EU DIMENSIONS: WORKPACKAGE 2 : STATE OF THE DEBATE

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ABSTRACT

One of the aims of this paper it to clarify the nature of the debate over 'civil society' and its relationship to the state. It begins by suggesting that the EU's borderland provides is a context in which deep-rooted 'Western' and 'Eastern' understandings of state and civil society, meet and overlap. The second section outlines the geo-political reshaping of the 'Neighbourhood' . It concentrates on the influence of non-EU actors, notably Russia, complementing the EU- focused literature on the subject. The third section elaborates the consensus in the literature on the weakness of civil society in the EU 'Neighbourhood'.   This is followed by a discussion of 'Western' debates over the role and significance of civil society. This discussion suggests that the 'export' of a western model eastwards begs many questions about which particular model is to be promoted. The final section seeks to contribute to the empirical research agenda of EU Dimensions by summarizing the opportunities for, and the constraints on, the promotion of civil society and cross-border co-operation between civil society organisations (CSOs) in the 'Neighbourhood'. It concludes that the precise characteristics of state-civil society relationship remains central to the prospects for enhancing civil society co-operation.

PROMOTING CIVIL SOCIETY ACROSS THE BORDERS OF THE EU NEIGHBOURHOOD: DEBATES, CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES[1]

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INTRODUCTION: 'WEST' MEETS 'EAST'

> *Concepts of civil society have a rich history, but it is only in the last ten years that they have moved to the centre of the international stage. There are a number of reasons for this – the fall of Communism and the democratic openings that followed, disenchantment with the economic models of the past, a yearning for togetherness in a world that seems ever more insecure, and the rapid rise of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on the global stage. Today, civil society seems to be the "big idea" on everyone's lips, government officials, journalists, funding agencies, writers and academics, not to mention the millions of people across the globe who find it an inspiration in the struggles for a better world…(c)ivil society is claimed by every part of the ideological spectrum as its own, but what exactly is it?* (Edwards, 2004: 2)

Edwards' concluding question in the above quotation implies that civil society is a perplexing phenomenon – frequently used in an elastic manner with diverse, and sometimes, contradictory definitions and meanings. As such it is a challenging and somewhat elusive subject for empirical research. The empirical focus of the *EU Dimensions* project is the promotion of civil society and cross-border co-operation between civil society organisations (CSOs) across the external borders of the newly enlarged EU. The geographical context for this research – the borderland or zone of transition between EU and the rest of Eastern Europe has been the setting for dramatic geopolitical change, and the site of very different histories of state and nation-building infused with a legacy of competing political ideologies. All have far reaching implications for the promotion of civil society networks within and across political borders.

One of the aims of this paper it to clarify the nature of the debate over 'civil society' and its relationship to the state. It begins by suggesting that the EU's borderland provides is a context in which deep-rooted 'Western' and 'Eastern' understandings of state and civil society, meet and overlap. The second section outlines the geo-political reshaping of the

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[1] This paper is a preliminary draft and the authors welcome comments on its contents, omissions and interpretations.

'Neighbourhood'. It concentrates on the influence of non-EU actors, notably Russia, complementing the EU- focused papers by Boedeljte et al (2006) and Anderson (2006). The third section elaborates the consensus in the literature on the weakness of civil society in the EU 'Neighbourhood'. This is followed by a discussion of 'Western' debates over the role and significance of civil society. This discussion suggests that the 'export' of a western model eastwards begs many questions about which particular model is to be promoted. The final section seeks to contribute to the empirical research agenda of EU Dimensions by summarizing the opportunities for, and the constraints on, the promotion of civil society and cross-border co-operation between civil society organisations (CSOs) in the 'Neighbourhood'. It concludes that the state-civil society relationship remains central to the prospects for success.

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The expansion of the EU into East Central Europe and the formulation of the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), has brought into focus a centuries-old interface between western notions of the autonomy of civil society from the state, and Eastern traditions of absolutist states where 'civil society' is extremely weak and dominated by an all powerful state. The East-West differences over civil society, however, constitute more of a spectrum than a sharp dichotomy with US perceptions of civil society at one end, and Russian perceptions at the other end.[2] These different conceptions of civil society over-lap and inter-penetrate in the new member states of the EU (25)[3] and are critical for an understanding of how the EU seeks to export its version of state-civil society relationships within its newly designated 'Neighbourhood' states.

'Civil society' in the academic literature is typically not a 'stand-alone' concept – rather it is paired historically with the concept of the state. Thus 'state' and 'civil society' are linked and help define each other. Consequently, an EU attempt to promote civil society co-operation also involves an agenda of reshaping state institutions in the 'neighbourhood states' in ways which underpin a positive and mutually supportive relationship between these institutions and civil society.

Historians of civil society in Western Europe have traced its emergence to a number of factors such as the autonomy of the Church from Empire, the autonomy of cities, and the significance of an autonomous legal system (with its origins in the legacy of the Roman Empire). Within the latter individuals were conceived as 'articulated wholes' rather than an 'undifferentiated mass' leading to the development of individual rights and representative institutions (Seligman1992: 157). The medieval Christian order allowed for the emergence of a pluralism within unity where communities with corporate rights with a measure of legal autonomy co-existed with the competing claims of the Imperial rulers and the clergy. This severely limited the capacity of monarchical authority to impose autocratic structures even in the period of Western absolutism.

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[2] US perceptions tend to stress the autonomy of civil society from the state and sometimes as alternative to it. Russian traditions on the other hand stress the overarching power of the state in society.

[3] Jeno Szucs has argued that East Central Europe was caught historically between Western forms of pluralism where civil society was differentiated from the state, and Eastern forms of absolutism, thereby constituting 'three historical regions' (cited in Seligman, 1992: 158).

At the other end of the spectrum was Russian absolutism where the development of absolutist rule and state building under the Czars precluded the development of autonomous cities and independent nobility and led to the subjection of the Orthodox Church to the state. In Seligman's (1992: 157-8) words, these factors 'led to the atomization and homogenization of society as an "amorphous mass of subjects" lacking the autonomy and articulated rights of the late medieval *societas civilis* in the West'. These historical understandings of the East-West differences, and the 'in-between' role East-Central Europe, find many echoes in contemporary debates over EU enlargement and the new 'Neighbourhood' policy.

