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# How do Israeli Government Officials Perceive the EU Neighborhood Policy? Implications to Normative Power Europe

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## Abstract

The 'Normative Power Europe' (NPE) theory suggests that the EU's power is in its ability to define what is "normal" or "appropriate" in international relations. NPE relies on EU core norms and is said to be transferred to other actors through various diffusion modalities. In 2004 the EU has launched the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), aimed at building relationships based on 'mutual values' with Eastern and Southern neighbors. The EU is constantly building capacity as a part of the ENP, spanning fields such as economy, trade, transport, legislation, environment and health. Institutionalization of the EU relations with its neighboring countries may thus be considered a form of normative power. Despite a growing body of knowledge pertaining to NPE theory and its relevance to the ENP, the perceptions and attitudes towards norm diffusion among government officials within beneficiary countries have not been extensively studied. Taking Israel as a case-study, a semi-structured interview approach was used to study the perceptions and attitudes of senior technical officers and decision-makers in four Ministries of the Israeli government. This paper will examine NPE from a new angle by exploring whether capacity building is a new form of diffusion of NPE that has not been previously identified and characterized. Specifically, this study seeks to analyze the relation between capacity building in European neighborhood and NPE and contribute to the theoretical discourse spanning NPE by assessing if capacity building is indeed a modality of normative diffusion.

## Introduction

Normative Power Theory, introduced by Ian Manners in 2002, has become central in the attempts to understand and analyze EU foreign policy and foreign relations. The new paradigm offered by Manners in his article originated from his willingness to shed new light on the study of the EU and present another argument beyond the traditional perspective regarding the identity, role and power exerted by the EU in the international arena – civilian power or military, economic or soft power (Carr 1962; Duchene 1972; Nye 1990; Bull 1982). The "normative dimension", also referred to as "ideological power" or the "power of ideas", has been proposed in order to capture an additional aspect of international impact by focusing on the ability of shaping conception of what is 'normal' in international relations (Manners 2002).

The Normative Power approach does not claim that Europe lacks military or civilian/economic power but rather emphasizes the power Europe has in setting agenda, spreading ideas, values and norms at the international arena (Diez 2005; Whitman 2011). Underlying Normative Power theory is the objection to a totalistic view of the centrality of the state as seen in the traditional theories. Therefore the innovation in this theory is in the definition of EU foreign policy in normative terms that cannot be explained using military or economic terms and it focuses on EU role in setting up and passing standards to others as means of spreading norms (Diez and Manners 2007:175).

Understanding the normative mechanism of the EU enables the disengagement from the colonialist/neo-colonialist perception that sees a strong actor (military or economical) positioned above other weak players in a way that alters internal affairs. Normative Power, anchored in universal values and norms, allows weaker players to accept it from a moral perspective and therefore normative influence communicates between the developed and developing worlds (Manners, 2006:176).

Through reviewing EU's normative basis over 50 years, through declarations, treaties, policies, criteria and conditions, Manners identified five core norms and four minor norms. The five "core" norms may reflect Europe's Normative Power: Peace, Liberty, Democracy, Rule of law and Human rights. In addition, four "minor" norms have been suggested: Social solidarity, Anti-discrimination, Sustainable development and Good governance. Normative power will seek to "overcome the power of politics through powering universal law and civilian rights not only the rights of the state" (Sjursen 2006:249).

Manners described six mechanisms of norm diffusion practically used by the EU, in the international arena: **Contagion** (the EU set as an example imitated by other). This happens especially with regional integration. Actors are "infected" with the European norms, unintentionally, from the simple political contact with the EU. The examples offered by Manners include Mercosur that promotes free trade in South America and ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations); **Informational diffusion** (diffusion by new policy initiatives or statements that spread EU norms); **Procedural diffusion** (occurs when the EU institutionalizes relationship with a third party and includes normative components in dialogues and agreements. The examples offered by Manners include World Trade Organization and trade agreements with neighbor regions as well as the enlargement states; **Transference** (when

norms are diffused while exchanging goods, trading, aiding, or technical assistance performing by the EU); **Overt diffusion** (occurs when there is a physical presence of the EU in third country); **Cultural filter** (refers to action and reaction occurred between building knowledge to creating social and political identity of the norms receivers (Manners 2002). Examples given by Manners are spreading democratic norms in China, civil rights in Turkey and environment in Britain. Those six mechanisms reflect how the EU normative ethics revolve around normative anchors – "life as an example", "being reasonable" and "less harmful" (Manners 2008). The most significant principal in the diffusion of the norms is the lack of use of force. The lack of physical force and the importance of cultural diffusion led Manners to argue that "the most important aspect that shapes EU's international role is not what it does or say but what it is" (Manners 2002).

