principles – and not its institutional construction (‘what it is’). Following this ethics-based approach, Dunne (2008: 3) proposed the concept of ‘Good Citizen Europe’, arguing that the EU possesses agency, i.e., the capacity to act, but to act with responsibility, since it is a ‘moral and political agent’. Simultaneously, Barbé and Johansson-Nogués (2008) brought up the idea of ‘the EU as a (modest) force for good’, in which ethical actions play a major role. Finally, and considering this power of ‘transforming’ the world through ethical actions, Börzel and Risse (2009: 5) proposed the concept of ‘Transformative Power Europe’, arguing that the EU is able to ‘spread ideas across time and space’. In contrast, Hyde-Price (2008: 44) proposed the notion of ‘the EU as a tragic actor’, criticising the idea that EU foreign and security policy is based on an ‘ethical commitment to transform the world’.

Between NPE and ‘Empire Europe’ (Zielonka, 2006), Del Sarto (2016) proposed the concept of ‘Normative Empire Europe’, which combines the idea that the EU acts in a normative way in world politics, due to its history and construction based on principles, values, and norms, with utility maximization, while trying to solve the conflict between the ‘realist/rationalist’ and normative notions. This compromise between both approaches is important considering the multi-layered configuration of the EU, and the idea of ‘empire’ also constitutes a (post-colonial) critique to power relations, identifying the EU as a self-perceived ‘superior’ entity (Ribeiro, 2018: 32). Following a similar line of thought, Haukkama (2008) formulated the idea of the ‘EU as a Regional Normative Hegemon’, criticising the NPE approach, especially the idea that the EU has a passive normative power, transferring its values through contagion.

Within the debate of whether normative power is inherent or part of the EU’s actions, it is fundamental to consider that it is discursively constructed. Carta (2014) proposed the idea of the ‘EU as an idiot power’, using three metaphors to determine ‘discursive patterns associated with the EU’s international subjectivity’. The *Candide* metaphor (Voltaire) shows that the EU can more effectively influence its surroundings if it acts in accordance with its principles. In

contrast, the *Pangloss* metaphor (Voltaire) demonstrates that the EU is ‘narrated in extremely abstract terms’, meaning that there is small reference to its inconsistencies. Finally, the *Don Juan* Metaphor (Mozart) is used to argue that the international scenario is ‘hostile’ and it has a negative influence on the EU and the way it influences its environment (ibid.: 349).

Other authors, such as Koops (2011) or Jovanovic and Kristensen (2015) brought up new conceptions related to the idea of integration. Koops (2011) advances the idea of ‘Integrative Power Europe’, based on the notion of ‘effective multilateralism’, and Jovanovic and Kristensen (2015) proposed the concept of the ‘EU as a Regional International Society’.

The debate on whether the EU is a ‘different’ kind of actor is, indeed, very diverse, and several authors continue to produce alternatives. Examples include the concept of ‘Market Power Europe’ proposed by Damro (2012), who considers that the EU’s influence in world affairs comes from the externalization of its economic policies, or the idea of ‘Liberal Power Europe’, advanced by Wagner (2017), who argues that the EU is a liberal power because it is composed by liberal democracies whose interests and identity constrain its policies. Finally, there are also cases of authors that do not see the EU as a ‘different’ kind of actor, such as Pardo (2012), whose concept of ‘Normal Power Europe’ tries to demonstrate that the EU is a self-interested actor that aims to maximise its security, through military and non-military means, just like any other power.

Having described the main characteristics of what NPE means, as well as some of its critiques and alternatives, the main objective of this dissertation requires a more detailed description of Diez’s work, namely his reconsideration of Manners’ NPE and how it helped in its improvement towards a more reflexive concept. As a reaction to the NPE approach, Diez (2005) considers that civilian power and normative power belong to the same type of discourse, that is not only produced by the EU, but also by the US. Simultaneously, the author problematises NPE not by focusing on discrepancies between rhetoric and action, but rather by focusing on the ‘power’ dimension of the ‘normative power discourse’. Thus, Diez asks for more reflexivity when using the NPE concept.

In fact, different authors identify a controversy related to the EU being a ‘different’ kind of actor, which is mainly related to the inconsistencies of EU behaviour and actions (ibid.: 614). However, Diez (2005) considers that this debate does not take into account the power that can be found in the *representation* of the EU as a normative power, which supports the construction of an identity of the EU against a representation of ‘the others’. Thus, it is the discourse of NPE that builds the EU’s identity. The author states that NPE includes a social constructivist approach, since it considers the possibility of tracing the impact of norms. Thus,

he points out that normative and civilian power are not so different, since both describe a specific kind of actor in international relations. So, Diez (ibid.) assumes that normative power can be considered a particular kind of civilian power, since both have a descriptive and a prescriptive dimension. The author also refers that the EU is not the only 'normative power' in world politics, since the US also have a moral and idealistic component in their foreign policy, meaning that interests and norms go hand in hand and that military and normative power are not always incompatible (Ibid.: 621; 623-24).

In addition, Diez (2005) presents another challenge to the concept of normative power that includes the EU's inconsistencies not within itself, but in relation to other actors, i.e., discourse versus practices, democratic backslides in Member-States, and different approaches by different EU institutions. This idea is linked to the representation of the EU as a normative power, since this construction of the 'self' is done in contrast to 'others'. This highlights the discussion around normative power as a representation of the EU, rather than an empirical phenomenon, taking inspiration from a post-structuralist approach on 'self/other constructions in international politics'. Thus, it is important to note that what defines the 'inside' and the 'outside' is 'a historically contextual representation of social relations infused with power' (ibid.: 626-627).

Moreover, Diez (ibid.: 628) describes the 'different forms of othering' that can be observed in the NPE approach. Firstly, he mentions the 'representation of the other as existential threat', related to a 'speech act of securitisation' that 'legitimises extraordinary measures'. Secondly, he mentions the 'representation of the other as inferior', when 'the self is constructed as superior' and sees the other as inferior. Thirdly, the author refers the 'representation of the other as violating universal principles, since 'the self is not only seen as superior, but of universal validity'. And finally, Diez explains the 'representation of the other as different', which does not see the other as inferior, but 'still imposes identities on others'.

In line with the critiques made by Diez (2005), Vukasović and Matić (2019: 305) call attention to the 'power' within NPE, and how it constructs a representation of the EU as 'normative', based on 'EU-norms' while representing others as 'non-normative', based on 'non-EU norms'. Furthermore, the authors assume that the NPE discourse is *exclusive*, since it frames the EU's distinctiveness against others, creating boundaries, and *inclusive*, since it depends on the recognition by the other, invoking the EU's superiority.

The 'self/other' articulations of NPE are linked to 'a tradition of the notion of peace community whose primary other is its own' (Wæver, 1998 cited by Diez, 2005: 634).¹ This means that the EU's past 'still legitimises its integration project', being conscious of its identity and expressing it through discourse. Diez (2005) concludes that the 'past as other discourse' questions power, while the NPE discourse 'projects power'. Thus, the author proposes a deconstruction of this projection of power, exposing the contradictions in NPE, through the conduction of a discourse analysis, as a means to 'rescue' normative power, a proposal that we will follow in this dissertation.

In response to Diez, Manners (2006) argues that the difference between the EU and the US is 'how far military power dominates other forms of power', the idea that the EU exercises its normative power in a way that oversteps the *status quo*, considering its own failures of the past, and the idea that the EU wants to promote 'universal' values that, if successful, might undermine its own power, while the post-Second World War international institutions intensified the US' power (Manners, 2006: 170-175). Furthermore, Manners (2006: 175-177) highlights that another difference between normative and civilian power is the 'post-colonial concern' within the later, that contrasts with the willingness of NPE to be an alternative for this type of discourse. This clarification is fundamental for our research, considering the goal to critically analyse the 'post-colonialist' discourse present in the ENP. Finally, the author acknowledges the importance of the suggestions regarding different representations of 'the self' and 'the others' but adds the idea that we must also consider the representation of 'the self as other', since the international identity of the EU is fluid and that there is an ongoing contestation of multiple identities, which makes it 'difficult to crystallise either self or other consistently' (Ibid.: 178). Manners (2006) clearly states that the EU is a normative power, which is 'a normative claim with a normative aim', arguing that the role of political scientists is to be critical, and, thus, proclaim 'what the EU is and should be doing in world politics'.

In view of several critiques, Manners (2009) assumes the importance of discourse and normative justification in the NPE. Considering that NPE is 'ideational, rather than material or physical', the author affirms that it requires normative justification instead of the use of material incentives or physical force and needs to be justifiable to others. So, normative power

1 Wæver, Ole (1998) "Insecurity, Security and Asecurity in the West European Non-war Community", in Adler, Emanuel and Barnett, Michael J. (eds), *Security Communities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

should include legitimate principles, which, in turn, must be coherent with (attractive) practices. Furthermore, dialogue between parties is fundamental to justify the EU as a normative power, promoting socialization and ownership and contributing to an open debate and understanding (ibid.: 3-5). Accordingly, Manners admits that discourse and perception are fundamental in the construction of the EU as an actor and a normative power, which requires specific analytical techniques, whether using social constructivism, critical theory, or post-structuralism (Ibid.: 9-10).

These adaptations of NPE are critical to our research, in which discourse analysis based on a post-structuralist approach. Furthermore, this dissertation will not focus on the NPE's 'discrepancies between rhetoric and action', but rather on the 'power' of the 'normative power discourse' (Diez, 2005: 614). Here, the role of CDA and post-structuralism is fundamental to understand how the EU's discourse perpetuates power relations and inequalities in relation to the selected neighbouring countries, through the construction of representations. Simultaneously, this approach will provide an explanation for the ENP, helping us understand the historical, political, and social context in which it was developed, thus 'setting the limits of its meaning and legitimacy' (Ibid.: 319). Following the attention paid to 'power' within NPE, we will focus on constructions of the self/other, looking into how representations of the EU and of the identified partner countries are constructed through discourse, perpetuating power relations, especially in what democracy is concerned.

The subsequent chapter will, thus, provide the analytical orientations to answer the main research questions and to accomplish the objectives of this study.

Chapter 2 – Framework of Analysis

Following Diez's (2005) and Manners' (2009) views on NPE, this chapter presents the research plan that will guide us in answering our research question: How does the EU construct, through discourse, a representation of itself as a normative power and a representation of the Eastern Neighbourhood partners as non-normative, perpetuating power relations?

To do so, we will conduct a post-structuralist CDA, inspired the analytical framework proposed by Fairclough (2001). Considering that we do not intend to conduct a positivist analysis and recognizing the usefulness of hypotheses as reference points for making contributions to the academic debate, we will consider in our analysis and discussion the following hypotheses, based on the scholarly literature: (1) The EU's discourse constructs a representation of itself as a normative power and of the Eastern Neighbourhood countries as non-normative (Vukasović and Matić, 2019: 239); (2) The EU's discourse constructs the Eastern Neighbourhood countries as an 'existential threat', as 'inferior', and as 'entities that violate universal principles' (Diez, 2005: 628); and (3) The EU's discourse perpetuates power relations between itself and the Eastern Neighbourhood countries (Diez, 2013: 196; 200).

Our methodology – CDA – is a discourse analytical tool that supports the study of how social power abuses are reproduced and legitimated, and on how ideological domination is 'recontextualized in text and talk' (Van Dijk, 2015: 466; Macaraan, 2015: 19). There are many types of CDA, with a wide variety of theoretical and analytical approaches, thus we must specify the type of CDA selected for our analysis. Yet, there are frameworks common to every approach, that will also guide this project's methodology (Wodak and Meyer, 2008: 5).

CDA focuses on 'larger units', such as discourse, speeches and conversations, and not on 'isolated words and sentences, going beyond grammar and considering non-verbal communication (Ibid.: 2, 15). The social and political contexts also play a fundamental role, since CDA sees discourse ('language use in speech and writing') as a 'form of social practice', which entails a dialectical relationship between the discursive event and the context in which it happens, i.e., the situation, institutions, and social structures. This means that 'discourse is socially constitutive', reproducing the *status quo*, but is also 'socially conditioned', since the context shapes it (Ibid.: 5-6). Finally, CDA's primary focuses are social and political problems, having a problem-oriented approach that distinguishes it from other types of discourse analysis, since it not only describes discourse structures, but explains them according to the context (Van Dijk, 2015: 467; Wodak and Meyer, 2008: 2). Thus, CDA pays attention to the ways discourse 'confirms, legitimates, reproduces or challenges' relations of power, being politically committed,

questioning the *status quo*, and aiming at producing critical knowledge that fosters the emancipation of marginalized groups (Van Dijk, 2015: 466-467; Macaraan, 2015: 23). This ‘critical impetus’ targets notions of ideology and power, which might dominate societies, when appearing as ‘neutral’ and ‘unchallenged’.

Organisations that pursue power try to influence others to adopt the dominant ideology and when most people accept it or forget possible alternatives we are in the face of ‘hegemony’, a concept proposed by Gramsci (Wodak and Meyer, 2008: 8), and used by Diez (2013) to describe NPE. Thus, the concept of *power* is also central to CDA, since it analyses the discourse of people in power positions that perpetuate power relations and inequalities (Ibid.). Those with power control the text and context of their discourse, and, thus, the acts and minds of others (Van Dijk, 2015: 470-471). As an example, official documents and speeches on the ENP contain references to the equality and shared values within the partnership. However, it is also possible to observe that it is the EU that defines the content of reforms, as well as the criteria that shows if they are performing in the right or wrong direction, according to its own norms and values (Katrochvíl, 2009: 7).

It is within this context that CDA is fundamental for this dissertation since our main goal is to question the EU’s discourse towards the Eastern neighbourhood (and our three specific case studies). Indeed, CDA is useful in demonstrating the ‘dominant representations’ in EU foreign policy discourse, as well as in finding different alternatives, that, however, should be always subjected to self-reflection (Aydin-Düzgit, 2014: 355). To achieve this, our analysis will be inspired by Fairclough’s (2001) CDA analytical framework.

According to Fairclough (ibid.), CDA looks at social life, which is constituted by the interconnection of ‘networks of social practices’, such as economy, politics, or culture. Hence, social practice is a form of social activity, which is the ‘arenas in which social life is produced (ibid.: 234). Social practice includes different elements, such as social relations, social identities, cultural values, consciousness, and semiosis. These are ‘dialectically related’, since they are different, but not entirely isolated. Thus, CDA analyses the relation between semiosis and other elements of social practice (Ibid.). In turn, semiosis, is part of a social activity within a social practice (e.g., being the President of the European Commission involves using language), but it also produces representations of different practices. Along these lines, semiosis constitutes several genres, which are ‘ways of acting’ and ‘producing social life’ (conversations, speeches, statements, etc.) (Ibid.). Thus, the presence of semiosis in the (self-) representation of social practices constitutes discourses, that are positioned representations of social life (Ibid.). When social practices are networked in a specific way, they produce a social order with

a semiotic aspect, which is the order of discourse, that is, the way in which genres and discourse are combined, producing specific meanings, which might be dominant or marginal, antagonistic or alternative (Ibid.).