The revival of interest in the question of 'civil society' in 'the West' since the 1980s, was partly stimulated by the sense that an embryonic civil society was the source of democratic opposition to the centralised state socialist systems over much of Eastern Europe in countries such as Poland, Hungary, Romania and, most recently, the Ukraine and Georgia. The policy of the United States and an expanding EU involved a policy of strengthening 'civil society' (in opposition to the state socialism) as a means of spreading western values of 'democracy', the rule of law', and the 'free market'. However, the meaning and role of civil society within the 'West' has simultaneously become the subject of prolonged debate with globalization, the shift towards a less interventionist state, and signs that large sections of the population are becoming apathetic to the institutions of representative democracy.

The exporting of western models of civil society eastwards is doubly problematical therefore. On the one hand, there is no uniform view in the 'West' of the meaning, role and significance of 'civil society'; on the other hand, in the 'East', and particularly in the 'neighbourhood' states, civil society is perceived to be weak both for deep historical reasons and because of resistances, which derive from contemporary authoritarian states. and post-communist legacies. Moreover, since the early 1990s, the scale of change at geopolitical and state level in the EU Neighbourhood has further impacted on the prospects for promoting civil society and cross-border co-operation between CSOs.

RESHAPING THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: THE GEOPOLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The expansion of the EU into the space vacated by the collapse of the Soviet Union provides the geo-political framework for the policy of strengthening 'civil society in the region. Given that the 'Neigbourhood' is a relatively new concept devised by the EU and closely associated with EU enlargement from 15 to 25 (27 members), it is scarcely surprising that the bulk of the literature on the topic has been EU- centric and falls under the rubric of 'EU studies'. The main focus has been on the formulation and evolution of the ENP, its degree of coherence and incoherence, and what it reveals about the changing nature of the EU itself[4] (see Boedeltje, van Houtum and Kramsch, 2006). There is also an extensive geo-political literature much of it concerned with how the EU might be understood as a particular type of polity.

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[4] See for example, Boedeltje, van Houtum and Kramsch's (2006) detailed account of the various discourses associated with the 'Europeanization' and 'European Neighbourhood Policy and their

As the EU expands, a growing body of literature has sought to characterise and analyse its moving eastern frontier. There is a high degree of consensus that the external borders of the EU are not to be understood as nation-state type borders, based on a sharp insider/outsider dichotomies. Instead, they are deemed to be 'fuzzy' (Christiansen et al, 2000; Zielonka, 2006). The 'borders' have come to be recognised as regional zones or 'frontiers, or areas of overlapping influences, interests, cultures and forms of governance. Analysts have reached back into to history, especially to pre-nation-state imperial systems to find appropriate terminology to characterise the EU's moving borderland. Some observers describe the emergent border region as having neo-medieval characteristics with Russia, Turkey and the EU constituting the three corners of a neo-medieval triangle (Waever, 1997; Christiansen et al 2000). Other such as Walters (2004) characterises the borderland in terms of four geo-strategies: networked (non) borders, march, colonial frontiers and limes. These terms are advanced as a means of suggesting different ways of territorializing the border region, different ideas of 'inside' and 'outside' and perceptions of risks and problems.

The use of imperial analogies for the EU is increasingly popular as it expands geographically (e.g., Waever, 1997; Anderson, 2006; Zielonka, 2006)[5]. Whereas the EU has been characterised as an expanding (neo-medieval) empire, the 'Neighbourhood' states have been portrayed as the outcomes of imperial demise, i.e. the demise of the Soviet Empire (Motyl, 2001; Beissenger et al, forthcoming).

Such debates have direct implications for understanding the enlargement of the EU, the construction of its new borders and its relationship with its 'Neighbourhood'. They provide a reference point for studies of 'enlargement' and 'neighbourhood' as 'bordering processes'(e.g. Kramsch, 2003; Walters, 2004, Berg and Ehin, 2006). They also raise questions of direct importance for EU Dimensions on how civil society and democracy might be reconcilable with new geo-political frameworks, neo-imperial or otherwise.[6]

While the process of enlargement has been relatively open-ended in geographical terms, the concept of 'neighbourhood' suggests that the era of EU territorial expansion is coming to an end. It implies a clearer distinction between those states that are to be 'permanent' neighbours, i.e., excluded from EU membership in the foreseeable future those which are in a pre-accession phase – in order words a clearer distinction between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.

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implications for how the EU might be understood as a polity and a 'geopolitical player' (prepared for EU Dimensions Gdansk Workshop, 27-29 October 2006).

[5] James Anderson's paper for the EU Dimensions Gdansk workshop) provides an overview of debates about the nature of the EU as a polity and includes a discussion of the imperial analogy.

[6] Certainly, it might be suggested that empires, old or new, have not been particularly conducive to democracy. Like the latter, the concept of civil society has arguably been more associated with national states rather than transnational empires.

Geographical ‘limits’ to EU expansion suggests that we should pay attention to non-EU influences in the area currently designated as ‘external’ i.e., the ‘neighbourhood states’. An EU-centric focus needs to be qualified by an analysis of other major influences. While the ‘gravitational pull’ of the enlarged EU in the Neighbourhood is substantial, it is both shaped and limited by competing influences. Three major states, the US, Russia and Turkey[7] are key actors in the region.[8] The ongoing wars in the Middle East cast a long shadow on the EU policy of creating stability and security along its external borders. Within the geographical area covered by the EU Dimensions project, the role of the post-Soviet states, especially Russia and the Ukraine, is critical. Russia, designated by the EU as a ‘neighbourhood state’ resists this label and projects itself as an equal ‘strategic partner’ with the EU (Emerson, 2005). It favours closer co-operation with the EU to help modernise its economy, but sees itself as an autonomous world power which controls energy sources on which the EU is dependent. States such as Moldova and Ukraine are pulled in different directions by the attractions of the EU, and their relationship to the Russian state.

Russia and the EU: The ‘near abroad’ versus the ‘neighbourhood’.

Motyl (2001a) argues that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian elites began to fetishise their ‘nation’ while non-Russian elites in the post-Soviet republics began to reify their state borders. After 1991, Russia elites invented a ‘near abroad’ of approximately 25 million ‘Russians and Russian speakers now living under non-Russian rule in North-East Estonia, urban parts of Latvia, most of Belarus, eastern Ukraine and the Crimea, the Trans-Dniester region of Moldova and northern Kazakhstan’ (see Motyl, 2001a: 203) argues that, at least in the 1990s, Russian elites were prone to using ‘irredentist’ and ‘upsizing’ language and logic. On the other hand, the other post-Soviet states such as Estonia, Ukraine or Latvia immediately sought to consolidate their borders. They would not contemplate ‘downsizing’, even if it would make their respective states more ethnically homogeneous.

