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**Normative Power is in the Eye of the Beholder:  
An Empirical Assessment of  
Perceptions of EU Identity at the WTO**

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# Normative Power is in the Eye of the Beholder: An Empirical Assessment of Perceptions of EU Identity at the WTO

**Abstract:** The concept “normative power” is developed to grasp the EU’s identity, role and concomitant practice in world politics. The EU’s ability to “define the normal in world politics” depends on others’ perceptions of it and its external practice. Normative power requires that non-EU states perceive the EU as embodying the norms it espouses, to perceive those norms as attractive for emulation, and to perceive EU action to be norm-driven (as opposed to interest-driven), and based on universally valid norms. To assess non-EU state elites’ perceptions of EU identity, we conduct a series of interviews with WTO negotiators and former negotiators with experience of negotiating with the EU. We find that, while third country elites do perceive the EU as embodying the norms central to its identity and, to some extent, see those norms as attractive for emulation, they do not perceive EU action as distinct and predominantly norm-driven or based on universal norms. Our research qualifies the understanding of the EU as normative power.

**Keywords:** Normative Power, NPEU, EU Identity, WTO, Trade Policy Making, Perceptions of the EU

**JEL code classification:** F13

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*The US will tell you straight away what its interests are, what they want exactly from you, even if you don't like it. The EU won't. It will talk to you about development and about trade and development, and the benefits, and about how much the EU wants to have a role in your country, but in the end it will have the same interests. There's a lot of rhetoric, I find, but it boils down to some very similar interests. Basically, the EU will invite you for lunch, and as they invite you, they threaten you, too.*

*-A former developing country trade negotiator*

## 1. Introduction

External trade policy is the oldest and most integrated external policy area of the European Union. It seems self-evident that the study of external policy would place this area at the centre of attention, especially when the scholarship develops concepts designed to capture the nature of EU as actor on the world scene. Remarkably, this is not the case; the Normative Power Europe (NPEU) literature omits trade policy to a large extent.

NPEU formulates an identity and role concept for the EU in world politics that gives rise to an observably distinct practice in world politics. According to Manners, a normative power defines the normal in world politics (Manners 2002; 2008). In effect, the normative power's own norms are represented as "the normal". Consequently, a normative power's self-image includes a perception of itself as a power whose norms are universal. This paper takes as its point of departure the idea that the EU understands its own norms in the economic sphere as universal.

However, because identity is relational, such a self-image relies critically on the perception that other actors have of the political entity known as the "European Union", its discourse and practice. The impact of normative power can only exist where third parties perceive a power's norms as "normal", as desirable and attractive for emulation. For that reason, rather than inquiring directly into whether or not the NPEU prism accurately describes the EU's identity and its practice in commercial negotiations, we ask whether the EU's interlocutors perceive the EU as being and acting as a Normative Power. We thereby center attention on the relational aspect of the EU's identity, holding that EU rhetoric does not suffice to establish it as a normative power unless others confirm its self-image as such. Most importantly, the perceptions of others raise questions as to whether the EU's practice in trade negotiations is distinct from that of other players, as the NPEU literature suggests it will be for external policy in general.

While the NPEU concept has often been applied in the study of EU external policy, economic and trade policies have often been omitted from consideration. Some implicit consensus suggests that the concept does not apply and that, in trade policy, EC merely defends its commercial interests (Smith 2003). Some exceptions exist, such as van den Hove's study (2006) on EU as normative power in the Doha Development Round. A more general exception are the studies on development policy and NPEU.

We believe multilateral trade negotiations are ripe for analysis under the NPEU prism. In recent decades, the multilateral regime has slowly morphed from an arena for negotiations on technical issues into one that is much more normatively thick. In tandem, the rhetoric the EU has deployed in the context of trade negotiations is increasingly normative, emphasizing the impact of trade on development, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability in poor countries. Secondly, because trade policy is the oldest of the EU's community competences, dating back a half a century to the treaty of Rome and creating a stable and lengthy history of ongoing commercial negotiations between the EU and its partners. And finally, because trade diplomacy itself has changed in the last three decades, shifting its focus from

traditional barriers to trade (e.g., import tariffs and quotas) to regulatory, behind-the border issues, leading to the inclusion of sensitive issues such as essential medicines, emergency food aid, core labour and environmental standards and the protection of indigenous knowledge into the negotiating agenda. In each case, different models exist on the “normal” relationship between market and society. The European model is only one among many.

So, we assume that norms do matter in contemporary trade negotiations. To assess the impact of EU norms, it is important to establish what norms third party (non-EU) state elites consider characteristic for the EU and what norms they believe guide the EU’s practice in trade negotiations. Such an assessment allows us to examine whether the norms constitutive of the EU’s identity, are confirmed by third parties. Still, studies of third actors’ perceptions of the EU are thin on the ground (Lucarelli 2007). Elgstrom (2007) studied the role of the EU as perceived by third parties in WTO negotiations.

*This paper, in contrast, seeks to address this gap in the literature by testing the normative power concept in the context of multilateral trade negotiations from the perspective of others.* Third party elites’ perceptions and experience were tested through a series of semi-structure interviews with current and former trade negotiators conducted in Geneva at the end of May 2008.

## 2. Normative power

The EU is an established, if atypical, actor in world politics. Although they do not always succeed, the 27 member states are formally committed to speak with one voice in international affair, including trade. Occasionally, coordination remains problematic as shown by the recent, high profile fall-out between EU trade commissioner Mandelson and the French president. Notwithstanding the complex pattern of cooperation and disunity in external action, academics and policy-makers have sought out a more precise understanding of what type of actor the EU is. In a seminal article, Manners (2002) suggested that the EU is a distinct type of actor: one whose practice is both norm-driven and defines the “normal” in world politics. Other scholars have persistently questioned the EU’s distinctiveness in terms of practice and argued that the EU is as interest-driven as any other actor in world politics [hyde price; youngs]. Before we can elaborate on this, we present our understanding of NPEU.

