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Re-thinking ‘Normative Power Europe’ from a Historical Perspective: Non-European Integration and the “Normative Shift”

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Abstract

This article is a follow-up of the ‘grand’ theoretical debate on Normative Power Europe and it seeks to engage with the surprising lack of in-depth historical investigation of this research program. The article attempts to contribute to the existing literature by trying to identify the origins of EU’s ‘normativeness’, i.e. to locate a significant normative shift in the EU’s becoming as a normative power. In doing so, it will advance the premise that the innovative model of governance of the European Union, which inspired other processes of regional integration elsewhere, constituted and validated the EU as a normative power long before the EU itself assumed such a role. Such forms of “silent”, quiescent and “passive” normative behavior were a priori to conscious political endeavors to promote new norms and structural change in the world. This means that the normative ontology of the European Union was first acquired through its ideational impact and the emulation of its system of governance beyond Europe, in different other forms of regional integration. The exploration of this largely under-theorized and empirically uninvestigated strand of enquiry will hopefully bring valuable reflections and perspectives on the normative content of the EU system of governance.

It is almost taken for granted that the European Union (EU), in the pursuit of its goals and policies internally and externally, acts in a normative way, by promoting and supporting a thickly normative agenda. In a more concrete sense, this entails an ability to re-mould and re-define rules and standards of behavior in the realm of interstate relations. There has been a vivid interest in this particular problematique in the past years, with the ever-growing leading role of EU in global affairs.

Both in the academia and also in political speeches, the adjective “normative” has often been added to “the European Union” in order to capture the specificity of EU’s identity on the international scene. An overview of the literature focusing on “normative power Europe” points to a continuously expanding research program, which has been built around some core issues and areas of focus. Starting with Ian Manners, who coined the term “Normative Power Europe” (NPE) in 2002, there has been an impressive number of scholars who, drawing on this concept, have developed similar or alternative conceptualizations and case-study investigation.

This article challenges a particular aspect of this debate, namely the utter lack of solid historical enquiry within this research programme. While there are empirical references and studies, they employ the conceptual and analytical tools of NPE to current or recent event, but there is hardly any attempt to try to locate a “normative shift” in the historical evolution of the European Union. This enterprise can be accused of a certain “slipperiness” given the intrinsic ‘moral’ and normative-guiding behavior of Europe in the world throughout history. However, this article will unpack both the theoretical tenets of NPE and the historical evolution of the EU, bearing in mind the specific task of ‘detecting’ and exploring the normative implications of the European Union, as a distinct actor (not to be confused with Europe), in global politics.

Therefore, it will put to scrutiny whether it is appropriate, in the quest for a “normative momentum”, to search for specific conditions and circumstances that led to a ‘detour’ towards a normative vernacular of the EU. Alternatively, it will argue that a historical perspective on the development and becoming of the EU as a normative power shows that its origins are to be traced back to a-priori academic or even political acknowledgement of its own normative role. The article will advance the premise that before engaging consciously and actively in promoting norms and standards in the world, the EU, through its innovative system of governance, had already been legitimized and validated as a normative power by other actors, through processes of regional integration outside of Europe. This process, which can be termed “silent normativeness” marks the beginning of the EU’s outstanding transformative role in the world.

Normative Power and Betterment the World: Overview of a Discourse

For Ian Manners, the ideational impact of the European Union in relation to other actors confers it a normative role. In various aspects of its external engagement, the European Union is able to (re)define what passes for “normal” in world politics. In doing so, the European Union does not simply offer prescriptions or teaches lessons to others, but parades its own model to the world and, hence, its *power of example*¹. In a later article, in 2008, Ian Manners contends that

normative power can be studied as an innovative act of breaching away from normalcy in world politics.

This means that by its very existence and process of integration, the EU managed to change the norms and standards of inter-national relations, which had previously been bounded by the logic of state-centricity.² This novel, multilayered system of governance that questioned the ontological foundation of classical state sovereignty, was not only successful and increasingly credible within the EU, but it was soon to be emulated beyond Europe.

