

“Europeanization of International Relations Governance: Much ado about nothing?”

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The field of International Relations has always been one of the most volatile areas in terms of policy planning, decision making and policy implementation, thus attracting always the interest of academia. The International System, especially in its formulation during the post-Westphalian era (from 1648 till now), has been always deemed as anarchic, antagonistic, and a self-help environment, as the various states seek to safeguard their national interests, each employing all means possible to that end, by devising strategies, charting courses, and making decisions about how to meet internal and external exigencies (Litsas 2013, and the references therein).

It has therefore been justifiably anticipated that the European Union, having as one of its aims to “contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter” (as stated in Art. 3 para 5 of the Treaty on the European Union), will develop and implement a policy in that respect. Examining the governance reflecting this policy as a characteristic element of the European integration process is the objective of this paper.

Before embarking to the analysis, it is necessary to examine the concept of governance and distinguish it from two other relevant concepts: the concept of management and the concept of government.

Maintaining the view that there is no difference between governance and management is a fundamental mistake with regard to the essence of these two concepts. Governance refers to the provision of leadership to an entity (i.e. a state, a supra-national group of states, an international organization, etc.), the formulation of the entity’s vision and the translation of this vision into policy for each sector of the entity’s activity, taking into account – especially within the context of a democratic representative regime – the wishes, the choices and the will of the entity’s main interest group, the people who form this entity. Management, on the other hand, refers to making decisions for implementing the formulated policies. This differentiation is further highlighted by the fact that the responsibilities of governance include choosing the executives for occupying the positions at the top of the administrative hierarchy, evaluating their performance through several schemes of (usually political/parliamentary) control, authorizing plans/commitments and evaluating the entity’s performance, while the responsibilities of management refer to enhancing the overall performance of the entity and implementing the systems of governance. Thus, governance entails the strategic task of setting the entity's goals, direction, limitations and accountability frameworks while management entails the allocation of resources and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the entity. In other words, governance is all about setting the right policy and procedures for ensuring that things are done in a proper way, while management is all about actually doing things in the proper way.

The distinction between governance and management is very useful for distinguishing also between governance and government. In relation to a state, or any similar entity, governance is the act of governing or ruling, the process of setting rules and laws, aiming at assuring good results following a set pattern of rules. The term government, however, refers to a group of people who rule or run the administration of a country. Government is the means through which the power of the state is employed. In a democratic regime, this entails a body of elected representatives which has the public mandate to run the affairs of the country within a defined term after which in the successive term the same people may be elected again. Simply put, governance is what governments do.

The European Union, during its historical course, has been considered, at a constantly increasing rate, as a “standard setting” scheme for the governance of several sectors, giving birth to the term “Europeanization”. This term has always been fashionable and maintains a certain degree of attractiveness. Its intriguing nature has caused several efforts, on behalf of the academic community worldwide, to provide a definition or even a basis for a solid theory on Europeanization.

Ladrech (1994) defined Europeanization as an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EU political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making. In a similar approach, Börzel (1999) defined Europeanization as a process by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making. Identifying Europeanization as a process was also endorsed by Héritier (2001) who focused on the influence deriving from European decisions and impacting member states’ policies and political and administrative structures, highlighting the following elements: the European decisions, the processes triggered by these decisions as well as the impacts of these processes on national policies, decision processes and institutional structures. Radaelli (2003) took the argument a little further by stating that Europeanization refers to processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’ and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies. Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001) adopted a more substantive political approach by registering the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal and social institutions associated with political problem solving that formalizes interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules. All these approaches are reflected in a more global point of view offered recently by Ladrech (2010), who understands Europeanization as the change within a member state whose motivating logic is tied to an EU policy or decision-making process, focusing the relevant academic research agenda on establishing the causal link of the impact of the EU on domestic change. One may argue that the entire effort of analyzing the concept of Europeanization is dominated by the idea of a procedural spectre as it is seen a two way process developing at several levels (Howell, 2002, and the references therein).

All these various views presented in the relevant literature, create the impression of a vicious circle that never stops evolving. Nevertheless, the definitions of the process of Europeanization have been more or less specific, at least as they focused on the steps followed in order to achieve the initial goal – to reassess the identity of the European Union and the functionality of its institutions, actors and structures, by identifying the perspective of integrating the Member States in a common/single political-cultural context.

