



Call for Papers "Geopolitics & Values: what is the real power of the EU?"

Towards Normative Power Europe

The EU as a standard-bearer of multilateralism and the role of European norms and values in the post-pandemic geopolitical order

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Abbreviations:

EU	The European Union
EEAS	The European External Action Service
EC	The European Commission
EP	The European Parliament
UN	The United Nations
UNIDIR	The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
G7	The Group of Seven is an intergovernmental organization consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
G20	The Group of Twenty is an intergovernmental organization consisting of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, and the European Union.
OSCE	The Organization for Security and Co-operation
ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The coronavirus pandemic has created a demand for closer multilateral cooperation. A combination of factors, such as the US-China rivalry, the EU's pandemic response and growing capabilities, and the demand for global cooperation has paved the way for a European relaunch of multilateralism. Within this context, the EU should take up the role of a normative actor and lead the third states by example. As the EU's normative power could prove crucial for the success of this undertaking, it needs to enhance its normative instruments, such as regional and strategic partnerships, while pursuing a European strategic autonomy. Besides the internal strengthening, the EU should promote a dynamic and autonomous foreign policy based on its normative identity. As the coronavirus has aggravated global problems, the EU should promote multilateral and bilateral cooperation on crucial transnational issues with like-minded partners and engage with big powers. The EU needs to become the third pole of influence between the US and China and utilize its normative power to enhance its geopolitical position.

Short bio

Alumnus of the Utrecht University and of University of Piraeus, Dawid has an eclectic background in European Affairs, International Relations and History. In the last years, he has collaborated with various think tanks all over Europe and has published articles and research papers ranging from EU foreign policy and security studies to political philosophy.



1. Introduction

After decades of intense globalization and integration, multilateralism is currently facing a crisis. The multilateral system put in place after WWII has begun to diverge widely from both the values of “indivisibility” and “nondiscrimination” and the expectations of “diffuse reciprocity” that initially led to its creation (Ruggie, 1992). While conventionally the causes of this development have been attributed to the policies of neo-revisionist powers like China or Russia (Sakwa, 2019), the roots of the modern setbacks stem from the West. Over the last years, several Western countries have experienced backlashes against the intrusiveness and reach of international institutions, such as the established champion of multilateralism, the United States (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Considering that these states have traditionally served as defenders and building blocks of the international order, the present shift has not contributed positively to the perception of multilateralism (Posner, 2017).

The coronavirus pandemic seemed initially to prolong the same narrative. Although being a transnational threat, the major powers did not choose to collaborate through the existing international mechanisms but instead turned to unilateral policies. Following the outbreak, a “race for vaccines” started among the superpowers (namely, China, Russia, and the US), while their political leaders utilized the pandemic for the inauguration of further divisions in the international order. For example, the US blamed China for the global health crisis, hence enhancing the already existing hostile relations, and undermined the functions of the WHO (Boylan, McBeath & Wang, 2020). As the pandemic proceeded, it soon became apparent that “defending the past multilateral legacy is no longer a serious option for any progressive force” (Telo, 2020). In lieu, there was a need to relaunch multilateralism and bring it back to its primary form and values. However, who could accomplish this task? The answer to this inquiry came from an unexpected global actor, the European Union.

When the pandemic started the behavior of EU nations did not differ from that of big powers. All the signs were indicating that the pandemic response would constitute another example of a European failure (such as the 2015 migration or 2008 Euro crises). Despite the initial panic, the long negotiations, and the scenarios of division, the EU managed to set its “machinery” in motion and formulate a collective response to the economic and health crises, thus sending a strong message of internal unity and solidarity. Apart from that, the Union played an important role in fostering and promoting international cooperation to deal with the virus and its consequences (WHO, 2020a). It achieved to both fill the vacuum created by the US-China rivalry and show that it has the expertise, tools, and capabilities to “bear the torch” of multilateralism.

