# Framing the Debate: The Evolution of the European Union as an External Democratization Actor

Ronald Holzhacker*

Marek Neuman**

**Abstract**

This paper maps the evolution of the European Union as an external democratization actor, identifying four critical junctures that have proven to be essential in delimiting the approach the EU has taken *qua* external democratization. These are (i) the end of the Cold War, (ii) the 2004 EU enlargement to the East, (iii) the signing of the Lisbon Treaty, and (iv) the events surrounding the Arab Spring in conjunction with the European economic crisis. This paper maintains that whereas the first years of the post-Cold War period were characteristic for their normative optimism concerning the support of democratic developments in the EU's near and far abroad, the European Union – and its individual member states – has recently emphasized more material/strategic aspects to the Union's external democratization policy. Consequently, this contribution outlines the main dimensions of the approach Brussels developed with regard to external democratization in the last two and a half decades. It concludes by calling for further empirical research to be conducted to assess the extent to which the EU's external democratization efforts vis-à-vis specific countries and regions is in line with the Normative Power Europe framework put forward by Ian Manners.

**Key words:** European Union, Normative Power Europe, European Neighbourhood Policy, external democratization policy, dimensions of the EU's external democratization approach

* Ronald Holzhacker is Assistant Professor at the International Relations and International Organization department of the University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands.

** Marek Neuman is Assistant Professor at the International Relations and International Organization department of the University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands.

**Introduction**

When Ian Manners argued in 2002 that the concept of normative power is 'an attempt to suggest that not only [was] the EU constructed on a normative basis, but importantly that this predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics,'[1] he had a profound impact on European integration scholarship. As such, he opened space in the debate of what it meant to *be normative* and what the constitutive elements of the European Union's alleged normativism were, and prompted scholars to carefully distinguish between the European Union (EU) as a normative, civilian, and civilizing power.[2] Consequently, while these ideas were at times attacked for being too ideational and indifferent of the more materialist aspects of the EU's foreign policy,[3] Manners' Normative Power Europe (NPE) framework still provides us with a valuable conceptual prism through which to assess how the EU acts in the "world out there."

Concerning the constitutive elements of the European Union's normativism, few scholars would disagree that its democratic credentials is one of the most essential ones. Furthermore, few would disagree that the strengthening of democratic principles – next to creating greater interdependence between the EU member states – has been the devised strategy for creating sustainable peace within the European Union (and on the European soil more generally); a strategy bearing fruit judging by the absence of major conflict between the member states. Yet, the extent to which the democratic foundations *at home* have been translated into active democracy promotion *abroad* is less obvious . This seems rather paradoxical – or at least Manners would  have us believe – with the NPE framework predicting that what the EU *is* also determines what it *does* in the international arena. Taking this puzzle as its starting point, this contribution hopes to add to the literature on the EU's external democratization efforts in three ways. First, it wishes to establish the applicability of a Normative Power Europe prism to the study of the European Union's external democratization policy. Second, by mapping the evolution of the European Union as an external democratization actor, the paper wants to identify the most essential critical junctures that can be said to have changed the EU's approach *qua* external democratization, whether in terms of policy-making, institution-building, or the EU's motivation for promoting democracy abroad (normative pragmatic rationale). As such, this paper identifies four such critical junctures; (i) the end of the Cold War, (ii) the Eastern EU enlargement of 2004, (iii) the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, and (iv) the economic crisis and political turmoil in the EU's neighbourhood in the late 2000s/early 2010s.

---

[1] Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 252.

[2] Helene Sjursen, "The EU as a 'Normative' Power: How Can this Be?," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006).

[3] Adrian Hyde-Price, "'Normative' Power Europe: A Realist Critique," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006).

Finally, this study draws a comprehensive list of the different approaches the European Union has – over the last two and a half decades – developed to promote democracy abroad. Such an analysis should enable us to answer the main question guiding this research, namely whether the EU's democracy promoting activities in third countries are in line with what Manners would expect from a normatively behaving European Union or whether we have to conclude that what the European Union *is* does not necessarily correspond with what it *does*.

The paper is structured in the following way. After these introductory remarks, the stage is set by outlining the conceptual framework of Manners' Normative Power Europe that guides the remainder of this research. This is followed by a historical overview of the – admittedly – limited external democratization activities the European Union has undertaken in the shadow of the Cold War. The third part discusses the first two identified critical junctures, by mapping the evolution of the European Union's external democratization agenda between the early 1990s and the 2004 EU enlargement, distinguishing between democracy promotion as an inseparable part of its enlargement policy and its incrementally developing foreign policy proper. Such an approach is continued in the fourth part, only this time focusing on the remaining two critical junctures. The discussion of the third and fourth parts enables us – in the final, fifth part – to identify several aspects of the approach the EU developed qua external democratization. Finally, the concluding section summarizes the main findings before drawing more general implications for the Normative Power Europe framework.