The most important conceptual element of the efforts to define Europeanization is the acknowledgement of several “actors”, whose operation lead to the planning and implementation of EU policies.

There are numerous categories of such actors including the state-actors (the Member States which participate directly and effectively to the Union's operation), the non state actors (non-governmental organizations, commonly known as NGOs), the supranational actors (deriving from the Union's institutional framework such as the European Commission) and the intergovernmental and transnational actors. Among these actors there is always a competitive disposition – reaching sometimes the point of rivalry – for the pursuit of influence and political power, as in the EU context, the greater involvement and participation to the integration efforts leads to greater influence, as a sort of exchange. Considering each type of actors, and using as a “tool” especially their way to decide and communicate their views and needs, one may see that that the actors plan their participation, their involvement and involvement to the EU institutions, so as to make them more useful/appropriate/suitable for their own interests. It is obvious though, that each actor that participates actively in an institution has the subsequent advantage of being considered as an important part of that institution, which cannot be deprived of the influence that this institution may have on all aspects of EU policies, including its international relations. This argument has enriched the debate on the definition of Europeanization by highlighting the combination of the actors' interaction and the effects of this interaction at three levels: a) the state actor's administration, b) the administration of the other Member States, c) the organization of the EU (see Britz, 2002 and the references therein).

The fact that the European Union has developed a foreign policy pillar, with a specific institutional framework, has contributed to the debate on the concept of Europeanization, as this concept can be studied and applied as a process, as a cause, and as an effect in the field of international relations. Its analysis, however, should not be based on a comparative perspective because, as argued above, especially in the EU context, the planning and implementation of foreign policy of the Union's actors take place at the interface of both domestic and international levels. Differentiating the internal (or domestic) decision-making process on one hand and the role of international politics on the other hand, is blurred by the constraints caused by the formal and informal procedures and competencies that exist in the relevant EU institutional framework. Nonetheless, this arrangement allows for a comparison between the efficiency of national levels and that of the EU, for an assessment of the role of EU institutions, and finally for a wider and more comprehensive analysis of the overall impact of an EU foreign policy and the way it is carried out. The process of Europeanization affects the domestic level of decision-making in the field of foreign policy and that in turn the domestic level affects EU decisions as well (see Stavridis, 2003, and the references therein).

This approach is reinforced if the focus is shift on the actors' systemic operation in the international relations scheme, as this operation is examined by Hasse (2005). They are considered to be mediating agencies of the world polity, especially in cases where their grid is dense, thus contributing to the implementation of world polity, by influencing policy planning and implementation. There are organizations, such as the United Nations or the International Labour Office, whose actions affect the behaviour of other actors in the international relations spectre, as these actors are expected to act in accordance to the world polity and incorporate in their policy making schemes various means of rationalization (ie accounting practices, technologies and reforms etc), adhere to social and legal norms (ie respect for human rights) and to reflect upon ethical standards (ie sustainable development).

In the case of the EU, the Union's initiatives in the international relations field have been formed for EU needs and through EU structures, experiencing the influence of theories such as neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism or multilevel governance. These theoretical approaches have provided a valuable tool: the methodology to apply governance models on the international relations of the European Union, especially after the transformation and renewal of the Union through the Lisbon Treaty.

The result is that in order to act, at national or European level, the above mentioned EU actors, in the international relations field, have to adopt and apply new sets of formal and informal rules, which reflect the Europeanization aspect of such actions.

The changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty were inspired by the goal to enhance the Integration process. However, the constant drive towards the achievement of the Treaty's aims set a series of interesting questions: Where does Europe end? Is there a limit? Is there a point beyond which one can talk about over-Europeanization? Being more European can be an interesting motivation, but how much of Europe can the EU Member States handle? And how much of Europe is the rest of the world ready to accept? In an attempt to answer one by one the previous questions one may claim that there is no end to what we call Europe but there is a limit to what we can include in such a word/concept. A constantly "Europeanized" Europe may be conceived, but it is difficult to imagine "a global Europe" or a global Europeanization process consisting mostly of influence and continuous outcomes of "Europeanized products of thought".