Russia was left with a top-heavy state apparatus suitable for the Soviet ‘empire’ and infused with a sense of the leadership role of the Russian nation. As such, it sought to exert its influence over its previously subordinate non-Russian republics with Russian minorities. The priorities for the Baltic states, Ukraine and Moldova were to establish their autonomy in the aftermath of Soviet collapse via state-building, distinct military and police forces, border guards and legal autonomy as a precondition for underpinning democracy and market relationships. With US and EU support, these states joined international organisations and acquired the symbols of sovereignty thereby helping legitimate their existing boundaries (Motyl 2001a: 209-215). Russia, on the other hand, was slow to develop an explicit borders' policy until 2002-2003. In 2002, Putin called for visa free travel between Russia and the EU. By 2003, he was stressing the lack of adequate infrastructure for Russia's land and sea borders in response to the threat of illegal immigration, terrorists and the influence exerted by the EU on Russia's neighbouring states (Teague 2005: 28).

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[7] The influence of Turkey (as a state neither fully in or fully outside the EU) needs special attention which is beyond the scope of this paper.

[8] The impact of EU Neighbourhood policy on specific states and sub-regions in eastern and south-eastern Europe is explored in Hayoz et al (eds) (2005). Empirical research in the EU Dimensions project will necessarily develop this more differentiated perspective in relation to civil society promotion and co-operation. In this paper, however, we are concerned with more ‘broad –brush’ characterisations of the debates around civil society in the region as a whole.

The struggle for geo-political influence in Eastern Europe also involves the United States, however. The three cornered relationship between the US, Russia and the EU has arguably become more important and more complicated against the background of increasing preoccupations with security, the war on terror, and ongoing war in Iraq, Afghanistan and the frequent eruptions of conflict in Israel/Palestine and Lebanon. Motyl et al (2005: 302-03) advocate what they admit is a somewhat unrealistic scenario at the moment: a security partnership between the US and Russia, Russian promotion of intra-EU and transatlantic amity while foregoing 'dusty imperial' projects in its 'near abroad and EU extension of its institutions and a Common European Economic Space to Russia and its neighbours. Part of this scenario involves the EU beginning to act as a 'great power', that is, translating its 'soft power' into encouraging Russian rapprochement with western institutions.

The invention of the EU Neighbourhood in some ways paralleled and overlapped with Russia's 'near abroad'[9]. The institutional strategy of the EU was very different, however, from the more blatant power politics of the Russian state.[10] For the EU, transnational and cross-border co-operation involving civil society organisations (CSOs) remains one of the elements in the EU's attempt to re-shape and stabilize its 'neighbourhood'. More broadly, it is part of the EU's 'civilising mission' aimed at encouraging prosperity, stability and security in its 'neighbourhood' (Landaburu, 2006) by spreading European values associated with democracy, the 'rule of law' and the 'free market'. In principle at least, the promotion of particular forms of 'civil society' by the EU goes well beyond bi-lateral agreements with external states and state elites. In the words of the Director General, External Relations of the EU Commission, it is interventionist…'we will work with our neighbours to promote *their* reforms, improving life for *their* citizens, as well as our own' [emphasis in the original] (Landaburu, 2006:3).

Without the promise of EU membership, it might be hypothesised, that the EU's 'interventionist' strategy will lack leverage. Here, there is potentially a sharp distinction between 'enlargement' and so-called 'deeper integration' *via* the 'neighbourhood'. In the accession process, a powerful conditionality process exists where the legal and institutional distinctiveness of the EU is brought to bear to push legal, market, and civil society reform in candidate states. The 'Neighbourhood' on the other hand, falls under the EU 'foreign policy' initiatives which are far more ambiguous and incoherent than either their US or Russian counterpart. Here the promotion of democracy and 'civil society' 'can be trumped by issues such as strategic security, energy supply, strategic diplomacy, conflicting visions for the future of Europe and world views' (Emerson et al, 2005: 225). In this context, the 'deeper integration' promised by the ENP remains a vague goal.

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[9] Christiansen et al (2000: 391ff) label the neighbouring EU states, the EU's 'near abroad'.

[10] For example, Russia sought to directly influence the outcome of Ukrainian elections and supported the autonomy of the Trans-Dniester region from Moldova. Russia's control of energy supplies to the other 'Neighbourhood' states and to the EU remains a major lever for exerting influence in the region.

Moreover, the relative weakness of civil society organisations in the neighbourhood states further militates against a coherent EU strategy. Nevertheless, EU funding programmes and the multi-faceted advantages of links with the EU, may provide stimulus, opportunities and some resources for civil society actors in the neighbourhood states. This is a key area for empirical research within EU Dimensions. Investigating attempts to export the EU model or models of civil society reform may illuminate, not only the different meanings and capacities of civil society in the 'neighbourhood' states, it may also provide a means of reflection on differences within 'western' or EU models of civil society.

THE WEAKNESS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE 'NEIGHBOURHOOD

There is a large measure of consensus in the literature that civil society is distinctively weak in post-communist countries. For example, in his study of civil society in four 'neighbourhood' states, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, Piehl (2004:62) concludes, with the exception of the western Ukraine, that they are 'virgin territory for the democracy and the development of civil society'. The empirical results of EXLINEA[11] and regional profile studies also indicate a rather weak civil society largely confined to a few sectors such as youth, cultural or environmental cooperation.

Neighbourhood states are associated with low levels of political participation by ordinary citizens, low respect for law, little confidence in government institutions and higher support for the return of the Communist system (see Zielonka, 2006: 40-41; Howard, 2003; Piehl, 2004). Zielonka (2006: 40) notes that Russia and Ukraine in particular have a very low NGO membership density per million of population (21.6 and 33.6 respectively) when compared to new member states of the EU in Eastern Europe.[12] The numbers of registered organisation or associations have rapidly increased particularly in the early 1990 in post-communist states, however, the number of registered NGOs often bears little resemblance to the numbers that are active, nor does it indicate how many people they represent. Sceptics of civil society argue, that its impact on the wider society remains modest (Hann, 2003; Howard, 2003).[13]

Discussions of civil society in the 'Neighbourhood States' tend to focus on Russia as the least promising arena for the development of 'civil society', and also as the state most impervious to EU and other 'Western' attempts to promote it. Maćków (2005: 35) draws a sharp distinction between Russia and the West, in that the former has a strong tradition of autocracy and ‘noncivil;’ society. He argues that from 13th century onwards, history of rule in Russia is without limitation by the law. Until second half of eighteenth century rule was patrimonial… the whole land including its inhabitants was regarded as possession of sovereign. By contrast, there was ’respect for law’ in the West linked to the development of private property and the capacity of powerful actors in civil society to limit the power of the state from the time of the medieval monarchs.

