CHAPTER 13

The EU and Its Eastern Neighbors—The Limits of Europeanization

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This chapter discusses the ways in which the EU seeks to “Europeanize” its eastern neighbors. A particular concern will be whether the so-called external governance model of extending the EU’s norms can be successful where membership of the EU is not a realistic prospect for the neighbors. As we shall see, the key limitation on effective Europeanization in the neighborhood is the asymmetry between the EU’s needs and those of its neighbors. The EU talks of “partnerships” but the conditionality of the EU approach means this is generally a one-way street. Hence adoption of EU norms is often instrumental at best. It could be argued that more effective partnerships, and hence more profound Europeanization, would occur if the neighbors’ own economic and geopolitical interests were to be more effectively accommodated.

Motivations for Europeanization of the EU’s Neighbors

In Europeanizing the neighbors, the EU seeks to promote particular values, norms, and practices across a range of areas such as democracy, human rights, governance, and business. Scholars have differed in the emphasis given to the EU’s motivations. For some, the EU is in essence a “normative” power (Manners 2002). Hence promotion of such norms is an end in itself. For “realists” the primary motivation is the security of the EU. As the European Security Strategy of 2003 stated “It is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed” (Council of the EU 2003: 7). Instability and poverty on its borders directly threaten the EU through such phenomena as migration, terrorism, and crime. In some cases, it has been suggested
the priority of security has overridden the desire to promote democracy (Pace 2009). This can be seen as the EU building a _cordon sanitaire_ around itself or a “ring of friends” (Barbe and Johansson-Nogues 2008:64) with the real threats pushed well beyond the borders of the EU itself. Some authors also argue that a key aim of the EU extending its norms is to open up the markets of the neighbors to the advantage of EU and multinational business interests (Lavenex 2004). In the Eastern neighborhood, the securing of the EU’s energy needs can be seen as a key priority. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the EU actually operates with a combination of all these motives. Security, economic interests, and norms are entwined. The emphasis can vary depending on the issues and the country. In some cases, given that the EU is not a unitary actor, it can actually pursue contradictory strategies at the same time (Pace 2007, 2009; Youngs 2004).

### The EU’s Strategies toward Its Neighbors

The most powerful strategy which the EU uses in promoting Europeanization is the promise of membership to any “European” state which, according to the Treaty of Amsterdam (Article 6), respects principles of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, and rule of law. It is argued that, in the initial rounds of enlargement, the countries of Central Europe transformed their political and economic systems to meet the EU’s Copenhagen Criteria (1993) because there was a promise of eventual membership. The main instrument that the EU uses to spread its norms—conditionality—was therefore able to operate effectively in this case because membership made it credible. The domestic costs of rule adoption were outweighed by the concrete offer of EU membership in the negotiations (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004). This is the clearest example of successful Europeanization of neighbors—so successful in terms of domestic permeation of European norms that states were able to pass from outsiders to insiders. The success of this “external incentives model of governance” in the initial enlargement was such that it has continued to be applied in the EU’s relations with its “new” neighbors as a core part of its relationship with them (Lavenex 2004). The question arises, though, how can the EU hope to extend its norms, rules, and policies using conditionality when EU membership is now either not clearly offered or, in cases such as Russia and Belarus, not actually desired?

Various other strategies with neighbors in the East have been adopted since the 1990s. Partnership and Cooperation Agreements were signed bilaterally with former Soviet states and Soviet bloc countries, including Russia in 1994. These also sought to promote norms but there was not necessarily the promise of integration with the EU. The main aim of the EU was to promote stability of the neighbor and assist in the process of transition. Given the