Executive summary

The social sciences have many different understandings of 'normative power'. The purpose of this brief is to help clarify the concept of normative power in world politics as developed in European Union (EU) studies over the last ten years.

The brief uses a five-point conceptual-isation of normative power as being **ideational**; involving **principles**, **actions**, and **impact**; as well as having broader **consequences** in world politics. For each point both a general observation about world politics and a specific comment about the EU is made.

May, 2009

The Concept of Normative Power in World Politics

Ian Manners

ima@diis.dk
www.diis.dk/ima

INTRODUCTION

The past two decades have seen rapid and radical transformations of global economy, society, environment, conflict, and politics. During this period three events in particular seem to capture these notions of global transformation – the 1989 collapse of communism, the 2001 terrorist attacks, and the 2008 global financial crisis. The beliefs of eastern Europeans in 1989, al-Qaida terrorists in 2001, and financial investors in 2008 all contributed, in very different ways, to a transformation of international order and the emergence of new global agendas. These events and the transformations they led to say something about the **power of ideas** and ideation in world politics.

IDEATIONAL

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 or physical force. 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. To capture the sea change in global thinking that the concept of normative power implies, it is useful to juxtapose two visual metaphors (borrowed from Jonathan Power's Story of *Amnesty International* and from Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* respectively) - normative power works like 'water on stone', not like 'napalm in the morning'.

In the post-Cold War period the power of ideas and ideation have been influential in the evolution of the European Community into the EU. Such ideas have helped create an EU which is concerned about more than economic policies,

and which exercises more than material forms of influence and power. In this respect, the incorporation of normative power and exercise of normative justification can be increasingly found in much of the EU's relations with the rest of the world including the external dimensions of internal policies; enlargement, trade, and development policies; and external relations more generally. Two examples of the power of ideas and ideation in post-Cold War EU relations with the world include the idea of 'sustainable development' and of 'humanitarian intervention'. In both cases the ideas came from within the UN system, were adopted into the EU treaty base, and then eventually promoted and practiced in EU external relations.

PRINCIPLES

Conceptualising normative power as ideational non-material justification involves a three-part 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. Coherence of principles comes from the extent to which differing principles, and practices to promote them, can be seen to be sound and non-contradictory. Consistency of principles comes from the extent to which differing principles, and practices to promote them, are uniform both within and without the promoting entity, and are applied uniformly.

Principles in the EU and its relations with the rest of the world draw upon the principles of the UN Charter, as well as the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, the Universal Declaration of Hu-

man Rights and UN Covenants, and the Council of Europe/European Convention on Human Rights. In practical terms such principles can be differentiated into the prime principle of sustainable peace; core principles of freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law (as set out in article 6 of the Treaty on European Union); as well as the objectives and tasks of equality, social solidarity, sustainable development, and good governance (as set out in article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and article 2 of the Treaty establishing the European Community). Coherence and consistency in the international promotion of these principles is intended to come from the role of a High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy envisaged in the Lisbon Treaty.

ACTIONS

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. Persuasion in the promotion of principles in world politics involves constructive engagement, the institutionalisation of relations, and the encouragement of multi- and pluri-lateral dialogue between participants. Within these international and domestic venues for dialogue, debate and argumentation can involve reference to international principles as well as encouraging understanding and agreement (although also misunderstanding and disagreement). Similarly, such engagement and debate can also involve the conferral of prestige or shame by participants. The attribution of prestige may range from public declarations of support to membership of an international community, while the attribution of shame may involve public condemnation or the use of symbolic sanctioning.

EU actions in the promotion of principles cover a full spectrum of practices and policies, encou-

raging a more holistic, or comprehensive approach to the many challenges of world politics. The EU has historically been better at addressing more structural challenges through development aid, trade, interregional cooperation, political dialogue and enlargement. In the past decade the gradual evolution of conflict prevention and crisis management policies has helped improve EU ability to deal with more immediate challenges, such as humanitarian crises and post-conflict reconstruction. This combination of EU actions marks a first step towards a more sustainable peace strategy where the EU is able to address both the structural causes and violent symptoms of conflict. However, the EU's greatest strength in the promotion of principles is not structural capacity or crisis ability, but its encouragement of processes of engagement and dialogue. Such EU engagement entails initiating and institutionalising regular patterns of communication or partnership, for example through accession procedures, stabilization and/or association agreements, the European Neighbourhood Policy, African, Caribbean and Pacific relations, and Strategic Partnerships.

