

The European Union: What Kind of International Actor?



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Abstract

The contested nature of the EU's role, status and impact as an international actor is clearly demonstrated in the literature. From this three broad categories of analysis emerge: realist, civilian power and normative power. This article offers an analysis of each of these, rejecting the realist critique as too narrow and state-centric, and arguing that an approach based purely on an examination of the EU's capabilities is insufficient when seeking to explain its international actorness. Instead, it contends that the most appropriate basis for analysis is through a framework that draws on both the civilian and normative power approaches. These encapsulate both where power exists within the EU in terms of policy-making and policy instruments, and how it sets out to exercise this power in practice. To illustrate this, the article examines two important but contrasting areas of foreign policy activity: economics, with a focus on regulatory and competition policy, and security. These demonstrate that the EU has much greater scope to act, and a clearer international identity, in those policy areas where internal integration is more advanced, but that even where not, the EU is still capable of significant if smaller-scale international interventions. It therefore argues that new, alternative approaches to analysis of the EU's international actorness are necessary that move beyond the state-centric paradigms that currently predominate.

**Key Words: EU actorness, EU security, CFSP, Civilian power Europe,
Normative power Europe**

Introduction

This paper explores two key questions: what type of international actor is the EU, and how does its actorness manifest itself? The dilemma facing scholars in answering these is captured by Ginsberg (1999: 432), who describes the EU as 'neither a state nor a non-state actor...neither a conventional international organisation nor an international regime', an analysis which remains valid a decade later. This difficulty is demonstrated by the contested nature of the EU's role, status and impact as an international actor in the literature. From this, three broad categories of analysis emerge: a realist analysis, arguing that the EU will never be independent or autonomous as long as it lacks either traditional coercive (i.e. military) power or the centralised decision-making apparatus to utilise it; a civilian power analysis, contending that the EU's considerable 'soft' power and legitimacy derive from exactly this lack of traditional coercive instruments, and that by utilising only economic and diplomatic instruments it has been able to confront the complexities of interdependence both internally and externally; and a normative analysis that regards the focus on capabilities as too narrow and looks instead at broader notions of values, principles and identity, arguing that what the EU *symbolises* is as important as what it does, with its impact as much through the example it sets as the actions it takes.

The extent of the debate is also reflected in analyses of *how* the EU's actorness is perceived to manifest itself. In general, a state-centric paradigm seems to predominate in the literature which hints at an inability or unwillingness within the scholarship to fully account for the international role played by the EU. Thus, while Hill (1990) and Ginsberg (1999) both warn against analysing the EU using conceptual models derived from the study of states, it is frequently considered in terms of its capabilities (particularly military), and therefore outcomes, while being often implicitly – and sometimes explicitly – compared unfavourably to state actors, notably the US. This is to miss the point. As neither a single nor unitary actor, the EU's power is uneven both in terms of policy and geography, reflecting the realities of its internal politics and bureaucracy, and crucially, the impact of the integration process. Thus, though important, the EU's capabilities cannot be considered in isolation, or as ends in themselves. They must instead be considered in the context

of what it is as a body, what it represents (and seeks to represent), and how it is perceived externally.

Based on a survey of the existing literature, this article contends that the EU is an international actor – and in some areas achieves global impact – but it remains ‘partial...and evolving’ (Ginsberg, 2001). The article begins by assessing the three main categories of analysis noted above, rejecting the realist critique in favour of one based on a combination of civilian and normative power approaches that, it is argued, provides a more appropriate lens through which to view the EU’s international actorness. To support this, two key policy areas are considered: economics, focusing particularly on regulation and competition; and security, where although role and identity are highly contested, it has still had an impact, albeit on a far lesser scale. Taken together, these demonstrate the central point that where integration is advanced, international action has thus been necessitated to safeguard what has been created. By contrast, where integration is either absent or has made little progress – for example in the security policy – coherent and unified actorness is much harder, although not impossible. What is beyond doubt is that the EU has shown itself capable of sustained and coherent international action in some areas. The contribution of this paper, therefore, is to demonstrate the inherent limitations of analysing the EU’s international impact using state-centric models of power and influence, and suggests instead that there is a need for new approaches better able to take account of its unique character.

Theoretical Approaches

The Realist Analysis

Regarding international politics as ‘synonymous’ with the struggle for power (Morgenthau, 1978: 29; Mearsheimer, 2007: 72), realism offers a state-centric analysis of the nature of the international system. It identifies nation-states as the primary actors within an essentially anarchic system whose only stabilising factor is therefore a balance of power that most seek to maintain, but some occasionally seek to overthrow. It considers sovereignty to be axiomatic of statehood, therefore denying its ‘divisibility’ (Morgenthau, 1978: 328). It assumes states to be rational actors whose main goal is survival. And finally, it sees their ability to defend or

promote their interests within this system as based on their enjoying a monopoly over the instruments of coercive (i.e. military) power within their territory, and the autonomy of action to use them.