The motivation of being more European used to be a great challenge among the states that tried to establish themselves as dominant actors in the European continent, after the Second World War. This challenge, although maintaining its impetus throughout the years, was reduced to a mere formal procedural requirement that the Member States had to follow in order to be acknowledged as belonging to the so called "advanced western world" and sharing the same civilization characteristics found in the so called "modern societies". This development did not occur, however, without problems. The tendency to change the national identity into a new one with more European aspects, caused, in several occasions, vivid reactions from the citizens of the Member States, resulting either to the self-exclusion of some states from the single currency effort and the eurozone or to the political rejection of the perspective of a European Constitution. It seems though that the "EU grand design" will remain a theoretical scheme, as the Member States proved -and keep on proving- that they are not fully committed to a more integrated Europe, fully "Europeanized" in terms of policies, society and institutional framework. Given this conclusion, there are substantial doubts on whether the rest of the world will be able to accommodate such a Union. International actors like the USA, or Russia, or China, or even other emerging economies worldwide, do not seem very willing to tolerate the loss or even the possibility of losing part of their influence in order to provide room for the extension of the EU's political authority in the thinly balanced international environment. The whole issue has now evolved as a matter of political antagonism, an issue of seeking power and the possibility of imposing points of view in the field of international relations.

Nevertheless, the process of Europeanization has always been promoted in a very positive perspective. It has always been associated with modernization, a concept used in order to describe changes in a state's functions and structures, such as decentralization, de-bureaucratization, and the building of a civil society. However, this is not always attributable to the states' participation in the European integration process, as, even now, it is questionable whether one can claim that there is an effective system of European policy-making and policy coordination, either at the EU institutions level or at that of the national member states. Most probably this is an ideal model, a positive exercise that only refers to the 'best practice' at EU level being 'internalized' at national level. One should not forget the shortfalls of the EU, the so called extension of 'worst practice' throughout the EU, with occasions of fraud, nepotism, lack of political will, or even the notorious democratic deficit. Thus, the Europeanization argument is not yet a solid basis for such conclusions (see Stavridis, 2003, and the references therein).

This argument is further enhanced by the treatment reserved by the EU Member States for the Europeanization as a political *modus vivendi*, as this treatment is highlighted by Ioakimidis (1997).

There is a quite visible division among Europhile and Eurosceptic states, as not all countries share the same enthusiasm with regard to the prospects of an Integrated Europe and this differentiation is based not only on political points of view regarding sovereignty but also on the actual results achieved by the EU so far. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that there are significant differences in national points of view, resulting in a “difficult” co-existence of such conflicting tendencies among the EU Member-States.

The European Union had been originally created mostly on economic and financial purposes, but it later acquired a series of social and political aspects, causing several chain reactions, inside and outside the Union. This course of events necessitated the use of marketing tools and communication policies, which seem to have been incorporated to the operation of the European Union in the field of international relations, so as to establish this “new brand” to the world. Realizing and adopting such a point of view is a quite useful tool in order to approach the goals and the institutions that affect the Union’s international relations policy and interpret its choices. The European Union initially intended to integrate the member-state’s policies but the ensuing distortion (caused probably by some ill-conceived or badly executed initiatives at EU level) led to the reinforcement of the nation-state idea, and, has now, transformed the concept of maintaining national sovereignty into the “must-thing of the season”. Thus, the international relations applied and exercised among several states of the Union have been formed by the national needs of each state, which, at the same time, are opposite to the needs of their neighbors states.

It is useful, at this point, to refer briefly to the theoretical background of international relations, as this will allow a better evaluation of the Union’s policy making in that field. International relations theory is defined as nothing more but the systematic reflection of phenomena, designed to explain them and to show how they are related to each other in a meaningful, intelligent pattern, instead of being merely random items in an incoherent universe (see Chatzikonstantinou, Sarigiannidis, 2002). International relations are the states’ way of acquiring the power needed in order to ensure their defensive policy against the suspicious enemies of their zone. In that respect they consist of a plan or even better, a procedure that aims to three important things: a) to evolve and strengthen -wherever no evolvment is possible- the relations between various international actors, b) to lead -whenever that need is implied but never seriously expressed- the governmental activity and c) to create a network/an agenda of external relations which will be useful for any state (whenever or wherever). International relations seem to be a valuable tool which can connect different opinions among various states without severe political damage.