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[11] See EXLINEA, Final Project Report, February 2006.

[12] This compares to over 1,000 for Slovenia and Estonia and between 300 and 600 for Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and somewhat anomalously, Albania (Zielonka 2006: 41).

[13] Russia: around 300,000 registered NGOs, of which 30,000 are active; Ukraine: approx. 40,000 compared with 4,000 in 1995 in a country of population of nearly 50 million; Moldova: about 2,800 (Peihl, 2004).

Without ‘demand’ or ‘respect’ for law, Maćków (2005) suggests that a Russian constitutional state can at best be a sham that hides informal decision-making channels (p 34). What he terms the ‘civil society of the president; which includes the party of power and the representatives of big business and the middle classes’ do not have a strong demand for law. Nor to the key actors of the new Russian society - the big associations, the economic tycoons, the large trade unions, the Russian Orthodox Church and some political parties who are closely linked to the state. According to Maćków (2005: 46), the majority of Russians rely not on civil society organisation to take up their cause swiftly and decisively, but rather on ‘authoritarian power, the firm hand of the president…’. He suggests that the majority regard the liberal NGO, worried about its autonomy, as a ‘foreign Western body’ that disrupts the natural hierarchical order. Non-commercial NGOs, many of them lobbying for human rights do exist independent of the state. They are linked and partly financed by ‘Western institutions but they are legally insecure. Maćków (2005: 46) concludes that: ‘ (i)t is obvious that a state having the Gestalt and behaviour of the Russian state cannot be seen as a reliable partner for autonomous social actors’.

Clearly, it may be argued that the Russian state constitutes a special case within the region, that is, one uniquely ill-fitted to supporting a civil society. Yet, some observers emphasise that common trends are visible in all post-communist societies. Marc Howard points out similarities among post-communist countries on societal levels particularly with regard to a common mistrust of the organisations of civil society or the disappointment with new governmental institutions (Howard, 2003; Mishler and Rose, 1997). Howard (2003: 151) argues that the relationship between ordinary citizens and the state is qualitatively different in post-communist societies. Citizens are excluded from decision-making processes (Howard 2003: 151). Yet this exclusion also means that it is hard to mobilize people, per se, for anti-democratic purposes thereby ensuring that the degree of ‘democracy’ achieved in not particularly precarious.

He goes on to argue, however, that post-communist citizens:

> ‘ (1) will maintain strong feelings of mistrust of voluntary organisations that result from past experience with communist organizations; (2) continue to make use of private friendship networks that have persisted in the current time period, and which serve as a disincentive to joining voluntary organizations; (3) feel extremely disappointed with the new political and economic system, thus discouraging them even more from participating in public activities’ (Howard 2006: 148).

If Howard's diagnosis is correct, then the European Neighbourhood Policy faces major obstacles in its attempts to promote civil society and cross-border co-operation among CSOs. If the ENP is conceived as a 'foreign policy' as opposed to a further enlargement strategy, then its seems likely that the emphasis will fall on the relationship between the EU and the *states* in the neighbourhood. Given that much of the literature underlines the problematical relationship between civil society and the state, working in and through state institutions, may actually hinder rather than encourage cross-border co-operation among CSOs.

Underlying the debate on civil society in the neighbourhood is a degree of consensus that there is malign, or at best problematical, relationship between the state and civil society. This does not mean, however, that there is a consensus on what that relationship should be. Nor is there a consensus on what model of civil society, the EU should promote in the 'neighbourhood. In the next section, we briefly review different understandings of civil society in the 'West', through the prism of the social science literature.

'WESTERN' PERSPECTIVES ON CIVIL SOCIETY

Overview

As indicated in the introduction, civil society remains, however, a difficult and highly debated concept in the literature and it would be misleading to suggest that there is consensus on its definition even within the core states of the EU. There is considerable disagreement about what might be included under the rubric of civil society and where its boundaries might be drawn. For example, for some analysts, the economy falls clearly under the remit of civil society, for others, it exists in the space between the economy (the market) and the state. Some observers, notably of recent East European developments, see civil society as the source of opposition to the authoritarian or totalitarian state, other see it as effectively co-opted, penetrated and manipulated by the state. Advocates of transnational civil society, see it as a necessary democratic counterbalance to globalisation dominated by the large corporations and the most powerful states.

Michael Edwards (2004) provides a useful overview of ideas and theories of civil society and of different perspectives on its definition, structure and role. He distinguishes three schools of thought about 'civil society'.[14]

(1) the characterization of 'civil society' as associational life, ie as a 'third or 'non-profit sector, that is as part of a wider society;

(2) 'civil society' as a kind of 'good society' characterized by positive norms and values

(3) 'civil society' as the public sphere

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[14] In the following discussion of theories of civil society, we are indebted to unpublished work by Milena Komarova at Queen's University, Belfast.

Civil Society as ‘associational life’ or the ‘third sector’

The first meaning has deep roots in American social thought: it sees civil society as containing all associations and networks between the family and the state in which membership and activities are ‘voluntary’ – formally registered NGOs of many different kinds, labour unions, political parties, churches and other religious groups, professional and business associations, community and self-help groups, social movements and the independent media.” (Edwards, 2004: 20). This is in Walzer’s words, the ‘space of uncoerced human association’. There is a difficulty here, however, in deciding which associations should be included and excluded from civil society’; the notion of a clearly defined sphere between state and market (.e. the profit sector) is difficult to sustain in a European context and above all in an Eastern European context where the state influence is much more pervasive. Nevertheless, this understanding is not irrelevant to the extent that it informs American promotion of civil society as the ‘third sector’ in the EU neighbourhood.