Realism thus denies the existence of any form of collective will or personality for the international system (Waltz, 1979), or the applicability of 'universal moral principles' to the actions of states (Morgenthau, 1978: 10). Instead, it regards international organisations as the tools of national governments, 'subordinated' to their efforts to maximise their own interests (Strange, 1996: xiv; Waltz, 2000: 18). From this perspective, the EU is inherently weak as an international actor (if indeed it is one at all), capable at best of only limited or qualified autonomous action, and then only at the behest of the Member States, particularly the most powerful, who retain ultimate control. Crucially, in the all-important area of military power it lacks either independence or autonomy of action in a strategic environment dominated by great powers, particularly the US (Bull, 1982; Kagan, 2004).

This focus on military weakness provides the core of the realist analysis. For example, Bull (1982) argued that without an effective military component, the then European Community could never become an effective international actor. Since then, efforts by the EU to develop a more effective international presence with the launch of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) have been criticised for doing the opposite, most notably by Hill (1993, 1998). He argued that the EU's efforts were being undermined by a significant 'Capabilities-Expectations Gap' – a disparity between the actions it claimed it could undertake on the one hand, and on the other the limitations placed on it by its actual ability to reach decisions, and the resources and instruments it was willing and able to employ to implement them (1993: 315). The realist critique thus rests on two central tenets. The first is the requirement that the EU be able to deploy military capabilities if it is to be a true international actor (and that it *should* as part of its responsibility for maintaining international security). The second is its inherent inability to do so.

This inability is a direct consequence of the negative impact of integration which imposes a need for consensus in decision-making, and which is exacerbated by the lack of a set of shared foreign policy goals and objectives among Member States.

Where integration has been most successful – i.e. in economic and trade policy – it is because Member States have identified clear benefits from close co-operation and the ‘surrender’ of sovereignty (Sjursen, 2005: 6). No such consensus exists on foreign and defence policy, however, especially among key states such as France and Britain.¹ This is a crucial point for Bull (1982: 164), who argues that although Europe’s nation-states remain its source of power in the world, the challenge is for them to identify ‘common and distinct’ strategic interests around which they can unite besides these trade interests. Both Gordon (1997) and Waltz (2000) echo this, with the latter contrasting the EU’s failings here with the unity it has achieved in economics, and suggesting that it is the lack of organisational ability and collective will around security policy that is of more concern than the lack of material capabilities (although this remains a significant factor).

Toje (2008b) develops this further. He argues that the ‘Capabilities-Expectations Gap’ is now a ‘Consensus-Expectations Gap’, whereby if Member States sanction action, they do so by ‘cherry-picking’ those issues where consensus can be achieved, rather than where intervention might be most effective or necessary, offering the failure to intervene in Darfur as a prime example of this. Process is therefore more important than outcomes, with the requirement for unanimity leading to an inherent conservatism, and the EU forced continually to respond to a strategic agenda it does not control (Toje, 2008b: 139). The result has been the emergence of a European strategic culture more akin to that of a small power than the great power the EU professes to be, and characterised by continuing dependence on the US particularly through NATO, and a ‘predisposition’ to ‘soft’ power (Toje, 2008a: 200, 210).

Kagan (2004: 65) is similarly critical of the strategic culture that has developed. He contends that the impact of integration has been more deleterious than simply reducing the capacity of European governments to lowest common denominator policy- or decision-making. Rather, integration is actually the ‘enemy’ of European military strength, and hence of a global role, with Europe seeking instead to make a virtue out of its weakness by creating an international system where economic and

¹ Although the recent bilateral defence agreement between London and Paris indicates movement in this area.

'soft' power matter more than military strength, and where multilateralism and international law are the principles for action. The divide that has thus emerged between the US and EU, which provides the clearest evidence of the EU's failure as a global actor (for example in the former Yugoslavia or over Iraq), is the inevitable outcome of this rejection of power politics and its attempt to 'move beyond power', despite the fundamental conceit that its freedom to pursue such a course is based on America's on-going security guarantee (Kagan, 2004: 1).

For realists, therefore, a 'civilian power' Europe that remains reliant on the US is the inevitable outcome of trying to balance the differing interests of so many Member States and the impossibility of creating either the shared strategic interests necessary for a common foreign and defence policy, or the decision-making structures to conduct it. Consequently, Europe remains essentially weak as an international actor in the realist sense.

Civilian Power Europe

Like the realist approach, the 'Civilian Power Europe' analysis, first advanced by Duchêne (1973), is also essentially state-centric, and again emphasises the need for functional effectiveness in decision-making as a precursor to influence. Moreover, some civilian power exponents regard a truly common European foreign and defence policy as unlikely (e.g. Rosecrance, 1998). Meanwhile, Kagan's (2004) contention that civilian power simply makes a virtue out of necessity seems to echo Smith (2000: 14), who argues that the lack of a European defence identity had more to do with a desire to protect the integrity of NATO than a belief in the 'intrinsic merits' of civilian power *per se*, and thus the EC/EU had become a civilian power 'by default'.

