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Liberal Power Europe

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Abstract

This paper suggests conceptualizing the European Union as a liberal power, i.e. as an actor that is composed of liberal democracies whose interests, identities and institutions motivate and constrain its policy. Rather than stressing the unique character of the EU in international affairs (as notions of the EU as a Normative or Civilian Power Europe tend to do), the concept of Liberal Power Europe emphasizes that European external relations can be examined with the toolkit of the liberal school of thought in International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis. This school of thought emphasizes that foreign policy does not result from the international balance of power but rather from an actor's domestic interests and identity as well as from the institutions that translate them into policy. With a view to European crisis management this perspective suggests that the member states' identities as liberal democracies come with a typically liberal philosophy of crisis management that emphasizes human, rather than state security as well as democracy, human rights and good governance as strategies to address the root causes of conflict. At the same time, the democratic accountability of member state governments leads them to be highly sensitive to risks for their own troops. Casualty avoidance and risk transfer are therefore key components of EU crisis management strategy.

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1 Introduction¹

The need for another adjective to characterize the European Union as a power in international affairs may at first glance seem quite limited. The large number of references to “Normative Power Europe” suggests that “NPE” has done an excellent job in stipulating a debate on the nature of the EU in international politics.² Moreover, the popularity of the concept among both academics and decision-makers indicates that it has captured an important trait of the EU’s role internationally. What is more, those who are – for whatever reason - uncomfortable with the notion of NPE have a large number of alternative concepts to choose from, including “Civilian Power Europe” (Duchêne, 1972; 1973), “Ethical Power Europe” (Aggestam, 2008), “Market Power Europe” (Damro, 2012); “Transformative Power Europe” (Leonard, 2005; Börzel, 2010), “Realist Power” (Zimmermann, 2007), “Idiot Power” (Carta, 2014), an “Integrative Power Europe” (Koops, 2011) or “Normal Power Europe” (Pardo, 2011).

The rich supply of concepts aiming to capture the character of the EU internationally notwithstanding, this paper introduces a further one, namely the EU as a “liberal power”.³ The next section reviews the “what kind of power?”-debate and identifies a number of shortcomings of the “Normative Power Europe”-concept in particular (section 2). Section 3 then introduces the concept of “Liberal Power Europe” systematically. It argues that the EU is a quintessential liberal-democratic organization and engages with the “democratic distinctiveness”-literature that has argued that liberal democracies systematically differ in their external relations from other states. Section 4 argues that the value-added of the new concept for the actual analysis of EU external relations is three-fold: In contrast to the civilian or normative power, liberal power Europe not only highlights the motivation driving EU policies but is also sensitive to the *constraints* imposed on EU actions (4.1). Furthermore, the concept draws attention to the *politics*

¹ I would like to thank Hylke Dijkstra, Arne Niemann and Trineke Palm for helpful comments on previous drafts of this paper.

² As of May 2016, Google Scholar has recorded more than 2400 citations for Ian Manners’ classical 2002 article and more than 1000 additional citations for related publications by the same author.

³ To my knowledge, the term „liberal power“ has not been used to characterize the EU’s external relations. Sten Rynning uses the term but concludes that the “EU does not have the capacity to become a ‘liberal power’“ (2003: 494).

in EU external relations (4.2). Third and finally, the concept facilitates dialogue between EU studies, on the one hand, and the vast field of foreign policy analysis, on the other hand (4.3).

2 The “What kind of power?”-debate

As an entity that was “more than a regime”, yet “less than a federation” (Wallace, 1983), the then European Communities raised intriguing questions as to its status in international affairs. At a time when the European Community made its first timid steps towards “European Political Cooperation” and Henry Kissinger famously asked whom to call when he wants to discuss international politics with “Europe”, François Duchêne, a close advisor to Jean Monnet, made a number of interventions that, with hindsight, opened the conceptual debate of how to conceive of the EU in international affairs. According to him,

“The European Community’s interest as a civilian group of countries long on economic power and relatively short on armed force is as far as possible to *domesticate* relations between states, including those of its own members and those with states outside its frontiers. This means trying to bring to international politics the sense of common responsibility and structures of contractual politics which have been in the past associated almost exclusively with ‘home’ and not foreign, that is *alien*, affairs.” (1973, p. 19f.)