What this paper argues is that the EU needs to instrumentalize the existing impetus and conditions for the reinvigoration of multilateralism. In this endeavor, it has a decisive resource that could prove crucial: its normative power. During the last decades, the Union has consistently pushed “the norms, standards, and prescriptions of world politics away from bounded expectations of state-centricity” and represented values that “are generally acknowledged, within the United Nations system, to be universally applicable” (Manners, 2008: p. 45). As the international order faces a crisis, it should take up the role of a normative power again and lead the third states by example towards multilateralism. The EU needs to formulate a multilateral order that not only tackles the preexisting mistakes but also features the European norms at its epicenter. Thus, in the



post-pandemic world, it needs to transfuse, support, and project the norms, values, and ideas that have been the base of both the European project and the “orthodox” multilateralism.

2. Multilateralism and the Coronavirus Outbreak

For the EU, multilateralism constitutes the core of its foreign policy (Dworkin & Gowan, 2019a), and it is a “part of its DNA” (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014: p. 301). As Christine Kaddous (2015) stresses, the EU’s participation in the contemporary multilateral order is both a “functional necessity” and “general aspiration”. The former refers mostly to the requirement for external representation on the international fora in areas and issues of common interests (p. 22). Due to its relative lack of hard power, the EU needs to invest in different sources of power, such as a rule-based multilateral system (Jokela, 2011: p. 56). The latter is the product of the ideational and normative commitments stemming from both the EU’s multilateral nature and its “modus operandi”. Since its creation, the EU has been a vivid promoter of a qualitative multilateralism, which is an alloy of Ruggie’s principles and the values, norms, and ideas constituting its own identity. This commitment is especially apparent in the EU’s body of law and official discourse at the regional and international levels. For instance, the significance of the multilateral approach has been repeatedly stressed in official documents like the European Security Strategy (2003), the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), and the recent EU Global Strategy (2016).

The misfortunes of the 20th century (such as World War II and the Cold War) have proved that an effective multilateral order is not possible without normative foundations and the active presence of a strong EU. For this reason, the EU has been “establishing close relationships and practical working methods to engage in the global governance architecture” (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2014: p. 299). Over the last years, the EU has been even more vocal about the importance of multilateralism in its official discourse. For example, in 2016, it adopted the aforesaid EU Global Strategy and in 2019, the EC and EP highlighted the intention to support and promote multilateralism consistent with European principles (EC, 2019; EP, 2020a). While the emphasis on multilateralism has been severely criticized and interpreted as a sign of weakness (Biscop, 2018), it has now created a unique opportunity for the EU in the post-pandemic world. The coronavirus outbreak and the existing economic and political situation have generated the conditions for the EU to not only relaunch multilateralism but also lead this process.

Firstly, in an international order dominated by Sino-American rivalry, the EU proved to be the most reliable supporter and promoter of a strong multilateralism. Following the eruption of the pandemic, China and the US’ decisions to adopt unilateral stances and divisive rhetoric have further reinforced this perception. Contrary to the two superpowers, the Union repeatedly encouraged multilateralism to de-escalate the global health crisis and supported technically and materially the work of international organizations (Castellarin, 2020). On top of that, the EU has managed to “make a positive impression” on the international community. The latter is especially important considering that Europeans have not been alone in this goal of defending and preserving the multilateral system. Plenty of states and organizations (like Canada, Japan, and the African Union) have expressed their opposition to the emergence of a bipolar world and their support for Europe’s vision of a table rules-based order (Dworkin & Gowan, 2019b: p. 3). Thus, the EU could utilize the “approval” of the third states to position itself as a third pole between the US and China and facilitate the undertaking of relaunching multilateralism, which is also the “popular” demand as the recent UN General Assembly has shown (UN, 2020a).