Pushing the argument further on, Manners claims that the normative component should not be evaluated solely in respect to what the Union *is* (a novel system of supranational governance), but also how it *acts* in a normative (i.e. ethically good) way. In this respect, the ground-breaking peculiarity of the European Union resides in its practices of promoting normative principles generally acknowledged by the United Nations, driven by an ethos to build a more *just, cosmopolitical world*.³

A useful contribution to the debate was given by Helene Sjursen, who questioned the theoretical validity of the “normative power” literature as the latter did not provide precision for empirical analysis. Therefore, the underlying question that emerges is “how does one recognize normative power Europe when one sees it?”.⁴ Sjursen suggested that the solution is to see how the European Union changes the structural determinants of power politics by strengthening international law. Therefore, Sjursen’s article aims at establishing benchmarks for assessing the “normativeness” of EU and sees the key in EU’s impact on the cosmopolitan dimension of international law, stressing *individual* rights and freedoms, not only rights of sovereign states.⁵

It is beyond the scope of this paper to steep deeper into the discussion of these normative principles of governance, such as sustainable peace, consensual democracy, human rights, rule of law, etc. It is also of less interest to unpack the whole construct of EU as a normative power, which is an enterprise many scholars have embarked on.⁶ In a similar fashion, other authors explore the ethical character of EU foreign action and the impact and implications of this self-selling of EU as a “force for good” in the world, striving for the common good. Some refer to its possible hidden agenda, hypocrisy, discourse-practice gap or, even worse, as a type of rhetoric that shrewdly avoids responsibility.⁷ Another ‘branch’ of the debate has focused on the multiple facets of normative power, its means, ends and interests.⁸

No matter how critically engaged and pertinent all these intellectual exercises have been, they all constitute a critique from *within*, from a standpoint that takes the ‘normativeness’ of EU global action as given and then deconstruct its ontology in order to observe certain features. However, the assumption of this article is that it is crucial to look into the diachronic

construction of this normative identity, to search for a possible point of departure or the *normative shift*, if one can be clearly identified.⁹

The Normative Trajectory

The “when”, “how” and “why” of EU as Normative Power

The attempt to map a distinct moment that constituted the normative shift in the five decades of EU integration is by no means an easy task. Disentangling this intricate puzzle might not lead to a clear-cut answer, given the fact that to some degree there has been a normative approach of the European Union, in various degrees, from its initial set off in the late 1950s. To begin with, ‘traces’ of what we might call the “normative temptation” have been apparent with the Schuman Declaration which states, among others, that: *With increased resources Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent.*¹⁰

Likewise, the ensuing phases of EU integration continued to highlight the outward looking sense of a missionary role, which has pervaded the EU discourse throughout its integration and successive enlargements. The Declaration of the Copenhagen Summit of 1973 stands as a proof to this fact posits that:

*the Nine are convinced that their union will benefit the whole international community since it will constitute an element of equilibrium and a basis for co-operation with all countries, whatever their size, culture or social system. The Nine intend to play an active role in world affairs and thus to contribute, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, to ensuring that international relations have a more just basis; that the independence and equality of States are better preserved; that prosperity is more equitably shared; and that the security of each country is more effectively guaranteed.*¹¹

Therefore, looking into past and recent developments, it is clear that there has been an inherent normative content of each and every EU action or document. Its goals are outward-looking, preaching and supporting the betterment of the world, based on an epistemologic superiority: the EU knows how to bring about change and improvement and also make a convincing case that would work at a global scale. However, these attempts *per se* do not render EU as a normative power because they have often had hardly any noticeable external implication at the time. For the EU to be called “normative” it has to cause structural change and have normative

implications in world politics, by redefining the acceptable rules and norms of inter-state relations and practices of governance.

