

THE EUROPEAN UNION: ITS INTERNATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE VALUES AT ITS CORE

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Abstract.

Purpose: The article studies the issue of the EU international identity as well as the values this identity is constructed on. The article emphasizes the importance of this identity both from theoretical and from practical perspectives, and claims that the liberal democracy governance model makes up the foundation of the EU identity. **Methods:** theoretical and methodological basis of this article is made up by the concepts of social constructivism, European constitutionalism and new institutionalism. **Discussion:** provides new perspective regarding the essence of the EU international identity, its importance for the EU performance at the international arena as well as the role that institutions are considered to play for identity formation. Moreover, the article offers the analysis of Normative Power Europe as the major explanatory concept for EU relations with third countries and studies the values that the EU identity is constructed on.

Key words: European Union, social constructivism, international identity, liberal democracy, multi-level governance.

Introduction. This article deals with both the EU's international identity and the values that are at the core of this identity. The discourse deals with the premises of the EU's international performance and its democratic qualities. Moreover, it appeals to the foundations of the entire EU project, revealing the roots of the contemporary phenomena that are in the focus of modern EU studies. The article consists of two sections, which correspondingly deal with the EU international identity and the values it is based upon. The first section begins with the importance of the EU's identity for its international performance and then moves to Normative Power Europe (NPE) as the major explanatory concept for EU relations with third countries. It then proceeds to shed light on the role that institutions are considered to play for identity formation. The second section provides the study of the values that this identity is constructed on.

The EU and its international identity. Traditionally, actors in international relations have been Westphalian-type sovereign national states. This type of polity has existed for centuries with rather

clear ideas of what they are both internally and internationally. Certainly, the last two centuries have considerably modified both perspectives of states' functions, goals and *modus operandi*; nonetheless, the basic notions of this type of polity have been preserved, although increasingly challenged by the current global transformation. The story with the EU is certainly different. From the landmark ECJ van Gend & Loos judgment claiming Community law to be "a new legal order of international law", the EU has been converting into a new type of polity, certainly different from a state. In this sense, the EU's *sui generis* status refers to its specific path of development as well as to its hybrid mode of governance [9, p. 176]. However, the *sui generis* label does not actually add much to understanding of the EU, as this cliché does not answer the question of what it is. Neither does it facilitate a good reference point.

Furthermore, the EU is a polity which is dynamically evolving, with its transformation from a "regulatory state" into a more political union being one of the perspectives of this evolution. From this

standpoint, the EU is morphing into a system of multi-level governance, with decisions “made not by Brussels but in Brussels as well as elsewhere around Europe” [10, p. 85]. Thus, the EU has traditionally been conceptualised with the “often invisible touch of stateness”, implying the federal perspective of its evolution. Habermas considers the EU to be a new political form. It is neither a ‘federal state’ nor a ‘federation’ but an association of sovereign states which pool their sovereignty in restricted areas to varying degree, an association which does not seek to have the coercive power to act directly on individuals in the fashion of nation state [4, p. 5]. In the international arena, the EU is unequivocally recognised as being an atypical foreign policy actor with limited resources but with global ambitions. Against the background of the EU currently being a “third way” between national and international politics as well as its being a recent political construct, the issue of the EU’s identity has been of utmost importance for understanding the essence of this polity.

Identity is normally defined as the self-perception of an actor; however, it may also include the perception that others have regarding this actor. In terms of EU international performance, the need for an identity was repeatedly stressed in the academic literature. Traditionally, identities are considered to be important for further articulation of interests as well as for the formation of political alliances. Schimmelfennig argued that “social actors use and exchange arguments based on identities, values, and norms institutionalised in their environment to defend their political claims and to persuade their audience and their opponents to accept these claims and to act accordingly” [13, p. 193]. Identity is also recognised as a property generating “motivational and behavioural dispositions”.

