Research Article

Europeanisation through Education: Promoting European Studies in "Eastern Partnership" Countries

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Abstract

Educational practices are instrumental in the transfer of European values beyond EU borders. Our aim is to problematize Europeanisation through education in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries by studying the promotion of EU studies in higher education projects funded by the Erasmus + programme. The paper discusses the educational dimension of Europeanisation in EaP countries from three interrelated perspectives - social constructivism, the Foucauldian concept of governmentality and a post-structuralist reading of centrality and marginality. We specifically focus on a series of international projects developed by the University of Tartu (Estonia) in partnership with other EU-based and non-EU universities from the EaP. We used qualitative data from reports of 4 EU-funded cooperation projects and also students' views obtained in 2 focus groups that explored how the EU is taught and discussed. In the end, the added value of the article is that it offers a critical view on teaching the EU in the Eastern neighborhood, focusing on nuanced local perspectives on the challenges of Europeanisation through education.

Keywords

INTRODUCTION

The field of European Union (EU) studies includes not only theories of EU integration, but also analyses of how the EU is being taught in different educational spaces. Seen from the sociological perspective of people-to-people contacts, the field of education is crucial for Europeanisation in non-EU countries. In the last decade, there were increasing critical accounts on how we study the EU through constructed representations. Parker (2008) and others stressed the need for moving beyond the EU-centric perspective in analysing the EU and including other 'marginal' voices in scholarly accounts to better scrutinize the normative 'center' of the EU. In this context, critical approaches to the European integration emerged under a new field of Critical European Studies (Bigo et al 2021). Based on this perspective and as is already discussed in the Introduction to this Special Issue, teaching and learning about the EU is as politicised as the EU itself. This is valid in EU member states, and even more so in the countries outside the EU, aspiring to either membership or closer relations with the EU. As part of this 'revision' of European studies, it was argued that the dominant academic practices tend to privilege particular methodologies and approaches, and have determined a dominant set of experiences in the study of Europe, leaving little space for non-EU scholars' "dissident voices" (Manners and Whitman 2016). Most recently Europeanisation scholars' theoretical developments in and around the EU focused also on the various forms of contestation over the EU or of distancing from the EU's institutional or normative structures (Gürkan and Tomini 2020) for which the concept of 'de-Europeanisation' opened a new research avenue (Müller et al. 2021). The multiple crises that have hit the EU since the global financial crackdown onwards have led scholars to conclude that there are numerous limits to the Europeanisation research agenda and the so-called 'good weather literature' needs to be adapted to the ways these crises have re-shaped the EU itself and reset its interactions with non-EU countries. Gürkan and Tomini (2020) and Saurugger (2014b) showed how the explanatory strength of the concept of Europeanisation might be limited to analysing the EU's impact mainly during 'good times', as opposed to crises. In this context, this article intends to discuss the importance of political contexts in which EU-based universities promote European studies–grounded disciplines in non-EU neighbors and partners, with a special focus on Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries.

From a geopolitical perspective, EaP covers six countries – Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan - all sharing a post-Soviet background, but in the meantime remaining dissimilar regarding their positioning towards Europe. What in 2009, at the time of launching the EaP project, was hoped to be a relatively cohesive bunch of partners and neighbors with European aspirations, became a fragmented regional grouping shaped by two interlaced dynamics. One is a broadly defined Europeanisation whose forms range from symbolic affinity with European culture (Azerbaijan) to long-term institutional and normative commitments through Association Agreements (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia). Another dynamic is fostered by a series of military conflicts, which is the direct opposite to the entire philosophy of EU's normative power. There is a significant degree of geopolitics behind EU's actions to advance Europeanisation in its Eastern Neighborhood, which became more visibly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The major sources of military insecurity are direct outcomes of Russia's invasions in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (since 2014), along with the continuing stationing of Russian troops in Transnistria. The military standoff between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh is another conflict that pits the two EaP countries against each other. The authoritarian retroversion of the Lukashenka regime in Belarus to the point of becoming an object of severe EU sanctions

is one more factor that sets limits to spreading EU norms and values as a core element of the EaP.

There are different policy fields analysed from a Europeanisation perspective in the literature. Education is one of them, particularly in qualitative-based analyses. There is an extensive literature focused on the Europeanisation of higher education, that argues that for more than three decades EU's Erasmus programme contributes to deepening European integration (Huisman, Luijten-Lub and van der Wende, 2005; Curaj et al 2015; Marques, Zapp and Powell, 2020). Beyond the student mobilities, there are now other EU-led programs, such as the Jean Monnet Actions or Academic Networks aimed at increasing cooperation between the educational systems of member states and third countries in order to modernize curricula and promote EU studies in non-EU countries. In this article we plan to look closer at power asymmetries within Erasmus cooperation projects and their impact on how the EU is taught outside the EU. The discussion is geopolitically relevant because the EU and its Eastern neighborhood go through a challenging period, with domestic evolutions and security threats that resulted in increasing differentiation between EU's partners.

What is missing from the current scholarly debate is a critical account of local perspectives on EU studies and the way they are taught in non-EU countries (Alpan and Diez, 2022). Going beyond the fact that students and professors from EaP countries have the opportunity to travel to and interact with other peers in EU universities, we believe that a more nuanced discussion on how this cooperation reproduces certain geopolitical biases or informal power structures is needed. We presume that educational practices are instrumental in the transfer of European values beyond EU borders. Consequently, we look at Europeanisation through education from both sides - from the position of EU-based universities that spread good practices of management, teaching and learning, and from the viewpoint of their non-EU partners with whom meanings of Europeanisation are shared and who are expected to become main beneficiaries of spill-over effects in knowledge transfer. The assumption that the ambivalent relations between the EaP countries and the EU during the last five years were reflected in the promotion of EU studies in these countries needs to be further investigated. In this context, we analyse practical details of the implementation of various EU-sponsored projects fostering higher education institutions, particularly those having strong research and policy-related components.

