

The EU's raison d'être in the world 2020-2030

submission to the Reflection Group on the Future of Europe, 2020-2030

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Published in:
Reflection Group on the Future of Europe, 2020-2030

Publication date:
2009

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (APA):
Manners, I. (2009). The EU's raison d'être in the world 2020-2030: submission to the Reflection Group on the Future of Europe, 2020-2030. In *Reflection Group on the Future of Europe, 2020-2030*
<http://www.reflectiongroup.eu/>

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The EU's *raison d'être* in the world 2020-2030

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While Europe may never have been so prosperous, so secure or so free, it does not feel this way to most of its citizens, its third-country residents, or those on its borders. For EU citizens and near-citizens, as well as most of the rest of the world, the EU seems like a foreign country: an unintelligible, remote, neo-liberal place where they do things differently to the world of first-hand experience. European unification *has* made peace and prosperity possible within Europe, but in that moment of achievement the EU has lost its way, **lost its meaning**. For EU citizens and beyond, the EU has no meaningful *raison d'être*, no clear mission 20 years after European unification, 50 years after its creation.

At exactly the same time the EU has never been more needed, more called upon to act, more important in global politics. The future of the world 2020-2030 will be defined by four **catastrophic failures** – the failure of the neo-liberal economic system to adequately reform itself; the failure to keep global warming below a 2 degree Celsius increase in mean temperatures; the failure to reach any of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals; and the failure to develop any meaningful form of global governance capable of addressing these, and other failures.

The EU could contribute to addressing these failures if it were able to find a meaningful role in the world – to find a means of linking its institutional 'acquis' with its global 'strategy' in a normatively sustainable way. Taking this step to finding a ***raison d'être***, a mission, does not need and must not focus on institutional or treaty reform. EU citizens and near-citizens, as well as the rest of the world, need and deserve more than slogans and platitudes, more than decision-making diagrams and unintelligible treaties.

Finding the EU's *raison d'être* in the world 2020-2030 involves an intellectual return to the **creative efforts** that lay at the origins of the EU. The recognition that the touchstone of the EU, of its *acquis*, holds the key to its mission and role in the world 2020-2030 can only be achieved by returning to the lost treasures of the Schuman Declaration. In the 1950s the making of creative efforts in the ECSC involved pooling basic production *and* instituting a new high authority; making war materially impossible *and* unthinkable; raising living standards *and* promoting peaceful achievements. This fusion of interests *and* ideas provided the intellectual origins of the EU as we know it – and should provide the EU's *raison d'être* in the world 2020-2030.

The creative efforts needed in the 21st century must also be proportionate to the dangers that new global threats and challenges hold for the EU. The recognition of the fusion of interests and ideas within the EU is captured in the EU's prime aim of promoting peace, values and well-being. It is here that clarity is needed in linking *raison d'être* and mission with the EU's *acquis* and strategy in world politics. The emphasis on material interests through the pooling of production, making war materially impossible, and raising of living standards leads to the aim of promoting well-being, in other words, prosperity in Europe and beyond. In parallel, the emphasis on normative ideas through instituting a new high authority, making war unthinkable, and promoting peaceful achievements leads to the aim of promoting values, in other words, progress in Europe and beyond. This aim and mission of promoting **peace, prosperity and progress** inside and outside the Union provides the EU with a much clearer *raison d'être* in the world 2020-2030, but it does not necessarily help provide a means of promotion.

The fusion of interests and ideas in EU *raison d'être* is matched by the fusion of aims and means in promoting peace, prosperity and progress. In other words, the EU's role, its perception, its strategies, and

external actions are not separable – aims and means, words and actions - co-constitute the EU in world politics. But it is useful to think in new ways about EU interests and ideas in world politics by differentiating between material policies/instruments and normative ideas. Material interests and material/physical policies and instruments are central to conventional thinking about the EU as a global actor. Normative ideas and normative justification have not been considered as important, but their role and deployment as **normative power** is critical if the EU's role, perception, strategies and actions are to become more meaningful and more normatively sustainable in 2020-2030.

The concept of normative power, in its ideal or purest form, is ideational rather than material or physical. This means that its use involves **normative justification** rather than the use of material incentives (such as market access) or physical force (such as ESDP missions). Clearly the use of normative justification implies a very different timescale and form of engagement in world politics. In this respect, relations and policies with the rest of the world should be 'normatively sustainable' – i.e. 'normatively' explicable and justifiable to others; 'sustainable' into the next generation. Conceptualising normative power as ideational non-material justification involves advocating a three-stage understanding of its use and analysis linking principles, actions, and impact.

Normative power should primarily be seen as **legitimate** in the principles being promoted. If normative justification is to be convincing or attractive, then the principles being promoted must be seen as legitimate, as well as being promoted in a coherent and consistent way. Legitimacy of principles in world politics may come from previously established international conventions, treaties, or agreements, particularly if these are important within the UN system. Normative power should secondly be perceived as **persuasive** in the actions taken to promote such principles. If normative justification is to be convincing or attractive, then the actions taken must involve persuasion, argumentation, and the conferral of prestige or shame. Normative power should ultimately be envisaged as **socialising** in the impact of the actions taken to promote such principles. If normative justification is to be convincing or attractive, then its impact must be involve socialisation, partnership, and ownership. The deployment of EU normative power is conceived in its ideal form, but in practical terms it is often used together with material incentives and/or physical force. However, the prioritising of normative power may help ensure that any subsequent use of material incentives and/or physical force is thought about and utilised in a more **justifiable** way.

The prioritising of EU normative power with its emphasis on holistic thinking and justifiable practices raises the possibility that a more **sustainable** world politics embraces both the power of ideas, the 'thinkable', and physical power, the 'material'. In this respect, the EU's *raison d'être* in the world 2020-2030 should aim to promote peace, prosperity and progress through the prioritisation of normative power. Only by clearly stating what the EU is for, its *raison d'être*, and how it intends to promote these aims in a normatively sustainable way can the EU take any step towards improving its perception from the outside in 2020-2030. The strategy of clear, coherent, consistent, and committed normative justification that guides any subsequent use of material incentives and/or physical force should be deployed in order to sustain any global influence if the EU is not to be rendered internationally invisible in next 10-20 years. Finally, with or without the Lisbon Treaty, the EU must refine and develop its array of policies and instruments to ensure it prioritises normative justification in the promotion of peace, prosperity and progress for its and other peoples in 2020-2030.