Keane’s (1998) understanding of civil society bears some resemblance to this ‘third sector’ approach although he includes the market or ‘profit sector’ in civil society. Based on recent European experience he defines civil society as “the realm of social (privately owned, market-directed, voluntarily run or friendship-based) activities” (1988: 9) that constitute “a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be non-violent, self-organising, self-reflexive and permanently in tension with each other and with the state institutions which frame, construct and enable their activities.” (1998). With the growth of neo-liberal capitalism and globalization he sees civil society in Europe becoming more autonomous from the state, with declining state control of the capitalist economy, partial retrenchment of the welfare state and the growth of social movement and social networks keen to expand and democratize civil society while being uninterested in gaining political power by control over the state. Thus, for Keane, state and civil society are becoming increasingly separated. However, he sees the state as an indispensable and benevolent protector of civil society and a ‘referee’ in intra-societal disputes. Civil society depends on the state for its security, since “vigorous political initiatives, funding and legal recognition are necessary for the survival and expansion of civil society. … sovereign state power is an indispensable condition of the democratization of civil society.”(Keane, 1998: 22)

There are many variations on the view of civil society as ‘autonomous’ or separate from the state. Some of them draw on Eastern European developments since the 1980s. Gellner (1994) for example, maintains Keane’s distinction between state and civil society but has a stronger sense of civil society a source of opposition to, a check on, the centralized state. Thus the overthrow or democratization of communist regimes in Eastern Europe is traced to the oppositional and democratic potential of civil society.

These views of an autonomous civil society, either guaranteed by the state or as a source of opposition to it, have been criticized for having a weak and inadequate conceptualization of how political society (including the state) actually works. In practice, the state has a major influence on associational life as a funder, co-ordinator, even manipulator although the nature of the influence may vary across political and geographical contexts. Walzer (1991: 302) notes that the state is unlike all other associations:

> 'It both frames civil society and occupies space within it. It fixes the boundary conditions and the basic rules of all associational activity (including political activity'

The work of Cohen and Arato (1994) tries to develop a more interactive view of the relationship between the state and civil society highlighting the more active quality of civil society: the politics of influence exercised by actors in civil society both over itself and over political society. In this account, civil society is the sphere of social interaction between economy and state, comprising the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations, (especially voluntary associations), social movements and forms of public communication. They distinguish civil society from both political society (of parties, political organisations, political publics and parliaments) and economic society (composed of organisations of production and distribution). In this they are seeking to bridge Western and Eastern European conceptions of civil society by demonstrating the "dramatic oppositional role of the concept under authoritarian regimes" and by attempting to "renew its critical potential under liberal democracies." (Cohen and Arato, 1994: ix). Thus, civil society mobilisation is not just about changing the state, it is also about positively transforming civil society itself. Certainly, a successful promotion of civil society in the neighbourhood states by the EU would appear to require some such bridging of East-West understandings of civil society.

The second and third understandings of civil society identified by Edwards in the literature also have some bearing on the debates over the EU's promotion of civil society in that they are often interwoven with the first approach.

(2) Civil Society as the 'good society' of the 'communitarians'.

Edwards points out that civil society is often used as shorthand for the kind of society we want to live in, i.e. as a metaphor for the 'good society'. Here it is seen as the repository of tolerance, non-discrimination, non-violence, trust and co-operation, tolerance, non-discrimination, non-violence, trust and co-operation, freedom and democracy…in short a society that is civil. Here the work of Etzioni (1993) and Putnam (1993) is prominent. Social theorists from this school stress the essential contribution of the third sector and the importance of engaging with local community interests in shaping policies to combat deprivation, addressing declining 'social capital' and promoting community well-being. This approach promotes an idea of 'active' or responsible citizenship via community involvement. This 'communitarian' perspective seeks to combat both liberalism and the legacy of communism. It questions what it sees as liberalism's excessive emphasis on the rights of the individual[15] which can lead to the disregarding of his or her public responsibilities. Simultaneously, its promotion of the 'active' citizen is a challenge to the passive, non-engaged, distrustful citizen in post-communist states. Thus, communities, neighbourhoods, voluntary associations and churches are the basic building blocks of society because they teach civic virtues such as trust and co-operation. It is these intermediate institutions that can be the source of moral and social cohesion in the globalised market society.

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[15] The communitarian approach also seeks to combat the reduction of citizenship to the right of the individual consumer within the market economy.

In the above manner the 'civil society revivalists' school of thought argues that voluntary social interaction produces high and generalised levels of trust and co-operation which in turn are essential for democracy and social progress. Their key hypothesis is that communities, networks and associations are microclimates in which skills are learnt, values and loyalties developed and caring and cooperation, instead of competition and violence become the rational ways to behave. Their vision for the future of civil society is the creation of social partnerships, involving state agencies, and the community, that will arguably result in the eventual devolution of power to the community. McClain and Fleming (1999), critiquing 'civil society revivalists' in the American context, make the point that getting people connected to each other in order to pursue the good of groups and associations does not necessarily translate into thinking about, or pursuing, the common good of the polity. It is the latter that is the primary focus of scholars who conceptualise civil society as the public sphere.

Civil Society as the Public Sphere

The third perspective on civil society identified by Edwards is one that equates civil society with the public sphere. Rooted in the philosophy of John Dewey and Hannah Arendt, the theory of the 'public sphere' as an essential component of democracy reached its highest levels of articulation through the work of Jurgen Habermas (1990). For him, the existence of a 'discursive public sphere' enables citizens to talk about common concerns in conditions of freedom, equality and non-violent interaction (Habermas, 1990). For Habermas and other 'critical theorists' a healthy civil society is one "that is steered by its members through shared meanings" which are constructed rationally and democratically through the communicative structures of the public sphere. Thus in its guise as the public sphere civil society becomes the arena for argument and deliberation as well as for association and institutional collaboration: a "non-legislative, extra-judicial, public space in which societal differences, social problems, public policy, government action and matters of community and cultural identity are developed and debated." (McClain and Fleming, 2000)

Edwards (2004: 58) is critical of Habermas's somewhat idealistic notion of the public sphere in which the best ideas, and not loudest voices will triumph. This he regards as 'a somewhat quaint conclusion', 'given the inequalities that characterise all contemporary societies'. A functioning public sphere does rest on elements of the first two definitions of civil society identified above (civil society as associational life and civil society as the good society) but it is much more that the sum of those parts. Inclusive and objective public deliberation is feasible only through channels that are not completely captured by states or markets so the conditions of associational life and the regulatory frameworks imposed by government are always important factors. On the other hand, what takes place in the public sphere, or is assumed to be marked out by the normative values of the good society, like tolerance for dissent, is crucial if problems are genuinely to be resolved in the public interest, since there is no other way the public interest can be defined. As we saw above, the theory of the public sphere is explicitly concerned with the generation and preservation of a democratic framework for the development and expression of collective visions about the basic rules of the game. It therefore demands a return to the practice of politics, not as an elite occupation, but as an ongoing process through which "active citizens can help to shape both the ends and means of the good society."(Edwards 2004: 59).