Secondly, the EU has repeatedly demonstrated that it has the capabilities and instruments to both keep the multilateral system running and help it expand over the next years. Even before the eruption of the pandemic, the EU has enjoyed the role of the “middleman” at the international fora. Indicatively, a European official in New York estimated that the EU member states take up a convening or chairing position in roughly four-fifths of the UN negotiation process (Dworkin & Gowan, 2019b: p. 11). Furthermore, the EU has repeatedly shown that it can foster multilateralism and lead to the adoption of crucial agreements. An excellent example is the Paris Agreement in 2015, when Germany, France, and the other Member States cooperated brilliantly with the US to draw the “neo-revisionist” powers, namely Russia and China, into the conference, and ensure that there would be no hindrances in the adoption of the final document (Brandt, 2018). Following the recent US turn to unilateralism, the EU has been forced to act autonomously and take on additional responsibilities. Although the initial projections were discouraging, the EU has managed to work along with other major or middle powers (e.g., China, India, Egypt, and Ethiopia) and take leadership in issues of common interest at the international level (e.g., the UN Climate Conference in Katowice in 2018 or the Climate Action Summit in September 2019).

Thirdly, the EU has displayed that it can tackle transnational crises by formulating a prompt pandemic response at the international and domestic levels. On the external front, the EU proved to be more than capable of “steering” multilateralism in the crisis of last months. To tackle the negative consequences of the pandemic, the EU instrumentalized the multilateral organization (such as the UN, G7, G20, WHO, WTO) as platforms for communications and formulation of solutions. Moreover, it took a leading role in the negotiations to ensure the adoption of collective decisions and the well-functioning of organizations. The biggest manifestation of the former is the EU’s success to achieve a compromise resolution and secure the extension of international cooperation based around the WHO, equitable access to testing, treatment, and vaccines, and for an independent evaluation of the WHO’s performance “at the earliest appropriate moment” (WHO, 2020b). Except for that, the EU funded most of the global initiatives (EC, 2020a) and provided financial aid to its regional partners in the context of EU global response (EC, 2020b).

On the domestic level, the EU accomplished to reinvigorate the trust of its population in the European undertaking (Krastev & Leonard, 2020) and show the possibilities of multilateral cooperation. Despite the existence of esoteric disputes, the EU managed to tackle the health and economic crises that emerged during the first months of the pandemic. To address the former, the EU utilized its preexisting instruments (like the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control and the Health Security Committee) and reinforced them by creating a European response team (EC, 2020c), while to overcome the latter, it proposed an ambitious 750 billion recovery fund. This dual response was especially important as it gave a chance to the EU to dismiss the preexisting criticism regarding the lack of unity among the Member States (Chaban & Holland, 2014). In other words, the EU demonstrated that when confronted with a transnational issue, it seeks the solution in a multilateral and collective manner.

Fourthly, the EU enjoys an advantageous position in the new post-pandemic multilateral order. In the last years, the European leaders and diplomats have been actively promoting the formulation of coalitions and caucuses in support of multilateralism. An excellent example of this practice is Germany’s launch of the “Alliance of Multilateralism” that unites states desiring (such as Mexico, Canada, and South Korea) to create a “rules-based international order and essential instruments of international cooperation” (Alliance of Multilateralism, 2020). Other similar European global initiatives are France’s Paris Peace Forum and the “EU8” (now “EU6”) in the UN Security Council. Apart from that, the EU has established itself as a force of progress and a strong supporter



of multilateralism in the “eye” of the international community. For the last decades, it has been pushing for cooperation in new policy areas, such as cyber-security, health, or climate change. Moreover, it has already developed multilateral solutions to contemporary issues like the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) on internet governance, demonstrated leadership in climate change prevention (e.g., the European Green Deal), and paved the way for the treatment of both recent health and economic crises. This distinctive combination of expertise and global appeal is what sets the EU apart from other actors and makes possible the undertaking of relaunching multilateralism.

3. The normative power of the European Union

Over the last decades, the concept of normative power has been used repeatedly to describe the distinctive European “ideological influence on other members in international relations” (Manners, 2002: p. 238). Inspired by François Duchêne notion of “civilian power” and in line with Nye’s “soft power”, this theoretical approach was created by Ian Manners to function as a sociological or cognitive framework, which aims to dismiss the formal faulty analysis of EU’s role in a solely materialistic and power equilibrium fashion. The scholar observed that contrary to the other great powers, the EU shapes the international system not as much as with the use of “hard power” (e.g., military power or economic sanctions), but instead through the attractiveness of the ideas, standards, and values driving the project of European integration (Manners, 2002:p. 239). These include peace, liberty, democracy, supranational rule of law, and human rights, social solidarity; anti-discrimination; sustainable development; and good governance (Manners, 2002:p. 240). According to Manners, while these norms are a manifestation of the EU’s identity, values, and ideas, they also force it to act in a normative way due to their legal nature. In fact, most of these principles do not constitute mere rhetoric but are legally binding commitments (Dunne, 2008: p. 22).