In that context, the European Union has to realize and use the power and influence it possesses as an international actor. The concept of “International Actorness” has been created during the 1970s concentrating on the notion of international presence and influence, focusing on the international role the EU perceives. According to that concept, the European Union has to be conscious of how much real influence it has and to recognize the fact that it eventually acts internationally even if it is not an actor with a clearly defined legal personality and capacity to state foreign policy. This is imperative given that the Union acts in a multi-centric world where many do not share the EU’s policy priorities (see Biukovic, 2009, Thomas, 2010).

Governance of international relations is the tool deemed necessary in order to manage the power and the political and economic advantages deriving from it, in the international relation field. It entails an significant effort in estimating the importance of the situation (power to be distributed) and in calculating with extreme precision the way a state may act in order to gain that power (peacefully, through diplomatic procedures and visits etc). In the EU context this process has an additional aspect, due to the Union’s unique status.

It seems to be a mechanism of self protection while, at the same time, it takes also into serious consideration the need to protect the possible “friends of the neighborhood”, so as not to create any further hostile dispositions (obvious or hidden). The Lisbon Treaty may be seen as a catalyst in that direction.

The wording of the EU Treaty in Art. 21, as amended by the Lisbon Treaty, demonstrates the Union’s goals in the field of international relations. They form a unique stimulus for the Union to extend its political action from the financial, social and political aspects of the Union’s interior to the international scene, as an innovative method of operating in the field of International Relations. Considering the solidarity among the ‘living-together but not living-with’ Member States as an important factor and source of inspiration, the European Union has established several ambitious schemes to provide assistance to third countries in need of achieving national stability. There have been several occasions of the EU offering humanitarian aid to countries that needed it, throughout the world. International relations is not simply a sector of plain politics which remain in the texts and documents produced during the EU Institution’s meetings and discussions. It is a field of trial for the Union’s activity in the international scene, and its “judges” are all those EU citizens who have been meticulously “bombarded” by all sorts of declarations on the virtues of their European identity and the importance of the Union as an international actor.

Having said that, one should note the dramatic change that characterizes our society, with the abrupt – to the point of barbarism – but at the same time so helpful intrusion of the new technologies into our everyday lives, thus causing a new model of communication in all fields, including that of international relations, which is faster, “safer”, more multifaceted and some times more civilized than marathon-like discussions among politicians (see Eleftheriadis, 2004). Within the EU context, the need to control the information communicated between the EU member states on issues relating to international relations, in order to formulate a single political position, attributed to the EU, was seen as one of factors necessitating the establishment of the position of the High Representative of the Union for the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and its unification, according to the Lisbon Treaty, with the post of the Vice-President of the European Commission. This institutional development provides the European Union with the capacity, at least in terms of institutional presence, to make more distinct and tangible political choices, either in the form of bilateral agreements, or by strengthening relations between states, and further enhancing the Union’s presence and actions globally, wherever possible etc. The overall aim is for the Union to become an international focal point of activities, a status that will reinforce the European Union’s profile.

These institutional developments provide the Union with the impetus to be more active, in view of the challenges set by the international environment, which is characterized by surprises and developments which question the existing state of affairs in the international relations scenery, and threatening the recognized strategic hegemon-states of the various regions worldwide. The Union seeks to establish itself as a world-level strategic and political actor and, therefore, it should take the respective action.

One such action undertaken by the European Union entails the aid provided to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake that stroke the region of the poorest community of the Western hemisphere. The – then – newly appointed EU High Representative for foreign affairs acted immediately so as for the Union to provide a fast-track primary emergency package of 3€ million which was intended for the immediate relief of the earthquake’s victims. The criticism that followed, focusing on the well paid EU High Representative’s absence of the areas which were hit by the earthquake thus causing the whole effort to be considered as non-recognized, ignored the fact that this was one of the rare times that the European Union acted indeed as a Union instead of a coordinated scheme of different states.

However, it should be noted that the amount of help granted is much smaller than the amount of help provided to the same country by the EU since 1993 which was about 90€ million and all these took place without an organized humanitarian aid department in the Commission or any other relevant institutional scheme such as the High Representative position. It is the Union's intention to convince the rest of the world that EU Member States not only co-exist peacefully, but that they can also co-exist with the rest of the world. This behavior leads to a justified, although rhetorical, question: Does the European Union really need an official to co-ordinate its actions in the international relations field, in such a way, that the only possibility to prove the solidarity and friendship among the nations is the cursed hope of a natural disaster???

