

Liberal empire, geopolitics and EU strategy

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

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

“In challenging times, a strong Union is one that thinks strategically”

(Federica Mogherini 2016, 3)

“I like to compare the European Union as a creation to the organisation of empires”

(José Manuel Barroso 2007)

Introduction

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

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

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3 international politics can replace the reality of zero-sum calculations (Smith and Howorth
4 2016), and they demand more coercive approaches to strategy (Hyde-Price 2004).
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7 But the political practice of EU foreign policy making indicates that the balance between
8 norm diffusion and interests cannot be fundamentally altered. Just as the ENP review in
9 2011 did not lead to a substantial strengthening of normative policy instruments
10 (Schumacher 2012; Tömmel 2013), it seems unlikely that the 2015 review will prompt
11 fundamental changes of EU grand strategy. The Union appears largely incapable of
12 substantially re-adjusting its strategic thinking (e.g. Kelley 2006). EU decision-makers remain
13 convinced of the compatibility of 'milieu shaping' and the harder edge of possession goals.
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16 Therefore, this article revisits the question: Why is it so difficult for the EU to strike a
17 convincing balance between the promotion of the Union's interests and norms? Why do EU
18 decision-makers struggle to adopt a more consistent strategy? This article argues that, due
19 to its imperial nature, the EU has to adopt a 'dual strategy'. Building on Jan Zielonka's work
20 (2006, 2013), various scholars have promoted ideas of "normative imperialism" present in the
21 EU's engagement with its borderlands (Pänke 2013, 2015; Del Sarto 2016). These
22 contributions draw our attention to the fact that the "EU is indeed engaged in 'normative'
23 policies, which however primarily serve [its] security and economic interests" (Del Sarto
24 2016, 227). The Union is linking its efforts of norm diffusion to a liberal ideology claiming
25 universal validity, despite this ideology's European origins – an EU-niversality in the best
26 interest of the recipients.
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29 Through a conceptual discussion of academic literature, I am seeking to expand these ideas
30 in three ways: Firstly, where Del Sarto "proposes the notion of empire, less as a model of
31 what the EU is and more as a mode of how the EU acts" (Marchetti 2018, 133; here Del
32 Sarto 2016, 223), I would like to understand the EU's entire polity as imperial, thereby
33 reconciling the imperial paradigm with ideas of 'external governance' which emphasizes the
34 continuity between internal policies and their external dimension (Lavenex 2008).
35 Furthermore, the inclusion of 'domestic' imperialism invites further research into dynamics at
36 play in current processes of EU disintegration. Secondly, this article – more consequentially
37 – conceptualises norms and interests as interlocking and mutually reinforcing. Thus, norms
38 are not merely devices to cloak rational self-interests in asymmetrical power relations
39 (compare Marchetti 2018, 133). Thirdly, and importantly, by incorporating findings of new
40 imperial historiography (see Howe 2009; Burbank & Cooper 2010; Judson 2016a) my
41 argument appreciates the dynamic links between core and periphery, as well as possible
42 benefits of imperial rule – e.g. the emancipatory potential of liberal norms – thereby, re-
43 emphasizing the ambiguity of empire. As such, this exploration of imperial governance and
44 discursive strategies follows recent demands to initiate a closer dialogue between political
45 scientists and historians (e.g. Haughton 2016).
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48 The first section establishes the EU as an empire. The argument is novel because of the
49 introduction of a more robust definition of empire informed by new imperial history, which
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allows a systematic comparison between the Union as a post-modern expression of empire and other manifestations of empire in European history. The definition highlights hierarchical geopolitical modelling and a legitimising discourse which understands the EU as a post-modern imperial manifestation – a liberal empire. The paper therefore advances previous contributions with references to imperial practices in the past. The second part utilises Michael Williams' understanding of security and culture to explore the impact of changes in the Union's strategic environment on the EU's 'dual strategy'. An analysis of the ENP reviews of 2011 and 2015 suggests a resilience of the EU's 'dual strategy' despite a geopolitical turn in the neighbourhood. Therefore, the supranational identity-building capabilities of the EU's 'normative power' are preserved. At the same time, its impact propensity in the neighbourhood appears much diminished. The article concludes that, due to the EU's imperial nature, all attempts to prioritise either interests or norms within its 'dual strategy' are futile and risk undermining the legitimacy of the European Union even further.

The EU as Liberal Empire

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

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

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3 mutually constitutive”; in fact, European nation- and empire-building are intimately linked “to
4 the extent that the two are now conceptualised as a single process” (Morozov 2013, 18; see
5 Leonhard and Hirschhausen 2010; Judson 2016a for the Habsburg; Barkey 2008 for the
6 Ottoman; Etkind 2011 for the Russian empire). Second, there is a tension between the
7 potentially emancipatory quality of the imperial normative order, and resistance against the
8 imperialist undertones of this order. This second tension between norms and power stems
9 from a symmetrical claim of equality of imperial subjects and the actual asymmetrical
10 distribution of power among them.
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15 The themes of imperial governance and discourse reappear in the EU-as-empire paradigm
16 which entered the debate in the context of the Eastern enlargements during the late 1990s.
17 The first contributions came from East Central Europeans (Janos 2001; Böröcz 2001;
18 Zielonka 2006). In the transition “from Eastern Empire to Western Hegemony” these authors,
19 from their peripheral perspectives, detected familiar repertoires of imperial rule. Hartmut Behr
20 (2007) has analysed the Union’s enlargement process, in which states deemed insufficiently
21 ‘civilized’ are excluded in the spirit of 19th century imperial practices. From a critical
22 perspective this scholarship focussed on “discourses and representational practices to unveil
23 the workings” of Europe’s ‘mission civilisatrice’ (Rutazibwa 2010, 212) while at the same time
24 acknowledging the positive transformative impacts of the Union.
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30 Critical geopolitics adds insights on the importance of self-image in hierarchical ordering
31 processes of space (e.g. Ó Tuathail 1996). These analyses investigate the Union’s
32 discursive (and material) strategies of incorporation, and explore how spaces of EU power
33 are narrated and constructed (Bialasiewicz 2011). The EU is here understood as “the
34 ‘civilized zone’ of the European continent” (Foster 2013, 375) in terms of a core, “surrounded
35 by a buffer zone of a so-called ‘ring of friends’, beyond which lies a threatening world”
36 (Browning 2018, 127). Accordingly, the EU – lacking a clear-cut “territorial fixity” – has to
37 adopt a more “heterogenous spatial logic” (Dimitrova 2012, 252; see Marchetti 2018, 133) in
38 line with concepts of “hybrid” (Scott 2005, 2011) or “soft geopolitics” (Dimitrova 2012). Again,
39 this literature establishes a link between ideas of imperial governance as geopolitical
40 modelling and the importance of imperial discourse based on norm diffusion which
41 transcends conventional self-interest as norms can adopt a placeless and timeless quality.
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46 Defining Empire