In addition to the above theoretical reasoning, the formation of the EU’s own international identity has been of utmost importance for practical political reasons due to the high-profile identities that the leading EU countries enjoy. This may result in a form of competition, leading to awkward and dubious situations such as the one in Egypt in the aftermath of the “Arab spring”, when the new Egyptian government declared that they were “too busy” to receive the EU High Representative; about two

weeks later they nonetheless welcomed the UK Prime Minister. It is identity that often provides the framework for foreign policy actors, thus influencing their behaviour as well as their collective choices. An illustration of this argument is the EU’s consistent application of political conditionality in its relations with third countries since the beginning of the 1990s.

An important question is what the role is that institutions play in terms of the identity formation. Weber considered organisations to be social constructs, *inter alia* for establishing guidelines for acceptable types of behaviour. In this sense, political actors organise themselves and act in accordance with rules and practices which are socially constructed, publicly known, anticipated, and accepted, while simultaneously shaping these rules and practices. The idea of an interconnection between institutions and political culture is also stressed by the understanding of institutions as being an embodiment of certain conventions and customs. Regarding the EU’s identity, Habermas emphasised the potential of the common institutions that he saw for the formation of “a post-national civic European identity”.

For the last two decades the concept of Normative Power Europe has been offered as the major explanatory model for the EU’s external actions. Furthermore, this concept is mainly accepted by the EU itself in terms of its self-reflection. The introduction of this concept has provoked a wide-ranging debate regarding the nature of the EU as an international actor. In addition to providing an interesting perspective for understanding EU international behaviour, this concept fits with the EU qualities as an international actor with limited military capacities, “whose power emanates from its economic might, political unity, and a very special system of internal co-operation”. However, this concept also implies two major points to stress: the EU’s difference from traditional polities existing on “traditional Westphalian principles” and the special place for the universal norms of democracy, the rule of law and human rights for EU external performance.

Thus, this concept underlines the importance of the EU’s own internal order, which should be in compliance with the values and principles that the

EU promotes outside of its own territory. This ultimately implies a synergy between EU's internal and external identity. In other words, the EU's power in international performance depends upon what the EU is itself. Furthermore, it is the commitment to common values that has traditionally been viewed as one of the cornerstones of the entire EU project.

The debate on the EU's identity also requires a reference to the concept of "Europeanisation", which is defined as "the external projection of internal solutions" [7, p. 695]. In this sense, "Europeanisation" is of interest as it also bridges internal and external aspects of the EU as a *sui generis* polity by outside "mirroring" of the EU fundamental principles. To some extent, it falls in line with a more general pattern of identity formation, which encompasses both the domestic and international spheres. Thus, "Europeanisation" is not limited by external extrapolation of these principles. As argued, the EU's impact on its Member States has been an important component of the EU timescape. Furthermore, the "mirroring" process implies compliance with these fundamental principles by both the EU and its Member States, which leads back to the debate on the EU's own democratic qualities as well as to the contemporary threats to the liberal democracy model in such countries as Hungary and Poland. Thus, the concept of "Europeanisation" focuses on the fundamental principles and values that the EU has declared as its foundation.

Exploring the European values. The post-Lisbon discourse has been shifted from defining and justifying the existence of the EU as an international actor towards attempts to address the question of "Europe, to do what in the world". Following the key questions on the EU foreign policy identified by Larsen [6, p. 68], this discourse moved from the first one, "*Is the EU constructed as an international actor?*" to the second and the third ones, "*If it is, what kind of actor is constructed?*" and "*What kind of values is this actor based on?*"

The normative power concept implies a strong interconnection of the EU as a normative power with the promotion of values that are of universal validity [8, p. 57–58], as well as with the EU's own politico-legal order, which is viewed as the internal "reference point" for its outside projection. This

section provides insight into both of the issues in focus. Manners refers to nine specific values that the EU has been promoting in its relations with the outer world. They are divided into two groups of "core" and "subsidiary" norms. The "core" group includes peace, liberty, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the "subsidiary" one consists of equality, social solidarity, sustainable development and good governance. Despite criticism of the rigid framework of the norms that the EU "absolutely must promote", in fact the totality of the "core" norms refers to a very specific governance mode of liberal democracy. Furthermore, contrasting the EU's identity with that of its Member States, Schimmelfennig stresses that the EU's own "thin" identity is "based on values and norms, and consists in a commitment to liberal democracy" [12, p. 220].

