The Dispositif of "Eastern Neighborhood": A Framework for Analysis

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Abstract

The paper introduces Foucauldian dispositif as a novel theoretical perspective on the study of EU power as deployed in its Eastern neighborhood. It lays down the theoretical case in favor of the dispositif perspective and illustrates how it can be employed in the case of one chosen partner country, Georgia.

Keywords: EU external affairs, Eastern neighborhood, Georgia, Foucault, dispositif

This conceptual paper makes a case for a novel theoretical perspective that can be used to explore how the EU exercises power in its "Eastern neighborhood". Inspired by the thought of Michel Foucault, it argues that the complex web of power relations and practices employed by the EU east of its border is usefully framed as an "Eastern neighborhood dispositif". Employing other Foucauldian concepts (governmentality) and methods (a distinct version of discourse analysis), it develops a framework for a critical yet systematic and empirical inquiry of EU power. In the second section, some preliminary remarks are presented regarding the ways EU power is exercised in one chosen partner country, Georgia.

"Eastern Neighborhood" Dispositif

Dispositif, as a concept coined by Foucault, is a power management apparatus. It is a "heterogeneous ensemble" of discourses, institutions, regulatory decisions, laws, architectural structures, administrative measures, scientific statements or philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions, a "set of strategies of the relations of forces supporting, and supported by, certain types of knowledge" (Foucault 1980: 196; cf. Foucault 1998). It is understood as a particular configuration in time which orients and arranges multiplicity of power relations in a certain domain; as a moving marker to think about power in a dynamic social field which goes beyond sovereignty, law and institutions while possibly including them (Bussolini 2011; Agamben 2009); and a machine to make see and speak and object in the certain configuration of forces (Deleuze 1992).

The power relations arranged by the dispositif can be identified with various, in historical terms gradually evolving but presently coexisting governmentalities (mentalties, practiced arts of governments). The sovereign power prohibits, punishes and conceives people in totality. The more subtle disciplinary power structures society by prescription and division of normal/abnormal, and individualizes subjects. Finally, modern security regulates circulation within life environment and normalizes through statistical distribution of optimal present and future risk analysis regarding statistical populations it constitutes (Foucault 2007; cf. Bigo 2008; Diez 2008), and "polices at distance" (Huysmans 2004; Bigo and Guild 2005; Bigo 2006; Evans 2010).

The EU, it is contended, has unique ways in which it deploys power in its neighborhood. It does not tally well with the more traditional, material conceptions of power, which is why it
tends to be underrated. Indeed, with no garrisons and few outposts (embassies issuing visas and delegations running projects and programs), its power is poorly understood in terms of chessboards. It is one that flows and shapes rather than coerces and breaks. It structures the neighborhood by the extension of its own practices and regulations (e.g. internal market or Schengen acquis) made binding without asserting direct jurisdiction (cf. Kratochwil 2011) or a membership perspective but employing the principles of conditionality (convergence for access) and competitive differentiation ("more for more").

Punishments are rare (Belarus sanctions), and while transposition of legal regulations to local states' juridical orders remains important, so are the more subtle, disciplining forms of changing the neighborhood through expansion of governmentality practices the development of which is supported by EU’s resources and expertise (e.g. economic regulatory regimes as preconditions for launching DCFTA negotiations; and more generally technologies of liberal governmentality involving statistical benchmarking and assessments); practices of norms diffusion and knowledge transfer; or the extension of liberal security governmentality manifested in technologies of "policing at distance" primarily aimed at increased circulation in a "secure environment" and creating a buffer zone in the neighborhood to transnational threats such as illegal immigration.

It is why the dispositif perspective, sensitive to more subtle forms of acting upon other acting subjects is a useful framework for analysis of EU power in its "neighborhood". How can the "neighborhood dispositif" be inquired into? Firstly, (external) conditions of its emergence and its (internal) discursive order can be explored using a Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), complementing existing narratives of its genesis and evolution by the analysis of broader historical conditions for statements' articulation within the official "neighborhood" discourse. Such FDA may betray inspiration by both the essentially structuralist and descriptive archaeological analytic "defining the conditions in which the function that gave a series of signs... a specific existence, can operate" (Foucault 1997: 122; cf. Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983) and genealogy as Foucault's later method with its focus on conditions of discursive formations and concerned explicitly with subjectivity (how the selves and others are discursively constituted), power and truth (in the interplay of pouvoir/savoir).

