The official birth of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 has urged a boom in then-nascent EU neighbourhood politics scholarships. Immense attention has been granted to the study of activeness, actorness and effectiveness of member states' influence over the shape and outcomes in this field of the Union's international engagement. Accounts studying actors and actorness, the stringency of EU-level decision-making mechanisms and member states' leeways deployable to channel their regional and other preferences, as well as the effects of ever closer Union onto the preferences of EU member states themselves soon came to profile this scholarship domain. One of the accounts is represented by Christine Normann's 2010 PhD thesis-based book on the influence of Germany, France and Poland on European Neighbourhood Policy (Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014).

The Book's main aim is to study the influence of three selected EU member states on the shape and development of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The underlying research question of the study reads as follows: "How do EU member states within their respective regional concepts and modes of interaction influence European Neighbourhood Policy?" (p.30). In the book, it is supported by a number of empirical sub-questions addressing both policy (content) and politics (process) aspects, "whereas polity – the form aspect – is only taken into consideration as a framework in which national and European policy-making takes place" (p.31). Scoped this way, the narrative of Normann's (2014) truly comprehensive monograph (over 500 pages!) unfolds in three stages that correspond with the respective "parts" of the book. Following the theoretical framework presentation, Part I reads as a sort of introductory chapter that elaborates on German, French and Polish European and regional identities. Part II addresses the particular regional concepts of these EU member states against the background of their own and wider EU-level engagements into the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy. A twenty-page long final conclusion (pp.482-507) could well be regarded as an autonomous part III of the book. In general, the book is strongly divided into chapters and subchapters at four numerated levels, with further unnumbered sublevels making it feel, at some instances, structurally overloaded (eg, pp. 76, 87).
The book’s narrative draws on two general hypotheses, that are then replicated and multiplied in each EU member state case study (e.g., in case of France – p. 142, 297; Germany – p. 109-110, 237, 485; Poland – p. 143, 367). The first underlying hypothesis (H1) reads as follows: “Based on their common national understanding of the historical, geographical, political, economic, cultural, and/or linguistic links with specific neighbouring regions, the EU member states will construct regional concepts for the European level in accordance with the logic of appropriateness. The effects on ENP will be external regionalisation” (p.68; 483). The second underlying hypothesis (H2) postulates: “Given their common understanding of the European integration process and their role within the EU, the interaction of EU member states within this regional integration will either be based on regional or normative assumptions. The effects on the ENP decision-making process will be specific forms of internal cooperation” (p.68; 483). These, in principle, testable hypotheses do reflect what is a common understanding rather than an original and challenging claim. For it should be also acknowledged that such a formulation of general hypotheses allows their wider applicability, not only in the context of the studied EU member states (Germany, Poland and France) but also further afield. The sampling for this research is well justified by the author on pp.62-63: Germany and France have been long regarded as ‘old’ motors of the European integration before the biggest EU enlargement; in an extended format with Poland, i.e. the ‘Weimar Triangle’ format, they may though well function as a new motor within an enlarged European Union, the author’s claim goes. In order to support these claims, just as to tackle the research questions posed, Normann (2014) draws her analysis on the tripartite theoretical basis. In the author’s own words, her “analysis combines theories from international relations with approaches from European integration theories” (p.32). After having (rather extensively) discussed potentially available theoretical lenses (pp.32-37) from both IR and European integration theories, she eventually postulates that “[g]iven the theoretical pluralism already mentioned, this analysis combines three theories and theoretical approaches that are anchored in international relations theory and in European integration theory […]” (p.37), those being (1) constructivism, (2) new institutionalism, and (3) Europeanization. Unfortunately, no overarching theoretical approach that would link those three layers of analysis, as presented on pp.39-57, could be detected. Therefore, the book reads like three different works – each pursuing its own agenda and using its own conceptual-methodological apparatus. Perhaps due to this, country-by-country comparisons within these three layers of analysis themselves appear to be a daunting task, and thus pp.186-197 reveal (repetitive) individual-state chapter conclusions, rather than a genuine analytical exercise of comparison. Interestingly, in part II, the author succeeds in providing a comparative account of German, French and Polish regional policy concepts which is much more in line with the research design developed for this study. In Normann’s (2014) own words, “this study constitutes a multi-case analysis of the German, French and Polish regional concepts of a European Ostpolitik, a Mediterranean Union and an Eastern Partnership; and those countries’ modes of interaction while influencing the European decision-making process in ENP” (p.62). The source basis she uses for this ambitious analytical entrepreneurship is broad enough to include: speeches given by political actors at both EU and national levels; official documents from EU and national administrations, as well as fora on regional cooperation; expert interviews; and secondary literature research. The bibliography extends over 50 pages (pp.509-564).

Substantively, the book represents thus a well-researched topic, or one should rather say – topics of German, Polish and French regional and European identities, their regional policy concepts and advocacy efforts at the EU level. The regional policy concepts of Germany (pp.237-296), France (pp.297-365) and Poland (pp.366-433)
are given a particularly scrupulous attention in the book that is keen on triggering the readers' appreciation. For instance, the German regional policy toward the East is derived from the historical "mission civilisatrice" and considered against the contemporary approach based upon "cooperation, support and moral duty" (p.99) that appear to constitute German Ostpolitik nowadays. France's regional identity and history have informed, the book contends, its policy emphasis on the EU's southern neighbourhood, in particular the countries of the Mediterranean region. Such a – deeply rooted in the history of political, economic, cultural and other relations – foreign policy orientation is also informed by contemporary political developments and challenges, like the migration challenge (p.298). Again, Polish regional and European identity, as well as the history of multifaceted relationship with its direct Eastern neighbourhood are said to have informed its Eastern partnership policy concept that emphasizes the EU's relationship with its immediate eastern vicinity "for which Poland acts as an advocate for EU membership" (p.366).

As it stands, Normann's title provides a valuable synthesis of contemporary debates in IR and European studies about the role of member states vis-à-vis the European Union (largely up to 2010, with decent updates till the year 2014), as well as political rationale of truly controversial policy templates – EU neighbourhood policies. Due to the complicated nature of the topics addressed, as well as the way of approaching them, with regrettably missing overarching explanatory framework, the book will be rather a difficult read for (under)graduates. For fellow scholars who are looking for detailed, broadly sourced and extensive exploratory elaborations on increasingly popular topics of EU and member states' neighbourhood policies, this book will be the right place to look. Ultimately, Normann's title is probably unique on the market for, on its own, it encompasses distinct insights from hugely populated Europeanization, new institutionalist and constructivist scholarships.

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