This point notwithstanding, the fundamental difference between the two perspectives remains their assessment of the relative importance of military power vis-à-vis alternative sources of influence. Thus, European military weakness, far from being a hurdle, has actually become a strength with its 'civilian status' forming the basis for its actorness and ability to exert international influence. Moreover, as Manners (2002: 236) argues, it also defines the EU within the international system, with its

position as a 'global civilian power' remaining central to any discussion of its role in international relations.

The origins of the EU's civilian power status lie in the wars of the 20th Century, which demonstrated the devastating consequences of the unfettered pursuit of power politics by individual states (e.g. K. E. Smith, 2003). For Duchêne (1973), these were the result of the inability of European nations to manage their increasing interdependence. Thus, the utility of the European Community, and the essence of its civilian power, lies in its capacity to deal with such problems by 'domesticating' relations between Member States, and with states beyond its frontiers. Moreover, its ability to do so has been underpinned by a 'sea-change' in the sources of power, placing a new emphasis on economics and diplomacy as instruments of international influence, leading to the evolution of a 'distinctive (West) European position' in international affairs (Hill, 1983: 200).

Developing this concept, Maull (1990: 92) defines civilian power in terms of its three key elements: co-operation in pursuit of international objectives; a concentration on non-military, primarily economic instruments to secure these; and the development of supranational structures to deal with 'critical issues of international management'. With the challenge remaining how to mediate the tensions inherent in a system characterised by increasingly complex interdependence whilst avoiding historically endemic conflict, he considers Europe the 'functioning laboratory' of a new international order based on 'mutually accepted reciprocal dependence'. This seems to endorse Duchêne's earlier argument that Europe can only finally escape the vicissitudes of power politics if the Community itself becomes a force for the 'diffusion of civilian and democratic standards' internationally (1973: 20).

As noted, realist critics see no place for such idealism within international relations, and have been quick to note that the strategic environment within which this civilian power developed was based on an external military balance of power over which Europe had negligible influence. Moreover, despite the fact that military force 'suddenly seemed irrelevant' in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War (Hill, 1998: 21); over the longer-term the use of force has become more rather than less likely. Furthermore, the inability of Member States to intervene meaningfully in conflicts on

their own borders in Yugoslavia, let alone further afield, and their attempts to develop more robust forms of foreign and security policy co-operation through CFSP and ESDP, indicate an apparent recognition of the limitations of civilian power.

Smith (2000: 28) counters this, however. Questioning the assumptions on which the EU's pursuit of a 'defence dimension' is based, she argues that it is 'giving up far too much for too little'. Challenging the notion that a greater military capability would make the EU more influential, she questions how and where the EU could intervene in practice. Arguing that most foreign policy does not involve the use of force (being instead diplomatically and economically-based), she identifies the main obstacle as not a lack of military capacity but rather the difficulty inherent in a system of consensual decision-making. Indeed, by 'repudiating' its civilian power status, the EU may actually be weakening itself at the same time as signalling to others that military force remains useful and valid within international relations.

From the civilian power perspective, it is paradoxical that the push for a greater European military capability is occurring just at a time when the achievements of EU civilian power should be most apparent. Ginsberg (1999) makes the point that the almost exclusive focus on CFSP, particularly within the realist analysis, ignores the real source of strength and legitimacy in European foreign policy – its Community Pillar. This has underpinned some of the EU's most successful international interventions and policies, particularly enlargement (Smith, 2000). It can also be seen in the informal expansion of EU influence through the extension of governance, for example in the Balkans (e.g. Lavenex, 2004; Renner and Trauner, 2009). More generally, the development of bilateral and multilateral trade regimes such as the Association Agreement with Mercosur, the increasing adoption of EU standards and regulations around the world, and the fact that states globally seek commercial, economic and political relations with the EU illustrate what Rosecrance (1998: 16) and Ginsberg (1999: 446) consider its 'magnetic force': it has successfully reversed the notion of the balance of power by attracting states towards it rather than pushing them into opposition coalitions. Smith (2000: 24) is more succinct, declaring that the EU is 'simply not threatening'.

Thus, although the EU finds responding swiftly to crises a challenge, principally because of its methods of decision-making and the policy instruments at its disposal, this is only one measure of its ability to act internationally. From the civilian power perspective, therefore, an emphasis on soft power does not mean a lack of coercive power, but rather a focus on the EU's great strength as an international actor – engagement (Smith, 2003).

Normative Power Europe

Like the Civilian Power analysis, the normative perspective (e.g. Manners, 2002) considers the EU as most effective internationally when deploying its considerable soft power assets, for example through the expansion of governance or the development of regulatory regimes. It also places great importance on the European historical experience as a basis for its actorness, its identity and its approach to international relations. However, in contrast to the civilian power perspective, the basis of the normative analysis is its view that the EU impacts on the international system simply by virtue of its existence – the symbolism of what it *is* is as important as what it does – and, more importantly, that this 'pre-disposes' it to act normatively (Manners, 2002: 242). Underpinning this is the impact of the integration process which Manners (2008: 65) believes has actually changed what is considered 'normal' in international relations: 'simply by existing as different...the European Union changes the normality of 'international relations''.

