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**The challenges of change in foreign policy – Norms and the EU’s policy learning in  
the European Neighbourhood Policy.**

MA Thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## ABSTRACT

The lack of fundamental change within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) seems puzzling given both the policy's lack of success and the self-initiated opportunities the European Union (EU) had to change the policy to address this lack of success – namely the major reviews of the policy ending in 2011 and 2015. This study seeks to understand this continuity from a perspective that has yet to be taken within the scholarship on the ENP – that of *learning*. The behavioural perspective of organizational learning, particularly the concepts of 'single loop' and 'double loop' learning, is taken as the foundation of the approach. Noting that the description of the lack of fundamental change in organizational learning theory has much in common with the identity-preservation behaviours described by ontological security, and with the objective to connect organizational learning approaches to the study of the EU's external action, a synthesis of organizational learning with ontological security is proposed. This synthesis provides organizational learning with a deeper, identity-based explanation for *why* fundamental learning does not occur even when it might be expected. Using this framework, and focusing upon DG NEAR (as the 'organization' most responsible for the ENP) and the reviews (as the clearest opportunities for learning), the lack of fundamental learning and, thus, the current state of the policy, can be explained as a series of learning opportunities in which fundamental learning was expected, but never implemented. This is because fundamental learning would have required the EU to change behaviours that can be connected to its identity as a promoter of values/norms, thereby constituting a challenge to its ontological security. The findings provide insight into the policy's historical lack of success with an empirically-based account of the EU's challenge in changing it, providing more detail to the existing literature regarding the continuity of the policy. In doing so, the findings highlight the role of identity-preservation concerns as a factor in fundamental learning outcomes with respect to the EU's external action, and therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of the EU's policy learning processes.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DG	Directorate-General
DG ELARG	Directorate-General for Enlargement
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
HR	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
MFF	Multi-annual Financial Framework
TAIEX	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean

## Introduction

Since its creation, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has become one of the primary means by which the European Union (EU) has interacted with the countries on its border. As an approach that explicitly combined elements of the enlargement process with foreign policy (e.g. Prodi 2002), it has generated a substantial scholarly literature (for a recent summary, see Konstanyan 2017). Within this, there has been a sustained critique of the policy's initial (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005) and continued use of the enlargement approach without the incentives that accompanied accession (among others, see Haukkala 2008, 1617; Lavenex 2017, 65–66; Browning 2018, 108–9). Additionally, the incentives that were offered have also been critiqued (Sasse 2008). More broadly, the policy itself has (even self-admittedly) not been successful in many ways over its lifetime (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 2), and in recent scholarly work has started to be declared an outright failure (Lavenex 2017, 64; see also Börzel and Lebanidze 2017, 17). Yet, the policy underwent several review processes over the course of its existence thus far (in 2011 and 2015, see European Commission and High Representative 2011, 2015c) which, *prima facie*, would imply at least the possibility of change in fundamental ways to address its shortcomings. This thesis seeks to investigate this puzzle between the processes of review and the underlying continuity (that is, the lack of fundamental change) in the policy.

One strand of research that has attempted to understand the challenges faced by the ENP has sought to identify the ways in which the policy is generally structured in an ineffective way. As part of this scholarship, two notable critiques of the EU's approach to the 'neighbourhood' have emerged: one concerning the lack of country-specific sensitivity in the policy's conceptual approach (Cadier 2014) (not always observed in practice (Browning and Joenniemi 2008, esp. 533-534)); another focused upon the tension between the competing goals of the policy (e.g. economic/political/stability) (see Börzel and van Hüllen 2014; Johansson-Nogués 2007). This latter tension has sometimes been described as the difference between the "short-term" and "long-term" goals of the ENP (Bremberg 2016, 424; Bosse 2007; more broadly, Pänke 2019, 101). While revealing the broader scope of the challenges faced by the ENP and adding

important dimensions to the overall critique of the policy, this literature does not address the persistence of these problematic elements of the policy over time.

In parallel to this, there have been attempts to understand the ENP as part of the EU's general behaviour towards the 'neighbourhood'. These attempts have utilised a number of conceptual approaches to start to account for the persistence of the challenges faced by the policy as part of this larger context, but do not account for its own attempts to change (via the review processes). One prominent line of this critique can be seen as building upon, or responding to, Manners' (2002) conceptualization of the EU as a 'normative power'; these critiques of the ENP have included (among others) accounts based on sociological institutionalism (Bicchi 2006), functionalism (Lavenex 2017) 'external governance' (e.g. Lavenex 2004; Bosse 2009), "disciplinary governance" (Korosteleva 2016, 376, see also 2018), and critiques of the EU as a normative 'hegemon' (Haukkala 2008), all of which provide a broader account of EU behaviour towards the 'neighbourhood' that would include the ENP as part of that behaviour.<sup>1</sup> Other assessments have argued that a "lack of coherence in policy implementation" (Delcour 2010, 535), and even the nature of EU subjectivity itself in relation to the 'neighbourhood' (Korosteleva 2017), can be seen as a source of the EU's lack of success in the 'neighbourhood'. By conceptualizing the EU (and the ENP) in these ways, scholars have attempted to (at least suggest an) account for its behaviour as part of broader context, but these accounts do not provide account for the specificity of the ENP review process and its self-created opportunities for change.

Beyond proposing adherence to broader conceptual frameworks from which to analyse the policy, there have been a limited number of contributions to the literature that address the lack of success of the policy by making reference to the explicit attempts by the EU to reform the ENP. One such contribution is Schumacher's (2015) analysis, whose approach in addressing this issue is to argue that the EU seeks to perpetuate some

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<sup>1</sup> These critiques themselves connect to wider literature regarding the EU's foreign policy. Two of the most relevant here would be those that conceptualize the EU as a normative 'empire' (e.g. Zielonka 2013; Del Sarto 2016; Pänke 2019), and those that regard the EU's external action as having other, possibly internally-focused, purposes (e.g. Rayroux 2013; Mälksoo 2016). While not specifically focused on the ENP, these approaches share with this study a focus on the attempt to explain the continuity seen in the EU's foreign interactions.

of the narratives that it deploys towards the ‘neighbourhood’ (in this case, the southern ‘neighbourhood’) in making (or not) changes to the ENP. Similarly, Natorski (2016) argues for the fundamental continuity of the ENP after the 2011 review as being a consequence of the EU’s desire for ‘coherence’, in particular, “epistemic coherence”, resulting from “*institutional rules*[sic]” (Natorski 2016, 648). These analyses, while providing an account of why there was no change from the original policy, understand the process from the perspective of the EU alone. They do not account for the feedback that the EU received concerning the problems with the ENP. They also only attempt to account for (in some cases necessarily so) only one of the formal reviews (the 2011 review). In a similar way, Johansson-Nogués’ (2018) analysis of the persistence of the EU’s security narrative as explaining the persistence of elements of the policy, while providing a longer term perspective of the process (including the 2015 review), does so from the perspective of the EU’s own narrative. All of these accounts also consider the EU to be a unitary actor in some sense, which obscures the collective elements of the EU’s functioning – that is, they obscure the understanding of the EU as an organization in favour of understanding the EU as an individual (on the relationship between states and individuals, see Steele 2008, 15–20). These accounts provide attempts to consider the specificity of the ENP’s development and continuity more closely, but they also suggest a gap: that the ENP’s evolution should consider not just the role that the EU has played, but the role that feedback given to the EU has played, when attempting to fully explain the current outcomes.

The objective of this thesis is to begin to address this gap. It seeks to understand more clearly the way in which the features of ENP have persisted over time in spite of the feedback that the policy was not successful and in spite of opportunities to change. It does so by analysing the attempts of the EU to address the lack of success of the ENP (namely the review periods) as part of one, long-term process. It proposes to conceptualise this process as one of *learning*, in which the review processes can be considered as a sequence of attempts by the EU to address its problems by incorporating feedback into its approach. This concept, it will be seen, allows for the natural inclusion of feedback into an account of change. This study analyses this concept from an organizational perspective to address the lack of this perspective in the literature. As a

result, *organizational learning* is ultimately taken as the foundation of a theoretical perspective from which to analyse the ENP.

The main research question for this thesis, then, is: *what explains the European Union's lack of fundamental learning with respect to the European Neighbourhood Policy?*

In order to answer this question, this study analyses the behaviour of the European Commission, as represented by the Directorate-General of European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) by considering the two review processes as both in-case observations (within the case of the ENP) of attempts to learn, and as interrelated elements of the broader learning process. In order to generate data for this analysis, this thesis performs a qualitative content analysis upon the speeches of the Commissioner in charge during each review period, and is supported by the EU documentation (policy statements, legislation, treaties, etc.) pertaining to the ENP.

Following this introduction, the thesis contains three main chapters. The first chapter builds a theoretical framework for studying the ENP on the basis of organizational learning in order to address the gaps in the literature noted above. The outcome of this chapter is a synthesized framework that provides a set of expectations surrounding the behaviour of the EU during the review periods of the ENP. The second chapter provides a method for uncovering these expectations within the context of the ENP. In particular, it provides a method for examining the in-case observations (the review periods) from a historical perspective. The third chapter presents the results of the application of the methodology within the framework for each of the two reviews. The reviews are presented separately at first, to understand the specific nature of learning for each, and then are discussed in combination to establish an account of learning over the course of the ENP's lifetime. Some final conclusions are then presented.

## **Learning and ontological security – a theoretical framework**

*This chapter will discuss the concepts of learning and ontological security, and use them to build a framework for understanding the continuity in the evolution of the ENP. It will begin by reviewing what other scholars have written about policy change and learning in the EU, noting that while learning appears in discussions of various EU policies, it has generally (with a small number of exceptions) not been developed as a way of understanding the external/foreign policy dimensions of EU action, in particular the ENP. It will then develop a concept of learning that can be applied to the ENP, drawing primarily on the insights of organizational learning theories. As part of this, it will present an understanding of the ways in which different types of learning do or do not occur. In an effort to connect this approach to understandings of the foreign policy the EU, it will review the literature on ontological security and the EU – it will be seen that the approaches of organizational learning have a high level of synergy with the concept of ontological security when considering explanations for non-learning in particular. On this basis, it will present a combined theoretical framework that integrates these two concepts in order to provide a more comprehensive explanatory model for understanding the types of learning in the context of the ENP to date.*

### **Review of the policy change and learning literature regarding the EU**

As this study is concerned with the concept of learning as a means of explaining the continued absence of fundamental policy change in the context of a particular case – the ENP - this section reviews the literature on policy change and learning as it relates to the EU. It will be seen here that, while the literature concerning these concepts is broad, and some have been applied to the EU, there has not yet been an attempt to develop a theoretical approach that fully accounts for the ENP and its review processes within this conceptual field. From the perspective of the research question, theories of policy change that relate to the EU generally (particularly from an institutional or organizational perspective) can be thought of as one strand of this broader conceptual

literature. Within this, two of the most relevant sub-strands for this research concern institutionalism and learning. Literature concerning institutionalist approaches is thus first discussed, and it is argued here that, while these institutionalist accounts of policy change provide some insight into this case, neither organizational perspectives nor external feedback are well accounted for in these models. The literature examining learning as it relates to policy is therefore then discussed, noting that while a large number of theoretical approaches make use of the broad concept of learning, those applied to the EU also have yet to do so fully from an organizational perspective. As a result, organizational learning is then proposed as the basis for addressing this with respect to the ENP.

Theories based around the general approach of institutionalism have produced a number of accounts of change within the EU, however the ENP, within the context of this study's focus upon policy change (and non-change), is not well accounted for by these existing theoretical approaches. In particular, while these theories have an account that includes the idea of an institution/organization, they do not understand that entity as an actor in its own right, nor do they fully capture the specific empirical features of the ENP and its review processes. The major theoretical branches of institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism, each has an account of behaviour and change (and thus non-change) derived from relevant institutional factors (Hall and Taylor 1996, 936; Aspinwall and Schneider 2000, 3). Rational choice institutionalism, as a theory in which individuals, within an institutionally-constrained context (Schmidt 2010, 14), act "entirely instrumentally so as to maximize the attainment of [...] [their] preferences" (Hall and Taylor 1996, 944–45), is understood to have an implicit concept of reflexivity resulting from its 'instrumental' approach to action (Bicchi 2006, 288–91). While the ENP reviews themselves might be understood as the EU attempting to be reflexive (and thus at least engaged in the practice of learning), the general continuity of the policy in 2011 in particular, when it was clear that 'preferences' were not being 'attained' (on continuity in 2011, see Natorski 2016, esp. 648) would not be well explained by this approach. Historical institutionalism, in which the accumulation of institutional 'sunk costs' – either in material (Fioretos 2011, 373) or social (Aspinwall and Schneider

2000, 6–7) terms - influences the range of actions of individuals, has an understanding that would help account for general continuity in the ENP over time, but does not easily account for the professed willingness of the EU to undergo self-initiated radical change (as evidenced by the public consultation questions – in particular the first question (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 4)).<sup>2</sup> Sociological institutionalism, in which institutions, and thus the range of actions undertaken by individuals, are determined by social norms (the prevailing ‘logic of appropriateness’ – (March and Olsen 1998, 951–52; Schmidt 2010, 2)), focuses upon the role of exogenous social norms as the source of institutional norms (e.g. Hall and Taylor 1996, 949; cf. Fioretos 2011, 374) and is considered not to have a reflexive approach to individual behaviour selection (Bicchi 2006, 292). This approach would account for the continuity of norms, for instance, within the ENP, but would not account for the advent of the review processes as self-initiated (i.e. endogenous) attempts to change the prevailing ‘logic of appropriateness’. Furthermore, even though each of these theories have been applied to the EU (e.g. HI: Immergut and Anderson 2008; SI: Schimmelfennig 2001; Bicchi 2006; RCI: Wagner 2003), given their focus on individual action (see Fioretos 2011, 372–76) they do not give clear accounts of the actions of the organization. As such, while each accounts for part (but not all) of the ENP, these institutional approaches do not provide a good account for the long-term behaviour of the EU as an *organization* in providing for the continuity of the ENP despite its attempts to change.

Furthermore, while some of the institutional approaches would appear to have an inherent concept of policy learning within their models, they do not provide an account for this at the level of the organization, nor do they provide a good account of the role of feedback. The most relevant example of this is in the case of sociological institutionalism, given that it already contains within it an account specifically of self-change through learning based on its underlying constructivist ontology (for overviews, see among others, Fosnot and Perry 1996; Liu and Matthews 2005).<sup>3</sup> However, not only would this inherent account of learning seem incongruent with its understanding of the

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<sup>2</sup> Schmidt (2010, 10) argues that historical institutionalism lacks an ‘endogenous’ account of change – this would be an example of that criticism.

<sup>3</sup> The approach of ‘discursive institutionalism’ would address this absence of ‘endogenous’ change to some extent (e.g. Schmidt 2010), however it too is largely focused upon the role of individual action as “agents” in this process (Schmidt 2008, 322).

relatively static nature of institutions (Schmidt 2010, e.g 5), and its designation as “unreflexive” (Bicchi 2006, 292), but this account is, as with other elements of the approach, focused upon outcomes for the individual rather the organization (e.g. Fosnot and Perry 1996, 27–34). It also does not have a strong, general account of change resulting from feedback, unless that feedback would happen to indicate a shift in the relevant ‘logic of appropriateness’ (see, for example, March and Olsen 1998, 957–58). Thus, even though some institutionalist accounts would appear to have some capacity to contain an inherent concept of learning within them, this is not the case.

There is, however, a different set of theoretical approaches to change in general, and policy change in particular, that may be useful in more fully capturing the processes and outcomes of the ENP reviews; these approaches are based on the concept of *learning*. If the situation of the ENP reviews is considered, it is clear that the review processes are deliberately reflective exercises involving feedback, and that the (at least professed) goal is policy improvement based on this feedback; that is to say, with the ENP reviews, the EU is self-consciously attempting to *learn* (in particular, see European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 4). Within the context of the research question and the lacunae in the institutionalist accounts noted above, theories of learning would, *prima facie*, better account for the deliberate, reflective attempts at change found in the review processes, while also providing an account of non-change (i.e. a failure to learn). They also have an additional benefit for this study – an account of feedback, which has been noted as one of the two key ways in which organizations acquire the “external knowledge” they need in order to learn about their actions in the world (the other being observation of other organizations) (Huysman 2000, 139). As this study is primarily concerned with policy (the ENP), the context of its review, and organizations (the EU), the policy learning, policy evaluation and organizational learning literatures, as they have been applied to the EU, are now examined.