A first precondition for normative power is a concentration of power in a political entity of the international system<sup>1</sup>. Hence, there are material conditions for a normative power. How these conditions are interpreted by the relevant agents and what options and constraints for practice they entail will vary between political entities. The dominant identity and role conception in a political entity bestow meaning on these material conditions and inform the relevant agents on appropriate practice. This paper is epistemologically grounded in critical realism: the world of “brute facts” makes up the material conditions that underlie the exercise of normative power. In the realm of trade negotiations, the sheer size of the EU market and its citizens’ purchasing power represents the “brute fact” that lends material weight to European trade negotiators’ positions in the context of multilateral negotiations. However, such brute facts acquire meaning only through the play of interpretations rendered possible by intersubjectivity, seen as the realm of shared meanings, values and rules. Normative power as identity is attributed to this intersubjective realm.

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<sup>1</sup> Manners underscores that normative power frees the discussion from the Westphalian connotation which are common to the concepts of civilian and great power [ref]. In this paper, we do not so much brush over the Westphalian myopia, but propose “political entity” in the international system [cf. Buzan & Little 2000]. A political entity can be a state, the European Union, an empire.

An essential characteristic of NPEU is the ability to “shape conceptions of the normal” in world politics (Manners 2002, 239). It is understood that EU norms define the appropriate practices and objectives in world politics in general, not just for itself. These EU norms are discursively constructed as “universal” (Diez 2005, ; Merlingen 2007, ; Pace 2007). “Universal” norms are expected to attract imitation by actors outside the EU.

As a Normative Power, the EU is expected to do more than simply embody its norms in the conduct of internal affairs, it is also expected to conduct external relations in accordance with its stated universal norms. Norm-adherence is expected to give rise to an observably distinct form of behaviour in world politics: the EU on the world scene is expected to act differently in comparison to other actors (Adler and Crawford 2004, ; Diez and Manners 2007, 176-178; Manners 2002, ; Manners and Whitman 2003). In short, NPEU proposes an ideal-typical identity and role conception for the study of the EU as external actor. The ideal-type is defined by three characteristics: (1) NPEU defines the normal in world politics through norm diffusion (appropriate practice); (2) the EU’s practice is norm-driven as opposed to interest-driven; and, (3) the European norms are universal.

This image of the EU as normative power is found both in academic and in official discourse (Diez 2005, ; Merlingen 2007, ; Pace 2007). NPEU is more than simply a scholarly category for the study of the EU as an external actor; an influential section of the EU’s political and academic elite generates this identity in its practice (cit. in: Diez 2005, 614; Diez and Manners 2007, 174). The identity “... tell[s] you and others who you are and tell[s] you who others are” (Hopf 1998, 175). According to the literature, NPEU generates a set of images, values and norms that enable the EU to set *itself* apart from other actors in world politics: the EU specific norms. They include the norm that the EU “... attempts to change others through the spread of particular norms”(cit. in: Diez 2005, 614; Diez and Manners 2007, 174). This norm for appropriate practice elaborates how the EU defines the normal: it spreads its norms in world politics.

Norm diffusion may be passive or active. Passive norm diffusion occurs when third parties choose to imitate the EU’s model. Active norm diffusion refers to EU’s purposive attempts to project its norms in world politics, including through participation in international organizations. When the EU seeks to spread its norms through the WTO system and negotiations, we have a case of active norm diffusion.

At this point, a detour outside the NPEU literature serves to elaborate the way a conceptualisation of normative power as identity comes to hinge critically on recognition by other actors in world politics. Identity is relational. That is, “European” norms exist by implicit contrast to “non-European norms” and the European Self to a non-European Other. Without these differences the EU Self disappears (Nayak 2006, 45). Identity depends on creating a boundary between the Self and the Other, on the distinction between European and the non-European, such that identity-creation is, by necessity, an exclusionary practice. This type of boundary creation is “an active and ongoing part of identity formation” (Neumann 1996, 166).

Several academic contributions to the NPEU debate illustrate this boundary drawing exercise in practice. The favourite Other in the literature is the United States (Adler and Crawford 2004, ; Lightfoot and Burchell 2005, ; Scheipers and Sicurelli 2007, ; Smith 2003) which is often cast in a realist or semi-realist role. The US is then assumed to act with a view to relative gains, while the EU defines itself as a promoter of universal norms (*idem*, also: Manners 2002, 236).

While the Other delineates the Self, the Self also depends on recognition by others. Identity is not only subjective (the EU’s self-image as elite construction), but has an intersubjective (relational) dimension (Wendt 1999, 224). It is this intersubjective aspect that, according to Wendt, provides “truth conditions” for identity claims (1999, 177). According to the NPEU scholarship, these are the EU’s norms and its

norm diffusion role. But because norms can only be defused if others choose to incorporate them, NPEU self-image actually depends on the acceptance of the EU's self-image by others. Therefore, consistency between the norms presented as European and the EU's external practice can confirm the European elite's claims to normative power, just as inconsistency can problematize them (Nicolaidis and Howse 2002, 769, 771-774) (Diez 2005, ; Pace 2007, 1056-1057).

Much, in this regard, hinges on the recursive interpretation of self- and other-perceptions: the EU's self-image and the interpretation of the EU's Self by third actors, need not correspond with each other. What the EU considers in line with its norms can be interpreted as norm-violations by the Other. And what the EU takes as confirmation of its self-image may not have been intended as such by the Other.

Existing research on the outsider's perspective points to the problems with consistency between practice and self-image (Barbé and Johansson-Nogués 2008, ; Chaban et al. 2006, ; Elgstrom 2007a, ; 2007b, ; Lucarelli 2007). This paper explicitly looks into the perceptions of the representative of third party states, specifically trade negotiators, former trade negotiators and trade negotiations specialists from outside the EU. Do such practitioners recognise the EU's Self-image as developed in the NPEU literature?