Our analysis began with finding a problem with a semiotic aspect, that can be found in the social practice or in its representation (Ibid.: 236-237), i.e., how the EU and the Eastern Neighbours are represented in the EU's discourse. Subsequently, we seek to identify the obstacles to the social problem, including in the network of practices in which it is located, in the relation between semiosis and other elements of the social practice, and in discourse (Ibid.: 236). To achieve these goals, it is important to understand the context of the problem by using different sources and keep in mind that discourse may be the obstacle itself, making it fundamental to question the arguments used, the authors' motivation and how the 'self' and 'others' are represented. It is also crucial to look at specific texts, and, thus, to conduct an interactional and linguistic analysis (Ibid.: 237-238). For the former, we will interpret the relationship between discourse and the context in which social practices occur, by asking how, by whom and why discourses were produced. For the latter, we will look at the whole-text organisation, especially linguistic features that relate to the genre, looking at how the actor defines and uses concepts, the main discursive patterns that form narratives, and the main discursive (dis)continuities. In the analysis and discussion of the results, we will also focus on whether 'the social order needs the problem', i.e., if the actor who benefits from the *status quo* – the EU – has an interest in the problem (not) being solved, and whether there is the need for 'radical social transformations' (Ibid.: 238; 261). We will also consider possible ways to overcome the obstacle, fostering 'progressive change in [the] network of practices' (Ibid.: 263). The discussion of our results will delve into a critical reflection of the analysis, considering our own social positioning and how the analysis can contribute to emancipatory chance.

We will apply this framework to the EU's discourse towards the EaP by analysing policy documents, declarations, statements, press releases, speeches, among other semiotic texts. The selected discursive corpus (listed in annex 1) followed specific criteria, namely: (1) texts must help us identify the historical and political context of the ENP and the EaP, as well as the discursive shifts that accompany this context; (2) texts must contain elements of discursively constructed representations of the EU and of the EaP countries, in relation to democracy issues; and (3) texts should be drafted or uttered by the highest political instances of the EU.

Chapter 3 – Analysis of the EU's discourse

3.1 - A problem with a semiotic aspect

As already explained, this dissertation aims to study the EU's discourse towards the Eastern neighbourhood countries, under the scope of the ENP and, later, the EaP. Firstly, we will focus on the policy as a whole, and, subsequently, we will look closer at three case studies, namely Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine. Considering the literature review on the ENP concept, the identified problem with a semiotic aspect resides in the relations between the EU and the partner countries within the scope of this policy, clearly expressed through the EU's discourse in different genres. The ENP, its Eastern dimension, and later the EaP aim at promoting the EU's norms and values in the region, thus creating a zone of 'security and prosperity'. The policy includes several features that, among others, include a 'more-for-more' approach, meaning that the EU's support to the countries depends on how far their reforms in areas such as democracy, human rights and rule of law go. Considering our research question, we seek to understand how the EU's discourse perpetuates power relations within the ENP and the EaP and creates unequal representations of the 'self' and of the 'others'. Thus, the EU is represented as a normative power and a community of values that 'others' threaten when they do not comply with. The generated inequalities and power relations thus frame a problem with a semiotic aspect.

3.2 - The network of practices

Within the EU's institutional structure, we mainly selected texts from the European Commission (E), the Council of the EU, but also from the European Parliament (EP), and the European Council, since these are, in terms of decision decision-making, the highest political instances of the EU in the ENP context. This was a complex task, considering the discursive struggles identified in this policy. In fact, diversity is the foundation of the EU, but it is also true that the EU does not have a single voice; on the contrary, it is a fragmented actor with different discursive channels and sources (Carta and Morin, 2014: 303-307), which makes its texts 'fluid' (Nițoiu, 2013: 240), considering, for instance, the influence of national and EU dynamics, that, in turn, take into account (non-)governmental perspectives (Ribeiro, 2018: 60). Constructivist approaches propose an EU identity projected through practices of 'purposeful construction' (Risse, 2004: 154; Bretherton and Vogler, 2006: 37), (re)produced by EU institutions, bodies, and Member States responsible for the ENP, and that create a discourse signature by the EU as a common author. These then form narratives, building the EU's identity, as well as the identities of the countries that the policy targets, as suggested by Diez (2014). This leads to

discrepancies, contradictions and conflicting definitions, especially considering the EU's complex structure (Ribeiro, 2018: 60).

Consequently, the efforts of coordinate the communication of policies and the meanings behind these practices are different (Diez, 2014: 28-29). These struggles operate at the individual and collective levels, as well as the level of the discourse (Ibid.: 29). Considering how the latter shape identities and forms narratives about 'others', how they should be and the role of the EU in this process of transformation, they are fundamental for our dissertation. Considering these characteristics, we selected 98 semiotic texts, including (joint) communications, reports, policy documents, declarations, speeches, and statements, from 2003 to 2020, that formed the basis for the development of the eastern dimension of the ENP, while constructing representations of the EU and the partner countries.

3.3 - The semiotic evolution of the EU as a normative power and a democracy promoter in the Eastern Neighbourhood

In this section we will analyse the selected discursive corpus. We will divide it into two different parts: firstly, we will look at the policy as a whole by analysing its main documents. Secondly, we will look closer at three EaP partners, namely Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine. These two parts will focus on analysing semiotic elements taking into account the historical and political context, identifying shifts in the EU's discourse and shedding light on the representations it creates.

3.3.1 - Part 1 – The EU's discourse within the ENP and the EaP

3.3.1.1 - The creation of the European Neighbourhood Policy

In this part, we will analyse the main texts that established the creation of the ENP, its principles, objectives, action plans, and financial instruments. These are the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the EP 'Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours' from March 2003; the Communication from the Commission 'Paving a way for the New Neighbourhood Instrument' from July 2003; the Communication from the Commission 'European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper', from May 2004; and the Communication from the Commission to the Council

‘On the Commission Proposals for Action Plans under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)’, from December 2004.

In general, the texts start with a historical contextualisation of the need to create the ENP, which is related to the 2004 enlargement and the new challenges it brought, as the first title of ‘Wider Europe’ called ‘Wider Europe: Accepting the Challenge’ shows. The first reference to a challenge that is presented in this document, and that appears similar in the others, is related to security. In fact, when we analyse the lists of challenges to tackle throughout the selected texts, it is clear that, in most cases, security is the first one to be mentioned, followed by market challenges and opportunities. Democracy, rule of law, and human rights appear below, both on lists and titles, including on the priorities of financial instruments and action plans. Besides being mentioned in the first place, security and market issues are much more frequently mentioned throughout the texts, meaning they are more emphasised and thus, prioritised. This shows that the ENP was firstly meant to tackle security and market issues and that promoting democracy was secondary. However, all the documents refer democratic institutions and free elections as a pre-condition to be part of the ENP and receive EU financial support, in a similar approach to enlargement conditionality, but without the possibility of membership. In fact, the documents show several references to the fact that the ENP does not contain a prospect of enlargement, including a text box highlighted in grey, making clear that being a partner within the ENP does not necessarily open the possibility of being part of the EU (European Commission, 2003a: 5).

Going back to references about democracy, and as already mentioned, even though it does not seem to be in the EU’s main interests, it is a pre-condition to be part of the ENP and receive financial support and other benefits. This is made clear with the emphasis given to the case of Belarus throughout the different texts, and especially on the ‘Wider Europe’ communication, where there is another text box highlighting the political situation in the country (Ibid.: 15). Besides explaining the weak relations between the EU and Belarus since 1996 ‘as a consequence of serious setbacks in the development of democracy and human rights’ (Ibid.), it establishes a representation of Belarus as ‘the other’ that is authoritarian and non-democratic, opposing it to a representation of the EU based on the values of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights, among others.

Considering the representation of the EU in these semiotic texts, the first and only clear reference to what EU values are is made in the Strategy Paper of the ENP (European Commission, 2004a: 12), which states that ‘[t]he Union is founded on values of respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.’ Besides

this, there are several references to ‘EU values’ that the ENP partners should follow, even though in most documents this concept appears to be vague. While those with knowledge about the EU and its historical, political, and legislative trajectory can easily understand what values are being mentioned; however, the fact that these documents do not mention them in a clear manner creates a representation of the EU as an ‘obvious’ liberal values-based actor. Thus, the values, whether mentioned directly or not, create the EU’s identity.

Furthermore, the EU represents itself as the one with the responsibility to implement the policy in its various areas of action, defining the rules for it. This attitude can be seen in quotes such as ‘[t]he EU has the duty (...) to ensure continuing social cohesion and economic dynamism’ or the frequent use of ‘the EU’ as subject of different actions, e.g. ‘[t]he EU must act’, ‘[t]he EU should encourage’, ‘[t]he EU should continue’, etc. (European Commission, 2003a: 3; 13). This is also clear when the partner countries are considered to be ‘very different judged by most standards’ (ibid.: 4). Besides being vague and with an unknown author (who’s standards?), this quote shows a representation of the partner countries as ‘different’, as the ‘others’ that do not align with (purportedly) ‘universal values’ (Diez, 2005: 628). Moreover, the same representation is expressed through the title that defines that the ENP must be based on clear benchmarks that are based on the *acquis communautaire*, as well as on other international organisations’ legal documents, such as the UN Human Rights Declaration and the OSCE or the Council of Europe standards (Ibid.: 16). In addition, besides the ‘standards’ defined by the EU, references to other international organisations support the legitimisation of the EU’s discourse in this matter.

This lack of ownership and empowerment of the partner countries can be observed throughout the texts, except for the title ‘Joint Ownership’ in the Strategy Paper of the ENP. However, even when the need for ownership is referred, it is followed by the idea that it must be based on ‘shared values and conditions’, highlighting once more the representation of the EU as a normative entity, in contrast with the non-normative partners (European Commission 2004a: 8).

The representation of the EU’s and the partner’s identities is also confirmed through using assertions instead of arguments in declarative sentences such as ‘(...) it is increasingly clear that the EU shares an important set of mutual interests with each of its neighbours’, assuming that this proposition is an unquestionable truth (Ibid.: 6).

Finally, the use of prosopopoeia is also worth mentioning, since ‘the EU’ does not have a single voice, which is also not presented, but represented (Ribeiro, 2018: 224).

3.3.1.2 - A stronger European Neighbourhood Policy

This part includes a second set of documents produced by the Commission that highlight the main achievements and challenges of the ENP in the following two/three years after its creation. This includes the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the EP ‘On Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy’, from December 2006; and the Communication from the Commission to the EP and the Council ‘A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy’, from December 2007.

The first difference between these two texts can be observed on their titles. The first document contains a set of proposals to strengthen the ENP, while the second one focuses more on conceptual, substantive, and operational issues. While the first document clearly identifies the challenges that the ENP still faces two years following its creation, the second does not emphasise this, even though it is mentioned. However, in both cases, the documents reflect the need to improve the ENP in areas such as economy and trade, mobility and migration, people-to-people exchanges, as well as political, regional, and financial cooperation (European Commission, 2006b: 4-12; European Commission, 2007b: 4-11).

Looking at the references to democracy promotion, and as observed in the previous section, these are not common in either document. The first document contains a reference to governance and human rights issues as important focuses of the policy, together with economic issues, under the scope of ‘integration’ (European Commission, 2006b: 3). The second document contains the first clear mention to ‘democracy promotion’, but with the aim of ‘promot[ing] stability’ (European Commission, 2007b: 7). Throughout the documents analysed so far, the lack of mentions to specific measures to strengthen democratic institutions in the partner countries is clear. When they are identified, they are usually a means to preserve the EU’s security and stability or as a path that partners need to follow themselves to receive EU support. This reinforces our conclusion that democracy promotion was not a priority of the ENP during its first years of existence.

As observed in the previous section, economy and trade, as well as security issues are mentioned firstly on the lists of proposals and weaknesses to tackle, while democracy promotion is almost never mentioned and, when it is, it is mentioned in relation to the other issues. When ‘political cooperation’ is covered, security issues are central and the text shows that the EU’s willingness to contribute to address conflicts in the neighbourhood is related to its own security, rather than with human rights (European Commission: 2006b: 9).

Looking at the ‘responsibility’ of implementing and enhancing the policy, the use of the subject ‘the EU’ is recurrent, once again establishing a representation of the EU as a normative entity who defines the rules. However, this set of texts include, for the first time, references to the partners’ responsibility of achieving ‘greater economic development and stability and better governance’, something in which ‘the EU has a vital interest’ (Ibid, 2006b: 2). Even though this ‘responsibility’ seems flexible, the improvements in the referred areas are identified as conditions for EU support. As the previous set of texts, this also makes references to the non-accession characteristic of the ENP, making clear that the policy does not mean a future enlargement process. However, a difference is observed in this second set of texts, since it does not close the window to a possible integration of Eastern European countries in the EU, even though it is not directly opened through the ENP (Ibid.).

The concepts of ‘ownership’ and ‘differentiation’ are more emphasised in this set of texts than in the previous one. In fact, ‘differentiation’ is referred as a fundamental characteristic of the ENP since the 2003 communication ‘Wider Europe’. However, it is more detailed in this group of documents, showing that the EU does not see the ENP as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ policy (European Commission, 2007b: 3). Furthermore, ‘ownership’ is also more detailed, highlighting the fact that the action plans, which are the operational tools of the policy, are negotiated between the EU and its partners (European Commission, 2006b: 3). However, the mentions to the concept of ‘ownership’ are often followed by the idea of a negotiation based on EU values, establishing, once again, a representation of the EU as the normative entity towards the non-normative ‘others’, enhancing the imbalance in power relations between the parts (European Commission, 2007b: 3).

3.3.1.3 - The creation of the Eastern Partnership

In this section, we will analyse two communications from the Commission to the EP and the Council – the ‘Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008’, from April 2009; and ‘Eastern Partnership’, from December 2008 –, as well as the first joint declaration of the EaP, resulting from the Prague Summit, in May 2009. These selected texts define the main principles and objectives of the Eastern dimension of the ENP, and, above all, provide the historical and political context for the creation of the EaP.

The communication ‘Implementation of the ENP’ starts with a definition of 2008 as a ‘year of crisis’ (European Commission, 2009a: 2). In fact, 2008 was marked by three moments of ‘crisis’ (as defined by the EU), namely the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August

2008; the intervention of Israel in Gaza, between December 2008 and January 2009; as well as the global financial and economic crisis. Besides that, the EU suffered disruptions of gas supplies, as a consequence of a dispute between Ukraine and Russia (Ibid.). Due to this political context, the EU decided to create the Eastern and the Southern dimensions of the ENP, allocating more attention and resources to both, as a reaction to what was perceived as a threat to its security. In fact, the Commission clearly mentions in its first communication that the creation of the EaP comes from a 'strategic interest in seeing stability, better governance and economic development at its Eastern borders', simultaneously adding that it also comes from 'the need to help the Union's partners to consolidate their statehood and sovereignty', in a clear reference to the events in Georgia and Ukraine (Ibid.: 8).