Duchêne is worth quoting at length because, to a remarkable extent, the terms of the debate have remained unchanged since: Most importantly, Europe’s external relations have been couched in terms of progressive distinctiveness, i.e. the then European Community has been pictured as a vanguard and harbinger of a more general transformation of international politics.

The EU’s self-perception as “a new form of power” and a “force for good” (Solana, 2006, p. 3) is also captured by Ian Manners’ concept of NPE (Manners, 2002). As a critical theorist, Manners questions the distinction between “value-neutral” and “normative” political science (Manners, 2015, p. 300) and sees NPE as an approach that can “explain, understand and judge the EU in global politics” (2013, p. 304). However, despite Manners’ efforts to prevent a separation of normative theorizing from empirical-analytical work, the bulk of subsequent work

on NPE has taken it as a primarily descriptive-analytical concept (see, amongst many others, Niemann/de Wekker, 2010; Haukkala, 2011). From such a perspective, peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights are considered a unique normative basis for the EU's relations with the world, which in turn "predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics" (2002, p. 252).

Several studies find support for NPE as an empirical-analytical concept. Björkdahl finds that EU's military missions in the DR Congo were "guided by and in defense of some of the core values of the EU such as sustainable peace, peaceful conflict resolution and democracy" (2011, p. 113); Riddervold (2010) argues that human rights promotion trumped economic interests in the EU's negotiation of Maritime Labor Convention; in a similar vein, Orbie (2011) holds that the EU uses its trade policy to promote labor standards; finally, van Schaik and Schunz find that the EU's strategy in international climate negotiations was dominated by normative considerations.

"NPE" has been criticized from various angles. Thomas Diez has pointed out from a constructivist angle that "interests and norms cannot easily be separated" (2005, p. 622). Realists have criticized that the concept masks underlying interests (Hyde-Price, 2006), a point echoed in several empirical case studies (Zimmermann, 2007). Several scholars have criticized the – implicit or explicit - notion of 'uniqueness' that comes with NPE (as well as with many of the alternative notions discussed above). From a constructivist perspective, norms and ideas are main driving forces of any state's foreign policies. What is more, examples like the USA and the Soviet Union remind us that a firm belief in the universal validity and power of attraction of one's own norms is not unique to the EU.

I have two points to add to these critiques: First, the concept of normative power tends to depoliticize EU external policies. The concept suggests an understanding of a set of norms and values as given and focuses on how EU actions are guided by them. This perspective downplays that the actual meaning of core norms, such as democracy or good governance, is heavily contested. What is more, core norms are not in any natural harmony with each other but instead often conflict with each other – just think of conflicts between democracy promotion and peace

and stability.

Second, the notion of uniqueness had cut off research on EU foreign policy from debates and insights in neighboring fields. Because EU external relations are boldly assumed to be driven by forces different from those driving US or other states' foreign policies, scholars of EU foreign policy are often unaware of the works of their colleagues studying the influence of e.g. public opinion, interest groups or bureaucracies on foreign policies in the USA and elsewhere. In a similar vein, the finding by students of EU crisis management that EU policies run into unexpected local opposition are less surprising to someone familiar with the debates on liberal peace-building in conflict studies.

3 The EU as a Liberal Power

The concept of "liberal power Europe" aims at overcoming the criticisms just mentioned. In doing so, it draws on an understanding of concept development as being more than a provision of a definition. Instead, concepts are conceived to be "theories about ontology", designating "the core characteristics of a phenomenon and their interrelationships" (Goertz, 2006, p. 5). In other words: Liberal Power Europe not only aims at a description of EU actions vis-à-vis other actors but also at identifying causes and causal mechanisms that bring these actions about. It is for this reason that, for example, 'interests' are included in the concept of liberal power as one main driving force of EU external action. Because in contrast to normative power, liberal power has no commitment to privilege norms and ideas over interests, it can incorporate interests conceptually.