From a post-structuralist perspective, Europeanisation also entails new symbolic dynamics that mark the complex center-periphery relations in Europe. Parker (2008) proposed an important theoretical problematisation of EU's geopolitical identity by exploring the center-periphery relations in Europe. This article plans to build on this understanding of the EaP region as a political construct resulted from a renegotiation of EU's center-periphery relations, where higher education plays an important role, as it contributes to the production of representations and discourses among students and professors. As part of this critical discussion of EU studies both teaching and learning in specific regional contexts require further problematisation. In this light, the article is centered on the following research question: how center-periphery relations are constructed and enacted in teaching and learning about the EU in EaP countries?

There are numerous analyses looking at different experiences of students in Erasmus exchange programmes in connection with the European identity (Van Mol, 2013; Zichner & Vladislav, 2016; Udrea, 2016). To add a different perspective to this strand in the literature, we approach Europeanisation in a more critical way, and adopt an interdisciplinary

perspective that combines socio-constructivist analyses on Europeanisation mechanisms in education, interpreted through the concept of governmentality and post-structuralist accounts on center - periphery relations. In this context, there are a series of other critical issues to be addressed in correlation with our main research question: how Europe-related subjects in political studies and international relations resonate beyond the EU educational space? How do engagements with educational programs in different post-Soviet countries affect EU-based universities? How does the exposure to EU integration narratives change attitudes and identities in non-EU countries? How does Europeanisation operate in collaborative transnational education projects through socialization and the spillover effects of social learning during the interactions between EU-based professors teaching EU studies in countries of EaP? We are thus interested in analysing mainly alternative narratives on the challenges of Europeanisation in the EU's Eastern neighborhood, and further reflecting on if and how they reproduce existing power structures. Thus, it is suitable to look at cooperation projects in higher education as channels of communication and engagement of EU-based educational and academic institutions with the spaces where Europeanisation takes place. In order to tackle these questions, we organized the article as follows:

The first section reviews the relevant theoretical discussions on Europeanisation and asymmetry of power, focusing on three interrelated perspectives: the social constructivist understanding of Europeanisation as identity transfer through social learning; the Foucauldian concept of governmentality; and the post-structuralist discussion on centrality and marginality. The second section consists in a methodological note explaining the main sources of our qualitative data - reports of 4 EU-funded cooperation projects and students' views obtained in 2 focus groups that explored how the EU is taught and discussed. Next, the case study section is divided in two parts: the first discusses the objectives, implications and opinions of the beneficiaries involved in the selected Jean Monnet projects, both in EU-based universities and their partners from EaP countries. In the second part we extend our analysis to students' perspectives on their mobility experiences in European universities. For that, we applied as main interpretive research methods participant observation and two focus groups with students studying EU-related disciplines: one in Tartu (Estonia, 8 participants) and one in Lviv (Ukraine, 8 participants) that were organised in person between August and September 2021. The article was also updated with a short section with reflections on the ongoing war in Ukraine (as of May 2022) and how it impacts higher education practices in the selected international cooperation projects. In the last section we conclude outlining how these engagements with educational programs in different EaP countries affect EU-based universities, and further reflect on how this alters the field of EU studies.

EUROPEANISATION AS EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE: THREE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Since the 2000's the concept of Europeanisation was and still continues to be one of the most debated and contested concepts in European studies. In this section we discuss the educational dimension of Europeanisation from three interrelated theoretical perspectives. We start with the social constructivist conceptualization that looks at European integration as a social construction constantly changing through social interaction between various actors who construct, diffuse and contest EU norms, and we apply this to the field of higher education. Then we complement this approach with the Foucauldian concept of governmentality that is helpful for highlighting the salience of the administrative and managerial

side of knowledge transfer and cross-border mobility among educational institutions. Finally, we refer to some ideas embedded in a post-structuralist understanding of centrality and marginality as mutually correlative and constitutive characteristics of spatial relations applicable to the field of this study.

Building Europeans Outside the EU: The Social Constructivist Perspective

Europeanisation is predominantly understood as the adoption of EU-aligned regulations and norms, reflected in discourses and practices. Rational choice-based theories propose a rather rigid view of Europeanisation, as they look mainly at such quantifiable effects of EU's interaction with partner countries as liberalization of the visa regime, progress of cooperation with the EU institutions through "action plans", adaptation of the *acquis communautaire* and EU's financial aid in different policy sectors. In contrast, constructivists look at non-quantifiable mechanisms of Europeanisation, such as the circulation of ideas, promotion of values, building features of a European identity and various norm transfers (Troncotă 2016). While rationalist institutionalist accounts have for almost two decades dominated the scholarly debates on Europeanisation, constructivists argued that beyond many other things, European integration transforms collective identities and lets non-EU citizens 'become Europeans'. In this theoretical strand, the EU is seen as a discursive force that shapes identities and determines states and citizens alike to act in a certain way (based on European values) by categorising their actions through its own criteria. In other words, Europeanisation is not something to be measured, but rather a process that can be closely observed looking at its manifestations in time and space as intersubjective interactions between actors inside and outside the EU (Troncotă 2016).

European studies scholars have recognised the importance of social constructivism for a better understanding of Europeanisation, a process through which new supra-national institutions and social identities emerge, as well as existent local institutions and identities transform (Wiener, Borzel and Risse 2019). Europeanisation is thus seen from the perspective of social learning in which Europeans become socialised in the EU polity through internalisation of EU norms, which influences the formation of actors' interests and identities (Risse 2004; Saurugger 2014). The basic premise of a constructivist understanding of Europeanisation is that all three dimensions of the EU - polity, politics, and policy - are social constructs, context-dependent and go through an ongoing process of change and adaptation (Christiansen et al. 2001; Saurugger 2014). As such, the impact of Europeanisation on European societies is largely determined by the extent of and the ways in which the EU is interpreted, represented and used by domestic actors (Kaliber 2013). The complex process of Europeanisation involves EU institutions and social norms influencing citizens' daily practices and social interactions. The constitutive effects of EU norms make actors socialise in European contexts to learn the rules of appropriate behaviour in the Union, becoming more Europeanised, and constructing their identity as Europeans (Borzel and Risse 2003; Risse 2004; Saurugger 2014). Constructivist authors highlighted the constitutive effects of Europeanisation not only at elite level, but also on ordinary citizens' identities (Risse 2019). They showed that we ought to look not only at the ability of EU institutions to shape decisions, but also at their motivations, ideas and preferences in justifying the EU's actions. Accordingly, "the EU not only increasingly regulates the daily lives of individuals in various respects; it also constitutes 'Europe' as a political and social space in people's beliefs and collective understandings" (Risse 2019: 156). Thus we will look at Europeanisation in the EaP region as a two-way process of building European citizens outside the EU.