Most important of all, says Edwards, the public sphere helps different groups to find a balance between personal autonomy and the demands of the social whole. The governance of complex societies and the preservation of peaceful coexistence require that some of these particularities are surrendered to the common interest in the form of rules, laws, norms and other agreements that cut across the views of different communities and to which all citizens subscribe. The application of these rules is ultimately the task of government and other institutions of the state but civil society plays a role in both legitimizing government intervention and imposing its own informal settlements.

> "A successful civil society is one that supports the peaceful expression of these multiple identities without fracturing into a myriad of disconnected agendas - a place where we can celebrate our differences within a common commitment to the interests of a public. Otherwise civil society remains a mere agglomeration of different interests. And public spheres provide the venues for deliberating over which differences fall into each of these camps, going beyond a shallow interpretation of pluralism (defending our differences against each other) to forge a common yet inclusive framework of norms and values." (Edwards, 2004: 67).

Clearly, there is little evidence that a public sphere as envisaged by Habermas exists in the neigbourhood states. But is there much evidence that it exists, other than in a very ghostly form, at transnational level either, or at the level of the EU as whole? The existence of 'free' mass media directly reporting and monitoring political society might be regarded as the *sine qua non* of a functioning public sphere. Restrictions on such a media are commonplace in the neighbourhood states. There is little evidence either of a functioning EU-wide media focused on the EU as a polity as distinct from the media of its individual member states.

At a general level, the 'civilising mission' promoted by the EU in the neigbourhood may seek to promote a vision of civil society which draws on varying combinations of the perspectives identified above – civil society as: (1) associational life (2) the good society of the communitarians and (3) a functioning public sphere. US and other western sponsors also support varying versions of civil society in the 'Neighbourhood'. Which aspects of 'civil society' are emphasised, promoted and implemented, and by whom, are empirical questions central to the concerns of EU Dimensions. The type of relationships between state, market and civil society in Western Europe and North America are very different to those pertaining in Russia, the Ukraine and Moldova. They may differ significantly also from those in the 10 new member states of the EU. In the next, and final, section of the paper, we summarise some of the factors which might shape the opportunities and constraints confronting civil society in the ‘Neighbourhood’. Our list of factors is tentative, however, and is meant to inform the empirical research required to provide a more definitive assessment.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE ‘NEIGHBOURHOOD: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

As suggested in section three above, a majority of researchers find that civil society in Eastern Neighbourhood is weak in comparison with Western democracies. In this section we summarise several factors which shape the role of civil society and its abilities to perform the functions described above. It needs to be acknowledged that our list is not exhaustive and might be modified in the course of empirical research. Nevertheless, this brief overview of impact factors may help us to unpack the ambiguities surrounding civil societies and its role in the European Neighbourhood..

The vibrant, large scale political mobilisations which challenged the communist regimes from the 1980s onwards conveyed the image of an active citizenry and the survival of a civil society autonomous from the state (Gellner, 1994). The mass mobilisation of civil society (apart from the Ukrainian and Georgian examples) now seems to have been replaced, however, by professional, knowledge-based groups and NGOs providing their expertise and services to the state authorities. A servicing role now seems to have supplanted the previous oppositional and ‘watchdog’ role (Raik, 2006; Piehl, 2004; Hirsch, 2002). Sceptics further argue that NGOs are limited in their scope to filling sectoral gaps which are neglected or are not seen to be of strategic importance by the states such as youth, environment, gender or culture. In some ways, mass anti-state mobilisations now threaten a stability in the region which is favoured by all the main geopolitical actors, Russia, the US, and the EU.

However, the new advisory role of civil society is far more limited than that represented in the more positive images of Western NGOs. The latter are seen to take on much broader functions than the merely advisory such as: exercising control over power holders and preventing the misuse of power; providing a channel of communication for citizens; performing social tasks; strengthening active citizenship and improving the quality and effectiveness of democracy *inter alia*. (Raik, 2006: 2-6).

Funding Opportunities and Legal Conditions

New funding opportunities after the political changes and opening of the borders towards the West undoubtedly initiated a rapid increase of registered NGOs even if many were to remain inactive. The exploration of international and state donor attempts to support and strengthen civil society raises several key issues around the autonomy, sustainability and strategic planning of relevant agencies. Here, we briefly discuss the financial and legal opportunities and restrictions.

Enlargement has increased the interest of the EU (and its new members in particular) in neighbouring states that might be abandoned otherwise to the Russian zone of influence. In spite of the steadily increasing support of civil societies in these countries, the main priorities of the EU assistance programme (Tacis) are institutional, administrative and legal reforms.[16] Only a small percentage of the total assistance of the EU was given to civil society despite the fact that this field is defined as one of the top priorities of the neighbourhood policy. The US, not the EU, is the most significant donor to Ukraine and Moldova (see table bellow).

Table 1. Assistance of major donors to Ukraine and Moldova, 1998-2004 (million Euros)

Donor	**Total assistance Ukraine**	**Assistance to NGOs/ % of total Ukraine**	**Total assistance Moldova**	**Assistance to NGOs/ % of total, Moldova**
United States	€1222.1	77.09 ≈6%	€212.83	4.27 ≈2
European Union	€826.2	16.4 ≈2%	€114.6	5.6 ≈5
Germany	€228.2	N/A	€19.52	N/A
United Kingdom	€77.5	0.76 ≈1%	€16.88	0.23 ≈1
Sweden	€31.5	0.92 ≈3%	€21.41	0.23 ≈1
Netherlands	€16.9	N/A	€45.06	N/A

Source: Table was modified for our purposes from, Raik, K. (2006), p.16-17.

The EU as the second largest contributor to the Eastern neighbourhood channels its aid through state authorities or large institutions which have better capacities to absorb highly bureaucratic and costly EU procedures. Unlike the bottom-up approach of the US donors to civil society, the EU focuses on the institutional dimension. Nevertheless, this top-down state-centric approach of EU is problematic in Eastern European countries characterised by mutual distrust and little communication between civil society and the state. It is even more limited in restrictive non-democratic environment (i.e. Belarus).

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[16] For example, Ukraine should receive 110 million EURO for institutional, legal and administrative reform in 2004-06, out of which 10 goes to civil society, media and democracy. For 2000-04, 11.1 million is allocated for NGO support, Raik (2006), p.6.