The next table summarizes the different steps in identifying a normative power. The main emphasis on this paper is on the relational aspect (e). It follows that we accept that the conditions from (a) to (d) fulfilled. In economic and trade terms in particular, EU is a power in the international economy. Its elites are well aware of these capabilities and the EU rhetoric confirms that the EU norms are considered universable. One question remains: what are the EU norms?

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*Table \* . Steps in identifying a normative power (Zutter, forthcoming)*

Material condition

- (a) concentration of power in international system.

The self-image and role-conception

- (b) awareness of these capacities by the political entity itself and its elites
- (c) its own (particularist) norms are constructed as universal or universable;
- (d) it is an appropriate practice to project these norms in world politics

**The relational aspect**

- (e) do others recognise the Self-image as the identity of the political entity?**

Assessment of the normative power's impact

- (f) the impact of its norms on other political entities or civil societies beyond its boundaries.
- 

To evaluate the recognition of the EU's self-image by others, we need first to determine the most relevant EU norms. What are the EU's core norms according to the NPEU literature?

A first issue is: where do the European norms emanate from? The origins are traced back to Europe's historical experience. Several aspects appear in the literature. Among them are the common experience of war and class struggle. (Lucarelli 2006, 5-6; Manners 2002, 241; Therborn 2001). Other elements involve the particular evolution of the EU as a hybrid polity and its unique constitutional configuration (Manners 2002, ; Manners and Whitman 2003). The roots of EU identity are historically contingent and evolve over

time. Hence, the norms that guide the EU's international conduct stand in dynamic relation to the ongoing identity formation practices of the EU (Lucarelli 2006, 1-2, 6; Manners 2002, 241-243).

It would seem straightforward that – within a specific time period – an unambiguous, bounded set of norms must constitute the European Self (Manners 2002, ; 2006a). Still, as is to be expected, different scholars elaborate lists with varying points of emphasis. Manners' seminal article listed peace, social liberty, consensual democracy, associative human rights, supranational rule of law, inclusive equality, social solidarity, sustainable development and good governance (Manners 2002, ; 2006a, 32-38; Manners 2008, 47-53). Other lists added overlapping and additional norms such as (liberal) democracy, democratic peace, rule of law, and order and justice (Manners 2008, 48-56; Nicolaidis and Howse 2002, 1045; Pace 2007, ; Scheipers and Sicurelli 2007, 441-442, 447-449). Manners and Whiteman (2003, 398-400) include pacifism, consensus-orientation and a contra-Westphalian order in the international identity of the EU. For this paper, we rely on Manners' selection of EU norms [2002, ..., 2008] and complement these with norms on the economic organisation of society. The 2002 table sets out the normative foundation of the EU, which distinguishes the European Self from the non-European Other. Still, as noticed before, some norms are characteristic of other actors in world politics, such as the USA

<i>Founding Principles</i>	<i>Task and objectives</i>	<i>Stable institutions</i>	<i>Fundamental Rights</i>
Liberty	Social solidarity	Guarantee of democracy	Dignity
Democracy	Anti-discrimination	Rule of law	Freedoms
Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms	Sustainable development	Human rights	Equality
Rule of law		Protection of minorities	Solidarity
			Citizenship
			Justice
Treaty base - set out in art. 6 of the TEU	Treaty base - set out in arts. 2 of TEC and TEU, arts 6 and 13 of TEC	Copenhagen criteria - set out in the conclusions of the June 1993 European Council	Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

Source: Manners (2002)

Whereas the 2002 table omitted the market economy, Manners included the five freedoms and “freer trade and market access ... promoted through trade liberalization agreements” in a more recent formulation (2008, 49). The market economy is hegemonic idea in the contemporary world, but can be interpreted in very different ways. As Susan Strange wrote, the European form of capitalism builds on “a sounder foundation of social acceptability ... [in which] economic transfers and guarantees of social security system can be defended as a politically necessary insurance against discontent and social instability” (cit. in: Manners 2006a, 21). Notwithstanding variations between European capitalisms (Giddens 2007, 9-11; van Apeldoorn 2002, 71-82), social solidarity and (more recently) sustainable development are the “non-economic” norms which give rise the EU specific market-economy (Manners 2008, 53-54).

The importance of the market-economy to the EU Self is reflected in official documents. The Copenhagen

European Council Conclusions complemented democracy, human rights, minority rights and implementation of the Community *acquis* with a direct vindication of market economy. (EU 1993, 13) More to the point, it demanded “the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union” (EU 1993, 13). These conditions for Membership of the EU were subsequently included in the treaties (TEU, art. 49). It follows that the market economy criterion establishes a norm by which the EU identifies itself and which guides EU practice in internal and external policy. This norm must be interpreted in conjunction with the aforementioned “non-economic” norms. A whole series of policies - competition policy, state aid regulations, consumer protection, economic and social cohesion with the structural fund and trans-European Networks – underline the complexity of the evolving EU market economy, as emphasized by the literature on “regulatory capitalism” [van den Hove (2006) Levi-Faur and Jordana (2005); Jessop (see also: Clark 1999, Ch. 5; 2002)]

The Lisbon process is the contemporary instantiation of the EU approach to the market economy: its emphasis on knowledge, innovation and competitiveness involves a reorganisation of the state as carer for its citizens into a “enabling” state: through education, training and a beneficial regulatory climate, citizens are activated in the economy (Jessop 2002, Ch. 2). It is important to underline that goal of the Lisbon strategy is “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (Council of the European Union 2000, para. 5), whilst “preserving the European social model” (Council of the European Union 2005, para 22). As a recent instantiation of EU’s form of regulatory capitalism, the Lisbon process shows the market economy norm as dynamic and evolving element of EU identity.

It should be noted that the Lisbon process has an internal as well as external agenda, and specific implications for the EU’s stance in WTO and other trade negotiations [global Europe].