As mentioned, the first communication described the implementation of the ENP four years after its establishment, and the challenges it faced due to the referred crises. Besides these challenges, the relations between the EU and the eastern partners improved, but a slow pace of reforms in the areas of democracy and respect for human rights was observed (Ibid.: 2; 10). The document provides a summary of the achievements of each partner country, both on the south and the east. Looking at the eastern partners, democracy, human rights, and rule of law are frequently mentioned in the first place, which may be not because they are seen as a priority, but because these were the areas in which more backslides were observed. In this context, it is important to note that, contrarily to the other eastern partners, Belarus is included in the category of 'other countries', with a very short summary that also includes countries of the southern dimension, such as Algeria, Libya, and Syria. In the case of Belarus, the only reference is to the release of political prisoners, which allowed the suspension of a visa ban imposed by the EU. Similarly to the other sets of texts analysed, Belarus was still not benefiting from the EU's support due to its 'low democratic standards', explaining why it is less emphasized throughout the texts and usually associated with backslides instead of positive achievements.

The communication 'Eastern Partnership' also mentions the conflict between Russia and Georgia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a moment that includes the ENP in a 'changing context', which created the necessity of a 'more ambitious partnership' (European Commission, 2008a: 2). In this context, the EU states its intention to send a 'lasting political message' of EU solidarity, support for democratic and market-oriented reforms, and consolidation of statehood and territorial integrity (Ibid.: 2-3). This 'message' targets the EaP countries, but also other actors in the region, especially Russia, taking into account its aggressive approach towards Georgia.

Furthermore, the principles of ‘joint ownership’ remain fundamental to the EaP, as the responsibilities are shared by the EU and the eastern partners. In this case, it is possible to identify a change in the EU’s discourse in terms of ‘responsibilities’, as, for the first time, they are referred to as being ‘shared’ and not exclusively one-sided, as seen in previous sections. This conveys a higher level of empowerment of the partners, as well as an equal share of responsibilities within the EaP. However, ownership is based on mutual commitments based on values established by the EU, used as pre-conditions for the partnership to work (Ibid.: 3).

In this context, the concept of ‘democracy’ is fundamental and it is, in fact, more emphasised than in the texts from previous sections. The EaP’s multilateral track provided a framework for challenges to be discussed through four policy platforms, with ‘democracy, good governance and stability’ as the first one to be described, including the first specific measure about democracy promotion observed in the texts analysed so far. Within this platform, the document presents the development of democratic institutions as a common challenge in all eastern partners, that should be achieved in accordance with their membership to other international organisations (IOs), such as the Council of Europe and OSCE. As already observed in other sections, the reference to IOs supports the legitimisation of the EU’s democracy promotion discourse. In addition, civil society is clearly emphasised within this platform, resulting in conclusions about ownership and legitimisation. In terms of ownership, the attention given to civil society shows an interest in empowering citizens and NGOs to support the necessary reforms. However, it can also be a way to present the EU as a coherent actor that, instead of negotiating directly with certain non-democratic governments, empowers civil society, thus legitimising the EU’s normative attitudes in other countries (Ibid.: 3; 11).

The last text of this section is the Joint Declaration of the Prague EaP Summit. The first main difference observed in this document, compared to others analysed so far, relates to authorship. This document was released by the Council, but was written in the presence of the President of the European Council, the Commission, the High Representative (HR), and representatives from the Member States and from the partner countries. Thus, this text is the first one to combine a wider range of voices, including the partner countries. Nonetheless, this characteristic does not add a lot of differences to content of the document, since it references similar concepts within similar contexts.

This declaration states that the EaP is based on principles of shared ownership and responsibility, as well as differentiation and conditionality. Its measures are based on international law and fundamental values, with the common endeavour of promoting peace in the region (Council of the European Union, 2009: 5-6). Nevertheless, the fact that this text has more

authors and includes the partner countries is proof of the commitments made within the partnership. Yet, if we compare the discourse it contains with the communications from the Commission, it is clear that, when the EU speaks by itself, the establishment of representations of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ are much more present and emphasised.

Thus, in terms of representation, this set of semiotic texts confirms the representations of the EU as a ‘normative self’ in contrast with the partner countries as ‘non-normative others’. Besides the overall representation of the EU as a democratic actor that respects human rights and the rule of law, the ENP is characterised as a ‘force of attraction’, meaning that both the values and the material benefits provided by the EU within the policy are represented as beneficial not only for the partner countries in general, but for each citizen. Thus, the EU is represented as an actor that brings ‘value-added’ and, thus, as a ‘force for good’ (European Commission, 2008: 10), reflecting an assimilation of the EU foreign policy power-related identities stemming from the academic debate (e.g., Barbé and Johanson-Nogués, 2008). On the other hand, the partners are characterised as the ‘non-democratic others’, the ‘others’ that need the EU to become more democratic, more human rights-friendly and, thus, ‘better’. The case of Belarus clearly illustrates this idea, since the country is always (briefly) mentioned with regard to its lack of democratic values, which must be improved if it wants to fully benefit from the EaP.

3.3.1.4 - The review of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011

Between 2010 and 2011, the southern neighbourhood experienced a wave of pro-democracy protests against the authoritarian regimes of some of these countries, namely Tunisia and Egypt. These experiences led to similar movements in other Middle Eastern and North African countries, even though these were not all successful. This wave of protests, commonly dubbed ‘Arab Spring’, was seen as a sign of hope towards regime change in the EU’s southern neighbourhood. In light of these events, the EU saw an opportunity to support these countries in implementing democratic regimes that included a higher level of respect for human rights and the rule of law. The civil war in Syria, following the protests calling for the resignation of the President Bashar al-Assad, became another concern for the EU in the neighbourhood (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021a). This context, as well as the possibilities given by the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, led the Commission to propose a review of the ENP in 2011.

In this section, we will analyse two joint communications from the Commission and the HR to the EP, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the

Committee of Regions (CoR): ‘A new response to a changing neighbourhood’, from May 2011; and ‘Delivering a new European Neighbourhood Policy’, from May 2012. These texts describe the new features of the reviewed ENP, as well as the results of each implementation in the first year, respectively. Furthermore, we will look at a report from the EP on the review of the ENP, from November 2011, as well as two joint declarations of the EaP summits in Warsaw (2011) and Vilnius (2013). This group of texts provide us with the historical and political context of this ENP review that marked a discursive shift of the EU towards the enhancement of democracy promotion in the neighbourhood, which became central, contrarily to what was previously observed.

As mentioned, events in the southern neighbourhood were the trigger for the 2011 ENP review, while also influencing the EU’s approach towards the eastern neighbouring countries, especially in what democracy promotion is concerned. Considering this context, the EU assumed the need to have a more flexible and tailored response in dealing with the rapid changes occurring in the neighbourhood. As observed in the communications, the Commission mentions the need to engage in support these processes of regime change towards democracy. In fact, the second communication states that

‘[the partner countries’] struggle for democracy, dignity, prosperity and safety from persecutions would be supported by Europe. Europe would also bring its experience and know how to help them address the challenges of transition from authoritarianism to democracy’ (European Commission and HR, 2012a: 2).

The use of the word ‘Europe’ instead of ‘the EU’ is embedded in meaning, since the EU (here ‘Europe’) suffered the same struggles for democracy, that also define its identity, and is now able to share that experience with the partners. Due to this past of conflicts, war and authoritarianism, and the long period of peace and democracy that lasts until today, ‘Europe’ is represented as not just an example, but as an ideal resulting from regime change to democracy and peace, that the partner countries were trying to achieve. Furthermore, ‘Europe’ is also represented as an ideal that can directly influence the partners’ path to democracy with its ‘know how’ coming from its past experience. Here, the EU is represented as more than its institutions, policies, or financial instruments; it is represented as an entity with a troubled historical past that learned the lesson and has now democracy as the cornerstone of its existence. Due to this historical narrative of peace and democratic integration, the EU sees itself as having the duty to support the partner countries in its democratic transitions, namely through the ENP based on

‘EU values’. This ‘historically contextual representation of social relations’ is, thus, ‘infused with power’ (Diez, 2005: 627).

As already mentioned, the review of the ENP brought new features to the policy and, thus, new concepts to be critically analysed. The communications characterise the new ENP as ‘mutually beneficial’, highlighting the importance of cooperation towards a win-win solution. We argue that the EU clearly aims to benefit from the partnership, especially in terms of security, as well as trade and economy. On the other hand, the EU represents itself as the entity that can bring benefits, or value, to the partners, representing them as less democratic or less economically opened in comparison to itself (European Commission and HR, 2011: 2)

Simultaneously, this review highlights the concept of ‘mutual accountability’, which is a progress towards more ownership and empowerment of the partner countries. Thus, not only are the partner countries made accountable to the EU, but also the EU must respond to partner countries. This new feature helps the EU legitimise its actions, presenting it as more open to scrutiny, especially concerning the democratic standards in certain Member States (Ibid.).

Furthermore, these two communications mention, for the first time, the idea that the EU does not want to impose a model for political reform, highlighting that each country has its own way of implementing democracy, improve human rights standards and the respect for rule of law, mentioning the importance of more differentiation within the ENP. However, following this idea, the texts mention that the ENP is based on ‘EU values’ and, thus, regardless of the trajectory followed, these should be implemented in partner countries. Thus, the implementation of these values in the practice of political, social, and economic life became a condition for EU support, with the possibility of sanctions and other political measures in case of backslides (Ibid.: 2-3).

As mentioned, democracy promotion became a priority of the renewed ENP and is the most covered topic on the Commission’s communications. Thus, the EU aims to support partners engaged in building ‘deep (and sustainable) democracy’, which is defined as the kind of democracy that lasts, because it is not only about the right to vote, but also about free speech, the creation of competing political parties, impartial justice, security from accountable police and the army and a non-corrupt civil service, among other civil rights. The 2011 communication contains a point about deep democracy, which is also the first one to be mentioned. Here, the features included in the concept are described in points, providing it not only clarity but greater emphasis. Another important idea to mention is the importance given to engagement with civil society (presented in a specific subtopic of the 2011 Communication) and the implementation of specific measures to support citizens and organisations in the struggle for

democracy, such as the creation of the European Endowment for Democracy and the Civil Society Facility. The importance ascribed to civil society, as already analysed in other sections, shows the EU's motivation towards the empowerment of the partners, but it also supports the legitimisation of its democratisation policy in other countries, since, in some cases, such as Belarus, it does not negotiate directly with authoritarian governments, but with civil society (Ibid.: 3-4). A final last consideration to make that, under the topic 'to support progress towards deep democracy', the text includes a box in grey that states that the EU 'shall adapt level of EU support to partners according to progress on political reforms and building deep democracy', showing the importance of conditionality for democracy promotion (Ibid.: 3).

The EP report welcomes the new features proposed by the Commission, highlighting the importance of values as the foundation of the ENP review. Besides the 'typical' values mentioned in the previously analysed texts, the report, as well as the Commission's communications and the joint declarations, mention more specific values concerning human rights, such as gender equality, minority rights, freedom of speech, or freedom of religion (European Parliament, 2011: 5).

Comparing the EP report with the Commission's communications, there are some clear warnings made by the EP. The first one is about the 'more for more' feature, that, according to the EP, should not mean the discourage of political reform in partner countries (Ibid.: 9). The EP calls attention to the importance of this review that constitutes a flexible response based on support for democratic transitions, meaning the EU and Member States are 'learning from [their policy's] failures and the mistakes with regard (...) to the complacent approach towards the authoritarian regimes in the Southern neighbourhood' (Ibid.: 6). Finally, the EP report congratulates the Commission on a bigger focus on democracy and prosperity and not only on security and migration control, especially in the southern neighbourhood (Ibid.).

The joint declarations of 2011 and 2013 include a wider range of authors and, thus, of voices, as mentioned in the previous section. The new features proposed by the Commission and welcomed by the EP are included in both declarations, and thus, were agreed upon by all parties. However, when comparing these texts with the other ones analysed in this section, it is clear that the concepts are the same and the text is similar, reminding us about the EU's voice as heard before. Thus, these declarations are a reflexion of the EU's proposals and the involvement of more authors, including the partner countries, does not add much difference.

In sum, this group of texts showed us a discursive shift towards the importance of democracy promotion in the neighbourhood, considering the historical and political context of some southern neighbourhood countries. The pro-democracy protests in Arab countries represented

a trigger for the EU to pay greater attention to democracy, human rights, and rule of law within the ENP, which ended up influencing the EaP. In this set of texts, we can observe that the EU continues to represent itself as a normative power, especially regarding democracy promotion, in contrast to a representation of the partner countries as ‘non-democratic’.

However, a new representation of the partner countries begins to develop, due to the events already mentioned, namely an idea of a group of countries that want a regime change towards democracy. This representation is emphasised through the idea that the EU acknowledges the ‘European aspirations and European choice’ of the partner countries, as it is mentioned in the 2012 communication, on the EP’s report, as well as on both joint declarations. This shows that the EU sees ‘democracy’ as ‘European’ and that every country who is struggling for democracy aims to become more ‘European’. Thus, the EU establishes a representation of ‘the other’ based on its own representation of a values-based entity (European Commission and HR, 2012a: 10; European Parliament, 2011: 7; Council of the EU, 2011: 3 and 2013: 1).

3.3.1.5 - The 2015 ENP review and the EU Global Strategy

Following the Arab Spring uprisings described in the previous section, the EU continued to face several challenges in the subsequent years, both inside and outside its borders. Between 2014 and 2015, the terrorist attacks on EU soil constituted a major security crisis. Simultaneously, the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the war in Eastern Ukraine constituted another crisis, this time on the other side of the border. This perception of instability and insecurity led to a discursive shift not only within the ENP, but within the EU Foreign Policy in general.

In this section, we will analyse a Communication from the Commission and the HR to the EP, the Council, the EESC and the CoR, the ‘Neighbourhood at a Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013’, from 2014. This text provides a first glimpse of the tension lived inside and outside the EU’s borders, since 2013 was characterised as a ‘year of crisis’ (European Commission and HR, 2014: 2). Furthermore, we will look at the Joint Declaration of the EaP Summit that took place in Riga, in 2015. This document is mainly a confirmation of what was mentioned in the previous one, placing a lot of emphasis on conflict resolution and mediation in the eastern countries. We will then analyse the Joint Communication of the Commission and the HR ‘Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy’, as well as the Council Conclusions of the review of the ENP (2015), which clearly show the discursive shift of the EU in light of the challenges it was dealing with in the neighbourhood. Subsequently, we will analyse the EU Global Strategy, a policy document launched in 2016 and

named ‘Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy’. This document presents the new strategy for EU foreign policy, providing us some discursive features that are important to analyse, taking into account the context and the discursive shift already mentioned.

The communication of 2014, as well as the joint declaration of 2015 provide us the context of crisis the EU was facing. In the first case, the text mentions not only the crises in Ukraine, namely the Euromaidan protests and the Russian aggression, but also the increment of terrorism in the EU, as well as in the southern neighbourhood. For these reasons, 2013 is described as a ‘year of crises’ (Ibid.). The joint declaration focuses on the conflicts in the eastern neighbourhood, namely in Ukraine (Crimea and Donbass), in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), in Armenia and Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and in Moldova (Transnistria), highlighting the external (Russian) pressure that some of these countries were facing (Council of the EU, 2015a: 3; European Commission and HR, 2014: 2). Consequently, these two documents show a first glimpse of a tendency that will be observed throughout this section, which is related to a bigger focus on security issues, to the detriment of democracy issues. In fact, the crisis in Ukraine reinforced an ‘ontological insecurity’ in the EU, creating a feeling of anxiety and fear (Freire, 2020: 2). Thus, if in the last section we observed a greater emphasis on democracy promotion, with new concepts and features being presented, on this set of documents we understand that the concerns with security and defence and the need to stabilise the neighbourhood are central.

