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## THE CONCEPT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S NORMATIVE POWER

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*Traditionally, studies into a state's foreign policy focus on the international situation and national interests of the parties. However, such approach does not completely conform to the objectives of studies into the foreign policy of the European Union — an example of unique integration of states. One of the modern approaches aimed to describe the nature of the EU as an actor in world politics is the concept of the EU's 'normative power' arguing that the 'power' of the EU lies in the ability to change the international community's idea of the 'norm'. The concept of the EU's 'normative power' is the focus of the article. The author describes the historical background of EU's foreign (and to a degree, domestic) policy, assuming that the policy is a 'product' of its time. The article examines three approaches to understanding these concepts and analyses the correlation between the 'normative' and 'soft power' as well as related contradictions. In conclusion, the author identifies prospects of studies into the concept of 'normative power' of the European Union.*

*Key words:* foreign policy of the European Union, European Union, EU, 'normative power'

For over ten years, European studies have focused primarily on the position of the European Union in the international arena. When analysing the degree and methods of EU's influence on world politics, it is worth taking into account its structural and conceptual features distinguishing the EU from classical Westphalian states. Despite the increased scope of the EU's opportunities and competences, the Union remains an alliance of states that voluntarily transferred part of their sovereignty to the supranational level. The Lisbon Treaty did not solve the prob-

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lem of unity and harmony in foreign policy — an increase in the number of actors shaping the Union's foreign policy complicated the negotiation process necessitating harmonisation of positions not only between member states and supranational institutions, but also between the latter. This circumstance imposes certain limitations on the possibilities of the European Union to project its 'power'. Moreover, in view of the complications faced by the EU when amending the founding EU treaties (a vivid example is the breakdown of negotiations on a Constitution for Europe), it is not likely that the European Union will gain sufficient institutional strength and political will in the near future to employ the most radical tools of 'hard power'.

This leads to a question as to the nature of the power of the European Union, whose choice of tools to influence world politics is rather limited.

This article addresses approaches to defining the EU's powers and pays special attention to the concept of the Union's 'normative power' and its critical analysis. The article considers the historical background to the concept of EU's 'normative power', examines three approaches to this phenomenon and the correlation between the 'normative power' and other 'powers', and analyses key contradictions within the concept.

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International authors have coined a series of terms to identify the EU as an international actor and to describe its 'power', namely 'civilian power' [16; 36], '*normative power*' [22; 24; 14], 'quiet superpower' [30; 31] 'soft imperialist' [20], 'trade power' [29], 'responsible power' [6], 'realist power' [39], 'ethical power' [7], 'pragmatic power' [38], 'market power' [13], etc.

A common characteristic of these concepts is the idea of the Union's integrity as an actor. This characteristic has certain reservations. It is worth noting that most studies are somewhat of a hypothesis or an invitation to discuss the role of the EU in the international arena, which is indicative of the need to identify the Union's position in the current world political system stressing, at the same time, its uniqueness. One of the most popular ideas is the concept of 'normative power' suggesting that the European Union strives to exert influence on other international actors (primarily, states) in terms of the values and rules of behaviour in the international arena and domestic policy. This concept excited keen interest in the academic community and generated, as Christopher Bickerton puts it, a series of 'adjectival prefixes' describing the nature of the EU [10, p. 4].

It is important to understand that, as well as many other political concepts, 'normative power' is a product of its time, therefore, it is worth examining its predecessors outlining the conditions of their formation.

In the early 1970s, as international relations thawed, and first discussions about the potential role of the European Community emerged. A significant contribution to the discussion was made by François Duchêne, who formulated the concept of Europe's 'civil power'. This concept suggests that the European Community is committed to using civil rather than military methods of exerting influence on other states. At the same time,

the policy based on the principles of collective actions and responsibility, common social equality, tolerance, and justice is aimed not only at achieving certain results but also at the formation of a favourable international environment [17, p. 19—20]. This interpretation of ‘power’ was considered as very progressive at the time. However, in that period, world politics was largely affected by the relations between two superpowers, thus the EU could not claim the position of a role model for other states in a short-term perspective.

