

Liberal empire, geopolitics and EU strategy

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Liberal Empire, Geopolitics and EU Strategy: Norms and Interests in European foreign policy making

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Liberal Empire, Geopolitics and EU Strategy: Norms and Interests in European foreign policy making?

“In challenging times, a strong Union is one that thinks strategically”
(Federica Mogherini 2016, 3)

“I like to compare the European Union as a creation to the organisation of empires”
(José Manuel Barroso 2007)

Introduction

The European Union appears stricken. The repercussions of the Euro crisis and the influx of refugees across the Mediterranean are challenging European solidarity. EU member states are experiencing an unprecedented rise of Eurosceptic and illiberal parties (e.g. De Vries 2018). Externally, the neighbourhood has turned into a “ring of fire” (*The Economist* 2014). The aftermath of the Arab uprisings and the Ukraine crisis have deeply affected the Union’s understanding of its role in international politics. “The transformative power of which the EU was once so proud has changed sides: it now belongs to the neighborhood rather than the EU” (Lehne 2016). The ongoing conflicts in the Union’s borderlands led to a geopolitical turn in strategic thinking among EU officials – expressed in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) review of 2015 and the Global strategy of 2016. The European Commission (2015a, 2) admitted that the “EU’s own interests have not been fully served”. ENP Commissioner Johannes Hahn (2014) demanded a revision of the Union’s ambitious transformation agenda. A significant rhetorical shift in EU documents indicates a critical re-evaluation of “normative power Europe” (Manners 2002).

From the beginning, the EU’s external relations have been “characterized by a fundamental tension between a long-term reformist agenda and the aim to increase European security in the short term” (Demmelhuber and Kaunert 2014, 575; e.g. Seeberg 2009; Ruffa 2011). Michael Smith (2011), in his description of the EU’s “liberal grand strategy”, emphasizes the large role of ideational factors, which challenge more state-centred views of governance and strategy. The quest for the right balance between interest- and norm-driven components in EU foreign policy making has dominated the debates – both among practioners and academics. The ENP literature urges a more consistent application and implementation of EU norms, lamenting that the Union is susceptible to double standards and complicity with authoritarian regimes – particularly in the Southern neighbourhood (Pace 2009, 2014; Del Sarto 2016). The realist critics of “normative power” (Hyde-Price 2006) are missing “a Strategic Concept linking [the] EU’s military capabilities to its political objectives” (Van Staden et al. 2000, 5; Rynning 2003, 2011). Representatives of a more interest-driven approach accuse the Union of cherishing the illusion that positive expecations of actors in

international politics can replace the reality of zero-sum calculations (Smith and Howorth 2016), and they demand more coercive approaches to strategy (Hyde-Price 2004).

But the political practice of EU foreign policy making indicates that the balance between norm diffusion and interests cannot be fundamentally altered. Just as the ENP review in 2011 did not lead to a substantial strengthening of normative policy instruments (Schumacher 2012; Tömmel 2013), it seems unlikely that the 2015 review will prompt fundamental changes of EU grand strategy. The Union appears largely incapable of substantially re-adjusting its strategic thinking (e.g. Kelley 2006). EU decision-makers remain convinced of the compatibility of 'milieu shaping' and the harder edge of possession goals.

Therefore, this article revisits the question: Why is it so difficult for the EU to strike a convincing balance between the promotion of the Union's interests and norms? Why do EU decision-makers struggle to adopt a more consistent strategy? This article argues that, due to its imperial nature, the EU has to adopt a 'dual strategy'. Building on Jan Zielonka's work (2006, 2013), various scholars have promoted ideas of "normative imperialism" present in the EU's engagement with its borderlands (Pänke 2013, 2015; Del Sarto 2016). These contributions draw our attention to the fact that the "EU is indeed engaged in 'normative' policies, which however primarily serve [its] security and economic interests" (Del Sarto 2016, 227). The Union is linking its efforts of norm diffusion to a liberal ideology claiming universal validity, despite this ideology's European origins – an EU-niversality in the best interest of the recipients.

Through a conceptual discussion of academic literature, I am seeking to expand these ideas in three ways: Firstly, where Del Sarto "proposes the notion of empire, less as a model of what the EU is and more as a mode of how the EU acts" (Marchetti 2018, 133; here Del Sarto 2016, 223), I would like to understand the EU's entire polity as imperial, thereby reconciling the imperial paradigm with ideas of 'external governance' which emphasizes the continuity between internal policies and their external dimension (Lavenex 2008). Furthermore, the inclusion of 'domestic' imperialism invites further research into dynamics at play in current processes of EU disintegration. Secondly, this article – more consequentially – conceptualises norms and interests as interlocking and mutually reinforcing. Thus, norms are not merely devices to cloak rational self-interests in asymmetrical power relations (compare Marchetti 2018, 133). Thirdly, and importantly, by incorporating findings of new imperial historiography (see Howe 2009; Burbank & Cooper 2010; Judson 2016a) my argument appreciates the dynamic links between core and periphery, as well as possible benefits of imperial rule – e.g. the emancipatory potential of liberal norms – thereby, re-emphasizing the ambiguity of empire. As such, this exploration of imperial governance and discursive strategies follows recent demands to initiate a closer dialogue between political scientists and historians (e.g. Haughton 2016).