Proof of the effects of Europeanization can be found all over the globe but the farther a state is, the less it is affected by European Union's processes and principles. However, although the EU international relations policies do not set limits and ends, as far as the Europeanization process is concerned, the candidate countries for accession are expected to respect and adopt the *acquis communautaire*. In that respect, Schimmelfennig (2010) poses certain interesting questions: which are the European modes and rules of governance that the EU projects beyond its borders? What kind of Europeanization does the EU pursue or produce beyond its borders? The answers focus on the "domestic analogy" which is conceived as a factor of influence exercised on the Member States in cases when they have to act, and they have to take into account the principles of EU integration and governance.

The external relations of the Union are inspired by the constitutional norms promoted by the EU. Such norms comprise the human rights, the rule of law and democracy. It was extremely important for the Member States to adhere to those principles since the early 1980s when the European Union regarded them as significant especially in cases of severe human rights violations (Schimmelfennig, 2010). Such rules form the core of a political behavior and doctrine that dictates the Union's actions in the field of its internal policies as well as of its external relations. External governance seems to be influenced by the internal solutions. Provided that the principles of Europeanization are safely kept, the human rights are respected, the rule of law is the identity each Member State carries and democracy is spread around the European continent, then Europeanization can be characterized as a process which results in the external relations policies, rendering the European Union a carrier of ontological quality, ideas and great influences for the rest of the world which needs a model of governance of its own. Being geographically farther from Europe is not a barrier since the influence can be deeper and more substantive than a simple imitation of Europeanization's processes and results. There are many states world-wide that tried to fit in a model of federalism, imitating the pattern of "Americanization" as they modeled the USA state, but instead they had to reconstruct their initial structure. There is an extensive variety of needs for a state, depending on the traditions and the ideological background of its society. The examples of intervention provided by the European Union are a system of Europeanizing the continent and the world in such a way that the Member States will realize what the EU does, why it does it and with what effect, which means that the Member States will finally find out about what the European Union is (Schimmelfennig, 2010 and the references therein).

In terms of means, the European Union's action in the field of international relations, in the name of improving its relations with States in need of aid, includes the declarations made by the High Representative of foreign affairs and security policy, which can serve also as a sample of the usefulness and importance of EU's institutions. For instance, with regard to the Syrian crisis, on the 14th of April 2012, the High Representative Catherine Ashton issued a statement, so as to contribute to the resolution of the problem in Syria, welcoming the UN Security Council resolution which authorized the deployment of an advanced team of unarmed military observers in order to report on the implementation of the cessation of armed violence in Syria.

The European Union's statement declares the Union's full support to Kofi Annan's six point plan as a first step to peace and called not only for the cessation of violence but also for allowing access to humanitarian aid schemes. This statement was preceded by the European Council Conclusions of March 22-23, 2012, on the issues of Syria, which called President Assad to resign so as to allow the peaceful and democratic transition that EU is willing to work for, in order to develop a new and more ambitious partnership with Syria across all areas of mutual interest including political and economic relations. It was obvious that the ceaseless violence and the political instability in Syria could not and should not leave the European Union speechless or idle. However, the effectiveness of the EU's intervention is questionable. A year after expressing these political positions, on June 24, 2013, during a meeting of the General Affairs Council, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy underlined the EU's belief that the crisis in Syria must be solved through a political process and the total response from the EU and its member states to the crisis exceeds EUR 1 billion. It is obvious that no progress in real terms, with regard to the resolution of the crisis, was achieved during these twelve months, as far as the EU's intervention was concerned and only a substantial package of humanitarian aid was provided for the relief of the suffering population.