Another important observation is the greater emphasis on co-ownership, differentiation, and the inputs of civil society to the policy. In fact, the EU recognises that ‘[w]illingness to reform cannot be imposed from outside and the expectation for reform must come from within societies’ (European Commission and HR, 2014: 8). This tendency towards ownership and a greater inclusion of civil society in ENP consultations is clear on the Review of the ENP as well.

The main conclusion of the analysis of these two documents has to do with the emphasis now given to security issues, even though the promotion of a deep and sustainable democracy remains fundamental. A good example is point 4 of the 2014 communication, that presents ‘[t]he EU as a diplomatic actor and a provider of security’ with the willingness to prevent and mediate conflicts and to ‘strengthen its contribution to security in its neighbourhood’, with the ultimate goal of ‘enhancing its own security’ (Ibid.: 17).

Moving on to the documents related to the 2015 ENP review, the communication starts once more with a contextualization of the major challenges the EU was facing at that moment, namely the ‘Arab uprisings’, the ‘violation of Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and

territorial integrity’, as well as other ‘protracted conflicts’ and the ‘terrorist attacks in Paris’ (European Commission and HR, 2015c: 2). For this reason, both the Commission and the Council state that ‘the stabilisation of the neighbourhood in political, economic and security terms will be the main political priority of the EU in the next years’ (Council of the EU, 2015a). The EU admits that it had limited leverage in solving these challenges, but now aims to improve its presence in mediating conflicts. In order to do so, the EU commits itself to a greater mutual ownership, flexibility, and differentiation, taking more into account the partners’ voices and a deeper engagement with civil society (European Commission and HR, 2015c: 2-3). In fact, the review of the ENP shows a greater involvement of the partner countries, especially of civil society, through several mentions to public consultations made under the scope of the ENP review. According to these consultations, the policy was ‘too prescriptive’ and there was a need to take partner’s preferences into account (Ibid.: 5).

Besides the greater emphasis on security and defence (including counterterrorism and migration policy), the ENP review presents good governance, democracy, rule of law, and human rights as priorities. Point 4, as other points in this document, starts with a box with some results from public consultations about democracy and human rights promotion. The public considered that the methods used to promote universal values through the ENP were ‘ineffective’ and an ‘obstacle to equal partnership’ (Ibid.). The use of this text box to highlight the perspectives and aspirations of the partner countries, as well as a summary of the EU’s measures to face those challenges, shows a great involvement of the EU with civil society and a recognition of its own flaws, especially following major crises.

Taking into account the context of crises already mentioned, it is already clear, through the texts analysed in this section so far, that there is a tendency to emphasise security and defence, to the detriment of democracy promotion, in contrast to what was observed in the 2011 ENP review, following the pro-democracy movements in Arab countries. This shows that the EU’s discourse adapts itself to what is happening in the neighbourhood, in order to safeguard its ‘vital interests’ and values. According to Schumacher (2016), the 2015 review is a turning-point for the policy, marking the end of a period in which the EU politicised its relations with the Southern neighbours, leading to the support of autocratic rule in the region.

The EU Global Strategy (EUGS), launched in 2016, is clearly a reaction to the insecurity felt inside and outside the borders of the EU and is worth to analyse, since it shapes EU foreign policy and, thus, the ENP and the EaP. In addition, the EUGS brings new concepts and features that are important to analyse, besides enhancing some of the representations of the EU and the ‘others’ and contributing to the establishment of new ones. Launched during a challenging

context, the EU's new strategy for foreign and security policy was called 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – a Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy'. The title 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe', displays a growing concern with the EU itself (and Member States), instead of the outside world. This discursive shift shows that the EU became more focused on protecting itself, instead of being a normative actor in the neighbourhood. The analysis of this document shows us how the EU became more focused on being a 'security' – rather than a 'democracy' – actor.

The EUGS starts with a foreword by Federica Mogherini, HR at the time, who provides the context of challenges and uncertainty the EU was facing due to terrorism, conflicts in the neighbourhood, and Euroscepticism, as evidenced in the 'Brexit' referendum. During this complex context, the EU had to position itself as a relevant actor, and, thus, Mogherini clearly states that due to a 'threat to the EU's existence', the EU aimed to be a 'global security provider' (EU, 2016: 3). In fact, Mogherini affirms that 'the idea that Europe is an exclusively "civilian power" does not do justice to an evolving reality' and that 'soft power and hard power go hand in hand' (Ibid.: 4). This also shows a possible normative retraction of the EU that may affect the democracy promotion improvements observed in previous sections.

In addition, Mogherini defines what 'global' means in this context: it is not just defined in the geographical sense, but also in terms of a wider range of policies with a focus 'in and around' Europe, showing a bigger focus on the EU and its Member States (Ibid.). In quotes such as 'our own security, and our partners', the EU always appears first, as a priority (Ibid.). This is clear throughout the document, in which the EU's normative motivation is more related to its own safety and protection of its interests and values, than with the well-being of partners.

The EUGS is divided into four main chapters: 'A Global Strategy to Promote our Citizens' Interests', 'The Principles Guiding our External Action', 'The Priorities of our External Actions' and, finally, 'From Vision to Action'. Looking at the first chapter, interests and values are described as interconnected, and the EU shows an interest in promoting its values in the world. In fact, the EU's values conflate with its own interests, based on the idea that the more democratic and peaceful the world is, the more protected the EU is. This chapter enumerates and describes the main 'vital interests' of the EU, namely: 'Peace and Security', 'Prosperity', 'Democracy', and a 'Rules-based order'. We can observe that security appears first, followed by prosperity, and democracy only appears in third place, reinforcing a greater emphasis placed on security to the detriment of democracy and human rights (Ibid.: 13-14).

Paying attention to 'The Principles Guiding our External Action', these are 'unity' in view of 'power shifts and power diffusion' (Ibid.: 16), 'engagement' in the marketplace and in the

co-shaping the rules that govern it' (Ibid.: 17), 'responsibility' in addressing root causes of conflict and poverty and to 'promote the universality of human rights' (Ibid.) and 'partnership', sharing the responsibility of 'advancing a rules-based global order' (Ibid.: 18). This chapter shows us the EU's willingness to engage more actively in shaping the global order based on its values and rules, considering its belief in having the responsibility to do so, especially in light of great challenges. Thus, the EU represents itself as a 'responsible actor', with moral authority, due to its history, to promote its values in the world and, specifically, in its neighbourhood.

The 'Priorities of our External Action' are: 'The security of Our Union', 'State and Societal Resilience to our East and South', 'An Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises', 'Cooperative Regional Orders', and a 'Global Governance for the 21st Century'. As in previous instances, the first priority presented is the EU's security, which is perceived as being threatened by external entities or circumstances. As affirmed in the document, terrorism, hybrid threats, climate change, economic volatility, and energy insecurity put the EU's people and territory in danger, challenging 'European values' and '*our* European way of life' (Ibid.: 18). This last expression is, in fact, problematic, as it creates a separation between the 'European way of life' and other ways of life, usually represented as less democratic, less human rights friendly, less stable and secure and, thus, as a threat that needs to be faced and changed.

The second priority focuses more on the neighbourhood (but also beyond), namely in the resilience of its states and societies. 'Resilience' is defined as 'the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises' (Ibid.: 23). This need to 'promote resilience in its surroundings' is based on the need to protect the EU's 'vital interests' against the 'fragility' of other states that are (continuously) represented as a threat (Ibid.) In a section dedicated to the EU's neighbours, this willingness to invest in resilience is also clear, reflected in the commitment to ownership and differentiation, to ensure each state and each society find its own ways to reform, though the latter must also be based on EU values and is to be implemented due to its 'enduring power of attraction' (Ibid.: 25).

Looking now at the fourth priority of promoting 'cooperative regional orders', the document mentions 'Russia's violation of international law' and the annexation of Crimea, which the EU would not accept. This reference shows the importance of this conflict in the discursive shift of the EU towards a great focus on security and defence (Ibid.: 33).

Finally, in the last priority, the EU reaffirms its commitment to a global order based on norms, such as peace and security, prosperity and democracy, and its role in enhancing these. This global order is based on international law, namely the principles of the UN Charter. This

priority reflects once again the need to reset the EU's role as a normative power in the world, especially in the neighbourhood, in light of complex challenges (Ibid.: 39).

The last chapter of the EUGS, 'From Vision to Action' informs us about the EU's need to act according to the vision presented throughout the document. As mentioned, the EU considers having the 'responsibility' to engage in the world, but it requires 'credibility' to do so, as affirmed in this chapter. This credibility comes from its union, achievements, and power of attraction, as well as the effectiveness of its policies and adherence to its values (Ibid.: 44). Thus, the EU represents itself as an actor that has the 'responsibility' to promote its values in world politics and to help, or even save, those that are 'less civilised' (Ribeiro, 2019).

In previous sections, we mentioned the use of 'the EU' as subject to several actions within the ENP and the EaP in the analysed texts, which showed us how the EU was the main voice of the policy. We also mentioned the use of prosopopoeia, since 'the EU' has several voices and thus is always represented. In the EUGS, instead of the use of 'the EU' as the subject, we observe that the subject is 'the Europeans'. This choice is embedded in meaning, since 'the Europeans' can be symbolically identified as more than the people of Europe, the continent, but the people who live in a space of values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, and peace. These values constitute the already mentioned 'European way of life' that allegedly needs to be 'protected' from external threats. Thus, more than protecting 'the EU' as an institution, the EUGS focuses on the need to protect its values and norms.

Simultaneously, the EUGS establishes a representation of 'others' as a threat that needs to be faced; as 'unstable', 'fragile', and as having a 'fractured identity', besides not following 'universal' norms and values (EU, 2016: 4; 23). Thus, 'the others', often unknown, provoke fear in 'Europeans' that want to preserve their more prosperous and safer 'way of life'.

3.3.1.6 - From the EUGS to the 'Eastern Partnership beyond 2020'

On this section, we will analyse two main documents that inform us about the evolution of the ENP, and especially the EaP, in the years following the launching of the EUGS until 2020. These are the Joint Declaration of the EaP Summit that took place in Brussels, in 2017, as well as the Joint Communication from the Commission and the HR to the EP, the Council, the EESC and the CoR, 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all', from March 2020.

The Joint Declaration of the EaP Summit reinforces the idea that the partnership is based on common values and mutual interests, as well as the features brought or reinforced by the

2015 review, such as shared ownership and responsibility, differentiation, and mutual accountability (Council of the EU, 2017: 1). It expresses that the summit participants recognise the need to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, as well as the principles of international law, based on the UN Charter and the OSCE Charter. Furthermore, and similarly to what was observed in the 2015 joint declaration, the EU expresses its commitment to the partners' territorial integrity and sovereignty, considering the conflict in Ukraine, confirming its concerns about the 'continued violations of principles of international law in many parts of the region' (Ibid.: 2-3). It also follows one of the main novelties of the EUGS – state and societal resilience –, highlighting its importance. It also asserts the EaP's support for the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, confirming the importance of civil society and gender equality (Ibid.).

Similarly to what was analysed in the previous section, the document brings attention to 'the EU's strengthened role in conflict resolution and confidence building' (Ibid.: 3). In terms of democracy, the declaration, as well as the communication analysed below, are more focused on the concept of 'good governance', that includes reforms in public administration, fighting against corruption, fostering human security, and developing effective, accountable, transparent, and democratic institutions, according to 'European standards'. In addition, good governance is also related with the reform of the security sector, namely border management, fighting organised crime and human trafficking, addressing irregular migration, tackling hybrid threats, and countering terrorism. This focus on security follows what was observed in the previous section, considering the conflict in Ukraine and the terrorist attacks and growing extremism both in the EU and in its neighbourhood (Ibid.: 6).

The declaration includes an annex with the 20 deliverables for 2020, which are 20 key areas with targets to accomplish by then. The first area encompasses 'cross-cutting deliverables', covering topics such as the importance of civil society, gender equality, non-discrimination, and strategic communication (Ibid.: 11-12). Besides the deliverables for 'economic development and market-opportunities', among others, there is also a focus on 'strengthening institutions and good governance', which includes rule of law and anti-corruption measures, independence of the judiciary, public administration reforms, as well as the willingness for a stronger cooperation in the area of security (Ibid.: 14-15).

The joint communication of the Commission and the HR of March 2020 reinforces the commitment to the UN 2030 Agenda, since it contributes to the goal of 'increasing stability, prosperity, and resilience of the EU's neighbours as set out in the Global Strategy (...) and the 2015 European neighbourhood policy review' (European Commission and HR, 2020b: 1). This

document describes the EaP's main achievements, considering the 20 deliverables for 2020 set out in the 2017 EaP summit joint declaration, that were based on four main policy areas: stronger economy, stronger governance, stronger connectivity, and stronger society (Ibid.). Within these main policy areas, this communication affirms that the EaP has been fundamental to 'bringing the EU and the partner countries closer together'. This is important to highlight, since in previous texts, including the 2017 joint declaration, the (more evidently asymmetric) goal was to bring the Eastern partners closer to the EU (Ibid.).

Besides a description of the achievements, the communication defines the future policy approach of the EaP and its main policy objectives. The first objective is related with 'resilient economies' (Ibid.: 4), while 'accountable institutions, the rule of law, and security' come in second. These objectives cover good governance, democratic institutions, rule of law, anti-corruption measures, fight against organised crime, human rights, and security, among others. The text shows that the importance given to rule of law is related to the confidence it creates for financial investment, which can be seen as an increase in economic and trade concerns within the EaP (Ibid.: 8-9).

The analysed documents show a continuation of the EU's discourse in its need to create resilient states and societies, with a focus on security and defence. In addition, these documents showed an increasingly greater focus on economic issues, which can be observed through the order of priorities described in the texts, as well as the references to rule of law as a prerequisite to financial and economic confidence. Thus, though democracy promotion is still a priority, it is not addressed with the same emphasis, especially when compared to the 2011 review. Thus, it is, again, possible to conclude that the EU's discourse shifts depending on the context lived inside and outside its borders and its perception of what a 'threat' or a challenge is.

In this first part of the analysis, we observed the main discursive shifts of the EU within the ENP, and specifically the EaP, according to the political circumstances at home and in the neighbourhood, as well as the (re)produced representations. Considering our goal of looking closer at the EU's democracy promotion discourse, we will now move to the second part of the analysis that will focus on the EU's discourse towards three EaP partners, namely Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine. The choice of these partners has to do with the observation of major pro-democracy movements, that were stronger or weaker depending on the circumstances, but that are important to analyse, especially considering the EU's discourse in the face of this tendency towards democracy, mainly coming from civil society.

