

# TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

*Assoc. Prof. Marjan Gjurovski, PhD  
University of St. Kliment Ohridski, Macedonia*

## **Abstract:**

*This paper analyzes the essential elements of the normative and transformative power of the European Union and their fundamental specifics. The research of these power concepts is directly inspired by their significance and mutual interference and also by their applicability to the existing worldview of the European Union in the XXI century international relations. Likewise, these two concepts have different generic features but identical discourse, which is worth to be decomposed in order to discern their essence, their existence and legitimacy. The main research intention of this paper aims to define the epistemological structuralism of the previous mentioned concepts, and thus, through the prism of the international relations, security and defense consequences of the EU as such.*

**Keywords:** *epistemological structuralism, normative and transformative power, EU, security and defense consequences*

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## **The discourse of the normative power**

The concept of the normative power as a subject of the research in this paper generically derives from the liberal construction of the norms, or the critical construction of the norms and the hegemonic construction of the norms (according to Antonio Gramsci). Namely, this concept starts from the position of the norms as *fundaments* of the external – the political power of the Union, rationalized and operationalized as a kind of capacity for acting and imposing its influence on the other international subjects. Or as the theorist Charles Grant defines the foreign political power of the Union:

“The European power is an *ability* of the European Union and its member countries, *to influence the world* that surrounds them in a *wanted for them direction*. In practice, that would mean *encouraging* the people in the other parts of the world to accept a political and economic system compatible for them” (Grant, 2009).

Despite that, the normative power is based on the *feeling for making damage*, or *maximum reduction of the possible damage*, as a result of the standardized and normative activities. Because of that, this conceptualization aims toward standardizing of the expectation for non-

deviation, understood as a non-abuse or abstinence from abuse of the activities causing harm rather than its existence as a kind of moral imperative. In that sense, the normative power is treated as a *regulatory, standardized power*, while the norms/normative/socially acceptable are categories that are becoming close to what is called power with all its attributes, because *only the great powers possess a certain power for determination and modelling of what is called "normal" through regulation of the behavior of the subjects in the international relations. As normal in this context should be understood the situation of regular, constant or usual behavior of the international subjects in the international relations.* Consequently, all international actors (especially the major powers) hold a "normative power" understood in *strictu sensu*, and thus, they all participate in the creation, modelling and organization of standards (code of conduct) in international relations. Despite the Union, it also applies to other international entities, such as the US, Russia, China, India, Japan, Brazil and South Africa, particularly in those parts of the world where they act in their own interest.

Situationally speaking, there is a problem in defining the *interest of the Union* in that whole conglomerate of will for (over)power and interest, that complicates even more the eventual defining of its interests and wishes for its establishment in the world as a big power (military or political, because from economic aspect the Union is an economic and commercial giant). In that regard, there rises the question if the Union outside the economic and commercial sphere is ready, knows and owns a capacity to "*trade*" with its values and in that way to shape its interest which, contrary to the set *raisonne d'etat*, we could define as ***raison de valeur*** or valuable interest. Or it can be said that it is an interest which is a direct result from the position of the Union as a normative power (with transformative effects) and aspiration to create an ideal organization (which will not resemble the traditional nation-state), a highly positioned on the pedestal of ideal international order in which all entities will be equal, responsible and conscientious, and thus will jointly participate in the creation of global peace, stability and prosperity. Hence, there comes the *ethical dimension* of the foreign political power of the Union as a whole, based on its normative, constitutional discourse and inbuilt ideological frame, which determines its worldview as *universal and comprehensive axiological system*, while the values (as elements of that axiological system) represent the conceptual prism (or ideological frame), through which are constructed, interpreted and articulated the interests of the Union. In that sense, the creator of the concept for "normative power" Jan Maners treats the European normativity as a *series of normative principles generally accepted in the UN system in order to be universally applied* (Manners, 2008).. Here he lists the values of the Union conceived as *basic normative principles*, constituted and promoted such as: *the sustainable peace*, the freedom, the democracy, the human rights, rule of law, social justice and good global governance. On this basis, it is safe to conclude that the conceptualization of the EU as a normative power binds the power of norms as identification of its activities globally.

