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THE EU AS A CONTINENT WIDE POLITICAL ENTITY: EXTERNAL 'NORMATIVE ACTOR' AND INTERNAL 'NORMATIVE POWER'

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(in sabbatical)

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EXTERNAL 'NORMATIVE ACTOR' AND INTERNAL 'NORMATIVE POWER'

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What does the theory say about continent wide political entities? To what extent do those theories apply to the European Union? And what do they tell us about the role of the European Union on the world scene? Two contemporary French political geographers may provide some useful starting points for the discussion.

CONTINENTAL ENTITIES AS GLOBAL PLAYERS

Rather than speaking of "control", Jacques Levy distinguishes three levels of spatial organisation in every political entity ³:

- the strategic level ;

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² This contribution to the IERI closing seminar (25 June 2013) is published as a personal view and does not reflect the point of view of any academic or European institution.

³ Jacques Levy, " Contrôle : un concept incontrôlé ? Pouvoir, espace et société " in Hervé Théry, *L'Etat et les stratégies du territoire*, Paris, CNRS, 1991

- the civilian level (norms, administrative organisation, public services) ;
- the democratic level (legitimacy institutions: churches, parties, trade unions).

This distinction by Jacques Levy may help to understand the specific constraints of large, continent wide political entities.

Usually large political entities have strategic difficulties to secure their vast territory and long borders against all internal and external potential threats.

They find it difficult to ensure an even level of service and control throughout their territory.

They have to find ways to accommodate into a single system many local interests, identities and diverging economic priorities resulting of heterogeneous economic clusters within their territory.

This explains the specific role of the military, the focus of infrastructures, and the usually federal organisation of government.

A certain sense of un-security, limited resources available at central level, and constant internal divisions, make continent wide political entities often oscillate between expansion, isolation, and risks of destabilisation from within.

In one word, they have good reasons to qualify for being 'difficult' players in the international system.

Paul Claval returns to the weberian distinction between power and authority.

He helps to understand why bigger continental wide-entities can survive and succeed.

If mere power is difficult to keep and organise over time upon a continent, authority can nonetheless be accepted on the basis of well established common rules - be they written (institutions, laws) or resulting from a common material civilization created by participation to a common economy and a common information space. Self-enforcement of common rules at local level makes them effective more than any kind of central control.

While issues formally decided at central level remain limited and check and balances organised in a way that dominance is prevented⁴, convergence happens at grass-root level through shared culture and economic practices. Each local community, although having a strong identity, engages itself in the respect of common basic principles and acts as a microcosm for the whole⁵.

⁴ See also Sergio Fabbrini, *Compound Democracies: Why the United States and Europe Are Becoming Similar*, USA, Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁵ Paul Claval, *Espace et pouvoir*, Paris, PUF, 1978 et *La Conquête De L'espace Américain - Du Mayflower Au Disneyworld*, Paris, Flammarion, 1990

There is then no surprise if such political constructs- rather weak in the centre - usually engage with caution in multilateralism as soon as it has a binding dimension, rather favour self-determination for other nations, and hesitate between projecting its own values beyond its borders or limiting itself to pragmatic cooperation.

The European Union, although not a federation, witnesses some of same difficulties which continent wide political entities are usually facing:

- the constant challenge to create and up-date continent wide infrastructures,
- the relative scarcity of resources at central level,
- difficulties in consensus building, institutional complexity,

But it also possesses some of the assets of the most successful ones:

- a well established common market,
- widely acknowledged general principles,
- elements of a material civilization derived from capitalism, industrialisation, welfare state and consumerism,
- a common wish by Members States and citizens to retain an influence on global affairs.

CONTINENTAL ENTITIES AS EXTERNAL "NORMATIVE ACTORS"

For more than a decade, the European Union has indeed been asserting itself as a new or emerging normative foreign policy actor, driven by self-declared principles. Some have said that the European Union had not other choice but to turn to soft power. Some others considered on the contrary that a rule and value based diplomacy as a signal of maturity in a polycentric world in which cooperation is more likely to bring about changes and deliver transformation than traditional power politics.

This more assertive role has been backed by stronger institutional support since the Lisbon Treaty with the establishment of the External Action Service. It has grown in a time when the US themselves have tried to increase their soft power and "lead from behind". In the same moment, Russia, China and India have also increasingly developed into assertive actors on the global stage and have claimed to be driven by a normative agenda".⁶

⁶ Nathalie Tocci (ed.), *Who is a Normative Foreign Policy Actor ? The European Union and its Global Partners*, Bruxelles, CEPS, 2008

If the European Union is to be an effective normative actor, the challenges seem to be clear-cut:

- a. "singing the same song" if not by one voice. This is a field in which fine tuned polyphony has to be privileged over the "creative cacophonia" described by Kalipso Nicolaïdis and the Gonzales' Report as the rule within the Union.
- b. gaining one seat in as many normative fora as possible⁷,
- c. being able to back one's word with some leverage (aid, sanction, coercion),
- d. establishing a effective cooperation with other normative actors and standard setters, and - in some cases - normative alliances.

But "*having a common position and sustaining common values will not be sufficient for the European Union to be considered a global actor. If the European Union is to be a pole in the global system, it needs a capacity to deliver more or less in line with the capacity of other large continent-wide political entities*"⁸.

CONTINENT WIDE POLITICAL ENTITIES AS INTERNAL NORMATIVE POWERS

What is the value added of those large political entities for global relations?

- a. They are able to implement and enforce commitments made to third parties over vast territories and large populations.
- b. They are able to pool together significant resources at central level in order to face unexpected circumstances.
- c. Due to this and due to the size of their economy, they are able to provide substantial aid and meaningful sanctions
- d. Usually they act as monetary entities will full-fledged monetary institutions.