"Liberal Power Europe" could be criticized for using an ill-defined key term because there is no generally accepted and at the same time strict definition of "liberalism". Rather, "liberalism" refers to a tradition in political philosophy (which itself encompasses various strands) as well as to a school of thought in international relations and foreign policy analysis. Internal pluralism notwithstanding, different variations of liberalism in political philosophy, however, all share a

key “family resemblance”, namely a focus on the individual, its freedom and well-being.⁴ Within liberalism, some strands emphasize economic freedom whereas others highlight civil liberties or even social rights. In any case, states are conceived as political institutions that should serve individuals, rather than the other way around.

Those who find “liberalism” too broad or vague may suggest “descending along a the ladder of abstraction” by “augmenting [...] attributes or properties” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1041). In this vein, Knud Erik Jørgensen (2015) and Richard Youngs (2011) use the concept “liberal internationalism” in their work on EU external relations. However, the gain in focus comes at the price of a loss in scope as “liberal internationalist” may describe the EU’s foreign policy ambitions quite well but may resonate less among scholars of EU external economic relations.⁵ In addition, the concept of “liberal internationalism” is more agnostic as to which causes and causal mechanisms bring about such a policy.

However, rather than a weakness, I see the fact that “liberalism” refers to traditions in both foreign policy analysis and political theory as an advantage of the concept because it links an a general analytical framework about the driving forces and causal mechanisms of foreign policy with a specific theory that explains a particular actor’s policy. As a result, the concept serves a dual purpose, namely 1) providing a theory of how foreign policy results from a set of variables and causal mechanisms and 2) offering a working hypothesis of how this set of variables and causal mechanisms in the particular case of the European Union leads to an outcome that is “liberal” in the sense that it embodies liberalism’s core political values.

The European Union is a quintessentially liberal-democratic organization (Schimmelfennig, 2003). Only stable democracies are eligible to become members. Based on the liberal-democratic identities of the member states, the EU institutions themselves have endorsed and fostered a liberal-democratic identity as well. The foreign and security policy goals, as stated in the Treaty

⁴ On family resemblances, rather than necessary and sufficient conditions as a tool to construct concepts, see Goetz 2006.

⁵ For a comprehensive discussion of resonance, scope and further criteria to assess the usefulness of a concept see Gerring 2011, chapter 5. It is important to note that both Jørgensen and Youngs use the term “liberal internationalism” to argue how the EU should not or no longer be characterized.

on the European Union, the European Security Strategy as well as other key foreign and security policy documents all emphasize typically liberal values, such as democracy, human rights, international cooperation and international law.⁶ In an interesting new wording of the liberal mission statement, the Lisbon Treaty links the foreign and security goals to the EU' identity:

“The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.”⁷

Inspired by the so-called Democratic Peace debate (Russett/Oneal, 2001), a growing body of literature suggests that the foreign and security policies of liberal democracies are systematically different from those of authoritarian states (Geis/Wagner, 2011). Political liberalism places a high value on the individual and democratic institutions facilitate to hold the government accountable for advancing their security and well-being. With a view to international conflicts, this does not make liberal democracies pacifist. Rather, the high value placed on the individual tends to make liberal democracies use armed force for different purposes and in different ways. Whereas the conquest of territory has been largely de-legitimized, liberal democracies have been vanguards of “humanitarian interventions”, “human security” and the “Responsibility to Protect (R2P)”.

With a view to post-conflict peacebuilding and conflict prevention, liberal democracies have been champions of “liberal peacebuilding”, i.e. “the promotion of democracy, market-based economic reforms and a range of other institutions associated with “modern” states as a driving force for building “peace” (Newman/Paris/Richmond, 2009, p. 3).

Although the high value placed on the individual may create a moral obligation to “saving

⁶ Treaty on European Union, signed at Maastricht on 7 February 1991, article J.1 (2) (OJ C 191 of 19 July 1992); see also Smith 2014 and Rynning 2003.

⁷ Article 21 of the Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union (OJ C 115 of 9 May 2008).

strangers” (Wheeler, 2000) elsewhere, if necessary with the help of military force, it also places constraints on government policy. Most importantly, liberal publics expect their government to minimize the risks for their own citizens, especially for those deployed to conflict zones. Martin Shaw has coined the term of “risk transfer wars” to characterize liberal democracies’ interventions “because it centers on minimizing life-risks to the military – and hence all-important political and electoral risks to their masters” (Shaw, 2005, p. 1).