The first section establishes the EU as an empire. The argument is novel because of the introduction of a more robust definition of empire informed by new imperial history, which

allows a systematic comparison between the Union as a post-modern expression of empire and other manifestations of empire in European history. The definition highlights hierarchical geopolitical modelling and a legitimising discourse which understands the EU as a post-modern imperial manifestation – a liberal empire. The paper therefore advances previous contributions with references to imperial practices in the past. The second part utilises Michael Williams’ understanding of security and culture to explore the impact of changes in the Union’s strategic environment on the EU’s ‘dual strategy’. An analysis of the ENP reviews of 2011 and 2015 suggests a resilience of the EU’s ‘dual strategy’ despite a geopolitical turn in the neighbourhood. Therefore, the supranational identity-building capabilities of the EU’s ‘normative power’ are preserved. At the same time, its impact propensity in the neighbourhood appears much diminished. The article concludes that, due to the EU’s imperial nature, all attempts to prioritise either interests or norms within its ‘dual strategy’ are futile and risk undermining the legitimacy of the European Union even further.

The EU as Liberal Empire

Since its establishment, the political character of the European Union has been debated. Many scholars interpret its institutional set-up and external behaviour as unique and that the Union therefore constitutes a *sui generis* polity (Hix 2005; Manners 2002). This is an ahistorical assumption and as Russell Foster argued, the EU needs to be understood as “part of a political continuum whereby the Union is inextricable from its historical roots and predecessors” (Foster 2015, 10; see Pänke 2015, 350). More specifically, the EU acts in ways informed by legacies of imperial rule. Empires seek dominance in large and politically, economically, and culturally diverse geographical spaces. Based on asymmetrical distributions of power, the people of these territories are located in different levels of subordination or integration. Empire-building is therefore an ordering process legitimised by appealing to ‘universally’ recognised norms. These norms may be in the ‘best interest’ of the subordinated, nevertheless it is clear “who is expected to learn from whom” (Browning 2018, 123). The first part of this section will give an overview of readings of empire in new imperial history, EU studies, and critical geopolitics. Building on these readings, I will define empire, and the EU as a post-modern liberal manifestation of imperial rule. Subsequently, the two relevant components, imperial governance and imperial discourse will be discussed.

With the ‘post-colonial turn’, new imperial historians shifted their scholarly interests to powers of discourse and links between the imperial core and its subjects. Stephen Howe (2009, 3) emphasizes the diversity within new imperial historiography and that we therefore should “speak instead of fresh, creative histories of imperialism”. Historians’ findings suggest two tensions which are relevant when conceptualising imperial identity formation and grand strategy: First, there is a tension between the supranational centre of governance and its constitutive member states, and within the states, between liberal ‘cosmopolitans’ and ‘nationals’ (e.g. Burbank and Cooper 2010; King 2003; Zahra 2010; Judson 2016a; for EU see Delanty 2017). The relationship between core and periphery is therefore “ambiguous and

mutually constitutive”; in fact, European nation- and empire-building are intimately linked “to the extent that the two are now conceptualised as a single process” (Morozov 2013, 18; see Leonhard and Hirschhausen 2010; Judson 2016a for the Habsburg; Barkey 2008 for the Ottoman; Etkind 2011 for the Russian empire). Second, there is a tension between the potentially emancipatory quality of the imperial normative order, and resistance against the imperialist undertones of this order. This second tension between norms and power stems from a symmetrical claim of equality of imperial subjects and the actual asymmetrical distribution of power among them.

The themes of imperial governance and discourse reappear in the EU-as-empire paradigm which entered the debate in the context of the Eastern enlargements during the late 1990s. The first contributions came from East Central Europeans (Janos 2001; Böröcz 2001; Zielonka 2006). In the transition “from Eastern Empire to Western Hegemony” these authors, from their peripheral perspectives, detected familiar repertoires of imperial rule. Hartmut Behr (2007) has analysed the Union’s enlargement process, in which states deemed insufficiently ‘civilized’ are excluded in the spirit of 19th century imperial practices. From a critical perspective this scholarship focussed on “discourses and representational practices to unveil the workings” of Europe’s ‘mission civilisatrice’ (Rutazibwa 2010, 212) while at the same time acknowledging the positive transformative impacts of the Union.

Critical geopolitics adds insights on the importance of self-image in hierarchical ordering processes of space (e.g. Ó Tuathail 1996). These analyses investigate the Union’s discursive (and material) strategies of incorporation, and explore how spaces of EU power are narrated and constructed (Bialasiewicz 2011). The EU is here understood as “the ‘civilized zone’ of the European continent” (Foster 2013, 375) in terms of a core, “surrounded by a buffer zone of a so-called ‘ring of friends’, beyond which lies a threatening world” (Browning 2018, 127). Accordingly, the EU – lacking a clear-cut “territorial fixity” – has to adopt a more “heterogenous spatial logic” (Dimitrova 2012, 252; see Marchetti 2018, 133) in line with concepts of “hybrid” (Scott 2005, 2011) or “soft geopolitics” (Dimitrova 2012). Again, this literature establishes a link between ideas of imperial governance as geopolitical modelling and the importance of imperial discourse based on norm diffusion which transcends conventional self-interest as norms can adopt a placeless and timeless quality.