In the political discourse, normative power serves to justify EU actions. Gerrits claimed that normative powers define, direct and justify EU international role and relevance. According to Gerrits, EU normative power became a meaningful narrative, a response to a growing need of providing legitimacy to EU's foreign policy (Gerrits 2009). In addition, the normative power discourse helped to the structuring and building EU identity (Diez 2005). Birchfield continued this line of thinking claiming that the "importance here is the understanding that reflectivity plays an important part in the building and representation of EU's international identity and actions". According to Birchfield in almost every international action implemented by the EU or in any position regarding a joint international policy the EU implements an "exercise" of apparently identification and internal legitimacy combined with an external process of justification and implication (Birchfield 2013). Therefore normative power theory is not a just a mere theoretical approach but a tool that allows the observation of the EU's action while internal observation and internal reflection takes place. The normative power theory allows defining and analyzing European political action (Birchfield 2013).

## Capacity building and the European Neighborhood Policy

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, significant progress in education, health and other fields has led to a major improvement in people's life, but there are many countries that still find it difficult to organize and conduct their systems in a way that allows them to prioritize their problems, develop their policy and implement them (Hiderbrand & Grindle, 1994). The struggle between theory and practice produced many ideas and new methods. During the 80's an idea that included many insights and lessons from past "development" activities has evolved. The approach called capacity building is still developing as are the studies examining its underlying assumptions and the chances of its success. (Lusthaus et al. 1999, 2002).

The development field, capacity building and other close concepts such as capacity development and capacity strengthening are considered relatively new and emerged during the 80s (de Koning, 2006). The capacity building approach became one of the leading themes in the discussion on development at all levels. Many countries declare they need capacity building, countries are willing to donate and to include this donation in their policy and there are governmental agencies, international and sub-national, that are tasked with carrying it out through projects or future planning. Despite the above, capacity building remained a general approach, wide and vague that includes under its umbrella many aspects such as organizational development, technological assistance, building economic institutions or concepts such as empowerment, performance and attendance and other ideas, not clearly linked (Morgan 1998). Some argue that to include many elements under the definition of capacity building is advantageous since this way it becomes power that unites and confederate many stakeholders. On the other hand, it can be argued that capacity building has many meanings that were used for a marketing process more than a working tool.

Capacity building is a "soft" tool that does not rely on a senior political level, but rather than on the professional/technical level, meaning it has less effect as a political leverage (Borras & Jacobsson 2004). In addition the tools that 'capacity building' is based on presume that that states in need of capacity building lack information, sources and qualifications which could be granted to them via a capacity building process (Schneider & Ingram 1990). Capacity building is mostly referred to as a tool that its outcomes are not immediately evident, rather to a tool that is used indirectly to shape policy in a sense that capacity building in itself will not necessarily lead to a direct effect such as standards and new laws and regulations. In other words, capacity building is a tool of long term effects (McDonnell & Elmore 1987). Generally speaking, capacity building can be regarded as a tool that its particular influence is hard to identify mostly due the fact that for increasing capabilities, diverse actions will be needed and also following the long term impact of capacity building (Schneider & Ingram, 1990). The individuals, institutions and context in which capacity building takes place are not identical and cannot be expected to be carried out the same way. Several factors influence the success of capacity building programs. There is a distinction between context factors that related to the plan's environment and implementation factors that relates to the program itself (de Koning, 2006).

In the literature dealing with policy instruments, there are many definitions and classifications to "capacity building", "capacity" and "influence" since these terms interrelate and there is a tendency to confuse them despite their different meaning. The term "capacity building" refers to approaches, strategies and methodologies used by participants at the national level and/or external sources to assist organization and/or systems to improve their performance. In other words, capacity building is a concrete method and process (for example workshops, training programs etc.). The indicators of capacity will focus on the performance of the organizational function or its activity (for example the decision making process), leadership, financial management, the ability to learn and implement etc. (Morgan 1998).

The European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) promotes a deeper economic and political relationship between Europe and its neighboring countries without allowing them to become EU members at any stage. This policy exists since 2003 and was developed as a result of EU's preparation to its enlargement with ten new Member States. The ENP was developed as a strategic approach to the situation faced after the enlargement in which it was necessary to redesign the

border between "internal" Europe to "external" Europe (Whitman & Wolff 2010) and when the main concern was avoiding creating dividing new "lines" in Europe (Comelli 2004).

The declarative objective of the ENP, according to the European Commission (2004) was to share the advantages of EU's enlargement with the neighboring countries in strengthening the stability, security and welfare (COM 2004/373 (final):3). More specifically, the EU's mission is to form an area of peace, stability and prosperity in its Eastern and Southern borders (Comelli 2004). The clear objectives set by the EU were joint work to reduce poverty and creation of a prosperous area and joint values on the basis of deepening the economic integration, empowering the political and cultural relationship, cross border cooperation and mutual responsibility to prevent conflicts among EU Member States and its neighbors.