The field of policy learning is complex yet without clear conceptual consensus. There have already been a number of approaches to learning developed with a view to explaining policy change (Dunlop and Radaelli 2013; Heikkila and Gerlak 2013), and there has been acknowledgement that the number of variations of theories in this

conceptual space is significant (Dunlop and Radaelli 2018, esp. 255-256; Moyson, Scholten, and Weible 2017, 162; Goyal and Howlett 2018). This has led scholars to attempt to order not only the phenomena of learning (for example, Radaelli 2009), but also the theoretical approaches to this phenomena in the literature (Bennett and Howlett 1992; Zito and Schout 2009; Dunlop and Radaelli 2013; Heikkila and Gerlak 2013; Moyson, Scholten, and Weible 2017). Within this, these different ordering schemas have been used to create yet more theoretical approaches to studying learning (as applied to the EU, see, for example Tamtik 2016; Dunlop and Radaelli 2016), or to explicitly attempt to create ‘meta-theory’ (Radaelli and Dunlop 2013). While these approaches have yet to construct a shared understanding of the field in general, there is at least some agreement regarding major contributions to this broad conceptual approach, and some of these approaches have been applied to the EU at various levels of analysis. As will be seen, however, not all of these approaches provide an explanation at the level of the *organization*.

Within the literature on policy learning, there are several key contributions acknowledged within the field. While these approaches have provided insight into different aspect of learning with respect to policy, they have not done so at the level of the organization. In this field, the approaches of Hall (1993) and Haas (1992) are often considered to be important contributions (Moyson, Scholten, and Weible 2017, 163; Zito and Schout 2009, 1107, 1109–10; Dunlop and Radaelli 2013, 599–602). Hall’s (1993) approach offers an explanation of learning as a series of ‘orders’ of change (“first order”, “second order”, and “third order” learning (Hall 1993, 281–84)) with respect to policy, and this approach has been used to help account for policy-making decisions with respect to the EU’s relationship with Africa (Farrell 2009). Haas’ (1992) approach understands policy change as dependent upon the activities of ‘epistemic communities’ which can be sources of feedback (“information and advice” (Haas 1992, 4)) for a given policy field; this approach has been applied at the level of the Members States within the EU to understand policy change (Dunlop 2017). However, even though these approaches have some capacity to explain collective action (for example, the ‘community’ element of the ‘epistemic community’), they are focused primarily on the individual as the level of analysis (Moyson, Scholten, and Weible 2017, 163) rather

than the organization. While there exist analyses that discuss organizational-level contexts from the perspective of policy learning (for EU examples, see Scholten 2017; Rietig and Perkins 2018), these studies also focus upon concepts developed in these earlier works (esp. the work of Hall, see Scholten 2017, 345–46; Rietig and Perkins 2018, 494; cf. Moyson, Scholten, and Weible 2017, 170) in doing so they too ultimately do not develop an account at the level of the organization. Thus, while they present important findings and conceptual frameworks, these approaches have not provided a specific account of learning from the perspective of the organization.

There is, additionally, scope for understanding *policy* learning as related to elements of the policy cycle, and thus connecting to the literature that understands the process of change from that theoretical perspective; it is first instructive to understand the nature of the ENP's attributes within this context from the perspective of learning. Given the review processes and the lack of a specific end date for the policy (the only substantial timeframes imposed on the policy are those of the funding cycles (see Article 19 of European Union 2014)), the ENP here can be understood from the perspective of the classic five-stage policy cycle approach (e.g. Wu et al. 2018). Within this cycle, it is proposed here that 'learning', as understood above to include feedback, would potentially encompass the stages of 'evaluation' through to 'policy formulation'. For the ENP, the Commission is the most important actor within this broad process; it is the key actor in the 'evaluation' (Hahn 2015c; on the Commission and evaluation broadly, see van Voorst 2017, 25; Højlund 2014b, 429) and 'policy formulation' (as seen in European Commission and High Representative 2015c) phases, plays a role in the 'agenda setting' phase (e.g. Article 3(1) of European Union 2014) (and even is empowered to oversee the 'implementation' phase (e.g. Preamble (26) of European Union 2014). This is in contrast to other areas of foreign policy, such as those falling under more-classicly CFSP procedures (see Articles 27-31 TEU: European Union 2016).<sup>4</sup> Given that, within the this institutional framework, the Commission is formulating the eventual policy proposal, the 'decision-making' aspect of the cycle (in which the Council and the European Parliament – in different contexts – are the relevant

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<sup>4</sup> Its possible that one explanation for this difference might be found in the different levels of engagement with the ENP by the Member States (see, for example, Wilson and Popescu 2009, 324; Bicchi 2014, 322).

actors for the ENP (e.g. Council of the European Union 2010; European Union 2014)), while important, is not necessary as a focal point in this study. Within these stages, ‘evaluation’, especially within the Commission, would, *prima facie*, appear to provide to the most relevant connection to ‘learning’, and the EU’s approach to ‘evaluation’ has specifically been seen as connecting across the entire policy cycle (Smismans 2015, 12, 18). In connecting to the literature on the policy cycle, then, literature concerning the role of ‘evaluation’ provides the clearest potential opportunity to understand policy learning.

The literature on policy evaluation, however, has not been fully integrated into the existing literature concerning the broader context of organizational-level learning for institutions and also does not clearly articulate an organizational-level learning theory. In general, this field has been focused upon evaluation procedures as part of the policy process, distinguishing evaluation processes at various parts of a policy’s ‘life’ (by, for example, differentiating between *ex ante* and *ex post* evaluation processes, among others (Borrás and Højlund 2015, 99)). Within this, some studies in this field have generated insights by examining the EU as a case, and there has been (as might be expected) some overlap between this literature and that on learning in general (*ex ante*: Dunlop 2010; *ex post*: Schoenefeld and Jordan 2019; *ex ante* and *ex post*: Højlund 2014b). However, while there is acknowledgement that *ex post* evaluations can inform policy formation (Smismans 2015, 12, 18), and while there has been some attempt to join this field with the broader approach of policy learning (for example Borrás and Højlund 2015; Hildén 2011), this general field has remained focused upon the specifics of evaluation rather than upon the broader understanding of learning (e.g. Ruddy and Hilty 2008; cf. Højlund 2014a; Smismans 2015). Furthermore, that organizational-level approaches are covered by this approach is inherent in the policy mechanism under discussion (evaluation by an institution of its policies) (see, for example, Højlund 2014a), rather than as a focus of the theoretical field, and thus are not a specific focus of theoretical development. As such, while there is considerable detail in these analyses, the overall approach does not yet provide a good fit for accounting for learning specifically within the EU as an organization, nor in a situation such as the ENP, where the review processes were broader than evaluation alone.

There already exists, however, a field of learning studies that focuses primarily upon the level of the organization that includes a more general account of this phenomenon – organizational learning. This field developed primarily outside of political science and its related disciplines (see Easterby-Smith 1997 for an overview), and the general concept has since been extended to encompass other types of ‘organizations’ including public institutions, governments, and supranational organizations (e.g. Schout 2009 (on the EU); Hirschmann 2012 (on the UN)). Unlike theories that focus more upon the level of the individual or those that have attempted to account for organizational-level change indirectly or as part of the policy cycle, as discussed above, organizational learning approaches understand the learning process of individuals as being part of a broader, organizational context but also provides an account of the organization itself as learning (Argote 2011, 440). They also include within them an understanding of why organizations do not learn in the way in which they might be expected to (for example, Argyris 1976, 365–66). As will be seen below, this theoretical approach would appear, in general, to provide a closer fit for the study of the ENP. However, this approach has yet to be fully developed with an analysis of the EU and its external action in mind.

While some of the key parts of the theoretical framework posited by organizational learning approaches have been used to analyse the EU, and to some extent foreign policy more broadly, they have not been systematically developed to analyse the EU’s relationship with the ‘neighbourhood’. Within the literature on organizational learning, the work of Argyris and Schön (1978) (see also Argyris 1976, 1999) is considered to provide some of the main theoretical foundations for conceptualizing the process of learning within organizations (for example, Easterby-Smith et al. 2004, 373). They conceptualize the process of learning as operating primarily on two different levels – what are termed “single-loop” and “double-loop” learning (Argyris and Schön 1978, 3; see also Argyris 1976, 1999). Scholars have built upon this framework to provide accounts for many organizations, including within the EU. For example, Dunlop (2010) has developed this framework for application to the problem of biofuels policy in the UK, noting that it can be used to help understand the role of timeframes in policy learning contexts. Likewise, Bossong (2013) uses this in part to provide an account of

the development of EU's CSDP crisis management, while Koch and Lindenthal (2011) use it to analyse environmental policy within the Commission. This understanding has also been referenced in relation to theories of foreign policy analysis more generally, specifically that the understanding that that field has of 'simple' and 'complex' learning shares many basic ideas with Argyris and Schön's approach (Levy 1994, 286, esp. note 25; Dunlop and Radaelli 2013, 599; see also Pomorska 2015, 59).<sup>5</sup> However, while this distinction between levels of learning exists for foreign policy broadly, the particular elements of Argyris and Schön's approach have not been fully developed as an analytical framework for the EU's foreign policy as it relates to the ENP. Given the capacity to include learning and an organizational level of analysis, however, it is proposed here that this general approach can form a theoretical foundation that can be developed further and usefully be applied to an analysis of the ENP. In the next section, the details of the framework proposed by Argyris and Schön will be presented and discussed with a view to establishing this foundation in detail.

### **Learning as an analytical framework**

In order to establish a theoretical basis for an analysis of the lack of fundamental learning within the ENP, this section will discuss a framework based on organizational learning. A definition of 'learning' will be established, and the organizational learning approach of Argyris and Schön will be presented with a view to understanding the behaviour of the EU as an organization with respect to the ENP. Within this framework, it will be seen that there is an understanding of how learning occurs and does not occur, which is related to the definition of learning that is used. Finally, it will be seen that the framework of Argyris and Schön suggests that is possible to combine it with the approaches of ontological security to explain the challenges faced by international actors (such as the EU) in a more specific manner.

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'learning' is used in foreign policy analysis more broadly but, as with the case of policy learning, multiple definitions can appear (for example, Harnisch's (2012, e.g. 48) development of "international" learning'). Even in the case of 'simple' and 'complex' learning, the focus can fall upon leaders rather than organizations (for example, Ziv 2013).

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to establish a definition for ‘learning’. Given the range of approaches noted above, it should not be unexpected that the definition of the concept itself takes many, sometimes very different, forms, and the field has (long) been criticized for the lack of consensus around this fundamental term (Bennett and Howlett 1992, esp. 276-278; see also Rietig and Perkins 2018);<sup>6</sup> these definitions can to some extent be seen as changing depending upon the level of analysis being used. Hall (1993, 278), for example, defines ‘social learning’ as “a deliberative attempt to adjust the goals and techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information.” Heikkila and Gerlak (2013, 486) propose a definition specifically for ‘learning’ in a collective context, involving a “collective process” of information gathering which results in some type of “collective output”, while also acknowledging that individual learning may take place in different forms within this larger picture. More generally, Dunlop and Radaelli (2013, 600) define learning in very broad terms as simply “the updating of beliefs at its most general level”. It is instructive here to note that Dunlop and Radaelli’s definition has something in common with Hall’s, insofar as both presuppose learning as involving a change in some fundamental aspect of the entity being studied, such as ‘beliefs’ or ‘goals’, and is an approach to defining learning found often in the literature (for example, Meseguer 2005, 72; see also the discussion at Zito and Schout 2009, 1107–9). In contrast, Argyris and Schön (1978)<sup>7</sup> build their framework upon a concept of learning that is based on the idea of ‘error’, and define it specifically for organizations. Their definition is: “[o]rganizational learning involves the detection and correction of error” (Argyris and Schön 1978, 2; see also Argyris 1976, 365; cf. Schout 2009, 1125; Bossong 2013, 96).<sup>8</sup> ‘Error’, in turn, is understood thus: “[e]rror is a mismatch” (Argyris 1976, 365) – Dunlop (2010, 346) clarifies this as being “a mismatch between intention and outcome”. While this definition of learning is also broad, it is considered here more appropriate for the study of the ENP because it does

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<sup>6</sup> This is also the case for the concept of ‘policy change’ (Howlett and Cashore 2009, esp. 37-41).

<sup>7</sup> As mentioned above, the key elements of the framework developed by Argyris and Schön in are established in this 1978 text, considered one of the key works in organizational learning (Easterby-Smith et al. 2004, 373–74; Lipshitz 2000, 456–60). These key elements remained in later work (for example, Argyris 1999). As such, the original formulation is followed here, as it is by other scholars (e.g. Dunlop 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Note also Argote and Miron-Spektor (2011, 1124), whose definition would expand this to include new knowledge that is not acted upon. As this study is concerned with policy change, this is not considered a hindrance, and Argyris and Schön’s more narrow definition is followed here.

not already presuppose the *nature* of learning within its definition, as is the case with other definitions of ‘learning’ used by policy learning scholars (cf. the discussion of Goyal and Howlett (2018, 7–9) concerning existing definitions). This approach also allows for a range of different ‘errors’ to be investigated (as specified below), therefore allowing for a more precise understanding of the basis of learning than the (less precise) “updating of beliefs” approach of Dunlop and Radaelli (2013, 600), for example, would demand. This increased precision, in turn, allows for an approach that can more clearly understand the mechanisms of learning (and non-learning) within the ENP. As a result, the definition used by Argyris and Schön will be followed here.

In addition to having a distinct definition of ‘learning’, the theory of Argyris and Schön contains within its foundations the basis for understanding the actions/behaviours that lead to both learning and non-learning. To provide a foundation for their theory of organizational learning, Argyris and Schön (1978) develop two concepts of how organizations think about how they *act* in general; they term this a “theory of action” (Argyris and Schön 1978, 10–12). The two categories they conceptualize are denoted by them as “espoused theory” and “theory-in-use” (Argyris and Schön 1978, 11). To summarise these concepts, ‘espoused theory’ is what organizations *say* they do, and ‘theory-in-use’ is what organizations *actually* do (Argyris 1976, 367; see also Argyris and Schön 1978, 11; Koch and Lindenthal 2011, 983). While this distinction can appear tangential to a discussion on learning, these concepts underpin the descriptions of behaviours with which ‘error’ and thus ‘learning’ are ultimately concerned (for example, Argyris and Schön 1978, 60–66). As a result, these concepts are used by them to more concretely propose an understanding of organizational learning by providing (as will be seen below) an account for how organizations both learn and do not learn.

Within their framework for organizational learning, Argyris and Schön understand three types of general learning, of which two are particularly relevant to the study of the ENP’s review processes here.<sup>9</sup> The first type - ‘single loop’ learning – forms the most

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<sup>9</sup> The third type (“deutero learning”) is largely concerned with the meta-process of learning; that is, an organization learning about its own learning processes (Argyris and Schön 1978, 26–28). While this has been expanded upon in the literature (e.g. McClory, Read, and Labib 2017, 1328), it is beyond the scope of this study, which is focused upon external interactions (policy outputs).

basic type of learning behaviour. ‘Single loop’ learning is initially defined by them in terms of the concept of ‘error’ noted above; it is given as: “[w]hen the error detected and corrected permits the organization to carry on its present policies or achieve its present objectives” (Argyris and Schön 1978, 2). This is then combined with the ‘theory of action’ ideas (as discussed above) to create a definition of *organizational* ‘single loop’ learning, which they present as occurring when:

*members of the organization respond to changes in the internal and external environments of the organization by detecting errors which they then correct as to maintain the central features of organizational theory-in-use [sic]. (Argyris and Schön 1978, 18)*

Thus, this type of learning might be understood as the process of updating the organization’s *strategies* for achieving its existing goals (Argyris and Schön 1978, 18–19; Dunlop 2010, 346). For the ENP, this could mean, for example, an attempt to engage a broader range of stakeholders to achieve an existing policy goal. This type of learning can be considered appropriate if the problem being analysed (in the language of Argyris and Schön: the ‘error’ identified as being in need of correction) only requires a minor adjustment to bring the actions of the organization better into line with achieving its goals (Argyris and Schön 1978, 18; see also Dunlop 2010, 346–50; Argyris 1999, 68–69). Put another way, this type of learning occurs when nothing about the organization’s general behaviour (its ‘theory-in-use’) is challenged by the ‘error’ (Koch and Lindenthal 2011, 983). Given that this study is concerned with ‘fundamental’ change, it is still possible that smaller changes that do not meet this definition would be observed within the ENP; this type of learning would provide an account of these (non-‘fundamental’) changes having occurred. As a result, this type of learning is relevant for use in the eventual model proposed here.