The exploration of the internal order can take as a point of departure the duality of logics of the neighborhood established in the literature, duty and threats (cf. Jeandesboz 2007; Christou 2010). The duty is to normalize the outlaying wild fields. It is a mission civilisatrice to which the EU is obliged, not only towards its citizens, but also "towards its present and future neighbors" (European Commission 2003). The mission's ultimate aim in this narrative is to create in its neighborhood through special relationships an "area of prosperity and good neighborliness, founded on the values of the Union..." [emphasis added] (TEU, Art. 8). The logic of threats, in contrast, renders the Eastern neighborhood a source of instability characterized by conflicts, deficient governance, weak states, organized crime, dysfunctional societies and exploding population growth (European Council 2003). Under this logic, interest in close cooperation with neighbors arises from the need to provide for security, stability and development inside the EU. Based on interaction of these two logics, it may be assumed, Eastern neighbors are made into subjects as "transitional Others", and the neighborhood rendered an ambiguous space associated and dissociated at the same time which needs to be shaped to the EU’s own image through transfer of modernity in broad sense and which, as a social construct, serves as the EU's spatio-temporal difference (cf. Rumelili 2004) against which it can define its own discursive Self.

To account for the external conditions of the official neighborhood discourse constitutive of the dispositif's practices, links to historical narratives of the East (cf. Melegh 2006; Kuus 2007; Wolff 1994), genealogical relationship between civilization and police and statebuilding (cf. Neocleous 2011), discourses of enlargement and security (capturing the
dynamic internal/external security management and the relation of security and migration, cf. Bigo 2006; Jeandesboz 2007; Munster 2009) or expert discursive practices of EU power, the neighborhood or common foreign and security policy (including "normative power" and "external governance") sustaining EU's identity and policies may all be assumed to be potentially significant.

Secondly, the operation of the "neighborhood dispositif" in discursive and nondiscursive practices delimited by the general determinants of the possible and the privileged, established in the first step, can be described in a cartography of EU power, a process inspired by Deleuze's metaphor of untangling the dispositif as "drawing a map, doing cartography, surveying unknown landscapes" (1992: 159). It may be organized around the modalities of power established above (sovereign, disciplinary, liberal security), and specified using e.g. adapted Merlingen's methodological framework for the study of governmentality, which focuses on political rationalities, problematizations, political technologies, translations and expertise (Merlingen 2011; on technologies specifically cf. Barry 2001; Huysmans 2004). A first sketch produced by such cartography is presented below.

Progressive development of the EU's capacity for external action and identity as a global actor has generated a substantial body of academic literature on the subject featuring a widening range of perspectives. The EU role as a "normative power" has been hotly debated (for the original thesis see Manners 2002; cf. Manners 2006), and alongside "unified actor" theories structural perspectives, such as external governance interested in norm diffusion and policy transfer (cf. Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009) have been introduced. Furthermore, norms, security, network governance, conditionality and local responses have become a familiar subject in the "neighborhood" literature. What makes the dispositif perspective a novel and useful approach to the study of EU practices in the neighborhood? It situates the EU neighborhood practices in the realm of power, from where they tend to be exempt in the processes of naturalizations of their technical and cooperative character; it contextualizes them historically, pointing out conditions of their emergence and current operation modes; and it is critical, rather than accommodative to the current practices, and it transcends the institutionalist boundaries (two points of divergence from the external governance paradigm). Therefore, it can contribute to both the debate on current modalities of power in international order, further exposing and transcending the boundaries of the interpretative framework dominated by its materialist concept and the epistémé of the Westphalian system; and on the nature of EU power, both generally and as deployed in the neighborhood.