The action plans, that were brought together with each neighboring country, were the platform to promote the objectives mentioned above and the understanding that "by helping our neighbors we help ourselves" (Ferrero-Valnder 2004). The action plan focused on (1) the commitment to joint values (basically compliance with regional and international treaties relating to democracy, human rights, role of law, etc.); (2) a more effective dialogue (as part of EU defense and security policy); (3) development of economic and social policy (legislative and regulatory proximity to EU's internal market and accompanying programs related to poverty and inequality); (4) trade and internal market (including regulation and adopting World Trade Organization principals); (5) justice, freedom and security (joint border management and cooperation relating the law); (6) sectoral topics such as transportation, energy, environment, science, development and research); (7) individual aspects, with an emphasis on "people to people" programs, civil society, education and public health.

The incentive for the states to comply with the plan's objectives and purposes is the intensive dialogue with the EU that prioritizes mutual interests in foreign policy such as regional cooperation, effectiveness of a multi-lateral organization, dealing with security threats (including terrorism), extremity, weapon of mass destruction, cross border health security etc. The novelty is in the long term view that promotes political and economic reforms, development and modernization, including components that are not offered to "their countries" or in other words – promoting normative European values and interest in the closest circle. The depth and velocity of a state's progress with the EU depends on its ability and willingness to implement the agreed reforms. When a country identifies the sector in the European market that it would like to approach it will promote reforms, with EU aid.

Del Sarto pointed out that the ENP is characterized by the "performance" approach - only those countries that will share EU political and economical values and/or will obligate to fulfill reforms will enjoy it. (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005). While the regional dimension of the ENP is decreasing, the conditioning dimension is increasing and goes hand in hand with the "state to state" approach that is implied by the ENP and with EU willingness to become a central player in world politics through this policy.

## **Normative Power as part of ENP**

Manners himself argued that normative power Europe is folded and diffused within the ENP framework in several ways. First and foremost, the ENP relies on treaties, conventions and previous agreements signed by ENP countries, which in itself strengthens the legitimacy of the principles and values. This way, the previous commitment of countries that are not EU members to universal values is contained in the policy and is a benchmark of fulfilling the objective the EU wants to promote anyway. At the same time, using legitimate, acceptable values, that are perceived exterior to the EU, encourages organizations to integrate the neighboring countries directly in their activities. Additionally, the use of international values, which as stated before serve as a legitimate external source, add to the consistency and coherence of EU's normative power policy, while granting that the EU is not promoting pragmatically its own values, but the values are part of its international obligation. The coherency of EU's values is improving due to the fact these values are part of UN values (Manners 2010).

As mentioned previously, Manners promotes observing the ENP as a long-term socialization process. The ENP includes the promise to promote good governance in the neighboring countries (European Security Strategy 2003) and the aim of developing special relations with the neighboring countries as stated in the Lisbon Treaty. According to Manners, the bureaucratic institutionalism is based on treaties that emphasize the vision of neighboring countries within the EU, as an unlimited process that lasts beyond the foreseeable future. In this regard the socialization process must be seen as a process that reflects EU policy on the neighboring countries with mutual responsibility of promoting the process with positive conditioning for progress from the European side. From here it can be argued that the ENP strived to express Europe Normative Power and that capacity building process should be examined in this regard.

## **European Neighborhood Policy and Israel**

On December 2004 Israel was among the first countries to have adopted the 'action plan' with the EU in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). This plan specified the prioritization and the development plan for three years that will lead for deepening of EU-Israel relations. The action plan was supposed to assist in the promotion of the Association from the 1995 Agreement that constitutes the legal basis for the EU-Israel relations. The EU committed, among other things, to assist financially and professionally in the promotion of several issues up to reaching European standards and norms.

Israeli and European experts meet on a regular basis to discuss the implementation of the agreement in eleven sub-committees that were established for this purpose.<sup>1</sup> The ENP employs two main mechanisms of sharing European expertise and information with Israel (and the rest of the ENP countries) - Twinning and TAIEX. Twinning is a project for cooperation of public systems (in twinning institutes) one that is located in an ENP country and the other in one of

the EU Member States. The purpose of cooperation is the exchange of information, best practice that will lead to legislation and regulation in the participating country, based on the EU legislation, and institutional reorganization. An EU advisor is sent to the beneficiary country for a period ranging from one year to three years; sometimes the expert is accompanied by additional advisors that spend a shorter period of time in the beneficiary country according to their mission. In 2007 the Twinning mechanism was initiated in Israel, and initially applied mostly on the legal, transportation and agricultural fields. The TAIEX mechanism (technical assistance and exchange of information), is a forum of experts that aid in approximation of national legislation to the EU legislation, as a mean of opening the internal European market to ENP countries and as a preliminary measure to a future Twinning project. One form of TAIEX operation is holding seminars and courses led by European experts to a broad local audience.

