

Is the EU a Normative Power?

Written by Daniel Hardwick

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DANIEL HARDWICK, SEP 3 2011

Following the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the subsequent upheaval in Europe, scholars in the field of Politics and International Relations have sought to conceptualise the European Union (EU) as an international actor. After nearly fifty years of a bi-polar superpower dominated world, with Europe as the epicentre, the EU (European Community prior to 1993) was suddenly presented with a multitude of challenges that needed to be addressed for it to be considered a power in the international system. The collapse of the Soviet Union left a number of states in Eastern Europe grappling for national sovereignty; Civil War in Yugoslavia erupted; the United States entered the Gulf War; and West and East Germany were reunited. Amid the Yugoslavian debacle, the signing of the Treaty on European Union in 1992 signalled a more coherent outlook for an EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which bound its members to common policies over issues including humanitarian aid and peacekeeping, in addition to other policies such as trade and cooperation agreements, conflict prevention and economic sanctions, to the point where it is the only genuine supranational power in world politics (Smith 2005: 171).

The debate has moved from the individual member state level of analysis to an analysis of the EU as a distinct institution, which has allowed for an increased critique of its conceptual role in world politics (White 2004: 17). Former High Representative Javier Solana commented: 'The EU has responsibility to work for the 'global common good'. That is a fitting way of describing the EU's global role and ambition' (Aggestam 2008: 6). Ian Manners has long argued that the EU is a normative power. He defines this as the way 'it changes the norms, standards and prescriptions of world politics away from bounded expectations of state-centricity', which 'are generally acknowledged, within the United Nations system, to be universally applicable' (2008: 45-46). This then allows for analysis of whether the EU is a normative power. It may portray itself as one, but does it act in a manner befitting its given conception? However, to assess whether the EU is a normative power, it is necessary to consider some of the EU's actions and analyse whether other conceptualisations of the EU as an international actor, including neo-realism and the English School, are more applicable.

Furthermore, is being a normative power achievable? What is a 'global common good' and is it possible to diffuse it universally? I will begin the essay by identifying the key aspects that Manners cites as central to the EU as a normative power. Then, I will analyse whether Manners' argument of normative power is achievable in world politics and if the EU is moving closer or further away from this conception. Issues of sovereignty and developments in its European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) suggest it is receding from normative power. The final section will then consider that if the EU cannot be considered a normative power, what is a more appropriate conception of it as an international actor? I will use examples of EU intervention in proximate third countries to deduce whether the EU is a normative power and argue that the more pragmatic approach of the English School based on solidarist and pluralist thought is a more pertinent conception of the EU as an international actor (Aggestam 2008: 5).

Aspects of EU Normative Power

Manners asserts that 'the notion of a normative power Europe is located in a discussion of the 'power over opinion'... and the desire to move beyond the debate over state-like features through and understanding of the EU's identity'; effectively a series of principles and shared beliefs that the member states adhere to and set an example with (Manners 2002: 239). These principles, or norms, are enshrined in the *acquis communautaire* (the EU's body of law). They include: the centrality of peace; liberty; democracy; supranational rule of law; and human rights. Four minor

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norms are also identified: social solidarity; anti-discrimination; sustainable development; and good governance. Manners argues that these norms differentiate it from other political entities and incline it to act in a normative way. Particular emphasis is given to the EU's historical context, hybrid polity and political-legal constitution (2002: 240). The EU's member states have developed agreement on these principles to the point that they are legally binding commitments (Dunne 2008: 22). Furthermore, Manners is convinced that the EU will remain and continue to be a normative power for the foreseeable future (Manners 2008: 45). The EU demonstrates its normative power by diffusing it through contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion and the cultural filter. The EU therefore diffuses its norms by example, rather than in the coercive manner of a traditional military power. One of the most important norms of EU normative power is that of human rights, closely linked to the policy of conflict prevention. The EU, when dealing with third countries, stipulates conditionality clauses that bind the recipients to practice ethical human rights, as stipulated in the European Convention on Human Rights. In addition, the EU includes human rights clauses with trade partners (Manners 2006: 187). Transference diffusion, where the EU diffuses its norms through trade or technical assistance, highlights its attempts to spread human rights through conditionality clauses (Manners 2002: 245). Manners comments that the way the EU promotes its norms is as important as what it is promoting (2008: 55), indicating how the EU's non-military diffusion methods can be considered specific to it. From this, it can be argued that the EU identifies itself as a normative power, as a result of the codification of its norms as binding agreements. However, a barometer of norms is required to deduce whether the EU's norms are generally accepted in the wider international system.