These social learning effects of Europeanisation are seen in constructivism as instances of 'horizontal Europeanisation' related to cross-border (inter-)actions of people through transnational communications and cooperation, migration and youth mobility, city twinning etc. From this point of view, students and professors from EU and non-EU universities working together provide a relevant space for problematising Europeanisation. There is a growing literature studying the impact of European exchange programmes on European citizenship and a shared sense of European identity (Udrea 2016; Gorgos, Vătămănescu and Andrei, 2016; Van Mol 2018). Yet recent studies pointed out that the role of education in the promotion of fundamental values in Europeanisation beyond the EU's borders has not yet been systematically examined: "This perspective broadens the current understanding of Europeanisation away from an elite-focused process towards a more 'everyday' conceptualization of Europeanisation that relates to and investigates how the European integration process affects citizens, their political behavior, and attitudes" (Slootmaeckers and O'Dwyer 2018:408).

The role of student exchanges in fostering a shared sense of European identity is one of the main claims of EU-funded programmes. There are studies focused on the importance of student mobility in promoting European values (Mutlu 2011; Öner 2015), discussing how Erasmus exchange programmes facilitate interactions between citizens from EU and non-EU states, how this contributes to their sense of 'community' and promotes a shared European identity (Stoeckel 2016). We will contribute to a different strand in the literature, looking more at power asymmetries within Erasmus cooperation projects and their impact on how the EU is taught outside the EU.

The Governmentality Perspective

Governmentality is usually discussed as a productive form of power and as a means to achieve greater freedom of action through knowledge-based practices based on the logic of the market and liberal political economy (Collier 2009). It implies a specific type of power relations grounded in socially, culturally and heuristically constructed practices of knowledge production, communication and meaning making, whose mechanisms significantly differ from sovereign power (Ettlinger 2011). The cognitive aspects of governmentality constitute spheres where educational practices are produced, generated and shared (Peters 2009), which becomes critical in situations of expanding the geographies of Europeanisation. Therefore, governmentality should not be understood in a narrow - technical, administrative and managerial—sense, and ought to embrace symbolic and cultural components (Weidner 2009). Governmentality scholars "are occupied with how the practices of government are intertwined with specific regimes of truth and the vocation of numerous experts and authorities" (Inda 2005: 8).

As seen from Michel Foucault's perspective, governmentality questions the idea of power derived only from the state. The state apparatus is neither the source nor the warrantor of power, but rather an outcome, an effect of more complex administrative, managerial and disciplinary relations. Governmentality mostly operates through (self-)regulative incentives and implies risk assessment, rational calculation, best practices promotion and transfer, fostering competitiveness through indexing, benchmarking, and other empowerment techniques. It exemplifies a technocratic model of steering and incentivizing grounded in rationalization of policy making in many spheres. Governmentality tools do not impose power, but rather help to optimize the limited resources. In this respect, "studies of governmentality have been extremely helpful in illuminating the "soft" or "empowering" mechanisms of power, demonstrating in what ways individuals and social groups

are governed by freedom and choice" (Lemke 2013, 37). Governmental mechanisms incorporate communicative and transformative power with its spill-over effects in such policy spheres as anti-corruption, transparency and accountability, anti-discrimination, civil service, intellectual property rights, public procurement, environmental protection, energy efficiency, and, of course, education.

Neoliberal governmentality can be part of a foreign policy strategy. The EU's agenda of external governmentality includes sharing best practices, learning at a distance, promoting innovative educational and academic programs, along with measures of conflict resolution / reconciliation / prevention through dialogue / communication and democratization. Governmentality packages offered to EU partners are grounded in a liberal political agenda of secularism, tolerance and multiculturalism; the externalization of these norms includes transformative impact over neighbors, modernization assistance with respective commitments (through the principle of conditionality), and visa liberalization as a special prize.

Initially, Foucault, the author of the concept of governmentality, analyzed liberal regimes grounded in knowledge-based technologies of power, as well as political rationalities of governance on a society-level that allows for the extension of European norms and values to other regions. As a response to the popularity of the concept, there were scholarly attempts to extend it from its traditional grounding in liberal societies respectful of human freedoms to all rationalized forms of power relation (Merlingen 2003). From this perspective, the governmentality approach should not start by assuming that policy actors have liberal intentions or qualities. Governmentality ought to be seen as a broad analytical framework that allows one to grasp how different agents (organizations, institutions, state bodies, etc.) utilize instruments of governance as power tools. Thus, the expansion of the notion of governmentality beyond the liberal West unveils a scope of diverse forms of governance, which fully applies to EaP countries.

The Making and Unmaking of Centers and Peripheries

Another source of theoretical inspiration for this research comes from the concept of "marginality" developed by Noel Parker (2008) and a group of his colleagues in postmodernist / poststructuralist scholarship. Within the frame of this discussion the European core is usually associated with a set of normative features – from principles to values – constitutive for the post-Cold War European identity-in-the-making. The key characteristic of the margin is the in-between location: margins are in a sense simultaneously "in" and "out", and they might (re)negotiate their belonging to the space controlled by "their" core and demand advantages for normative loyalty. Non-EU margins in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus wish to join the core from geographically peripheral positions through taking normative commitments and associating themselves – both symbolically and, when possible, institutionally – with the EU. The EU contributes with financial assistance to EaP countries to promote reforms, influence policies, institutions, laws and enhance the ensuing transformations towards a democratic model. As part of the EaP policy dynamics, the 6 countries were expected to create mutual commitments to build common values and actions for reaching good governance, the rule of law and the promotion of market economy and democratic principles. Most analyses conclude that these countries were engaged in very different processes with different outcomes (Emerson et al, 2018; Been, Zweers and van Loon, 2021). Scholars have also pointed that differentiation and flexibility are two constants of the first decade of the EaP (Korosteleva et al. 2020).