This is how continent wide entities reduce the complexity of the global economy.

⁷ Michael Emerson (and alii), *Upgrading the EU's Role as Global Actor*, , Brussels, CEPS, 2011

⁸ *Preparing for Complexity. European Parliament in 2025. Going global, going local, going digital*. Final Report by the Secretary-General, Brussels : European Parliament, April 2013

The "Hobbesian" institutional capacity to ensure implementation of treaties, agreements, standards - in one word the *internal* normative power - are here more important than the external normative activity.

To be considered a serious partner in the global multi-polar setting, the capacity to deliver on commitments and to apply one's own common rule consistently over time is the first credibility test, not only for fellow States in the international system, but also for investors, migrants, NGOs...

In that regard, the European Union, with its impressive "acquis communautaire" soon implemented in 28 Member States, and even beyond through neighbourhood arrangements and accession negotiations, is clearly performing one of the key function of a continental political entity. One may even wonder if the European Union is not performing this Hobbesian function to have rules implemented *better* than other fully fledged political federations.

Table 1: Level of integration and openness of continent wide political entities

	Brazil	Canada	India	E.U.	U.S.
Free flow of goods	Tax on interstate trade (7% or 12% depending on the destination). To be harmonized as of 2013.	Interprovincial non-tariff trade barriers on a few products (e.g. dairy and agricultural products, alcohol).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutionally, a State is allowed to impose restrictions on the flow of trade • Tariffs across states • Non-harmonized Standards 	Mutual recognition of national rules	
Free flow of services		Strong regulations on professional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrati 	Some regulations on professional	

		services Public procurements	ve burden • Some regulations on professional Services	services	
Free flow of people		Non-mutual recognition of certain professional qualifications across provinces	• Constitutionally, a State is allowed to impose such restrictions on the flow of people • Some labour market rigidities hampering labour force mobility	Schengen area	
Free flow of capital	Free flows across states, but not at the international level.		Free flows across states but controls on FDI re-introduced since 2007.		
Monetary integration				Euro area	
Fiscal integration					
Political integration		Separatist provinces			

Source: *Preparing for Complexity, the European Parliament in 2025*, Brussels, European Parliament, March 2013

The internal normative power of the European Union is certainly its key asset in the traditional American vision. The European Union is granted to bring "stability" to the continent and to provide a secure, reliable and largely predictable environment for American investors.

CONCLUSION

ADDRESSING INTERNAL BLIND SPOTS FIRST

If the European Union entity is *de facto* playing the role of the continent wide political entity of Western and Central Europe and having there the internal "normative power" over 500 millions consumers and workers, then its international credibility as a global actor can be separated from internal organisational issues. Investing in solving those issues may do more for restoring the lustre of European Union on the world scene than just an assertive and value based diplomacy.

1. **Institutions matter** not only for us but also for the rest of the world: the capacity of the European Union to retain cohesiveness, to minimize the number of exemptions, to decide and implement swiftly is not only essential for us but also for our global partners. It is not enough to recall the rule of law as a general principle of EU's action in the world. We are to deliver internally. The expected result calls stable and predictable rules, implemented throughout the Union in a consistent fashion.

The generalisation of opt-outs, exemptions, enhanced cooperation would on the contrary weaken the role of the European Union as the normative hub of Western and Central Europe and weaken the interest of third parties to deal with Europeans at that level.

The quality of internal arrangements around decision-making is a pre-requisite for external credibility and influence.

The subsidiarity and proportionality principles, the double-check on the European Commission by Member States and pan-European political forces represented in the European Parliament, the whole mechanism of "comitologie", are not byzantine innovations that just end up slowing down the decision making process at European level. They are instruments here to facilitate the building of acceptable compromises that can be brought to effective implementation.

Keeping decision taken at European level legitimate for the majority of citizens is by no means a peripheral challenge for the Union's role in the world.

The new citizen initiative, a more politicized European elections, representatives closer to citizens and shorter budget cycles may be part of the answer. The establishment of a direct link between citizens and the European Commission President that may result from a new type of European election campaign with lead candidates presented by pan-European political forces. This new linkage is in line with the requirement of traditional "conservative" political theories which claim that legitimacy is to be attached to the leaders more than to the rules and processes of the political system, as this has been recalled to us by professor Seminatore.

2. **A solid 26 Members (or more) EMU** remains one of the achievements expected from the European Union as a pole in the global economy. The divide between EMU and non EMU member states within the Union is accepted as a transition process not as a structural permanent split. This is the reason why, to my opinion, future EMU members have to be associated as fully and as early as possible to decisions taken on the common currency.

3. **The pooling of resources at central level** to face the unexpected remains the weak point of the European Union as a continental political entity and will have to be addressed at a point⁹.

Progress may be on the way in the monetary field with the creation of rescue funds and financial backstops. But even there things remain fragile.

There is no serious pooling of resources in the field of transport, energy infrastructure or digital infrastructure.

There is no serious pooling of resources in the field of defence or defence industry. On the contrary, what seems to occur seems to be renationalisation and globalisation, which increases the dependency ratio for most of the Member States.

If the mutualisation of Member States' resources together with a central additional European Union dimension is likely to remain adequate in the field of diplomacy, the normative power inside the Union, which is the key to international credibility, has to rely on much more robust institutions that allows stronger discipline based on decisions taken in a more democratic fashion. The institutional instruments for external normative action and those required for internal normative power should not be necessary aligned. One size does not fit all.

⁹ Franck Debié, *L'Avenir de l'Europe*, Paris, Institut Diderot, 2010