This concept of power implies the legitimistic base of the European foreign policy, security and eventually defensive activity. Furthermore, the theoretician Jan Maners says that by its acting the Union seeks to encourage the institutions and the people by accepting its values in order of intensification and expansion of international law and regional organizations, multilateral cooperation and good global governance, while standing the Charter of the United Nations (as ethical and axiological source and benchmark the Union). Otherwise, for the theorist Jan Maners the diffusing of the EU norms or cultural diffusion demonstrated by

the existence of the Union as such is particularly important, because “it does not matter what [the EU] does or speaks, but the important thing is that it represents” (Manners, 2008), which again reanimates ontological exemplarity of the EU as a specific international entity with a separate normative identity that produces transformative effects.

### **The transformative power or transformative effect**

We should immediately say that the Union through legal profiling of its foreign policy power definitely exists as a missionary “community of standards”. Or as the first President of the European Commission, Walter Holstein, would say: “The community is a legal work founded on international agreements (...). [It] doesn’t own direct means for imposing of its authority, nor does own army or police force. It owns a small administrative machinery which largely relies on its member countries” (Leonard, 2005).

Based on such legal formulation of the Union through implementation of its regulations, legal stipulations and political signals, leads us to think of it as a normative “hegemony” or transformer of the international behaviour, or power that doesn’t force but power that changes. From this aspect, it is treated as a transformative power which through the power **of the norms, the collaboration and the preventive engagement** (principles of the European security strategy) is contributing to the global pacifying of the world and to the constituting of the EU in a new *non-aggressive, non-ocupatory and regulatory empire*. That means that the Union as a normative power articulates itself through the tendency to use non-military, standardized and regulatory means, with the intention not to coerce, but to transform.

Unlike the unilateral doctrine of George W. Bush rationalized through the doctrine of “preventive war”, the Union through its security strategy named “A secure Europe in a better world” promoted its foreign policy and security doctrine characterized as “preventive engagement” (Bush, 2003). In that way EU demarked its own foreign policy profile as a political and legal organism ready to share the responsibility for the global governing and promotion of the world peace through humanitarian assistance and support, police operations and strengthening the rule of law and economic support. In this sense, the theorist Mark Leonard said: “Europe possesses what is called ‘transformative power’ or power to change the state from within. First, the EU is neither a super state nor empire, but it is a kind of decentralized Club. It also created the largest single market in the world and is able to offer trade and aid to other countries” (Leonard, 2005).

Similarly, it can be stated an existence of a specific power of the Union, close to the definition of the theorist Joseph Nye for the soft power. Namely, through practicing of the soft power or the affirmative conditionality and attraction, the EU not only can, but also designs their foreign policy power, ideologically speaking, like a magnet to attract international entities to the European way of life. EU projected its power not through force, coercion or through the threat of aggression, but through threat of exclusion of the countries in it. Such legal / normative power enables transformation not only of the regimes or the political systems in other countries, but their whole societies. As an example, cited countries such as Turkey and the Balkan countries in which accepting the regulations and directives (norms) of the Union transform their way of life, are held under their strict membership criteria (Copenhagen criteria represent a paradigmatic example of this).