Yet the core/margins relationship is not unidirectional, and countries that are (perceived as) non-central and thus weaker position themselves as belonging to Europe's normative

space and capable in one way or another of reshaping Europe. Looking at Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus from the perspective of European Studies, one may assume that the portrayal of these regions is heavily embedded in the legacy of Western geopolitical and geographic categorization. EaP countries are objects of the EU's normative investments, yet their integration with the Euro-Atlantic core has always been precarious and ambivalent. Consequently, EaP countries are often regarded as peripherals of different centers, which is consequential for teaching international politics and European Studies, since many elements of the liberal international order - such as multilateralism, the primacy of institutions and rule-based policies, or human security concerns - are not at the heart of the regional agendas. The prevalence of bilateral relations over multilateral and institutional policies (Makarychev and Kruessmann 2019: 11) underscores the specificity of the post-Soviet region, and many project participants from EaP countries, instead of unconditionally accepting the EU primacy, advocate for finding a proper space for "Eastern" particularities in university curricula: in the words of a Georgian expert, "We need to look at our countries as laboratories of political development because here you can in a short time see developments that are no longer present in Europe'' (Next generation… 2018).

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

We problematise Europeanisation as a process of transferring EU values in the Eastern neighborhood through the promotion of EU studies in higher education. In particular, we are looking at four specific EU-funded international projects developed by the University of Tartu in partnership with other EU-based and non-EU universities from the EaP. Mechanisms of Europeanisation are interpreted and contextualized using qualitative methods analyzing the transnational integration of norms in teaching EU studies and collaboration between students and teaching staff from different EU and non-EU member states.

As empirical material, we used three types of primary sources: a. web-based information about the projects under consideration, b. the respective project final reports, and c. opinions and perceptions on the topic obtained in two focus groups with international students. The focus groups were organised in English, in person in autumn 2021 - one with students studying in Lviv where a EU-funded project helped to open a new master's program in Baltic – Black Sea Studies, and another with students from EaP countries in Tartu. These primary qualitative data were instrumental for understanding participants' perceptions of European Studies as an academic and normative realm, and for exploring political dilemmas that both teaching staff and students have to face as part of their study mobilities. Our analysis is divided into two clusters. The first one summarizes the analysis of three Erasmus Plus and Jean Monnet projects in which EU-based universities were sharing their expertise with partners from EaP countries. The second cluster reflects on Eastern European and South Caucasian students' perceptions of their experiences of participation in mobility programs and studying in a multicultural environment. We used numbers to identify each participant's quote, in order to anonymize their identities (see Annex).

CASE STUDY - PROBLEMATIZING THE PROCESS OF TEACHING EU STUDIES IN THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

> "Culture and science are at the core of our European project as a way of going beyond borders. So culture and science are not some kind of accessory in the European idea.
>
> They are indeed a genetic element of the European project. They also show us what can be achieved when people meet and inspire each other."
>
> José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission (2014)

Understood as diffusion of European ideas, norms and practices, education for Europeanisation is explicitly mentioned both in the EU's official policy documents related to higher education and in the EU's representatives' public speeches. The EU sees itself as 'a community of values' (Oshri, Sheafer and Shenhav 2016) promoted externally via education, culture and science, amongst other means. In January 2016 the European Parliament adopted the Ward Report on the promotion of EU values through intercultural dialogue, cultural diversity, and education (European Parliament 2016). As President of the Commission, Jose Barosso highlighted the need to include cultural dimensions (and thus education) within the work of the European External Action Service and EU representations throughout the world (Barosso 2014). From a financial perspective, currently the EU's overall budget for the Erasmus Plus programme has significantly risen - from €14.7 billion for the previous multi-annual framework (2014-2020) to €26.2 billion for the next one (2021-2027) (EACEA 2021). Moreover, from a political perspective education is seen as fostering a shared sense of belonging or constructing a European identity, as voiced in Emmanuel Macron's speech at the Sorbonne in September 2017, and his plea to create "European universities".

Of course, at the policy level these measures for enhancing educational cooperation in Europe are far older than the above-mentioned recent initiatives. The Bologna process, the inter-governmental initiative launched in 1999, which aims to ensure the comparability of higher education qualifications, the creation of a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and a European Research Area (ERA), along with mobility programmes (for example, the Erasmus programme for students or the Marie Skłodowska-Curie scheme for researchers) are illustrative of this idea. All of these actions aim to strengthen the "European educational dimension" and thus to bolster Europeanisation, transforming non-EU citizens' collective identities (Carlson, Eigmüller and Lueg, 2018). In this context, Slootmaeckers and O'Dwyer (2018) have discussed the potential of higher education as a new avenue to analyze the transformation of attitudes within the Europeanisation agenda.

With funding from the Erasmus + programmes of Jean Monnet Actions, academics in the field of European studies from non-EU countries are encouraged to propose projects in cooperation with universities from EU countries. Since 2015, this specific type of funding has been available for all six EaP countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Between 2015 and 2018 the budget allocated to EaP countries allowed establishing a total of 1 514 projects for bilateral partnerships that plan to organise mobility for almost 25 000 students, researchers, and staff (EuNeighbors.eu 2019).