The second type of learning – ‘double loop’ learning – is also based upon the idea of correcting an ‘error’; this type of learning can be considered as a way of conceptualizing the ‘fundamental’ element of the research question. The primary difference between ‘single loop’ and ‘double loop’ learning is that ‘double loop’ learning involves the modification of the underlying behaviour of the organization itself – as Argyris and Schön state, this type of “learning occurs when error is detected and

corrected in ways that involve the modification of an organization's underlying norms, policies, and objectives" (Argyris and Schön 1978, 3). In terms of the 'theory of action' foundation for their approach, this implies that the organization's 'theory-in-use' itself should change (Argyris and Schön 1978, 21–22). For the ENP, this might (hypothetically) mean that, rather than have an overarching framework promoting the *aquis* to all ENP countries, the EU might decide to abandon this and engage only in limited, bilateral deals with ENP countries without any reference to European political standards.<sup>10</sup> The authors make some key observations related to this type of learning: one is that many organizations believe themselves to be involved in this type of learning most of the time (as they would term it, this is most organizations' 'espoused theory') (Argyris and Schön 1978, 139); a second is that, for many organizations, this is not the type of learning actually encountered (that is, in most instances, organizations' 'theory-in-use' results in a 'single loop' learning approach)(Argyris 1999, 69); Thus, while 'double loop' learning is fundamentally different from 'single loop' learning, both are built upon the ideas of correcting various types of 'errors'.

Given that 'double loop' learning, as with 'single loop' learning, is built upon the idea of correcting an 'error', this conceptual framework thus implicitly contains within it not only a conceptual division of why certain things are learnt, but also the basis of an account for why certain things are *not* learnt. In a general sense, this can be understood simply as the occasions on which 'errors' fail to be corrected (or even be detected). For 'single loop' learning, this is the basic failure to address the 'error' using existing organizational processes and norms (see, for example, Argyris and Schön 1978, 19–20). For 'double loop' learning, there are two general types of failure: one is failing to adjust the organization's norms to its situation, the second is the failure to correct a 'theory-in-use' that differs from an 'espoused theory' (Argyris and Schön 1978, 143, see also 116). In a sense, both of these 'double loop' learning failures can be considered as aspects of the same general failure – the failure to change the underlying, routine behaviour of an organization. In a policy context, *not learning* can be understood at the 'single loop' learning level as failing to adjust the details of the policy within existing policy goals

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<sup>10</sup> Inspiration for this hypothetical is drawn from the response of (former Director General of DG ELARG) Michael Leigh to the 2015 ENP review public submission (Leigh 2015).

and norms, and at a ‘double loop’ learning level can be understood as the inability to adjust goals/norms in order to achieve the desired outcome (Dunlop 2010, 346, 350; see also Koch and Lindenthal 2011, 983–84). For the research question, a lack of ‘fundamental’ learning would be seen at this second, ‘double loop’ level – that is, the failure to adjust organizational norms/goals of ‘the EU’, whether it is because of the inability to change their existing norms/behaviour to address the issues of the ENP’s performance, or the inability to reconcile the difference between their observed behaviour and their claims about their behaviour concerning the ENP. As such, this framework includes a clear understanding of both learning and non-learning.

In constructing this framework, the authors provide a set of factors for predicting which type of learning will occur, and this set is related to the behavioural norms of the organization as they apply to the idea of ‘errors’ preventing ‘double loop’ learning. Argyris and Schön (1978, 61–66; 136–39) enumerate a set of ‘governing variables’, based upon their ‘theory of action’ (discussed above) for ‘single loop’ and for ‘double loop’ learning separately. They argue that the observation of these ‘governing variables’ can help predict whether a given learning opportunity will result in ‘single loop’ or ‘double loop’ learning as the outcome (Argyris and Schön 1978, 61–66; see also Dunlop 2010, 350). These ‘governing variables’ are:

(for ‘single loop’ learning – a type of behaviour they term “Model I”) (all from: Argyris and Schön 1978, 62–63):

- “[d]efine goals and try to achieve them”;
- “[m]aximize winning and minimize losing”;
- “[m]inimize generating or expressing negative feelings”; and
- “[b]e rational”;

(for ‘double loop’ learning – a type of behaviour they term “Model II”) (all from: Argyris and Schön 1978, 137).

- “[v]alid information”;
- “[f]ree and informed choice”; and
- “[i]nternal commitment to the choice and constant monitoring of the implementations”

These ‘governing variables’ are actually behavioural norms (Argyris and Schön 1978, 61). Argyris and Schön’s ‘models’ of action here thus unify behavioural norms and learning outcomes so that, in this framework, when ‘single loop’ rather than ‘double loop’ learning (as discussed above) is detected (even if ‘double loop’ learning is actually required), one can understand that the behavioural norms observed should be those listed here for ‘Model I’ (Argyris and Schön 1978, 64–65). Thus, in specifying the conditions under which certain types of learning are predicted to occur, the framework also gives an account of how to observe the relevant organizational norms that are involved in preventing ‘double loop’ learning.

While the set of factors above is relatively broad, there would appear to be some general connection with existing international relations literature. Within these factors, it can be seen that, in the case of ‘single loop’ learning, some of the focus (particularly concerning ‘feelings’) is on protecting the self from critique and in this way is concerned with the continuation of organizational norms or goals (Argyris and Schön 1978, 64–65; see also Easterby-Smith et al. 2004, 373). To link this to the discussion above, this means that organizations that are protecting themselves from critique (thus ultimately preserving their norms or goals) would be expected to only exhibit ‘single loop’ learning, even if ‘single loop’ learning does not produce a more optimal outcome than ‘double loop’ learning (with its accompanying changes to norms/goals) would produce. Within theories of understanding policy change in the area of foreign policy, there is an existing theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of states not changing their behaviour (that is to say, not *learning*) due to a reluctance to have their fundamental understanding of themselves (their *identity*) challenged, even if this continuity produces a “harmful or self-defeating relationship” (Mitzen 2006b, 342) with another state - ontological security. There are, then, connections between the framework of Argyris and Schön and existing approaches to international relations.

Not only do there appear to be there some connections between organizational learning and ontological security regarding non-learning, the two theories would appear to complement each other from the perspective of the empirical case examined in this study. Of particular interest is the direction from which these two theories approach this

shared account of a lack of fundamental change in behaviour – organizational learning focuses much of its account on the mechanisms of (non-) learning (i.e. *how*), whereas ontological security (as will be seen below) provides a deep theoretical account of the underlying reasons for non-learning (i.e. *why*). Additionally, these two approaches between them also cover all the elements that this study is concerned with – organizations, foreign policy, policy change/non-change, and feedback (as part of learning). These theories, then would not only have elements in common, but also provide explanations that more fully account for the ENP’s development if considered together. It is on this basis that ontological security is investigated as a potential candidate for theoretical synthesis with organizational security in the next section.

### **Ontological security and learning**

In order to establish the connections between organizational learning and ontological security, this section examines the literature on ontological security as applied to the EU. In particular, the work of Mitzen is discussed as providing many of the details of this approach. The connection between this approach and that of Argyris and Schön is then discussed in more detail. Finally, it is argued that, given the similarities, a synthesis of organizational learning and ontological security can provide a richer explanatory framework for the study of learning by the EU than can be provided by organizational learning alone.

Ontological security as a theoretical concept in international relations (and related fields) has been developed as a way of linking the understanding that a state has about its own identity with an understanding of its behaviour (and its ability to modify its behaviour), some strands of which can be understood as relevant to the ideas of policy change discussed above. Developed for analysis in foreign policy theories by Mitzen (2006b, 2006a), ontological security approaches are acknowledged within the literature as having taken different directions of analysis (Kinnvall, Manners, and Mitzen 2018, 252–53; see also Johansson-Nogués 2018, 3–4; Mitzen 2018, 396–97). If the distinction that Mitzen (2018, 396–97) herself makes of the literature, between studies concerned with the way states *construct* their identity and those concerned with the *behaviour* of

states (both of which have been applied to the EU (constructing: Subotić 2016; Johansson-Nogués 2018; Mälksoo 2016; see also Della Sala 2018; behaviour: Mitzen 2006a; Browning 2018), is accepted, this study is situated within this second strand of literature concerning ontological security.<sup>11</sup>

Not only is this second strand of literature relevant because of its focus upon behaviour, it is also (perhaps even primarily) relevant because it provides a conceptualization of state behaviour that is based, in part, on an understanding of learning. In addition, included within this is an account of non-learning that occurs in situations where learning should be expected. The primary account of the way in which the idea of ontological security might be applied to the actions of states is given (as mentioned above) by the seminal articles of Mitzen (Mitzen 2006b, 2006a). Her conceptualization provides a description and explanation of how a state might be seen to be responding predictably to its environment in what otherwise might have been considered an irrational way by realist accounts (Mitzen 2006b, 343; Browning and Joenniemi 2017, 34). A key part of this is the idea of a state engaging in the repetition of certain behaviours in situations when adjusting its behaviour would require it to question or adjust elements of its own identity (Mitzen 2006b, 346–48) – in other words, continuity/non-change in behaviour. Mitzen argues that this continuity of behaviour occurs *even in* situations where the existing behaviour is not resolving (and may even be contributing to) negative situations (Mitzen 2006b, esp. 341-343; Steele 2008, 58) – in other words, when the environment is indicating that change is, in fact, necessary. Importantly for this study, Mitzen regularly describes the process by which a state interprets its environment and makes decisions about its behaviour in terms of ‘learning’, with the description of the conditions under which a state is likely to learn about its environment, in a way that allows it to adjust the necessary elements of its behaviour, being composed of the ideas of “healthy basic trust” and (in the absence of this trust) “rigidity” of action (for example, Mitzen 2006b, 350–51). Mitzen relies upon these ideas, developed in the context of individual behaviour, to create a conceptual understanding of the state as behaving in the manner of an individual (Mitzen 2006b, 351–53); that is, she applies an individual explanation to a state (see Steele 2008, 15–

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<sup>11</sup> A recent attempt to combine these two approaches can be seen in Mitzen (2018).

20). Together, these ideas allow Mitzen to account for situations when states appear to be unwilling to change their behaviour – which is to say, they appear unable to *learn* - even when their environment (or the results of their actions) suggest that they should.

There is considerable conceptual overlap between the conceptualization offered by Mitzen and the understanding of certain factors that inhibit ‘double loop’ learning offered by Argyris and Schön. In fact, such is the overlap, it extends even to the level of language. Like Mitzen, Argyris and Schön posit that ‘trust’ is an element in the way that an entity responds to its environment, the lack of which results in ‘rigidity’; for example, in discussing the factors that might be observed in ‘single loop’ learning, they state:

[t]o the extent that one behaves according to any of the four action strategies [of Model I – i.e. ‘single loop’ learning], one will tend to behave unilaterally towards others and protectively towards oneself.[...] This tends to generate mistrust and rigidity. (Argyris and Schön 1978, 64)

That is, if there is behaviour that the theory would predict results in a ‘single loop’ learning outcome, this behaviour *will also* result in rigid behaviour – behaviour that reinforces organizational norms – and therefore an inability to achieve ‘double loop’ learning. Mitzen has a similar understand of learning behaviour, only from the perspective of the state:

[i]f there are two forms of basic trust then routines, and their effects, should vary systematically. Rigid routines should be associated with an inability to learn; [...] Flexible interstate routines that permit reflection, on the other hand, should be associated with learning and transformative change. (Mitzen 2006b, 364)

Here, if ‘inability to learn’ is understood in terms of ‘double loop’ learning, then the formulations are very similar – two types of underlying behaviour (one flexible, one rigid) that produce two types of outcome (learning and non-learning). Similarly, both theories are based to some extent on the understanding that rigidity (and mistrust) is related to some threat to the entity (state or organization). Writing later, Argyris notes that:

[o]rganizational defensive routines are any action, policy, or practice that prevents organizational participants from experiencing embarrassment or threat [...]. Organizational defensive routines, like Model I theories-in-use, inhibit genuine learning and overprotect the individuals and the organization (Argyris 1990). (Argyris 1999, 58)

Mitzen, likewise, notes that “individuals fear uncertainty as an identity threat and suppress that fear through routines to which they become attached” (Mitzen 2006b, 349).<sup>12</sup> While Argyris discusses threat in general terms here, Mitzen is more precise about what exactly is being threatened – *identity*; both, however, understand the results of dealing with threatening situations to be the same – a lack of ‘double loop’ learning/fundamental behavioural change. These points of comparison are, to some extent, natural - both conceptual frameworks (as has been discussed) are based around the notion that the behaviour of entities changes differently based upon the willingness of those entities to change themselves. Nevertheless, there is still a considerable amount of overlap between elements of these two approaches to behaviours associated with non-learning from two different theoretical perspectives.

Given that the ontological security approach has a more precise understanding of why such threats produce rigid behaviour, combining it with organizational learning would provide organizational learning with a more detailed account of why its general understanding of threats can also result in specifically rigid behaviour under certain conditions. As noted above, only one of the ‘governing variables’ of Argyris and Schön’s framework was directly linked to organizational norms through the concern about the critique of the self. While this is an clear point of connection between the two theories, Argyris and Schön (1978) understand ‘norms’ to be wider than this – a reading of their work would suggest that they understand ‘norm’ here as simply any general pattern of behaviour, and, in fact, each of the behaviours through which ‘governing variables’ might be observed can be considered ‘norms’ (e.g. Argyris and Schön 1978, 61). Furthermore, as noted above, Argyris and Schön’s approach contains an

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<sup>12</sup> Steele’s (2008, e.g. 13) understanding of the role of ‘shame’ as a motivating factor might be considered a ontological security’s parallel version of ‘embarrassment’ here, although it also includes within it ‘remorse’, which is not necessarily contained within ‘embarrassment’. As such, while this connection to Steele’s understanding is noted, it is not followed here.

understanding of what happens when these norms of behaviour are challenged – ‘double loop’ learning is avoided, and in its avoidance the norms are preserved. Norms of behaviour in general can be thought of as part of an entity’s identity (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891), particularly in the context of ontological security’s understanding of identity (e.g. Mitzen 2006b, 342). As a result, if this general connection is accepted, then it is possible to propose that ‘errors’ that require the change of an organization’s behaviour/norms, *insofar as those behaviours/norms can be understood as part of the organization’s identity*, will result in ‘single loop’ learning and not ‘double loop’ (i.e. ‘fundamental’ learning) because of the threat the change required poses to the organization’s identity. Given that organizational learning only contains a limited account of *why* the behavioural norms it describes are become ‘rigid’,<sup>13</sup> combining it with ontological security would provide it with a more detailed explanation underlying the predictions that it makes.

There are some important differences between the two concepts, however, and these can be understood as further opportunities for conceptual integration. One of the primary understandings of ontological security approaches to state behaviour is the understanding that the ‘self’ of the state functions essentially as an individual – that those theories that have been developed for individuals can be “scale[d] up” to the level of the state (Mitzen 2006b, 343, also 351–53; see also Steele 2008, 17; Browning and Joenniemi 2017). Organizational learning, on the other hand, understands the organization as distinct from the individual (even though it is composed of individuals) (Argyris and Schön 1978, 12–18; see also Argote 2011, 440; Bossong 2013, 96). In this way, organizational learning acknowledges the role of the collective in the expression of an entities norms/values/goals through its action (e.g. Heikkila and Gerlak 2013, 486). Such distinction, however, need not be insurmountable from a theoretical perspective. Rather, by acknowledging the account provided by organizational learning theories, ontological security can gain access to the predictive elements enabled by the detailed understanding of collective processes that exists within the organizations that necessarily exist as part of its subject matter – states (on the composition of states, see Franke and Roos 2010). That is, the combination of these two approaches would

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<sup>13</sup> Being based on behavioural observation, the account relies largely on the observation of “defensive” behaviours among the case studies used to build the theory (for example, Argyris 1999, 178, 188).

provide ontological security with an account of non-learning/rigid behaviour not just for the state ‘as an individual’, but for the state ‘as a collective’. As such, both theories’ explanatory power can be enhanced through their combination into a unified framework; in the next section, steps towards such a framework are made.