3.4.2 - Part 2 – EU’s discourse towards Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine

3.4.2.1 - Belarus

In this section about the EU’s discourse towards Belarus we will mainly analyse press releases, statements, speeches, and declarations from the Commission, the Council, and the EP. The fact that Belarus does not have, until today, full ENP (nor EaP) membership, due to its non-alignment with EU values, makes it impossible to analyse other types of documents, such as Country Reports, that will be analysed in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, as these do not exist. We will analyse documents produced following the publication of the 2003 ‘Wider Europe’ Communication and following the parliamentary elections and the referendum that took place in 2004, until the presidential elections in 2020 and subsequent protests.

The relations between the EU and Belarus were always controversial, considering the nexus between values and security, since, on the one hand, the EU would like to ‘[win] hearts and minds’ of the Belarussian population, but it is highly concerned with its own security and stability (Bosse, 2009: 1), as we will see throughout the analysis.

In 2004, Belarus held parliamentary elections, as well as a referendum, which, according to the EU, failed to meet international standards. Following the electoral process, and in addition to the ongoing persecution of members of civil society and the political opposition, Belarussian authorities acted with violence against peaceful protesters that demanded fair elections and a democratic regime. Following this, the Dutch Presidency of the Council issued a declaration about the elections and the referendum, stating that these were not fair and did not meet the rules of international organisations, before, during, and after the day of the voting. Thus, the Council Presidency declared its support to the civil society and the democratic forces. In addition, it affirmed that Belarus could still benefit from the ENP, but only if it were to follow the fundamental values upon which it is based (Council of the EU, 2004d: 1).

In 2005, Benita Ferrero-Waldern, EU Commissioner for External Relations, spoke at the Belarus Assistance Co-ordination Workshop in Lithuania. In this workshop, Ferrero-Waldern explained that the main goal of these sessions was to ‘undertake fundamental democratic and economic reforms [and] support civil society’ (Ferrero-Waldern, 2005a: 2). In reaction to the 2004 elections, the Commissioner stated the EU’s willingness to improve support to civil society, while applying sanctions to Belarussian authorities for not following the international rules of a democratic electoral process (Ibid.: 3). The importance of the work of civil society towards a more democratic country is here express and remains, in fact, the main focus of the

EU's support to Belarus. Ferrero-Waldern acknowledged that democracy could not be imposed from outside, requiring changes from within. However, the EU stays committed to supporting countries that want to follow a path towards democracy. Finally, the commissioner highlighted that, if Belarus changed its non-democratic approach to elections, protests, the media, political opposition, and civil society organisations, it would be able to benefit from the ENP. In fact, Ferrero-Waldern affirms that '[w]e want to build a close partnership with Belarus and to share with its people the benefits of our common European home' (Ibid.: 2). This idea of 'European home' is important to highlight since Belarus is already part of the European continent. However, to the EU, being 'European' also symbolically represents being a democracy.

This idea of 'Europe' is usually antagonistic to the 'non-western world', two representations that are not only based on geography, but mainly on values and norms-based identities. In fact, a declaration issued by the Luxembourgish Council Presidency in 2005, still about the persecution to protesters, civil society organisation and trade unions following the 2004 elections and anticipating the presidential elections of 2006, 'regrets the increasing of anti-western language in state-controlled media and in public statements' (Council of the EU, 2005: 1). From the EU's perspective, Belarus was aligning its discourse with Russia, and thus isolating itself from the EU and its 'European values'. Following the same discursive approach, in July 2005, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner gave a speech at the EP about the political situation in Belarus, where she condemned the repression lived in the country, which was making it impossible for Belarus to fully benefit from the ENP and 'from taking its rightful place in the family of European nations' (Ferrero-Waldner, 2005b: 2).

In 2006, Belarus held Presidential elections, that were, once again, considered fraudulent, in addition to the environment of repression and violence during and after the process. In the same year, the Austrian Council Presidency issued two declarations condemning both the pre-election and the post-election situation in the country where severe human rights violations occurred. The Belarusian authorities did not respect the rights to campaign, to protest, freedom of expression, association, and information, which made the EU react with restrictive measures towards specific individuals involved. The Council Presidency affirmed, again, that the conduct of the Belarusian authorities would not allow the country and its population to benefit from the ENP. Furthermore, it emphasized the willingness of the EU to provide a stronger support to civil society and those fighting for a democratic Belarus (Council of the EU, 2006a: 1; Ibid., 2006b: 1).

In the same year, Ferrero-Waldner gave a speech at the EP about the presidential elections in Belarus, regretting the repressive measures of the authorities towards civil society, including

widespread detentions, violation of freedom of expression, association, and assembly, violent suppression of protests, and problems with counting the votes, among others. The Commissioner reinforced the EU's intention to support democratisation in the country through civil society and increase the EU's visibility therein. This would 'show Belarus and its people that an alternative – a democratic, open future – is possible.' (Ferrero-Waldner, 2006a: 2). Here the EU constructs itself as a 'democratic alternative' in contrast with the 'authoritarian imposition' made until that moment.

In 2007, the President of the Commission sent a message to the Belarusian people, on the celebration of the signature of the Treaty of Rome, on 25 March. José Manuel Barroso took the opportunity of the anniversary of the treaty to share that, since 1957, 'the visionary idea of a unified Europe truly started to become a reality'. This vision 'transformed the European continent', ending wars and becoming 'a unique pole of stability and democracy', that 'Europeans are rightly proud of' (Barroso, 2007a: 1). Following this, Barroso affirmed that the EU was ready to enter into a full partnership with Belarus, depending on its commitment to EU values, and thus taking 'its rightful place in a European family that shares the values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law' (ibid.). The use of this anniversary to send a message to Belarus and the reference to the EU's historical past reinforces the path towards democracy that EU Member States followed, and that Belarus could also follow to be considered 'truly European'. Thus, Belarus is constructed, once again, as non-European, not in the geographical sense, but in the normative sense.

In 2009, the year of the creation of the EaP, a high-level round table discussion on the EU's Eastern Partnership project and the future of Belarus-EU relations took place at the CoR headquarters. The press release of the discussion states that 'tradition and historical circumstances must not prevent Belarus from moving rapidly towards the development of a strong local and regional democracy' (Committee of the Regions, 2009: 1). This sentence is, in fact, the title of the press release. The panel of this discussion was composed by several EU officers and ambassadors that highlighted the importance of taking the country's historical circumstances into account, especially when promoting or implementing reforms. It also shows that, since 2008, there was an improvement in EU-Belarus relations, triggered by the release of political prisoners. Finally, it asks for a more constructive cooperation with Belarus, fewer sanctions and less pressure (ibid.). In fact, this text shows that EU-Belarus relations improve when there are concessions in terms of human rights protection, and, thus, a 'less aggressive' discourse towards the country, which will be seen through the analysis of the next semiotic texts.

In June of the same year, Ferrero-Waldner, in an official visit to Belarus made a speech entitled ‘The European Union and Belarus: moving closer together?’. During the speech, the Commissioner highlighted what Belarus had to do to receive a stronger support from the EU and fully benefit from the EaP. Ferrero-Waldner explained that following European values would be the best solution for all countries, since ‘[w]e believe that these are the values that give people the best quality of life, wherever they live in the world’ (Ferrero-Waldner, 2009a: 1). Thus, she stated that Belarus should make a ‘European choice’ (Ibid.: 4), representing the EU not just as an example (among others), but as a model to be followed by Belarus.

In 2011, Catherine Ashton, EU HR and Vice President of the Commission (HR/VP), spoke at the EP, expressing concerns about the 2010 Presidential elections in Belarus, which were neither free nor fair. Besides that, the post-electoral environment was characterised by repression and persecution of members of the political opposition, civil society organisations, and protesters. In view of this situation, there was an increase in commitment towards civil society and the support that the EU should provide thereto, which can be observed in the analysed text. Simultaneously, Ashton affirmed that ‘the events we witnessed were an affront to our vision of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy’ (Ashton, 2011a: 2).

In the same year, Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, had a meeting with the Belarusian opposition, following which he stated, through a press release, that the EU is a community of values that guide its policies. He also affirmed that the EU still believes in a democratic Belarus ‘with its proper place in European cooperation’ (Van Rompuy, 2011: 1). This corroborates the representation of ‘Europe’ as a synonym of ‘democracy’, which means that those who do not have a democratic regime are not/cannot be considered fully European, even if they share the continent. In December, Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP gave a speech at the Carnegie Europe event ‘Transforming Belarus: Ways ahead’. The name of the event shows an interest in actually *transforming* Belarus through the promotion of values and norms in the country. This transformation is ‘towards a European future for the citizens of Belarus’, which is the name of the speech given by the Commissioner. Once more, a ‘European future’ is equated with a ‘democratic future’, which is seen as an alternative to the ‘fear’ that the people of Belarus were living (Füle, 2011b: 1-2).

Still regarding this representation of the EU as ‘European’ and the latter’s equating with ‘democratic’, following parliamentary elections in Belarus in 2012, Füle gave a speech at the EP, during a debate on Belarus. During his speech, the Commissioner condemned the parliamentary elections that were not in line with international standards (Füle, 2012d: 2). Besides the reinforcement of the support to civil society, Füle affirmed that ‘[t]he European message

should be brought to as many ordinary Belarusians as possible' (ibid.: 3). A year later, Füle was back at the EP to give a speech about the EU policy for Belarus, in which he expressed the desire to 'bring Belarus back to the heart of Europe where it belongs' (Füle, 2013b: 3).

In fact, the idea of 'Europe' as more than a continent, but as a community of values constructing the EU's identity is clearly expressed in these texts. This is much clearer when the target country is Belarus, considering its history of electoral fraud and human rights violations. The constant reference to 'bring Belarus back to Europe' is, in fact, an expression of the construction of these identities through the EU's discourse, making the EU as the 'true European', based on values and norms, and Belarus as 'not entirely European', because it does not follow these values, even though it is part of the European continent.

The subsequent years were still marked by episodes of fraudulent elections or repression towards the political opposition. Nonetheless, the EU's discourse tended to become 'smoother' when Belarus gave some positive signs of respect for human rights or alignment with international electoral standards, as mentioned. Simultaneously, the EU continued to give major support to civil society and to apply sanctions to members of the government, as observed. This support to civil society, represents a positive sign towards ownership, since it leaves the decision of becoming a more democratic country to the people, despite the clear interest of influencing regime change in the country to have a more stable neighbour. At the same time, it supports the EU's legitimacy as a 'normative actor' in the world, since it does not mean support for an autocratic government, but for the civil society fighting for democracy.

EU-Belarus relations were always marked by tensions, with some moments of appeasement, as mentioned. However, 2020 was marked by another important backslide, due to the presidential elections on 9 August that led to protests with an unprecedented number of people on the streets, asking for the resignation of President Lukashenko. Between August and September 2020, the Commission, the Council, and the EP have firmly condemned the illegalities observed during the electoral process, as well as the wave of violence against members of the opposition and protesters. Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen, in a statement following a joint meeting with European Council President Charles Michel, stated that 'the people of Belarus want change', considering the enormous number of people protesting on the streets following the elections (Von der Leyen, 2020: 1). In view of this situation, the President of the Commission declared that the EU would 'stand by the people of Belarus', 'sanction those responsible for violence', and that the EU is 'ready to accompany peaceful democratic transition of power in Belarus' (Ibid.). Furthermore, the European Council President also condemned the 'disproportionate and unacceptable violence' occurred after the elections and confirmed the

sanctions to Belarusian authorities. Michel highlighted the importance of an ‘inclusive national dialogue’ to ‘end the crisis and end violence’. In fact, the European Council President affirmed that the situation lived in Belarus was putting the latest improvements in the EU-Belarus relations at risk (Michel, 2020: 1). This shows that the EU’s discourse towards Belarus becomes more rigid in moments of crisis, despite always being considerably strict, especially when compared to Georgia or Ukraine, as we will see in subsequent sections of the dissertation.

Finally, a resolution from the EP on the situation in Belarus rejected the ‘so-called’ Presidential election and did not recognise Lukashenko as President. The EP condemned the violence and intimidation targeting peaceful protesters and organisers of strikes. It states the support to the people of Belarus, as well as to a peaceful democratic transition, in addition to asking for more financial support to civil society (European Parliament, 2020: 7-9).

In sum, the EU’s discourse towards Belarus is often rigid, especially towards the countries’ authorities and President Lukashenko. There are no relevant discursive shifts towards Belarus since 2004, with the exception of an easing when human rights standards have improved in the country, especially when political prisoners have been released. In terms of representations, we can observe in the semiotic texts analysed that the EU constructs itself as the ‘true Europe’, not directly due to its geographical position, but because of the values it promotes, such as democracy and human rights protection. Contrarily, Belarus is constructed as ‘non-European’, having a long path to go until becoming part of the ‘family of European nations’. As mentioned, Belarus is part of the European continent, which means that the EU sees ‘Europe’ not just in the geographic sense, but as a continent with an identity based on values and norms.

3.4.2.2 - Georgia

In 2003, Georgia went through one of the most important moments of its history as an independent country. The Rose Revolution, a peaceful uprising led by Mikheil Saakashvili, head of the United National Movement, led to the fall of President Eduard Shevardnadze, following fraudulent elections, human rights violations, and widespread corruption (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021b). The Rose Revolution was an important step into Georgia’s approximation to the EU. In fact, a declaration of the Italian Presidency of the Council, from November 2003, showed satisfaction with the peaceful outcome of the political crisis, highlighting the importance of peace and stability in Georgia, but also in the whole of the South Caucasus (Council of the EU, 2003: 1).

At this time, Georgia was still not on the ENP plan (as it did not exist yet), but this was a crucial moment for that path, followed by an improvement in electoral standards. In 2004, the Irish Council Presidency issued another declaration welcoming the conclusions of international organisations regarding the presidential election in Georgia, that happened at the beginning of the year. The EU stated that it remained committed to supporting Georgia in the preparation of free and fair elections and that it ‘looks forward to helping Georgia and the other countries of the South Caucasus to come closer to the European family’ (Council of the EU, 2004b: 1). Similarly to what was observed in the analysis of semiotic texts related to Belarus, Georgia is a country of the European continent, however, from the EU’s perspective, it was still far from the ‘European family’ due to its problems with following democratic values. The use of the word ‘family’ to refer to the EU constructs an idea of a group of countries with strong ties that bind them together – based on democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

In the same year, Romano Prodi, President of the Commission, made his first visit to the region, giving a speech at the Tbilisi University, which, he states, ‘shows the EU’s growing interest in the region’ (Prodi, 2004: 2). In his speech, Prodi demonstrated a clear intention of strengthening EU relations with the South Caucasus countries, since the prosperity and stability of the region is ‘for the benefit of all’ (Ibid.). He also mentioned the importance of the Rose Revolution but stated that there was still progress to be made in terms of democracy. The EU would support this path, and the welcoming of Georgia into the ENP, on 14 June, was an important step (Ibid.: 3). The Commission President clarified that the partnership was based on common values and interests, differentiation, and ownership, the common features of the ENP (Ibid.: 4). In comparison to Belarus, it is interesting to observe that, in the first case, there are no mentions to these features and the discourse towards the country is much more political than technical. In the case of Georgia, we see that the two go hand in hand. This is related to the differing democratic trajectory of each country and the respective alignment with EU values. Furthermore, Prodi highlighted the benefits of the ENP in a ‘country which is still grappling with conflict and misery’, highlighting that, in contrast with Georgia, ‘Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure or so free’ (Ibid.). Prodi emphasised how war and conflict were part of the past, followed by a period of peace and stability that lasts until today, for which the establishment of the EU was essential. Thus, the EU aims to promote a ‘ring of well-governed, peaceful and stable countries’, which includes Georgia; however, Prodi added that the responsibility of achieving this does not belong to the EU but to the partner country (Ibid.: 5).