The clearest and most formalized statements of EU identity can be found in the European treaties. According to the *Treaty on the European Union*, the Union aims “to assert its identity on the international scene, in particular through the implementation of a common foreign and security policy ... ” (TEU, art. 2). The treaty sets out the objectives for this common foreign and security policy as multilateralism with respect for international law, international cooperation and the goal to “develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (TEU, art. 11). Specific reference to trade policy in conjunction with the market economy norm can be found in the TEC, which sets out the EC’s aims in its trade policy as the “progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade and the lowering of customs barriers” (art. 131, TEC).

The balance to be struck between economic and non-economic norms and the dense regulation of the market is less straightforward in the text on external trade policy. Two problems arise: the market economy norm is not qualified by non-economic norms and the coherence in EU’s external policy is not laid down in the existing treaties. The latter is partially solved in the *Treaty on the European Union* as revised by the Lisbon treaty (Council of the European Union 2008, 1-60. Henceforth: TEU rev.) which seeks coherence in the EU’s external action. The TEU rev. enshrines normative coherence in external action, but it omits external trade policy. The *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (Council of the European Union 2008, 61-260. Henceforth: TFEU) regulates the external commercial policy and links it to the norms and objectives of the EU’s external action in general (TFEU, art. 205). Moreover, the revisions give a more comprehensive set of norms which guide the external action (TEU rev., art. 21, 1): human rights, fundamental freedoms, solidarity (TEU rev., art. 21, 1); rule of (international) law (TEU rev., art. 21, 2 b & c), democracy (TEU rev., art. 21, 2 b); sustainable development (TEU rev., art. 21, 2 d & f). While the former appeared in Manners’ 2002 table, other norms are also included: market economy (TEU rev., art. 21, 2e) and “the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of developing countries, with the primary aim of eradicating poverty” (TEU rev., art. 21, 2d).

On the basis of these official documents, it is possible to develop a taxonomy of EU norms. In the research, a subset of norms are selected which reflect the EU approach to the market-economy. The norms constitute the EU identity and are relevant for its self-image, including its external practice, in the economic sphere. Yet, the norms do not belong to a single sphere (cf. Manners in Lucarelli & Manners) because they exist within a dynamic interplay non-economic norms. The EU specific approach of regulatory capitalism explains the inclusion of norms from other spheres. As we focus on commercial negotiations, norms which are relevant to the broader context of international cooperation, are included.

<i>Sphere</i>	<i>Norm</i>
Political	Democracy, rule of law, multilateralism, fundamental freedoms, human rights and peace
Economic	Market economy, regulatory capitalism, competition
Social	Solidarity, poverty reduction/economic development and <i>sustainable development*</i>
*ecological	

The image of the EU as a normative power cannot be limited to an arbitrarily delineated realm of external action (security policy, for instance), but instead should cover all different spheres (Pace 2007, 1043). Undue delineation [Scheipers and Sicurelli (2007, 437); Keohane (2002)] would ignore the relational character of identity, since third actors do not necessarily differentiate between the different aspect of the EU's external practice. The perceptions of the EU as actor in world politics in general may affect the image of the EU in trade policy and *vice-versa*. Therefore, the general image on the EU, the perceptions on the EU as norm diffuser and as actor in the WTO are to be compared. Our research strategy aims to incorporate these insights into our questionnaire design.

Since a normative power considers its own, particularistic, norms universal, we have traced and set out the EU norms on the organisation of the economy and international cooperation. Although these norms are part of the EU's self-image, there is no reason to simply assume that third actors recognise them as constitutive of the EU's identity. This is the first aspect to be assessed. Second, the NPEU literature assumes that it is an appropriate practice for the EU to project these into world politics. Again, the question arises whether third actors perceive the EU's norms as attractive and worthy of imitation. Third, we must question whether the norms guide the EU's external action in practice in a given field of external action, and whether other actors' state elites recognize the weight of norms in guiding EU action. To put the last question into sharper perspective, and mindful of the long tradition of defining the EU by reference to the US, we enquire also whether the EU's practice in the WTO is perceived as significantly different, less coercive and more norm-bound as that of the USA.

We reject the view that a normative power adopts specific strategies and instruments in the practice of world politics (Johansson-Nogués 2007, 188-191; Sjursen 2006, 241-242; Tocci 2007), instead treating a wide array of strategies and instruments as compatible with the exercise of state power (Diez 2005, 616; Diez and Manners 2007, ; Hyde-Price 2006, ; Manners 2002, ; Youngs 2004) . Nonetheless, in the comparison of perceptions of the EU and USA, instruments and strategies were included because several authors sought to distinguish these two actors in world politics in these terms [e.g. scheipers & sicurelli].

These considerations lead to the following format of the questionnaires.

<i>Spheres</i>	<i>Norms</i>	<i>Image of EU</i>	<i>EU's external practice</i>	<i>EU – USA in WTO</i>	<i>EU in WTO</i>
Political	Democracy	X	X		
	Rule of law	X	X	X	X
	Multilateralism		X	X	X
	Fundamental freedoms & human rights	X	X		
	Peace project	X			
Economic	Peace through economic integration	X			
	Market economy	X	X		X
	Regulation (regulatory capitalism)	X			X
	Competition on the market	X			X
Social	Solidarity	X	X	X	X
	Poverty reduction (economic development)	X	X (in developing countries)	X	X
	Sustainable development	X	X	X	X

### 3. Traditional approaches to EU trade policy

Traditional accounts of EU trade policy making have relatively little to say about EU identity or its nature as an actor in world politics. Much of the literature is preoccupied with institutional dynamics, particularly the factors underpinning delegation of authority over trade policy from the national to the community level (Nicolaidis and Meunier 1999; Meunier 2005; Woolcock 2005).

Its central concern has been the so-called puzzle of liberalization: why have relatively protectionist principals (National Governments) chosen to delegate authority over trade policy making to a largely protectionist Agent (the European Commission)? How much autonomy has the agent acquired, and what mechanisms have evolved to ensure principals' ongoing control over the agent?