### **Conceptual framework synthesis – Ontological security as an explanation for organizational (non-) learning.**

This final section first discusses the general idea of theory synthesis as an approach to political science research. It then proceeds to combine ideas from organizational security and organizational learning to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the behaviour of the EU, and derives some theoretical expectations for this research.

The combination of organizational learning and ontological security into one analytical framework fits into the existing practice among political science scholars of both theory synthesis generally and learning specifically. In terms of general theoretical synthesis, Moravcsik (2003, 132) argues that theories can be combined if they share some “overarching assumptions”, even if they do “not share not share a full range of basic ontological assumptions”, and that research should be “problem as well as theory-driven”, with a particular focus upon data. Other scholars would agree in general that theories can be combined, although would term this differently (“pragmatism”: Friedrichs and Kratochwil 2009, 708; “analytical eclecticism”: Sil and Katzenstein 2010, 412). Given that this research is explicitly problem-driven and that the two theories (as discussed above) overlap in their account of behaviour (specifically, ‘rigid’ behaviour/non-learning) that results from a challenge to norms, this research would meet Moravcsik’s understanding of a valid context for synthesis. Furthermore, this would also be in line with previous work in the field of learning, in which organizational learning has been augmented with other theories for greater explanatory power when examining the EU (e.g. Dunlop 2010; Koch and Lindenthal 2011). While some would dispute the ability of such a synthesis in general (for example, those critiqued by Moravcsik 2003, 133–35), the conformity of this synthesis to the criteria

above, as well as advantages that each theory gains by its combination with the other in this empirical case, are such that Moravcsik's approach is followed here.

In this case, ontological security can be integrated with organizational learning to provide an understanding of the inability to learn through the protection of the self from challenges to existing norms/behaviours. Specifically, it is through the elements of the organizational learning framework above that account for non-learning at the 'double loop' level – that is, learning that only results in a 'single loop' outcome even when it requires a 'double loop' approach – that the two theories can be synthesized. Given that, as noted earlier, there are two conditions in which 'double loop' learning is unlikely – the existence of either a difference between 'espoused theory' and 'theory-in-use' or a challenge to 'governing variables' – these conditions can now be modified to understand their relationship to identity. Recalling that it was established above that an organization's 'theory-in-use' is a set of behaviours/norms which can be understood as part of an organization's identity, for the first condition it can be said that: organizations are unlikely to engage in 'double loop' learning when their 'espoused theory' does not match their 'theory-in-use' *because of the threat that the required changes would have to its identity*. Similarly, as the 'governing variables' are themselves behavioural norms, the second condition under which 'double loop' learning will not occur can be reformulated as: if the behaviours of the 'Model I' approach are observed, then 'single loop' rather than 'double loop' learning will be the likely outcome *because of the inherent threat that change would have upon the identity of the organization*. This extension allows for the theory of Argyris and Schön to make use of the insights of ontological security to provide a richer explanation of situations when entities (such as states or supranational organizations) do not appear to correct 'errors' in their policy programs to the extent that might be expected, or are otherwise engaged in 'single loop' learning processes rather than 'double loop' processes. Thus, the approach of ontological security can practically be integrated into the approach of organizational learning.

Given this framework, and the discussion of organizational learning and ontological security above, some theoretical expectations for the study can be derived, specifically,

some expectations for the study of the ENP in the context of the EU learning through its review processes. According to the general assumptions and predictions of the theory, in general, ‘single-loop’ learning would be the dominant form of learning undertaken by the EU and that this should be expected even when the EU claims that it is attempting to learn in a ‘double loop’ fashion. If ‘single loop’ learning is observed in the review processes of the ENP when ‘double loop’ learning is expected, it should also be the case that the explanation is related to the two possibilities given by the theoretical framework. That is, one should expect that the reason that ‘double loop’ learning did not occur was that either the ‘governing variables’ or ‘theory-in-use’ were seen to be challenged. Finally, it should be possible to understand the reason for the particular way in which ‘double loop’ learning did not occur as being a function of the EU’s efforts (conscious or otherwise) to maintain its ontological security. That is, the behaviour that is challenged can be linked to the EU’s identity. These can be considered the basic set of theoretical expectations for the ENP based on the integrated theory proposed above.

These expectations can be reformulated as a series of questions to be empirically measured. First, what type of learning is observed when looking at the EU’s role in each ENP review? Second, if ‘single loop’ learning is detected, should the observation of ‘double loop’ learning have been expected here (that is, did an ‘error’ require a ‘double loop’ approach)? Third, assuming that the result of the previous question indicates that ‘double loop’ learning should be expected, what explains this lack of ‘double loop’ learning – specifically, which of the ‘governing variables’ and/or which differences between the ‘espoused’ and actual behaviours/norms that would predict only ‘single loop’ learning can be observed as part of the EU’s review of the ENP? Finally, are any of the factors identified related to the identity of the EU – that is, can the link be made between the behaviour of the EU in these review processes and a potential threat to the EU’s identity? Thus the expectations can produce a series of sub-questions for this research to answer empirically. A method for establishing the answer to each of these sub-questions is presented in the next chapter.

Overall, in this chapter, it was seen that the literature covering the concept of learning can be seen as a potentially valuable theoretical approach to understanding the ENP.

While other theories exist, and while learning itself is a complex and unsettled theoretical field, the conceptual framework of organizational learning emerges as a useful theoretical base. Given the conceptual overlap between this approach and that of ontological security, a synthesis between ontological security and a classic organizational learning approach was proposed, and used to derive some theoretical expectations for the study of the ENP from this perspective. In the next chapter, a methodological approach to observing these phenomena across the review processes of the ENP is presented.

## **Methodological considerations**

*This chapter presents a method for examining the theoretical expectations presented in the previous chapter. It first establishes the precise objects of inquiry and overall research design. It then presents an operationalization of the individual elements of the analytical framework.*

### **Methodological overview**

In assessing the way in which the EU has or has not learnt over the course of the ENP, this research focuses upon the two formal reviews of the ENP that concluded in 2011 (European Commission and High Representative 2011) and 2015 (European Commission and High Representative 2015c). These reviews of the ENP are understood here as providing a focused and deliberate attempt by the EU to learn (for example, see European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 3). While Argyris and Schön posit that organizations adapt to their environment in their general daily practices, they also note that processes of “organizational inquiry” are important sites of learning (Argyris and Schön 1978, 42); it is argued here that the review processes could be understood in this, latter, manner. Additionally, the review processes of the ENP have several elements that support their use as comparable in-case observations: they were both formal reviews, were both of similar duration,<sup>14</sup> and were both overseen by the same section of the European Commission (see below). It is suggested here that, with these factors in mind, if learning cannot be observed when the EU is self-consciously and publicly attempting to learn with respect to the ENP, then it is unlikely to be observed more clearly under other conditions, and thus that the reviews provide the best opportunity to observe the phenomenon of ‘fundamental’ learning.

In order to study organizational learning within the context of ‘the EU’, the European Commission, specifically the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement

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<sup>14</sup> The 2011 review was conducted from July 2010 until May 2011. The 2015 review was conducted from March 2015 until November 2015.

Negotiations (herein DG NEAR),<sup>15</sup> is taken to be the ‘organization’ through which the review processes, as in-case observations (of the case of the ENP), will be examined. For the use of the Commission to represent ‘the EU’ with regard to the ENP, as was noted in the previous chapter’s discussion regarding the policy cycle, it is the Commission that is the most relevant actor with respect to the ENP reviews, in particular within the stages of policy ‘evaluation’ and ‘formulation’ – exactly the processes that were noted as relevant to ‘learning’, and thus the reviews here.<sup>16</sup> For the focus upon DG NEAR within the Commission, Koch and Lindenthal (2011, 980) note that within the Commission, the DGs can themselves be seen as organizations. Furthermore, it has been noted that capacities for processes such as policy evaluation vary at the level of the DG (van Voorst 2017), making this level of analysis the most relevant for potentially observing learning behaviours. For the ENP, even though the policy connects with many other policy fields (for a brief overview, see Helwig, Ivan, and Kostanyan 2013, 45–48), and makes use of other resources available in the Commission (such as the capacities of EEAS (see, for example, Mogherini and Hahn 2015)), it is DG NEAR that is the primary actor and, importantly, the DG that carries out the reviews and formulates the initial policy proposals (see Lightfoot, Szent-Iványi, and Wolczuk 2016, 673). As an organization that fits with Argyris and Schön’s understanding of what an organization is (Argyris and Schön 1978, 12–16), and as the section of the Commission most directly responsible for conducting the ENP reviews, the selection of DG NEAR is here considered an appropriate focus for understanding learning within the EU regarding the ENP. The particular features of the ENP, then,

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<sup>15</sup> A note on institutional development. At the time of the second Barroso Commission (beginning in 2009), the Commissioner for DG ELARG also oversaw the parts of other Commission departments that were responsible for ENP matters (European Commission 2009), and was in charge of conducting the 2011 review. As of the first Juncker Commission, DG ELARG became DG NEAR and the various non-ELARG departments were merged with it to create an officially unified department overseeing both enlargement and neighbourhood policy (European Commission 2014). This is not considered a hindrance here, as this can conceptually be considered one continuous organization for the purposes of this analysis since, with respect to the ENP, there is continuity of an understanding of “making decisions”, “delegating [...] authority”, and “setting boundaries”, which would meet Argyris and Schön’s definition (Argyris and Schön 1978, 13). ‘DG NEAR’ is used throughout to refer to this entity.

<sup>16</sup> For the role of the Commission, it is useful here to compare the main meetings of the 2015 process – for the Eastern partners, this was the Riga Summit of the Eastern Partnership in 2015, attended by many Member States’ heads of state or government, but also many parts of the Commission (Council of the European Union 2015), while for Southern partners, an “Informal Ministerial meeting” was held in Barcelona, chaired by the High Representative and Commissioner of DG NEAR, and included only foreign ministers in addition to the Commission (European Commission 2015, 1).

allow for ‘the EU’ to be reasonably represented by the actions of DG NEAR in this instance and therefore DG NEAR forms the ‘organization’ through which the review processes are to be observed as potential examples of learning within the EU.

The overall approach here is taken to be an examination of the two in-case observations initially, which are then placed in their broader historical context. In doing so, it is guided by the general approach of previous studies of learning when accounting for historical change. Within the literature concerning learning, it is broadly understood that *change over time*<sup>17</sup> is fundamental not just to the conceptual approach (as discussed in the previous chapter), but also to the empirical and analytical approach; in particular, Hall (1993) has been noted as making this clear – “one of the principal factors affecting policy at time-1 is policy at time-0.” (Hall 1993, 277; see also Moyson, Scholten, and Weible 2017, 164). More broadly, scholars have taken approaches that incorporate some historical approaches within them when studying policy learning, including path dependency (Dunlop 2010, esp. 349-350) and “process-oriented analysis” (Koch and Lindenthal 2011, 984). While this study is focused primarily upon the two review processes as examples of learning, it is understood that the policy being reviewed in 2015, for example, was itself the result of the 2011 review, and acknowledging this is unavoidable. As such, this study is guided by principles of these earlier works while also focusing upon the cases as individual examples.

In summary, this study takes the Commission, as embodied by DG NEAR, to be the ‘organization’ that is used to analyse the actions of ‘the EU’. Within this setup, the reviews function as two in-case observations for the case of the ENP that, while related, serve as a basis for understanding the attempts by the EU to learn about the ENP over time. Using this as a foundation, the next section describes the way in which the theoretical expectations of the previous chapter can be measured.

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<sup>17</sup> Also, for example, in the literature regarding ‘institutionalisms’ (e.g. Pierson 2000; Checkel 2006).

## Operationalization

Within the set of theoretical expectations derived from the literature on learning and ontological security in the previous chapter, a number of points of assessment were established; it is necessary here to operationalize these for this case. The first expectation concerns ‘single loop’ learning, namely: did ‘single loop’ learning occur? As noted in the previous chapter, the framework of Argyris and Schön understands the phenomenon of ‘single loop’ learning to involve changes to strategies, but not goals. In this research, this is to be operationalized as a variable able to take three values measuring the changes observed in the policy– ‘change in strategy’, ‘change in goal’, ‘no change’. ‘Change in strategy’ here is measured by the presence of new strategies in the review’s conclusions, and is understood to imply the process of ‘single loop’ learning. Similarly, ‘change in goal’ is measured by the presence of new goals in the review’s conclusions, and is understood to imply ‘double loop’ learning. If change is observed, it must fall into one of these categories. ‘Change in strategy’ can only be valid if ‘change in goals’ is not observed, but ‘change in goals’ could also include the observation of ‘change in strategies’. ‘No change’ indicates that neither strategies nor goals were changed. It is not expected that ‘no change’ would be observed, given the context of the empirical case detailed in previous chapters, however it is included here for conceptual completeness (following Radaelli 2009, 1147–48). For sources of data, the documents detailing the policies of the ENP are here used to establish this change through a simple pre- and post-review comparison relative to each of the review periods. In this way, values for this variable are generated for both observations.

This approach to measuring learning outcomes is consistent with previous scholarship that takes changes in policy to indicate learning (e.g. Bennett and Howlett 1992, 285–88; Hall 1993, 278). It is noted that policy changes do not always necessarily indicate learning (Broekema 2016, 383–84), but rather its possibility. However, it has also been noted that *intentional* change based upon a deliberate reflection should be considered as an example of learning (Hall 1993, 278). As such, it is here proposed that such circumstances exist in the review processes of the ENP by design (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 3; Council of the European Union 2010,

16) and that, as such, changes that result from the review processes under examination here can be assumed to be examples of learning (rather than other forms of policy change).

Next, it is necessary to establish whether, if ‘single loop’ learning is detected, ‘double loop’ learning should have been expected; as discussed in the previous chapter, this requires an examination (and thus operationalization) of the two ‘error’ subtypes, composed of the ‘theory-in-use’ and ‘espoused theory’ for the first subtype, and ‘governing variables’ for second subtype, for each review period. For the first subtype of this ‘error’ category, it is necessary to compare the ‘espoused theory’ and ‘theory-in-use’ elements for each review. To determine the ‘espoused theory’, Argyris and Schön are clear – it is simply the way in which the organization declares that it is acting (Argyris and Schön 1978, 11). For the EU here, it can be considered as the general way in which the EU presents its own behaviour – what it believes itself, and thus claims, to be doing – with respect to the ‘neighbourhood’ during the review periods. This can be established by examining policy documents, in particular the policies at each of these moments, and supported by statements made about the policy by the EU (here represented by the Commissioner responsible for the review in each instance). This is in line with previous research on the Commission using this framework, which uses existing policy documents to understand an organization’s ‘espoused theory’ (e.g. Koch and Lindenthal 2011). In this way, the ‘espoused theory’ of each review can be established.