In 2005, the Commission delivered a communication to the Council about the ENP with recommendations for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Egypt, and Lebanon. Looking at the

recommendations for Georgia, the role of the Rose Revolution is, once more, highlighted, with progress in the areas of elections, the fight against corruption, as well as macro-economic performance. However, the communication stresses the remaining challenges, related to the rule of law and democratic checks and balances. In fact, in the first years of the ENP, the democratic standards in Georgia were a matter of concern for the EU and, thus, a priority. The EU-Georgia Action Plan (2006) clearly shows that democracy, the rule of law and human rights promotion were priorities, followed by security and defence, and economic and trade issues. The document sets priorities for action, in which ‘strengthen[ing] the rule of law’ and ‘democracy’ come up as top priorities. Other priorities such as improving the business and investment climate, fighting corruption, economic development, or promoting the peaceful resolution of internal conflicts are also listed (European Commission, 2006a: 4-12). As for the general objectives and actions, the first to be mentioned is ‘political dialogue and reform’, namely ‘democracy and rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms’ (Ibid: 12).

In fact, the concern with democracy in Georgia is expressed through other declarations by Council Presidencies in 2007 and 2008, with some improvements but also drawbacks (Council of the EU, 2007: 1; Ibid, 2008.: 1). However, 2008 was marked by a major security crisis, related to the ‘military incidents and provocations’ of Russia in Georgia, which led to the ‘outbreak of an armed conflict over the control of South Ossetia’s territory’ (European Commission, 2009b: 2). Despite this, Georgia still made progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. In September 2008, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili announced a ‘new wave of democratic reforms’, an important one since the Rose Revolution, including amendments to the constitution limiting the presidential powers (Ibid.: 4). There was also an improvement in human rights and fundamental freedoms, namely in terms of media freedom, criminalising torture, and ill treatment, as well as women’s rights (Ibid.: 5-6). Despite the challenges, these improvements in the areas of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights clearly made the EU engage more with Georgia, which is clear in its discourse, which becomes much more ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘friendly’ over time.

In 2010, Enlargement and ENP Commissioner Štefan Füle gave a speech at the EP, in which he stated that the countries of the South Caucasus sent ‘a clear and loud message to Europe’, wanting closer relations with the EU. In 2011, the idea of a ‘European choice’ made by Georgia is also highlighted during Füle’s speech at the International Conference on ‘Georgia’s *European Way*’. This speech was done in the context of the revision of the ENP in 2011, following the crisis related to the Arab Spring and the terrorist attacks described in the first part of this analysis. According to Füle, EU-Georgia relations had gradually strengthened,

especially due to the Georgia's 'European choice of adherence to the *Universal* values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law', though there remained much to be done in areas such as sustainable development, reducing social and regional inequalities, and creating jobs and higher living standards. This path is identified as the 'European way' (Füle, 2011a: 3). Additionally, the 'European way' also means creating benefits for the whole of the Georgian population. Finally, the Commissioner admits that it might not be the 'easiest way', but it is the 'real route to political and economic stability' for Georgia (Ibid.: 4).

In 2012, at another Conference on 'Georgia's European Way', Füle expressed his contentment with Georgia's progress, in the context of the Prague and Warsaw EaP summits, despite some challenges. The summits had set the agenda for the EU-Georgia partnership, which is mainly based on values. To the Commissioner, values are crucial, since they are part of the national identity, as well as of the European identity. Füle affirmed that 'there is a European way of life which we are proud of at this time of globalization' and that 'sustaining this way of life requires that democracy and the rule of law go together with economic opportunities and competitiveness' (Füle, 2012b: 1). Once more, Füle, on behalf of the EU, demarks 'Europe' from 'the others', in the sense that the EU Member-states are 'more Europeans' than Georgia, not because of their geographic position, but because of their adherence to 'universal' values (ibid.: 2). Besides this, the Commissioner also opens a window into Georgia's accession to the EU, mentioning that there was no agreement on that, but there was also no limit on the depth the integration could achieve. This is, in fact, an expression of contentment with the progress made by Georgia, but also a way to provide a possible 'carrot', encouraging Georgia to follow the 'European way' and thus, improving stability in the region, from the EU's perspective (Ibid.: 5).

In the same year, HR/VP Catherine Ashton made some remarks at the end of her visit to Georgia, congratulating the country on a historic parliamentary election, which meant the first democratic transfer of power since Georgia's independence. This meant the upholding of 'European values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law' (Ashton, 2012: 1). However, in 2013, following the referred to transition of power, the polarisation of the political environment was clear. This situation was commented on by Ashton and Füle in a statement that highlights the importance of a healthy power-sharing between political actors and institutions, 'in line with shared European values' (European Commission, 2013a: 1). At the 2013 Conference on 'Georgia's European Way', Füle clarifies that the political situation that followed the election in Georgia did not mean the country was leaving its 'pro-European, pro-reform and pro-democracy orientation', even though the EU was paying attention to it (Füle, 2013a: 2). Additionally,

the Commissioner called attention to the importance of the Vilnius summit, which should mean ‘a genuinely European path’, with steps to be taken ‘in a European way’. This would ‘make Georgia more attractive for its own citizens’ (Ibid.: 2-3).

2014 was marked by one of the major crises experienced in the Eastern neighbourhood. The Euromaidan uprising, followed by Russia’s annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, and the conflict in Eastern Europe influenced the EU’s discourse towards Georgia. Considering the Russian aggression in 2008, and the later developments in Ukraine, Štefan Füle issued a statement in 2014 with a ‘message of EU support to Georgia’. The commissioner referred to events in Ukraine, stating that ‘Russia’s behaviour (...) in Georgia is also a matter for serious concern’ (Füle, 2014a: 1). Keeping in mind the pressure made on Ukraine due to the signature of the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, the Commission affirmed that ‘the EU will stand firmly by Georgia should it too experience any kind of pressure’ (European Commission, 2014: 2). Furthermore, the commissioner highlighted the importance of the AA and clarified that the EU did not want to undermine Georgia’s traditional values. In fact, Füle argued that the EU follows ‘universal’ values of tolerance and, thus, respects diversity (Ibid.).

In the same year, Füle gave a speech about the myths and benefits of the AA, affirming that it meant more than rules and regulations, and that it embedded the core values of the EU. This would bring Georgia to resemble an EU Member State (Füle, 2014c: 1). Besides other myths, Füle clarified that signing the AA did not mean that Georgia would have to choose between Russia and the EU, and that it was not an attempt by the ‘west’ to impose its own values on Georgia (Ibid.: 3). The clarification of the first myth was clearly a reaction to events in Ukraine, about which Füle tried to make clear that the AA was not a confrontation with Russia and that Georgia would not necessarily suffer the same consequences as Ukraine. As for the second myth tackled, it tried to appease the suspicion of certain parts of the Georgian population, as well as of other neighbours, including Russia, related to the idea that traditional values would be questioned.

Finally, in June 2014, Georgia signed the AA and Commission President Barroso made some remarks at the signing ceremony, confirming it as a historic day. The signature, according to Barroso, showed the partner’s willingness to ‘live by the European spirit with European values’, even though ‘[these agreements] are not against anyone’ (Barroso, 2014b: 1). After that, Füle gave a speech during the ratification of the AA, stating that it ‘progressively brings the country to the European mainstream’, since the country would ‘embed into its public life core European values’ and become an ‘increasingly prosperous part of a wider European continent’ (Füle, 2014e: 1).

In 2015, the Commission and the HR/VP released a joint staff working document about the implementation of the ENP in Georgia in 2014, accompanying the document ‘implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2014’. The document shows that Georgia made some progress in implementing a deep and sustainable democracy and higher human rights standards, as well as measures to fight corruption, improve the prison system, and the anti-discrimination law, among others. However, problems with freedom of association and assembly during the electoral campaign remained. Thus, the Commission and the HR/VP argued that Georgia should invest the separation of powers, improvement of the political climate and the reform of the justice system (European Commission and HR, 2015a: 2). These improvements, along with the signature of the AA caused a good impression with the EU, with enthusiasm towards the country growing clearer in its discourse, especially after 2014.

A statement by the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Johannes Hahn, following a meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili in 2016, shows that EU-Georgia relations were, in fact, in a very good state. In 2017, in a speech at the Conference ‘Georgia’s European Way’, the Commission manifested, once more, the ‘excellent state of EU-Georgia relations’, expressing that ‘our relationship is strong, our partnership is excellent!’. The use of anaphora in this sentence emphasises how good the relations were. Simultaneously, the exclamation point reinforces the enthusiasm used during the speech (European Commission, 2017a: 1). The Association Implementation Report from November of the same year presents the progress made by Georgia over the previous months, showing that EU-Georgia relations improved, due to the efforts of Georgian authorities and society in implementing the AA (European Commission and HR, 2017d: 1).

In 2018, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, gave a speech during the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Georgia’s first democratic republic. During his speech, the progress in the EU’s discourse towards calling Georgia a ‘European country’ is clear. Juncker starts by saying that it was a ‘historic moment for your great European nation’ (Juncker, 2018: 1). This nation resisted the soviet occupation and was ‘built on the principles of democracy, equality and respect for human rights’ (Ibid.). This made the partnership between Georgia and the EU natural, according to Juncker. Furthermore, he states that ‘Georgia has always been part of Europe and has always look towards Europe’ (Ibid.). In fact, this speech clearly shows that the EU was now considering and directly describing Georgia as a European country, considering the improvements observed in terms of adherence to EU values.

In the following years, Georgia continued to improve in the various areas covered by the AA, namely in democracy, the rule of law, and human rights protection. As the 2019

Association Report on Georgia shows, there was a progress, albeit sometimes modest, in justice, electoral system, gender equality, and anti-discrimination (European Commission and HR, 2019a: 1-3). However, and as a press release from 2020 also indicates, Georgia needed to work harder on depolarising the political environment (European Commission, 2020a: 1).

Effectively, the EU's discourse towards Georgia is considerably different from the discourse towards Belarus. The fact that the former showed willingness to implement reforms in the areas of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights protection, but also in security, economy, and trade, made the EU's discourse much more friendly, enthusiastic, and constructive. In the case of Georgia, the support to civil society is less mentioned, since the EU cooperates also directly with the government, for the same reasons. Simultaneously, the EU's discourse towards Georgia continues to construct the EU as a 'model' and its values as the best option to follow if a country wants to be prosperous and peaceful. It also represented Georgia as non-democratic to a certain level and, thus, as 'non-European', even though this discourse changed as Georgia's commitment to reforms progressed. Ultimately, normative convergence plays a fundamental role in the case of Georgia, highlighting the importance of ownership and empowerment (Sierra, 2011).

3.4.2.3 - Ukraine

Ukraine has been part of the ENP since the beginning, considering its similar historical path with other former soviet countries that joined the EU in 2004. In 2003, when the ENP was still called the 'Wider Europe' policy, Christopher Francis Patten, Commissioner for External Relations, following the Wider Europe Conference and a bilateral visit to Ukraine, outlined the policy's potential and the high priority that the EU intended to ascribe to the country. Patten highlighted the main points discussed with Ukrainian authorities, and the importance of political and economic reform, calling attention to the free and fair democratic procedures and media freedom required for the subsequent presidential elections in 2004 (European Commission, 2003c: 2).

Before the elections, in May 2004, the Irish Presidency of the Council made a declaration condemning the problems with media freedom and democratic standards in the country, sending a negative signal to what was expected from the voting. It also brought attention to Ukraine's need to comply with 'European values and standards', if it wanted to improve relations with the EU (Council of the EU, 2004c: 1).

In May, Janez Potočnik, Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, gave a speech at the Economic Policy Committee Dialogue in Brussels, about the future prospects of EU-Ukraine relations. During this speech, Potočnik mentioned that the enlargement brought the political nature of EU integration to the heart of its policies, meaning that the Single Market was not the only *raison d'être* of the EU. Besides enlargement, the ENP constituted another important part of this process, including both political and economic cooperation, based on joint ownership and differentiation (Potočnik, 2004: 2-3). Potočnik also pointed out existing concerns, inside the EU and especially among Member States, about a possible new enlargement to the countries of the ENP's eastern dimension. Answering this, he states that the enlargement and neighbourhood policies are different, and that the second does not predict the possibility of accession. However, it did not prevent Ukraine from becoming a candidate in the future, since it is part of the European continent (Ibid.: 3). The Commissioner also touched upon the question of credibility, affirming that the ENP was credible not only because it was developed by the EU, which is 'the unique and certainly best of all unions', but also because it was of highest interest to the EU to have stable and prosperous neighbours (Ibid.: 3-4).

In fact, the 2004 presidential elections and the events that followed constituted a major political momentum for the country, but also for its relations with the EU. The electoral campaign, mainly disputed by the incumbent Viktor Yanukovich, supported by Russian President Vladimir Putin, and opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko, were held in a climate of persecution. In the first round of the election, on 31 October, both candidates won around two-fifths. In November, the runoff gave the victory to President Yanukovich, but the opposition considered the elections as fraudulent and organised mass protests that lasted two weeks and were later dubbed the 'Orange Revolution'. In December, the court declared that the election was invalid, and a new voting was scheduled for the following weeks. Yushchenko officially won the election and became President of Ukraine. In the following years, the political atmosphere in the country remained turbulent (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021c), but there were improvements in the areas of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, as can be observed in the analysed EU documents from the subsequent years.

In December 2004, Foreign Affairs and ENP Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner gave a speech at the EP about the situation in Ukraine. The Commissioner demonstrated concern with the breaches of fundamental democratic principles during the presidential elections and assured that the Commission was working actively to find a peaceful outcome for the crisis (Ferrero-Waldner, 2004a: 2). Considering the situation in the country, Ferrero-Waldner stated that the quality of the EU-Ukraine partnership would depend on the quality of democracy in

the country (Ibid.: 3). She finished her speech with a reference to the ‘millions of Ukrainians actively living out their fundamental democratic freedoms under difficult and dramatic conditions’, comparing the Orange Revolution protests to those seen in 1989 in other Central-Eastern European countries that had become part of the EU, through which it was possible to ‘overcome the division of the European continent’ (Ibid.: 4). The Commissioner expected a similar outcome in Ukraine, supporting its ‘historical transformation’ (Ibid.).