The different approaches used to promote civil society suggests that the origin of the funding may be as important as its scale in determining how civil society is to be promoted.

In this context, Raik suggests that the EU should establish a special European democracy foundation to support civil society in more flexible, innovative and effective way than through Commission's very complicated and bureaucratic programmes. Listing the advantages of large foundations such as the German Stiftungen or the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, she argues that the foundations are more acceptable in non-democratic countries and are able to better react to local circumstances.[17]

Funding often leads to dependency on either domestic state donors or international institutions which often pursue their own strategic goals regardless local or regional priorities advocated by civil society organisations (Hirsch, 2002).[18] Interference in domestic affairs through civil society activities was heavily criticised by the Kuchma regime in Ukraine and by the Putin administration which accused domestic NGOs of collaboration and conspiracy against national interests threatening to undermine their public image in the process.[19]

The legal conditions such as registration and tax exemption are obviously important factors for establishing functional legal NGOs. For instance, NGOs in Russia operate in a rather restrictive environment where the activities and funding is strictly controlled by state authorities (see new law regulating NGOs in Russia issued in 2005)[20]. The politics of choice is often limited by restrictive governmental regulations or by international donors themselves[21] - an issue to be explored further in empirical studies. Nowadays, as Piehl argues, civil society organisations themselves are becoming increasingly aware what they can and cannot do. Hence their role as monitors of state power may be very limited or overestimated (Piehl, 2004).

Legacies of History, Culture and Tradition

Another group of factors that accounts for the weakness of civil society are rooted in history, culture and tradition. Here, building upon Howard's empirical research we point out specific attributes of communist and post-communist experiences to better understand the problems around civil societies in this region. As noted above, Howard (2003) argues that, despite the importance of structural factors such as the level of economic and democratic development, behavioural patterns inherited from previous communist experiences play a crucial explanatory role of the weakness of civil societies.

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[17] Raik (2006: 22) lists the following advantages of the foundation funding: flexibility; innovation; better adaptation; less bureaucratic; multilevel work with more agents.

[18] Hirsch argues that NGOs need to safeguard their autonomy vis-à-vis the states or international organisations.

[19] At a press conference in the Kremlin on 31 January 2006, president Vladimir Putin said Russia supports NGOs but does not want them to be run by "puppeteers from abroad.", source www.rferl.org/features

[20] In brief, under this new law, NGOs in Russia will have to re-register with the state and will be subject to annual checks to determine whether their activities conform to their charter. Their access to funds from abroad will also be restricted, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4624064.stm See also : 'New Russian Law on NGOs Goes into Effect', http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/04/2AA31A18-64C9-4D4D-9871

[21] See Howell and Pearce (2002).

Since the public sphere was under heavy control and surveillance it has created sharp distinction between public and private realms. Almost all citizens of communist countries had mandatory memberships in different organisations which developed negative opinions about civil society and participation. Due to these past experiences with associations imposed by the state, post-communist citizens view CSOs as unnecessary if not dangerous: ‘the alienation and fear bred by the system meant that the Soviets were individuals bound into groups, not individuals associating in groups- a crucial difference from the perspective of social capital’.[22]

If people are simply not accustomed taking part in public life they do not change their behaviour quickly even if the new political system is favourable to civil society. Connections and informal networks played a very important role during the previous regimes. Here, Putnam’s social capital theory discussed above may have limited importance for post-communist countries where noncommunitarian social capital of informal networks and informal social organisations predominate. Some argue that social capital theory and communitarian approach to civil society is more significant to established democracies in the West rather than in the Easter European countries which experience political transformations (Mihaylova, 2004).[23] Aberg believes that as long as the state policies and institutions are inefficient this noncommunitarian social capital will remain a powerful aspect of societal relationships. [24]

The legacy of mistrust of all formal organisations and disappointment with the new institutions are also characteristic features of these societies. Throughout the region people expect the state to solve their problems. This is accompanied by passivity and lack of interest in politics (Piehl, 2004). Consequently, the general mobilisation and enthusiasm about liberation and the establishment of new systems were replaced by apathy and disillusionment. Another obstacle for civil society is the lack of trust and support and confidence among the post-communist population which often views CSOs with suspicion and scepticism. It is commonly believed that NGOs do not offer solutions and represent their own interests (Raik, 2006:13).

In summary, the significance of widespread passivity of citizens across Eastern European countries is a key factor to take into considerations during the empirical investigation. In other words, an element of path dependency may be important in that the nature of the previous state socialist regimes may be a strong factor in explaining the level of civil society and the existing mutual distrust between the state and civil society.

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[22] Nichols, quoted in Mihaylova (2004), Social Capital in Central and Eastern Europe.
[23] For overview see Mihaylova (2004), p.76-92.
[24] Aberg cited in Mihaylova ibid.

Structural Factors

As mentioned above, the Eastern European Neighbourhood countries with some variations can be described as economically deprived, with high unemployment and widespread corruption, weak absorption capacities, enormous social inequalities and highly bureaucratic and centralised administrations. In addition, they are threatened with further disintegration by powerful clans and informal groups (Russia, Ukraine and Moldova) which remain the driving force in state and society (Piehl, 2004).

Many studies show a correlation between the level of **socio-economic development** and civil society. In other words, poorer countries usually display lower levels of civic activities.[25] Therefore, it might be expected that poverty reduction and economic development will strengthen civil societies. Howard's (2003) quantitative evidence challenges this view by showing that the more economically developed new EU members may still have weak civil societies. Several other researchers argue that unlike in market economies, civil society is not positively correlated with economic growth in post-communist countries – rather it is linked to trust in institutions.

It is perhaps obvious that the **lack of democracy** hinders independent civil society. Nevertheless, stage of democratisation is often not taken into account despite the extent to which civil society depends on the nature of state regimes. Raik (2006: 5) urges the external donors to carefully examine the conditions in respective countries although it is sometimes difficult and problematic to evaluate the levels of democratisation (Raik, 2006:5).

Border regimes, i.e. the forms of state control and regulation at borders, are also likely to impinge directly on regional cross-border co-operation between civil society actors. Some experts argued, for example, that the tightening of border regimes between Russia and its neighbours was 'likely to negatively affect small scale traders, families and ethnic minorities whereas drug smugglers, human traffickers, and money launderers can find their way through the most stringent of borders'. These experts favoured increased cooperation with international police and security services rather than investing in border police, barbed wire and surveillance equipment (Teague, 2005: 29).

