The EU as an international actor from a theoretical perspective

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Summary

- What are the methods?
- What are the theoretical interpretations?
- Can the EU be considered as an actor?
- What kind of actor (which concepts?)
1. ≠ methods to analyse the EU role

- Different **methods** and **theories** in the field of **IR**

- **Two categories:**
  - a. Communitarian **decision-making process** approach
  - b. Public policies
a. Communitarian decision-making process approach

Aims:

- elaboration process of the external policies
- power distribution (EU institutions)

Input
b. Public policies:

- **Aim:**
  - EU positions within global governance
  - the way the EU interacts with 3rd actors

- **Question:**
  - Is the EU capable to act in an effective way in the field of ‘low politics’ & ‘high politics’?

- **Output**
2. The EU in the theoretical debate

D. making approach attempts to answer theoretical question:

- Can the EU be considered an international actor?

But what is ‘an international actor’?

Need a definition for the actor

Marcel Merle:

  - To exist an actor needs several assets:
    - **Authority:**
      - international recognition and capable to take action:
        *Is the EU recognised internationally?*
    - **Autonomy:**
      - must be able to act in autonomous way:
        *Does the EU have the freedom of action regarding its MS?*
    - **Coherence:**
      - must be able to define its goals, to adopt strategies and to implement these strategies
        *Is the EU able to implement a coherent global strategy?*
Marcel Merle’s Conclusion

Does the EU have the essential assets of an international actor?:

→ NO

Book before the end of the cold world and all the treaties (Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, Lisbon)

Since then:

- EU has grown up
- Political union
- CFSP, CSDP, HR/EEAS, institutions + competences...
- A lot of new assets

But, in spite of that the dominant school of thinking in IR still support the EU ≠ from an international actor

Who are they? To which paradigm do they belong?
3. Pessimistic answer provided by the realist theories

- Robert CHAOUAD (IRIS), Christopher HILL (LSE), Richard HAASS (CFR), Joseph GRIECE (Duke University), John MEARSHEIMER (Chicago University), ...

- The EU:

  - unable to speak with one voice

  - unable to act in a coordinated way in a crisis context
Examples

- Former Yugoslavia (during the nineties),
- Israeli-Palestinian conflict (on-going conflict),
- War in Iraq (2003),
- Libya conflict (2011),
- Russia intervention in Syria (2015)
- Migration crisis (2015)
- Europe’s recognition of Juan Guaidó (2019)
- …
The realist interpretation

- Realists consider
  - Strategic stakes
  - State actors
  - The EU ≠ actor
4. Alternative approaches

- EU = an international actor:
  - Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler:
    - *The European Union as a global actor*
  - Damien Helly and Franck Petiteville:
    - *L’UE, acteur international*
  - Ester Barbé:
    - *La Unión Europea en las relaciones internacionales*
  - Christopher Hill, Michael Smith & Sophie Vanhoonacker
    - *International Relations and the European Union*
  - ...
+ Criticisms

- Realist assertions too ‘radical’ and too ‘simplistic’:

- Realist approach is ‘reductive’:
  - CFSP
  - CFSP

- Comparison of 2 examples:
Example 1

D. making in CFSP

The major distinctions lie in ≠ elements:

- The right of initiative
- The decision making in the Council
- The role of the EP and the EC ➔ weak power BUT:

  - EP:
    - ➔ may ask questions
    - ➔ some power through its control over the EU budget
  - EC:
    - ➔ no right of initiative
    - ➔ retains some influence through the HR’s
Example 2:

D. making process → trade:

Which are the institutions that matter?

EC, Council, EP:

- **EC**:
  - right of initiative
  - negotiates on behalf of the MS
  - in charge of the day-to-day running of the trade policy

- **Council**:
  - gives the mandate to the EC
  - takes decisions by qualified majority
  - keeps the EC under control → EC must report regularly

- **EP**:
  - EC must report the EP:
    - but the EU doesn’t authorise opening of negotiation
  - decides jointly with the Council whether to approve
What are their theoretical assertions of these alternative approaches?