Similarly, this paper posits that it is misleading to search for the origins of the EU as a normative power in any of the grand political events that took place in the 1990s, such as the fall of communism, the Balkan wars etc. Likewise, arguments like those claiming that the EU as a normative power is nothing but a timid response to an actual incapacity to intervene otherwise due to the non-existence of an army overlook important theoretical and political factors of NPE, which render these arguments simplistic. The seeds of EU normativeness lie, quite ironically, not in an intentional endeavor or pre-conceived action plan to disseminate certain norms of conduct at a global/ regional level, but in a process of emulation which it inspired beyond Europe, which started to acquire particular significance in the 1980s.

Non-European Regional Integration and “Silent Normativeness”

Regional Blocs outside of Europe

This article puts forward the hypothesis that, while the theoretical underpinnings of the NPE form a solid building block, there is still a lack of empirical depth as to the historical foundations of EU as a normative power. Tackling the question when the EU started being/acting in a normative fashion, inspiring and mobilizing other (groups of) states for a fundamental change of their patterns of interaction and interests, it is of paramount importance to look beyond EU intentionality and ‘transparent’ goals. The incipience of EU as a normative actor should be investigated in more subtle transformations that took place outside the EU but decisively inspired by the latter. One such case is the formation of other regional blocs through regional integration.

A methodological clarification becomes important at this point. It goes without saying that throughout modernity, Europe, as a cultural and political entity, has been a great source of inspiration for the entire Globe. Notions of progress, nation, state, society as well as economic relations or political institutions etc, are all European in nature and became transposed elsewhere either by coercive means and violent subjugation or by benevolent and voluntary emulation. Nevertheless, EU as a normative power becomes such a source of inspiration due to a specificity of factors. This is not to deny the “Europeanness” embedded in the EU, but there are clear delineations.

Apart from the ideational aspects, the EU managed to distinguish itself and become a role model due to a set of practical achievements: the creation of common institutions and policies at a regional level, outstanding economic development, a consistent and evolving

Community law, a coherent system of governance. These conferred EU immense credibility and an unequalled “power of example”. To a large degree, all the ensuing processes of regional integration looked up to the EU as the ultimate model to import.

While the EU has recently been more eager to encourage economic integration, as early as the 1970s it was not directly involved in any process of regional cooperation and movements for integration outside Europe. However, the image it projected onto the world and its internal developments had an exquisite inspirational ethos. In many ways, it can be argued that non-European integration was an epiphenomenon of the European integration itself.

A brief overview if these processes can further shed light on this premise. The early successes of European integration gave rise, since the 1960s, to the formation of regional organizations, particularly in Latin America, and to a lesser extent in Asia or Africa. A second wave of regionalism can be traced back to the 1980s, with increasing specialization of actors and the creation of several multi-tier systems of governance.¹² Progressively, regional integration started off, increased and deepened, following a trajectory as that experienced in Europe.

When ASEAN (the Association of South-East Asian Nations) was formed in 1967 it was committed to establish an area of free trade by 2015 and also to develop a body of law that would be commonly binding. Despite a much slower pace of integration, ASEAN has registered remarkable achievements, in economic cooperation and beyond. Currently, it is developed along three pillars: ASEAN Political-Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, a structure that resembles the EU.

Displaying similar features of evolution, when MERCOSUR Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1991 it was the consequence of a longer process of regional cooperation and integration that was initiated as early as the Montevideo Treaty of 1980. Despite the fact that its developments have been jeopardized by diplomatic or economic disputes, what is of relevance is the fact that it was heavily influenced by the EU model. Avowedly expressed in the 1991 Document, the ground for the initiation of regional integration started with *bearing in mind international trends, particularly the integration of large economic areas*.¹³

The explicit reference to a new model of interstate relations, based on increased cross-border cooperation and integration, the pioneer of which was the European Community, shows that there was an undeniable impact of the European Common Market in Latin America, leading the latter to consider the benefits of linking *economic development to a free trade arrangement*.¹⁴

Moreover, the Southern Common Market was conceived to be based on rights and reciprocities, free movements of goods, services and factors of production as well as a harmonization of the state parties' legislations in all the relevant areas.¹⁵ All these provisions are similar or identical to the principles and objectives inherent in the EU integration from its onset in the 1950s.