**Normative Power Europe as a Conceptual Prism**

According to Manners, the European Union's normative character is predominantly based upon five core norms – peace, liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights – and further supported by four minor norms (social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance).[4] Based upon these, Manners develops the idea of Europe as a normative power, arguing that such a reconceptualization of what the European Union *is* has three specific implications; an ontological, a positivist, and a normative one:

> '[presenting] the EU as a normative power has an ontological quality to it – that the EU can be *conceptualized* as a changer of norms in the international system; a positivist quantity to it – that the EU *acts* to change norms in the international system; and a normative quality to it – that the EU *should* act to extend its norms into the international system.'[5]

While the reader should remain critical as to the extent to which the identified core and minor norms have been internalized by the EU's population and thus constitute the EU's identity, it is the second

---

[4] Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?,": 242.
[5] Ibid., : 252 (emphasis in original).

and third aspect of the Normative Power Europe framework – namely its external applicability – that is of interest to this paper. Yet, what does it *mean* to behave in a normative way? How is the European Union to act in order to impact often deeply-routed belief systems in third countries? Manners' answer centers on norm diffusion, which is shaped by six factors; (i) contagion, (ii) information diffusion, (iii) procedural diffusion, (iv) transference, (v) overt diffusion, and (vi) the cultural filter.[6] In a somewhat simplified way, the process of norm diffusion has played a central role in the work of Finnemore and Sikkink, who discuss a norm's "life cycle" from norm emergence, over norm cascade, to norm internalization:[7]

---

[6] ———, "Normative Power Europe Reconsidered: Beyond the Crossroads," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 184.
[7] Figure 1 adopted from Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 896.

|  | Norm emergence | "Norm cascade" | Internalization |
|---|---|---|---|



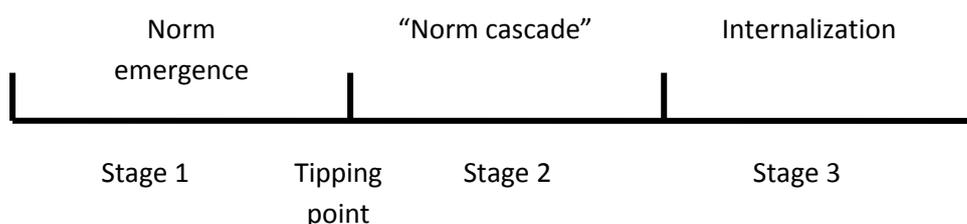|  | Stage 1 | Tipping point | Stage 2 | Stage 3 |

FIGURE 1: Norm life cycle

During the first stage, the role of norm entrepreneurs – agents (in our case the European Union) who want to convince a larger group of states to embrace a new norm – is highlighted. As such, the norm's "life cycle" begins at the domestic (in our case the EU) level, where the emergence of the norm can be motivated, among others, by 'empathy, altruism, and ideational commitment.'[8] Subsequently, the agent utilizes such mechanisms as language and persuasion to frame and spread the norm among a larger group of recipients. Once a large enough group of countries has accepted the new norm, this then begins to cascade and is being diffused among an even larger group of countries. This process of norm diffusion, defined as the 'transfer or transmission of objects, processes, ideas and information from one population or region to another,'[9] creates much empirical controversy as the factors motivating it are rather unclear.[10] On the one hand, social constructivists maintain that through mechanisms such as socialization and social learning, agents adopt the norm because they start believing in its appropriateness with the norm ultimately having cognitive effects. On the other hand – and equally plausible – agents might adopt the norm for purely strategic reasons, following the logic of consequentiality, with the norm altering the agent's behavior only. In the final stage, the agent might internalize the norm, effectively taking it for granted. Yet, should not a large enough group of actors accept the norm, preventing norm diffusion and cascading, the norm, instead of becoming internalized, might dissolve.

While this study is not concerned with the motivations behind potential norm adoption by third countries, the NPE's perceived "pacifism" stands out and merits a closer look. Put simply, the question arises whether the absence of any punitive mechanisms in promoting the EU's norms abroad, as put forward by the Normative Power Europe framework, corresponds with the reality on the ground. While Manners is able to conclude that over time the 'EU's commitment to the promotion of [the] nine normative principles has moved from internal and enlargement policies to

---

[8] Ibid., : 898.

[9] Jeffrey T. Checkel, "Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe," *International Studies Quarterly* 43(1999): 85.

[10] For a more detailed discussion of the problèmatique of norm diffusion, refer to ———, "Social Construction and European Integration," in *The Social Construction of Europe*, ed. Thomas Christiansen, Knurt Erik Jørgensen, and Antje Wiener (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2001), : 56-59.

external, development and foreign policies,'[11] just how normative has the EU become in its activities beyond its borders? Focusing on the subject matter of this paper – namely external democracy promotion – the Normative Power Europe framework then helps us to situate our research within the wider context and becomes of particular value when assessing the different dimensions to promoting democracy abroad that the European Union has developed as an integral part of its enlargement, development, and foreign policies. Yet, before we turn to these – and ultimately answer the question of whether the EU's approach meets the criteria of Manners' normativism – we need to establish whether the EU can be regarded as an external democratization actor in the first place. It is a discussion of the EU's evolution with regard to this very policy area that this contribution therefore now turns to.

**The European Union and External Democratization during the Cold War**

Since the very beginning of European integration, little explicit references to the EU's normative quest of democratizing its near and far abroad have been made. What is more, even where such a reference has been made implicitly, this has usually been concealed under a more general banner of a human rights policy. Put frankly, although few would disagree with the notion that EU integration is constructed on the premise that the individual member states are to be well functioning democracies, exhibiting good governance, observing the rule of law, and protecting human rights, little reference to these allegedly constitutive norms can be found in the founding treaties.[12] Yet, the lack of references to these norms in the founding documents should not be understood as a complete absence of a focus on human rights and democratic developments in the early stages of European integration, but rather as a testimony to both the scope of European integration and the context within which this took place. First, early integration efforts were strictly limited to the economic realm, which consequently called for the establishment and observance of rights pertaining to the European citizen as a subject within the common European market – hence a worker, a self-employed person, or a business owner.[13] Second, developing a human rights policy in its own right seemed superfluous considering the work of other international bodies, particularly the Council of Europe. Once the Council in 1950 negotiated the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) and agreed on the foundation of the European Court of Human Rights, the highly irascible

---

[11] Ian Manners, "European Union 'Normative Power' and the Security Challenge," *European Security* 15, no. 4 (2006): 415.