Particularly in the EaP region, this dominant approach of 'top-down Europeanisation' assumes that future elites are to be socialised into EU institutions and procedures, to prepare for future membership through EU-funded international projects. Moreover, the focusing of the EaP Platform 4 on "Mobility and People-to-People Contacts" is an illustration of this

logic of educational setting as a platform of EU norms transfer. EaP Platform 4 covers a wide array of policy dialogues on education, youth, culture, research and innovation, migration, mobility and border management between EU and EaP countries. This specific field was included after the EaP was launched (in 2009): the Panel on Education, Culture and Youth was endorsed by the EaP Summit in 2017 as part of the renewed EaP architecture. EU policy makers realised that a more direct focus on education, employability, culture and youth will better address local needs of the EaP populations.

Of all the Erasmus + programmes Jean Monnet (JM) activities are directly focused on the field of EU studies as they foster transnational academic networks. JM networks funded by the European Commission aim to develop EU studies worldwide by promoting cooperation between students and staff in teaching and researching European integration. These types of projects are relevant vehicles of Europeanisation in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood, but they can also illustrate other features of the process. On the one hand, these projects contribute to Europeanisation in EaP countries because they stimulate the feeling of belonging to the EU and boost the trust in the European project. On the other hand, these projects allow participants in different countries to face biases and limitations in defining EU values that are adapted to their own surroundings. Europeanisation is not the only discourse, particularly in a region where other alternative 'discursive entrepreneurs' – such as Russia, Turkey or China - are contesting the EU's legitimacy. As previous research shows, Europeanisation proves to be more than a one-way street as conventional approaches described, since there are contrasting views between EU's normative expectations and local realities as seen by civil society representatives (Buzogany 2018). Recent studies also showed that there are diverse and nuanced reactions to the EU's institutionalised norm transfer attempts in the EaP, and there is plenty of geopolitics involved in the process (Korosteleva 2017). Alternative narratives of this 'norm transfer' include contestation and resistance to EU values, leading non-EU citizens to question the fundamental aspect of EU's foreign policy which is its role as a transformative power produces positive outcomes (Alpan and Diez 2014; Yılmaz 2015; Alpan and Ozturk 2022). Going beyond the fact that students and teaching staff from EaP countries have the opportunity to travel to and interact with other peers in EU universities, we believe that a more nuanced discussion on how these cooperation projects reproduce certain logics and rationalities of governmentality is needed. Next, we assess these 'alternative narratives' in our selected case study.

PROBLEMATIZING EUROPEANISATION IN INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

The four projects we analyse in this subsection are based on consortia of EU-based and EaP countries-located universities (see Annex). One project - titled "Possibilities and Limits, Challenges and Obstacles of Transferring Best Practices and Experience to Moldova's and Georgia's Pre-accession Process" (EU-PREACC) - was implemented in 2013-2017 by a consortium of four participants representing EU-located universities (Tartu and Vilnius) and their non-EU partners in Chisinau and Tbilisi. The project activities were designed in line with the much-discussed vision of the Baltic states as EU's communicators with the EU's eastern neighbors and facilitators in their Europeanisation endeavors.

Another project - titled 'Developing European Studies in the Caucasus' (DESCnet, 2015-2018) was aimed at promoting the teaching of Europe-related disciplines in the region and

establishing the Association of European Studies in the Caucasus (AESC). The project consortium consisted of a group of EU-based universities (Tartu and Graz) and their partners from Yerevan, Tbilisi, Baku, Pyatigorsk and Istanbul.

The third project - "Rethinking Regional Studies: the Baltic - Black Sea Connection'', RRS, 2017-2021 - has established a new MA program on Baltic - Black Sea Studies at the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. Within the project framework, EU-based universities (Tartu, Poznan, Lund and Kaunas) were cooperating with their Ukrainian partners from Lviv, Kyiv, Odesa and Mariupol.

The fourth project - "Academic Responses to Hybrid Threats", WARN, started in 2019 and brought together a consortium of EU-based participants from Finland, Estonia, Portugal and France, and their partners from several Ukrainian universities. The overall goal is to improve Ukrainian universities' curricula of disciplines related to security in general and, in particular, relations with Russia through the prism of European standards of teaching subjects related to hybrid threats, including fake news and disinformation campaigns.

Our insiders' analysis of the practical implementation of these four projects led to two mutually correlative observations. First, the EU studies - based disciplines, when taught in and for EaP academic audiences, are instrumentally adjusted to the political and security agendas of the neighboring countries. Second, the bulk of the projects' participants perceive the gained advantages from the viewpoint of governmentality, rather than in the categories of European values.

When it comes to the first argument, it is largely based on the multiple forms of flexible adaptation of the European studies agenda to the practical needs of the countries in question. EU-PREACC was targeted at assisting Moldova and Georgia in adapting the standards of Europeanisation through academic and educational activities (Final Report Summary 2017); and the RRS project was primarily keen on borrowing EU's expertise in teaching regional integration, particularly in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea regions.

Of particular interest in this regard is the WARN project that focuses on integrating in Ukrainian universities' syllabi a specific dimension of European experience of dealing with peace and conflict resolution. Conceptually, the project builds upon the idea of resilience that implies a shift of responsibility towards social and professional groups and communities. The crux of the matter is the construction of resilient subjects who accept the necessity to change themselves in response to these uncomfortable new conditions. In the governmentality literature, resilience is a central element of the EU's policies capturing 'a middle way' between demands to engage in *Realpolitik* and the normative commitments constitutive for EU identity. For some, it is a new type of soft power the EU uses for raising its international traction and appeal to other countries (Giusti 2020).

We understand resilience not simply as a set of 'passive'/reactive governmental policy tools, but primarily as a generator of new policy practices, experiences and subjectivities. This approach is instrumental in demonstrating how resilience reinforces certain groups and their agendas, opens new spaces for their social and political initiatives and actorship, and produces new incentives for an enhanced non-state agency. Resilience operates as an endurance of democratic mechanisms, the sustainability of welfare institutions and mechanisms of sociocultural adaptation of the population to the state of exception. This approach, being harmonious with the idea of governmentality, is helpful for a better understanding of how the implementation of the resilience agenda engenders new social roles, creates new publics and requires new forms of communication with new audiences whose actorness is critically important for successful crisis management strategies.