Rosecrance (1998: 19), meanwhile, argues that this has made the EU a 'new type' of international actor, building on the notions that it is essentially non-threatening and a 'magnet' to potential competitors within the international system. This enables the analysis to move beyond the 'unhealthy concentration' within the first two approaches on how much like a state the EU looks (Manners, 2002: 239), allowing – indeed demanding – an examination of the EU as an actor, however partial or incomplete, on its own merit. The normative perspective thus considers 'traditional' (i.e. state) models of global politics unable to account for the true depth and complexity of the international system (Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996: 401). Instead, the EU must be considered within the context of the 'multiple realities' in which it operates (Zielonka, 1998: 10).

Central to this is the role of norms or principles in European foreign policy. While realist and civilian power analyses focus on capabilities, the normative approach has a different starting point, being as (if not more) concerned with the principles underlying action. For Manners (2002: 242), there are five 'core norms' that he argues form the ideational foundation of the EU and how it behaves: peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.² Although these are not exclusive to Europe, he argues that in the context of the EU they are crucial, providing the mainstay of inter-state relations, particularly the peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomatic means. At the same time, they are the basis and source of legitimacy for its external actions, and as such are reflected throughout the EU's treaties and declarations. They represent the product of the unique combination of European historical experience, the hybrid nature of the EU as a polity and its legal construction, and are therefore the 'crucial constitutive factors' (Manners, 2000: 241) in its international identity, determining the nature of its relations with the rest of the world. For Ginsberg (1998: 16) they represent the 'cornerstones' of European foreign policy, while Hill (1996: 9) argues that they have become increasingly linked with the notion of 'European diplomacy' in the minds of the public.

Their centrality within the EU's external activity does not equate to a specifically ethical foreign policy, however. For example, Zielonka (2008: 480) argues that while their promotion may bring benefits to 3rd parties – such as seeking improved labour standards or environmental protections – this is a secondary achievement, as EU external policies are designed predominantly to protect and promote the interests of the Member States.

Rather, from the normative perspective their significance is twofold. First is their contribution to the notion that the EU performs a 'particular role' within the international system which distinguishes it from other actors (Sjursen, 2005: 12). This can be seen in the methods by which it seeks to transfer or 'diffuse' its norms, particularly through the institutionalisation of relationships between the EU and 3rd parties, for example during the enlargement process (*procedural diffusion*), and in

² These are also set out in the Preamble to the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* as part of the Treaty of Lisbon (C 83/391) (<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2010:083:0389:0403:EN:PDF>)

the specifics of trade and aid agreements (*transference*), both of which involve conditionality (Manners, 2002: 245). Moreover, this occurs across the whole range of the EU's international activity. Thus, applicants for membership must be practising democracies (Ginsberg, 1998), while clauses on human rights have been included in trade agreements with third countries since 1992 (Sjursen, 2005), and even the strategic rationale of ESDP missions are presented in idealistic terms, such as protecting democracy and human rights (Toje, 2008a). Perhaps the most symbolic example, though, is the EU's efforts to abolish the death penalty globally (Manners, 2002).

Second are the insights they offer into the nature of internal relations between Member States on the one hand, and between Member States and EU institutions on the other. Ginsberg (1999, 439) argues that many areas of EU foreign policy, such as special partnerships or the use of conditionality to promote human rights, are unique and have developed as the result of the 'dynamic of co-operation' that exists between Member States and the Union's common institutions. He goes on to suggest that this is because the habits and procedures of political co-operation that have developed, not least the obligation to consult other parties, have not only become institutionalised, but have evolved into European norms and values which are crucial in conditioning how the EU acts collectively. Sjursen (2005: 6) argues along a similar line. By regarding EU foreign policy as essentially 'problem-solving' – i.e. that co-operation will only occur where there are clearly discernable benefits – there is a tendency to focus only on structural and institutional limitations, and the relative power of the actors involved. However, this ignores the realities of the day-to-day management of foreign policy or the possibility of incremental or even transformational change, with Member States' perceptions of the types of problems or issues to be addressed altering over time, not simply their strategies for dealing with them.