Last but not least, a more recent but equally relevant instance of non-European form of integration, bluntly and assumedly inspired (or even copied in some respects) by the EU model is the African Union (AU). Created in 2002, the AU paralleled the European model, although it is specifically designed to address issues and challenges on the African Continent. Composed of 53 states, the AU mirrors the EU in institutional structures as well as certain economic and cultural aspects. The Union is organized around a group of core institutions: the African Commission, the Pan-African Parliament, an Executive Council, Court of Justice and the Commission of the Union.¹⁶

In addition to that, the AU aspires to adopt a single currency and a specific financial institutional framework, consisting of the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund and the Investment Bank.¹⁷ Like in the earlier forms of regional integration, the EU has been a pivotal, sine qua non actor, albeit "acting from the distance", by providing a model that could be further on emulated. This is hardly a matter of doubt, as openly and sharply stated by an AU official, Mohamed Mustoofe, in an interview: *The European Union has served as a source of inspiration.*¹⁸

Filling the (Historical) Gap: "Silent" Normativeness

Bearing in mind all these instances of non-European regional integration it can be inferred that starting with the 1980s, the European Union inspired, through its own success, other similar processes of regional integration. Therefore, the assets of the EU as a normative power and its groundbreaking model of governance were not translated into an active engagement abroad. The European Union was not initially an actor invested with an agency that was purposefully committed to exporting certain norms and "lessons learned" to others.

Long before assuming normative and ethical roles on the international scene or before the debate was initiated in the academia, the EU had already been inspiring norms and structural change by its very 'being'. The 'normativeness' embedded in the EU manifested itself, at this stage, in quiescence, without vocally or ambitiously hailing change and betterment in the world. This "silent" normative salience is the initial phase in the EU's becoming as a normative power. Moreover, its ability to drive normative and ethical change as a distant actor, not directly

implicated, is a proof of its exceptional ability to instill new standards of behavior, aspirations and expectations without actual, physical interference.

The EU model of successful regional integration was, as a result, not only a constant source of inspiration, but also a *passive promoter* of regional integration, especially in MERCOSUR. The logic of emulation came into play as the path of economic integration followed the step-by-step example of the EU: it started with sectoral cooperation and integration between Argentina and Brazil in strategic industries, in the 1980s, continuing with progressive liberalization of trade and the following plans to create a common market for goods, services, capital and labour.¹⁹

Concluding Remarks: Questioning the present-ism of ‘Normative Power Europe’

The consistent literature on the EU as a normative power has embarked on an ambitious project to develop a coherent and theoretically and analytically viable framework to grasp the tenets of EU ‘normativeness’. However, in the paucity of solid empirical and historical research, the current theoretical framework is deprived of a long-time, diachronic perspective and is rendered an undeserved a-temporality. By stripping the research of its historical frame of reference, much of the NPE literature simply places concepts in a present context and proceeds to analyze current events and situations on this basis, or contends to assume the origins of NPE in regard to an array of well-established, overly repeated clichés (the end of East-West divisions, the Balkan wars etc).

Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the ‘normativeness’ of the EU is discussed in its historical, evolutionary unfolding. Apart from inducing more methodological rigor and clarifying the quandary of chronology, this analytical move can further shed light on the theoretical underpinnings of the NPE as such. As it has been discussed, the outstanding normative power of the EU started to produce effects with processes of regional integration elsewhere, by inspiring and spreading norms, values, ideas without an appropriated normative agenda on the part of the EU at this point. These can be considered the first instances of the EU as a normative power. Whereas it later on assumed such an agenda in its foreign relations, by conscious and active engagement, the EU had already been confirmed and endorsed as a nascent normative power.