By the same token, resilience shapes the ongoing transformations within the neoliberal international order (Mavelli 2019). Resilience is much less concerned with liberal ideology and values than with effectively tackling new security challenges as it causes shifts from an idealistic to a pragmatic view of international politics. Unlike the liberal paradigm, resilience does not exaggerate the cognitive abilities of human beings (Chandler 2014). Thus, resilience as a policy paradigm admits that society need to adapt to the complexity of the world. In this light, the focus on resilience is harmonious with the concept of post-liberalism that is discussed as a new conceptualization of changes taking place within the liberal order (basically a shift from pursuing a value-based normative policy to developing effective policy technologies). WARN serves as a good illustration of a practical niche for this approach in the realm of EU-Ukraine project management.

As for the second conclusion, we claim that it is the governmentality framework that defines the dominant attitudes of projects' beneficiaries to Europeanisation. In this sense, the normative and axiological foundations of Europeanisation are translated through the prism of good management practices in higher education and their concomitant effects. Video testimonials of the RRS project participants give a clear picture of the priority given to capacity enhancement, team building, budget management, e-learning, improving language skills, acquiring new teaching techniques, and raising visibility of their universities and attractiveness for international students (Video Testimonials… 2020).

Illustrative in this respect is the DESCnet project. AESC publications point out that regional educational spaces in the Black Sea region ought to become "a forum within which technical aspects of European integration are taught in order to ensure policy relevance and sustainability" (Newsletter 1, 2016). In particular, this is the case of developing curricula on anti-corruption policies and public integrity (Newsletter 3, 2016). Another good example of a norm that requires the application of the governmental - in the Foucauldian sense - approach is a discussion on teaching politically controversial issues in a multicultural environment that was launched within the framework of DESCnet. The discussion came under the rubric of "European Studies Experiences" and exposed a typical shift from the logic of norms and values (freedom of expression, multiculturalism) to the logic of educational governmentality. What usually starts as a normative and identity-ridden issue of free speech, often moves towards striking a balance between divergent interpretations of political and security arguments in a multicultural classroom. The following opinion nicely illustrates the technique of normalization beyond identity transformations:

> "*If I'm very direct about it, the compromise that may be found is a balance of forces on each community. It's not going to be a synthetic compromise of ideas. It is going to be that 51 percent of these people are ready to do it, come to an agreement, and then we decide that we are going to do this and hopefully, move forward with this. The other 49 percent will slowly find new ways of channeling their energy. I think that's kind of what happens in these things, and we get that 51 percent together*" (Interview with Vello Pettai, 2017).

Another discussion illustrative of the huge potential for governmentality approaches concerns the concept of e-governance and digital state. In the opinion of a Georgian participant of a project, "there is no research to determine whether the models of e-voting or e-medicine are relevant for Georgia, how costly they are, and whether we could really afford it. In Estonia one can find research-based answers to these specific questions. Sometimes, in non-EU countries there is a deficiency of data to study" (Next Generation … 2018). This

opinion confirms that what the grant-making institutions might perceive (or wish to be) as an identity-driven change in the direction of a more mature Europeanisation, might be appraised by local recipients of EU policies as a set of technological innovations that remain country-specific and largely value-neutral.

PROBLEMATIZING EUROPEANISATION IN THE VIEWS OF STUDENT MOBILITY BENEFICIARIES

In this section we summarize students' perceptions of the Europeanisation- through-education paradigm. This analysis is based on primary qualitative data obtained from two focus groups we conducted in Lviv and Tartu in September 2021, where all together 16 students have participated and shared their views on four clusters of issues that, to our mind, are insufficiently studied in the existing literature.

First, we discussed how different is teaching European Studies in an EU-based university and beyond the EU. Usually respondents pointed to a greater freedom of expression in EU-based universities, more interaction with the teaching staff and respect to students' opinions. "In Belarus we mostly receive knowledge, here we speak up, and this might entail some confusion", a student from this country acknowledged. Yet in the meantime, students from post-Soviet countries studying in the EU have a sober assessment of the state of affairs within Europe: "We do know what happened to the Central European University", a participant from Azerbaijan mentioned, and added a remark about a "negative Europeanisation" that might entail "too much of liberalism, which for some non-EU students might be an issue".

Secondly, we proposed to the students to discuss how EU-based universities profit from enhanced contacts with non-EU partners. How does close involvement of non-EU participants change the discipline of European Studies? Do they bring a different outlook on Europe, open up new themes and new controversies? There was a consensual understanding within both focus groups that mobility and exchange programs serve bilateral interests. International students and scholars bring different perspectives in the classrooms, which enriches the teaching process. For EU-based universities the growing diversity gives a first-hand and detailed knowledge of the events in the EaP region and insights from the partner countries, along with experiences of teaching controversial and politically explosive issues in a potentially divided audience. "It is important to bring our non-democratic experiences into the "democratic bubble" of the EU, since here many can't even imagine how things might be in the east. In this sense we have an advantage over those who possess purely theoretical types of knowledge", a student from Belarus posited. "I was the first Belarusian many of my interlocutors in Europe ever met. It is hard to explain what we went through, we human beings from Belarus'', her compatriot added. Therefore, the educational space functions as a series of meeting points connecting both academic and vernacular experiences of cross-border encounters that are important from the communicative perspective.

Our third inquiry was about the potential for raising the visibility of EaP countries in the EU as an outcome of EU-sponsored exchange programs. Unexpectedly, this question sparked some controversy. On the one hand, some participants from EaP countries agreed that their educational experiences might be helpful for a better recognition of their countries in Europe, which is fully consistent with the policies of their foreign ministries. On the other hand, some respondents expressed their skepticism about the general interest in Europe to their countries of origin: "Why should Europeans pay more attention to us?", a

Ukrainian participant of the Lviv workshop rhetorically asked. This apparently was not a stand-alone remark; it rather reflected a strong - and very much self-inflicted - sense of marginalization of peripheral countries and universities in the pan-European context.