[12] Note that, for instance, the 1957 Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community does not once mention human rights, democracy, or good governance. The term "rule of law" is referred to only once, in relation to discussing the ECJ's jurisdiction. Found in "The Treaty of Rome," (Rome: European Commission, 1957).

[13] Karen E. Smith, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2008), : 113.

domain of human rights could be somewhat sidelined with Brussels focusing on economic development instead. Finally – and most importantly – the emerging Cold War setting, against which the Western European nations began to integrate in the 1950s, cautioned the EEC to refrain from developing and omnipresent, outward-directed human rights – let alone democratization – agenda in order not to add fuel to the fire. What is more, even where some European democratization activity could be discerned, this was conducted bilaterally by the individual EU member states with the EEC playing a supporting role at best. *Qua* European consistency, then, Youngs argues that the Cold War imperative ensured that the few democratization activities undertaken were 'less than systematic and pursued with vigour only in the limited number of cases where political change was itself seen as likely to be beneficial to the struggle against communism.'[14]

As a result, the early EU's human rights and democratization agenda – if one can even be spoken off – was internal, self-explanatory, and remained non-institutionalized. In fact, human rights and democratization enjoyed such low profile within the European Communities that it was not until the 1973 *Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity* that the principles upon which a European identity was being formed were made explicit. The then nine member states reiterated that they were 'determined to defend the principles of representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice – which is the ultimate goal of economic progress – and of respect for human rights.'[15] Yet, while the Communities thus specified which underlying values would inform its *internal* identity, it did not yet give rise to an outward-geared human rights and/or democratization policy. Consequently, this lack of an *external* human rights and democratization dimension has inhibited the European Communities from assuming an active role in bringing about democratic transition in the three post-dictatorial states readying for membership in the late 1970s and early 1980s – Greece, Portugal, and Spain.[16] Certainly, their membership perspective was crucial for accelerating the establishment and observance of democratic processes, but the Communities – lacking other than declaratory tools to support their efforts – was not the causal factor in the three countries' speedy democratization. Rather, it has served as a catalyst, to which Athens, Lisbon, and Madrid looked as a buttress for democratization. While it has become evident that the European Communities would

---

[14] Richard Youngs, *The European Union and the Promotion of Democracy: Europe's Mediterranean and Asian Policies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), : 2.

[15] "Declaration on European Identity," in *Bulletin of the European Communities* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 14 December 1973), : 1.

[16] Regarding the European Communities' interest in democratizing Franco's Spain, Guirao argues that the 'EC record in effectively defending human rights and democratic values in Spain under Franco was nil, and that both the Commission and the Council were more inclined to passively support the then existing authoritarian regime than to actively erode it.' Found in Fernando Guirao, "The European Community's Role in Promoting Democracy in Franco's Spain, 1970-1975," in *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community's Quest for Deepening, Widening and Completion, 1969-1974*, ed. Jan van der Harst (Brussels, Paris, and Baden-Baden: Bruylant, L.G.D.J., and Nomos, 2007).

only enlarge by democratic countries, it was everything but a conscious human rights- and democracy-promoting international actor.[17]

**Becoming a Conscious External Democratization Actor**

With regard to the European Union's external human rights and democratization policy, the end of the Cold War cannot be interpreted as anything short of the first critical juncture in the EU's development of a conscious external democratization policy. While the European Union predominantly focused on developing an effective external human rights policy to be tackled in an across-pillar fashion, prompting some to speak of an outright 'rights turn,'[18] another trajectory began to run its course through the EU's institutional framework. Put simply, the end of the Cold War created an environment in which both individual member states and the EU as a whole began to toy with the idea of promoting democracy abroad. While, read in light of the post-Cold War context, where the 'end of history' predicted a widely supported spread of liberal democracies to the detriment of the few remaining autocratic/dictatorial regimes, such a quest does not seem surprising, the operationalization of developing a streamlined external democratization policy soon proved to be anything but simple.

The first hurdle that needed to be overcome consisted of finding common grounds among the individual EU member stated on a more philosophical matter, namely the extent to which democracy as a political system could be promoted in the first place. Whereas some scholars, in a neo-Hegelian fashion, argued that democracy has emerged as a result of a long and dialectical historical process and as such was context-specific,[19] others warned outright of a backlash against the west should it attempt to impose its own liberalizing policy in third countries.[20]

---

[17] There are, however, a few exceptions to this, which stem from the fact that from 1970 onwards, the European Communities began to develop somewhat of a foreign policy dimension in the form of the European Political Cooperation (EPC). While in general a rather weak instrument to coordinate foreign policy between the EC member states, some have pointed out that at times the EPC succeeded in recording some headway in promoting human rights and democratization, particularly during the Euro-Arab dialogue after 1975 and during the negotiations of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Found in Anjo G. Harryvan and Jan van der Harst, "Learning Interdependence the Hard Way. The Netherlands, European Political Co-operation and the Oil Crisis, 1967-1977," in *Aufbruch zum Europa der zweiten Generation: Die europäische Einigung 1969-1984*, ed. Franz Knipping and Matthias Schönwald (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2004), : 160-62.

[18] Agustín José Menéndez, "Human Rights: The European Charter of Fundamental Rights," in *Contemporary European Foreing Policy*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Helene Sjursen, and Brian White (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2004), : 240.

[19] Cornelia Navari, "Intervention, Non-Intervention and the Construction of the State," in *Political Theory, International Relations and the Ethics of Intervention*, ed. Ian Forbes and Mark Hoffman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), : 49.

[20] Kenneth N. Waltz, "America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 24, no. 4 (1991).