Thanks to the Orange Revolution, and with President Yushchenko in power, Ukraine saw several reforms towards democracy in the following years. In 2005, Ferrero-Waldner gave a speech at the *Mardi de L’Europe* luncheon, starting by quoting Jeremy Rifkin about the ‘European Dream’, which is a ‘beacon of light in a troubled world’. The Commissioner presented herself as a firm believer in the European dream and in the potential of promoting this dream, characterised by democracy, freedom, and justice in the neighbourhood (Ferrero-Waldner, 2005b: 2). Following years of stagnation in EU-Ukraine relations, these increasingly improved following the revolution. In the words of President Yushchenko, ‘[t]he world has seen that Ukraine [could] already be called European’. In the analysis made to documents about Belarus and Georgia, we mentioned the construction of these countries as ‘non-European’ due to not following the EU values. This sentence by President Yushchenko, quoted by Ferrero-Waldner in her speech, shows that also the countries’ authorities, especially after being part of the opposition, tend to associate ‘Europe’ with the values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights protection, regardless of already being part of the continent. Furthermore, Ferrero-Waldner also affirmed that it was her task and the EU’s to promote these values, making it responsible to spread its norms in the world and, more specifically, in the region (Ibid.). In fact, this shift in the country’s historical path that led to an improvement in EU-Ukraine relations, according to the Commissioner, was possible due to a combination of factors, in which the action of the EU through the ENP stood out (Ibid.). Following this idea, the Commissioner admitted that democracy could not be imposed from outside. However, ‘as [the EU] leveraged [its] magnetic power to promote reforms in the enlargement countries, ENP aims to encourage the spirit of democracy’, having already done that, according to the Commissioner, in playing a key role in the outcome of the Orange Revolution (Ibid.: 3).

Following reforms in Ukraine, the Austrian Presidency of the Council issued a declaration on the 2006 parliamentary elections, attributing a positive note to it, since, according to IOs, it was aligned with international standards, regardless of some technical shortcomings. After the Ukrainian people assumed ‘ownership’ over their democracy and the reforms implemented by

the government, it had been possible to deepen the EU's partnership with Ukraine (Council of the EU, 2006c: 1).

The same path was followed in the following years and, in 2008, a joint declaration on the EU-Ukraine Summit confirmed these expectations. The EU showed its satisfaction with the democratic standards of the latest electoral processes, acknowledging the 'European aspirations of Ukraine' and welcoming its 'European choice', which led to the start of the negotiations for the AA, improving the relations between both parties, which became more dynamic (Yushchenko et al., 2008: 2).

According to Freizer (2017), the war in Georgia in 2008 was a major event that drove political change. This, among other aspects, led to the creation of the EaP, including new policy features, as explained in the first part of the analysis.

In 2010, Enlargement and ENP Commissioner Štefan Füle, gave a speech at a University in Kiev, in which he talked about the future expectation for EU-Ukraine relations. Füle mentioned the importance that the EU and Ukraine had for each other, and the 'natural and inevitable dynamic in [the] relations, based on mutual interest, which draws [them] close together' (Füle, 2010a: 2). He also referred the improvements in terms of democracy, including a much more dynamic civil society (Ibid.). Considering these improvements, the Commissioner highlighted the path being made to an even stronger relationship, leading to a stronger political association and economic integration, namely through the AA (Ibid.: 3). In the same year, Commissioner Füle and HR/VP Ashton gave a speech at the EP about the situation in the country. Again, they congratulated Ukraine on the latest electoral processes, that were considered mostly free and fair by IOs, as well as the development of an increasingly dynamic civil society and media environment (Füle and Ashton, 2010: 2). Despite some concerns with freedom of media, assembly and association, the overall improvements in constitutional reform and human rights were satisfactory to the EU leaders, which considered them as a legacy of the Orange Revolution and important steps towards stronger relations with the EU (Ibid.).

Between 2011 and the end of 2013 several steps were made towards the signature of the AA and the DCFTA. As observed in the first part of the analysis, 2011 was a year of change for the ENP, considering the events of the 'Arab Spring' in the southern neighbourhood and the terrorist attacks on EU soil. Within the EaP, there was an increasing focus on democracy promotion. Thus, in these years, the EU continued to congratulate Ukraine for its 'European choice', as Commission President Barroso (2011: 2) expressed in a statement following the EU-Ukraine Summit. However, several human rights breaches were still observed, namely regarding the verdict against Yulia Tymoshenko, former Prime Minister, which was considered

politically motivated (Ashton, 2011b: 2). Thus, despite the concerns with selective justice and the need for other reforms, Füle, in a speech at the European Policy Centre, presented the priorities to improve EU-Ukraine relations, hoping to ‘turn 2012 into a year without paradoxes’ (Füle, 2012a: 2). In the same year, the Country Progress Report on Ukraine showed the same paradoxes, but the expectations to improve the relations between both parties remained high (European Commission, 2012b: 1-2). In fact, the EU saw these necessary reforms as a ‘dream’ of seeing Ukraine ‘deeply rooted amongst EU democracies’, which would then continue the end of divisions in Europe and further contribute to its unification (Füle, 2012c: 3).

The end of 2013 saw a major backlash in EU-Ukraine relations, but also in the human rights standards in the country. Days before the scheduled signature of the AA, Yanukovych, then President of Ukraine, decided not to sign it, due to Russian pressure. In fact, the negotiations and signature of AAs with eastern partners, namely Ukraine, meant a faster disruption of Soviet-era links between Russia and these countries, creating feelings of anxiety and fear, as highlighted by Freire and Simão (2018). Consequently, mass protests emerged on the streets of Kiev, namely in the Maidan Square, and rapidly spread to other cities. The ‘Maidan Movement’ and its demonstrators faced brutal police repression, arrests, violence, and several casualties. The EU threatened to impose sanctions on Ukraine in case authorities did not stop the violence.

Following these months of turmoil, the parliament of Ukraine voted to restore the 2004 constitution that had been previously changed to give more powers to the President and an interim government was constituted. Yanukovych left the city of Kiev and Arseniy Yatsenyuk was installed as Prime Minister. In February 2014, Yanukovych gave a speech from Russia stating that he was still the President of Ukraine. Meanwhile, the pro-Russian protests had emerged as a response to the Euromaidan movement in Crimea, its parliament was occupied, and a Russian flag was raised. Sergey Aksyonov, leader of the Russian Unity Party was installed as the new Crimean leader. Russian authorities moved forces into the region, arguing that the protection of Russian citizens in the region was at stake. In March, the parliament of Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine and join Russia, based on a referendum. The referendum was not recognised by the EU and other ‘western’ countries, which imposed sanctions on Russian authorities and members of the Crimean parliament. On 18 March, Putin and Aksyonov signed a treaty that confirmed the annexation of Crimea into the Russian territory (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021c).

The EU did not recognise the referendum nor the annexation, considering it as illegal and illegitimate, as we will see in the next semiotic texts. In fact, the Euromaidan and the

annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, as well as the subsequent conflict in Eastern Ukraine, constituted major crises in the EU's neighbourhood, and were some of the main events that led to the 2015 ENP review. Despite the political, economic, and humanitarian consequences of these events, the EU continued to support domestic reforms and signed the AA in June 2014. The crises influenced the conditions of reformist policies towards Ukraine and led to a change in the engagement with Russia. The feeling of uncertainty created by the perception of a crisis makes actors accommodate the perceived phenomena and 'recover a sense of order to the existing ideational structures' (Natorski, 2017: 177-179), as the analysed documents show.

In a joint statement by the President of the Commission and the President of the European Council, the EU mentions the suspension of the signature of the AA due to external pressure. Even though the EU would not force its signature, it condemned the Russian position (Barroso and Rompuy, 2013: 1). A statement by HR/VP Ashton and Commissioner Füle condemned the violence used against the peaceful protesters in Kiev between 29 and 30 November. Ashton and Füle also highlighted that the people of Ukraine expressed their support to the AA (Ashton and Füle, 2013b: 1). In another statement, Barroso brought attention to the danger of populist and extremist forces, dubbing them 'negative', often embedded in an anti-European theme. These forces meant the 'revival of all the demons of Europe', including extreme nationalism, xenophobia, and racism, which he identified as 'negative values'. In view of this, Barroso highlighted the courage of Ukrainians on the streets, fighting for the 'European' flag, which meant fighting for the future of the country. He also stated that 'if sometimes in Europe some of us doubt about how important [the EU] values are', we need to look at young people in the streets of Kiev that are 'rewriting the new narrative for Europe' (Barroso, 2013: 1).

In the same year, Füle gave a speech at the EP, following the EaP Summit in Vilnius. The Commissioner, again, mentioned the situation in Ukraine, highlighting that it was time to be united and strongly commit to the EaP, to reform the path Ukraine was following at that moment. He reinforced that the EU remained ready to sign the AA, this time considering a more strategic approach than just words, since 'history will judge us not by the promises we made in Vilnius, but by the promises we keep' (Füle, 2013d: 2-3). Finally, in another speech at the EP, Füle mentioned how much he admired 'the Ukrainian nation's love for freedom and the maturity of its European spirit'. Thus, he states that 'it is not the European Union's compensation that they seek; it is a chance to live by the European values' (Füle, 2013e: 2).

As already described, 2014 was not easier than 2013, considering Russia's aggression on Ukrainian territory. Füle, at the EP, gave a speech on 'how to find the way out of the [Ukrainian] crisis'. He, again, condemned the casualties, torture, and disappearances occurred in 2013,

during the Maidan protests (Füle, 2014b: 1). The Commissioner also highlighted the importance of establishing trust on all sides of the conflict through political dialogue, and that Ukraine could count on the EU's support in this matter. He also mentioned that the EU and Ukraine prepared updated benchmarks, creating better conditions for the signature of the AA (Ibid: 2-3).

In March, Commission President Barroso made a statement at the EP about the situation in Crimea, considering it a challenge for the EU's 'unity as Europeans', its policies, and its values (Barroso, 2014a: 1). The Commission President considered the crisis in Crimea an 'unacceptable violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and its territorial integrity' (Ibid.). In April, Füle also gave a speech at the EP, mentioning the willingness of the Ukrainian people to 'living by the European values'. Füle reiterated that Russia could gain from Ukraine's success, obtained through the EaP, having a chance to bring stability back to the country. The Commissioner considered that what was happening in Ukraine, especially in Crimea and other Eastern regions of Ukraine, was a challenge to the 'notion of Europe', based on human rights, democracy, the rule of law, freedom, and sovereignty (Füle, 2014d: 1). According to Füle, the EU was facing 'the most serious crisis in Europe since the end of the World War II', which shows how these events were perceived as dangerous to the EU's integrity and unity. Furthermore, he affirmed that the Russian propaganda at the time was more aggressive and dangerous than during the Cold War (Ibid.: 3).

In 2015, the Commission prepared a report on the implementation of the ENP in Ukraine, accompanying the joint communication 'Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2014'. This document shows the difficult political, economic, social, and security situation lived in the country. Despite that, the EU reports that Ukraine found a sustainable political solution to the crisis, including an agreement on 21 February, the reinstatement of the constitution of 2004, the instalment of a new government, and free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections, among others. Besides the severe human rights abuses, it was still possible to observe, later, improvements in terms of democracy, fight against corruption, and freedom of expression, among other aspects. Another very important step in EU-Ukraine relations was the recovery of the negotiations towards the signature of the AA, which is mentioned in a speech by President Juncker in 2015. Juncker also mentions the aspirations of the Ukrainian people 'to live in a modern, European country'. The President finally compares the situation lived in Ukraine with what happened in the Central-Eastern European countries after the fall of the Iron Curtain, considering this a 'miracle of history', that Ukrainians also want to enjoy (Juncker, 2015: 1-2).

The following years were marked by several improvements in EU-Ukraine relations, especially under the context of the implementation of the AA and following the crises felt in the country. In 2016, the Commission issued a press release supporting the ‘comprehensive reform agenda of the Ukrainian government’, considering stabilisation of the economy, privatisation of state-owned enterprises, and liberalisation of the energy sector, while reducing corruption (European Commission, 2016a: 1). Improvements in the areas of democracy, human rights, and an active civil society were also highlighted in another press release (European Commission, 2016b: 1).

In 2017, following the EU-Ukraine summit, the EU congratulated itself and Ukraine regarding the positive results in the country, including decentralisation, anti-corruption measures, reform of the judiciary, or police reform, despite security challenges (European Commission, 2017b: 1). In September, a press release informing that the AA fully entered into force led Juncker to consider it ‘a day of celebration for [the] European continent’ (European Commission, 2017c: 1).

In 2019, Commission VP Dombrovskis spoke at the anniversary of the Maidan protests, in Kiev. He mentioned that Euromaidan meant ‘sacrifice’, ‘love of one’s country’ and ‘freedom’. He congratulated the Ukrainian governments on the reforms achieved since then and stated his belief in the country and its potential (Dombrovskis, 2019: 1-2).

Finally, in 2020, a joint statement by European Council President Charles Michel, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and HR/VP Josep Borrell reaffirmed the commitment to strengthening the political association and economic integration of Ukraine with the EU, through the AA and the DCFTA. The leaders affirmed that the EU and Ukraine shared the common values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for minorities, and gender equality. Simultaneously, they acknowledged the ‘European aspirations of Ukraine and welcomed its European choice’ (Michel et al., 2020).

Between the three countries analysed in this dissertation, Ukraine seems to draw the biggest expectations from the EU. In fact, Ukraine is the closest country to the EU, if we consider the geographic and normative dimensions together. For this reason, the EU’s discourse towards Ukraine does not include as many references to the need for the country to become ‘more European’, in comparison to Belarus or Georgia, and despite the major challenges the country faced. However, looking at the representations created through the EU’s discourse, the perpetuating of asymmetric power relations is still clear, since the EU is referred to as ‘the best’ and ‘the model’ to be followed, while Ukraine as the one to follow EU rules.

Chapter 4 - Discussion of the results

After analysing the evolution of the EU's discourse and its context, we will now discuss the results by deconstructing the narratives discursively built by the EU, both about itself and about the Eastern partner countries (i.e., the 'others').

Firstly, it is important to recall what was already said about the attribution of an identity to the EU through the use of the pronoun 'we' and 'the EU' in the third person singular, as well as the resort to *prosopopoeia*, which attributes a 'collective identity to a complex institutional structure' that does not have a single voice and is not actually present, and so it is represented through discourse (Ribeiro, 2018: 224). Thus, since the EU is discursively constructed, it is possible to deconstruct it by identifying narratives that are used to shape its identity and legitimise the ENP and the EaP. Thus, we will look at discursive hierarchies identified in the analysed texts, including dominant discourses and narratives and marginalized ones.

Looking at the EU, we conclude that, through the analysis of the selected discursive corpus, it represents itself as 'a normative power', 'a democracy and human rights model', as 'responsible', and as 'truly European'. As for the Eastern partner countries, we conclude that they are represented by the EU as 'non-normative', as an 'existential threat' (Diez, 2005: 628), as 'inferior' (Ibid.), as 'entities that violate universal principles' (Ibid.) and as 'non-Europeans'. The use of expressions such as 'universal' in reference to EU values further reinforces the EU's self-positioning at a superior hierarchical level. In other words, we confirm the three hypotheses initially proposed in this dissertation.