For the ‘theory-in-use’, however, more interpretation is required. By definition, an organization’s ‘theory-in-use’ must be established based on the observation of the organization’s *actual* behaviour (Argyris 1976, 367). Given that this research is interested in the historical behaviour of the EU, it is clearly not possible to establish this through direct observation of the organization in its daily routines in the present. As a result, it is necessary to rely upon historical evidence of the EU’s behaviour to determine this. It is offered here that the documentary evidence of the EU’s behaviour over the course of the policy review process (policy documents from the reviews, statements by the Commissioner concerning the policy over the course of the review,

and relevant legislation) might constitute the primary evidence from which to make this interpretation. It is also suggested here that existing scholarly literature that makes use of, or interprets, the EU's behaviour in this policy field can supplement this, by affording this study at least indirect access to other relevant, but inaccessible, primary evidence (such as contemporaneous interviews, for example). It is then necessary to interpret this data and these existing studies to produce a 'theory-in-use' of the EU for each review period. While this is not the traditional method for determining this element of the framework,<sup>18</sup> the historical nature of the research conducted here places some constraints on the ability to generate better data, particularly concerning the 2011 review. Given that, as was noted in the previous chapter, the 'theory-in-use' is a specific form of one of the general types of behaviour (the 'Model I' and 'Model II' types), then the evidence that indicates a *general* behaviour of the EU can also be understood as containing evidence of the *specific* behaviour of the EU in that moment. As the speeches of the relevant Commissioner for each review are analysed by means of qualitative content analysis (QCA) for the general case (see below), this information can be used to highlight the specific behaviours contained within the speeches for more detailed analysis of their relevance to this element of the framework.<sup>19</sup> As such, the results of the QCA approach discussed below constitutes the selection of passages for analysis here to help determine the *specific* behaviour of the EU in each review, and are combined with policy documents and secondary literature to establish the 'theory-in-use'.

The second subtype of 'errors' involved the establishment of the behavioural norms of the EU, understood in the framework as 'governing variables'. In order to establish the 'governing variables' that exist, it is necessary to operationalize the indicators from the framework of Argyris and Schön. These can be considered as categories that constitute values for a variable of 'justification', which has been noted as one way in which norms

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<sup>18</sup> Within organizational learning studies, more direct observation methods are more common. For examples, scholars can make use of interviews (e.g. Dunlop 2010; Koch and Lindenthal 2011), to understand this part of the phenomenon. Argyris and Schön's own research often included direct observation and intervention (Argyris 1977, 119–20; see also the discussion of Lipshitz 2000, 463–68), in addition to interviews (Argyris and Schön 1978, 178–79).

<sup>19</sup> This can be thought of as an adaptation of Argyris and Schön's use of "content analysis" to attempt to derive 'theories-in-use' from transcripts and participant activity records (Argyris and Schön 1978, 81).

can be detected (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, esp. 892-893; see also Bremberg 2016, 427–28). The values that this might take are the seven different types of behaviour (i.e. the ‘governing variables’) that the framework would expect to observe in learning situations, (reproduced here for convenience):

(behaviours that increase the probability of ‘single loop’ learning) (from Argyris and Schön 1978, 62–63)

- “Define goals and try to achieve them”;
- “Maximize winning and minimize losing”;
- “Minimize generating or expressing negative feelings”;
- “Be rational”

(behaviours that increase the probability of ‘double loop’ learning) (from Argyris and Schön 1978, 137)

- “Valid information”
- “Free and informed choice”
- “Internal commitment to the choice and constant monitoring of the implementations”

Here, ‘justification’ might take multiple values from this set – that is, it is theoretically possible that several relevant values for this concept might be observed in a given situation (Argyris and Schön 1978, 64). Given that this set of reasons is, in part, based on the actions of members of the organization (which would normally be observed through interviews or direct observation, as noted earlier),<sup>20</sup> it is necessary to attempt to discern these from their manifestations in the actions and reasoning of the EU (following Bremberg 2016, 427–28). As such, it is offered here that the manner in which the EU discusses and justifies its behaviour, if done consistently, might provide

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<sup>20</sup> If the wider ‘organization’ of the EU is considered, then the involvement of the Member States and the ‘neighbourhood’ countries in the process is also important to acknowledge. However, the details of the debates at Foreign Affairs Council meetings, and the private discussions between the EU and the ‘neighbours’ are effectively secret, and thus considered here impossible to access. While this data might, hypothetically, indicate that the ‘neighbours’ were satisfied with the policy without substantial change, this would not necessarily eliminate any difference detected between the ‘espoused theory’ and ‘theory-in-use’, for example, and therefore the absence of this data not considered an obstacle in this study.

such an insight.

In order to do this, the speeches of the appropriate Commissioner of DG NEAR over the period of the review (and soon after its completion) are analysed with a view to establishing the way in which the resulting policy is justified. While these speeches are largely given during the period of review (rather than entirely after), this is the period in which the possible changes to the ENP are most salient in the interactions of DG NEAR with the partner countries and the various ENP stakeholders. This selection has the additional advantage of providing a similar time span across the two in-case observations from which to draw data for analysis. In order to establish which of the seven factors that Argyris and Schön detail are present, QCA upon of a set of forty-three (43) speeches (22 for the 2011 review, 21 for the 2015 review) is conducted. QCA is considered appropriate because the study is concerned with *how* the Commission seeks to justify its actions with respect to the categories given in the theoretical framework (following Schreier 2012, 40–42). The speeches by the relevant Commissioner within this time frame were selected purposively, on the basis of their relevance to the issue of the ENP and its review – that is, the speech discusses the ENP at some point. All such speeches were included for analysis. Given that this is a finite set, saturation criteria were not considered necessary – it is proposed here that the speeches selected constitute not a sample, but the entire set of these speeches. Finally, the speeches of the Commissioner are here proposed as valid indicators of, at a minimum, the EU’s desired interpretation of the review periods by the general public.<sup>21</sup>

In order to analyse this set of speeches using QCA, the development of a coding frame is necessary. Given that the theoretical framework includes within it a set of indicators that might be observable, it is possible to use these to produce some initial, theoretically-derived codes for the coding frame, however the coding frame also provides scope for data-driven codes (e.g. see Saldaña 2013, 7) in order to capture the specificity of the reviews. Given this, an initial coding pass of five (5) speeches from each of the review periods is conducted in order to capture the details of the behaviours, constituting approximately twenty (20) percent of the total content. This frame is then

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<sup>21</sup> Following the discussion at Finnemore and Sikkink (1998, 897).

checked against two (2) additional speeches from each category for completeness, then refined, and applied to the entire set of speeches (following Schreier 2012, esp. 6). As the speeches are of differing lengths, and discuss the ENP in different levels of detail, the five longest speeches from each review period constitute this initial coding sample, on the assumption that these speeches are most likely to contain the greatest number of possible emergent codes from which to generate a coding frame. Coding is at the paragraph level, although it is understood that, with speeches, this often equates to coding at the sentence level in practice.

Finally, it is necessary to establish a link to ontological security. Based on the analysis of the variables above, the ‘justification’ can be examined to determine if the values/norms that constitute this factor are related to the identity of the EU in some way. Using the same data set as the investigation into ‘justification’ allows for these values/norms to be extracted within the correct context of discussions about the ENP by the EU. It also allows the theory’s synthetic elements to be tested upon the same data. Here it is necessary both to extract the values/norms from the ‘justification’ data and then to compare these values/norms with those of the EU. For the latter, foundational documents of the EU (the treaties, the EUGS, etc.) are the primary sources of data, supplemented if necessary with the results of existing studies into elements of the EU’s identity (among others, see Johansson-Nogués 2018; Browning 2018). In this way, the identity-based elements of the EU’s behaviour can be established.

In summary, this chapter presented the set of methodological choices taken in applying the theoretical framework of the previous chapter to the case of the ENP. The Commission, through DG NEAR, constitutes the primary focus of this study, and each of the theorized points of assessment from the previous chapter appear measurable in this case. A number of different documents and techniques are needed, with the primary data for analysis being EU policy documents concerning the ENP and speeches by the relevant Commissioners of DG NEAR. In the next chapter, the in-case observations of the 2011 and 2015 reviews are discussed, and the results from the application of the theoretical framework are used to build an evaluation of the research question and the applicability of the framework itself.

## **The Reviews of the ENP – 2011 and 2015**

*This chapter presents an analysis of the two reviews of the ENP (concluding in 2011 and 2015).<sup>22</sup> Each review is initially analysed individually through the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapters. Following this, a brief discussion of the results of the two reviews in an integrated historical context is presented. It will be seen that the two in-case observations provide results largely in line with the theoretical expectations offered earlier, and that ultimately the results of the analysis support an understanding of the ENP's development as a series of learning opportunities, in which 'double loop' (i.e. fundamental) learning was resisted because addressing the 'errors' would have involved changing elements of the EU's behaviour connected to its identity.*

### **The 2011 Review of the ENP**

The 2011 review of the ENP (European Commission and High Representative 2011) occurred within the context of two important changes to the foreign policy environment of the EU, within which significant changes to the ENP might have been expected. The first change was the recent entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, which reorganized the foreign policy of the EU both in terms of institutional structure and scope (for example, the creation of EEAS)(European Union 2016; Missiroli 2010; as a potential factor, see also Natorksi 2016, 655). This occurred before the review was announced and, given that the scope of foreign policy in particular was modified, it might have been expected that the ENP would also change. The second change was within the countries that formed the 'neighbourhood' – specifically the emergence of what became known as the 'Arab Spring'.<sup>23</sup> Although this began during the review process, rather than prior to it, the significant change in the political situation in those countries involved might also have prompted significant changes to the ENP. While both of these contexts are

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<sup>22</sup> A note on sources. For speeches by the Commissioners, where the speech has an official 'SPEECH/x/x' designation through the press release service, page numbers corresponding to the provided printable press release are used. Some, however, are published by the EU as webpages only without official printable versions (in particular for Johannes Hahn) and are cited as such.

<sup>23</sup> One among several terms for this series of events. Its use here follows Bicchi (2014), Noutcheva (2015), and Natorksi (2016) among many others.

explicitly acknowledged by the review (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 1), as will be seen below, the policy itself did not change in a fundamental way.

### **The 2011 Review of the ENP as ‘single loop’ learning**

In applying the theoretical framework, it is first necessary to establish the type of learning that the EU ultimately undertook in the 2011 review. As noted in the previous chapter, the type of learning is operationalized as ‘change in strategy’, ‘change in goals’, or ‘no change’. In order to measure this, the policy as presented by the Commission (European Commission and High Representative 2011) was compared with the original policy strategy of 2004 (Commission of the European Communities 2004). There were some obvious differences within the internal structure of the policy as a result of historical developments (for example, the creation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (Council of the European Union 2009) and Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) (Union for the Mediterranean 2008)). However, as will be seen below, overall the policy contains changes that can be understood as ‘changes in strategy’, but does not contain changes that can be considered as ‘changes in goals’. As such, it can be asserted that ‘single loop’ learning was the type of learning that the EU engaged in during the 2011 review.

The 2011 review contains a number of changes that can be considered to be ‘changes in strategy’, leading to the conclusion that, at a minimum, ‘single loop’ learning occurred. In particular, the key changes within the policy of the ‘more for more’ approach (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2011, 3) and of greater ‘differentiation’ (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2011, 2), are examples of the EU adapting its strategy to existing, but not changing, goals. For example, the ‘more for more’ approach is explicitly an attempt to better achieve the existing goals – it is described as “enhanced support” (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 3); that is, an enhanced version of the existing support for the existing goals (see also Bicchi 2014, 322–23). Likewise, greater ‘differentiation’ contains within it the understanding of continuity – an existing approach (differentiation was part of the

original 2004 policy (Commission of the European Communities 2004, 8)), within the existing goals, simply to a larger extent. As neither of these changes modify the goals of the ENP, they can be understood as ‘changes in strategy’. As a result, it can be asserted that, at a minimum, the EU engaged in ‘single loop’ learning in the 2011 review.

By contrast, the fundamental continuity of the policy and the general policy goals indicate that ‘double loop’ learning did not occur in this instance. Most directly, fundamental continuity of the policy itself is evidence that there was no ‘change in goals’ with respect to the ‘neighbourhood’ (see Natorski 2016). That is, even though by 2011 there were other frameworks that existed through which the EU could interact with the ‘neighbourhood’ (namely the EaP and UfM as noted above), the EU maintained the ENP as the primary policy through which interaction with the ‘neighbourhood’ occurred.<sup>24</sup> Within this, the aims themselves did not change either (see Bicchi 2014, 322–23); while the 2011 review highlights a “new approach” (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 2), the points listed as constituting that approach (“deep democracy”, “inclusive economic development”, and a focus on regional approaches (for all, see European Commission and High Representative 2011, 2)) are all already present in some form within the 2004 strategy (Commission of the European Communities 2004, democracy: 10-13; economic development: 6, 9; regional elements: 4). This is to some extent acknowledged implicitly in the review itself: with respect to “deep democracy”, the real ‘change’ is “greater support” from the EU (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 2). As such, this ‘new’ approach can only be considered as, at most, a ‘change in strategy’. Given the fundamental continuity of the policy itself, and the continuity of the general approach, it cannot be concluded that a ‘change in goals’ occurred during the 2011 review and, thus, it is the case that ‘double loop’ learning is not observed in this instance. It can therefore be claimed that this first variable takes the value ‘change in strategy’ only, and thus that only ‘single loop’ learning was observed in 2011.

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<sup>24</sup> The persistence of this approach is line with the goals for the ‘regional’ elements of the original policy (Commission of the European Communities 2004, 4). Thus, the emphasis on the EaP and UfM in 2011 (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2011, 12–18) would itself be indicative of continuity, rather than change.

## **‘Errors’ requiring a ‘double loop’ learning approach in 2011**

Having established that ‘double loop’ (i.e. ‘fundamental’) learning did not occur in 2011, it is then necessary within the theoretical framework to determine whether ‘double loop’ learning was required at all. If ‘double loop’ learning was required there should have been circumstances (i.e. ‘errors’) that challenged the underlying behaviour of the EU. From the framework, these are understood as manifest either as a difference between the ‘espoused theory’ and ‘theory-in-use’ of the EU, or between the behavioural norms of the EU and its environment, each of which is discussed below and is measured, as noted in the previous chapter, by examining the speeches the relevant Commissioner in combination with supporting documents and the existing scholarly literature.

In the 2011 review, the ‘theory-in-use’ of the EU can be understood as being composed of the ideas of ‘enlargement’, and ‘more values-based approach’. The first of these, ‘enlargement’, captures the idea that the EU’s basic approach in the ‘neighbourhood’ is based on the enlargement process (such as regulatory alignment and institutional reform (see Herdina 2007)) – an idea that has been well documented (e.g. Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005, esp. 20, 26-27; Börzel and van Hüllen 2014, esp. 1035-1036). This is clearly seen in the continued references to ideas such as “regulatory convergence” (Füle 2011a, 2, see also 2010c, 2010d, 2010e) and “political reform” (Füle 2010b, 3, 2011a, 2, see also 2010c, 5). The resulting policy reflects this, as it never challenges the underlying goal to drive political and institutional reform (Commission of the European Communities 2004, 13). The ‘more values-based approach’ idea here can be understood as capturing the behaviour of the EU in bringing more emphasis to the political and institutional elements of the ‘enlargement’ idea. This too has been noted in existing literature (e.g. Noutcheva 2015, 24; Bicchi 2014, 324; Lightfoot, Szent-Iványi, and Wolczuk 2016, 667–70). This idea can be seen in the way values are understood during the process of review, for example in the phrases: “[w]e should be more forceful in underlining that good governance and political reform are not “optional”[sic] elements of our policy” (Füle 2011a, 2) or “the EU has shied away from expressing its expectations on shared values. We should be more forceful” (Füle 2010b, 3). This

emphasis on the political and institutional aspects of the policy is also seen in the final policy produced (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2011, 2). These two ideas, then, can be understood as the way in which the EU acted with respect to the ‘neighbourhood’ in the 2011 review, and thus as the ‘theory-in-use’.