Nevertheless, rather than finding an answer to these philosophical puzzles, the EU was soon forced to push such conceptual considerations to the background and react to the political realities as they were developing on the ground. Concretely, the first litmus test of whether the European Union would be able to diffuse its internal norm of democracy in third countries consisted of preparing the ever-growing number of newly independent and sovereign countries of Central and Eastern Europe for EU membership. Whereas we were able to conclude above that with regard to preparing Greece, Portugal, and Spain for EU accession in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the European Union did not play an active role in bringing about democratic transformation, the sheer magnitude and specificity of the approaching Eastern enlargement called for a much revised approach on Brussels' part. Particularly after the Union was vividly reminded of the political instability in its own backyard in the form of the secessionist wars in former Yugoslavia, the urgency with which the European Union would need to address the democratic deficiencies of the applicant countries east of its borders increased. Consequently, already at the June 1993 European Council summit in Copenhagen – and thus well before the first CEEC would submit its membership application – the European Union outlined the criteria for membership. The very first criterion, commonly referred to as political, stipulated that 'membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing *democracy*, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.'[21] In essence, the EU thereby established the instrument of conditionality; the speed with which the candidate country would be approaching the ultimate carrot (EU membership) would be conditioned by the progress it would achieve with regard to the established criteria.

Yet, relying on conditionality only was perceived as not necessarily bringing about the coveted positive change in the target countries[22] and as such the European Union developed several positive measures to accompany conditionality. Democracy assistance, as it became known, differed depending on the target country. Where basic democratic institutions had already been established, the European Union would provide both technical and financial assistance to strengthen these. In non-democratic states, the EU would aim at 'carving out a degree of autonomous "political space" within which opposition to the authoritarian regime could take root,'[23] by – in essence – relying on the cooperation of local civil society. In practice, however, the EU's external democratization policy in the early 1990s was primarily aimed at the many candidate countries east of its borders, which by the time of their application for EU membership exhibited the most fundamental traits of a democratic political system. Consequently, the EU's early democratization policy became closely

---

[21] "Conclusions of the Presidency," (Copenhagen: European Council, 21-22 June 1993).(emphasis added).

[22] Youngs, *The European Union and the Promotion of Democracy: Europe's Mediterranean and Asian Policies*: 21.

[23] Ibid., : 23.

associated with its enlargement policy. Whereas technical assistance consisted of knowledge transfer and best practices, financial assistance was carried out through the PHARE program. Two major shortcomings of the European Union's early democratization policy towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, however, can be identified. First, whereas conditionality has become the mechanism determining the applicant country's rapprochement with Brussels, no clear benchmarks for assessing democratic progress have been established. Rather, the European Commission solely relied on its yearly progress reports that – with regard to the meeting of the first, political, criterion – remained vague at best. Second, and interrelated, how would the EU ensure consistency in its demands for democratic transformation across the many candidate countries?

In sum, while the EU thus consciously developed an external democratization policy in the early 1990s as part of its enlargement policy, this was far from being consistent and streamlined into other EU policy domains. With the enlargement process moving forward, it soon became clear that the European Union would have to extend the scope of its external democratization policy to other territories, particularly to the post-2004 neighbourhood-to-be. Consequently, in this paper, the 2004 enlargement shifting the EU's borders East is treated as the second identified critical juncture. Particularly the creation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 stands as testimony of the earlier felt normative ambiguity – defined by the EU setting out to democratize its neighbourhood throughout the 1990s on the one hand, yet failing to develop a consistent approach on the other hand – being reflected in new policy-making. Democracy, to be specific, was treated as a prerequisite for political stability, social and economic development and as such regarded as a means to the achievement of greater goals, rather than being seen as an end goal in its own rights.[24] Of little surprise then is the fact that the question of just *how* democratic developments are to be supported in the many partner countries is not explicitly – nor implicitly – posed at all. Interestingly, though, when studying the bilateral treaties signed between the EU on the one and the respective ENP partner country on the other hand, each ENP Action Plan was more specific as to the democratic changes that would need to occur in the respective country if it wishes to intensify its relationship with Brussels. Hence, it appears as if the European Union fell back upon the very same mechanism of conditionality – accompanied by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership [financial] Instrument (ENPI) – which is the more interesting since the carrot Brussels was willing to dangle in front of the ENP countries fell far short of EU membership. As Romano Prodi, then President of the

---

[24] "Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Nighbours," (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2003), : 7.

European Commission, repeatedly reiterated, the partner countries were invited to share with the European Union everything but institutions.[25]

Consequently, where we were able to conclude that the EU's early external democratization policy towards CEECs – hence as part of the EU's enlargement policy – suffered from several shortcomings, having adopted the very same approach towards the ENP partners – and hence as part of the EU's foreign policy proper – would prove to be even more problematic. Over time, Brussels has duly recognized this and developed more targeted democracy assistance policies for the distinct ENP parts, whether in the form of the Union for the Mediterranean or the *Democracy, good governance and stability* thematic platform of the Eastern Partnership. These include exchange of best practices, workshops, closer involvement of civil society groups, targeted financial assistance, the establishment of a European Endowment for Democracy, and others. As such, while the democratic developments in most of the ENP partner countries have been less than encouraging – think of the Arab Spring uprisings or the political developments in Eastern Europe – the fact that the European Union is devising strategies of how to mold the neighbouring countries' political systems in accordance with its own normative believe system should be read as testimony of the Union's increasing confidence in being able to shape the international arena.

**From Normative Optimism to Materialism? The EU's External Democratization Efforts since 2007**

So far in this article, we have focused mainly on democracy promotion and human rights within the EU itself and as part of the process of enlargement. In those cases, processes of conditionality, the benefits of joining the EU, were a strong component of success. We now turn to promotion beyond the area of likely enlargement, to other countries and regions of the world where the ideational arguments offered by Manners likely play a larger role. Nonetheless, notions of conditionality continue from the EU side in a different form, for example by offering beneficial bilateral agreements with the EU, for example in trade or developmental aid projects.