This literature is concerned with formal aspects of governance: its central object is the relationship between the structure of European institutions and the EU's negotiating capacity, flexibility, effectiveness and/or authority. Much of it centres on a debate about what Dur (2006) describes as the "collusive delegation argument": the idea that politicians consciously designed the EU's institutional framework to insulate trade policy making from the influence of protectionist lobbying.

The collusive delegation argument amounts to the application, to the EU context, of a family of arguments developed within American political economy (Destler 1986) to address the puzzle of liberalization. In this view, politicians ideologically committed to the cause of Free Trade would realize that they are unable to deliver it in the face of organized protectionist pressures, and therefore delegate their authority as an exercise in blame-shifting, or "bureaucratic shirking". In the United States, delegation takes the form of congressional representatives handing trade policy making authority to the executive. In the European version, national governments delegate authority to the European Commission (Dur, 2006).

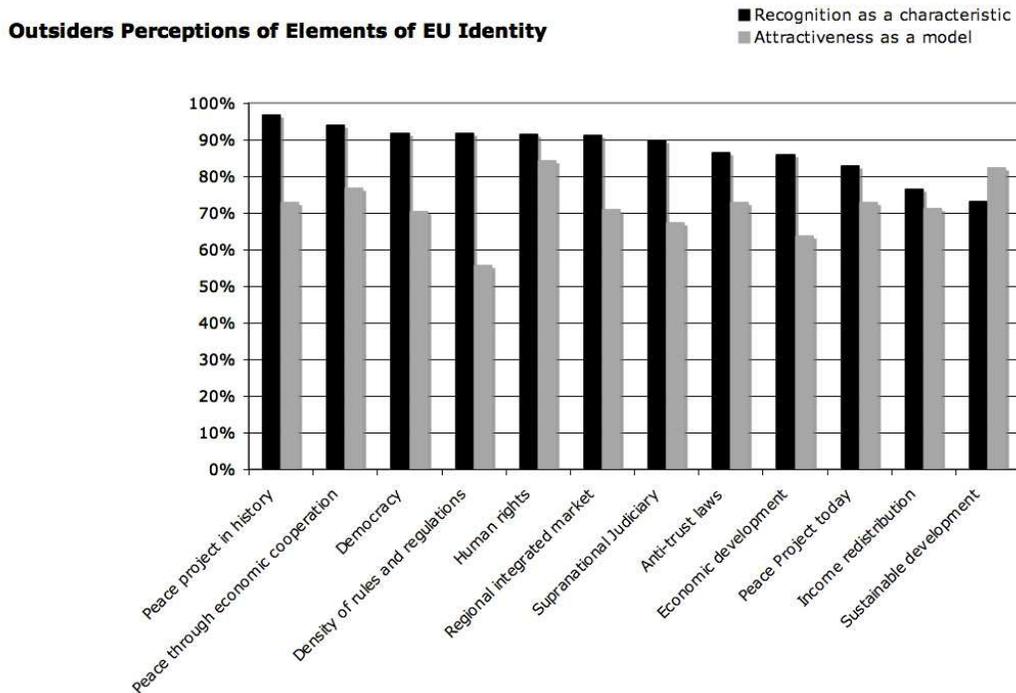
Lifted nearly whole from an American political science tradition, the collusive delegation argument

assumes away the problem of characterizing the nature of EU power. It is therefore singularly ill-suited to providing insights into the role of norms and role conceptions in the formulation of trade policies, much less their perception by outsiders. Centred on the dynamic interactions of interest groups mobilized to obtain commercial advantage, it is in some ways blind to the thickening normative content of contemporary trade diplomacy, where technical debates over tariff structures and countervailing duty trigger points are increasingly coupled with morally charged interactions over lifesaving medicines and the livelihood security of the world's poor.

#### 4. Empirics

To test third countries' perceptions of EU norms, we conducted 17 semi-structured interviews with Geneva-based trade negotiators and former negotiators from twelve separate countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Brazil, Egypt, India, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, the Philippines and Venezuela). All subjects had personal experience of negotiating directly with EU trade negotiators. In all but two cases interviews were conducted in person, including 39 questions and typically lasting an hour.

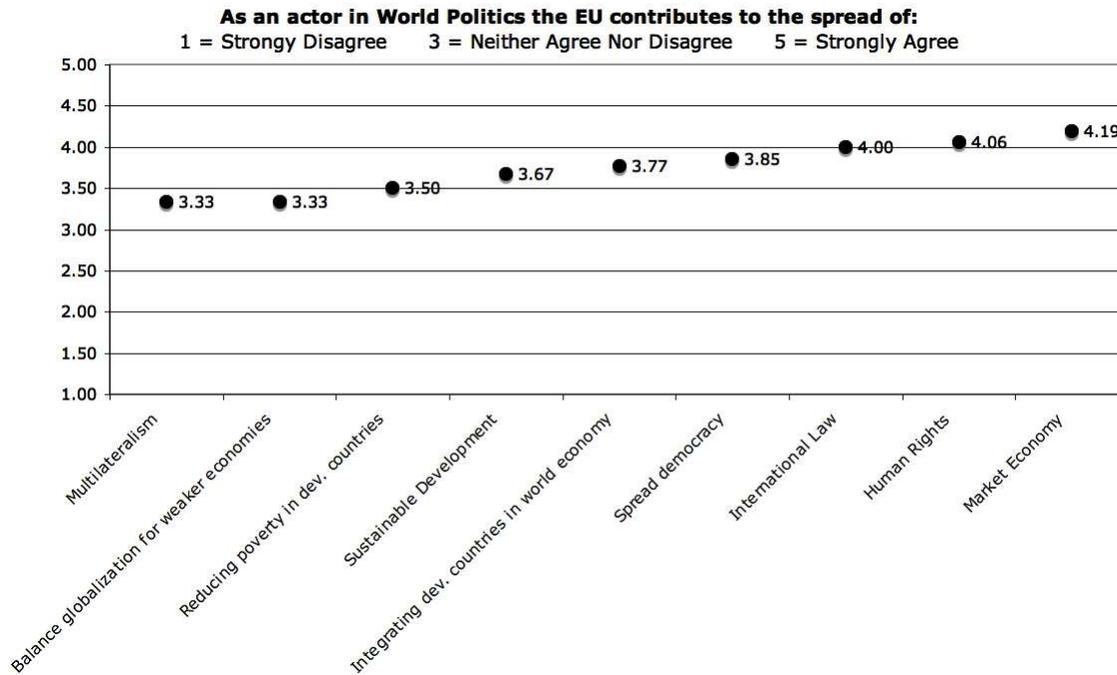
An initial set of 11 closed questions inquired into subjects' perceptions of the EU's identity. Eleven norms usually described as constitutive of the EU were presented, and subjects were asked to what extent they considered the norm constitutive of EU identity. Responses were placed on a 5-point attitudinal scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Subjects that identified a given norm as constitutive of EU identity were then asked whether they perceived that norm as relevant and attractive for emulation for their country and its region. A four point attitudinal scale was developed (ranging from the norm is "a model for my country and its region" to the norm "applies only to the EU.") Both sets of replies were then normalized on a percentage scale (full agreement = 100%). The results are as follows:



Respondents largely reflected the EU's identity self-perception, with the Europe's historical peace project perceived as the strongest constituent of EU identity and norms relating to sustainable development and

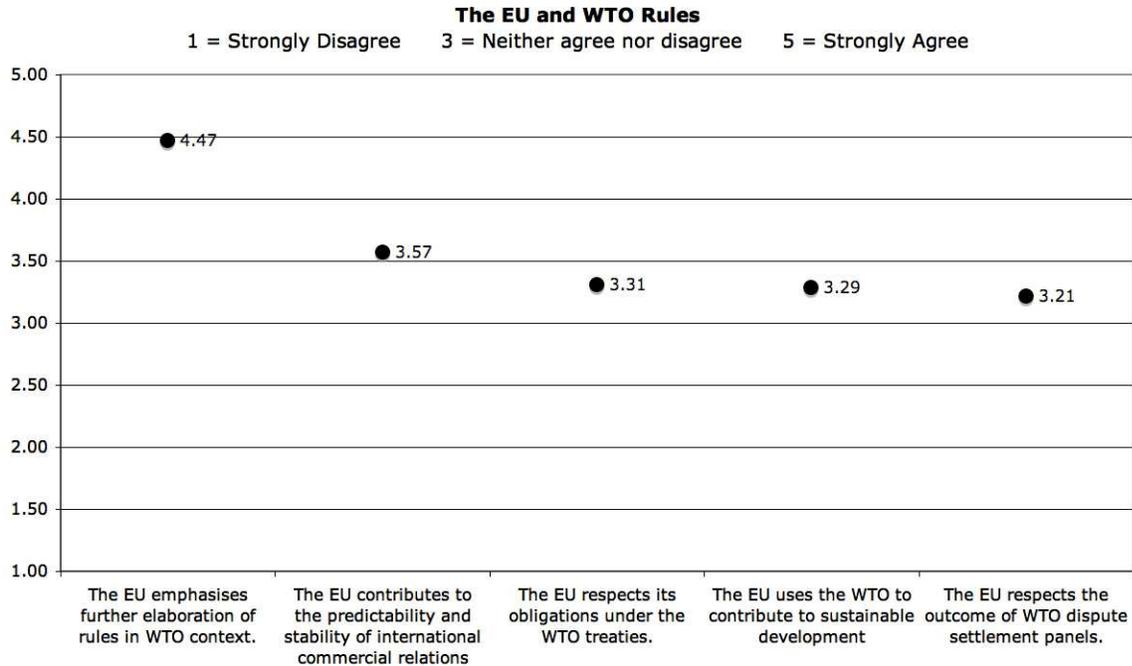
income redistribution between and among states less strongly associated with EU identity. Interestingly, no correlation is evident between a norm's perceived centrality to European identity and its attractiveness as a model for emulation. The density of rules and regulations within the EU internal market standing out as a feature strongly associated with EU identity but is not widely perceived as a model for emulation. Alternatively, the EU's approach to sustainable development is seen as a highly attractive target for emulation, but not as a key component of EU identity.

When our survey turns from questions relating to the EU's identity to questions about its role in world politics, respondents' appreciation of the EU as a normative power become more problematic.