In the 1980s, the deteriorating relations between the USSR and the USA made the idea of ‘civil power’ less attractive, whereas political realism and the corresponding interpretation of a state’s power came to the fore. According to the Australian realist Hedley Bull, the concept of ‘civil power’ is a ‘contradiction in terms’: the ‘progressive thinking’ of the 1970s rested on a weak foundation, since the ‘force’ of the European Community based on the military power of member states rather than on the Community itself. Bull also believed that Europe should not rely that much on the USA and should be more independent in the field of defence and security [11, p. 150—153]. In 1999, the trend towards strengthening the military component of the Union’s power was formalised in the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War took the discussion about the regional and global status of the European Union to a new level. Alongside the problem of war and peace, the unfolding process of globalisation brought to the fore such issues as human rights, economic equality, promotion of democracy, humanitarian interventions, global climate change, etc. All these changes made it possible for the EU to identify the key areas of its foreign policy based on international ethical norms contained in the Charter of the United Nations<sup>1</sup> and to pursue such policy in line with the objective of supporting democratic values, protecting human rights, and ensuring good governance at the global level. Since then, the idea of the Union’s ‘normative power’ has dominated European studies.

In 2002, in response to the criticism of François Duchêne’s concept of ‘civil power’ by the Australian realist Hedley Bull, the Danish political scientist Ian Manners suggested using the concept of ‘normative power’, which interprets the ‘power’ of the European Union as an ability to develop the idea of ‘norm’ in international relations [22, p. 239]. Manners stressed that the changes sustained by global politics since the 1990s called for a revision of the concepts of ‘civil’ and ‘military power’, since the basic principles underlying these notions became obsolete with the end of the Cold War [22, p. 236—238]. Therefore, the concept of ‘normative power’ formulated within the liberal-idealistic paradigm is underlain by renunciation of totalitarian and state-centred doctrines of traditional approaches, therefore the Union’s ‘power’ cannot be reduced to economic or military elements, being expressed through ideas, opinions, and conscience [14, p. 175].

<sup>1</sup> Later, based on this provision, Lisbeth Aggestam described the European Union at this stage of development as an ‘ethical power’ [7].

At the same time, this conceptual area has certain weak points. In particular, the central thesis of the ‘normative power’ concept is that of the ‘power’ of ideas, whose attractiveness is considered beyond the concept of material stimuli. This is the major difference between ‘normative power’ and its predecessor — ‘civil power,’ — which suggested a connection between the material and non-material sources of ‘power’. Although this assumption did not appear in the first article introducing the concept, in a later 2009 work, Manners emphasised that, in practice, ‘normative power’ was often used alongside material stimuli or physical coercion [27]. This circumstance questions the internal cohesion and originality of the whole concept.

Moreover, there is no unanimous opinion as to how to interpret ‘normative power’. In 2001, Ian Manners systematised his vision of ‘normative power’ and identified three approaches: from the perspective of normative approach to international relations (normative international theory), as a form of an actor’s ‘power’, and, finally, from the perspective of its international identity [28]. Let us consider each of them.

The first approach suggests the existence of a normative approach to international relations. According to the American political scientist Molly Cochran, any theory of international relations is based on the normative approach, i. e. researchers — even those sympathising with the positivistic approach and using methods close to those employed in natural sciences — cannot avoid normative assumptions as to why their research is of scientific significance, what data are most important for the study, and how this data should be interpreted [12, p. 1]. Considering the Union’s ‘normative power’ from the perspective of the normative approach to international relations requires, according to Manners, paying attention to such assumptions. In other words, it is worth taking into account the way researchers estimate and justify these normative assumptions and how they criticise them [28, p. 228]. Manners stresses that, in order to understand what the European Union is, what it does, and what it should do in the international arena, it is important to employ a broader and more contemporary approach rejecting ‘unreflective and uncritical analysis’ and striving to ‘analyse and to judge the EU’s normative power in world politics’ [25, p. 45—46].

The other approach identified by I. Manners suggests considering ‘normative power’ as a special case of the ‘power’ of an actor in world politics. However, it is important to keep in mind that, in its ideal type, it is not manifested through either material stimuli or physical coercion, but rather is expressed in the ability to exercise normative justification. As Manners stresses, this form of ‘power’ is rather close to social power, where ‘power’ over someone is secondary to the *ability* to influence the behaviour of individuals. This is reflected in such a key characteristic of ‘normative’ power as an actor’s ability to formulate and apply normative principles in the international arena in a normatively sustainable way, i. e. normatively explicable and justifiable to others and sustainable for generations to come [28, p. 230].

The third approach is based on the understanding of ‘normative power’ as a characteristic of an actor in world politics from the perspective of inter-

national identity. In other words, as I. Manners stresses, it concerns the degree to which an actor has approached the ‘ideal type of a normative power’. It is assumed that such an actor will use the idea of ‘normative justification’ to ‘normalise a more just cosmopolitical world’ [28, p. 232]. This thesis is crucial for the concept of ‘normative power’, since any strong state can shape an idea of the ‘normal’ in international relations. However, if it does not rely on the principle of ‘normative sustainability’, it cannot be considered a ‘normative power’, since it uses the imperial approach in its relations with the outer world.