At the beginning of this article, we put forth the thesis that critical junctures have taken place with regards to EU promotion of democracy and human rights abroad. We identified the end of the Cold War as one such juncture, where the EU began to use conditionality to carefully promote democracy in East Central Europe to prepare for the enlargement of the EU. This was followed by a critical juncture for the EU, after enlargement, when attention was turned to focus on the stability in the regions bordering the EU, with the focus on the Neighborhood Policy. Gradually new institutional mechanisms were created to coordinate foreign policy, not only in the immediate neighborhood, but also in EU policy toward the wider world. These institutional developments, which were formalized in

---

[25] Romano Prodi, "A Wider Europe: A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability" (paper presented at the Peace, Security and Stability: International Dialogue and the Role of the EU conference, Brussels, 2002), : 1.

the Lisbon Treaty which was signed in 2007, and entered into force in December 2009, may be seen as a critical juncture for the EU by strengthening its institutional mechanism to act abroad, also in the promotion of democracy and human rights. Here the EU began to focus more on the Common Foreign and Security Policy, and democracy promotion and human rights became a common denominator which could serve as the basis of CFSP among the member states. In addition, in agreements outlining the relationship between the EU and countries beyond Europe, in both trade and aid agreements, democracy and human rights were included.

This period after EU enlargement (2004) and continuing through to the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and the very early years of its implementation, was an optimistic period for the EU's promotion of democracy and human rights, with new institutional mechanisms and a period where normative goals were emphasized. The rapid spread of the Arab Spring in early 2011 brought new demands from the people across North Africa and the Middle East, and the EU moved after some initial delay to put new emphasis on supporting democracy and human rights as the national governments of the member states moved from open or tacit support for autocratic leaders in the region to greater support for reform elements.

However, this period of optimism on the effectiveness of EU and member state support for democracy waned, and there was a growing realization that such measures could have limited effect, when the pressures from below of the Arab spring waned and autocratic or military regimes re-asserted control. Thus, a new critical juncture seemed to occur in late 2011, not only with doubts about the success of the Arab Spring growing, but also the intensification of the economic and financial crisis within the Eurozone. We see now a decrease in the optimism of the support for democracy and human rights and this focus on normative aspects of foreign policy, and instead a growth in what Manners refers to as 'material' dimensions of the common foreign policy around economic benefits and security for Europe. This period is continuing into the present. The economic crisis has influenced the composition of national governments across the EU, and this has placed an increase focus on domestic economic considerations in many of the governments of the EU. The return to geo-political security considerations is continuing with the current focus on Russia incursions into the Ukraine.  Thus, we see an increased dominance of trade relationships and security when assessing relationships with third countries, and less focus on building long term stability through measures to strengthen democracy and human rights.

Simmons in an article titled 'The State of the Art in the EU Democracy Promotion Literature' argues that there are four streams apparent in the literature in this field. It is apparent that part of the critical debate in the academic literature reflects on the challenges of the EU's promotion and human rights during the different phases we have identified following a critical juncture. The first stream of literature identified by Simmons is focused on democracy promotion within the EU existing

member states, and the second focused on likely candidate countries to the EU where conditionality is an important factor.[26] Those topics were introduced in the first part of this article.

The other streams of literature are focused on countries beyond present and future EU members, thus the third stream of literature focusing on democracy promotion within CFSP and on human rights. Simmons argues that the CFSP literature has suffered from an excessive focus on a discussion of high-level geopolitical considerations, as well as on the inter-governmental processes within the EU itself at arriving at a common policy and approach. Simmons argues that the fourth stream of democracy promotion literature, focusing on the inclusion of legal clauses in agreements, as well as small scale projects involving civil society organizations, lacks a larger discussion of the effectiveness and challenges faced in this policy area. He argues that the main weakness here is 'the proper examination of which instruments work under what conditions.'[27]

**The Five Dimensions of the EU's External Democratization Approach**

What we propose to do in the remainder of this article is to first delineate the various approaches that the EU uses to advance the promotion of democracy and human rights. Below we group these into five categories, (i) direct EU democracy and human rights programs, (ii) indirect support through economic change, (iii) EU support for UN processes, (iv) EU support for other regional international bodies (Council of Europe and the OSCE), and (v) EU cooperation with member states' promotion of democracy and human rights abroad. The approaches, instruments and tools used for this process vary by region and country. Following this list, space does not permit an exhaustive empirical review of how each of these approaches is used in practice, but some initial discussion is provided.

*1. EU policies and programs supporting democracy and human rights*

- Formal programs of the EU, for example the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)
- Support for electoral reform processes through the EU Electoral Observation Mission (EOM)
- The mainstreaming of democracy and human rights within EU development cooperation abroad
- Activities of the High Representative
- Participation in high level inter-regional dialogues, such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

*2. Economic approach, reform and trade, the indirect approach*

---

[26] Peter Simmons, "The State of the Art in the EU Democracy Promotion Literature," *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 7, no. 1 (2011).
[27] Ibid., : 130.