- EU policies cover all the significant issues concerning contemporary global politics

- No other actor with a comparable range of interest, policies & relationships

- EU is becoming more autonomous regarding its MS:
  - Qualified majority voting extended
5. Public policies

- Second debate ➔ analyses:
  - the way in which the EU positions itself in the international arena
  - the international impact of the external policies of the EU
- Pays less attention to the decision-making process
- Interested in the influence that the EU policies have on:
  - Neighbourhood,
  - developing countries,
  - global trade agenda,
  - international climate negotiations,
  - reducing international poverty,
  - promoting democracy and human rights
  - shaping regionalism,
  - development of multilateralism
  - …
What kind of actor?

The question addressed:

- what kind of international power is the EU?

Concept of Power (realist approach & applied to State):

- The definition of the concept

Concept of power used regarding the EU during the 1970s:

- First enlargement:
  - Perceived as a peacemaker & power
Johan GALTUNG and François DUCHÊNE

Johan Galtung:


François Duchêne:


J. Galtung: F. Duchêne:

- ‘Superpower’ ‘Civilian power’

Concept of superpower:

- covers all features of power ➔ military

F. Duchêne:

- Why a ‘civilian power’?
  - will never have an autonomous defence capacity
- But, a collective actor capable to implement policies inside & outside
  - Civilian instruments of power:
    - trade, financial support, humanitarian and development aid, …
    - Promoting diplomacy & cooperation with others
Civilian power: popular concept in the 90s

- Why?:
  - end of the bipolar confrontation ➔ dominant narrative concerning the ‘end of history’:
    - Globalism & western liberal democracy
    - ‘decline of war’
    - reinforcement of international cooperation
  - Dominant perception ➔ exercise of power of military force deacrising

- Alvaro de VASCONCELOS & Marie-Françoise DURAND:
  - La PESC, ouvrir l’Europe au monde, Paris Science Po
  - The EU = a ‘sui generis power’ (unique)
  - A new kind of actor:
    - --> EU: ‘a post-modern power’:
    - --> EU = definitely a ‘civilian power’
Some show the limit of the concept of civilian power

Karen SMITH:


The EU is not a civilian actor anymore

CSDP

EU abandoning its civilian power image
Still a civilian power in spite of the fact that the EU now has military instruments

Why?:

- defence/security = very sensitive issues
- will remain an intergovernmental issue dominated by the MS
- EU will never be a traditional military power
Answer of the liberal institutionalist approach

Mario TELÒ:

- Book ➔ *Europe: a civilian power?* (USA, Palgrave, 2006)

EU:

- has developed a distinctive social model:
  - It combines:
    - economic growth
    - high living standards
    - good working conditions
- has succeeded in promoting:
  - liberal values
  - a particular vision of regionalism outside Europe
‘Normative power’: new concept

- Ian MANNERS:
  - BOOK ➔ *Normative power Europe* (London, Palgrave, 2011)

- Escape the dichotomy between ‘civilian’ and ‘military’
  - EU influence as a source of norms

- Question raised:
  - How are EU norms disseminated in world politics?:
    - Promote the international abolition of death penalty

- Other case studies show the EU’s ability to diffuse:
  - Industrial norms,
  - Trade norms
  - Environmental norms
  - …

- Conclusions:
  - EU = constructed in a normative basis
  - EU = acts in a normative way in world politics
Last concept: ‘Transformative power’

Heather GRABBE

BOOK ➔ The EU's Transformative power (London, Palgrave):

EU ➔ conditionality ➔ candidates countries

transformative power captures how EU uses accession conditions to exercise influence:

- political criteria
- economic criteria
- administrative and institutional capacity

EU = Transformative power:

- imposing standards/preferences
- shaping public policy-making in 3rd countries