Is the EU a normative power?

To discern whether the EU is a normative power, it is necessary to consider why the EU's historical context, hybrid polity and political-legal constitution make it unique, or *sui generis*. Why is it that the EU is predisposed to act in this manner because of the genealogy of its norms, and how can this be validated against other actors' perceptions of norms (Sjursen 2006: 242). Sjursen asserts that 'it is only by presenting clear definitions of what 'normative power' is, and consequently what it is not, that we can realistically hope to say something empirical about the argument' (2006: 236). If Manners' definition of EU norms stated in the introduction is implemented, it can be argued that as the EU has enshrined its core norms in its constitution and adheres to these norms, as stipulated by various articles explaining their meaning, then it will be acting as a normative power. Its insistence that new members must comply with its constitutional norms gives credence to the argument that the EU is a normative power; it is changing the norms of world politics away from state-centricity through leading by example. In addition, the EU's support of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in contrast to the US' opposition highlights it as a normative power (Dunne 2008: 24). However, Manners' claim that the EU's norms are generally acknowledged by the United Nations (UN) is contestable. The idea of multilateralism can shed light on whether it is possible for the EU to be considered a normative power. Multilateralism is central to the European Security Strategy (ESS), which promotes the UN as the foundation of a law-based international order. However, a key aspect of multilateralism is the principle of national sovereignty (Sjursen 2006: 245). If the norm of human rights is considered, is the EU acting as a normative power if it attempts to diffuse this to third countries? For example, although the EU places high value in human rights, this does not mean that China holds the same beliefs. Furthermore, the EU's willingness to trade with China despite its insistence on human rights conditionality clauses contradicts its norms, leading to an argument in line with realist thought that it is simply promoting its own self-interest. Although Manners has demonstrated that the EU has displayed a distinct desire to diffuse human rights to China through discourse, the ambiguity of the situation leaves notions of normative power open to criticism (2002: 248). Human rights would have to be legally enforceable to conceive of it as a universally accepted norm (Sjursen 2006: 246). In addition, the lack of sanctions in a multilateral institution means that member states can contravene the norms without fear of severe repercussion (Sjursen 2006: 246). Great Britain's decision to enter the war in Iraq despite French and German opposition highlights this (Blair 2004: 207). With this in mind, the EU as a normative power as defined by Manners does not correspond. For example, the Iraq War highlighted differences between member states and demonstrates how sovereign power and national-self interest is still relevant. Great Britain's prominent involvement in the conflict contrasted with Germany's and France's abstinence; if member states are unable to form a coherent normative policy towards an issue as important as Iraq, then it must place severe doubt over whether the EU can operate as a normative power competing against member state self-interest. In this way, the EU's internal norms have not predisposed it to act in a normative manner and notions of normative power are acutely idealistic.