The EU, in the trajectory of its becoming a normative power did experience a stage in which its ‘normativeness’ consisted of what the EU *is*, per se, not only what it *does*²⁰. With the benefit of hindsight it can be argued that processes of regional integration outside Europe were largely inspired by the European model, the latter offering from the distance an example to be

followed. The normative power of the European Union, intrinsic in its ontological foundation, was already able to produce a normative change in the world, in actors' behavior, even before the EU itself acknowledged and acclaimed its mission to the others.

NOTES

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¹ Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms?" , in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No 2, (2002), p 252.

² Ian Manners, "The Normative Ethics of the European Union", in *International Affairs*, Vol 84, No 1, (2008), p 45.

³ Ibidem, pp 46-47.

⁴ Helene Sjursen, "The EU as a "normative power": How can this be?", in *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 13, No 2, (2006), p 235-236.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ For instance, Michelle Pace, in "The Construction of EU Normative Power", discusses the contents, process, agents, environment, mechanisms and goals of NPEU and how this construction serves or disempowers the European Union in its external engagements.

⁷ See Lisbeth Aggestam, "Introduction: ethical power Europe?", in *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No 1, (2008).

⁸ See Tuomas Forsberg, "Normative Power Europe (Once More): A Conceptual Clarification and Empirical Analysis", Paper presented for Presentation at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, New York, February, 2009.

⁹ An observation should be made as to the fact that the EU as a normative power does not share the same chronology as the academic reflections on it, but it is prior and independent, analytically, from scholarly insights. This means that while the concept of "normative power" is quite recent, traces of EU 'normativeness' can and should be looked for *a priori* to their academic labeling.

¹⁰ "The Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950", available online at: <http://www.ena.lu/schuman-declaration-paris-1950-022500006.html>, accessed: November 2009.

¹¹ "Document on The European Identity" published by the Nine Foreign Ministers on 14 December 1973, in Copenhagen, available online at: <http://www.ena.lu/declaration-european-identity-copenhagen-14-december-1973-020002278.html>, accessed: November 2009.

¹² Jurgen Ruland, ASEAN and the European Union: a Bumpy Inter-regional Relationship, Discussion Paper, 2001, pp 4-5, available online at: http://www.zei.de/download/zei_dp/dp_c95_rueland.pdf, accessed: December 2009.

¹³ MERCOSUR Free Trade Agreement, Asuncion, 26 March 1991.

¹⁴ Marcos Aurelio Guedes de Oliveira, "MERCOSUR: Political Developments and Comparative Issues with the European Union", Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies

Association, July 2005, available online at: <http://www6.miami.edu/EUCenter/guedesfinal.pdf>, Accessed: December 2009.

¹⁵ Art 1, MERCOSUR Free Trade Agreement.

¹⁶ Art 5, Constitutive Act of the African Union, Lome, 11 July, 2000.

¹⁷ Art 19, Constitutive Act of the AU.

¹⁸ Renata Goldirova, “The EU: a model impossible to export?”, 22 March 2007, available online at: <http://euobserver.com/9/23753>.

¹⁹ Tobias Lenz, “Problematizing the EU’s Model Export to Mercosur-Strategies and Motivations”, Paper presented for the GARNET conference, 24-26 April 2008, pp 12-13, available online at : http://www.ies.be/files/repo/conference2008/EUinIA_V_3_Lenz.pdf?download, Accessed: December 2009.

²⁰ The contrast between what the EU “is” and “does” is emphasized by Ian Manners, quoted above. The distinction seems, however, superficial and arbitrary because it is very difficult to establish a clear-cut separation. The EU’s simple “being” produces a certain type of discourse which has multiple effects on other actors and their behavior and bids for transformation and action.