Soon after its emergence, the concept of normative power lost its popularity. In the last two decades, the EU faced a series of crises and internal divisions (such as populism in the Central and Southern EU Member States) that negatively affected its normative image and identity. However, the current global circumstances have brought the concept back to the attention of policymakers and scholars. The lack of a great power driving multilateralism forward has created a gap that could be filled by a normative actor, such as the EU. To utilize this chance, the Union does not need to pursue outdated and ineffective practices like “arms race” or “power dilemmas”. On the contrary, it should invest in its normative power and exert a positive influence on the remaining third states in the time of crises. In this manner, it will achieve a two-fold result: to push the other states towards multilateral cooperation and establish itself as a normative and leading force in this process. The role of the EU is thus perceived as a “force of good” and progress in a divided world by conflicts (Skolimowska, 2015). This perception also helps to boost its geopolitical appeal and impact on third states (Ginsberg, 2001). Nevertheless, for the normative power to be effective, it should correspond to the EU’s capabilities to diffuse its standards, values, and principles.

a. The instruments of normative power

To export its normative power, the EU uses a “toolkit” of normative power instruments, which include: a) spontaneous diffusion, in which the norms are naturally diffused in the third states without EU’s direct engagement; b) the use of communication strategies, which constitutes the informational activity of the EU; c) procedural activities, which is the institutionalization of relations with the EU; d) transference of mutual benefits in the relations of the EU with third states;



e) the presence of the EU in the third states; f) cultural diffusion, the process of learning European norms by third states (Manners, 2002: p. 254; Skolimowksa, 2015). Considering that the efficiency of the EU's normative power is dependent on its capabilities to transfuse its values, standards, and norms, the focus on the instruments has the purpose of examining the potential that its influence has or could have on the third states. Putting it simply, by treating them as manifestations of the EU's normative power, the analysis seeks to validate the existence of the conditions that could facilitate the relaunch of multilateralism based on European norms.

Regarding spontaneous and cultural diffusion, it is difficult to examine their impact on third states. Yet, some indications are suggesting that the EU is more than capable of diffusing its norms and culture with or without its direct engagement. For one thing, the European countries have been figuring at the top of soft power indexes in the last years, which constitutes a good hint of the EU's growing spontaneous diffusion. In the Soft Power 30 index, among the first twenty places, eleven belong to the EU Member States, while France is positioned in the first place (McClory, 2019). This shift indicates that the European political values and culture have become more "appealing" (Nye, 2008), and so does its normative power and spontaneous diffusion.

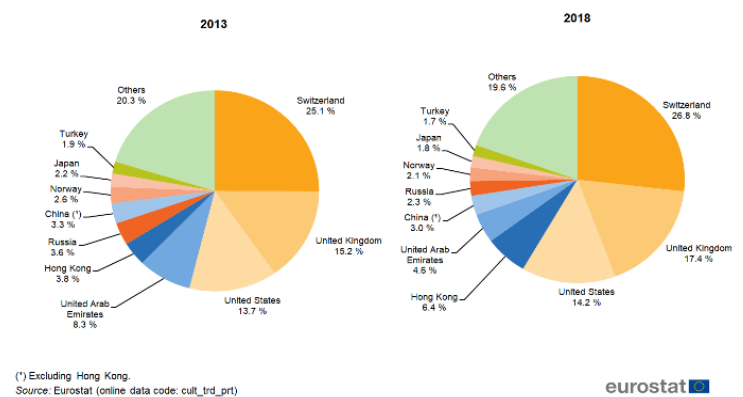


Figure 1. Top 10 main partners for extra EU exports of cultural goods(%) (Eurostat, 2018)

and Partnership Instrument). Except for that, the EU has promoted cultural cooperation through major European initiatives, such as the EU4Culture Program of the Eastern Partnership (EC, 2020d), and its official discourse, e.g., the 2016 Global Strategy (EUGS, 2016). The current pandemic has further reinforced the process of cultural diffusion as the EU has been both contributing to various international and regional initiatives (e.g., the G20 Annual Plan) and transfusing its practices and norms through international agenda-setting and agenda-building (EC, 2020e).