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The EU's desire to increasingly coordinate and develop its ESDP is an area where the idea of it being a normative power can also be called into question. The 2003 ESS declaration of a need to 'develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and where necessary, robust intervention' and a commitment to 'preventative engagement' marks a dramatic departure away from its constitutional norm of sustainable peace (Manners 2006: 188-191). It can be argued that it is hard to conceive of the EU as a normative power that leads by example if it employs coercion to diffuse its norms. There is a lack of consistency between internal policies and external actions (Manners 2008: 56). The EU's actions in Bosnia are able to illustrate this point further. The launch of the EU Police Mission in 2003 illustrates how member states' self-interest impedes normative action. It is one thing to agree that a situation such as Bosnia requires attention through normative action, but another to implement action with distinct non-normative methods. Hansen comments that 'the definition of tasks and goals is influenced by the merits of a given conflict and the member states' interest in its resolution' (2004: 179). Here the context of the situation is important; it is irrational to assume that normative principles can be imposed on any given situation without individual member states' own self-interest being taken into account. This also raises doubt over whether the EU as a normative power is achievable if national self-interest can never be fully disassociated from the machinations of the Union. If the EU and conflict prevention is considered, such as in Bosnia, then at face value it can be argued that the EU is acting normatively. The emergence of sustainable peace as a generally acknowledged norm by the EU and United Nations validates the former's actions in the country (Manners 2006: 185). Norms are diffused overtly, or by the physical presence of the EU in a third country. However, the EU's subsequent attempts to 'Europeanise' Bosnia have stripped local administrations of their political functions, with a view to becoming an EU member state in future. The prioritising of military over civilian objectives has undermined the EU as a normative actor in this sense (Manners 2006: 191). Despite the fact that conflict prevention has become part of EU and UN normative discourse, it is disingenuous to suggest that the EU has acted normatively if it stretches the norm of sustainable peace to the limit of what the norm entails. The EU's actions in this case are more akin to that of a great power than a normative one. The EU and the UN could continually redefine what the 'norm' is and what is not, but the need to redefine detracts from the validity of the EU as a normative power.

The EU's shift towards a more integrated and coordinated ESDP agreed in the Lisbon Treaty with the creation of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, demonstrates how the EU has reached the precipice of how far normative power can reach, and has decided to take steps away from it. Manners states that 'the military tasks [of the EU] should only be attempted under a UN mandate, in a critically reflective context, on a clear, normative basis. Without such fundamental reflection on militarisation, it is likely that... the normative power of the EU will be lost' (2006: 195). The following section will argue that the EU as a normative power has already receded, to the extent that other conceptions are more useful in analysing its role as an international actor.

Normative power, Neo-Realism and the English School applied to the EU

Returning to Solana's comments of the EU working towards a 'global common good', an analysis of whether this is achievable is required and in addition, whether diffusing the EU's norms marks it out as a normative power or a realist power maximising gain at the expense of weaker states. Does the EU adhere to the norms that it has outlined and enshrined, or do other factors, such as state sovereignty and self-interest, and hypocrisy reduce these claims? To discern this, it is necessary to apply its norms to examples of its interventions in neighbouring countries to see whether other conceptualisations explain more appropriately the EU as an international actor. Neo-realist thought offers an alternative explanation of the EU as an international actor. It asserts that in a system of international anarchy, cooperation between states is limited and that states are unitary actors concerned with maximising security and relative gains. The EU can therefore be viewed as a vehicle for its member states to maximise their own interests (Hyde-Price 2006: 220). The EU's actions in its 'near abroad' can be seen as an area where it is acting as a realist, rather than normative, power. By placing conditionality clauses on trade and on eastern European countries with the process of enlargement, the EU is imposing its own norms on third countries with coercive means. This amounts to 'milieu shaping', where the member states use the EU to maximise their relative gains in their environment and use their economic power and carrot and stick methods to force third countries into line with them (Hyde-Price 2008: 31).