The normative perspective, therefore, regards the EU as an international actor, but one that is 'unorthodox and uneven' (Ginsberg, 2001: 11). It is both qualitatively different from others within the international system and 'more than the sum of its parts' (Manners, 2002: 244). Moreover, while the realist and civilian power approaches assume it utilises non-military instruments due to its lack of capabilities

(which realists equate to weakness), the normative analysis sees this as a choice based on Europe's historical experience prior to integration, and on the processes, systems and practices, both formal and informal, that have developed as a result of this. In this way, the EU's international actorness, and its existence as *different* to other actors, is generated internally through processes of co-operation and interaction that occur at multiple levels and across the whole range of policy areas. Of course, this is not to argue that the EU is necessarily equally or more effective than other actors across all policy or geographical areas. Indeed, Zielonka (2008), in questioning how much leverage it really has over other actors such as China, suggests that it lacks the power to fully impose itself globally. However, from the normative perspective the ability to define what is 'normal' in world politics remains one of the most significant sources of influence, and this is where the EU's true power and the source of its actorness resides (Manners, 2002: 253)

The European Union as both Normative and Civilian Power

Two broad conclusions emerge from these discussions. The first is that approaches that are state-centric and focus predominantly on capabilities – and especially traditional (i.e. military) instruments of power – are too narrow and do not account for the full range and intensity of EU activity, or indeed for the complexity of the international system. The EU is not a state and so cannot reasonably be compared with state actors. Moreover, despite its lack of military resources, it has shown itself to be an actor capable of at times robust and sustained international action (through, for example, enlargement, development etc), even if such action can be uneven and have varying degrees of impact. This emphasises the fact that as an international organisation it does much more than merely reflect the preferences of its Members, as realist perspectives suggest, something that is underlined by how it is constructed and has evolved. In particular, its structures and processes for policy- and decision-making and implementation, the actors involved, and the manner in which Member States' foreign policies interact with EU external policy, suggest a vastly more complex and multi-directional set of relationships is at work. EU foreign policy co-exists alongside its national counterparts, with the two clashing but also shaping each other (Ginsberg, 2001). It is also reflected in the particular role played by the European Commission which can be more or less proactive and both principal and

agent to an extent not seen in any other international organisation. These factors demand that the EU be examined and judged in its own context.

Thus, the second conclusion is that to analyse the nature of the EU's international actorness requires an approach that accounts for the internal relationships and processes that are at work in the formulation of its policies, not simply the capabilities and instruments utilised to achieve them. As indicated, scholars from all three perspectives highlight shared interests and common policy objectives by the Member States as fundamental to effective decision-making and international action on the part of the EU. However, only the normative analysis seeks to account for how the integration process impacts not only on policy- and decision-making, but on the underlying choices, preferences and interests, allowing for the possibility that these can alter through intense interaction between actors over an extended period of time. Thus, while the basis of the Civilian Power approach may be accurate – that the EU developed along the civilian path because military options were neither realistic nor desirable during much of the post-war period – this is to tell only half the story. Consequently, drawing on both civilian and normative approaches may offer a better framework for analysis.

How the European Union Acts Internationally

To illustrate the arguments offered above, two important but contrasting areas of policy are now discussed: economic and regulatory policy, and security policy. These provide good examples of the EU's efforts at international impact and also of how a combination of civilian and normative approaches is better able to capture the nature and operation of its actorness.

Economic and Regulatory Actorness

The EU's economic power is widely regarded as both the main source and main expression of its international power. It is considered to be at the 'core' of its actual and potential power (Meunier and Nicolaidis, 2006: 906) and the foundation of its international actorness (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006). For Rosecrance (1998: 19), the development of centralised economic (as opposed to political) power in the EU has been crucial to its ability to attract other actors towards it, thus making it the 'new

type' of international actor noted above. Of course, the EU possesses a number of robust policy instruments to support its aims (e.g. anti-dumping measures, countervailing duties, etc.), and has demonstrated a frequent willingness to use them (Woolcock, 2005). It also enjoys a good record of success in the disputes it has pursued through the WTO (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006).

However, this is only part of the picture, for arguably the most effective instrument available to it remains the opportunity to access its markets, giving the EU enormous power whether at bilateral, region-to-region or multilateral level (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006). Indeed, this is where the evidence of its power of attraction is most clearly demonstrated, with the vast majority of states around the world now in some form of institutionalised relationship with it. Moreover, the opportunity to access its vast marketplace has not only led these states to seek commercial agreements with it, but also to adapt to its standards (Meunier and Nicolaïdis, 2006). With a plethora of rules governing access to its markets, the EU's power is enhanced, as is its ability to act as global setter of standards, and herein lies the true nature of its global economic power: its success in exporting laws, standards, norms and ideas lies not in forcing others to do what they would not otherwise do, but rather in persuading them to do what is in its interests, an approach characterised as about pursuing replication rather than domination (Young and Peterson, 2006).

The nature of this actorness rests on three important and interconnected factors. These are the process of economic integration and the extent to which this, particularly through the Single Market programme, has been a catalyst for the expansion of EU power; the internal structures, processes and institutional relationships involved in policy-making that have developed and contribute to the manner in which the EU engages with the world; and the institutional capacity of the EU to 'act'. Together, these have had several consequences for EU foreign economic policy: (i) the need to protect what had been created internally from the imposition of external disciplines; (ii) a functioning system for dealing with regulatory trade barriers; (iii) an understanding of the importance of dealing with 'private' barriers to trade, for example through competition policy; (iv) the recognition by Member States of the advantage of developing a system of rules beyond the EU (Young and Peterson, 2006: 804). The first three demonstrate how integration has

driven the expansion of EU power by giving it a major stake in determining how international trade relations are managed, a template that could be exported for doing so, and an agenda for the future. For the actual exercise of that power, meanwhile, it is the fourth consequence, that is arguably the most significant, with the concept of unity of representation through the Commission remaining the guiding principle of EU interaction at the international level, and both accepted and expected by external partners (Meunier and Nicolaïdis, 1999).