Similarly, the ‘espoused theory’ of the EU also appears to contain elements of the ‘more values-based approach’ to the ENP, in combination with a sense of ‘didactic responsibility’ in the actions of the EU towards the ‘neighbours’. Unlike the ‘theory-in-use’, the ‘espoused theory’ can be derived on the basis of the statements themselves without additional interpretation (in line with the discussion in the previous chapter). In this instance, the ‘espoused theory’ of the EU in the 2011 review is also concerned with emphasizing the role of values (largely through political/institutional reform) in its approach to the ‘neighbours’. In addition to those noted above, phrases such as: “[t]he European Union encourages reform in our neighbourhood and seeks to promote convergence towards our shared values” (Füle 2010c, 7) and “[t]here is also an agreement that shared values, including democracy, human rights and rule of law, must have a central place in this policy” (Füle 2011b, 2, see also 2011d) can be seen as reinforcing this point. This aspect of the EU’s ‘espoused theory’ is given context by other statements that position the EU as having a ‘didactic responsibility’ in the ‘neighbourhood’. The idea that the EU considers itself to have a kind of “duty” to the region has been explored previously in studies of the ENP generally (Browning and Joenniemi 2008, 532; see also Schumacher 2015, 384–85), and the idea offered here echoes that understanding. Here, however, the focus is on the EU’s guidance/experience as *necessary* for the development of the region. This can be seen in references to the lessons of 1989 (e.g. Füle 2011c, 2, 2011d, 4), as well as in phrases such as “[t]hese programmes will therefore serve as an introduction in the EaP countries” (Füle 2011g, 3) and “[w]hat happened in May in Tbilisi during the protest rally must never happen again” (Füle 2011f, 3). These phrases in particular highlight the EU as having to instruct the ‘neighbours’, and is in line with analyses that understand the EU placing itself in the role of the “teacher” (Kratochvíl 2009, 8; Dimitrovova 2010, 469). Thus, ‘more values-based approach’ and ‘didactic responsibility’ can be understood as capturing the way in

which the EU talks about the ENP, and thus constituting the ‘espoused theory’ of the EU in this instance.

Having established the ‘theory-in-use’ and the ‘espoused theory’ in this instance, it can be seen that there is not sufficient contradiction between them to consider ‘double loop’ (i.e. ‘fundamental’) learning to have been necessary. It is clear from the above discussion that there is significant overlap between the ‘espoused theory’ and the ‘theory-in-use’ in terms of ‘values’. This would indicate that the EU both *spoke* and *acted* according to the idea that ‘more values-based’ promotion was necessary with the ‘neighbourhood’. The resulting policy would indicate that this indeed was the case (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 2). The other elements, while different, do not contradict each other, and might even be considered to be complimentary (that is, proceeding in line with ‘enlargement’ practices might be the EU’s way of acting out its ‘didactic responsibility’).<sup>25</sup> As a result, it cannot be said that the EU needed to engage in ‘double loop’ learning on the basis of a difference between its ‘espoused theory’ and its ‘theory-in-use’ in 2011. This type of ‘error’ requiring a ‘double loop’ approach can therefore be eliminated as a possibility. However, it is still possible, as per the theoretical framework, that a ‘double loop’ approach was needed on the basis of differences between EU’s ‘governing variables’ and its environment. As such, it is also necessary to examine the EU’s ‘governing variables’ in relation to its behaviour during the 2011 review to determine if ‘double loop’ learning was necessary in this instance.

Based on an analysis of the speeches of the Commissioner using the QCA approach described in the previous chapter, it is possible to establish the ‘governing variables’ for the EU during the 2011 ENP review process. The first major result of the analysis is that there were examples of behaviour that would conform to the ‘Model II’ type – that is, the EU would appear to have, *prima facie*, behaved in ways that would be consistent with a ‘double loop’ approach to learning. In particular, the behavioural norms concerned with the ‘validity’ of information and with ‘monitoring’ were visible. With respect to the ‘validity’ of information, this behaviour can be seen in phrases such as

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<sup>25</sup> This would be in accord with the general implications of Browning and Joenniemi (2008, 532).

“[w]e have listened to experts and academics” (Füle 2010b, 2); “I have undertaken broad-ranging consultations to review this policy” (Füle 2010d, 7); and “[o]ur consultations so far have been extensive” (Füle 2011a, 2). Likewise, ‘monitoring’ can be seen in phrases such as “[w]e will monitor the progress made towards meeting the benchmarks through progress reports” (Füle 2011e, 3) and “[p]olitical influence over the judicial system cannot be tolerated anywhere and this is something the European Union monitors closely” (Füle 2011f, 3). To some extent, this result should not be surprising; given that this was a review process that included within it consultations with the ‘neighbours’ and other stakeholders (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 1), it should be expected that this context would, at a minimum, produce statements that mentioned the ‘validity’ of the input from these stakeholders. In fact, statements such as these would be in line with the experience of Argyris and Schön, who note that while it is easy to speak of these learning ideals, not all organizations actually act upon them (Argyris and Schön 1978, 139). Indeed, the very statements of the Commissioner himself would not necessarily support the actual use of the result of these consultations in the policy process itself.<sup>26</sup> However, it is still the case that while the EU failed to engage in ‘double loop’ learning, it appeared to exhibit at least elements of the behavioural model (‘Model II’) that would indicate that it was capable of ‘double loop’ learning. As such, this finding would suggest the presence of these ‘double loop’-indicating behaviours was not sufficient to enable the EU to engage in ‘double loop’ learning.

One part of the reason for this result can be seen in the second major finding of the analysis - the dominant presence of behaviours by the EU in 2011 that accord with the ‘Model I’ (i.e. ‘single loop’-indicating) behavioural type. The analysis of the speeches of the Commission reveals that behavioural norm concerned with the definition of goals is the most dominant type of behaviour found within the conduct of the EU towards the ENP. This behaviour can sometimes be seen explicitly in the speeches of the Commissioner through statements such as: “[w]e want to discuss the future of ENP policy, to define a vision” (Füle 2010c, 10), and “we need to communicate with greater

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, statements such as: “we have taken care to consult widely with our partners so that they *feel involved* in the process” (Füle 2011e, 4) (emphasis added).

clarity where we wish the European Neighbourhood Policy, and by extension the Eastern Partnership, to lead” (Füle 2011d, 3). Such behaviour can be found in many of the speeches by the Commissioner (e.g. Füle 2010a, 2010b, 2010d, 2010e), leading to the conclusion that it is a deeply held behavioural norm of the EU in this context. Of the remaining categories of behaviour, that concerned with ‘negative feelings’ is the next most prevalent, although this can be explained to some extent by the context of the data itself; as speeches on foreign policy, often delivered abroad (e.g. Füle 2010a, 2010c, 2011f), there is some expectation that feelings will be respected as a matter of protocol.<sup>27</sup> There is also evidence that the EU seeks to engage in maximizing ‘winning’; the phrase “[w]e need to avoid overlap and maximize collective impact” (Füle 2011c, 4) is an example of such behaviour in the context of the ‘Arab Spring’. As the theoretical framework only requires the presence of one of these behaviours for a ‘Model I’ type identification (Argyris and Schön 1978, 64), and given the dominance of the behaviour concerned with the definition of goals exhibited by the EU here, it can be said that the EU’s general behaviour in 2011 was in line with ‘Model I’ type approaches in this instance.

Furthermore, in these behaviours, it is possible to identify a difference between the behavioural approach of the EU and its environment that would constitute an ‘error’ requiring ‘double loop’ learning. Specifically, it is in the behaviour concerned with the definition of goals that this difference can be seen. As discussed above, the EU clearly seeks to control the definition of the relationship between itself and the ‘neighbours’. However, the definition of this relationship was itself a source of problems for the ENP insofar as the ‘neighbours’ did not always share, or agree with, the EU in this matter;<sup>28</sup> for example, it is clear from the speeches of the Commissioner that some of the ‘neighbours’ did not think that value-based and institutional reform were a necessary aspect of policy, as seen in statements such as “good governance and political reform are not “optional”[sic] elements of our policy” (Füle 2010b, 3, 2011a, 2). This lack of common understanding extended to the incentives on offer from the EU, seen, for example, in the phrases: “there are some important gaps between partners’ expectations

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<sup>27</sup> Although not in all cases. For example, the speech delivered by the Commissioner at Batumi in July 2011 (Füle 2011f) might not conform to this expectation at times.

<sup>28</sup> See also Natorski (2016, 658).

and what the EU may be prepared to offer” (Füle 2011a, 2) and “clear benchmarks in which our expectations of partners as regards reform are spelt out more clearly, as are the “rewards”[sic] that our partners will obtain if those expectations are met” (Füle 2011d, 3). Put another way, the EU and the ‘neighbours’ were defining the goals and processes of the ENP differently. In terms of the framework, the environment (i.e. the ‘neighbours’) clearly indicated that the behaviour of the EU here (i.e. in defining the goals) was not working. That is, it constituted an ‘error’ that would require a ‘double loop’ approach to ‘correct’. That this ‘error’ can be discerned in the speeches of the Commissioner is evidence that this was understood by the EU itself. As such, it is possible to conclude that there was an ‘error’ that would require ‘double loop’ learning in this instance.

From the analysis above, it is also clear that the framework gives a clear mechanism for the choice by the EU to not engage in ‘double loop’ learning in this case. Given that the EU was engaging in ‘Model I’-type behaviour, the framework would expect that (as discussed in previous chapters), when confronted with a problem requiring a ‘double loop’ solution, the EU would instead take a ‘single loop’ approach. This can be seen here directly, in the advocacy of the ‘more for more’ approach – the Commissioner explicitly makes this connection:

This approach - described as “more for more” - implies developing a framework with clear benchmarks in which our expectations of partners as regards reform are spelt out more clearly, as are the “rewards” that our partners will obtain if those expectations are met. (Füle 2011d, 3)

That is, rather than adjust the behaviour of the EU in the definition of goals, it sought to attempt to refine its existing behaviour. Thus, not only does the framework allow for the source of the ‘error’ to be established, it provides insight into the means by which the EU ultimately did not engage in ‘fundamental’ learning in the 2011 review – there was a ‘error’ that required the EU to change its own behavioural norms, which were of a type that would resist such a change.

## **The link to ontological security in the behaviour of the EU in 2011**

Having established the means by which the lack of fundamental (i.e. ‘double loop’) learning did not occur in this instance, the reason for this resistance to change can be sought. Within the synthetic theoretical framework, this is posited as being an issue of ontological security – that is, it is theorized that if that behaviours needing change can be linked to parts of the EU’s identity, then the lack of change can be understood as an attempt to preserve that identity. It is necessary, therefore, to see if this link can be established.

In this instance, it is possible to observe elements of the EU’s identity in its behaviour in the 2011 review, in particular the definition of the role of the ENP as being to promote values/political reform within the ‘neighbourhood’. It was seen above that the EU acted in line with elements of a ‘more values-based approach’ with respect to the ENP at this time. It was also noted that the EU sought to control the definition of the nature of the ENP, and in doing so it resisted any feedback that would ask it to redefine the ENP. These two ideas are necessarily linked – in controlling the definition of the ENP, the EU is *de facto* controlling the definition of what type of emphasis (i.e. ‘more values’) the ENP has. These values, as is clear from the speeches of the Commissioner, constitute the foundational values of the EU: for example, “[t]he values of good governance and rule of law, together with democracy and respect for human rights, lie at the heart of ENP. These values underpin all EU norms and standards” (Füle 2010c, 7). Such a claim by the Commissioner is supported by the treaties themselves, in particular Article 2 of the TEU (European Union 2016). In the context of the ENP review, the EU can be considered to be protecting its behaviour as a *projector* of these foundational EU values into the ‘neighbourhood’. This behaviour, of value projection, is also considered to be part of the EU’s identity; the TEU claims it as such in Article 21(1):

The Union’s action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity. (European Union 2016)

Scholars have understood the EU's projection of values in this same way.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it is possible to understand that the EU's behaviour, as observed in the 2011 review, was identity-related in fundamental ways.

It is also possible to understand that 'double loop' learning in 2011 would have required the EU to change this behaviour, and thus to change elements of its identity – in this way, the link to theories of ontological security can be made. In 2011, the 'error' discerned was the difference between the EU's control over the ENP as a means of promoting values, and the 'neighbours'' understanding of what the ENP should be. In order to address this difference, the EU would have been required to give up control over the definition of the ENP as a means for value-promotion, and thereby be reduced to behaving in a way that *no longer* included value-promotion. As such, this rejection of elements of the policy would have constituted a rejection of elements of the EU's identity. Therefore, the EU's decision to preserve its control over the definition of the policy can be seen as the EU choosing to preserve elements of its own identity. This agrees with the understanding of ontological security-related behaviour as discussed in the previous chapters – the EU here is preserving (and, as such, repeating) its existing behaviour (here, as a promoter of values), rather than change itself to correct an 'error' in its behaviour revealed by feedback from the environment (here, the 'neighbours' and their different understanding of the ENP). As a result, it can be said that the EU's lack of 'double loop' learning can be understood in terms of the EU's efforts to preserve elements of its own identity rather than have its ontological security challenged.

### **The 2015 Review of the ENP**

The 2015 review of the ENP (European Commission and High Representative 2015c) also occurred in the context of circumstances that may suggest that significant change

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<sup>29</sup> The classic articulation of this is given by Manners (2002). A more recent discussion and summary can be found in the work of Birchfield (2013). For the 2011 review period especially, see Del Sarto (2016), who would agree with the connection between normative projection and identity.

might also be anticipated from its review. Unlike the mid-MFF review of 2011, the 2015 review was first proposed at the beginning of the new EU governance and budget cycle in late 2014 (Junker 2014).<sup>30</sup> Additionally, while both policy reviews addressed difficulties in the region, unlike the 2011 review (in which the ‘Arab Spring’ occurred during the review process), a set of regional issues were already underway prior to 2015 review being announced.<sup>31</sup> Such changes in the Commission and the environment of the ENP might suggest that the 2015 review would provide a greater opportunity to observe the potential of the EU to undergo fundamental learning (i.e. ‘double loop’ learning) (should it be necessary) with respect to the ENP than occurred in 2011.<sup>32</sup> However, as the theoretical framework (and the empirical case setup) predicted, this was not the case.

### **The 2015 Review of the ENP as ‘single loop’ learning**

As with the previous review, it is first necessary to establish which type of learning is being observed. In this instance, the proposals and declared changes announced in the 2015 document (European Commission and High Representative 2015c) were compared with the policy situation that was established by the 2011 review (European Commission and High Representative 2011) in order to determine the value of the variable measuring the type of learning (i.e. ‘change in strategy’, ‘change in goals’ or ‘no change’). While it is possible to observe ‘change in strategy’ in these proposals, as with 2011 a ‘change in goals’ cannot be observed in the 2015 policy proposals (discussed below), indicating that, while ‘single loop’ learning occurred, ‘double loop’ (i.e. ‘fundamental’) learning ultimately did not occur in 2015.

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<sup>30</sup> Although, importantly, after the MFF for 2014-2020 had been adopted (European Union 2013). The review was announced on March 4, 2015 (European Commission and High Representative 2015b) and concluded with the review report provided by the Commission and HR on November 18, 2015 (European Commission and High Representative 2015c).

<sup>31</sup> The consultation paper specifically mentions the situations in Ukraine, Libya, Syria, and Gaza among others (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 2).

<sup>32</sup> Given that, as a number of the theories discussed earlier note, large changes of external origin are often considered necessary or important for large change (see Scholten 2017, 345–46; Fioretos 2011, esp. 374).

For the 2015 review, it can be said that ‘change in strategy’, and thus ‘single loop’ learning, can be observed. On one level, the policy details presented in 2015 were either a continuation or, at times, a repetition, of those presented in 2011. A key example is the changing method of ‘differentiation’. While ‘differentiation’ was highlighted in the 2015 review as an important element (European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 2), this was part of the existing policy approach, having also been highlighted as part of the 2011 review (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 2). What is emphasized in the 2015 review is the *extent* of the ‘differentiation’ – that is, working with the same goal (‘differentiation’), but adjusting the approach (‘more differentiation’ (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 4)) in response to feedback. Likewise, the security elements highlighted by the review (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 3–4) and later analyses (e.g. Koenig 2016, 3, 8; Pänke 2019, 113), such as the extension of existing security arrangements to now potentially include CSDP missions (European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 14), as with ‘differentiation’ can only be considered a ‘change in strategy’, given the presence of security-related elements in the previous policy (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 5–6). In these examples, it is clear that no fundamental shift in policy has occurred. As such, the variable can be considered to take the value ‘change in strategy’ at a minimum here, and thus that ‘single loop’ learning can be observed.