Defining Empire

There have been multiple definitions of empire. Most of them share ideas of managing diversity and establishing hierarchical orders (Eisenstadt 1963; Doyle 1986; Motyl 2001). In line with Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper (2010, 8, 11), I am not aiming “to put things into neatly defined boxes”, but rather “the opposite: to look at ranges of political possibilities and tensions and conflicts among” different manifestations of empire through history, because “empire – as a form of state – was persistent over time, [but] empire – as a way of rule – was not uniform”. Jürgen Osterhammel (2016) has pointed out that it would be misleading to assume empires to be uniformly constructed power machines, which invariably

follow the same logic. One could argue that the EU differs from most historical empires as it: a) is polycentric with decision-making shared by Brussels' EU organs and the Union's member states; b) has – despite overlapping authorities within Union territory – an identifiable external border; and most importantly c) rests fundamentally on voluntariness. But again, imperialism escapes precise taxonomies. Coercion comes in different shapes and sizes.

Within the various processual, fluid and multifaceted understandings of empire, Karen Barkey's definition derived from her analysis of the organisation of the Ottoman empire appears very helpful:

An empire is a large composite and differentiated polity linked to a central power by a variety of direct and indirect relations. [...] These relations are [...] regularly subject to negotiations over the degree of autonomy [...] in return for compliance. (Barkey 2008, 9)

Barkey emphasises the negotiated aspect of empires and advocates considering their centre-periphery relations as “hub-and-spoke network structure” mediated by elites and networks. Similarly, Alexander Motyl (2001, 4) defined empire “as a hierarchically organized political system with a hublike structure – a rimless wheel – within which a core elite and state dominate peripheral elites and societies by serving as intermediaries”. These ideas are mirrored in the institutional set-up of the EU generally and in the bilateral framework of the ENP more specifically.

According to Barkey, maintaining “domination and longevity requires that empires ensure the articulation of three conditions”: 1) “appropriate mechanisms of rule over cultural diversity”; 2) “an ideological/ cultural form of legitimation”; and 3) “modes of appropriation of political and economic resources” (Barkey 2008, 13).

From these readings, I derive two broader features of empire:

First, **Imperial governance as geopolitical modelling of a hierarchical order**, “embodied in flexible arrangements of different levels of integration and constantly negotiated relations between the imperial centre, the regions, and entities in multi- and especially bilateral frames” to rule over cultural diversity (“hub-and-spoke network structure”). These hierarchical orders very often manifest themselves in concentric circle models and flexible bordering strategies (Pänke 2013, 116; see Gammerl 2010, 17).

Second, **Imperial discourse as ‘ideological/cultural form of legitimation’**, to “substitute the absence of a narrow national identity concept” and based on the weak coherence of the polity. This legitimising narrative is directed to the inner and outer realms and calls for continuous expansion, or “at least interaction with the periphery, which in turn gains influence on the imperial core for the benefit of both” (Pänke 2013, 116). Empires strive for “discursive hegemony” throughout their territories. In contrast, the governance of federal and nation states is characterised by greater symmetry between the various constitutive subjects (Osterkamp 2016, 592; Motyl 1997; Berger and Miller 2015).

Within the normative realities of 20th century international politics, the EU had to construct itself as 'liberal empire' – similar to the Habsburg empire in the second half of the 19th century (Judson 2016b; Osterkamp 2016). EU norms – codified in Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty (respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and respect for human rights) – are firmly rooted in the European Enlightenment and what Norbert Elias (1939) has described as the European civilising process. 'Liberal imperialism' has been ascribed to the EU in various ways. Robert Cooper (2002) – Tony Blair's former architect of a new internationalism and one of the authors of the 2003 *European Security Strategy* – highlighted its benevolent nature for the "good of the recipients". This was expressed in the *European Security Strategy* which defined the EU as a "force for good" in global politics. The idea of the EU as a 'liberal empire' floats in the ambiguous concepts of "transformative power" (Börzel and Risse 2009) and "normative empire" (Del Sarto 2016). The term captures nicely the "dual face" of European integration (Brunkhorst 2014) where the emancipatory ambition of a liberal agenda is dialectically linked to expressions of local and national resistance. Such liberal ordering processes are a reminder of Gramscian hegemony (Diez 2013) and are "inescapably compromised" (Porter 2018). However, imperial rule may have its merits in regions which are divided ethnically, confessionally, or along other lines. Furthermore, its norms may be genuinely appealing (Beller 2017) – but at the same time its imperialist face evokes scepticism. This ambiguity of empire is very observable in various current EU-ropean conflicts, like Brexit, or the rule of law probe targeting Poland and Hungary. Thus, the Union's liberal ordering processes are prone to provoke national opposition, but nevertheless, its EU-niversal liberal norms provide a more convincing base for inclusive societies and economic prosperity than exclusive and protectionist nationalist agendas. These tensions, therefore, constitute the inescapable reality of empire-building processes in Europe.

The EU's Imperial Governance

Imperial governance feeds on asymmetrical power relations and constructs – based on appeals to shared normative understandings – a hierarchical order through different strategies of 'bordering' (Browning and Joenniemi 2008; Scott 2009). The EU-ropean liberal order rests on a design of "institutions, norms, and patterned relationships that defines" the balances of power on the continent and between the centre and the borderlands (Ruggie 1982, 380; Porter 2018). Often, imperial orders are marked by concentric circles, in which each ring represents a reduction in integration from the centre to the periphery – along with ever-lower degrees of 'civilisation'. Decreasing integration corresponds with shrinking adherence to the common body of law and diminishing possibilities of participating in the decision-making process at the core (Watson 1992, 16; Münkler 2005, 17).