The Cartography of EU Power: A Georgia Sketch

The basic framework for relations between the EU and Georgia is a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1999). Since 2009 its validity has been extended several times, and it is to be succeeded by a new, "much more ambitious" (European Commission 2010a) Association Agreement currently negotiated under Eastern Partnership. The total sum allocated for "technical and financial cooperation" by the EU between 1992-2009 is calculated by the EU Delegation in Tbilisi at € 865 million. In the period 1992-2006 the total of more than € 505 million was disbursed to Georgia through instruments such as TACIS (€ 129 million in market economy and democratic institutions programs, and additional funds in regional projects TRACECA and INOGATE), Food Security Programme (FSP), European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), in EC Humanitarian Office (ECHO)'s projects (€ 102.2 million spent in emergency relief after the civil war, rehabilitation programs in the conflict areas and

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assistance to IDPs, including support for income generating activities), and in macrofinancial assistance (European Commission 2006).

Following the Rose Revolution (2003), Georgia was included in the planning of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). More immediately, Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM) funding was released to Georgia, a donor conference co-chaired by the EU (together with the World Bank) took place, and the first CSDP mission in the Post-Soviet space, EUJUST THEMIS, was deployed to assist the rule of law reforms. The same year, EUSR for the South Caucasus was appointed. In the aftermath of the 2008 Georgia-Russia War, another special EUSR for the crisis in Georgia was created, and represented the EU in Geneva peace talks. (In 2011, both positions were effectively united in a new mandate issued for an EUSR for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia.) Furthermore, the first CSDP peacekeeping mission (EUMM) was deployed in the region, albeit, given the resistance by the separatist entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (and effectively Russia), only along the Tbilisi-controlled side of the administrative border lines. The EU also delivered a postconflict assistance to Georgia amounting to € 500 million (with additional € 61.5 million allocated from the ENPI to facilitate resettlement). Fuelled by the events, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as a political superstructure to the ENP came to being next spring (2009), with Georgia as one of partner countries (Council of European Union 2009a; Council of European Union 2009b). It is within the EaPs bilateral dimension that visa facilitation and readmission agreements were concluded, and the new association agreement negotiations, as well as preparatory talks about Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), have been held. Moreover, Institutional Reform Plans specifying assistance within the EaP’s Comprehensive Institution Building (CIB) have been passed with the aim to aid Beneficiary Public Administrations (BPAs) involved in the association agreement and DCFTA (pre)negotiations (€ 30.86 million of the CIB budget was allocated for Georgia).

Political rationalities of the EU practices in Georgia are articulated in the discourse of technical, programmatic documents which define the available means and desired ends of EU governance. Key among them are the Country Strategic Paper (2007-2013), Action Plan (2006-2011) – formally endorsed by both parties in EU-Georgia Cooperation Council – so far two National Indicative Programmes (NIPs) and annual Action Programmes (AAPs). In general, “technical and financial cooperation” provided to Georgia is aimed at restructuring the modalities of political and economic governance, with both securitized in terms of their discursive links to conflict resolution and stability generally (following the logic of threats mentioned above). The current NIP, following the earlier documents, thus defines these priority areas for EU action (European Commission 2010): Democratic Development, Rule of Law and Governance; Trade and Investment, Regulatory Alignment and Reform; Regional Development, Sustainable Economic and Social Development, Poverty Reduction and Peaceful Settlement of Conflicts.

Problematizations (challenges to the defined aims) are identified indirectly as failures to achieve “sufficient progress” in harmonization or, as for example in the case of DCFTA, internalizing “key recommendations” made by the European Commission. For example, the failure on Georgia’s part to effect reforms (at least as seen so by the Commission) in the areas of competition, property rights, food safety and technical barriers to trade (TBT) has so far precluded starting the DCFTA talks (currently open with Ukraine and more recently Moldova). More generally, current problematic issues are listed in documents such as annual progress reports that the Commission issues for individual partner countries, including Georgia (European Commission 2011).

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Political technologies translate the rationalities in practice. Since sovereign power is all but absent in the neighborhood dispositif, achieving the rationalities' objectives is to take place predominantly by disciplining means – diffusion of governance practices (including statistical benchmarking and assessments) or developing, as in CIB programs, "administrative capacity, including through training, technical assistance and any appropriate innovative measures" of BPAs through twinning – programs involving placement of member states' experts in local agencies (Council of European Union 2009b). The basic mode of relations between the EU and Georgia is conditionality. Political and economic governance reform, consisting in convergence with EU governance facilitated by its resources (since ENPI became operational, the average annual assistance Georgia has received amounts to € 42.96 million, i.e. € 9.34 per capita, or almost three times the neighborhood average) and expertise deployed in what has become to be called "interventions"(programs) is, at least in theory, the price for an increased access to money, market and territory.