Throughout the analysis, it was possible to observe that the EU discursively represented itself as a 'normative power', especially when it comes to democracy promotion. The semiotic texts analysed showed us that the EU aims at promoting its norms and values in the Eastern partner countries, through a set of instruments within the Eastern dimension of the ENP. Thus, the EU shows its willingness to influence the trajectory of these countries towards democracy, but above all, it also shows conviction in that it actually does influence them, due to its 'power of attraction' that is often mentioned. Simultaneously, the references and comparisons made with the democratic transitions of Central-Eastern European Countries since 1989 and their path towards EU membership is another example of how the EU represents itself as a 'normative power', since it gained the 'moral authority' to be so.

Following this, the EU represents itself as a 'democratic model', taking into account its historical past of war and authoritarian regimes, and how it overcame those moments, until it became the community of values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law it is today.

Considering this historical past and the ‘victory of democracy’ that put war, conflict, and dictatorships aside, the EU expresses itself as ‘responsible’ for spreading its model of democracy to the world and especially to its Eastern neighbourhood.

Finally, considering its historical trajectory, as well as the values on which it is based, the EU constructs itself as a ‘true European’, since ‘Europe’ is not only a continent, but a space where values such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, non-discrimination, among others, define it and create its identity. These values define the ‘European way of life’ that the EU aims to preserve, since it is the basis of its existence. The analysed documents show that the ‘European way of life’ is often questioned, or even threatened, by ‘others’, namely the Eastern European countries. In fact, the selected discursive corpus shows that the EU constructs the Eastern partner countries as ‘non-normative’, since their historical past, as well as their current political situation does not give them the moral authority to be so, as proposed by Diez (2005) and Vukasović and Matić (2019). On the contrary, they are the ones to be ‘positively’ influenced by the EU’s policies that bring value-added and a set of benefits to the populations of these countries, as mentioned in the documents targeting Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine. Thus, the EU’s discourse creates a representation of these countries as ‘entities that violate universal principles’ (Ibid.), since they do not comply with the EU’s values – emphasis also on equating ‘EU’ with ‘universal’ values. This is often observed in EU statements and speeches about electoral processes or human rights breaches, especially in the case of Belarus, that is often characterised as authoritarian in both statements and policy documents, and, thus, not worthy of being part of the ‘European family’ (unless it changes/improves according to EU standards).

Simultaneously, the EU discursively represents these countries as an ‘existential threat’ (Ibid.). In fact, several documents analysed referred some years as being ‘years of crises’ that questioned the EU’s existence. The year of 2008, with the conflict between Georgia and Russia and the years of 2013-2014, with the Euromaidan protests and the annexation of Ukrainian territories are examples of these moments of perceived threat that led to the questioning of the EU’s integrity and ‘way of life’. In fact, these moments led to important changes in the ENP, such as the creation of the EaP, or the 2015 review. The 2016 EUGS is also a result of a moment of existential crisis, that also included Brexit or the beginning of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’. Thus, the threat provoked by these countries needed to be countered through a stronger unity within the EU, which was seen as the only way to preserve its existence and identity.

Finally, considering all these characteristics, the Eastern partner countries are also discursively constructed as ‘non-European’. This is mostly clear in the analysis of the documents

concerning the three case studies of Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine, since there are several mentions to the need for these countries to become ‘more European’ or to take their righteous place in the ‘family of European nations’. Even though all these three countries are part of the European continent, they are not described by the EU as being ‘European’, since they do not follow the EU’s values, norms, and principles. These discursively constructed representations of the EU and of the Eastern partner countries perpetuate power relations between them, with the EU being ‘superior’ and the partner countries ‘inferior’, having a long way to follow if they want to resemble an EU Member State.

Considering the construction of these representations and how they perpetuate power relations, we will briefly comment on whether the social order needs the problem, that is, whether the EU needs to perpetuate these asymmetrical power relations, and what solutions can be found to tackle the problem. The EU constructs, through discourse, contrasting representations of itself and the partner countries, as explained. Through the establishment of representations of the Eastern neighbours as non-normative and non-democratic, the EU is able to preserve its status as a ‘normative power’ and a ‘democracy model’, on which its identity depends. To face this problem, on the one hand, the EU can prioritise ownership as a feature of the EaP, promoting the empowerment of the partner countries, and taking into account their historical, social, and political context that influence their regime choices, instead of imposing its world vision. On the other hand, academia also plays an important role, in the sense that it can help deconstruct the representations created and perpetuated throughout history, as well as unequal power relations, as this dissertation aims to do. Finally, civil society, both in the EU and in the partner countries, must hold EU institutions and politicians accountable, while raising awareness about these problems in their countries and internationally.

Conclusion

The goal of this dissertation was to study the concept of Normative Power Europe applied to the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. With a post-structuralist inspired critical discourse analysis, we aimed to understanding how the EU constructs, through discourse, representations of itself and others, thus perpetuating unequal power relations. In order to do so, we conducted a CDA, based on Fairclough's (2001) framework, of the main policy documents of the ENP and the EaP, as well as reports, press releases, statements, declarations, and speeches, with a special focus on the case studies of Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine. Following a literature review that provided us with theoretical foundations, the analysis was conducted in four stages. Before moving on to the fifth stage, it is important to highlight that, as observed in the discussion, the hypotheses proposed in the literature were also confirmed in our analysis, which helped answer our research question.

As proposed by Fairclough (*ibid.*), the analysis would not be complete without our own reflection. Looking at its contributions, and despite the already existing extensive literature on the subject, this analysis was fundamental to understand how the EU discursively creates representations of itself and of the partner countries within the eastern dimension of the ENP, what these representations are and how they contribute to the perpetuation of asymmetric power relations, suggesting ways to solve the problem through the analysis of a relevant discursive corpus. However, this study is not free from limitations, namely regarding the language choice (as the researcher is not a native English speaker – which is the language of the analysed semiotic texts). Even though these choices are often done for practical reasons, we, for instance, use the subject 'the EU' in the third person singular, thus contributing to the establishment of a representation of the EU, as criticised before. At the same time, considering that this work was developed under a master's program, it may not reach a large audience (unless it is published), which means this discussion might not reach some parts of society as it would be desirable.

Considering the contributions and limitations of our work, it is possible to identify opportunities for research. Firstly, it would be important to extend the period of analysis until 2021, to include the latest developments in the policy and the EU's discourse towards the selected countries, especially Belarus. Secondly, it would be useful to analyse more semiotic texts from the European Parliament, and texts from Heads of State or Government of Member States, to include all the voices that are part of the EU. Finally, it would be fundamental to consider the views of the eastern partner countries on these matters, from Heads of State or Government to civil society members.

Nonetheless, we reached this dissertation's goals and answered our research question. However, considering the limitations identified, we cannot say that the emancipatory propose of this work was fully accomplished, which means that there are plenty of opportunities to further develop it in the future.

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Annexes

Annex A – Discursive corpus

The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership

Author	Title/Context	Type	Year
European Commission	Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours	Policy document	2003
European Commission	Communication from the Commission – Paving the Way	Policy document	

	for the New Neighbourhood Instrument		
European Commission	Communication from the Commission: European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper	Policy document	2004
European Commission	Communication from the Commission to the Council on the Commission Proposals for Action Plans under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)	Policy document	
European Commission	Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy	Policy document	2006
European Commission	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy	Policy document	2007
European Commission	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Eastern Partnership	Policy document	2008
European Commission	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008	Policy document	2009

Council of the EU	Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit	Declaration	
European Commission	Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A new response to a changing Neighbourhood	Policy document	2011
Council of the EU	Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit	Declaration	
European Parliament	Report on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy	Report	
European Commission	Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Delivering on a new European Neighbourhood Policy	Policy document	2012
Council of the EU	Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit	Declaration	2013
European Commission	Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Neighbourhood at the Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013	Policy Document	2014

Council of the EU	Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit	Declaration	2015
European Commission	Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy	Policy document	
Council of the EU	Council conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy	Conclusions	
EU	Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy	Policy document	2016
Council of the EU	Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit	Declaration	2017
European Commission	Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all	Policy document	2020

Belarus

Author	Title/Context	Type	Year
Council of the EU	Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European	Declaration	2004

	Union on the parliamentary elections and the referendum of 17 October 2004 in Belarus		
Benita Ferrero-Waldner	Statement by Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner	Statement	2005
Council of the EU	Declaration from the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on recent events in Belarus	Declaration	
Benita Ferrero-Waldner	Belarus – Political Situation and the Independence of the Media	Speech	
Council of the EU	Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the EU on pre-election situation in Belarus	Declaration	2006
Council of the EU	Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the presidential elections in Belarus	Declaration	
Benita Ferrero-Waldner	Belarus – Flawed elections	Speech	
José Barroso	A message to the people of Belarus from European Commission President José Manuel Barroso	MEMO	2007
Committee of Regions	Tradition and historical circumstances must not prevent Belarus from moving rapidly towards the development of a strong local and regional democracy	Press release	
Benita Ferrero-Waldner	The European Union and Belarus: moving closer together?	Speech	

			2009
Catherine Ashton	Remarks on Belarus	Speech	2011
Herman van Rompuy	Remarks by President Van Rompuy following the meeting with Belarus opposition	Speech	
Štefan Füle	Towards a European future for the citizens of Belarus	Speech	
Štefan Füle	Speech in the European Parliament in the debate on Belarus	Speech	2012
European Parliament	Motion for a resolution to wind up the debate on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy	Motion	
Štefan Füle	EU policy towards Belarus	Speech	2013
Ursula von der Leyen	Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with President Michel, following the videoconference of the European Council members on the situation in Belarus	Statement	2020
Charles Michel	Conclusions by the President of the European Council following the video conference of the members of the European Council on 19 August 2020	Conclusions	
European Parliament	Joint motion for a resolution on the situation in Belarus	Motion	

Georgia

Author	Title/Context	Type	Year
Council of the EU	Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the situation in Georgia	Declaration	2003
Council of the EU	‘Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the Presidential elections in Georgia	Declaration	
Romano Prodi	To students and representatives of civil society in Georgia	Speech	
European Commission	Communication from the Commission to the Council: European Neighbourhood Policy – Recommendations for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and for Egypt and Lebanon	Policy document	2005
European Commission	EU/Georgia Action Plan	Policy document	2006
Council of the EU	Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the current situation in Georgia	Declaration	2007
Council of the EU	Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European	Declaration	2008

	Union on the Presidential elections in Georgia on 5 January 2008		
European Commission	Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008 – Progress report in Georgia	Communication	2009
Štefan Füle	Exchange of view on South Caucasus and Ukraine	Speech	2010
Štefan Füle	Key address at the 8 th International Conference on ‘Georgia’s European Way’	Speech	2011
Štefan Füle	Georgia’s European Way – the EU and its European Neighbours	Speech	2012
Catherine Ashton	Remarks by High Representative/Vice President Catherine Ashton at the end of her visit to Georgia	MEMO	
European Commission	Statement by the spokespersons of EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, and the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, Štefan Füle, on development in Georgia	Press release	2013
Štefan Füle	Georgia’s European Way	Speech	
European Commission	Message of EU support for Georgia	Statement	

Štefan Füle	EU-Georgia: About myths and true benefits of Association Agreement	Speech	2014
José Barroso	Remarks by President Barroso at the signing of the Association Agreements with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine	Speech	
Štefan Füle	Association Agreement: investment by today's Georgians in tomorrow	Speech	
European Commission	Joint staff working document – Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Georgia Progress in 2014 and recommendations for actions	Working document	2015
Johannes Hahn	Statement by Commissioner Johannes Hahn following the meeting with Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Kvirikashvili	Statement	2016
European Commission	Speech at the 14 th Batumi International Conference: 'Georgia's European Way'	Speech	2017
European Commission	Association Implementation Report on Georgia	Policy document	
Jean-Claude Juncker	Speech by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the ceremony of the celebration of the 100 th anniversary of Georgia's First Democratic Republic	Speech	2018
European Commission	Association Implementation Report on Georgia	Policy document	2019

European Commission	Georgia: EU report highlights importance of maintaining reform momentum and depolarising the political environment	Press release	2020
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Ukraine

Author	Title/Context	Type	Year
European Commission	Commissioner Patten in Ukraine, 10-11 November 2003: Wider Europe Conference and bilateral visit	Press release	2003
Council of the EU	Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on media freedom and democratic standards in Ukraine	Declaration	2004
Janez Potočnik	Ukraine-EU Relations: Prospects for the Future	Speech	
Benita Ferrero-Waldner	Situation in Ukraine	Speech	
Benita Ferrero-Waldner	The EU and Ukraine – what lies beyond the horizon?	Speech	2005
Council of the EU	Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the parliamentary elections in Ukraine	Declaration	2006
Viktor Yushchenko, Nicolas Sarkozy and José Barroso	EU-Ukraine Summit – Joint Declaration on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement	Declaration	2008

Štefan Füle	EU-Ukraine Relations: future expectations	Speech	2010
Catherine Ashton and Štefan Füle	Statement on Ukraine	Statement	
Catherine Ashton	Speech on the situation in Ukraine	Speech	2011
José Barroso	Statement by President Barroso following the EU-Ukraine Summit	Statement	
Štefan Füle	Ukraine: Relations with the EU at the cross-road	Speech	2012
European Commission	ENP Package, Country Progress Report – Ukraine	Memo	
Štefan Füle	Ukraine and the World: Addressing Tomorrow's Challenges Together	Speech	
European Commission	ENP Country Report Progress 2012 - Ukraine	Memo	2013
Štefan Füle	EU-Ukraine: Dispelling the Myths About the Association Agreement	Speech	
José Barroso and Herman Van Rompuy	Joint statement by the President of the European Union Commission José Barroso and the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy on Ukraine	Statement	
Catherine Ashton and Štefan Füle	Statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle on last night's events in Ukraine	Statement	

José Barroso	Statement of President Barroso on the current situation in Ukraine	Memo	
Štefan Füle	Time to get stronger in our commitment to EaP and reforms in Ukraine	Speech	
Štefan Füle	EU-Ukraine: standing ready to help and support	Speech	
Štefan Füle	Ukraine: how to find way out of the current crisis	Speech	2014
José Barroso	Introductory Statement by President Barroso on Ukraine	Statement	
Štefan Füle	Russian pressure on Eastern Partnership countries, destabilisation of eastern Ukraine	Speech	
European Commission	Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Ukraine – Progress in 2014 and recommendations for actions	Working document	2015
Jean-Claude Juncker	Speech by President Juncker on “Reforming for Ukraine’s future”	Speech	
European Commission	European Commission supports Ukraine on its reform path	Press release	2016
European Commission	EU report: Ukraine carrying out unprecedented reforms	Press release	
European Commission	EU-Ukraine Summit: Ukrainian reforms combined with European Union support delivering positive results	Press release	2017

European Commission	EU-Ukraine Association Agreement fully enters into force	Press release	
Vladimir Dombrovskis	Ukraine 5 years after Maidan	Speech	2019
Charles Michel, Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Josep Borell	Joint statement following the 22 nd EU-Ukraine Summit	Statement	2020