## Methods

### Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were performed with six Israeli government officials based at four different Israeli Ministry offices that have experience with the twinning and TAIEX mechanisms. The interviews were held during the early months of 2016. I had no previous acquaintance with the interviewees and the interviews themselves took place at the respective working place. The average time of the interviews was one hour. After introducing myself, defining the interview purpose and its conduct and obtaining written consent, the interviewees were asked to provide basic information on themselves, their current working position, and the organization in which they work and the areas of activity and interfaces with the EU. After this short introduction the interviewees were asked to answer questions regarding European Neighborhood Policy, capacity building and aspects that relate to the normative power theory (the interviewees were not aware of the theory itself). The questions were open questions, and they were not "guided" or "leading" questions rather than presented to the interviewees in an inductive and systematic way. In order to produce fruitful information the questions started broad and then narrowed, allowing the interviewees to remember more details. All the interviewees signed a consent form for participating in this research.

### Method of analysis

Thematic analysis is a widely-used qualitative analytic method within, and beyond, psychology and it offers an accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data that search for themes or patterns in relation to different epistemological<sup>ii</sup> and ontological<sup>iii</sup> positions. Qualitative approaches are incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway & Todres, 2003) and thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There is a debate among scholars on whether thematic analysis can "stand" as a specific method or if it is one of a few "shared generic skills across qualitative analysis" as identified by Holloway and Todres (2003). Boyatzis (1998) characterized thematic analysis not as a specific method but as a tool to use across different methods. Ryan and Bernard (2000) located thematic coding as a process performed within major analytic traditions, such as grounded theory rather than a specific approach in its own. Other scholars see the benefits of thematic analysis stating that "through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can provide a rich, detailed, yet complex account of data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thematic analysis can thus be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality' (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Besides mentioning the different views among scholars I will not reflect on this ongoing debate for I have used thematic analysis as an independent method.

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the researched data; The methodology can be seen as a pyramid- its base is the *Data corpus*, all the data collected for a particular research project; the next layer will be the *Data set*, all the data from the *data corpus* that is being used for a particular analysis (the dataset may look at some specific topics in the data emerging from a specific analytic interest or it may consist of many or all individual items within the *data corpus*); the next layer is *Data item* which refers to the use of each individual piece of collected data, which together make up the data set or corpus. At the top of the 'pyramid' the *Data extract* will refer to an individually coded chunk of data, which has been identified within, and extracted from a data item. Obviously there will be many of these taken from the entire *data set* but only a selection of these extracted data will feature in the final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The active role of the researcher is in identifying patterns or themes, selecting which are of interest and reporting them to the readers (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