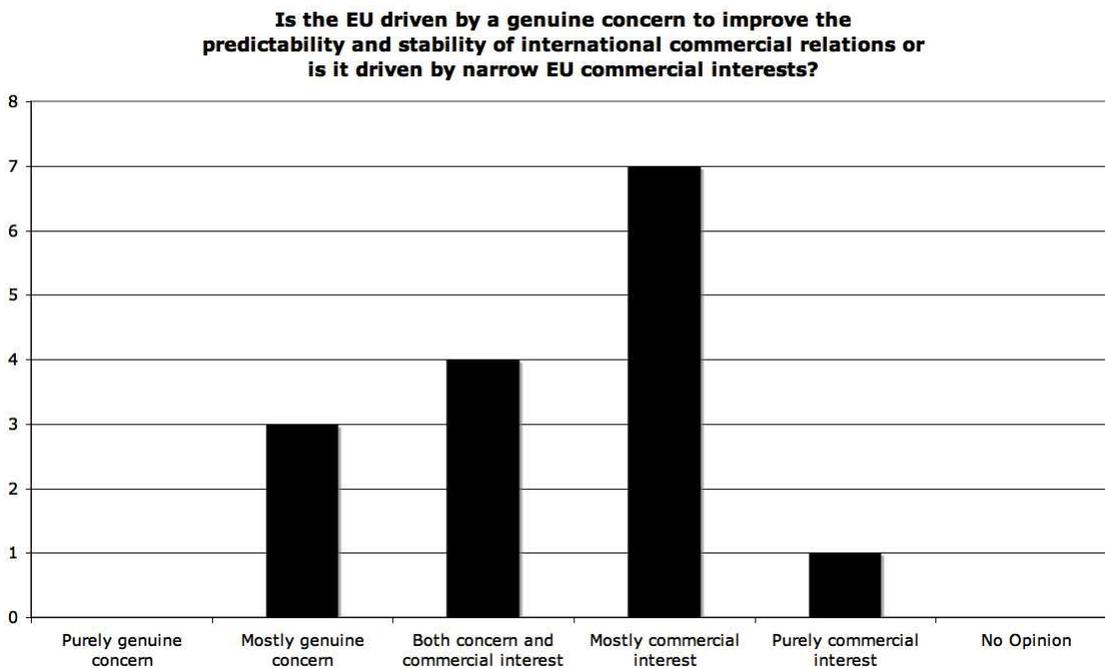


The strongest consensus surrounds the EU's actions to aid the spread of the market economy, followed by a series of abstract norms such as Human Rights, International Law and the Spread of Democracy. Agreement is weaker on actions likely to be of direct economic benefit developing countries. Each of the statements still garners more approval than disapproval (average answer > 3) yet the very high scores obtained in the first set of questions are not replicated.

The questionnaire moves from the abstract to the concrete, with the next set of questions concerning the EU's specific practice in the context of multilateral trade negotiations. As we move into territory our respondents have direct experience with, we find the willingness to describe the EU's practice as norm-driven diminishes.



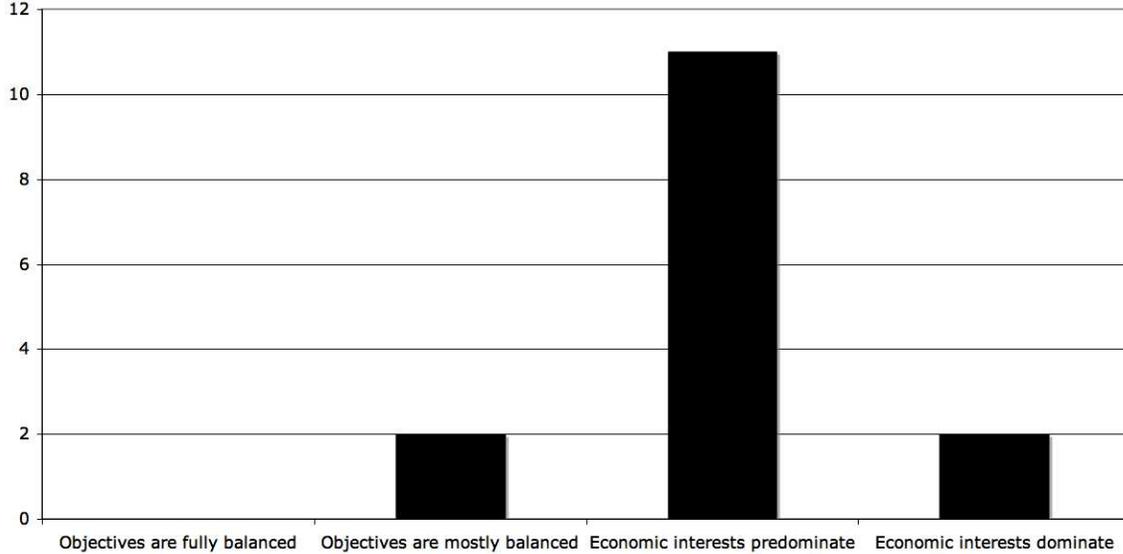
While the average response remains above the 3 mark (agreement outranks disagreement) only the contention that the EU emphasises further elaboration of rules in the WTO context enjoyed truly strong support. The EU's penchant for WTO rule-making, however, was more often seen as driven by a desire to score commercial gains for EU producers than by a will to spread its own norms:



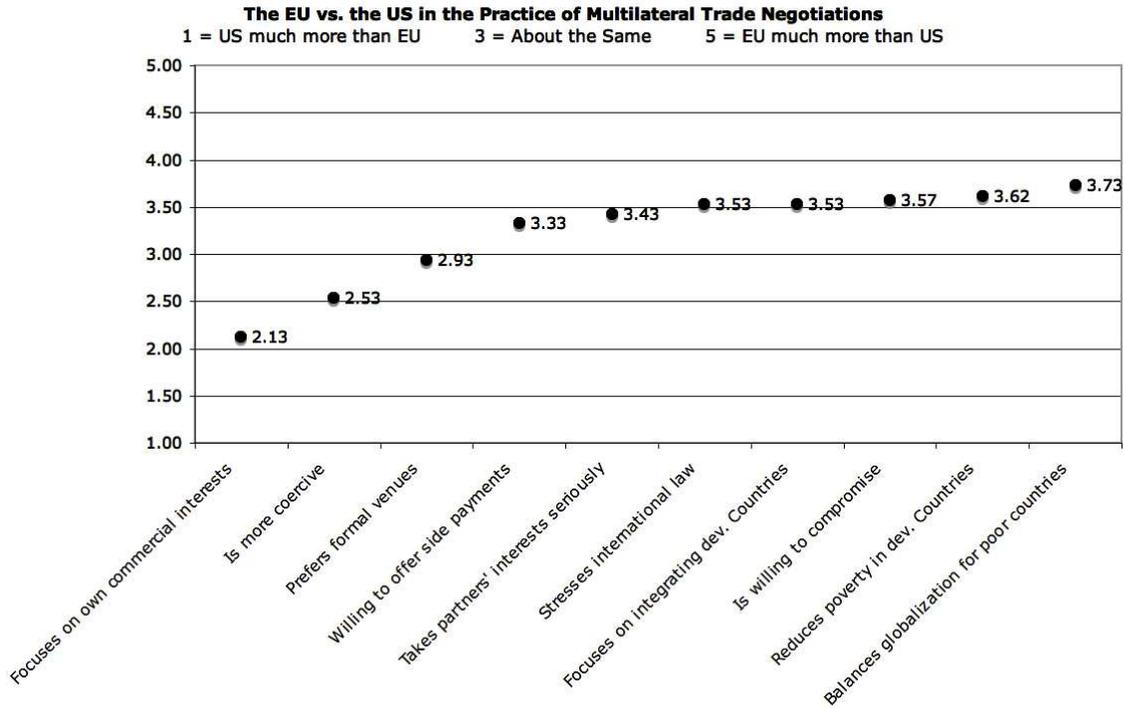
Overall, while few respondents were prepared to attribute EU trade policy stances entirely to mercantilistic impulses, a clear majority perceived economic interests as being the preponderant factor in

EU trade negotiating positions.