In an effort to become more effective in its international presence, the EU has established a mechanism in order to impose sanctions as one of the tools to promote the objectives of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). According to the Union's point of view, these sanctions are always part of a comprehensive policy approach involving political dialogue and complementary efforts. EU sanctions are not punitive, but designed to bring about a change in policy or activity by the target country, entities or individuals. Measures are therefore always targeted at such policies or activities, the means to conduct them and those responsible for them. At the same time, the EU makes every effort to minimize adverse consequences for the civilian population or for legitimate activities. Such sanctions include: a) arm embargoes normally covering sale, supply, transport of the goods included in the EU common military list, as well as related technical and financial assistance, b) asset freezes concerning funds and economic resources (cash, cheques, bank deposits, stocks, shares, etc) and other tangible or intangible assets, including real estate owned or controlled by targeted individuals or entities, and bans on providing resources (making payments or supplying goods) to the targeted entities and persons (the later may include derogations to cover basic needs such as foodstuffs, rent, medicines or taxes), c) visa or travel bans leading to a denial of entry to the EU at the external borders. Employing these sanctions against Russia because of its actions in Ukraine was the result of extensive discussions undertaken both at COREPER level (Committee of Permanent Representatives) as well as Ministerial level, within the General Affairs Council, which on July 31, 2014, decided to restrict Russia's access to EU capital markets, by not allowing EU nationals and companies to buy or sell new bonds, equity or similar financial instruments with a maturity exceeding 90 days, issued by major state-owned Russian banks, development banks, their subsidiaries outside the EU and those acting on their behalf. Services related to the issuing of such financial instruments, e.g. brokering, are also prohibited. In addition, an embargo on the import and export of arms and related material from/to Russia was imposed.

It covers all items on the EU common military list. Finally, exports of certain energy-related equipment and technology to Russia will be subject to prior authorization by competent authorities of Member States. Export licenses will be denied if products are destined for deep water oil exploration and production, arctic oil exploration or production and shale oil projects in Russia. The measures will apply to new contracts. In order to highlight the importance of this decision, its contents were announced, two days before its official adoption, by European Council President Van Rompuy and Commission President Barroso. The following days Commission President Barroso called Russian President Putin in order to ask for Russia to refrain from any other provocative actions.

The absence of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in all these developments is more than noticeable. Only after several days, on August 12, 2014, the EU High Representative called a meeting of the EU's Political and Security Committee, which underlined the need to address any issues regarding the provision of humanitarian support in Ukraine and stressed the need for the EU to actively contribute to a political resolution of the crisis. The overall reaction of the European Union to Russia's actions in Ukraine was considered very hesitant and delayed, and this was attributed to the fact that most of the Union's countries are some of Russia's main trading partners and rely heavily on Russian energy exports, while there has been a point of view that Europe's hesitance is indicative of a general unwillingness among the United States' transatlantic allies to punish international aggression. (Gottlieb and Lorber, 2014).

In the meantime, Russia reacted by imposing a "full embargo" on food imports (fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, milk and dairy imports) from the EU, US and some other Western countries (Australia, Canada and Norway), in response to sanctions over Ukraine. In addition to the food imports embargo, Russia banned Ukrainian airlines from transit across its territory, while the Russian government is also considering banning transit flights for EU and US airlines in retaliation for sanctions over Ukraine. The consequences of these reactions maybe very negative for some of the countries involved. Barring airlines from Russian/Siberian airspace would significantly increase costs and flying time for many jets bound for Asian destinations. EU food exports to Russia in 2013 were worth 11.8bn euros (£9bn; \$15.8bn) while US food exports to Russia were worth 972m euros (£772m; \$1.3bn). Russia was the EU's second-biggest market for food exports (10% of total), after the US (13%). The EU takes more than 45% of Russia's exports. So, the impression of an "own goal" is created, as the EU in its effort to inflict economic pain on Russia, might end up harming itself. However, the instinct of self-preservation helped the EU Member States not to introduce sanctions directly relevant to their energy supplies, and they have not limited oil and gas imports from Russia, as this would hurt those EU countries that rely on Russian energy. They have instead targeted Russia's long-term ability to develop new oil resources, by placing restrictions on the technology systems behind offshore energy exploration. There are also EU countries who seek to secure bilateral agreements with Russia in order to minimize the effect of the Russian embargo especially with regard to agricultural products. In that aspect, the single/common position of the EU Member States seems to be fractured, thus reducing its "europeanizing" effects.