In this context, it is crucial to mention the narratives of the EU norms because the narrative norms “tell the story” of legitimizing of the Union in global political terms. These norms, perceived as legitimate global position and profile of the Union (compared to others), focus on the construction of differences, which should enable the practice of war, while portraying the others as a “threat” or “evil”, something like what the administration of the former US president George W. Bush (especially) did when he called Iran, Iraq and North Korea the “axis of evil” that they (the US) will have it down. Or when the American diplomat John R. Bolton accommodated Cuba, Libya and Syria in the “future axis of evil” and when Condoleezza Rice qualified the countries like Zimbabwe, Belarus and Myanmar, as “outposts of tyranny”. According to that, for the Union may be said that such a narrative (the relation “friends – enemies”) is misplaced and does not correspond to its global political discourse, worldview and activity, starting from its normative-axiological “oath” to respect and affirmation of the above-mentioned values. The EU embraces and promotes friendship and cooperation with other international actors, global justice and of course, the achievement of sustainable peace in the world, despite the conflicts, political or military.

Furthermore, the transformative power, according to its creator Mark Leonard, shows the Union more through a prism of idealism and optimism, functionally attached to the principle *ceteris paribus* (as a principle which means all things to remain unchanged, and thus, to allow practicing the power of the Union). But if this concept faces military aggression against the Union, or against a state of its neighbourhood, the question is whether it will be able to transform the essence of the aggressive power, which will seek to deeply penetrate her immediate neighbourhood or within its territory (where the emphasis on defense is on the defense capabilities of Member States). Or as stated in the Lisbon Treaty: “If any Member State is a victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States are obliged to give support and assistance by all available means” (The Treaty of Lisbon, 2009). In such conditions, the transformative power, definitively, is displaced because it implies passivity, which requires good will on the other side. And in terms of military aggression, that goodwill will remain wishful thinking, which will undoubtedly lead to deprivation and degradation of the dominant economic and legal fabric of the Union. For these reasons, there is the dilemma of the Union, for its possible autonomization regarding the military umbrella of the USA and NATO pact, and creating their own autonomous European armed forces with the rank of highly specialized and technologically advanced army. In this regard, the creation of European armed forces adapted to act aggressively at a time in order to remove the threat is a difficult process of “cat and mouse”, first within the Union itself, and then within the transatlantic partnership. In this light, the mere favour of the Union’s transformative power would be unrealistic, and therefore fatal, if it is faced with a real threat of the Union’s survival, which could produce other side effects of larger scale, again facing the world (hyper)tension that could degenerate destructive rather than positively transformative effects. Accordingly, this concept would be better perceived if treated only as an effect of the peace and normative action of the EU in international relations, in terms of cooperation between the parties and goodwill for internal transformation, and through voluntary internalization of its normative axiological Corps by other international actors.

## Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the legal and transformative power of the EU and their structural marks, we can conclude that it is a specific composition of legal, axiological and ideological constructions grounded in its worldview. Those are constructions articulated through its attractive power, as a category of the soft power, which rejects the use of force for its realization. Also, it is concluded the exemplarity of the Union through which it subtly imposes its model of functioning over the other international subjects.

Epistemologically speaking, the structure of the researched categories of power is composed of the corpus of the norms understood as law and the norms understood as valuable cues which are the ground base of the legal power of the EU as a kind of base for its foreign policy action, standardized and legally determined since its existence as a community of values and norms. The transformative power, however, is being considered as an effect of normative power of the EU starting from its teleological nature aimed toward the future in order to cause non-violent transformation of the international subjects from the inside without pressure in the traditional sense. Staring from that, it can finally be confirmed the epistemological structuralism of the analyzed segments of power, which includes the existence of legitimating base (legislative power) which implies to a normative axiological body of EU objectives (transformative power) that imply its unobtrusive intention to change the world from within and its modeling in accordance with its worldview and way of functioning. Or, as the theorist Mark Leonard says: "We will witness the creation of 'new European century', but not because Europe will lead the world as an empire, but because the European model of work will grow into world model" (Ilik, 2012). According to that, the time has come when the Union must seriously take steps for its own profiling in the political union, capable to deal with the challenges of the 21st century internally and externally because only in that way it will grow into a relevant factor of the modern international relations. On the contrary it will become a hostage of the national egotism of the Member States and a coin in the hands of new great powers that are in sight.

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