Christopher Browning's (2018) concept of "mindscape" is useful to further illustrate these ordering processes. Based on an "idealisation of European space", the EU's "mindscape" rests on four elements: 1) a teleological vision which imagines the Union at the "forefront of an universal developmental model" and as quintessentially 'normal'; 2) the EU itself as the

representation and culmination of a liberal civilising process; 3) with each layer of the concentric circles the ‘worlds’ of risks, insecurity, instability is enhanced; and finally 4) a “restricted and geocultural conception of Europeaness” (Browning 2018, 120 f.). The Union’s “mindscape places the EU at the apex of a hierarchy, dispensing wisdom” (Browning 2018, 121) and establishes “semipermeable borders through the export of rules and practices” (Dimitrova 2012, 252).

Such concentric circles could be ascribed to the EU in various ways. The core seems to be made up of the original founding members of the EC (EU-6). A first ring inside the Union is constituted by the Southern states and the new member states (who could not opt out of anything) in the Eastern peripheries. An EU-ropean hierarchy of states establishes itself regarding the impact propensity in EU policy shaping (Adler-Nissen 2017). A second ring is the European Economic Area (EEA), which integrates non-EU members in the single market (Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland). A third ring is the candidate and associated countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey. The fourth ring is the target countries of the ENP (with privileges for the countries of the Eastern Partnership). And the fifth ring is states outside the ENP.

The history of empires shows that authority and sovereignty have been “shared out, layered, overlapping” in these polities (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 17). The EU’s flexible governance and ideas of differentiated integration mirrors these observations as well:

1) enhanced cooperation, which allows a group of states to accelerate integration in any area without other members being involved; 2) opt-out clauses (e.g. for Denmark and the UK in the Euro zone or Schengen area); or 3) transition periods within the accession treaties (e.g. for free movement of labour within the single market for the new member states of 2004). (Pänke 2013, 117 f.)

Therefore, the Union establishes “its rule in a radial manner through differing zones of order” (Wæver 1997, 64). The Union establishes a hierarchical order via geopolitical modelling of different layers of influence and power. The Union’s strategic interest of promoting “a ring of well governed states” in the neighbourhood (European Council 2003, 8), its multi-dimensional governance and ‘variable geometry’ indicate such geopolitical considerations, which are realised in processes of constant negotiations, in bilateral frameworks, between the imperial core and its subjects.

The EU’s Imperial Discourse

Vincent Della Salla argued that “every form of social organisation requires narratives to give it meaning and to provide reason for being” (Della Salla 2010, 1, cited in Miskimmon 2018, 154). Empires construct their hierarchical order as legitimate with the help of supranational narratives; in Barkey’s words, they are “the glue that offered the spiritual cohesion of the elite upper classes of the empire, encouraging their participation”. She also reminds us that “[l]egitimacy is not maintained just by the actions of the ruler, but also by the willingness of those who are subordinate to believe in the legitimacy of the ruler’s claims” (Barkey 2008,

98-99). In contrast to nation states, imperial polities may not refer to constructions of ethnic or religious homogeneity but, rather, have to establish 'community' on the base of more or less abstract norms and values. Thus, the creation of a sense of belonging – a 'we' – becomes even more relevant for imperial external behaviour in comparison with a nation state's foreign policy. As dominant powers in a Foucauldian sense, empires maintain social peace in nationally heterogeneous environments, and have to produce ethical truths in the shape of norms. These norms are defended "at the borders against barbarians and internally against the rebellious" (Negri and Hardt, 10; Ungureanu, 2012, 19).

EU legitimacy very much rests on its idea of an EU-ropean identity already expressed in the *Declaration on European Identity* published in Copenhagen by the nine EC Foreign Ministers in 1973 (and now codified in Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty):

The Nine wish to ensure that the cherished values of their legal, political and moral order are respected, and to preserve the rich variety of their national cultures. Sharing as they do the same attitudes to life, based on a determination to build a society which measures up to the needs of the individual, they are 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. (Bulletin of EC 1993)

The main objective of Europe's 'normative power' is the diffusion of these universally understood core values of the European integration project among its member states and to third states (Diez 2005). The EU's 'normative power' depends on its 'defining authority' being capable of establishing what is perceived to be 'normal' in the neighbourhood and beyond (Manners 2002). Hence, the Union's external relations are a direct consequence of its striving for internal community by establishing a "set of political and social values and principles in which [EU citizens] recognize themselves as a 'we'" (Cerutti 2008, 6). Imperial discourse therefore clarifies the EU's vision and role to the member states and its citizens.

The historical assuredness of the Union's 'civilising mission' in an enlightened spirit and the non-negotiability of its normative contents (Del Sarto 2016) continue the 'mission civilisatrice' of 19th century imperialism, which felt 'responsible' for its imperial subjects. Just as in Paul Leroy-Beaulieu's 1874 book *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, Europe is often "contrasted to a backward colonial world" which needs to be enlightened (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 287).