The EU has also been investing in its informational activity and communication strategies. Over the last years, it has been actively promoting its norms through its official discourse at the international fora. The EU has instrumentalized its information diffusion to influence third countries to join the European cause and further validate the European image as a "force of good" (Skolimowska, 2015). For example, during the pandemic, the EU has exploited its normative influence to encourage global and regional policies in line with its norms of sustainable development, good governance, and social solidarity (UN, 2020b). Moreover, in their speeches, the European leaders and representatives have repeatedly stressed their commitment to the preservation of global peace, liberty, democracy, and human rights to justify their policies in the multilateral organizations (European Council, 2020a). Nonetheless, the biggest testaments of

At the same time, the EU has an increasing "cultural presence" (Eurostat, 2018). This can be attributed to the numerous channels through which both the process of learning of European norms and cultural diffusion occur. The EU and its Member states oversee multilateral initiatives promoting European practices and norms, (e.g., the French and German Alliance of Multilateralism) and instruments of policy dialogue (like the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance or European Neighborhood



European informational diffusion are its various legally binding treaties and declarations, which also function as the official discourse of the EU (Balzacq, 2016). The EU's legal commitment to its norms of human rights, nondiscrimination, and multilateralism are both a manifestation of loyalty and a guarantee of its "modus operandi" to the third states. An excellent example is the Global Strategy, where democracy is mentioned twenty times, peace sixty, and human rights thirty (EUGS, 2016).

At last, the most prominent tool of the EU's normative power is its procedural activities and transference of benefits to third states. Considering that Europe is the world's largest exporter of manufactured goods and services (EC, 2020f), it is justifiably a point of appeal for third states. The EU has cleverly utilized its economic power to draw numerous states into bilateral or regional partnerships (Buchholz, 2019). Over the last years, it has also strengthened its global position by establishing international ties with a series of actors ranging from Brazil and Japan to countries of the Caribbean and the Atlantic (EC, 2020d). Furthermore, the EU has created multilateral initiatives (such as the Eastern Partnership or the European Neighborhood Policy) that have institutionalized the political dialogue and relations with regional states (EC, 2020g). As Manners (2002) points out, these association agreements or strategic partnerships are important channels of European normative power as the third states must often adhere to binding clauses to respect human rights. In this manner, the EU achieves to diffuse its norms through trade or technical assistance, while providing sustainable and democratic solutions to its partner's problems. Apart from agreements, the EU also offers development aids that encompass a commitment to specific values, such as human rights or democracy (p. 254). This practice helps the third states to not only develop autonomously but also it gives them the motives to pursue good governance (Ripoll, 2014). Therefore, by utilizing its institutions, financial means, and agreements, the EU could transfuse its norms both voluntarily and efficiently to numerous states.

4. What should be the EU's modus operandi?

It follows from the above analysis that the conditions for the EU's relaunch of multilateralism are in place. The EU possesses the tools to reform the multilateral structure, but this undertaking should be based on its normative power. For this reason, its future "modus operandi" should rely on a two-fold approach: fostering multilateralism on the one hand, while increasing its normative power on the other hand. As the current form of the global system and the coronavirus pandemic pose an excellent opportunity, the EU needs to adopt concrete measures and ambitious policies to achieve both.

a. Maintain the existing momentum

The EU should maintain the existing positive momentum. The EU and its Member States need to distinguish the elements that have made it attractive and appealing in the first place. This move will help locate its competitive advantages, which the EU could potentially instrumentalize for the



Figure 2. The infographic presents the high level of institutionalization of EU's relations with third states (Buchholz, 2019).



formulation of more efficient future strategies and policies. This step might seem self-evident, but in a constantly changing international order, it is crucial for the success of the EU's endeavor. Except for that, there are some simple steps that the Union could adopt to boost its global presence at the international level.