Thus, the core value that the EU as a normative power promotes in its relations with third countries is the liberal democracy governance model. At the same time, the issue of democracy has been at the core of the debate concerning the EU's own qualities. Therefore, the debate on this governance mode simultaneously concerns both the perspectives that are at the core of the normative power concept. In terms of the EU, this debate has had its specific features due to EU's supra-national qualities. Therefore, it is often connected to the issue of the legitimacy of EU's own legal order. This section begins with the importance of a shared cultural and philosophical background for the formation of common values. It then moves to the current EU democracy debate with its further interconnection with the issue of legitimacy.

The starting point here is the idea that the very foundation of individual and group interest is fundamentally rooted in their beliefs about how the world works and the group's values. This approach echoes the Weberian understanding of the role that the ideas and beliefs play in terms of legitimising a political system [14, p. 263]. Weber's triad of motives causing actors to believe in the legitimacy of the system includes rational, traditional and charismatic reasoning [14, p. 215]. Moreover, in his understanding, the violation of traditions may have fatal consequences for the legality of the entire system. Later, Jachtenfuchs elaborated the notion and content of shared beliefs about a "legitimate politi-

cal order” [5] with their further interconnection with the constitutional perspective of the polity construction process. Thus, the political system has to comply with the “parameters established by the dominant institutional values”. In turn, these values are rooted in and derived from the cultural *milieu*, which is the ultimate source of “legitimacy” or “social appropriateness” in terms of the selection of particular arrangements. Extrapolating this approach to the EU context, it should be stressed that the liberal democracy model is today the predominant legitimating belief in the ‘developed’ world’, shared by the political elites of the Member States, which set the parameters for the supra-national level of governance.

Since the end of the 1970s, most Western democracies, including many current EU Member States, adopted a neo-liberal direction for their development. The fact that the model of the democratic welfare state is the dominant model for the EU Member States certainly influences the vision of the principles underpinning the EU institutional system that the national political elites have. Thus, the fact that liberal democracy is the shared standard of legitimate authority provides a powerful normative resource for the proponents of supranational democratisation [12, p. 230]. In other words, being a community, “of values and norms, in which all actors share fundamental principles of liberal democracy”, Member States “externalise their domestic political practices and norms about democratic governance”, extrapolating them to the supranational level [11, p. 24].

Despite its similarities with a federal state, the EU remains a unique polity, which suggests that EU practices can differ from the “national-level versions of democracy”, thus implying the potential to get closer to the core ideals of democracy. In terms of specific EU-related approaches to perceiving a correlation between democracy and legitimacy, it is worth mentioning the concept of input-output legitimacy, with input legitimacy stressing the procedural aspect of the decision-making process and output legitimacy the effectiveness of the decisions. However, the efficiency-oriented reallocation of political competences from the national to the supranational level “tends to devalue traditional democratic institutions and processes” [12, p.

230]. Furthermore, the EU’s evolution along the path of polity construction increasingly requires its own democratic legitimacy instead of reference to the technocratic legitimacy and indirect legitimacy borrowed from the Member States. Thus, the trend of strengthening democratic institutions at the EU level has been viewed as a compensation mechanism. Furthermore, the enhancement of the European Parliament’s position in the EU institutional system was recognised as the central idea reflecting the commitment of the Member States to the idea of democratic governance.