Indeed, despite the initial promises of "everything but institutions" to the partner countries the membership perspective of which was postponed indefinitely after the final round of Eastern enlargement, each of these has been compromised by the EU, limiting, but importantly not removing entirely, the incentives to Georgia's compliance (see conclusion). An important side effect of this has been a progressive development of "policing at distance" technologies regulating, in practices falling into the realm of liberal security controlling circulation, the movement of persons entering the EU by both more traditional (embassies as access points for visas to the "Schengenland") and nontraditional means (involving the local agencies in surveillance by cooperation with FRONTEX, concluding not only facilitation, but also readmission agreements, which for Georgia entered in force in March 2011, or developing South Caucasus Integrated Border Management, SCIBM as a regional structure ultimately protective of EU border of which Georgia is a key constituent).

Regarding translations (processes of how networks through which governmentality is effected come to being and operate), the many governmentality networks built around agencies such as the Commission and its selected DGs, High Representative and EEAS, Member States or border security agencies (FRONTEX), all connecting with the local governance agencies, meet and intersect at various sites in the EU and in Georgia. A more detailed map of these networks is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that they are constituted by professionals of politics, security and external economic relations and knowledge experts (technical professionals, in advisory networks such as GEPLAC, an researchers), and are conducive to socialization and expert knowledge transfer and dissemination through "impositions" (twinning), but also TAIEX or SIGMA programmes and dozens of committees which permit, in the Commission's words, "regular and intense exchanges on all issues of common interest, ranging from governance and democracy to transport and health sector reform, and contributing to increased confidence and reciprocal knowledge" (European Commission 2010a). The expertise underlining the rationalities and technologies has mainly been inherited from the enlargement process to which the neighborhood policies are genealogically related, and it has been cultivated for the sake of achieving coherence across various agencies involved on the part of the EU e.g. by issuing appropriate "manuals" (cf. European Commission 2009).

Conclusions: EU as an Empire

Measured against its (ambitious) objectives, EU political, social, economic and security policies in the neighborhood's success has been limited. Incoherence, presence of external actors "who seek to extend their influence in a way that is not always compatible with EU values or the EU acquis"(Fülle 2010) and local resistance are the main cause. The same goes for Georgia specifically, despite the fact that Tbilisi's securitization of convergence (by being
embraced among the governing elite merely as a pragmatic strategy to brave the current "bad weather" in global politics) and high dependence on Western assistance make it, from the EU's perspective, one of the best performers among the Eastern neighbors (if also the political troublemaker). Much remains to be desired, however, both in terms of democratic governance – with the ultimate test being the coming elections, showing the extent of Georgia's political elite "Kremlinization" – and economic convergence. Russia's presence at the horizon has contributed to this situation by indirectly effecting threat narratives that legitimize exceptional modes of governance; yet so has the unclear incentive structure for political and economic convergence of a regime with authoritarian tendencies and the ruling elite which at once champions greater differentiation in ENP, seeing itself as a reform leader, and adheres to a radical neoliberal ethos at odds with the EU approach to market regulation, cherishing instead the utopia of Georgia as a Caucasian "Singapore" or "Switzerland", metaphors of deregulated and autonomous economy capitalizing on its tourist potential.

EU's governmentality practices have not been entirely successful to meet the criteria of their political rationalities even in the case of one of the neighborhood's best performers. But the EU has structured Georgia, and the entire Eastern neighborhood, in a way the significance of which can be clearly appreciated if the absence of its practices is counterfactually imagined (e.g. in terms of legislative transpositions, institutional changes or governmentality inscriptions). More research is needed to elaborate this point. It will confirm (or disconfirm) the thesis that what is observed is a new, perhaps postmodern, empire in the making, one whose presence is marked not by garrisons and trading companies, but missions running projects and programs as the contemporary forms of "intervention" to meet the objectives defined by the logic of duty (civilization) and threats (pacification).

References