Although students of democratic distinctiveness have been primarily interested in the differences between democracies and non-democracies, they have also examined further observable implications among democracies. Higher levels of institutional constraints on government foreign policies, for example, have been found to correlate with a more reticent use of military force (Dieterich et al., 2015; Saideman/Auerswald, 2014).

Moving beyond security and defense, liberal democracies have been found to be more supportive of free trade than non-democracies (Russett/Oneal, 2001, p. 218ff.). To be sure, governments in democracies are lobbied by both free trade- and protectionist interests groups, and the former do not always carry the day. However, in contrast to autocratic governments, democratic ones are also held accountable by the electorate and therefore tend to be more sensitive to the effects of commercial policy on the general welfare in society (Milner/Kubota, 2005, drawing on Bueno de Mesquita et al, 2003).

Finally, liberal democracies have been found to be generally supportive of internal law and international institutions. According to John Ikenberry, “[d]emocracies are better able to create binding institutions and establish credible restraints and commitments than nondemocracies” (2001, p. 75). This notion is confirmed by studies that found democracies to have more memberships in intergovernmental organizations (Shanks et al, 1996) and to be more willing to accept judicialized dispute settlement (Hooghe et al, 2014; Powell/Mitchell, 2007).

Although addressing a diverse set of policy areas, the contributions reviewed above concur in treating regime type as a key variable in explaining variation across states. This “democratic distinctiveness program” (Owen, 2004) not only highlights the differences between liberal

democracies' and other states' foreign policies. It also explains these differences with the toolkit of liberal theories of international relations and foreign policy according to which “societal ideas, interests, and institutions influence state behavior by shaping state preferences, that is the fundamental social purposes underlying the strategic calculations of governments” (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 513).

4 Liberal Power Europe in Action

As with any other concept, the value-added of conceiving Europe as a liberal power depends on the contribution made to the actual study of EU external relations. I contend that the value-added of studying the EU as a liberal power, rather than a normative, civilian, or ethical power is three-fold: First, in contrast to the civilian or normative power, liberal power Europe not only highlights the motivation driving EU policies but is also sensitive to the *constraints* imposed by interests, ideas and institutions on EU actions. Second, the concept draws attention to the *politics* in EU external relations. Third and finally, the concept facilitates dialogue between EU studies, on the one hand, and the vast field of foreign policy analysis, on the other hand.

4.1 Bringing constraints back in

With NPE, liberal power Europe agrees that core liberal values such as human rights and the rule of law are important driving forces of EU external policies. In contrast to NPE, however, the concept of liberal power also sees the EU constrained in typically liberal ways. Groups that stand to lose from an envisioned measure can be expected to mobilize in order to prevent or at least water down such a policy. To what extent liberal core values or more specific interests carry the day also depends on the institutions and decision-making rules in an issue area.

The value-added of bringing in constraints differs across issue-areas. The value-added is smallest in studies of EU external economic policies because scholars in this area have already been working with the explanatory toolkit of liberalism to a large extent. Drawing on established theories in International Political Economy, Young and Peterson, for example, have explained trade policies with “the constellation of societal preferences, the range of government

preferences and the pattern of political institutions” (2014, p. 24). Of course, scholars have differed in the relative weight attributed to the commercial interests of firms, employees and consumers, the ideas held by powerful actors and the institutions that impact on how diverging interests and ideas are translated into policy. Few, however, would doubt that EU commercial policy is driven by a mix of a general commitment to open trade, on the one hand, and specific constraints by interest groups (and their advocates amongst the member states).