The EU should rise above the US-China rivalry by continuing to engage with the two sides as a third independent "player". To preserve the multilateral order, the EU is called to act as a mediator between the two powers, while promoting policies in line with its norms and interests. When it comes to China, there are a lot of obstacles that hinder the perspectives of a "healthy" bilateral collaboration. The "bones of contention" are several (such as human rights violations in Hong-Kong or the 2019 Commission's decision to describe China as a systemic and economic competitor) and their dissolution will not come soon. Although the existence of efforts by both sides to find some points of convergence, the recent undertakings have been fruitful only to some extent. For instance, the 22nd EU-China summit, though the adoption of an Agreement of Geographical indication, proved that China and EU showed to be not ready to yield their authority in low politics, such as technology or finance, or high politics, such as Africa or South China Sea (Fallon, 2020). However, China has simultaneously proved to be an effective ally on issues of health and the environment, and it is, after all, a global power. Therefore, the EU should preserve open channels of communication with China and continue collaboration on issues of common interest, mostly through multilateral institutions. A total rupture in EU-China relations would be harmful not only for both sides but also for several multilateral institutions.

In the case of the US, the last years have been characterized by differences and hostilities, but the two sides have remained key strategic partners. Despite the aggressive rhetoric of the two sides, they maintained good relations on issues of high politics, such as terrorism, internet governance, and cybersecurity (Council of the EU, 2019). Whenever they adopted a common stance, they achieved great results (for example. the stance against Maduro in Venezuela), thus proving the effectiveness of a transatlantic front in international crises. Unfortunately, this cannot be affirmed for other crucial fields like health and the environment, where the recent US opportunism has severely damaged global initiatives. Consequently, the EU should disrupt its overreliance on its Western counterpart and seek a more independent foreign policy. The Union needs to preserve its close strategic partnership with its traditional ally, but not anymore as a secondary or passive player. The future of EU-US relations should rely on equality, dialogue, and an understanding of each other's interests.

The EU also needs to keep up the momentum for the revitalization of multilateral cooperation. There are plenty of future international conferences and meetings, where the EU can promote its international agenda, push forward the multilateral order, and simultaneously enhance its geopolitical role. In fact, the EU has programmed numerous international conferences on important topics, such as human rights, climate change, international development, and global health. There it can push for the finalization of agreements and the enhancement of already existing international cooperation. Moreover, the emergence of a new wave of the pandemic could be utilized by the EU to further extend its influence at the international level. The Union can channel its previous experience and funds into the formulation of a more comprehensive and efficient global strategy, in which it has a leading and normative role. However, to succeed in this endeavor, the EU ought to repeat its successful handling of the coronavirus outbreak at the regional level. Despite the return of the lockdown measures and the concerns over the future of the European economy, the series of recent meeting have shown (41st meeting of the macroeconomic dialogue or the video conference of 29th October 2020) that the EU has the tools (such as the



NextGenerationEU) and trust of its Member States to deal with the second wave. Thus, considering these encouraging signs, it is safe to assume that the EU will not face any serious issue in its current pandemic response.

b. Relaunch multilateralism that is tailored to European benefits and values

The current coronavirus outbreak has demonstrated the need for closer multilateral arrangements. As a normative power, the EU should remain the driving force of multilateralism and shape the rules, values, and norms of the post-pandemic multilateral order. The existing global demand poses a perfect chance for the EU to push forward for the adoption of international settlements in numerous areas and sectors. In most cases, the EU has the necessary expertise and foundations that could prove to be important for the accomplishment of transnational consensus. This advantage constitutes its participation necessary and vital. For instance, it could achieve new arrangements in the sectors of cyber-security and internet governance. Due to the increase in the use of virtual means and the growth of insecurity, several global actors (e.g., Russia, the African Union, and the UN) have called for global regulations on cyberspace (Troianovski & Sanger, 2020; African Union, 2019; UNIDIR, 2017). Considering that the EU and its Member States enjoy competency and experience in such topics, they could foster multilateral cooperation and help set a rule-based “cyber order”. Other areas that this could be also accomplished are A.I., biodiversity, security, and defense.