A contentious and little-studied aspect of the concept of ‘normative power’ is the correlation between ‘normative power’ and other ‘powers’, primarily, ‘soft power’ (as opposed to ‘hard power’) — a notion coined in the early 1990s by Joseph Nye [32]. Nye defined ‘soft power’ as the ‘ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes’ [33, p. 20–21]<sup>2</sup>. An interesting perspective on J. Nye’s concept is presented in Nikolai Yudin’s work. Based on a context-centred approach, he suggests considering ‘soft power’ as a ‘special form of interaction aimed at achieving long-term strategic goals through subtle, indirect influence on the object. ‘Soft power’ is aimed at the ‘remediation’ of a state’s environment, i.e. minimising the risks of immediate challenges and considerable threats requiring high-cost management and using ‘hard power’ [5, p. 101]. It may seem that ‘normative power’ is similar to ‘soft power’. However, according to Ian Manners and Thomas Diez, it is not the case. They stress that ‘soft power’ is an empirical concept, i.e. it is an instrument of foreign policy that can be used for negative goals. ‘Normative power is an explicitly theoretical concept requiring an understanding of the social diffusion and normative practices. Similarly, normative power is not a foreign-policy tool to be wielded for national interests’ [14, p. 179]. This thesis gives rise to a number of questions. Since ‘normative power’ is not a foreign-policy tool, the norms are disseminated in a different way, including transfer through trade, financial and technical assistance or even sanction policy against third countries [22, p. 245]. Therefore, one cannot exclude situations, when negative consequences for third parties ensuing economic sanctions do not pose a moral obstacle to achieving the final goal of ‘implanting’ desired norms of behaviour. It is not clear how this correlates with the principle of ‘normative sustainability’ and where the borderline between ‘normative power’ and imperial approach falls. The thesis that ‘normative power’ does not serve national interests also raises questions. National interests of a state cannot be considered separately from values and norms. As E. B. Pavlova and T. A. Romanova emphasise, ‘understanding interests is a product of the actor’s perception of the world and

<sup>2</sup> It is worth stressing that the concept of ‘soft power’ is a matter of heated debate among specialists in international relations, since it contains numerous contradictions. This debate is considered in detail in N. V. Yudin’s monograph *A hard look on soft power: A critical analysis of J. Nye’s monograph The future of power* [4].

its current values' [22]. Therefore, it is hardly correct to deny the rational basis of 'normative power'.

Moreover, according to Manners, the term 'soft power' was used by Nye primarily to describe the foreign policy of the United States — a combination of 'soft' and 'hard' power, which makes it unsuitable for studying the European Union [14, p. 179]. From the historical perspective, an additional incentive to popularisation of the concept of EU's 'normative power' in the academic and political circles was the United States' one-sided foreign policy pursued by the Bush administration after September 11, 2001. The EU — unlike the US, which were prone to use military force — strived to use diplomacy to resolve foreign policy disputes. This way, the Union gained a reputation of an actor respecting the rules of international law. Therefore, the idea of the EU's 'normative power' rested on juxtaposing the EU with the US and other actors in world politics. According to the advocates of the 'normative power' concept, whereas classical Westphalian states participated in the process of material competition to achieve their goals, the European Union made a qualitative transition to a new level of relations in the international arena and joined value competition with other actors for developing a favourable environment for international relations. In effect, this means moral superiority and idealisation of the European Union as an actor in world politics that has achieved a sufficient level of development to assess the development of its partners based on its own idea of 'norm' and to influence them, should the need arise to 'implant' lacking qualities. As any approach based on the positions of superiority, the idea of the EU's 'normative power' can raise questions in third countries. This is the case in the EU's relations with Russia, which does not share the EU's perspective on the universality of the norms projected by the Union<sup>3</sup>.

Special attention should be paid to the origins of the Union's 'normative power', i. e. answering the questions as to whether the EU is a 'normative power' because of its nature or because of its policy [22; 23]. As the British authors Thomas Diez and Michele Pace stress, the European Union has both characteristics of a 'normative power' — those of a special 'power' and an actor's identity [15, p. 210—211].

According to Manners, the EU's 'normative power' has three roots: its historical context (i. e. the legacy of the two world wars), its hybrid polity, and its political-legal constitution [22, p. 240—241]. These three circumstances made it possible for the member states to bring together key principles and values under the aegis of the EU and ensure their observation at the national and supranational levels, which made these principles a 'norm' for the European Union. Common EU values are formulated in the founding treaties, which constitute the basis of the Union's identity: *'The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member*

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<sup>3</sup> For more detail on the problem of perception of the EU as a 'normative power' in Russia, see, for instance [1—3].