### The analytical process

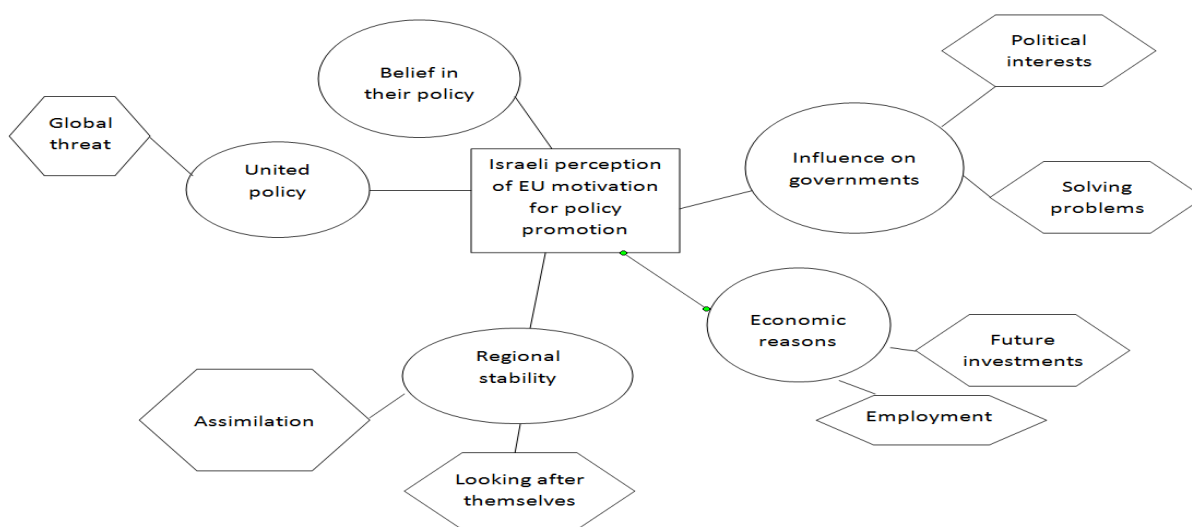
The data corpus, all the data collected, of my research, consists of literature review, source analysis, database analysis and semi-structured interviews. In this paper I will present the preliminary analysis of six interviews taken with Israeli government officials. Since I used thematic analysis those interviews were part of my data set, and by analyzing them I have extracted them into different themes. A theme captures something important from the data set in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. A theme might be given considerable space in some data items, and little or none in others. Basically it is for the researcher to decide what should be considered as a theme. The "keyness" of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question. One can define and determine themes in a number of ways but it is important to stay consistent when this is carried out (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I sought to understand the differences, similarities and inconsistencies regarding the interviewees' understanding of the motivation for the capacity building efforts of the EU and its possible relation to Normative Power Europe. I used an inductive approach (bottom up) identifying themes with strong relation and linkage to the data themselves (Patton, 1990; Frith & Gleeson, 2004). In this approach the data that was specifically collected for the research via interviews enabled a process of coding without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the research analytical preconceptions. My analysis went beyond the semantic or explicit content of the data and I identified assumptions, ideas and conceptualizations which I have later interpreted and theorized. Using analysis with this type of tradition may overlap with some forms of 'discourse analysis', which are sometimes referred to as 'thematic discourse analysis' where broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorized as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data (Singer & Hunter, 1999; Taylor & Ussher 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process starts when the interviews are transcribed into a written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis. The transcription was made without adding punctuation in order not to alter the meaning of the data. Phases two began after I familiarized myself with the data and have generated an initial list of ideas of what is in the data and what may be interesting about them. This involved the production of initial codes from the data "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis 1998). The process of coding is part of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) since the research organizes the data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). The coding process was done manually, by writing notes on the texts, using different highlighters to indicate different patterns. I worked systematically through the entire data set, giving full and equal attention to each data item, and identifying interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns/themes across the data set. I coded as many potential themes as possible while presuming that at a later phase I will focus on the more interesting themes. I kept a little of the surrounding data in order not to lose the context (Bryman, 2001), then copied extracts of data from individual transcripts and collected each code together in separate computer file. Phase three began when all my data has been initially coded and collected and I had a long list of different codes that I have identified across my data. This phase, of searching for themes, involved sorting all different codes into potential themes and collecting all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. I have started to analyze my codes considering how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme, thinking about the relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels among themes (overarching themes and sub-themes). I used tables for this purpose with 'miscellaneous' category used to house the codes that do not seem to fit into the main themes and I created an early thematic map<sup>iv</sup>. Phase four begins after devising a set of candidate themes (themes that had enough data to support them). Once the thematic map has been validated I moved to the next phase. Phase five was about defining and naming theme and it began after I have identified the "essence" of what each theme is about and determined what aspect of the data each theme captures. For each individual theme I wrote a detailed analysis considering how it fits into the broader overall "story" that I am telling about my data, in relation to my research questions and ensuring that there is not too much overlaps between the themes. By the end of this phase I could clearly define what my themes are and what they are not. The last phase involved the final analysis and write up of the report.

## Results

Overall, seven major themes were identified: (1) EU motivation and drivers for their policy promotion; (2) Israel's motivation for accepting EU policy; (3) Israel as part of EU; (4) Israel's effect on EU; (5) capacity building; (6) normative power Europe; (7) the beneficiary side. In addition, twenty two sub themes were recognized. Only four major themes had enough data at this stage of the research to be further analyzed.



**Figure 1.** Thematic map depicting the Israeli perception of EU motivation for policy promotion.

EU motivation and drivers for policy promotion were defined in several ways. Not surprisingly the economic motive was very strong, claiming that creating the same standards will help securing EU investments.

*“..if the standards are the same and people speak the same language it also helps to open up economic borders“;*

*“..values that eventually will help them, will help the Europeans that arrives to countries in this region to fit in faster I mean if he wants to invest here he will have an easier access more convenient..to invest and sustain his activities so they are preparing these countries to except the European standards“;*

EU political motives were raised as well, seen as a direct way to influencing government ministries.