Apart from that, the coronavirus outbreak has revealed the need for the review and readjustment of already existing international initiatives and arrangements. The coronavirus outbreak has severely affected global trade, economy, security, and climate, while the second wave could further deteriorate the situation (WHO, 2020c). To tackle this negative scenario, the EU should ensure multilateral resolutions in the context of international organizations. For example, on issues of economy and trade, the EU needs to secure the well-functioning of WTO, WHO, G7, and G20. To avoid the emergence of any internal division, the EU should adopt a dynamic, inclusive, and adaptive multilateral diplomacy, which makes use of its normative power and multilateral nature. It needs to lead by example, but also to be careful to not prolong the internal imbalances and disputes.

When it comes to the UN, the EU needs to adopt an entirely different strategy. In the last years, the organization has been rendered inefficient, due to a series of internal divisions and global hostilities hindering significantly its operability. So, the EU needs to tackle the stalemate on two fronts. On the one hand, it should protect and preserve the well-functioning of important UN initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Human Rights Council, which are in line with its norms and values, and push for their further development and implementation by the UN and its members. Whereas these programs have proved efficient in the past, the pandemic and its negative outcomes could diminish and seriously damage the existing progress through the decrease of funds, global efforts, and interest in these initiatives. Being one of the biggest financial contributors to the UN (EC, 2020h), the EU could prevent this from happening by using its normative power and instruments. On the other hand, the EU should have a more active and mediating role in the UN Security Council. As it has good relationships with all the members, it could act as a third pole between the US and China and help alleviate the existing tensions. However, it should act in line with its norms and “steer” the conversation on issues of European interest. A stable and better functioning Security Council is in the interest of not only the EU but of the whole multilateral order.



Ultimately, the EU should transfuse its norms, ideals, and values into the international system and establish itself as a normative power in the “revived” multilateral order. A simple way to accomplish it is to adopt a more active multilateral diplomacy and push for progress in areas that are in line with the EU’s policies and values. For instance, due to the influence it currently enjoys, the Union could determine and help shape the agenda and priorities of future UN meetings, hence guiding them towards favorable matters and initiatives (EP, 2020b). It could also use the experience from its Coronavirus Global Response, to coordinate the international pandemic recovery programs and ensure their sustainability, efficiency, and non-discrimination. Except for that, the EU should enhance both multilateral initiatives, which are products of its Member States, and alliances with like-minded partners. In the case of the former, the EU should invest in their further development as they could serve potentially as a driving force of multilateralism, a tool of normative diffusion, or simply a platform of communication between the EU and third states. As far as the latter, a good place for the EU to start is NATO. In the aftermath of the US elections, it needs to push for the enhancement and renewal of the transatlantic relationship as it is an essential tool for the maintenance of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Considering that the vision of a shared European Defense Union is bleak, a reinforced NATO could be a good leverage tool in the face of regional conflicts, such as the existing crises in Belarus and Nagorno-Karabakh and the growing influence of China.

c. Increase EU’s normative power in the revived multilateral order

While in the past the concept of normative power has been disregarded, the current existential and operational crises of multilateralism have restored the interest in its utility. The combination of the phenomena of pandemic and the growth of European influence has paved the way for the EU to further increase its normative influence at the international and regional levels. If these conditions are correctly utilized, normative power could become an important tool of European foreign policy and could prove to be vital in the task of relaunching multilateralism. For this reason, the EU should invest further in its expansion and the enhancement of the existing normative instruments. Putting it simply, without a robust normative power, the EU cannot take up the role of a normative force and lead the third states by example towards multilateralism.