The energy, drive, curiosity and goal-directed desire for improvement rooted in the Enlightenment were opposed to the lethargy, conservatism and disorder, however picturesque, of the non-European order. (Okey 2007, 1)

Robin Okey is describing the Habsburg empire's 'civilising mission' in Bosnia before the First World War. Nevertheless, his descriptions are echoed in the 'liberal imperialism' of the EU's current missions in the Balkans (Knaus and Martin 2003). The endeavour of imperial bureaucracies is expressed in the general tone of system transfer during the EU's Eastern enlargement of the 1990s. On their annual tours, EU representatives evaluated through

“safeguards,” “benchmarks,” “monitoring,” and “screening,” the “progress” of the accession candidates (Posener 2007, 94; Pänke 2015, 356).

In this section I aimed to establish that the EU is a liberal empire. Both imperial features – geopolitical modelling of hierarchical orders and supranational identity building – limit the strategic options available to the metropolis. Imperial polities have to make sure that their political orders are perceived as credible and legitimate – and due to their scale, these orders cannot be sustained by relying solely on power capacities in a conventional, realist sense. This will be further explored in the next section.

Norms and Interests in the EU’s ‘Dual Strategy’

As the EU is a liberal empire, its foreign policies differ markedly from conventional, goal- and possession-based state foreign policies with their clearly demarcated borders and their – more or less – uncontested national identities in homogenised spatial contexts.¹ The second part of this article briefly introduces the idea of ‘dual strategy’ in reference to the Roman Empire. The three subsections establish the EU’s comprehensive strategy as the only available strategic option for an imperial polity. First, Michael Williams’ concept of strategic cultures is introduced to reconcile the constructivist and realist components within the EU’s ‘dual strategy’ and discuss potential implications of changes in the EU’s strategic environment for strategic thinking. Second, an analysis of the ENP reviews of 2011 and 2015 shows the inability of the Union to substantially alter its strategic outlook. Finally, the importance of the normative component for supranational identity building and ordering processes is highlighted. This inevitably creates a dilemma for EU foreign policy making, as the EU’s ‘normative power’ has been severely weakened after the supportive ‘cultural field of security’ (Williams 2007) has changed to an unfavourable geopolitical field of security.

The unresolvable tension between norms and interests is well illustrated in Foster’s (2015, 11-12) reference to the original Roman understanding of empire. “Cicero distinguishes two related yet theoretically separate ideas. These are the twin concepts of *imperium* and *patrocinium*”. Only with a *patrocinium* – translatable as patronage and paternalism – to unite its peoples and foster a collective identity is an empire likely to sustain its domination. Again, empires in history oscillated between brutal *imperium* and utopian *cosmopolis* – occupying an unclear position in between promoting “universalist co-operation, peace, and security – but only so far as is permitted by the patronising interference of an established core civilisation”. Norms and interests are in fact two sides of the same coin of an imperial comprehensive strategy. For which, in her analysis of the bilateral action plans within the Southern dimension of the ENP, Michelle Pace (2007) coined the term ‘dual strategy’. This ‘dual strategy’ aims at the same time for an EU-isation² of the neighbourhood through norm transfers *and* for the protection of the Union’s own security interests.

EU Strategy and Strategic Environments

The tension between interests and norms in EU policies is linked with the wider debate between rationalists and constructivists regarding factors shaping international politics (Kratochvil and Tulmets 2010, 15; Katzenstein and Keohane 1999; Pollack 2000; Sicurelli 2010). A fruitful attempt to reconcile rationalist and constructivist thought is Michael Williams' study on "Culture and Security" (2007). Williams develops a framework that emphasizes the links between culture, power, and strategy. Similar to ideas of the Copenhagen School, or Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot's "international practices" (2011), Williams utilises Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. He diagnoses that within the constructivists' focus on norms and identities, "concepts of power and strategy have largely been lost" (Williams 2007, 1-2). Bourdieu's 'structuralist constructivism' helps with "overcoming the divide between strategy as pure instrumentality, and visions of culture as 'embedded', norm- or rule-governed action that lack a sense of the strategic action of agents" (Williams 2007, 3). According to him, agents are possessing a set of dispositions, semi-conscious orientations, which make them act and react in certain ways (habitus). The 'cultural field of security' then describes the dominant strategic thinking patterns of a specific temporal and spatial context structuring the agents' habitus. Williams draws our attention to the fundamentally changed contexts of the post-Cold War strategic environment which favoured the EU's liberal empire and its 'normative power' by establishing a liberal 'security field of democratic peace'.

Unlike those who stress either the dominance of norms and values, or the absence of power and strategy, I suggest that what took place in the 1990s was a reconfiguration of the 'field' of security where military and material power, while remaining significant, were repositioned within what might be called the 'cultural field of security' that privileged cultural and symbolic forms of power. (Williams 2007, 2)

Williams (2007, 2) goes on to argue that the means of cultural and symbolic forms of power were "dominantly possessed by Western states, societies, and security organisations" – very importantly the EU. I share Williams' understanding of strategy (2007, 36), which "concern[s] the ways in which agents pursue their interests. They too, however, take place within the context of the habitus, [...] and field, and their relevant interests".

Thus, one could argue that in this strategic environment of a 'security field of democratic peace', the EU responded to the so-called 'Arab Spring' in 2011 by rhetorically strengthening the normative democratisation agenda. The communications *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean* and *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood* promised greater incentives in the three dimensions of 'money, markets and mobility', further bilateralisation within the 'more for more principle', and closer engagement with civil society in order to build 'deep democracy'. As we shall see below, closer analysis of the documents revealed the ongoing importance of the Union's (self-)interest, e.g. the centrality of readmission clauses within the mobility partnership negotiations.