- A view that economic reform and administrative capacity building in market creation would spill-over to broader political reform
- Assistance for good governance, broadened over time to be seen as contributing to broad democratizing dynamics

*3. EU support for UN processes*
- EU involvement and attention paid to the process and recommendations of the UN Periodic Review Process
- EU support for the development of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)

*4. EU support for international regional bodies, especially the Council of Europe and OSCE initiatives on democracy and human rights*

*5. EU multi-level governance and coordination of promotion efforts with the member states*
- Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)
- In addition to these EU level policies, policies and practices of EU member states abroad in supporting democracy and human rights are an integral component

*1. EU policies and programs supporting democracy and human rights*

After a fuller analysis, it will be interesting to see how the EU's use of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights has changed from the third period we have identified, from the initial optimism and normative framing of this foreign policy area following EU enlargement, to the more material and skeptical period following the collapse of the Arab spring and the rise of the European economic crisis. It will also be interesting to see how the EU Electoral Observation Missions have changed over time, from an early focus on election day and counting of the ballots, to a longer term monitoring perspective including the run up to the election in the campaign period and the democratic rights of assembly, speech, and access to the media to communicate with voters in this critical democratic period.

But at this time, here we will focus more on the mainstreaming of democracy and human rights in EU development cooperation. In this article, we have linked the promotion of democracy and human rights. This is also what has occurred at the policy level in the field of development cooperation. For example, the European Commission has prepared a programming guide for the preparation of strategy papers prepared for partner countries which states 'Democracy and the

protection of human rights are inextricably linked...'[28] This is a policy area that the Commission has integrated and mainstreamed into all areas of policy making with partner countries, including trade and external assistance. The Commission sets forth a policy that prior to any country programming, the process of democratization and respect for human rights in a country is to be analyzed, directing particular attention to the information available in the EU's Human Rights Fact Sheets kept in a protected Council web-site and Head of Mission (HoM) reports on recent development, reports produced by UN human rights bodies, and the Amnesty International Library.[29] It also directs attention for analysis to the institutional framework and government policies, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of civil society and political parties toward democracy and human rights.

The guide places particular stress on seeking information about the 'most vulnerable and marginalized groups in society: for example ethnic or sexual minorities, indigenous people, handicapped persons, migrants, women, children and prisoners' and in particular to focus on the particularities of each society to understand '*who is vulnerable here and now*.'[30] This guide was a further detailing and guide to the implementation of the 'mainstreaming human rights and democracy in EC assistance programmes' formally set forth in the Commission Communication on the European Union's role in promoting Human Rights and Democratisation in third countries.[31] The Commission begins the guide by setting forth the grounds for the importance of this policy. It argues that while democracy and the protection of human rights are universal values to be pursued in their own right, they are also integral to alleviating poverty, conflict resolution, and in combating terrorism.

It should be noted that there has been a certain backlash by governments against democracy promotion efforts at times. For example, the EU in its relationship agreement with Ethiopia provides support for institutional development promoting democracy and human rights, for example in measures aimed at the development of the judiciary and the national parliament. But these measures also provide support for civil society development. Recently Ethiopia has attempted to curb the role of NGOs in the country by requiring NGOs that receive funding from abroad to refrain from certain activities and activism.[32] Thus, at times countries attempt to restrict the ability of the EU and other international actors in promoting democracy and human rights abroad.

---

[28] "Programming Guide for Strategy Paper: Programming Fiche: Democracy and Human Rights," (Brussels: European Commission, 2008), : 1.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid., : 2 (emphasis in original).
[31] "Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The European Union's Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratisation in Third Countries," (Brussels: European Commission, 2008).
[32] "NGO Law Monitor: Ethiopia," The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/ethiopia.html.

Finally, we wish to cite some recent statements of the High Commissioner focused on democracy and human rights which underscores her recent actions in this area:

'One year ago, the EU adopted its Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, and appointed our first Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis. Since then, we have focused on ensuring that human rights and democracy are mainstreamed throughout the EU's external action. We have adopted new EU Guidelines on freedom of religion or belief and on the enjoyment of human rights by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons. We have continued our long-standing campaign to ban capital punishment throughout the world.'[33]

'The EU has welcomed recent decisions by the Chinese authorities to deepen the reform of the justice system and to uphold the Constitution and laws to protect human rights. However, in recent weeks, the EU has become seriously concerned about the trials, convictions, detention and house arrests of a number of Chinese human rights defenders. (…) The EU urges China to implement the announcements made at the last Third Plenum of the 18th CPC, as well as the pledges before the Human Rights Council, by releasing all those imprisoned or detained for the peaceful expression of their views.'[34]

*2. Economic approach, reform and trade, the indirect approach*

In a review of this approach, the arguments of scholars and policymakers concerning the democratic spill-over from economic reform measures can be discussed. Furthermore, the trajectory of broadening good governance and rule of law measures to include democracy promotion can be discussed in greater detail.

*3. EU support for UN processes*

We next want to turn our attention to the EU's use of United Nations mechanisms to further strengthen its support for democracy and human rights. A recent report prepared for the European Parliament concludes that while the EU has been active in presenting proposal for review by the UN's Human Rights Council (HRC), the influence of the EU has been mixed, and that the agenda and

---

[33] "Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union on Human Rights," (Maputo: Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Mozambique, 10 December 2013).
[34] "Declaration by the High Representative Catherine Ashton on behalf of the European Union Regarding the Treatment of Human Rights Defenders and their Relatives in China," (Beijing: Delegation of the European Union to China, 5 February 2012).

outcomes of the HRC has been dominated by other blocs. The report sets forth a set of recommendations for increasing the EU's influence in the review process. The report outlines a strategy of 'building ties with moderates'[35] to foster wider agreement on strengthening the HRC in its mandate. The report also calls for greater institutional coordination within the EU to reach further this strategy. The report notes that the positions which the EU takes at the UN need to be better incorporated into the EU's external relations by involving the High Representative and her deputies to 'lobby capitals of third countries in support of EU positions at the HRC.'[36] In addition, the positions of these third countries should be the subject of discussion during the EU's bilateral dialogues with third countries. 'The EU should be much more explicit about requesting support for its positions, and should express its disappointment when such support is not forthcoming.'[37]