*“they are exposed to more and more government ministries and we serve as their spokespersons and distributors..promoters of the twinning and TAIEX projects to other government offices“;*

Regional stability was pointed out as a strong motive for promoting EU policy through ENP programs when pointing out that the EU’s main interest is in ensuring people will have no reason to leave their birth place and immigrate to the EU. *“they are not hiding it, from what I understood directly from them, I can't tell you were, it might be written in the twinning manuals..they tell you that their interest is in passing on their values and standards, everything they have to infiltrate that to countries, now they do that through the ENP, because they claim it is like an osmotic membrane in the borders. They want their neighboring countries to be like them for the people to stay where they are and not to come to them“;*

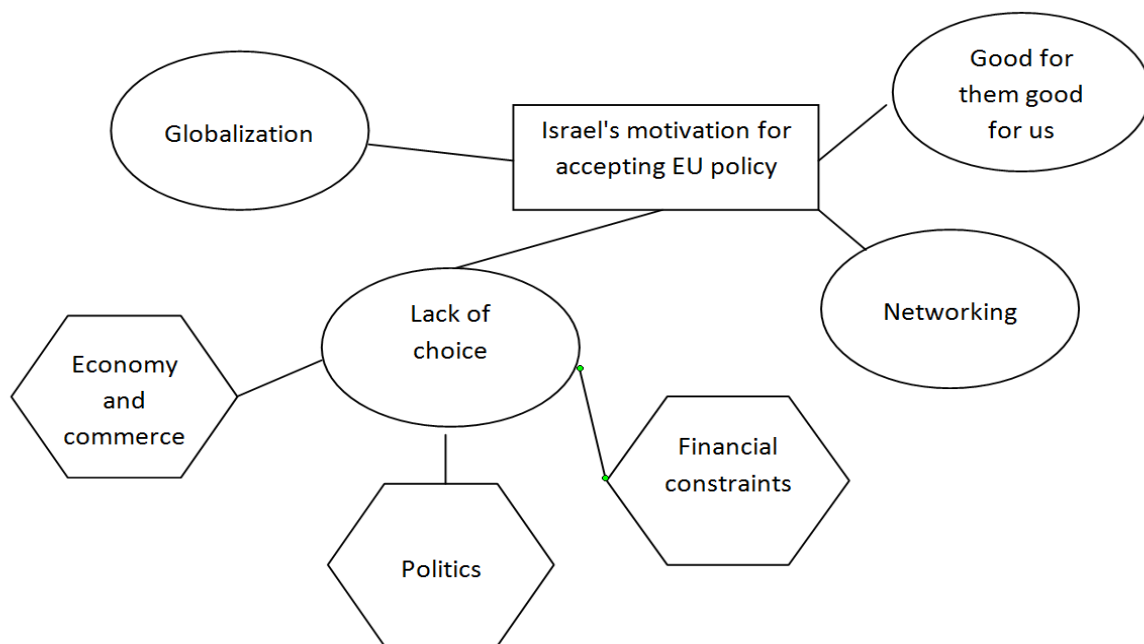
*“they need to calm down their neighborhood they see...they need their closest neighbors stable they will give all the money needed for the neighboring countries not to bring them immigrants..every program that will decrease radicalization and encouragement of employment for the young population they will spill buckets of money only for them not to come to them“;*

It is important to state that these observations were not made with criticism by interviewees but represent their perceptions of the situation, as one interviewee concluded:

*”...creating a united policy will decrease the need to deal with threats at their door step“.*

One very interesting finding was that several interviewees thought that one of the reasons for the EU to promote the twinning and TAIEX mechanisms was employment –

*“they have a very simple interest, pay salaries. This money goes only for Europe it is not for our use. It enters from one European pocket to the other. Employment. They provide their own people with employment“;*



**Figure 2.** Thematic map depicting the Israeli motivation for accepting EU policy.

What was intriguing after shaping the perspective on their views of what drives the EU was to understand what drives the Israeli side to be a part of twinning and TAEIX projects. I received very 'desirable' answers starting from the globalized world we live in –

*“we are part of a lot of international partnerships and we know where we are strong and where we need to progress and sometimes it is out of obligation to international commitment or that we have to adjust ourselves to a standard and it is hard for us or it is going to take us a lot of time and we know that twinning will provide it..”*

Through more realistic interest such as economy, commerce and politics –

*“you always want to be with the European standards because it is good for your economy and good for your language you speak the same language and it is positive”*

or a pragmatic view of such programs as compensating for the lack of internal budget that ministries are sometimes facing -

*“we don't have the sources as a government ministry to afford everything from the research phase“;*

*“there are always cuts (in budget-LMG), us for example if we want to develop something it would be of our interest to attend international conferences but there aren't many people exposed to conferences but if we can bring the experts here for a three- four day course or send some workers to meet their colleagues on their (EU- LMG) expenses..”;*

I also received different reactions. Responses that looked at the EU administration admiring its benefits and wanting to learn from it –

*“as an administration we have what? 48 years? They have administrations, government offices working with traditional workflow..traditional methodologies that existed long before we started to hear about them..we can learn from them”*

Reading and re-reading this part of the interviews I realized that it even if the Israeli motivation for accepting EU mechanisms was practical and pragmatic they still chose to cooperate and by doing so they inevitably became influenced by the EU experts as I will discuss later.