The distribution of cultural minorities in border regions may also affect the prospects for cross-border co-operation between CSOs. As is typical for many border regions, the main regions under study are also areas of cultural overlap where **minority issues** loom large.[26] Russian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Romanian and Greek communities can be found across the state borders which create practical opportunities for co-operation unless they are precluded by central states suspicious of border minorities. Nevertheless, the existence of minorities across the borders combined with opportunities for increasing mobility may provide new window of opportunity for transnational and cross-border civil society (i.e. diaspora or minority networks).

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[25] There are exceptions to this general trend (i.e. Bangladesh).

26 The Finish-Russian border is the one major exception.

The new Neighbourhood countries should benefit from the **experiences of new member states** (Poland, Hungary, Estonia and Romania), which have undergone legal and institutional reforms in line with the EU directives. The Baltic States, Poland and Hungary, for example are keen to forge links in the 'Neighbourhood'. A key rationale of cross-border programmes, most recently the ENP is to exchange 'lessons learned' and to avoid the further marginalisation of these peripheral regions.

Another common denominator in the case studies regions is the lack of connectivity, underdeveloped infrastructure and the **rural character** of the border areas. Rural areas have dispersed settlement patterns which may impact negatively on the scale and form of cooperation across the border. According to Raik's analysis there is widening gap between larger cities where NGOs activities are concentrated and the rural areas with considerably weaker in civil society (Raik, 2006). Research suggests that NGOS attract more urban and educated people.

The Role of the ENP

Despite this relatively inhospitable environment in the 'Neighbourhood, EU[27] and Council of Europe programmes have arguably strengthened civil society through programmes relating to young people, education and research. Support for civil society has been defined as one of the priorities in newly designed European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It is envisaged by the European Commission (EC) that funding for neighbourhood countries will be doubled from 2007. To be more precise, the role of civil society is noted in the ENP strategy paper with reference to a number of different spheres: youth work, science and education, culture and cross-border cooperation, the environment, the fight against corruption, local administration.[28]

The democratisation of the ENP might be enhanced if civil society actors were to be involved in the preparation and implementation of ENP Action Plans. Despite the explicit call for 'involvement of the citizens in the decision-making process, including some from civil society organisations'[29], the EU-Ukraine Action Plans gives little support to civil society. The absence of civil society from the agenda of political dialogue between the EU and 'Neighbourhood' governments has been heavily criticised. For instance, NGOs lament that the Action Plans negotiated exclusively with the governments repeat the experience of previous EU programmes thus largely constraining the opportunities of CSOs to be actively involved in decision-making processes (Piehl, 2004; Raik, 2006).

Raik (2006: 18) identifies five major reasons for the existing gap between rhetoric and practice in the ENP: weakness of strategy, lack of common political will, bureaucratic rules, insufficient recourses and tense relations between the EU institutions.

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[27] The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, see http://ec.europa.eu/comm/europeaid/projects/eidhr

[28] EC (2004), European Neighbourhood Strategy Paper, COM(2004) 373.

[29] EU-Ukraine Action Plan, approved by the EU-Ukraine Cooperation Council in February 2005, p.7.

The lack of common political will and incoherent strategy for civil society is related to a broader problem around Neighbourhood Policy and its ambiguities. The weaknesses of the ENP have a negative impact on its capacity and ability to promote and to strengthen civil society in Neighbourhood. In brief, the overall emphasis on securitisation and bilateral emphasis of the ENP does not create a favourable environment for enhance cooperation of civil societies. In words of Pertti Joenniemi there are fewer opportunities for 'heterogeneous approaches' in this newly emerging space which seems to about managing borders not overcoming them (Joenniemi, 2006).

This bilateral and centralised framework of the ENP has been criticised by several authors as the step back (Pace, 2006; Joenniemi, 2006). For instance, Michelle Pace (2006) is highly critical on the EU's bilateral or inter-governmental arrangements which is particularly problematic in less democratic or authoritarian countries where civil society is disadvantaged. She further urges the EU to seriously engage with non-state actors and reformists to allow for political reforms and transformation in respective societies. For instance, the lack of 'carrots' available for the neighbouring countries under the bilateral dimension of the ENP is not very encouraging for civil society. As noted above, bureaucracy and strict financial regulations of the EU programmes reduce the opportunities and the effectiveness of NGOs. EU procedures are costly, slow, and characterised by tight financial controls making it difficult for small NGOs to apply for funding. The problem is exacerbated by the intersection between EU bureaucracy and that of the receiving state.

Multiple Factors

Further specification of the above-mentioned factors, and others not discussed here, will help to unpack the complex cultural and structural conditions and policy ambiguities which impact on the promotion of civil society across the external EU border. While the ENP is an important influence here, it is important to recognise that it is not the only one. The geo-political influence of the US and Russia and its intersection with that of the EU will continue to shape civil society in the region creating opportunities for its development as well as constraints on its potential. Moreover, it is important to recognise that 'Western' understandings of the definition, role and significance of civil society are far from homogenous or uniform. Therefore, it is important to ask which form of civil society is being promoted or advocated and how realistic is it in the context of the Neighbourhood States. Whatever model is promoted, central to its success, is a positive and benign relationship between state and civil society.

Finally, there are distinct advantages the qualitative approach proposed by EU Dimensions. Most studies of civil societies in the region rely on dubious quantitative measures such as the number of registered NGOs or their nominal memberships (Kubik, 2005). Such approaches can be misleading to the extent that they fail to grasp the complex influences which shape and undermine the actual level of civil society activity in the EU's new borderland..

SUMMARY

This paper suggests at the outset that the EU's new borderland is a potentially fruitful environment for examining the contemporary interface and overlap between 'Western' and 'Eastern' concepts of civil society. It then goes on to outline the changing geo-political framework shaping the EU's neighbourhood and the prospects of civil society within it. This section pays particular attention to impact of non-EU actors, notably Russia. The third section describes the basis of the widespread consensus on the weakness of civil society in the region. This is followed by a discussion of the debate over the meaning of civil society in the 'West' in order to demonstrate that there is no uniform or undifferentiated model of civil society available for export to Eastern Europe. The final section sketched out a range of factors that influence opportunities for, and constraints on, civil society in the EU Neighbourhood. The list is not exhaustive, nor is it fully elaborated; however, it is advanced as a set of suggestions for the research agenda of the EU Dimensions project.

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