There are many factors working against visibility as a booster for partner countries' political capital. According to one report, some partner universities "did not indicate their progress status", while others were "not leading any activities of their own", which might be explained by a lack of human resources for fostering visibility and poor experience of participating in consortium-based international projects. Another big challenge is the quality of texts meant for publication in peer reviewed international journals. "It is often downright impossible to "translate" a scholarly analysis written in the post-Soviet tradition into a paper for an international journal" (Newsletter 2, 2016), an Austrian coordinator of an EU-funded project acclaimed. In the educational sphere, as his Georgian colleague presumed, "the main challenge is managing the expectations of foreign exchange students studying in Georgia. They're not used to the local culture of (not) doing things, including in universities. They will most likely be surprised to see there is no projector in the class or that you have to switch the classrooms often, or the professor doesn't' show up on time etc. Administrative issues are less organized and communicated than in their home universities. Also language is an issue since foreign students often speak better English than Georgians on average" (Tangiashvili 2018).

When it comes to student mobility, obviously more students from EaP countries prefer to study in the EU than the other way around. What we have found out in the process of research is that after the crackdown on the opposition in Belarus in 2020 some students from this country were facing negative attitudes when moving to a European country. According to one testimony, "we are treated as savages who escaped from the dictatorial regime… People here see us as if we were coming from Northern Korea. They can make jokes about us. When I was arranging my apartment rental, I was asked: Do you have money for that? I am not sure that students from Austria or France would have been asked similar questions". Another student shared her personal story: "In the admittance letter I was asked primarily to do my payment first. And the visa for my daughter was denied, which put me in a situation of a refugee".

It is at this point that something completely opposed to the value of visibility pops up in students' narratives: "Sometimes I try to hide where I am from to avoid repetitive spicy questions I am tired of". As another participant of the focus group put it, "We want so much to study and learn, but we feel some kind of pressure on us, as if we are less valuable". Yet another voice extended this argument further on: "Some of us did have an inferiority complex when travelling and studying abroad, while our colleagues and interlocutors from Europe did show their superiority. People here are stigmatized and often ashamed of their identity and origins. And they do know that Polish or Estonian diplomas have a higher value".

Finally, based on the previous questions, we asked students' opinions about whether exchange and mobility projects in the sphere of European Studies with non-EU partners diminish academic hierarchies or create new "soft hierarchies"? By "soft hierarchies" here we mean role and status distinctions between EU-based universities as project initiators, reporters to grant making institutions, quality controllers and financial supervisors, and their partners from EaP countries who often see their roles as secondary recipients of European charity.

On the one hand, collaborative projects give non-EU universities a chance to upgrade their infrastructure and educational standards and become peers with their counterparts. Yet on the other hand, many gaps remain in place. The structure of EU-funded projects implies that EU based partners share their knowledge and expertise, while non-EU partners are learners and recipients, which many of our respondents considered logical: "Conditionality implies that you set the rules. If you have money, you define these rules". One of the project reports made this clear by stating that its key objective was to transfer experiences of reforms in Latvia and Estonia for Moldova and Georgia during the pre-accession phase of their transition (EU-PREACC Report). More specifically, as the project report says, the representatives of partner universities have familiarized themselves with various managerial and administrative practices that are in use at Baltic universities: due to the extended mobility opportunities provided by the project Georgian and Moldovan universities were "able to develop their research capacities, upgrade the study programs and, in general, become more competitive". No changes in EU-based universities were either needed or reported (DESCnet Report); however, as we could learn from the debate on teaching sensitive issues and integrating students from 'risk countries', EU-based universities hosts of the growing numbers of foreign students face new challenges of diversity in the classrooms that need to be properly addressed.

THE RUSSIAN WAR IN UKRAINE: REVERBERATION FOR TEACHING AND STUDYING EUROPE

The invasion of Ukraine launched by Russia on February 24, 2022, when the initial plan for this paper had been already completed, became what foresight analysis would qualify as a "black swan" – an unlikely yet enormously consequential event. Despite its unexpected and irrational nature, the military invasion and its effects have corroborated our argument of a fundamental importance of the geopolitical dynamic for the process of Europeanisation in the education field, and the war's impact is an unfortunate and painful illustration of that.

There are two contexts in which Russia's war against Ukraine fits in our reasoning. One is a matter of content: the beginning of the war required fast readjustment of many teaching courses dealing with foreign policy analysis, international relations and world politics. Based on our own experiences and those of our colleagues, from the first day of the Russian aggression it became obvious that interactively teaching subjects related to the EU and its neighbourhood policy without close engagement with the developments in the battlefields becomes unsustainable. For many of the university teaching staff this was their first and highly challenging experience of integrating the ongoing war events into their regular classes in political science and security studies. The war has obviously raised the demand for including a military factor into the analysis of EU's eastern neighborhood. In this sense the Russian invasion in Ukraine became a major game changer for the entire EU, which – as we have assumed in the theoretical part of this paper – proves the constitutive importance of European margins and their ability to reshape the plethora of characteristics pertaining to European identity, security, and borders.

Secondly, the war in Ukraine rendered meaningful and rather controversial effects on the educational milieu and procedures that were discussed above. On the one hand, some EU-funded and Ukraine-focused projects were suspended from the beginning of the aggression by requests of lead partners. In particular, this was the case of the WARN project; according to the formal note circulated among consortium partners, the project activities

can be resumed after the suspension by a written request and an update to the project plan, which can also be done retroactively, once the situation allows this without waiting for formal permission. On the other hand, from the end of February 2022 dozens of European universities started opening new study and job opportunities for Ukrainian students and researchers using either their own resources, or applying for auxiliary targeted funds from the EU Commission as extensions of the ongoing project budgets. The new inflow of Ukrainian scholars into the European educational and academic institutions will undoubtedly improve the quality of Ukrainian studies as a research field distinct from the generalized "post-Soviet studies" – a discipline that, as many deem, after the Russian – Ukrainian war ceased to exist as designed and understood after the fall of the USSR. Multiple forms of assistance to Ukrainian students – from everyday psychological counselling to new stipends for young Ukrainians – have clearly attested to the strong normative commitments inherent in European educational culture and guiding universities' responses to the Russian aggression.