Shortly after, Russia's aggression in 2014 and its zero-sum calculations regarding the Eastern neighbourhood and the reemerging authoritarian regimes in the Southern neighbourhood arguably altered the Union's strategic environment significantly. Again, one

could argue that this geopolitical turn has led to the rhetorical U-turn within the last five years. The new context implied a shifting 'security field' favouring strategic thinking in neorealist terms of power and competition. Now, EU officials appear somewhat paralysed and prefer pragmatic management of the geopolitical challenges over ambitious normative narratives (e.g. Schumacher 2016). Again, EU institutions did respond quickly and published two major foreign policy documents: the 2015 ENP review and the 2016 *EU Global Strategy*. In this changed strategic environment, neorealists, like Vivien Smith and Jolyon Howorth (2016), recognise that the "High Representative correctly spoke of 'rethinking the EU's transformative agenda'. That is a crucial objective. The EU needs to focus much more on interests" and postulated further that "there should be no illusions: positive sum aspirations have not replaced zero-sum realities".

The prevalent strategic environment seems to have a considerable impact on the formulation of European foreign policy. The examples of the ENP reviews in 2011 and 2015 signify rhetorical shifts in the balancing of norms and interests within the EU's 'dual strategy'. The next section will take a closer look at the two policy papers and show that in neither case has the Union substantially altered its approach, which indicates the persistence of the EU's imperial strategic vision.

The EU's Quest for Strategy: ENP reviews 2011 and 2015

The ENP review of 2011 was characterised by feelings of euphoria caused by the Arab uprisings and "a proud tradition of supporting countries in transition from autocratic regimes to democracy, first in the South and more recently in Central and Eastern Europe" (European Commission 2011, 2). In response to the toppling of the authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, the EU formulated a focus on norm transfer within the incipient transformation processes. Its approach seemingly became politicised. A transformative appeal dominates the language, e.g. when the Union highlights that:

[t]he events unfolding in our southern neighbourhood are of historic proportions. They reflect a profound transformation process and will have lasting consequences not only for the people and countries of the region but also for the rest of the world and the EU in particular. [...] While acknowledging the difficulties the EU has to take the clear and strategic option of supporting the quest for the principles and values that it cherishes. (European Commission 2011, 2)

However, "differentiation" and "flexibilisation" and a departure from a problematic one-size-fits-all model remained key messages much in line with the 'old ENP' (see Schumacher 2012; Tömmel 2013). The promised 'more for more' principle basically indicates intensified relations with willing ENP partners. "It must be a *differentiated approach*. Despite some commonalities, no country in the region is the same so we must react to the specificities of each of them" (European Commission 2011, 2). This section reemphasizes the bilateral approach of the ENP in difference to the multilateralism of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (see e.g. Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005).

1
2
3 In 2011, the ENP was focussing on democracy promotion by, for example, intensifying
4 bottom-up initiatives with the aim of listening “not only to requests for support from partner
5 governments, but also to demands expressed by civil society” (European Commission 2011,
6 3). However, central instruments remained focussed on financial support (*money*), sectoral
7 cooperation and access to the single market (*markets*) as well as visa facilitating
8 arrangements to enhance *mobility*. The interest-driven components of the ‘dual strategy’
9 remained present, both in the concluded bilateral action plans and in local implementation of
10 EU policies (e.g. Pänke 2016). Therefore, the 2011 ENP review had shown an inability to
11 initiate a substantial change in the Union’s ‘dual strategy’.

12
13 Throughout the EU’s institutional history, central and sensitive policy areas within ENP
14 remained vague. Examples include the formulation of concrete incentives of conditionality,
15 the cooperation with authoritarian regimes and the access of citizens of the target countries
16 to the Union’s labour markets. Areas of cooperation relevant to security – energy security,
17 migration management and counter-terrorism – remain largely unspecified.

18
19 In 2015, newly elected president of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, declared, with
20 great fanfare, a revision of the EU’s neighbourhood policies during his first year of tenure.
21 Again, a revised ENP would need to take into consideration the often diverging interests of
22 its partner countries. In its language, the strategy paper of 2015 seeks to distance itself from
23 the last review in 2011, “recognising that not all partners aspire to EU rules and standards,
24 and reflecting the wishes of each country concerning the nature and focus of its partnership
25 with the EU” (European Commission 2015b, 2). The paper recommends a more pragmatic
26 approach, and cooperation with the neighbourhood “should be given a tighter, more relevant
27 focus” and “greater flexibility” (European Commission 2015b, 3). This sounds familiar, but
28 what it actually means becomes apparent a few lines later when there is mention of a “new
29 focus on stepping up work with our partners on security sector reform, conflict prevention,
30 counter-terrorism and anti-radicalisation policies” (European Commission 2015b, 3). The
31 Union aims for a more pragmatic, realist, and therefore de-politicised, approach to relations
32 with its neighbours.

33
34 The Union rhetorically promises to concentrate on fewer but more relevant fields of
35 cooperation, which serve the interests of both sides. Furthermore, EU interests, particularly
36 in regional stability, security, and controlled migration, are now much more explicit than
37 before.