Third countries are effectively left with a damage-limitation decision, as exclusion from the EU would be more damaging than inclusion, despite being forced to agree to the conditionality clauses. If ESDP is considered, neo-

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realist thought places the EU as a 'balanced multi-polarity', where as the most powerful states are too closely matched for any one of them to make a credible attempt to gain more power through military means. Therefore the ESDP has developed for 'coalitional coercive diplomacy and military crisis management' (Hyde-Price 2006: 230). Cooper has argued that the EU 'must use the laws of the jungle' when dealing with states outside of its borders, for example Iran. The fact that the EU's three most powerful members, Great Britain, Germany and France, have attempted dealing with Iran, highlights the self-interest of states being put before that of the Union. Here it can be argued that the EU is not normative and displays hypocrisy by resorting to coercion to impose its will on third countries (Hyde-Price 2008: 35). However, in my opinion this view is overly cynical and unrepresentative. Whilst the idea of the EU as a normative power may be too idealistic, it cannot be said either that EU foreign policy has become grounded in structural realism. By imposing conditionality clauses on third countries trading or aspiring to be a member of the EU, it can be argued that ethical concerns such as human rights would not mark the EU out as a realist power. 'Bringing ethics into the equation is an intrinsically normative undertaking' (Aggestam 2008: 5). The EU trades with China despite the latter's dubious human rights record, which if applied to realist thought, would show the EU to be chasing self-interest. However, as previously mentioned, Manners has highlighted EU attempts to diffuse norms through discourse with China. The fact that the EU's forces have been deployed for peacekeeping and election monitoring in countries including DR Congo highlights how it is used for peaceful means. Hyde-Price asserts that 'although security competition is muted in Europe at present, realists would expect it to grow as power relationships change, as they inevitably will' (2006: 231).

Great Britain and France's recent agreement to pool military resources would show that this is not the case, and that the EU is not acting as a realist power. In this sense, neo-realism is inadequate when describing the nuances of the EU. Whereas both normative and neo-realist arguments have some relevance, both also have flaws in conceptualising the EU as an international actor. Whilst the EU portrays itself as a normative power through its constitutional norms, the individual actions of member states, such as in Iraq, highlights how it is not demonstrating norms separate from state-centricity. In addition, neo-realism's negative view on cooperation in an anarchical international system is unable to adequately explain the increased cooperation among the EU's member states. The Great Britain and France military example shows how states are willing to cede some sovereignty in order to cooperate. This is pertinent as a state's military is often viewed as a bastion of its sovereignty. Neo-realism's inability to account for change and progress blunts its conceptualisation of the EU.

The Third Way?

If the EU as a normative or realist power is to be dismissed, a further conception will need to be considered. With this in mind, a conceptual middle ground based in the English School can offer a more balanced conceptualisation of the EU as an international actor. Following the discussion of the EU's increased military capability and coercive tactics, it is difficult to view the EU as a unique actor that acts based on its norms in world politics, despite its composition being unique (Aggestam 2008: 4). Dunne asserts that 'becoming a regional engine for the world common good requires both greater self-reliance in the provision of its own security as well as the capacity to deploy 'forces for good' rapidly to prevent or eradicate crises out of area' (2008: 14). The concept of an 'ethical power Europe' complements Dunne, with the idea that the EU should be more proactive in its pursuit of norms, rather than simply setting an example (Aggestam 2008: 1-2). Although the English School accepts that an international system of anarchy exists, it argues that sovereign states are able to form a society. Furthermore, in line with the EU becoming a 'force for good', the English School believes that prospects for global reform are more optimistic than does realism, but stops short of believing that any type of world society could ever form (Linklater 2009: 87-89).

This middle ground between Manners' idealistic view of normative power and the rather negative view of realism is a more accurate conception of the EU as an international actor. Dunne espouses the idea of 'good citizen Europe', which amounts to its ability to 'export an expression of individual rights and duties from a bounded polity to a global order'. However, it is also crucial that state self-interest must not take precedence over critical moral considerations (2008: 16). Sijrsen asserts that 'values or conceptions of what is good may vary according to cultural or social contexts' and that 'normative' power cannot be anything other than the EU promoting its own norms in a similar manner to historical empires and contemporary powers'. It can be argued that ideas of a 'global common good' are tied up in unachievable cosmopolitanism and fall foul to accusations of cultural imperialism, an issue that discredits