IMPACT

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. Socialisation as an impact of the promotion of principles in world politics should be seen as being part of an open-ended process of engagement, debate and understanding. Partnership as an impact of the promotion of principles may be the result of institutionalised relationships created by the participating parties whether multilateral or plurilateral, international or transnational. Ownership as an impact of the promotion of principles involves practices of joint or local ownership as a result of partner involvement and consultation. However, such impacts of normative power should be based on the

recognition that while international diplomatic socialisation is largely a mirage, the nurturing of domestic, transnational, and international support for international principles can be helped by the three-part processes of normative justification conceived here.

EU impact in promoting principles can be extraordinarily difficult to judge. *Clarity* of principle is important in ensuring others understand what the EU is trying to promote, as with the idea of 'never again' in the post-Yugoslav space. *Simplicity* of action space is important when the EU, albeit very rarely, is the only or predominant actor, as with the pre-accession processes of the 1990s. *Consistency* of promotion is crucial to ensure the EU avoids claims of 'double standards', as is often the case in state recognition (such as Kosovo) or UN resolutions (such as the Middle East). *Holistic*, 'joined-up' thinking is important in the broader promotion of principles through the multilateral system, such as the many challenges of the Doha Round of trade liberalisation, the Millennium Development Goals, and addressing climate change at the Copenhagen CoP15. *Partnership*, not EU unilateralism is important for building global consensus and ensuring success in multilateral institutions. Finally, *timescale* is important when attempting to judge EU principles, actions and impact in any normatively sustainable way.

CONSEQUENCES

A belief in, and practice of, normative power has three broader consequences concerning the possibility of more holistic, justifiable, and sustainable world politics. The concept of normative power invites more **holistic** thinking, 'outside the box', about the purposes of agency, power, and policy in world politics. Such holistic thinking demands more thorough consideration of the rationale/principles, practices/actions, and consequences/impact of actors/agents in world politics. The concept of normative power is concei-

ved here in its ideal or purest 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. Finally, the concept of 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'.

The European Union has a history of, and capacity for, the practice of normative power in world politics, but three challenges remain. The evolution of EU politics and policies over the past decade has occasionally copied some of the technologies and habits of other actors in world politics, for instance in the 'war on terror' and the 'securitisation' of ordinary life, or in trying to rival other 'great powers' in international relations. Such technologies and habits tend to involve copying other 'boxes', not inviting more holistic thinking 'outside the box'. In this respect, the development and use of EU material incentives and/or physical force has tended to follow the patterns and practices of 'great powers' instead of thinking about and using normative power in a more justifiable way. To address these tendencies and better prepare for the challenges of the 21st century the EU should return to making creative efforts to ensure that global challenges, as with endemic war in Europe, become 'not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible' through the exercise of normative power in world politics.

FURTHER READING

Ian Manners, N*ormative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?* Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, Working Paper 38/2000.

Ian Manners, 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?' *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2002, Vol. 40, No. 2, pp. 235-258.

Ian Manners, 'The Normative Ethics of the European Union', *International Affairs*, 2008, Vol. 84, No. 1, pp. 65-80.

Ian Manners, 'As You Like It: European Union Normative Power in the European Neighbourhood Policy', in Richard Whitman and Stefan Wolff (eds.) *The European Neighbourhood Policy Since 2003: Much Ado about Nothing?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009).

Ian Manners, 'The Social Dimension of EU Trade Policies: Reflections from a Normative Power Perspective', in Jan Orbie and Lisa Tortell (eds.) *The Social Dimension of European Union External Trade Relations*, Special Issue of *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 2009, Vol. 14, forthcoming.

Edward Keene, 'Social Status, Civilization and the Idea of a 'Normative Power Europe'', paper presented to symposium on 'The EU as a Global Actor: Perspectives on Power', Georgia Institute of Technology, August 2008.

Tuomas Forsberg, 'Normative Power Europe (Once More): A Conceptual Clarification and Empirical Analysis', paper presented to the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, New York, 15-18 February 2009.