In the meantime, the ongoing war in Ukraine has triggered the discontinuation of educational and academic contacts with Russian and Belarusian partners. This affected some exchange students who have already started their studies in European universities. Apart from that, some European universities have announced their refusal to accept students from Belarus and Russia for the next academic year, which sparked a discussion between those pundits and educators who believe in the importance of maintaining educational contacts for fostering political changes in these two countries in the future, and their opponents who advocate for isolating these countries from Europe on all possible accounts. The political core of this debate boiled down to disagreements on a key issue of whether disengagement and re-bordering is a better strategy than the continuing engagement with Russian and Belarusian academic communities as parts of civil societies.

CONCLUSIONS

Mobility programmes and academic networks in higher education funded by the European Commission are an insightful venue for studying Europeanisation. Constructivist analyses of Europeanisation in higher education focus on the transnational socialization of political elites. We aimed to extend this research to universities that teach EU studies to both EU and non-EU students. One of the main assumptions of this article was that teaching and researching the EU in countries outside the EU cannot be perceived as a neutral or apolitical topic, as lecturers, researchers and students engage in knowledge production, which can differently affect the overall educational dynamics around EU-related academic topics. We explored this assumption with illustrations from the EaP region, where it proved valid. This process is currently profoundly marked by Russia's war in Ukraine, where geopolitical markers that actors hold in the field of academia represent an even more puzzling yet fascinating venue of critical inquiry.

In this article we reflected on two aspects of the process that we interpreted using an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective. On the one side, we looked at the active agents of Europeanisation that were identified within EU-based universities and expected to spread good practices of management, teaching and learning in the analysed international projects funded within the Erasmus + framework. On the other side, we scrutinized the voices of the subjects of this process, including the viewpoints of their non-EU partners with whom meanings of Europeanisation are shared and who are expected to become main beneficiaries of spill-over effects in the knowledge transfer facilitated by EU institutions.

We presented analytical accounts from EU member states' experiences (mainly Estonia) as viewed from several university consortia, and discussed the contextual and political nature of knowledge transfer. Our database contained web-based resources reflecting the content of several Erasmus projects implemented by the University of Tartu over the last 5 years, along with project reports submitted to grant making organizations and interviews with students from different EaP countries.

The way non-EU students get engaged with the EU as part of their studies matters for an in-depth understanding of Europeanisation in higher education. Data from our two focus groups with students confirmed that beyond formal policy settings, Europeanisation also takes place within knowledge transfer mechanisms and it is influenced by subjective actors' positions. These knowledge transfer processes start in the classroom, from interactions between peers and with lecturers, and continue beyond the classroom, in informal environments. All these layers are relevant for the construction of representations on the EU among non-EU students. Moreover, data revealed that as various crises that affected the EU in the last decade and the ways in which its relations with its Eastern neighborhood were challenged by major geopolitical events - starting from the 2008 war in Georgia until the most recent war in Ukraine - were all reflected in the studied teaching and learning experiences in different EaP countries. In the study, we observed that the process of Europeanisation understood as an education practice of identity building requires constant updates, revisions, critical insights and it can be to some extent distorted by various political positions of the main actors involved. Actors' self-reflections proved also critical for a deeper understanding of how they view transformations of themselves and their institutions as part of Europeanisation. In this context, the article focused on the role played by EU-funded academic projects linking EU-based and non-EU universities in order to observe these invisible mechanisms of Europeanisation at work. Our assumption is that the knowledge transfer process at the heart of numerous Erasmus + international cooperation projects relies to a great extent on the EU's reputation in the neighborhood and on the actors' intersubjective relations. In this vein, we looked at how the EU is discussed in discourses and enacted in practices of higher education cooperation projects, using an interdisciplinary analytical framework connected to critical theory. The added value of the article is that it offers a critical view on teaching about the EU in the Eastern neighborhood, focusing on local perspectives on EU-funded projects. In the process of drafting this analysis Russia's invasion in Ukraine started, and we believe the topic of promoting European studies in EaP countries is and will remain of critical interest for the future. Another added value is our additional observations on how EU-funded projects in Ukrainian universities after February 2022 were impacted by the current war.

In the end, we would like to streamline three arguments that were central for our analysis. First, in most cases EU-funded programs in the sphere of higher education are instruments of Europeanisation, broadly understood in a socio-constructivist that includes important communicative, discursive, cultural and societal dimensions. The way the main actors engage in the process involves both assimilation, appreciation combined with self-reflection, critical reflection and contestation. Based on the experience of non-EU universities participating in projects of this sort, we argue that their implementation, on the one hand, creates powerful spill-over effects, yet, on the other hand, produces new 'soft hierarchies' boiling down to structural factors of unequal resource distribution, role assignment, and professional statuses. Secondly, the export-oriented European studies programs both adapt to local conditions on the ground (from business cultures, professional ethics, formal

and informal rules to post-colonial sensitivities) and simultaneously contribute to the process of discursively reshaping the post-Soviet space through its fragmentation into regional geoeconomic / geocultural clusters. Thirdly, the visibility achieved due to promotion of European studies in each of these clustered areas 'bounces back' in the sense of opening up EU-based universities to more intense professional contacts with their eastern colleagues and the growing interest from non-EU students to study in EU-based partner universities. For the latter, this trend strengthens their expertise in Eurasian and Oriental studies, yet in the meantime also makes them face a challenge of reorganizing and readjusting the teaching content for an increasingly diverse community of international students with dissimilar ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds.

These observations should be tested also on different non-EU countries interactions in order to discuss how it impacts the field of EU studies beyond the EaP countries. In terms of avenues for future research we believe that these three arguments should open a future critical discussion on the role of academic structuring of political discourse in the post-Soviet space, and the interplay between regionalist and nationalist perspectives that frame how EU studies are being taught outside the EU.

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