38
39 Growing numbers of refugees are arriving at the European Union’s borders hoping to
40 find a safer future. Energy crises have underlined the EU’s need to work with
41 neighbours on energy security, including diversification of energy sources, routes and
42 suppliers. There have been acts of terror affecting the EU and the neighbourhood, most
43 recently the heinous terrorist attacks in Paris on 13th November. (European
44 Commission 2015b, 2)

45
46 Similarly, the new security strategy, which was presented on 28 June 2016, shortly after the
47 British EU referendum, emphasises the need for clear strategy and concedes that “the idea

that Europe is an exclusively ‘civilian power’ does not do justice to an evolving reality” (European Council 2016, 4). Thus, both papers indicate a significant rhetorical change and “turning point” (Schumacher 2016). The “political idea at the heart of the ENP – Europe’s transformative power” was replaced by a “new realism” (Furness and Schäfer 2015). The Union now appears as a ‘normal’ security actor, which is significantly developing the capacities to act upon more conventional models of geopolitical foreign policy making.

Nevertheless, the 2015 ENP review appears much less depoliticised in substance. The explicit emphasis on self-interest does not indicate that the Union has put its norms and values on the back burner; the ‘dual strategy’ remained largely intact throughout. Repeated references to democracy, the rule of law and human rights appear prominently in the new review. Moreover, the Commission acknowledges the relevance of the ENP for the construction and protection of its own EU-ropean identity: “The EU’s own stability is built on democracy, human rights and the rule of law and economic openness and the new ENP will take stabilisation as its main political priority in this mandate” (European Union 2015, 2). Norm transfer consequently needs to play a decisive role in the EU’s external behaviour. “[R]egulatory convergence” and “harmonisation” in trade and environmental policies remain central objectives of the ENP (European Commission 2015, 10, 13, 14).

Similarly, the new Global Strategy indicates a continuation of the Union’s ‘dual strategy’. The paper emphasizes at the same time the common interests of EU citizens as well as the transfer of norms and values. The central concept of the Union’s new strategy – “principled pragmatism” – is, in essence, a re-formulation of the very nature of the familiar ‘dual strategy’ by promoting norms and interests at the same time, as the Union will be “guided by clear principles. These stem as much from a realistic assessment of the strategic environment as from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world” (European Council 2016, 4, 16). EU foreign policy continues to be based on its fundamental liberal principles, as the paper emphasises its will to “invest in win-win solutions, and move beyond the illusion that international politics can be a zero-sum game” (European Council 2016, 4).

Upon closer inspection, the language in both 2015 documents reveals a continued commitment towards the transformative appeal established during Eastern enlargement. The Council demands in its conclusions on the ENP review, a “comprehensive approximation with [...] EU legislation and standards”, and at the same time the need “to strengthen the security dimension of the ENP” (European Council 2015). The ongoing tensions between the two drivers of EU foreign policy and the EU’s quest for strategy are hardly surprising. Both components are constantly present in the Union’s ‘dual strategy’ and mirrored, as is evident throughout the revisions of the ENP in the last decade, in the continued tension between a normative democratisation agenda and the formulation of rational self-interests.

EU Strategy and Identity Building

As argued above, one of the key objectives of empire is to export political order to the peripheries with the objective of establishing credibility and durability. Empires do have material interests – among them the extraction (or provision) of various kinds of resources in the peripheries – but they have to balance these against their normative survival strategy. Thus, empires follow their rational interests, but are less free to do so than nation states are. Another way of looking at this would be the application of Watson's (1992, 14) idea of the 'raison de système', a counterpoint to 'raison d'état', which is defined as "the idea that it pays to make the system work" within its given normative boundaries.

The outcomes of this dilemma are clearly observable in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, where the Union has material interests in energy security, hindering migration, and fighting terrorism, but is always in danger of losing its EU-niversal appeal and credibility in the perspective of local actors, thereby destabilising the established hierarchical order. The EU's export of political practices and habits has created "dependable expectations of peaceful change" (Adler 2010) but also raised concerns about applications of 'double standards'. This is similar to imperial governance in the past, e.g. Austria-Hungary in Bosnia (e.g. Okey 2007). Empires legitimise themselves by stabilising and appeasing their peripheries. They therefore have to invest a considerable share of their wealth into the development of neighbouring regions. It is a key objective of an empire to make its peripheries as interested as the imperial core in the continuation of the empire (Münkler 2005; Pänke 2013, 115).

Empires are furthermore primarily concerned with maintaining their internal cohesion and legitimacy. Their foreign policies are therefore less "the expression of interests in the external environment" (Ungureanu 2012, 26). In a similar way, Adler and Barnett (1998, 43) suggest that regional integration projects can function as security community-building institutions as they provide "sites of socialisation and learning [which] foster the creation of a regional 'culture' around commonly held attributes". Again, the EU has successfully linked these attributes to a liberal ideology claiming EU-niversality.