One of the most significant expressions of this has been the expansion in recent years of the EU's global regulatory influence. Indeed, this has been so significant that it has been described as the 'global pacesetter' in regulation (Buck, 2007: 1), the world's 'regulatory superpower' (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006: 71) and is even accused of 'regulatory imperialism' by some in the US (Zielonka, 2008: 474). This growth in its regulatory actorness has come as the direct result of internal integration. The creation of the Single Market has required the European Commission, acting on behalf of the Community, to design, implement, monitor and enforce a series of regulatory regimes covering a wide range of policy areas in all existing and acceding Member States, itself a major act of normative, international intervention. At the same time as harmonising domestic policy among Member States, as 'gatekeeper' to the Single Market the Commission finds itself in a position of growing international influence by virtue of the sheer size of this market. This reflects what Bretherton and Vogler (2006: 71) consider the 'external ramifications' of an internally-focused policy. Moreover, as Zielonka (2008) notes, it is now in the position of being able virtually to dictate to domestic actors across the world what and how they can and cannot produce if they wish to export to the Union.

As a consequence, the norms, standards and regulations the EU sets down are being adopted globally, ensuring it leaves an 'indelible mark' on other countries (Buck, 2007: 1). For example, China has adopted EU regulations for its domestic motor industry and food safety, while the EU's GSM standard in telecoms has virtually been adopted globally (Zielonka, 2008). Indeed, even where states opt not to adopt European standards (for example the US), those of their companies that export to the EU often do. Meanwhile, in terms of product standards, because EU rules on safety, consumer protection, the environment and health tend to be much

stricter, non-European companies know that by following these they 'assume that their products can be marketed everywhere else as well' (Buck, 2007: 2).

Within the field of regulation, meanwhile, it is competition policy that stands out most as an instrument of the EU's global actorness. Damro (2006: 868) contends that this is one of its 'most formidable' international powers, having previously described it as 'a new instrument' of EU foreign economic policy that is contributing increasingly to the Union's identity as an international actor, particularly through its increasingly extraterritorial nature (2001: 208). The cross-border operations of corporations have been one of the major benefits of integration, as well as a key driver of globalisation, and thus the removal of 'distinctions' in national competition policies has been a policy priority for the Commission both internally and internationally (Woolcock, 2005: 395). Moreover, this is the area of policy where the Commission enjoys perhaps its greatest discretionary decision-making authority (Damro, 2006), and is therefore able to act authoritatively on behalf of the EU both internally and externally (Krotz, 2009).

The first major external example of this was the EU's legal challenge to the merger of Boeing and McDonnell-Douglas in 1997 even though, as Bretherton and Vogler (2006) note, the operations of both companies were entirely within the US jurisdiction. In his analysis of this case, Damro (2001) identifies three key reasons for this intervention: first, the EU had reasonable economic and legal objections, in this case anti-competitive behaviour in US territory that could have an adverse effect in the EU; second, they wished to ensure opportunities for future market access by European firms (specifically Airbus); and third, it provided an opportunity to improve and enhance the standing of the Community (and therefore the Commission) in the eyes of Member States. This has enabled the Commission to achieve a number of important objectives. The first of these was the international recognition of their regulatory reach which has supported their on-going efforts to improve harmonisation of national competition policies, based on a clear belief in the 'validity' of the EU model (Woolcock, 2005: 395). This, in turn, furthered the second – the establishment of the EU as a major international actor in the field of competition policy. As Damro (2006) notes, the Commission has steadily built on this through its efforts to promote co-ordination of competition policy through a number of venues at

international level, including the WTO. Finally, pursuit of such cases provides a clear demonstration to Member States of the 'value-added' the Community can bring in this area, thereby bolstering the authority of the Community (and Commission) in what remains a 'relatively new' area of supranational policy (Damro, 2001: 209). Its successful investigation into Microsoft's dominant position in the PC market and ongoing investigations into a number of mergers in the aviation sector further illustrate its efforts in this direction.³

Regulation is a key area of norm transfer, and the EU's status as a global 'rule-maker' (Buck, 2007: 3), whether in competition, product safety or consumer protection, therefore establishes it as a powerful normative actor. This has led to disputes, for example with the US over the import of genetically-modified foodstuffs, and there are suggestions that European efforts to export rules and standards are prompted by a desire to level the playing-field for their much more highly-regulated domestic corporations. More significantly, the EU's legitimacy to act in this way, and the willingness of other states to accept and adapt to European standards, are closely tied to their desire to access European markets, and there are question marks over the degree of leverage the EU actually enjoys over global actors such as China, the US, India and Brazil (Zielonka, 2008). Thus, although influential, the EU's position as an international economic and regulatory actor does not go unchallenged.

