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Democratic Peace through (inter-)regional cooperation: conceptual significance and empirical limits to the EU's contribution to a re-structured international order

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Abstract

Linked to the founding principles of the European inter-state governance, the EU's "structural foreign policy" inherently upholds a restructured international order. This paper aims to assess the role of the EU in shaping the ongoing post-Cold War transition from a declining *Pax Americana* to a "world of well-governed democratic states", theorized through the Kantian-rooted concept of Democratic Peace. Central attention is paid to the promotion of regional cooperation as a specific European approach to democratization and inter-state relations' reform.

The ensuing research questions arise: under what conditions is EU's vision of international order realistic? To what extent is the EU successful in promoting Democratic Peace through regional cooperation?

In outlining the proposed answers, the paper will firstly delineate the basic elements of the EU-pursued international order; secondly, it will explore the internal and external conditions under which such order may be realizable; thirdly, it will assess the EU's performance as a "trend-maker" in a restructuring international order. Contrary to widespread skepticism, it will argue that EU-backed Democratic Peace might prove a realistic long-term design, provided that the EU succeeds in increasing the coherence of its composite international projection.

Key-words

Democratic Peace, regional cooperation, EU

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Summary: 1. Introduction.- 2. Conceptualizing the EU's vision of world order.- Section II.- 3. Democratic Peace through regional cooperation: two sets of "feasibility conditions- 4. The European approach to Democratic Peace: empirical scrutiny. Its misleading application.- 5. Conclusions.

1. Introduction

Linked to the founding principles of the European inter-state governance, the EU's "structural foreign policy" inherently upholds a restructured international order[1]. This paper aims to assess the role of the EU in shaping the ongoing post-Cold War transition from a declining *Pax Americana*[2] to a "world of well-governed democratic states[3]", theorized through the Kantian-rooted concept of Democratic Peace[4]. Central attention is paid to the promotion of regional cooperation as a specific European approach to democratization and inter-state relations' reform.

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[1] The structural nature of CFSP, aiming at inter-relational and foreign policy goals, is highlighted in S. Keukeleire & J. MacNaughtan, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

[2] See P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers, Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 to 2000,* New York, Random House, 1987; K. Parag, 'Waving Goodbye to Hegemony,' *New York Times Magazine,* 27 January 2008.

[3] Council of the European Union, *European Security Strategy*, *A Secure Europe in a Better World,* 2003, p.10, at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf.

[4] D. Mahncke, 'A new World Order?', in A. Reinisch & U. Kriebaum (eds.), *The Law of International Relations - Liber Amicorum Haspeter Neuhold*, Utrecht, Eleven International Publishing, 2007

in a restructuring international order. Contrary to widespread skepticism[5], it will argue that EU-backed Democratic Peace might prove a realistic long-term design, provided that the EU succeeds in increasing the coherence of its composite international projection.

2. Conceptualizing the EU's vision of world order

In spite of a persistently denounced "strategic void" behind the EU's foreign policy[6], there is increasing evidence of an emerging *European* approach to post-Cold War international change. Modeled on the legalized rule-based intra-European order, the EU's conception of international order is outlined by the European Security Strategy (ESS) and permeated by the notion of Democratic Peace[7].

Complementary to the universal character of Democratic Peace, two elements confer a specific European connotation on the ESS global purpose. Firstly, the emphasis on multilateralism reflects a peculiarly European approach to the promotion of democracy, distant from the messianic "armored Wilsonism[8]" behind the 2002 US National Security Strategy[9]. "Constitutionalized" among the objectives of CFSP[10], the European contribution to "effective multilateralism" aims at overcoming the Westphalian "security dilemma" by favoring incremental institutionalization of peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms. Secondly, the promotion of regional cooperation through a worldwide network of formalized agreements is an identifying-mark of the EU. Regionalism as a model for cooperative inter-state relations should not be confused with "regionalization", the latter describing an international trend characterized by multiple "hegemons", responsible for providing regional stability[11].

Beyond the ESS strategic framing, in the day-to-day practice of interregionalism and of the European Neighborhood Policy, the EU acts to consolidate legally-binding regional cooperation frameworks, accompanied by domestic commitments to democracy-building. Thus, there is both

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[5] See C. Layne, "Kant or Can't: the Myth of Democratic Peace", *International Security*, 19(2):5-49, 1994.

[6] S. Biscop & J. Andersson (eds.), *The EU and the European Security Strategy: Forging a Global Europe*, London, Routledge, 2008.

[7] European Security Strategy, op. cit.

[8] P. Hassner & J. Vaisse, *Washington et le monde. Dilemmes d'une superpuissance*, Paris, Autrement, 2003.

[9] US National Security Council, *National Security Strategy of the United States,* 2002, at http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/nsc/nss/2002.

[10] European Union, "Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union", *Official Journal of the European Union*, C321, 29/12/2006, art. 11.