To begin with, the EU should start with the intensification of partnership dialogues and bilateral agreements. Bilateral relations are an excellent way for the EU to increase its foreign policy footprint (Carnegie, 2020) and its impact on the “modus operandi” of the international organization (e.g., agenda-setting and voting), while simultaneously functioning as a channel of norms transfusion. Due to the significance of these elements in the task of reforming multilateralism, especially in a polarized international system, the EU should seek new partners and reinforce already existing alliances. As past experiences have shown, a good place to start would be by collaborating with other like-minded partners and democratic forces. The shared systems of value, ideas, and values make it much easier and efficient to collaborate in policy areas of high politics. The EU should become a pole of attraction for these similarly minded states and help the formulation of enhanced cooperation either by the creation of institutions, such as Alliance for Multilateralism, or bilateral ties.

The EU needs also to preserve the current momentum and push for further institutionalization of its relations with third states. In fact, the coronavirus outbreak has resulted in the formulation of closer ties with countries like Japan, India, and the Republic of Korea (European Council, 2020b). The future meetings with other leaders, (e.g., India and the UK) also pose an excellent opportunity to achieve this (European Council, 2020c). In the case of bilateral relations with systemic “rivals”,



the EU should pursue adaptive and tailored diplomacy. Despite the divergent views on matters of human rights and defense, the EU collaborates with China and Russia on issues of low politics. With the largest economy in the world (EC, 2020h), the EU remains a point of interest, for the two countries. Therefore, it should utilize its economic appeal to either maintain the existing ties or pursue a “tit for tat” strategy based on the EU’s interests and norms.

The EU should also adjust and modernize its regional approach and continue to develop partnerships with regional actors. The coronavirus outbreak and the polarization of the international system have aggravated existing issues in several regions and created opportunities for the EU to extend its normative power. Compared to other major powers, it has the advantage of having a strong regional, normative, and economic influence in several loci. For this reason, it should build up the existing ties and utilize them to enhance its normative influence. A simple manner to achieve this is the formulation of trade agreements and the provision of financial aid packages. This was exactly the rationale behind the delivery of 15.6 billion in the context of the programs of “EU global response to fight the pandemic” and “Team Europe package”, which aims to “address their [partners] short-term needs, as well as the longer-term structural impacts on societies and the economy” (EC, 2020b).

On top of that, the EU should continue to maintain its regional projects, such as European Neighborhood Policy, and other important regional institutions (e.g., OSCE and ASEAN), while simultaneously looking for ways to magnify and instrumentalize them to serve its interests. Over the last decades, the regional partnerships, neighborhood policies, and general regional multilateral EU initiatives have proved to be great tools and channels of political dialogue and normative and cultural diffusion. The future EU summits regarding the African Union, the Eastern Partnership, the Southern Neighborhood, and the Future of Schengen pose excellent chances for the discussion of their future expansion (European Council, 2020c). Moreover, the EU should increase its presence in third states and help the settlement of regional issues. The former goal could be accomplished by the further cultivation of organs of foreign and cultural diplomacy, such as the EEAS, while the latter by taking on a more active or mediating role in regional conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh and Belarus.

Finally, the EU should focus on its internal capabilities and “domestic” conditions to help the diffusion of its normative power. The well-functioning of its normative instruments is not only dependent on the audience, but also the transmitter. So, by improving its capacities and modus operandi, the EU could significantly improve the force of its normative influence, while supporting its pledge to relaunch multilateralism. A good starting point would be its official discourse. The efficiency of all its external enterprises would be greatly brushed up by the formulation of reformed and clearer European priorities and goals. This practice would help to avoid the danger of polyphony in international fora and create a convergence between the European representatives at the international level. In a similar manner, the official documents (such as the 2016 Global Strategy) should be upgraded to match the modern demands and circumstances like “Brexit”, China, and the pandemic. The EU should also encourage the increase of its strategic autonomy as it is a prerequisite to sustain both multilateralism and its normative power (Keohane & Morse, 2014). The several domains where this could be possible include technology, digital sovereignty, finance, energy, trade, and defense. The EU already has the instruments and initiatives necessary for the achievement of autonomy and growth. Ultimately, the EU should address some of the internal problems and dysfunctions that have emerged in the last month. The human rights violations of some of its Member States could negatively affect the normative identity of the EU, hence decreasing the power of its normative diffusion.



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