The third theme that came up very strongly during the interviews was the attitudes of the beneficiary side. At first the interviewees presented their side as sharing the same interests with the EU –

*“I definitely think this it is an encounter of interest”;* *“ we don't perceive that as arrogance rather than an opportunity“;*

Some interviewees even perceived themselves as equal partners, having control over the situation-

*“do you know how many... there was a request from several ministries to do such things a lot of ministries offered themselves to do reverse TAEIX so they could provide their knowledge and spread it to the EU”;* *the EU doesn't come to the government ministries and tells them do this and that..it is those ministries that ask them to come”*

But ambiguity and criticism were also encountered –

*“it is not necessary the 'beneficiary' side because same times you have ambiguous feelings about that..it is a professional experience and you learn a lot and all that but at the end their goal is to have a regulation accepted by all and to take it to the implementation stage..and during this process you sometime disagree with what they want ..”;*

Subsequently, a sub-theme one might call 'we have the power' emerged -

*“we have this power, for example we are part of 'horizon 2020 we are there”;*

*“for us it is very simple she (the expert-LMG) tells us what she wants us to do and we do as we like”;*

another sub-theme that came out very strongly is the fact that Israeli government officials felt that Israel is in fact a part of Europe and that ENP is not really meant for Israel but to 'other' countries –

*“we are Europe”;* *“we are part of the western world and we see ourselves as part of the European family so it is very natural”;*

*“from cultural and historical perspective we are part of it..think about how many Israelis have European citizenship we have shared history, culture, values.. people here speaks all of the European languages we see ourselves part of the European culture and we are even if there is a sea between us it cannot be disconnected“*

When Israeli government official perceive themselves as part of the EU, many concerns and much resentment which can naturally emerge in a cultural encounter, could be put aside.

The fourth and last theme deals with the capacity building programs. I have asked the interviewees to explain the meaning of capacity building since all of them are involved in capacity building projects-



*“range of actions that I do starting from management continuing in allocating budget and people through writing of procedures...all the phases from the policy level up to implementation and verification that things are implemented”; what happens in the twinning in TAIEX is capacity building“; it is implementation of values]; “;*

All the interviewees were familiar with different types of capacity building and have included twinning and TAIEX projects as part of capacity building mechanisms. When I presented them with a possible connection between capacity building and normative power Europe they have all rejected the normative approach and the possibility it could influence their ministries -

*“it is not accurate (NPE-LMG) because if you don't stand in specific norms it has its consequences without threatening I mean if you will not meet in the demanded standards you will not be allowed to export to EU”;*

*“the power of the diffusion is set by the height of the waterfall and because the difference in Israel (from EU-LMG) is small it doesn't have a great effect“;*

*“I think the Americans are better in this..if I look at their influence on their neighbors I am not sure they succeeded less than the Europeans”;*

*“they invest a lot of money in it and what do they get in return? Here it is not working because we refuse to subject“;*

*“I have no doubt that they have hidden interests not just.. norms? For what purpose? As if we are coming to give you the light? It think it is political and economic interests”*

Striking was the fact that at the practical level, capacity building programs do change Israeli policy and even inspires the Israeli law -

*“you adopt their pattern and accept it..you build the whole system towards their direction”*

*“we thought about adopting OECD regulations in specific issues..today we want to take the European parallel..it is easier to learn from the Europeans and if they bring their experts here to talk about European regulations it is better to adopt and apply them already..we received guidance from them”*

*“ the law basically relies on European directive it doesn't say that but this is how it is“*

*“as a result of the twinning project she had an expert helping her from the beginning up to the end and now she has an active Commissioner for disabilities”*

*“I mean..it is clear to me that the twinning that was done regarding equal rights in working places..yes.. it led to, I am not sure since I am no expert on Israeli changes of policy in relation to Arab employment in different sectors of Israel economy..but I am sure Europe had an interest to make it happen“.*

It should be mentioned that none of the Israeli officials noticed that until they were asked to explain twinning and TAIEX programs outcomes.

## Discussion

This study explored the perceptions and attitudes of Israeli government officials towards the EU neighborhood policy using semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The analysis of the interviews revealed several major themes, relating to the acceptance of EU policy by Israel, Israel's position with respect to the EU and the process of capacity building and Normative Power Europe.