In search of the basic formula to adequately define standards for democratic legitimate governance at the supranational level, the three core principles put forward by Abraham Lincoln – ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people’ – have been recognised by most scholars [11, p. 29]. This formula raised an intricate debate regarding the (non)-existence of the European demos as a necessary component for the formation of post- or supranational democracy [15]. This approach was countered by post-nationalism social philosophers who were promoting a “thin” political identity detached from the nation in contrast to the “thick” ethno-nationalism identity. Thus, democracy has been detached from the nation state by shifting the emphasis towards the notion of “deliberative democracy”, which focuses on due deliberation during the decision-making process. In other words, following legitimate procedures was reasserted as an important factor of its own. This trend reaffirmed the idea of post-modern social philosophers of democracy lying at the core of legitimacy [3]. Furthermore, in a wider context, democracy today is conceived as “a legitimation principle which lays out the conditions necessary for finding out what constitutes the “common interest” and, more generally, a community or common identity” [11, p. 32].

The rather innovative concept of ‘demoi-cracy’ offers a new look at the EU as a polity “evolving on the basis of mainly nationally constituted demoi” [1, p. 2]. Thus, “[a] democracy consisting of only one people has one *pouvoir constituant* and several *pouvoirs constitués* (parliament, executive, etc.). ... A demoi-cracy “has several *pouvoirs constituants*, i.e., constitutive member statespeoples, and also several *pouvoirs constitués*”. According to Schim-

melfennig et al., this fact “does not only affect government activity, but the constitutional structure of statehood” [1, p. 3-4]. Nonetheless, this concept suggests that the democratic qualities of the EU should be assessed “on the balance between, and interaction of, the political rights of individuals and those of the democratically constituted statespeoples” [2, p. 340]. Thus, it nonetheless stresses the liberal democracy “core” of the concept, despite the innovative angle on the EU provided.

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ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИЙ СОЮЗ: ЙОГО МІЖНАРОДНА ІДЕНТИЧНІСТЬ ТА ЦІННОСТІ, ЩО СКЛАДАЮТЬ ЇЇ ОСНОВУ

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Мета: у статті досліджується проблематика міжнародної ідентичності ЄС та цінностей, що складають основу цієї ідентичності. У статті підкреслюється важливість цієї ідентичності як з теоретичної, так і з практичної точок зору. Також стаття стверджує, що основу ідентичності ЄС складає ліберально-демократична модель урядування. **Методи:** теоретичну та методологічну основу статті складають концепції соціального конструктивізму, європейського конституціоналізму, та нового інституціоналізму. **Дискусія:** висвітлює нові перспективи тлумачення сутності між-

народної ідентичності ЄС, її важливості для зовнішньополітичної діяльності ЄС та роль інституцій в формуванні цієї ідентичності. Більш того, у статті пропонується аналіз концепції Нормативна Сила Європа, яка є однією із головних концепцій щодо розуміння сутності відносин ЄС із третіми країнами, та аналіз тих цінностей, які покладається в основу міжнародної ідентичності ЄС.

Ключові слова: Європейський Союз, соціальний конструктивізм, міжнародна ідентичність, ліберальна демократія, багаторівнева система врядування.

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**ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЙ СОЮЗ: ЕГО МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ И ЦЕННОСТИ,
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Цель: в статье исследуются проблематика международной идентичности ЕС и ценностей, которые составляют основу этой идентичности. В статье подчеркивается важность этой идентичности как с теоретической, так и с практической точек зрения. Также в статье утверждается, что основа идентичности ЕС составляет либерально-демократическая модель управления. **Методы:** теоретическую и методологическую основу статьи составляют концепции социального конструктивизма, европейского конституционализма и нового институционализма. **Дискуссия:** исследуются различные аспекты феномена международной идентичности ЕС, ее важность для внешнеполитической деятельности ЕС, а также роль институции в формировании этой идентичности. Более того, в статье предлагается анализ концепции Нормативная Сила Европа, которая является одной из главных концепций толкования сути отношений ЕС с третьими странами, и анализ ценностей, которые составляют основу международной идентичности ЕС.

Ключевые слова: Европейский Союз, социальный конструктивизм, международная идентичность, либеральная демократия, многоуровневая система управления.