A Security Actor

In contrast to its obvious economic and regulatory strengths, the view that the EU remains a 'partially-constructed' international actor is most clearly on display in the field of security (Ginsberg, 2001: 9). Indeed, here the EU's identity here is much more contested. As noted above, within the literature much of the criticism focuses on the development of the CFSP and ESDP, contrasting the rhetoric that accompanied their creation unfavourably with the apparent inability to develop the kind of robust, coercive policy instruments, particularly military, required to make such declarations a reality – the 'Capabilities-Expectations Gap' (Hill, 1993). Thus,

³ See <http://ec.europa.eu/competition/sectors/ICT/microsoft/investigation.html> for further details on the European Commission's investigation into Microsoft and <http://ec.europa.eu/competition/sectors/transport/overview.html> for details on its scrutiny of mergers in the aviation sector.

although the European Security Strategy (ESS) (2003: 1) declares that Europe 'should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world', whilst stating later that the 'first line of defence will often be abroad', Kagan (2004: 65) sees integration as the enemy of a serious global role for the EU, while Howorth (2009) critiques the ESS for rarely looking beyond the EU's immediate neighbourhood or hinterland.

Whatever the validity of such viewpoints – and they do not go unchallenged – the EU has still demonstrated some capacity to perform a security role. The list of operations launched under the auspices of the ESDP bears this out, as well as indicating a considerable normative component to EU interventions. For example, *Operation Artemis* (2003) sought the improvement of humanitarian conditions in Bunia in the DRC, and *Operation Promixa* (2004-5) was designed to consolidate law and order and reform the Interior Ministry in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).⁴ Moreover, Ginsberg (2001) and Menon (2009) both demand a consideration of outcomes and an assessment of where the EU has had an impact instead of the concentration on capabilities and institutional development that predominate in much of the literature. For example, Ginsberg recognises that if measured against the objectives of the Maastricht Treaty – which he considers 'overly ambitious' (2001: 3) – the CFSP has not been a success. However, he argues that this does not prevent the EU from being an important international actor in other spheres (e.g. the environment or nuclear non-proliferation) and that CFSP is just 'one facet' of European foreign policy. Menon (2009: 5), meanwhile, notes the broadly positive impact of the EU's interventions through ESDP – for example in FYROM – arguing that even if the ambitions of such operations have been limited, they have been achieved.

A lack of success or ambition should not therefore be equated with an *inability* to act. Rather, the EU's aspirations compared with its actual achievements in the security field reflect the difficulties and sensitivities of forging common policy in this area, to which the position of Member States is central. Indeed, when considering the EU's limitations as an international security actor, it is no coincidence that the structures

⁴ A full list of ESDP operations can be found at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=268&lang=EN>.

created to manage and conduct decision-making in CFSP/ESDP have been designed to ensure that they remain predominantly under Member State control. The establishment of CFSP in a pillar separate from Community affairs, the appointment of a High Representative for the CFSP placed within the structures of the Council of Ministers and until Lisbon institutionally detached from the Commission, and the preference of Member States for *ad hoc* solutions to funding problems to limit as far as possible the influence of Commission and Parliament (Keukeleire and MacNaughton, 2008), all serve as proof of this.

With foreign and security policy fundamental to national interests, Member States have been understandably reluctant to surrender their prerogatives in these most sensitive of areas. The clear statements regarding EMU in the TEU stand in stark contrast to the ambiguous nature of the provisions on CFSP within the same treaty, emphasising the gulf between Member States regarding foreign policy co-operation (Ginsberg, 1998). Equally, the lack of a shared vision as to the kind of international security identity the EU should have, and the absence of shared strategic goals to underpin common policies hampers the overall effectiveness of the EU in this area – in some cases even causing paralysis (e.g. during the second Iraq War). For Howorth (2009: 17), the most obvious example of this lies in the incompatibility of the world views of Paris and London which he considers ‘a real problem’ to EU actorness. He thus contends that what is needed is agreement on an EU ‘grand strategy’ which can only be facilitated by more ‘agile’ decision-making rather than the iterative deliberations that seek to incorporate all possible viewpoints. By this analysis, real security actorness therefore resides in the ability to be bold and swift in decision-making and implementation, which as Menon (2008) argues, goes against the culture of ambiguity that has historically pervaded many of the key policy developments in the EU.