However, the continuation of the general approach of the policy as well as of the policy itself indicates that, as in 2011, ‘double loop’ learning cannot be observed here. While some of the low-level policy details could conceivably remain constant in the face of a fundamental policy shift (for example, moving to a bilateral approach but keeping a number of the existing instruments), the continuity of the general policy approach found in the 2015 review indicates that ‘double loop’ (i.e. fundamental) learning did not occur in this case. The maintenance of the overall unifying policy framework in 2015 (for its justification, see European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 4), in combination with persistence of the role of the EaP and UfM to do much of the work of ‘differentiation’ within this framework (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 13–18, 2015c, 18), represents this continuity at a structural level. The continued

use of the underlying ‘more for more’ approach (European Commission and High Representative 2011, 3, 2015c, 5) represents this at a financial level. Perhaps most importantly, the goals of the policy itself (“stability, security and prosperity” (European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 2)) as understood to be the advancement of “democracy, human rights and the rule of law and economic openness” (European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 2) remain the same (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2011, 21). Given the continuation in all these dimensions, it is clear that substantial change did not occur in the policy as a result of the 2015 review. As a result it can be said that a ‘change in goals’ was not observable in this case, and therefore that ‘double loop’ learning did not occur. Thus, in the 2015 review, only a ‘change in strategy’, and thus only ‘single loop’ learning, can be observed.

### **‘Errors’ requiring a ‘double loop’ learning approach in 2015**

With respect to the next stage of analysis, it is still necessary to determine if ‘double loop’ learning could have been expected at all by establishing the ‘theory-in-use’, ‘espoused theory’ and ‘governing variables’ at the time of the 2015 review. While it is possible that the ‘theory-in-use’ that existed at the time of the 2011 review continued into 2015 by default, this cannot be assumed.<sup>33</sup> As this study is focused upon the review periods as points of observation, it is necessary to establish the ‘theory-in-use’ for each review period and, as such, it is reestablished here. As with the 2011 review, this is done on the basis of the speeches of the Commissioner during the period of the review, and is supported by additional policy documents and the secondary literature on the historical behaviour of the EU with respect to the ENP.

The ‘theory-in-use’ of the EU with respect to the ENP during the period of the 2015 review can be thought of as consisting of two main elements: what are herein termed ‘enlargement’ (as in 2011) and ‘unilateral’. The first of these elements, ‘enlargement’

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<sup>33</sup> For example, Argyris (1999, 84) notes that changes may have occurred by “fiat or unilateral imposition”.

can be seen as a further continuation of the original approach of the ENP, as acknowledged by the Commission (e.g. Hahn 2015h), in which the ENP was in effect a copy of the enlargement process that would result in “everything but institutions” (Hahn 2015h; see also, e.g. Prodi 2002). As noted for the 2011 review, this approach has long been noted as a central feature of the ENP (in addition to those cited earlier, see Lightfoot, Szent-Iványi, and Wolczuk 2016; Börzel and Lebanidze 2017, 22) and this approach (and its resulting set of behavioural norms) can be seen as persisting throughout the 2015 review process also (cf. Koenig 2016, 8), as part of the EU’s ‘theory-in-use’. These can be observed in the manner in which the behaviours sought from ENP countries are articulated, for example by continuing to seek reforms from the ENP countries (among many others, see Hahn 2015d, 2015i, 2016a). It can also be observed in the advocacy by the EU for the continuation of the use of instruments that were, and remain, designed to work with the enlargement process in mind (such as TAIEX and Twinning (Hahn 2016b)). Perhaps most clearly, it can be observed in the persistence of the underlying goals of the original enlargement-based ENP (seen in the repeated insistence that the EU was not “giving up on [...] [its] values” (Hahn 2015c, 2, see also 2015b, 2015j)). While there were attempts by the EU to rhetorically position itself as open to criticism of this underlying logic (for example, with the acknowledgement that some may have found the approach “patronising” (Hahn 2015c, 2, 2015b, 2, see also 2015h)), it is also the case that no actual self-critique of this approach is offered, nor were any proposals that would fundamentally contradict this approach suggested by DG NEAR (European Commission and High Representative 2015c).<sup>34</sup> This is further underscored by the persistence of the ENI funding apparatus, which, in Title 1, Article 2, Section 2(b), maintained as a goal “legislative approximation and regulatory convergence towards Union and other relevant international standards” (European Union 2014).<sup>35</sup> From this evidence, it is clear that ‘enlargement’ (without membership) remained part of the underlying approach of the EU to the ENP during the 2015 review process and constituted part of its ‘theory-in-use’.

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<sup>34</sup> On this point, Koenig (2016), among others, would disagree and argue that differentiation itself would constitute a change from this approach.

<sup>35</sup> This instrument has also been used to highlight the continuation of conditionality (Koenig 2016, 10; Bremberg 2016, 434).

The other element of the EU's underlying approach to the ENP at the time of the 2015 review, 'unilateral', can also be detected in the policy documents, statements and secondary literature regarding the ENP. 'Unilateral' can be seen as the behaviour of the EU in which it does not consider the ENP countries' wishes or preferences in the design or implementation of the policy. As with the 'enlargement' element, the EU's behaviour, through the ENP, has been characterized as 'unilateral' with respect to the 'neighbourhood' within the scholarly literature (e.g. Haukkala 2008, 1612–13; Nicolaidis et al. 2014, 737–38; Theuns 2017, 295). As above, it is asserted here that this behaviour can be seen in the actions of the EU at the time of the 2015 review, and that this can be seen in the speeches of the Commissioner during this period, in particular through the definition of the policy's elements prior to their negotiation with the ENP countries. For example, the description of differentiation as "[t]hose who want to seek deeper integration will continue to do so. Others who want a more transactional partnership will get a narrower menu" (Hahn 2015h) – here it is still the EU that decides the 'menu', even when the goal is to engage with the ENP countries more cooperatively. Or again:

When you read the review you will find a new emphasis on *stabilising* our neighbourhood [...] this means a greater focus on security issues [...] [i]t also means using economic development [...] [b]ut let me stress again: the EU's own stability is based on democracy and rule of law. That is the kind of stability we mean. (Hahn 2015j, 2)

Here, the EU itself defines what stability means, and thus subsequent negotiations can only constitute a discussion of how the EU's definition applies. More broadly, and perhaps most clearly, the idea of 'unilateral' can be seen in the process of the review itself. The announcement of the review contained within it a series of focus points for the review (e.g. Hahn 2015b), which helped shape the public consultation questions (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 6–9), and which ultimately shaped the final review (European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 2–3) – that is, the outcome of the review itself (having been declared to be interested in public consultation (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 10)) was already

framed by the Commission at the time of its announcement.<sup>36</sup> ‘Unilateral’ then, can be considered another part of the EU’s ‘theory-in-use’ at the time of the 2015 review. In combination with the ‘enlargement’ element, it constitutes the EU’s ‘theory-in-use’.

Having established elements of the ‘theory-in-use’, it is next necessary to establish the ‘espoused theory’ of the EU over the same period in order to conduct the comparison. It is possible to assert that (one element of) the EU’s ‘espoused theory’ here can be thought of as one of ‘differentiated cooperation’. The first concept, ‘differentiated’, here represents the idea that the EU understands itself to have already been acting in a differentiated manner toward the ‘neighbourhood’. This is clearly articulated in the announcement of the 2015 review: “the concept of differentiation has been present from the start” (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 4). The EU here presents itself as acting (in fact, as always having acted) in accordance with the concept of ‘differentiation’. This idea is reinforced by the way in which the document describes the partners’ role in this process: for example, by attributing ineffectiveness of the ENP to “the changing aspirations of our partners” (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 2). Here, it is the partners’ seeking of even more difference that is the issue, not the efforts of the EU. Even though large parts of the discussion of the review ultimately involved discussions of ‘differentiation’, it is often found in the context of, for example, “more differentiation” (Hahn 2015j, 2, see also 2015h, 2015c) – that is, an expansion of what the EU is doing already. Such statements by the EU concerning how the EU thinks about, and talks about, its approach to the ‘neighbourhood’ thus support the inclusion of ‘differentiated’ into an understanding of its ‘espoused theory’.

The second element of the ‘espoused theory’ is that of ‘cooperation’. This is based on the idea that the EU works in partnership with the ‘neighbours’ and, as with the idea of ‘differentiated’, be seen in the announcement of the review and its supporting discussions. When discussing the ‘neighbours’, they are referred to often as the “partners” (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, e.g. 2; see also Hahn 2015j, 2015f, 2015e, 2015c). When presenting the way in which the ENP

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<sup>36</sup> This was not lost on some respondents to the public consultation (for example, Leigh 2015, esp. 2-3).

operates, terms such as “partnership” (Hahn 2015b, 2) and “cooperation” (Mogherini and Hahn 2015, 1) are used. Even the very process of the review itself is presented at times as a chance to “consult partners on their interests and ambitions for this partnership” (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 3). While the 2015 review acknowledges that the partners themselves may not always have the same understanding of this relationship to the ENP as the EU (e.g. “lack of a sense of shared ownership” (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 4)), it is also clear that the EU believes that this is, in part, simply due to ineffectively communicating the benefits of the ENP (e.g. European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 9; see also Hahn 2015d), thus reinforcing its presentation of itself as already engaged in joint and cooperative relationships with the ‘neighbours’. As such, the second element of the ‘espoused theory’ of the EU at the time of the 2015 review can be understood as ‘cooperation’.

Even in the case that there is a clear difference between the ‘theory-in-use’ and the ‘espoused theory’ of the EU, it is still necessary to establish the ‘governing variables’ of the EU; if these norms can be identified as being in conflict with the organization’s goals, then the theory would identify this as an ‘error’ that required ‘double loop’ learning. Perhaps more importantly, if those norms can be identified as belonging to the ‘Model I’ approach of behaviour (i.e. those that would predict ‘single loop’ learning), then the mechanism for preventing ‘double loop’ learning will also be clear. As discussed in the previous chapter, the speeches of the Commissioner were examined using a QCA approach in order to determine the ‘governing variables’ present in this review.

As with the 2011 review, one of the findings of the analysis of the 2015 review is the presence of behavioural norms that in line with ‘Model II’ type of organizational learning behaviour. Again, a number of the EU’s behaviours indicated the seeking of “[v]alid information” (Argyris and Schön 1978, 137). While this was the only one of the ‘Model II’-type behaviours to be observed in 2015 (unlike in 2011), it was done so with some frequency (see particularly the use of the term ‘honest’ when discussing the review/consultation process (i.e. Hahn 2015h, 2015g, 2015a)). This may be related to

the existence in 2015 of the public consultation (European Commission and High Representative 2015b) – in these circumstances, any public consultation would reasonably be expected to present itself as seeking ‘valid’ and ‘honest’ feedback (in the manner of European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 10). In 2015, the feedback from these consultations is cited as part of the justification for the particular policy changes presented (for example European Commission and High Representative 2015c, 4, 5, 7, see also 2015a). However, much like the 2011 review, the actions of the EU – here the explicit framing of the outcomes of the review prior to it occurring (as discussed above), in combination with the structure of the review questions within that framing (see, for example, the comments of Leigh 2015, esp. 2-3) – would suggest that the public consultation itself was not actually central to the final policy that was produced. It is still noteworthy, however, that ‘double loop’-indicating behaviours are present, in contrast to the ‘single loop’ learning outcome established above. As with 2011, it indicates that the presence of these behaviours was insufficient to produce a ‘double loop’ learning outcome.

An initial explanation of the ‘single loop’ outcome in 2015 can be found, as in 2011, in the finding that almost all of behavioural norms that would predict ‘single loop’ learning can be identified in the behaviour of the EU in 2015, the most dominant of which, again, concerned the definition of goals. It is clear from the discussion above regarding the 2015 ‘theory-in-use’ norm of ‘unilateral’ that there was a clear indication in the data that the ‘Model I’ behavioural norm of “[d]efine goals and try to achieve them” (Argyris and Schön 1978, 62–63) could be found. Additional examples of the EU either directly setting the goals, or setting the terms by which they are defined, can be seen in the phrases: “I want a focus on stabilization. [...] [t]his means prioritising economic development” (Hahn 2015h) and “[i]t is essential that reforms advance and the EU, with the new ENP, will be more flexible to accompany Tunisia” (Hahn 2015g). That this behavioural norm was identifiable to such an extent is the strongest indicator that the approach of the EU in 2015 was dominated by a ‘Model I’ (i.e. ‘single loop’-indicating) approach.

While the other behavioural norms predicted by the theory did not appear to quite the same extent in all cases, they did still appear, and reinforce the determination that the EU here was engaged in a ‘Model I’ behavioural approach. Of the three other categories of the ‘Model I’ type, that which is concerned with ‘feelings’, was the least visible of the behaviours on the surface. However, much like the 2011 example, the context of the speeches themselves can serve as some indication of this category. That is, the data is taken from public speeches by the Commissioner and, therefore, these speeches would be *expected* to be, at a minimum, diplomatically polite. Thus, the very format itself can again be seen as an indication of the presence of the ‘feelings’ behavioural category. The category concerning ‘winning’/‘losing’ was also less visible than the category regarding goals, although examples were more common than those concerning ‘feelings’. An example can be seen in the following:

So we have achieved a lot. We have brought some neighbours closer. But in the light of structural problems and turmoil in many parts of the neighbourhood, we have to take a hard look at the policy and ask self-critically: is it working? Is it delivering? How can we do better? Because we have to do better, in our own interest! (Hahn 2015h)

This passage contains the idea of achieving a goal within it, but key to the passage is the idea of being ‘better’, that is, of ‘maximizing’ outcomes, within the bounds of the existing policy. As such, this category of behaviour can also be said to exist in the EU’s approach to the ‘neighbourhood’. Additionally, while the final category concerning ‘rationality’ is also not as dominant as the category concerning goals, it too appears with regularity; the most common formulation of this behavioural norm found in the data was the idea that the policy was being reviewed to better address the interests of both the EU and the ‘neighbours’. For example, the statement: “Federica and I will reach out to all parties to discuss how the design and implementation of the ENP can be better adapted to our interests and theirs” (Hahn 2015c, 1) is typical of this category’s manifestation. While none of these additional categories is strictly necessary to claim that the EU behaved in a ‘Model I’ manner towards the ENP in the review process,<sup>37</sup> the fact that all categories can be observed here reinforces the conclusion that the EU was acting in a ‘Model I’ (i.e. ‘single loop’-predicting) manner in this review.

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<sup>37</sup> Since, as Argyris and Schön (1978, 64) note, behaviour of any of those four categories will influence behaviour towards ‘single loop’ outcomes.

Having established the behaviour of the EU in 2015, it can be seen that *both* types of ‘error’ that would require a ‘double loop’ learning response are observable; from the discussion of the ‘espoused theory’ and ‘theory-in-use’, it is clear that these two constitute a clear difference (i.e. a ‘mismatch’ constituting an ‘error’) in this instance. Where the ‘espoused theory’ can be seen as having ‘differentiation’ as an element, the ‘enlargement’ element of the ‘theory-in-use’ would be in conflict with this idea. Similarly, the ‘unilateral’ element of the ‘theory-in-use’ would be in conflict with the ‘cooperation’ element of the ‘espoused theory’. It is also clear that this potential for continued difference was known to the EU – the announcement of the public consultation notes that: “[s]ome partners are actively seeking closer integration with the EU. Others are not, or not currently, attracted by it, calling into question some of the assumptions on which the ENP has been constructed” (European Commission and High Representative 2015b, 4). This difference between the ‘theory-in-use’ and the ‘espoused theory’ thus constitutes one of the ‘error’ types requiring ‘double loop’ learning to resolve. Moreover, it could also be argued that the ‘governing variables’ themselves contain a difference (or ‘mismatch’) with the environment, also constituting an ‘error’ requiring ‘double loop’ learning. In particular, as in 2011, the behaviour concerned with defining goals can be seen as challenged by the recognition by the EU (noted above) that the ENP countries themselves would prefer to define the goals jointly. It is therefore another example (with 2011) of a difference between a behavioural norm of the EU and the requirements of the environment, and thus would also constitute an ‘error’ requiring ‘double loop’ learning to resolve. It can be concluded therefore, that *both* ‘error’ types that would require a ‘double loop’ response are visible in this case. While the theory does not require that both exist, in this instance it might be the case that this reinforced the need for ‘double loop’ learning here.