The value-added of bringing in constraints is higher in the realm of foreign, security and defense policy. For example, NPE treats sanctions as an instrument to diffuse EU norms (Manners, 2002, p. 244f.). In an empirical analysis of the actual imposition of sanctions, however, Klaus Brummer finds inconsistencies and double standards, which he attributes to the “distorting impact of the Member States on the EU’s sanctions policy” (2009, p. 203). He concludes that sanctions are a case of “the not so ‘normative power Europe’”. From the perspective of liberal power Europe, the impact of member states on sanctions policy does not come as a surprise but lies at the heart of the analysis. Liberal power Europe concurs with NPE that sanctions are used as sticks to reinforce demands vis-à-vis third countries to adopt and comply with EU norms. At the same time, however, it takes the effects of sanctions on European exporters seriously and expects affected firms to lobby member states as well as EU institutions against their imposition. Institutions then impact on the relative weight that ideational and economic preferences have on EU decision-making and thus policy. As Brummer points out, the intergovernmental set-up of CFSP provides ample opportunities for member states to influence decisions on sanctions.

As I will elaborate below (4.3), the EU’s military missions are another area whose study benefits from adding constraints to the analytical tool-kit.

4.2 Bringing politics back in

Conceiving of the EU as a liberal power draws attention to the *politics* of EU external relations. NPE-analyses have shown little interest in contestation over EU foreign policy. Instead, they tend to reify a set of core norms that characterize and drive EU policies. In contrast, the liberal power-perspective emphasizes that foreign policies such as the imposition of sanctions, the

launch of a military mission or the distribution of development aid do not emanate directly and unambiguously from an identity as a normative power. Instead, each of these decisions is highly political in the sense that abstract norms and values have to be applied to specific cases and balanced against possibly conflicting norms and values. For example, Michael E. Smith identifies such a strategic dilemma in his analysis of the EU's "liberal grand strategy", namely "whether to risk innocent civilian lives (and violate EU norms) by attacking the perpetrators of human rights violations (a Kosovotype dilemma); or whether to offer only token protection to victims and allow them to be slaughtered by a stronger force (a Srebrenica-type dilemma), which also would violate EU norms." (2011, p. 159).

Again, such a politicization of EU external relations is already well established in the realm of commercial policy. As the preceding section pointed out, business associations mobilize and lobby for market access or for protection from foreign competition. In contrast, foreign and security policy is still widely perceived as a domain of member state governments. However, recent studies have documented the activities and even influence of NGOs in the areas of EU arms exports policy (Joachim/Dembinski, 2011), EU policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Voltolini, 2016), sanctions and visa-liberalization (Shapovalova, 2015). What is more, analyses of votes in the European Parliament demonstrate that EU external policies have been contested amongst the political groups (van den Putte et al., 2015). Bringing together state and non-state actors, Trineke Palm (2016) distinguishes various advocacy coalitions with different belief systems on the use of military force that bargain over specific deployments.

Taken together, EU policies do not emanate directly from a set of core liberal norms. Instead, they are the result of political struggles that pit coalitions of member states and non-state actors against each other. The liberal-power perspective draws attention to this highly interesting dimension of EU external policy-making.

4.3 Facilitating dialogue with Foreign Policy Analysis

Another contribution of the liberal power concept is to encourage the dialogue with students of foreign policy analysis and democratic distinctiveness. Once again, the value added of this

dialogue will be smallest in the study of EU commercial policy, where comparisons with other actors, especially the USA, are already common. Moreover, major theories and approaches, for example Principal-Agent Analysis, have been imported from the study of US policy.

In contrast, the value added of this dialogue will be substantial in the study of the Common Security and Defense Policy. The progressive establishment of a security and defense policy since the late 1990s with a rapid reaction force at its core has been received controversially among scholars of normative power Europe. Whereas some, including Manners himself (Manners, 2006), have seen CSDP as a threat to the EU's progressive distinctiveness, others have welcomed the establishment of military capabilities as an additional instrument to pursue normative aims more effectively (Stavridis, 2001). More than 15 years since the initialization and more than ten years since the first military deployments, most scholars consider CSDP as reinforcing, rather than undermining the EU's progressive distinctiveness (Björkdahl, 2011; Juncos, 2011). The military toolkit has been successfully integrated into a comprehensive approach. Furthermore, CSDP itself has developed a strong – and successful – civilian dimension that allows the deployment of police, prosecutors or judges in addition to the military. Most importantly, the availability of military force has not changed the liberal vocation of EU foreign policy. For example, Marianne Riddervold (2011) argues that the EU's maritime mission Atalanta off the Somali coast was motivated by concerns about the long-term protection of humanitarian aid and that this has remained the priority despite the enormous importance of the Gulf of Aden as a trade route.