*States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail*<sup>4</sup>.

Moreover, the European Union is guided by the same principle in the international arena: *'In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter'*<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the European Union develops its relations with the outer world based on a 'power', whose legitimacy<sup>6</sup>, according to Manners is based on these fundamental principles and values [22, p. 244].

However, both in theory and practice, a state's policy can contain contradictions between values. How, in this case, can commitment to one of them justify neglecting the other? This raises the question of priority of values and their interpretation. Today, the European Union is guided by the priority of human rights over the principle of national sovereignty. In other words, this approach makes it possible for the EU to intervene in a state's domestic affairs if this state violates basic human rights. Since this interpretation of international law is not shared by most states, in particular, Russia and China, the legitimacy of the Union's 'normative power' cannot be considered absolute.

One can also question the thesis about 'normative power' being an exclusive feature of the EU, since the above values are formalised in the constitutions of many other states. In view of this circumstance, it is possible to conclude that the role of the EU as an actor capable of affecting the idea of 'norm' in international relations is rooted in its historical context and its hybrid polity.

European and non-European researchers express different opinions about the role and significance of the EU in the international arena. Most European authors are prone to idealise the nature of the European Union. This is especially pronounced in the case of the advocates of the 'normative power' concept. The problem lies in that the consideration of the studied object as a 'global power supporting everything that is goods', a manifestation of the basic values shared by the author, limits his or her ability to judge the attractiveness of the EU as a role model. Moreover, the concept of 'normative power' suggests a *voluntary* desire of other actors to adopt the EU's norms and practices in the conditions of a critical transformation of the Westphalian model. This assumption is perceived by the concept's advocates as a postu-

<sup>4</sup> The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, TFEU. Part One, Article 2.

<sup>5</sup> The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, TFEU. Part One, Article 3.

<sup>6</sup> The problem of legitimacy of 'normative' power is a matter of most heated debate between the proponents and opponents of this concept. For more detail, see, for example [10].



late that does not require verification. Ian Manners seems to be the most fervent idealiser of the EU's role in the international arena. In 2008, he wrote the 'EU has been, is and always will be a normative power in world politics' [25, p. 45]. Such idea takes the idea of the EU's normative power to the plane of ideological concepts.

However, international authors have conducted a series of studies to verify the argument concerning the EU's normative power and consistency of its foreign and domestic policies. The results of these studies are not always unambiguous they indicate that, under certain circumstances, the EU can 'lose its energy' [37, p. 114] when defending some of the norms, for instance, human rights, which has always been central to the EU's 'normative power' [8; 9; 21]. Such inconsistencies reduce the persuasiveness of the EU's 'normative power', which turns to be shaped by political goals, means, and reasons and, therefore, its potential depends on the problem field. Apparently, the Union's 'normative power' is strongest in the areas relating to solve moral and ethical issues — protection of human rights, assistance to international development, environmental protection, and struggle against climate change. Therefore, the future of the European Union as a 'normative power' will largely depend on its successes in the above areas.

On the other hand, one should not interpret self-perception of the EU's aspirations to be a 'normative actor' as a hard fact. The EU can position itself as any force imaginable but the scope of its influence on the international environment will depend on to what degree this vision is shared by other actors in global affairs. Surprisingly, this research area remains little studied, in particular, by European authors despite the perception by others and image being important factors in foreign policy. There is a number of studies on the perception of the EU in such countries as Russia, China, Brazil, India, and Japan, whose results suggest that the Union's image is rather positive in these countries, since it is not associated with 'hard power'. However, it is not associated with 'normative power' either [34; 18; 19; 3; 35]. However, the circumstance that the EU acts in the international arena as if its image were identical to its self-perception can lead to dangerous cognitive dissonance, which will adversely affect the Union's relations with the outer world. Apparently, the European Union is faced with the need to conclude the phase of self-reflecting and identifying its role as a global actor and to pay more attention to the opinion of its partners.

As to the prospects of the concept of 'normative power', it is necessary to take into account its incongruity and a high degree of idealisation of the suggested 'power' of the EU. However, this conceptual area offers a new perspective on the nature of the European Union and its role in global affairs through emphasising such important aspect as the purposiveness and essential bases of the EU's policy. Naturally, in view of the changes taking place in world politics, this research area is far from exhausted. A number of empirical and theoretical works based on the concept of the EU's normative power will appear in the near future. However, it seems that further research requires a more flexible approach to norms and a critique of not only actual

political practices but also the initial conceptual bases of the idea of the EU's 'normative power'.

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