The analysis of this dominant theme – the motives and drivers behind what drives the EU to promote its policy, alludes to an understanding among Israeli government officials of realistic motives. None of the government officials indicated the cosmopolitan principals that define the EU or the "centrality of commitment to universal values and principles that are central in EU relations within EU countries and the world" (Manners 2006) as a cause for EU policy promotion. One can get the impression that there is a total rejection or lack of awareness from the Israeli side to the idea of normative power Europe acting towards Israel. Moreover, per several interviewees, Israel and the EU are seen as equal to the Israeli eye and that since Israel is an OECD country which practices similar norms there will be no influence of the EU over Israel.

But reality seems different for what the Israelis officials perceive. The subject of influence (Israel) conforms to the regulations and standards of the EU. Reporting that the participation in the twinning projects gives *“...a lot of confidence“* and they have found that the comprehensive work done by the EU can help them when dealing with internal sector forces objecting the changes they offer *“references to European documents from which we were inspired gives us a good back-up“* reinforces the visioning of the EU as an authority and therefore adopting its rules and regulations, even if serving internal interests, comes natural. There was a consensus about the fact that there is a lot to be learned from the EU (*“they have capabilities that we don't” ; “we don't copy as is but we do understand that we don't have to reinvent the wheel“*).

The EU identity is built up by its own action and twinning and TAIEX projects are a platform for diffusing EU values, norms and regulations as is evident in the Israeli case. Manners, has stated that *“the most important aspect that shapes EU's role is not what it does but what it is”* (Manners 2002). As is evident from this study, what influences Israeli officials most, as non-European actors, is, in fact, EU's policy and its active approach that involves *“soft”* intervention through performing capacity building activities. Furthermore, there appears to be a hidden conditioning from EU side, as described above, that motivates the beneficiary side to accept programs and mechanisms offered by

the EU. Specifically, the short term and long term financial benefits vested in EU capacity building activities are perceived as drivers for adoption of EU norms and regulations.

Truly one can claim that EU policy is based on values and norms, but here it will be quite difficult to attribute EU influence directly and solely to normative influence. While the result is similar (EU norms and values diffuse to Israeli ministries in a very active way) it may well be that in EU eyes, capacity building is performed as a moral activity that serves an international model but for the beneficiary side, the realistic motives are those that dominate.

This preliminary study suggests that capacity building activities of the EU may indeed be a yet unrecognized form of normative diffusion. Furthermore, dependencies and conditionality between funding mechanisms and capacity building activities and the overt and covert diffusion of EU norms do exist. These relationships between the international actors and related decision-making processes deserve further study. One such theoretical approach is the Principal-Agent theory that aims at analyzing the relationship between a principal actor that delegates authority to some extent to an agent (Pollack, 1997; Reinalda and Verbeek 2004).

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The sub-committees are: (1) industry, commerce and additional services; (2) internal market; (3) research, innovation, social information, education and culture; (4) transportation, energy and environment; (5) political dialogue and cooperation; (6) legal; (7) economic and financial matters; (8) customs and taxation, (9) society and immigration; (10) agriculture and fish.

<sup>ii</sup> Epistemology as a branch of philosophy dealing with sources of knowledge. Specifically, epistemology is concerned with possibilities, nature, sources, and limitation of knowledge in the field of study.

<sup>iii</sup> Ontology can be defined as "the science or study of being"(1) and it deals with the nature of reality. Ontology is a system of belief that reflects an interpretation of an individual about what constitutes a fact.

<sup>iv</sup> Thematic map refers to a detailed account of the hierarchical relationship between codes , as well as the description of each, their criteria, exemplars and counter examples and other such detail (Ryan and Bernard, 2000; Braun & Wilkinson, 2003).

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### **Short Bio-note**

Lia Moran-Gilad is a PhD student at the Department of Politics & Government, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and recipient of the Kreitman Fellowship Award for Doctoral Studies. Lia's doctoral thesis, under the supervision of Prof. Sharon Pardo, deals with capacity-building in the European region as evidence for diffusion of Europe's Normative Power. Lia is a recipient of the Erasmus+ scholarship and is currently a visiting scholar at the Department of Political Science, School of Management, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands. She holds BA and MA degrees from Ben-Gurion University in the fields of Middle East Studies, Military and Security and International Relations with the focus of her MA dissertation being international monitoring interventions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Over the last decade, Lia held several senior positions at the Israeli Ministry of Defense, the Prime Minister's Office and National Security Council. She is highly experienced in strategy and policy-making and work with government decision-makers. Under this capacity, Lia has been involved hands-on with key issues in the Israeli agenda, and was a core member of the Peace Negotiation Team with the Palestinians during the Annapolis peace process.