However, while it is tempting to see institutional reform as the solution to EU ‘weakness’ in foreign and security policy, this is to ignore the reality that the EU offers neither the only nor necessarily even the best venue for Member States to pursue collective action. More importantly, it indicates a narrow definition of ‘security’ that remains essentially state-centric and rooted in the ability to deploy coercive force in pursuit of particular policy objectives. Countering this, Menon (2008, 142)

offers an alternative perspective that seeks to widen the definition, thereby allowing a reconsideration of the nature and effectiveness of the EU's actorness. He argues that the deliberate weakness in the structures created by the Member States to manage foreign and security policy, along with the multi-tiered system of governance and collective decision-making which characterise the EU, ensures that there are 'profound limitations' on the scope of any EU-level security policy. Meanwhile, given the primacy of NATO and the security capabilities of individual Member States there is clearly capacity for *European*, if not EU, security action in the traditional sense. Thus any EU security role is better framed as complementary to rather than competing with the Member States or NATO, while the solution to the problem of effectiveness lies in better co-ordination by Member States, rather than seeking for the EU a role to which it is institutionally and temperamentally ill-suited. In this context, it is possible therefore to see that the EU can and does perform a role as a successful – if unambitious – security actor, as evidenced by the ESDP operations launched to date, and one where the emphasis remains predominantly on civilian missions.

Conclusion

This paper has set out to answer two key questions: if the EU is an international actor, what type of actor is it, and how does its actorness manifest itself? Based on an examination of the literature, it identifies three key strands of analysis: realist, civilian power and normative power. It argues that the realist approach is too narrow as it seeks to define actorness purely in terms of the ability to deploy traditional coercive force in the pursuit of national interests. Thus, it focuses on the EU's military weakness, while ignoring the full range and intensity of activity it undertakes at the international level. The civilian power analysis, meanwhile, sees the EU's power in terms of its ability to deploy its economic and diplomatic influence in pursuit of international policy goals, with the development of these forms of power part of a conscious choice that of the organisation not to follow a military trajectory. However, it fails sufficiently to account for the impact of integration on the EU's development, not simply institutionally or functionally, but in terms of its international identity. Finally, the normative approach sees integration as influencing and even changing the underlying choices, preferences and interests of Member States over the long-

term. The consequence has been the development of a set of principles, norms and behaviours that govern not only how an integrated EU functions, but the interaction between states. Accordingly, it is this that makes the EU unique within international relations – what it *is* is as important as what it does.

The argument here, therefore, is that an approach drawing on both the civilian and normative analyses offers a better framework to explain the nature and variety of the EU's global actorness. To test this, two contrasting policy areas are examined – external economic policy, particularly through regulatory and competition policy, and security. In the first, the objectives, methods and tools employed by the EU at the international level were clearly both civilian and normative. The need to protect the Single Market and the regimes of regulation underpinning it has seen the EU pursue an international strategy based on replication rather than domination. Meanwhile, efforts to upload its rules and systems of regulation lead by the Commission have taken place at multilateral, regional and bilateral levels, and have been based on its ability to persuade its interlocutors that the prize of access to European markets justifies their acquiescence. In this policy area, the EU has consequently developed the ability to have global impact, although not without challenge.

In contrast, in security the EU's international actorness is far less developed and remains controversial. On many occasions it has failed to act effectively and in some cases, at all. Even here, however, it has had some success in achieving albeit modest ambitions and the operations launched under the CFSP/ESDP have had a clearly normative character. While this is not to suggest that it is developing a security actorness that will mirror that achieved in its economic external relations, it does indicate that even in this most controversial and sensitive of policy areas, Member States are edging towards a greater degree of shared understanding. However, it remains unlikely to exercise global influence, with its security actorness continuing to focus on its immediate hinterland and near-abroad. This demonstrates perhaps the most important point: that the ability of the EU to act internationally is directly related to the level and degree of integration achieved in the policy area in question.

A final illustration of this can be found in two important issues that are not covered in the parameters of this paper, but which will nonetheless have a major bearing on the future of the Union's international actorness: the financial crisis and the Lisbon Treaty. The financial crisis has resulted in significant cuts to national budgets to which the machineries of foreign policy are not immune. For example, a significant restructuring has taken place over recent months in the UK Foreign Office, with the department seeing its budget reduced by 24% in real terms as part of government efforts at deficit reduction,⁵ with similar cuts being implemented across the EU. Out of necessity, therefore, a greater emphasis on common approaches to foreign policy issues at the European level is almost inevitable. Moreover, this could well be facilitated by the new foreign policy structures introduced by Lisbon which, while intended to ensure more effective decision-making and policy-implementation, have the potential to transform the EU as an international actor in its own right. Thus, a dedicated External Action Service has been created, while the CFSP and the Community's external policy instruments (including its considerable aid and development budgets) have been drawn together under the authority of the High Representative who is also now a Commission Vice-President. Indeed, given the economically-straitened circumstances that currently prevail, it does not seem too far-fetched to imagine these new Brussels-based foreign policy structures assuming a far greater role in the articulation, implementation and even direction of European foreign policy. If this does ultimately occur, it will have profound effects both on the degree of integration in this policy area and on the nature and scope of the EU's international actorness in the future.

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⁵ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, "Spending Review 2010".

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