"Do you believe the EU balances its position to take account of objectives such as the rule of law, sustainable development, democracy, multilateralism, with its economic objectives or that economic interests tend to trump all other objectives?"



There is, to be sure, some scepticism about the EU's self-image as a normative power among its WTO negotiating partners. Interestingly, distinctive practice is only observed in the use of instruments which does not confirm the EU's Normative Power identity. When contrasted with the negotiating practices of the United States, in particular, the EU is perceived as acting more cooperatively and less coercively:



So the US is perceived as being somewhat more focused on its narrow commercial interest and more willing to use coercive tactics in negotiations than the EU, while the EU is seen as slightly more willing to compromise, and more interested in reducing poverty in developing countries and in balancing globalization to avoid negative outcomes for poor countries. The differences are easy to overstate, however: across all of these comparative questions, respondents answered “both are about the same” or “neither” 47% of the time.

Several respondents described the difference between the way the EU and the US practice negotiations as largely stylistic, with “brash” Americans happy to put their demands bluntly and directly to their negotiating partners, while more “polished” Europeans made a greater effort to show (or feign) concern before pressing quite similar concerns. Preference for one approach or the other appeared to depend on negotiator’s personalities - also a factor stressed in responses - with some “no-nonsense” negotiators actually preferring the American way of negotiating as “more straightforward” to the somewhat mystifying European approach.

What is perhaps most interesting is that respondents did not, by and large, perceive a contradiction between their identification of EU constitutive norms and the European Commission’s weak adherence to those same norms in the conduct of multilateral negotiations. Again and again, our interviewees granted that the outsized importance of narrow commercial interests was simply a feature of trade negotiations, “the way the game is played”. This widely shared, tacit understanding of what is appropriate in the conduct of negotiations precluded, in many cases, the judgment that the EU’s practice of trade negotiations is in some way at odds with its self-image. Within the negotiators’ ethic that prevails in Geneva, the abandonment of high principles and developmentalist rhetoric once negotiators find themselves behind closed door does not raise eye-brows.

## 5. Conclusion

Our exploratory research suggests a particular set of interactions and tensions between the constitutive elements of the Normative Power ideal-type. We recall that a normative power (1) defines the normal in world politics through norm diffusion (appropriate practice); (2) is norm-driven as opposed to interest-driven; and, (3) treats its own norms as universal. According to the NPEU literature, this gives rise to an observably distinct practice in world politics. Rather than studying the EU’s self-image in terms of Normative Power, this paper emphasized the relational aspect of the EU’s identity. It takes external policy as the whole of EU’s practice on the world scene and therefore sought to assess the EU as Normative Power on three levels: the perception of EU norms and their universality; norm-driven practice in world politics; and, norm-driven practice in WTO negotiations. For the latter, the EU’s practice is compared to its “favourite Other”, the US.

We find that non-EU state elites recognize the EU norms from the economic, political and social spheres, relevant for commercial negotiations, as characteristic of the EU, with particularly high agreement on the regulatory capitalism norm. The EU norms are to a certain extent considered a model for non-EU countries and thus accepted as universal and able to be adapted to local circumstances.

However, while the EU is reasonably successful at defining the normal through passive diffusion - because its constitutive norms are both recognized and, in many cases, perceived to be attractive to imitation - its attempts at active norm-diffusion are not widely regarded as themselves norm-driven. Hence, there is only limited support for the thesis that the EU’s practice is in line with the Normative Power concept. In world politics in general, the market economy is again the norm that the EU is keenest on promoting, according to the interviewees. Some other norms, like human rights and international law, are also seen as characteristic for the EU’s external policy, but other norms which the EU discursively

presents as its own, are less strongly identified with its external action. Here, there is a first discrepancy between self-image and perception by others becomes clear.

In the context of WTO negotiations, this discrepancy is more keenly felt: Europe's interlocutors tend to assume that attempts at European norm diffusion are, if not solely, certainly largely interest driven. They do not perceive this as illegitimate, given the norms of appropriateness constituting world trade negotiations. An important conclusion in terms of the NPEU literature is that the EU norms do not give rise to a distinct practice in trade policy in specific. The EU is a player like all others and its practice is inline with the dominant practice in commercial negotiations. The logic of appropriateness discernable in WTO negotiations allows for each participants to seek to realise economic gains for its own key internal constituencies, and this logic appears to dominate the expectation of norm-driven action from the EU in this setting.

Such an interpretation supports Smith's argument (2003) that a reversed use of the high and low politics divide appears in external trade policy: the EU is seen as soft/normative in high politics and hard/realist in low politics. Yet only comparison with EU's practice in "high politics" can establish this.

Judged in contrast to the main alternative world trade power and favourite Other US, EU negotiating practices are indeed perceived as less narrowly focused on relative gains or gaining narrowly conceived commercial advantages. Indeed, our interviewees by and large do not perceive EU negotiating stances at the WTO as solely interest-driven. They do, however, conceive them as mostly interest driven.

Our research suggests several new avenues for NPEU researchers. To what extent can NPEU continue to serve as an identity-defining concept for EU academic and political elites when its practice of external affairs is not seen as fundamentally norm-led or as substantially distinct from that of the US? Can a power "define the normal in world politics" through passive norm diffusion only? And, finally, do state elites engaging with the EU in other fora share the perception of the EU prevalent among WTO negotiators? Each of these questions strikes us as ripe for further research.

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