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the EU as a normative power (2006: 247). With this in mind, it is possible to discount the EU as a normative power as it contradicts itself. The EU has taken a more prominent role in diffusing its norms, but has not taken on the role of a great power. Dunne uses the concepts of solidarism and pluralism in the English School and asserts that they share many facets, including mutual recognition, adherence to rules, cooperation within institutions and a belief that progress is achievable (2008: 27). If the example of conditionality is considered again, the EU demonstrates the aforementioned solidarist and pluralist facets when dealing with its 'near abroad', by stating that Eastern European candidate states abide by the norms outlined in the *acquis communautaire*. However, the EU does not enforce the same conditionality with Mediterranean states, excluding Malta, Cyprus and Turkey (Charillon 2004: 258). This highlights how the EU acts as a good citizen and is sensitive to cultural and social contexts; it cannot be described as normative as economic coercion is used by threatening the removal of trade. Being a 'normative' power and diffusing it to other parts of the globe may simply be unachievable due to vast differences in culture, language and religion (Sjursen 2006: 247).

Dunne states that 'the EU is a solidarist international society in so far as its members are states that share high levels of common interests and values', but that it suffers with the capabilities-expectations gap outside of its borders. Here, pluralist ideas can be used where solidarist concepts do not fit the cultural or social context (2008: 22). Taking into account the solidarist principle of cosmopolitan law, the EU supported the ICC in contrast to US opposition, portraying itself as a normative power as it recognised the general consensus for the development of an independent ICC and that the threat to its vital interests was minimal (Dunne 2008: 24). However, in dealings with Iran and its uranium enrichment programme, the EU follows pluralist concepts by promoting non-intervention, an issue that contrasts with solidarist principles (Dunne 2008: 27). Although solidarist principles would be the more 'normative' approach, the recognition of pluralist concepts shows how EU member states' individual interests and concerns are present. This ability to decide between a solidarist and a pluralist policy shows that the EU is not a normative power, in the sense that its recognition of context, cultural differences and its ability to decide on various courses of action mean that it can decide on an appropriate policy, where being 'normative' would restrict it to its predetermined methods of norm diffusion. This is not to say that the English School is a perfect approach, and indeed, managing 27 member states' opinions on foreign policy is an issue (Dunne 2008:19). However, it is able to explain the EU as an international actor more accurately than Manners' conceptualisation of it as a normative power regarding state self-interest is considered.

Conclusion

In this essay I have sought to discern whether Manners' assertion that the EU is a normative power is agreeable, by considering its norms in relation to aspects of its foreign policy. I have demonstrated that it is difficult to agree with Manners that the EU is a normative power, due to discrepancies between what it says and what it does, the so-called capabilities-expectations gap. If the EU is not a normative power then it must be something else, and I have argued that the more pragmatic approach of English School between normative power and realism presents a more accurate depiction of the EU as an international actor. Manners' own admittance that the EU's prioritising of military over civilian operations illustrates this point (2006: 190). In addition, the EU appears to have realised the shortcomings of being a normative power and has taken steps away from the notion with the development of ESDP, although not as far as a realist power concerned with security maximisation. I have also argued that being a normative power is perhaps unattainable if the interests of its member states cannot be detached from EU foreign policy, and if the coordination of 27 separate member states is necessary. As this is the case, as demonstrated by Iraq, the EU is not acting as a normative power that is changing expectations of norms away from state-centricity; any assertion that it does is tied up in idealism. Hedley Bull, a key figure in the paradigm of the English School, asserted that states should attempt to strengthen the normative principles of international society (Wheeler and Dunne 1996: 94). However, the EU, by using non-normative means to diffuse norms and by not being able to detach itself from state self-interest, has regressed from being a normative power as Manners argues. This repositioning places the EU on a middle ground between 'normative' power and political realism. Therefore, I do not agree with Manners' assertion that the EU is a normative power.

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