In highlighting human security as a key motivation of CSDP missions, the concept of liberal power does not add much to the concepts of normative, civilian or ethical power Europe. However, with the help of the broader democratic distinctiveness literature, the liberal power-perspective facilitates an understanding of the specific way in which the EU conducts its missions. In particular, and echoing the point made above (3.1), the liberal-power perspective emphasizes that the liberal identity of the EU and its member states motivates *as well as constrains* EU military action. The democratic distinctiveness literature reviewed above does not only point to liberal publics' calls to "save strangers" but also emphasizes the even stronger demand to do so with minimum risks for the troops deployed and, to a lesser extent, for civilians

in general. “Casualty aversion” therefore has become a major constraint on governments’ deployment of armed forces; “casualty avoidance” has therefore become the main guideline for liberal democracies’ use of force, including CSDP missions.

Whereas the concept of normative power does an excellent job to explain why the EU launches missions under the CSDP, the concept of liberal power adds an explanation of why the EU often refrains from intervention and, if the EU decides to intervene, *how* it does so.

Students of NPE have often been criticized for downplaying or overlooking double-standards in EU action (Niemann/de Wekker, 2010; Haukkala, 2011; Juncos, 2011). If the EU is truly a normative power, critics ask, why does it not intervene in more places characterized by large scale human rights violations, ethnopolitical violence and the like? Proponents of NPE may answer with ad hoc references to limited capabilities and the like. The concept of liberal power, however, helps to overcome this blind spot in NPE. Although ‘liberal power’ and NPE both share an understanding of the driving forces of CSDP, ‘liberal power’ comes with the additional advantage of providing a theory of distinctly liberal constraints, going back to the fundamental ambivalence of human security as a call to save strangers and a demand to refrain from putting one’s own citizens-cum-soldiers at risk.

From a liberal power perspective, the EU way of crisis management is little different from the “Western way of war” (Shaw, 2005) in general. The EU’s prime concern, this perspective highlights, is the minimization of risks for the soldiers-cum-citizens of the member states. Such efforts are facilitated by the member states’ high level of economic development and, as a consequence, military technology, which allowed them to follow the US in the so-called ‘revolution in military affairs’ (RMA), i.e. advances in precision warfare, improved intelligence and reconnaissance (with the help of satellites and drones) and the provision of detailed real-time information to troops as well as decision-makers (‘network-centric warfare’). These technological advances reflect political priorities to maximize the protection of own forces (Sauer/Schörnig, 2012). Capital-intense investments into technology and equipment have multiplied the costs per individual soldier but helped to minimize fatalities (Caverley, 2014, p. 36).

Constrained by the casualty aversion of liberal publics, CSDP has also adopted strategies to transfer the risks for its own troops to others. First, the EU aims at leaving the risks of combat tasks to local forces. This is most obvious in crisis management in Africa, where the majority of CSDP missions have been. According to the Joint Africa-EU Strategy of 2007, EU support is “guided by the principle of African ownership” and focuses on capacity building and “sustainable, predictable and flexible funding for African –led peace support operations”.⁸ Accordingly, the EU has launched military training missions in Mali and Somalia, engaged in capacity building in Niger and the Horn of Africa (EUCAP Nestor) and Security Sector Reform missions in Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic. With a total of ca. 10.000 troops, the EU has also made a significant contribution to peace support missions in the DR Congo, Chad, the Central African Republic, Mali, South Sudan and Somalia. In EUFOR RD Congo, however, most troops were stationed in safe Gabon, rather than in Kinshasa where the risk of hostile engagement was higher (Palm, 2016, p. 46). Moreover, the EU’s missions in Africa are typically bridging missions that are handed over to regional forces as soon as possible (typically in less than a year). In order to outsource combat tasks, the EU has channeled around € 1,6 billion to African-led peace operations via its African Peace Facility (Tardy, 2016, p. 2). An excellent indication of the EU’s risk-transfer strategy is the number of casualties suffered. The African contingents of AMISOM Somalia to which the bulk of the African Peace Facility funds have gone are reported to have suffered more than 1.000 fatalities (Tardy, 2016, p. 1). In contrast, most of the EU’s crisis management operations did not suffer a single fatality; the French soldier who was killed while serving for EUFOR Chad in 2008⁹ remains an exception.