It has been acknowledged that the sanctions aim at altering Russia's external behavior, by forcing it to give its neighbors the space to build their own nations without being permanently under pressure from Moscow. The EU Member States seem ready to disrupt commercial and other interaction with Russia through sanctions, but this disruption should not be permanent, initiating a Cold War-like climate. On the contrary, the current clash should ultimately be about reengagement, but reengagement that is based on a new definition of relations. These relations may accommodate Russia's foreign policy aspirations for energy dominance and increased global status as Russia can remain the key provider for European energy, in accordance with the EU's market rules. In return, Russia would need to accept its neighbors' full sovereignty and to start to work with the West to solve the many "frozen" conflicts in the region, in which Moscow is deeply involved. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to have a clear, united front that will make Moscow understand that the EU and the United States are ready for a standoff that the Kremlin simply cannot win. The more credible such a front is, the more likely it is that Moscow will seek an agreement. As long as there are mixed messages, the ability to influence Russia's behavior is low (Speck, 2014)

On another occasion, with more permanent elements of EU involvement, the Union used its relationship with Mercosur (regional trade organization between some South American countries) in order to promote the concept of democracy.

Given that in the countries of Mercosur the democratic regimes had significant shortfalls (generalized corruption, social inequalities, shortcomings in political representation, low growth and difficulties in social development due to excessive state intrusion in economic life), the EU used its intervention in forming a customs union in these states as a means of introducing also stronger institutions of a democratic regime, by linking the effort to liberalise the states' economies, through the opening of the national markets, with the need of achieving political stability and creating a politically friendly environment for attracting investments. Such a result is to be achieved, according to the EU point of view, with the consolidation of the institutional architecture of the democratic regimes of these states. For that reason the EU has initiated technical consultative missions in the Mercosur countries, in order to improve the standards of democracy therein (de Almeida, 2009).

Promoting democracy throughout the world is an objective that the Union adopted and started its implementation since the early 90's, the landmark political initiative being a Statement of the EU on May 25, 1993, according to which the Union will stop providing assistance to countries whose record on establishing democratic procedures or protecting human rights falls below the standards set by the Union. This statement has been the political basis for the amendment of several EU programmes providing aid to third countries which did not adhere to the principles of democracy and rule of law (Moussis, 2011). The text of the Treaties always provided and still provides a legal basis (see Art. 208 et seq of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU) for establishing schemes of development cooperation with third countries, always within the scope of the Union's external action. The four Lome Conventions (1975-2000) were more hesitant in that respect, but their "successor", the Cotonou Convention (2000-2020) has been more "activist" by incorporating a political pillar in the provision of development assistance on behalf of the EU, and by setting standards for promoting democracy in third countries. This initiative is further enhanced by the establishment of a financing instrument focusing specifically on promoting democracy and human rights in third countries, thus reinforcing the implementation mechanism of this aspect of the Union's policy (see Council Reg. 1889/2006). In an overall evaluation this ambitious scheme has been characterized as an offensive political effort to export democracy (Kouskouvelis, 2002).

A final remark has to do with the effort of the EU in keeping appearances with regard to its foreign policy as a direct or indirect means of promoting Europeanization. It is true that the media have not been kind to the Union's efforts in promoting democratic standards inside and outside Europe. This should not be dismissed easily as the global influence exercised on public opinion by the media can be very effective. The mass media agenda is willing to promote the Europeanization process as a part of the globalization or the European Union's main process of integration, but the lack of information or participation that characterizes the majority of the European citizens leaves no space for improvement. The talk of Europeanizing norms, ideas and values is best predicted by material and spatial aspects of the integration project – such as residence close to the border, engagement in cross-border commerce and transactions, or involvement in "parapublic" European cross-national associations and activities, such as town twinning and sports clubs. Furthermore the national media, in several countries, are prepared to frame debates on actual EU policies, in more international or universal terms, and this in turn induces actors to pitch their claims in these terms, thus reducing the "European element" in the relevant discourse. Finally it seems that the degree to which 'new media', such as the internet, might be facilitating new forms of Europeanized communication has only recently been established and pursued (see Favel, 2006 and the references therein).

As a concluding remark, one may refer to the infamous question of Henry Kissinger “Whom am I to call when I want to speak about the EU’s position on international relations?” The Lisbon Treaty has provided the reply with regard to the official responsible, however it seems that it is still debatable the issue of whether the EU’s position is actually “European” or even worse if it has any “European” impact on the international relations spectre worldwide...

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