The EU has also been involved in strengthening the system of National Human Rights Institutions under the UN system. For example, there have been calls by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), to have the NHRIs of the EU member states work together more closely and to consider their international outlook and cooperation. FRA notes that among the regional groups of NHRIs, two have permanent secretariats, the Asia Pacific Forum of NRHIs in Sydney and the Network of African NHRIs in Nairobi, whereas the secretariats of the Europe Group and the Network of the American rotate with regional chairmanships.[38] The FRA report notes that the APF is highly praised for promoting close cooperation among the NHRIs in the region to establish independent and effective NHRIs and to provide training courses and offer thematic courses on areas of need of attention.[39] The report notes that collective cooperation among the NHRIs in Europe deserves greater attention, noting that more permanent structure would allow NHRIs in Europe to better coordinate their activities at the EU, Council of Europe, and UN levels.[40] FRA notes that NHRIs could strengthen their role in the UN Human Rights Council through coordinated contributions. It also notes that such a structure would contribute 'to channeling substantive, strategic, or technical know-how among NHRIs in the region and beyond' thus spreading the careful implementation of human rights abroad.[41]

---

[35] "The European Union and the Review of the Human Rights Council," (Brussels: European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, 2011), : 2.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] "National Human Rights Institutions in the EU Member States: Strengthening the Fundamental Rights Architecture in the EU I," (Wien: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010), : 149.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.

*4. EU support for regional mechanisms, Council of Europe and OSCE initiatives on democracy and human rights*

Part of the EU's and of the member states' support for democracy and human rights is channeled through the support for other regional institutions like the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

*5. EU multi-level governance*

Once again, in an overall analysis of the support for democracy and human rights abroad, the policies and practices of individual member states also are important.

These are the five dimensions to the approach that the EU and the member states have employed to pursue the promotion of democracy and human rights abroad. The mix of these approaches and particular policies pursued by country and region vary in term of Manner's normative and material focuses during the different policy eras following a critical juncture. At the end of this article, we wish to mention one region in particular to give an example of the changing EU policy over time, and to underscore that EU policy does not happen in a vacuum, but exists in cooperation and competition with other international actors.

**The EU's Democratization Efforts vis-à-vis ASEAN**

Thus, now we would like to turn our attention to one region, Southeast Asia and its regional organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a relatively new geographic area and organization for EU engagement, but one that is growing in interest because of new trade links and the competition with China for influence in the region. Here it is apparent that a strategy consolidating democracy in some countries and promoting reforms in non-democratic countries is necessary. The strategy of the EU toward ASEAN needs to be geared both to the democratic and non-democratic states in the region, and to bilateral measures to assist the further consolidation of democracy in the democratic states. Commentators have noted that given the limited scope of a democracy agenda within ASEAN, '(T)he EU could focus on less sensitive issues such as the strengthening of governance capacity, combating corruption, humanitarian relief, disaster management and promoting bureaucratic reform.'[42] In terms of a bilateral approach to the more democratic members 'the EU needs to go beyond human rights and electoral assistance to work on key issues such as strengthening the party system, the role of parliaments, security sector reform (with a special focus on military reform), legal reform, and the role of the media and civil society

---

[42] Rizal Sukma, "Democracy Building in South East Asia: The ASEAN Security Community and Options for the European Union," (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2009), : 13.

organizations.'[43] These EU foreign policy approaches also mean that scholars need to be sure to not narrow their focus unnecessarily when considering democracy and human rights promotion, but is a call to include consideration of a wide range of measures related to good governance and the rule of law for all governments, and to issues beyond narrow election day concerns for democracies.

When analyzing the EUs policy towards a region such as Southeast Asia, it is important to consider key international actors involved as well. This example underscores the need to broadly consider the EU's direct and indirect promotion of democracy and human rights in relation to other actors. The Asia Pivot of the US announced by President Obama, now usually referred to as a re-balance, was underscored by his recent visit to the region in April 2014. There was great attention paid to economic trade and to security. The EU simply does not compete in the region with such international actors when the focus turns to these elements of foreign policy. The US has proposed the establishment of a Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact being negotiated with 11 countries in the region. There is also a great focus in the re-balance toward Asia on military assets, including a new base sharing agreement with the Philippines, rotating deployments to Australia, a re-assertion of the alliance with Japan in the context of maritime disputes with China, and expanded arm sales to the region.[44]

Thus, in any analysis of EU promotion of democracy and human rights in a particular country of region, the involvement of other strong international actors must also be taken into account. In addition, changing international circumstances have resulted in the balance between a normative focus on foreign policy and more material factors of economic growth and security must be taken into account.

**Conclusion**

The value added of this contribution is threefold. The first section concentrates on outlining Manners' Normative Power Europe framework and asks whether the European Union, in its external democracy promotion policy, constitutes such a normative actor. To answer this question, the paper thereafter focuses on understanding the EU's evolution as an external democratization actor. It identifies four critical junctures that have determined Brussels' approach *qua* external democratization. The first is the end of the Cold War, after which the European Union experienced a period of normative ambiguity where, in line with the overall 'end of history' spirit, it set out to democratize its (near) abroad, yet fell short of streamlining such a policy into the remaining EU policy areas. Thus, while we can speak of a certain normative optimism in the early 1990s, the EU's external democratization policy only really found anchoring as part of its enlargement policy. The second

---

[43] Ibid., : 4.
[44] Carol Giacomo, "Obama Turns to Asia," (New York: New York Times, 23 April 2014).

critical juncture was then constituted by the 2004 EU enlargement to the East. This was not only due to the fact that the "preparing-the-East-for-accession" chapter has come to an end, but also because it stood as testimony to the new democratizing challenges East and South of the new member states. Duly realizing the complexity of the task at hand, Brussels devised several new policy strategies vis-à-vis the new neighbourhood, with the most prominent one being the European Neighbourhood Policy. The third juncture, namely the institutionalization of the approach adopted by the EU so far, mainly in the form of the Treaty of Lisbon, led to external democratization being firmly anchored in – among others – the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. Finally, the observed normative optimism to some extent retreated in favor of a more "materialist" approach as a reaction to the EU's failures to bring about specific democratic change in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, further amplified by the European economic crisis that forced individual member states to prioritize other policies over the EU's normativism.