This idea suggests a concentration on the intersubjective construction of social reality, which emphasises the impact of identity on interests. Compared to nation states, an imperial polity therefore has to adopt a different strategy to project its power; power then means – as highlighted by Filippo Andreatta and Lorenzo Zambarnardi (2017, 75) – "to construct by persuasion particular normative frameworks and meanings at the social level and to change actors' identities and interests accordingly". They usefully separate notions of 'destructive power' within realist theory from 'productive power' in liberal scholarship, and crucially 'integrative power' – as 'the social construction of Europe'. Their ideas resonate in Williams' attempt to reconcile norms and interests, culture and security. Imperial discourses then appear as reflexive processes which are:

concerned with the *production* of legitimate forms of subjectivity that performs subtle yet powerful disciplinary functions. In this process, Kantian liberalism generates specific practices of identity and substantial, if often overlooked, forms of power that can become the basis of strategies exercised by dominant actors. (Williams 2007, 5)

The Union's 'normative power' thus becomes part of a process reproducing a 'we'. The EU therefore operates within a field of identity, understood as "a relational structure" in which various forms of *inclusion* become crucial. A key part of EU power lies in this articulation of an identity "that any state could, and indeed should, aspire toward"; according to Williams (2007, 43), "[t]hese processes are not just sociological puzzles: they are overtly political practices, practices entailing and enabling the exercise of considerable power". In this reading, the EU's ENP, with its normative and self-interested components, coalesces as a 'multi-layered strategy' which appeals at the same time to states and entities inside and outside the imperial polity "to recognize their true identities as part of a [...] community whose principles are chosen and freely accepted, not dictated" (Williams 2007, 60) – despite the subordination of these states and entities due to an imbalance of power.

Thus, the EU's 'dual strategy' qualifies as a proper strategy and aspires, at the same time, to the EU-isation of the neighbourhood through approximation of norms *and* the defense of its rational self-interests. EU-isation is mainly about identity construction, a long term process of harmonisation and norm convergence. Such norm transfers and constant norm communication stabilise the Union itself and the neighbourhood as well, but crucially they create a 'we' and therefore legitimise the European integration project overall. ENP then "acts as a disciplinary structure whereby the moral community is maintained and reproduced" (Williams 2007, 51) – the establishment of this imagined "civilizational community of practice" (Adler 2010) under the reality of asymmetrical power distributions exposes the EU's normative imperialism. At the same time the EU asserts its rational self-interest. In the neighbourhood these interests remain consistent and focus on conventional security threats, energy security, and migration management. In this second reading, ENP follows neorealist assumptions of 'milieu-shaping' in the neighbourhood and does create a bufferzone (Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005; Hyde-Price 2006). Both objectives are inseparable in imperial strategies.

Conclusions

Through critical engagement with EU scholarship, new imperial history, and EU strategy documents of 2011 and 2015, I have tried to demonstrate that the Union, due to its imperial nature, has to adopt a 'dual strategy'. European external relations are therefore deeply enmeshed with the construction of an EU identity, as is typical of imperial polities. This article aimed to show the added analytical value of the imperial paradigm to explain the perceived strategic limitations of the EU. As an imperial polity the Union has to adopt a comprehensive 'dual strategy' which needs to integrate large scale geopolitical core-periphery models, narratives to establish a supranational identity, and conventional rational security and economic self-interests. Tensions between the norm- and interest-driven components of imperial strategies are therefore unavoidable and will continue to shape the EU's strategic outlook despite changing international contexts, as in 2011 and 2015. Thus, the perception of a European "holiday from strategy" (Williams 2007, 130) and calls for strengthening either of

the components of the EU's strategy are deeply misleading. Rather, we have to revisit our understanding of strategy, which crucially depends on the actor in question and the nature of its strategic environment.

The EU's 'normative power' provides an indispensable tool to build and consolidate the necessary consensus among member states, and also to strengthen the overall "legitimacy of the integration project by externalising 'common' norms and values" (Pänke 2016, 196). Therefore, adopting a merely rationalist foreign policy – along with the formulation of an explicitly securitised set of interests – would furthermore weaken the legitimacy and credibility of the European project. In the last years the Union has rather failed to reassure the world and, more importantly, its own citizens of the sustainability of the integration project. Nevertheless, EU foreign policy does face a dilemma. The imperial 'dual strategy' qualifies as good strategy if the prevalent strategic environment is favourable. After the geopolitical turn, the impact propensity in the neighbourhood appears much diminished.

Reading the EU as a liberal empire – furthermore – reminds us of the ambiguity of the EU's 'normative power' – the undeniable tensions between the emancipatory quality of EU norms, and their imperialist undertones within the hierarchical framework of the EU-ropean order. "As it happens, the pursuit of 'liberal order' is not just an antidote to the current difficulties suffered by the international system but a source of them" (Porter 2018). Still, the Union's liberal norms establish a more convincing base for inclusive societies and economic prosperity than exclusive and protectionist nationalist agendas. Bearing this in mind, the longevity of the EU will depend to a great extent on its capacity to play to the strengths of any imperial power: governmental adaptability and flexibility, based on a consistently applied normative supranational ideology. Currently, the EU's 'normative power' should perhaps be more actively projected inside the Union, rather than outside it.

¹ A few nation states, particularly large states like the United States, Russia or China with their federated arrangements, indeed share some features of imperial foreign policy making with the EU. This comes as no surprise, as US, Russian, and Chinese politics and foreign policies have been discussed as different manifestations of imperialism in the literature. The concept of 'hybrid empire' captures the reality of their external behaviour quite well. For the USA see e.g. Negri & Hardt 2000; for Russia see e.g. Morozov 2013, Oskanian 2018.

² The article refers to EU-isation rather than Europeanisation as the liberal norms and values in question are Western European in origin and represent a specific normative consensus among the 'core' EU-6 states.

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