Second, the EU has joined other liberal security actors in making use of Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs). According to Francesco Giumelli and Eugenio Cusumano who have contributed one of the few, if not the only study of this subject

„the EU is no exception to the emerging trend of security privatization in the different

⁸ Joint Africa-EU Strategy of 2007, reprinted in EU Security and Defense Core Documents 2007, compiled by Catherine Glière, Paris: EUISS, points 18 and 19.

⁹ New York Times, 6 March 2008.

areas of CSDP operations. In both military and civilian missions, the EU has consistently relied on contractors for the provision of armed security, medical services, transportation and base and personnel support, relying on contractors to bridge the gap between the global scope of its crisis management ambitions and the limited capabilities made available by its member states for the conduct of CSDP operations.“ (Giumelli and Cusumano, 2014, p. 38).

Taken together, the concept of liberal power provides a richer analysis of EU crisis management than NPE because the latter by and large lacks an interest in interests and institutions. From a liberal power perspective CSDP missions are not unique at all. Rather they are classical illustrations for distinctly liberal democratic strategies to avoid casualties as far as possible. Thus, in contrast to NPE, the concept of liberal power also helps identifying key constraints on EU action in addition to highlighting motivations (on which the two concepts differ very little): As the examples above demonstrate, a comprehensive analysis of EU crisis management is difficult to achieve without references casualty avoidance as a key rationale.

5 Conclusion

Conceiving of the EU as a liberal power does not require a radical re-interpretation of the EU's external relations. In fact, the “idea of NPE tends to be explicitly aligned to a liberal view of EU ‘foreign policy’” (Rosamond, 2014, p. 133). Moreover, findings from countless case studies about the importance of societal interests and ideas and about the impact of institutions on translating them into policy are not challenged as such because the concept of liberal power Europe does not introduce a hitherto omitted variable. Rather, Knud Erik Jørgensen's conclusion with a view to research on the EU and ‘liberal internationalism’ also applies to research on the EU as a liberal power: a considerable amount of it has been done although it has not been explicitly framed in these terms (Jørgensen, 2015, p. 504).

Yet, a re-conceptualization is more than an exercise in re-branding. Following Gary Goertz's

notion of concepts as “theories about ontology” (Goertz, 2006, p. 5), the liberal power-concept offers a more comprehensive analytical perspective on the EU’s external relations. Most importantly, the liberal power-perspective not only highlights the motivation driving EU policies but is also sensitive to the *constraints* imposed by interests, ideas and institutions on EU actions. In the area of military missions, for example, EU policy seems difficult to fully comprehend without taking the constraining effect of liberal publics’ casualty-sensitivity into account. Furthermore, the liberal-power perspective facilitates the study of political contestation over EU foreign policy. Rather than assuming a stable set of norms and values that guide foreign policy, liberal power Europe highlights the ambiguity of many norms (e.g. when dealing with an illiberal government that has emerged from free and fair elections) and conflicts between different norms (e.g. between human rights protection and free trade).

The importance of constraints and of political contestation in the study of foreign relations is widely acknowledged in the vast literature in foreign policy analysis and on democratic distinctiveness in particular. An additional benefit of the liberal power-perspective therefore is the facilitation of dialogue between students of EU external relations and scholars in foreign policy analysis. Rather than treating the EU as a *sui generis* entity with a unique policy, the liberal power-perspective suggests treating the EU as any other actor that is motivated and constrained by liberal ideas and interests. The value-added of such a reconceptualization may be small in the field of commercial policy, which already is influenced by studies of US commercial policy in particular. By contrast, the area of security and defense policy has much to benefit from an exchange with foreign policy analysis and especially the literature on democratic distinctiveness.

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