The third part of this paper briefly discusses five dimensions that can be identified as constituting the EU's approach to external democratization Brussels has devised over the last two and a half decades. These dimensions are (i) direct EU democracy and human rights programs, (ii) indirect support through economic change, (iii) EU support for UN processes, (iv) EU support for other regional international bodies (Council of Europe and the OSCE), and (v) EU cooperation with member states' promotion of democracy and human rights abroad. Consequently, such a listing of the dimensions leads us to answer the main question raised in this paper in a rather ambiguous manner. Certainly, some of the mechanisms and tools Brussels utilizes to promote democratic developments abroad are in line with what Manners regards to be normative behavior as they center on argumentation, persuasion, and norm diffusion. Yet, other dimensions also include more coercive aspects and as such may go beyond the normativism as envisaged by the Normative Power Europe framework. Consequently, to fully answer this paper's main question, we call on further research to be conducted. We believe that particularly empirical research into the approach the European Union has taken vis-à-vis particular countries and regions could help to establish whether the EU *acts* in accordance with what it *is*. The brief discussion on the EU's approach towards ASEAN presented in the final part of this contribution needs to be regarded as a first – and preliminary – attempt at this.

**Bibliography**

Checkel, Jeffrey T. "Norms, Institutions, and National Identity in Contemporary Europe." *International Studies Quarterly* 43 (1999): 83-114.

―――. "Social Construction and European Integration." In *The Social Construction of Europe*, edited by Thomas Christiansen, Knurt Erik Jørgensen and Antje Wiener. London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2001.

"Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: The European Union's Role in Promoting Human Rights and Democratisation in Third Countries." Brussels: European Commission, 2008.

"Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Nighbours." 1-26. Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2003.

"Conclusions of the Presidency." Copenhagen: European Council, 21-22 June 1993.

"Declaration by the High Representative Catherine Ashton on behalf of the European Union Regarding the Treatment of Human Rights Defenders and their Relatives in China." Beijing: Delegation of the European Union to China, 5 February 2012.

"Declaration by the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, on behalf of the European Union on Human Rights." Maputo: Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Mozambique, 10 December 2013.

"Declaration on European Identity." In *Bulletin of the European Communities*, 1-3. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 14 December 1973.

"The European Union and the Review of the Human Rights Council." 1-49. Brussels: European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, 2011.

Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 887-917.

Guirao, Fernando. "The European Community's Role in Promoting Democracy in Franco's Spain, 1970-1975." In *Beyond the Customs Union: The European Community's Quest for Deepening, Widening and Completion, 1969-1974*, edited by Jan van der Harst. Brussels, Paris, and Baden-Baden: Bruylant, L.G.D.J., and Nomos, 2007.

Harryvan, Anjo G., and Jan van der Harst. "Learning Interdependence the Hard Way. The Netherlands, European Political Co-operation and the Oil Crisis, 1967-1977." In *Aufbruch zum Europa der zweiten Generation: Die europäische Einigung 1969-1984*, edited by Franz Knipping and Matthias Schönwald. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2004.

Hyde-Price, Adrian. "'Normative' Power Europe: A Realist Critique." *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 217-34.

Manners, Ian. "European Union 'Normative Power' and the Security Challenge." *European Security* 15, no. 4 (2006): 405-21.

―――. "Normative Power Europe Reconsidered: Beyond the Crossroads." *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 182-99.

―――. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235-58.

Menéndez, Agustín José. "Human Rights: The European Charter of Fundamental Rights." In *Contemporary European Foreing Policy*, edited by Walter Carlsnaes, Helene Sjursen and Brian White. London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2004.

"National Human Rights Institutions in the EU Member States: Strengthening the Fundamental Rights Architecture in the EU I." 1-63. Wien: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010.

Navari, Cornelia. "Intervention, Non-Intervention and the Construction of the State." In *Political Theory, International Relations and the Ethics of Intervention*, edited by Ian Forbes and Mark Hoffman. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993.

"NGO Law Monitor: Ethiopia." The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/ethiopia.html.

Prodi, Romano. "A Wider Europe: A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability." Paper presented at the Peace, Security and Stability: International Dialogue and the Role of the EU conference, Brussels, 2002.

"Programming Guide for Strategy Paper: Programming Fiche: Democracy and Human Rights." 1-9. Brussels: European Commission, 2008.

Simmons, Peter. "The State of the Art in the EU Democracy Promotion Literature." *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 7, no. 1 (2011): 129-42.

Sjursen, Helene. "The EU as a 'Normative' Power: How Can this Be?" *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 235-51.

Smith, Karen E. *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*. 2nd ed. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2008.

Sukma, Rizal. "Democracy Building in South East Asia: The ASEAN Security Community and Options for the European Union." 1-15. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2009.

"The Treaty of Rome." 1-80. Rome: European Commission, 1957.

Waltz, Kenneth N. "America as a Model for the World? A Foreign Policy Perspective." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 24, no. 4 (1991): 667-70.

Youngs, Richard. *The European Union and the Promotion of Democracy: Europe's Mediterranean and Asian Policies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.