[11] B. Buzan & O. Waever, *Regions and Powers, The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

theoretical and empirical evidence of a specifically European conception of international order, linking the promotion of democracy to the construction of a newly "regionalized multilateralism".

The conditions under which such a distinctive European approach to Democratic Peace can be successfully applied are worth analyzing.

3. Democratic Peace through regional cooperation: two sets of "feasibility conditions"

Feasibility is often mentioned as the Achilles' heel of Democratic Peace[12]. Nevertheless, one might argue that there is reasonable room for reframing international order according to the EU's strategic vision, under two sets of conditions, respectively pertaining to the EU's international projection and to its external environment.

With respect to the EU's foreign policy, it must be pointed out that the set of external instruments deployed to foster the European international role requires additional efforts in terms of "institutional consistency[13]". As a matter of fact, the promotion of democracy through interregional cooperation is hindered by the plethoric variety of EU-supported dialogue-formats, where coercive instruments, such as conditionality, are applied *à géometrie variable[14]*.

Moving to the external environment, which Bretherton and Vogler define as the "opportunity" for EU "actorness[15]", there is widespread perception that the European efforts to Democratic Peace are facing an increasingly hostile international *milieu*. The EU "soft" instruments to foster incremental institutional changes are seriously inhibited by the return of hard security at the center of international politics. Regional cooperation as a distinctive European response to regional conflicts, listed among ESS key threats[16], becomes inexorably ineffective without a deeper institutionalization of international relations.

For these reasons, the extent to which the EU can effectively promote its conception of international order depends both on the *consistency* of the EU as a foreign policy actor and on the gradual *institutionalization* of the international environment. Interestingly, the ESS seems to take both dimensions into account as mutually-enforcing[17].

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[12] D. Mahncke, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

[13] S. Nuttall, "Coherence and Consistency", in C. Hill & M. Smith (eds), *International relations and the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.

[14] F. Petitville, *La politique internationale de l'Union Européenne*, Paris, Presse Sciences PO, 2006. pp. 125-138.

[15] C. Bretherton Charlotte & J. Vogler, *The EU as a Global Actor*, London, Routledge, 2006

[16] European Security Strategy, op. cit.

[17] *Ibidem*.

A brief empirical inspection is required to assess the effectiveness of the EU in promoting Democratic Peace.

4. The European approach to Democratic Peace: empirical scrutiny

The EU's role in favoring the post-Cold War transition to Democratic Peace proves ambiguously nuanced by the co-presence of achievements and shortcomings.

In a critical perspective, recent democratization setbacks, namely within developing countries, would show the limits of the European model. Indeed, the EU-led regionalist and multilateral approach to Democratic Peace foresees interference in domestic affairs to manage inter-state relations, something Asian and African countries resist accepting[18]. Moreover, the contradictory use of coercive top-down instruments, such as the European-driven sub-regionalization of ACP countries in the framework of EPAs, paradoxically weakened existing African regional organizations[19].

On the positive side, the EU still represents the most advanced regional polity[20]. Democratization of Central and Eastern Europe remains the most remarkable achievement of the EU foreign policy. Nevertheless, recent instances of EU interregional policies, namely towards ASEAN and MERCOSUR, which the ESS sees as cornerstones of "a more orderly world[21]", have shown some progress. Even in the field of hard security, the more holistic and multilateral approach embraced by the 2006 US NSS clearly reinforces the image of the EU as a "trend-maker" at the international stage[22].

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[18] Cooper sees the "interference principle", typical of "postmodern" orders, notably resisted by India and China. R. Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century*, London, Atlantic Books, 2003.

[19] L. Bartels, "The Trade and Development Policy of the European Union", *European Journal of International Law*, vol. 18, n.4, 2007.

[20] M. Telò (ed.), *European Union and new regionalism : regional actors and global governance in a post-hegemonic era*, Burlington, Ashgate, 2007.

[21] European Security Strategy, op. cit.

[22] S. Biscop & J. Andersson, op. cit., pp.1-20; US National Security Council, *National Security Strategy of the United States,* 2006, at http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/eop/nsc/nss/2006.

5. Conclusions

Starting from the conceptualization of a specific European approach to "Democratic Peace", this paper addressed the conditions under which the EU's conception of international order might be realizable and the extent to which the EU is successfully pursuing its global vision. Two mutually-enforcing prerequisites to making the European model of Democratic Peace realizable emerged: an essential reinforcement of the EU's foreign policy consistency and a deeper institutionalization of international relations.

In spite of recent shortcomings, due to a contingent rise of authoritarianism and to the return of hard security at the heart of international politics, the EU's contribution to a restructured international order registers achievements, notably in the European Eastern neighborhood. As a *longue durée* global design, the EU approach to Democratic Peace proves overall more realistic than any re-defined *Pax Americana*. It remains, nonetheless, a long-term process, based on incremental changes in institutions and mentality, rather than on traumatic "regime changes": this is why excessive attention to short-term failures might be misleading.