It is also possible to conclude from the above discussion the mechanism by which ‘double loop’ learning did not eventuate from a behavioural perspective. From the discussion of the ‘governing variables’, it is clear that EU’s behaviour conformed to the ‘Model I’ type. Given that the theory understands that behaving according to this type should result in ‘single loop’ outcomes even when ‘double loop’ outcomes are

necessary, it can be concluded in this case that the EU's behavioural norms in general could predict that the required 'double loop' learning would not occur. The final stage of the analysis for the 2015 review, then, is to ascertain if a deeper cause can be discerned in any links between these behaviours and the EU's identity.

### **The link to ontological security in the behaviour of the EU in 2015**

If the 'theory-in-use' of the EU here is examined, it can be seen that it contains clear elements of the EU's identity. Specifically, if the 'enlargement' element is considered, then there are clearly articulated components of this approach that are visibly linked to foundational elements of the EU's self-understanding. In articulating the approach of the EU in this way, the idea of a need to continue to promote 'values' recurs.<sup>38</sup> As was seen above, the EU understands its aims to be defined (or redefined) in terms of 'values' (for example, the idea of "stability" being equivalent to "democracy" and the "rule of law" (Hahn 2015j, 2)). Yet the connection is even more clearly made with respect to the ENP generally, for example: "[t]he promotion of democracy, human rights and rule of law is a defining characteristic of the EU" (Hahn 2015c, 2). This should not be surprising given the treaties, in particular Article 21(1) of the TEU (European Union 2016) (and given the discussion of the 2011 review). The ENP, therefore, in being expressed in terms of promoting these values, can be understood as an expression of the ideas and values underpinning the EU itself. That these continue (i.e. post-2011 review) to be part of the identity of the EU can be seen in analyses of the EUGS (European Commission 2016) that note the role of values in this document (Johansson-Nogués 2018, esp. 9-10; Mälksoo 2016, 7–8).<sup>39</sup> From this it is clear that of the EU's 'theory-in-use' here can be related to an understanding of the EU's identity.

Furthermore, in the context of 'double loop' learning, it is this element of the EU's identity that would require change in order to address the observed 'error', thereby

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<sup>38</sup> As with 2011, Manners' work serves as a starting point in general (Manners 2002, esp. 241). See also the discussion of the 2011 review above.

<sup>39</sup> The role of values can be also seen in the literature characterizing the EU as a normative 'empire' (e.g. Zielonka 2013)

connecting organizational learning with ontological security. Part of the ‘error’ observed in the 2015 review was the difference between the EU’s ‘enlargement’ ‘theory-in-use’ and its ‘espoused theory’ of ‘differentiation’. It is clear from the above quotes that the EU understands that some ‘neighbours’ would prefer a situation in which values play less of a role at times – meaning that, for the EU to bring its behaviour in line with its ‘espoused theory’ (thereby ‘correcting’ the ‘error’), it would have to forgo elements of its ‘enlargement’ approach associated with value-promotion. Through the lens of ‘double loop’ learning, the EU’s identity as a promoter of values would require change, and thus the idea of no longer acting to promote values would constitute a threat to that element of the EU’s identity. From this perspective, ontological security theory would provide a reason for this change to be resisted – that the EU chose not to engage in ‘double loop’ learning in order to preserve these elements of its identity. It can be said, therefore, that in the 2015 review, the EU’s lack of ‘double loop’ (i.e. ‘fundamental’) learning can be connected to its ontological security concerns.

### **2011 and 2015 – Explaining the current state of the ENP as learning and identity**

In light of the findings of the individual reviews, it is possible to understand the ENP’s development as a series of learning opportunities over time, with the current state of the policy understood as the result of the learning approaches taken. In 2011, the behavioural norms of the EU were challenged by feedback from the environment, when the EU’s insistence on control over defining the elements of the ENP was not accepted by the ‘neighbours’. In 2015, there was both a difference between the ‘espoused theory’ of the EU and its ‘theory-in-use’ (where the ‘unilateral’ and ‘enlargement’ elements of the ‘theory-in-use’ contradicted the ‘differentiated cooperation’ that was ‘espoused’) as well as a conflict between its behavioural norms and the environment (again, the insistence on controlling the definition of the elements of the ENP). In both cases, it was established that ‘single loop’ learning occurred when ‘double loop’ learning should

have been expected.<sup>40</sup> While the framework understands these outcomes to be different from a theoretical perspective (in that the difference noted between the ‘theory-in-use’ and ‘espoused theory’ constitutes a different type of ‘error’ than the difference between the behavioural norms and the environment), it should be noted that the substance of the ‘errors’ in 2015 is related to that identified in 2011. Specifically, the EU’s underlying behavioural norm of defining the goals of the approach of the ENP, whether in openly controlling the process (as in 2011) or simply acting in that manner (as in 2015), can be seen as clearly connected to the lack of ‘double loop’ learning in both instances.<sup>41</sup> The persistence of this underlying issue – the control exerted over the definition of the elements of the ENP – although manifesting in different forms, suggests that the current policy is best understood from this wider, historical perspective. This would be in line with general understandings about the importance of time in explaining outcomes (e.g. Pierson 2004); however the synthetic framework used in this study would not imply that, for example, the outcome of 2015 was *more likely* because of the outcome of 2011 (as would be the case in studies focused upon the role of path dependence, for example (on path dependency, see Pierson 2000, 489–96)). In this sense, the approach taken here uses time to explain the current state, without using it as a distinct variable; that is, the decision to only take a ‘single loop’ approach in 2011 led to the policy that itself was not fundamentally modified in 2015, but did not determine the outcome of the 2015 review. As such, the current state of the policy can be understood as the outcome of a series of connected, although distinct, learning events.

Furthermore, the contemporary state of the policy can be seen as the product of a series of identity-based challenges having been resolved in favour of maintaining the status quo in each instance rather than engaging in fundamental behavioural (and thus identity) change. In each instance, it was seen that the underlying reason for the rejection of a ‘double loop’ approach could be linked to the preservation of elements of the EU’s identity. That the two instances of this challenge were related – concerned

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<sup>40</sup> This result thus confirms and reinforces the basis of the initial ‘puzzle’ – that the EU could have been expected to behave differently in both instances, given the conditions in which it found itself.

<sup>41</sup> In a sense, this might also be understood as the underlying issue from 2011 being at least known as an issue in 2015, with the resulting behaviour seen as a failure to address the underlying problem with this new awareness in mind. This would position the 2015 outcomes as not so different as the initial data might suggest, but rather as a more complex version of the original issue seen in 2011.

with the role of *values* in the policy – should not be a surprise within the context of the historical process here; if elements of the identity of the EU (as distinct from their manifestation in behaviour) were preserved as a result of the decision to not undergo ‘double loop’ learning in 2011, it should not be unexpected that these same elements of identity were identifiable in the decision not to undergo ‘double loop’ learning in 2015.<sup>42</sup> As such, it is possible to understand the contemporary state of the policy as a series of attempts by the EU to avoid engaging in fundamental change due to attempts to preserve its identity. This continued repetition of identity-preservation in the face of external information indicating that change is necessary would fit with Mitzen’s (2006b, 350–51) characterization of ontological security-seeking behaviour. Thus, it is possible to understand the combination of the two reviews as being not just two separate occasions on which the identity-related behaviours of the EU preserved, but a case where the same identity-related behaviour is *repeatedly* preserved, despite expectations that it should change to address its environment. In this way, the contemporary state of the policy can be seen not only as a series of learning events, but also as a series of identity-preserving events in which repetition of the same behaviour can be observed.

With these results in mind, it is possible to present the findings as an answer to the research question. The question for this research was: *what explains the European Union’s lack of fundamental learning with respect to the European Neighbourhood Policy?* From the above results, it can be said that: *fundamental learning did not occur within the context of the ENP, even though it should have been expected, because the ‘errors’ the EU encountered required the EU to change itself to address them, and it chose not to change itself in order to preserve elements of its own identity.* In short, the lack of fundamental learning here can be understood as the result of the EU choosing ‘single loop’ approaches to ‘double loop’ problems in order to preserve its own identity. When viewed from the context of the current policy, it can further be understood that the current policy can be seen as *series* of occasions in which these ‘errors’ requiring a change to the EU itself were encountered, but that the identity-preserving course of

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<sup>42</sup> Although this relationship is visible in this case, the theoretical framework does not require that this is constant over time. Furthermore, while this is not a surprise (given that the reviews were attempting to address the same policy), there is no reason within the framework to assume it should be *expected* in general.

action was taken. It is therefore possible to understand the current policy as a function of organizational learning behaviours within the EU ('errors', behavioural norms, etc.), the outcome of which is underpinned by concerns of ontological security on the part of the EU. In the next (final) chapter, conclusions based on these findings are presented, and implications for ENP scholarship and future research are noted.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, the case of the ENP was examined from the perspective of a synthesis of organizational learning and ontological security in order to answer the question: *what explains the European Union's lack of fundamental learning with respect to the European Neighbourhood Policy?* It was established that this synthetic theoretical approach provided a theoretical perspective that differs from existing approaches to studying the ENP (e.g. Schumacher 2015; Natorski 2016; Johansson-Nogués 2018) in that it allowed for the incorporation of feedback while also incorporating a level-of-analysis that focused upon the organization. This theoretical approach resulted in a framework that understands resistance to 'double loop' (i.e. 'fundamental') learning as connected to an underlying challenge to the identity of the learner (in this case, the EU). In order to explain the continuity of the ENP, the theoretical framework was then applied to the 'organization' of DG NEAR, utilising data from the two review periods of the ENP (2011 and 2015) as in-case observations of the ENP – these being instances of the most likely points of observation of learning within the policy's lifetime. This data, comprising speeches by the relevant Commissioners of DG NEAR and supplemented with policies, treaties and other documents, allowed for the behavioural norms of the EU, as embodied by DG NEAR here, to be extracted and analysed within the broader synthetic theoretical framework.

The analysis of the data, both as individual reviews and then together in their historical context, demonstrated that, not only can the current ENP be understood as the outcome of a series of learning events that threatened the EU's identity, but also that the synthetic theoretical framework itself provides an internally-consistent result. At each time period, the EU was observed as being aware of an issue that required 'double loop' (i.e. 'fundamental') learning, yet chose to engage only in 'single loop' learning. In addition, at each time period, this choice can be connected to the EU's identity, with the EU acting to preserve the current approach at each time rather than change aspects of its own identity. Specifically, while the exact behavioural manifestation of identity-preservation differed for each in-case observation, in both observations it was seen that the identity of *the EU as a promoter of values* was challenged. As a result, it can be said

that this study provides an explanation for the lack of fundamental learning with respect to the ENP at each time period and, when these observations are placed together, also provides an explanation for the fundamental continuity seen in the current policy. That is: *fundamental learning did not occur within the context of the ENP, even though it should have been expected, because the 'errors' the EU encountered required the EU to change itself to address them, and it chose not to change itself in order to preserve elements of its own identity.* It can also be said that the framework used here produced a result that is internally coherent within the context of theoretical synthesis. As such, it validates the synthetic theoretical framework used in this study as a means to understand the lack of fundamental learning in a policy context.

The findings should, however, be read in light of the limitations of the present study. First, as noted earlier, the traditional method of examining behaviour through the lens of organizational learning theories is by means of contemporaneous interviews. As the ENP reviews represent historical examples, this was not possible. While the methodological approach taken here produced sufficient data to conduct an analysis, had it been possible to have access to more in-depth contemporaneous data concerning the learning processes, the findings here could have been further substantiated by the additional detail that such data can provide. Second, as a single case study with in-case observations, the conclusions drawn here are also necessarily limited, in this case to the context of the EU's foreign policy as enacted through the Commission. However, the underlying theoretical models used (organizational learning and ontological security) are more general in their applicability, suggesting that there is scope for future testing of this approach, at a minimum, in other areas of the EU's policy portfolio that are linked to the EU's external action. Finally, from the perspective of theory-testing, this case provides a clear instance of identity-based challenges being related to a lack of fundamental learning however, as a single case study, this result may not hold for all institutions or supranational settings. Further testing of the applicability of the framework to examples of supranational entities other than the EU in future studies would be a welcome contribution to establishing the scope of these findings.

Nevertheless, the findings can be seen as connecting to the existing literature on the ENP, while potentially providing a different perspective to contemporary understandings of the 2015 review in particular. First, the finding that identity-preserving behaviours play a role in the EU's policy learning efforts adds more nuance to the critiques of the lack of substantial change in the ENP (e.g. Lavenex 2017), by providing more insight into the specific causes of this outcome (in the manner of Börzel and Lebanidze 2017; Lightfoot, Szent-Iványi, and Wolczuk 2016), and in doing so demonstrates the value of examining the ENP from the perspective of *learning* (thereby including feedback). Second, by highlighting the role of 'values' as an underlying element of the ENP, and the connection these have to the EU's identity, these findings would appear to support those strands of the ENP literature that emphasise the normative aspects of the EU's behaviour in the 'neighbourhood' (e.g. Del Sarto 2016; Zielonka 2013; Pänke 2019); in particular, the repetitive identity-preserving, and thus, value promotion-preserving, choices seen in the data would suggest that 'values' do play a key role for the EU's behaviour in the ENP (contra Bosse 2007; cf. also Johansson-Nogués 2007, 191–92). Third, the in-case findings engage with discussions on the type of change seen at each review period; specifically, the findings here would indicate that the 2015 review did not represent a significant change for the policy, and that the EU's identity was relatively stable with respect to the policy over these periods (insofar as the EU's behaviour with respect to the ENP might be considered an example of the 'routinized' behaviour that Mitzen (2006b, 350–51) describes); this would be in contrast to some contemporary research into the EU's identity that understands the 2015 review (as a precursor to the EUGS) to constitute a more noteworthy change (e.g. Johansson-Nogués 2018, esp. 11; Korosteleva 2018, 11). This suggests that more fine-grained analysis of the 2015 review and the EUGS is necessary to understand the relationship between the changes therein and their connection to different elements of the EU's identity. In these ways, the findings contribute to the existing literature regarding the ENP.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to understandings of EU foreign policy and policy change more broadly. That ontological security theories can be usefully applied to the case of the ENP gives more support to studies that take this approach when analysing

the EU generally (e.g. Johansson-Nogués 2018; Mitzen 2018). In particular, this study suggests that ontological security approaches could provide useful analytical lenses when considering the lack of fundamental change in other areas of the EU's policy portfolio, especially those areas that connect to the EU's external action. More broadly, the finding that identity-preservation plays a role in the ENP would place this research in dialogue with perspectives on the EU's foreign policy that understand the role of the EU's policies to be different from their *prima facie* ends, whether within the EU itself, (e.g. Rayroux 2013; Mälksoo 2016), or within the ENP countries (e.g. Sasse 2008). By seemingly confirming the value of these approaches, this study suggests that a deeper analysis of the underlying purpose/roles of the ENP could further prove a useful area of research. Finally, with respect to policy change more broadly, the study provides empirical support for understanding change through a broader, organizational lens than existing institutionalist accounts would provide (e.g. see Fioretos 2011, 372–76), while still lending support to the underlying sociological institutionalist concern for the role of norms in understanding change (i.e. March and Olsen 1998, 951–52). This suggests that there is scope for exploring points of overlap within these disparate theoretical approaches in order to provide a more comprehensive account of policy change in general. In these ways, the findings contribute not only the study of the ENP, but also to the broader literature concerning the EU's foreign policy and policy change.

In conclusion, the study has presented a synthetic theoretical framework and analysed the findings that resulted from the application of that framework in order to understand the lack of fundamental change within the ENP. By combining organizational learning and ontological security, the framework presented here provided an account of the ENP's development over time that explained not just how the lack of fundamental learning occurred, but why this was the case. It was seen that, with the ENP, the EU did not engage in fundamental learning because it faced 'errors' that would have required it to change itself, and chose not to do so in order to preserve the elements of its identity that such a change would challenge. This result contributes to the existing literature concerning the ENP in the ways noted above, and to the methodological and theoretical potential of the two underlying theories. This study then, has not only provided an answer to the research question with regard to the ENP, it has highlighted the role that

identity plays as a factor when attempting to understand a lack of fundamental learning with respect to the EU's external action. In doing so, this study has contributed to the understanding of the normative elements of the EU's external action, to studies of policy change and policy learning within the EU, to knowledge of the practical interaction between behavioural norms and change within DGs, and to the analytical potential of organizational learning and ontological security in explaining these areas, while providing additional opportunities to expand this research in the future.

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