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48 There have been multiple definitions of empire. Most of them share ideas of managing
49 diversity and establishing hierarchical orders (Eisenstadt 1963; Doyle 1986; Motyl 2001). In
50 line with Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper (2010, 8, 11), I am not aiming “to put things
51 into neatly defined boxes”, but rather “the opposite: to look at ranges of political possibilities
52 and tensions and conflicts among” different manifestations of empire through history,
53 because “empire – as a form of state – was persistent over time, [but] empire – as a way of
54 rule – was not uniform”. Jürgen Osterhammel (2016) has pointed out that it would be
55 misleading to assume empires to be uniformly constructed power machines, which invariably
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3 follow the same logic. One could argue that the EU differs from most historical empires as it:
4 a) is polycentric with decision-making shared by Brussels' EU organs and the Union's
5 member states; b) has – despite overlapping authorities within Union territory – an
6 identifiable external border; and most importantly c) rests fundamentally on voluntariness.
7 But again, imperialism escapes precise taxonomies. Coercion comes in different shapes and
8 sizes.
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12 Within the various processual, fluid and multifaceted understandings of empire, Karen
13 Barkey's definition derived from her analysis of the organisation of the Ottoman empire
14 appears very helpful:
15

16 An empire is a large composite and differentiated polity linked to a central power by a
17 variety of direct and indirect relations. [...] These relations are [...] regularly subject to
18 negotiations over the degree of autonomy [...] in return for compliance. (Barkey 2008, 9)
19

20 Barkey emphasises the negotiated aspect of empires and advocates considering their
21 centre-periphery relations as “hub-and-spoke network structure” mediated by elites and
22 networks. Similarly, Alexander Motyl (2001, 4) defined empire “as a hierarchically organized
23 political system with a hublike structure – a rimless wheel – within which a core elite and
24 state dominate peripheral elites and societies by serving as intermediaries”. These ideas are
25 mirrored in the institutional set-up of the EU generally and in the bilateral framework of the
26 ENP more specifically.
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31 According to Barkey, maintaining “domination and longevity requires that empires ensure the
32 articulation of three conditions”: 1) “appropriate mechanisms of rule over cultural diversity”; 2)
33 “an ideological/ cultural form of legitimation”; and 3) “modes of appropriation of political and
34 economic resources” (Barkey 2008, 13).
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37 From these readings, I derive two broader features of empire:
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39 First, **Imperial governance as geopolitical modelling of a hierarchical order**, “embodied
40 in flexible arrangements of different levels of integration and constantly negotiated relations
41 between the imperial centre, the regions, and entities in multi- and especially bilateral
42 frames” to rule over cultural diversity (“hub-and-spoke network structure”). These hierarchical
43 orders very often manifest themselves in concentric circle models and flexible bordering
44 strategies (Pänke 2013, 116; see Gammerl 2010, 17).
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47 Second, **Imperial discourse as ‘ideological/cultural form of legitimation’**, to “substitute
48 the absence of a narrow national identity concept” and based on the weak coherence of the
49 polity. This legitimising narrative is directed to the inner and outer realms and calls for
50 continuous expansion, or “at least interaction with the periphery, which in turn gains influence
51 on the imperial core for the benefit of both” (Pänke 2013, 116). Empires strive for “discursive
52 hegemony” throughout their territories. In contrast, the governance of federal and nation
53 states is characterised by greater symmetry between the various constitutive subjects
54 (Osterkamp 2016, 592; Motyl 1997; Berger and Miller 2015).
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3 Within the normative realities of 20th century international politics, the EU had to construct
4 itself as 'liberal empire' – similar to the Habsburg empire in the second half of the 19th century
5 (Judson 2016b; Osterkamp 2016). EU norms – codified in Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty (respect
6 for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law, and respect for human rights) –
7 are firmly rooted in the European Enlightenment and what Norbert Elias (1939) has
8 described as the European civilising process. 'Liberal imperialism' has been ascribed to the
9 EU in various ways. Robert Cooper (2002) – Tony Blair's former architect of a new
10 internationalism and one of the authors of the 2003 *European Security Strategy* – highlighted
11 its benevolent nature for the "good of the recipients". This was expressed in the *European*
12 *Security Strategy* which defined the EU as a "force for good" in global politics. The idea of the
13 EU as a 'liberal empire' floats in the ambiguous concepts of "transformative power" (Börzel
14 and Risse 2009) and "normative empire" (Del Sarto 2016). The term captures nicely the "dual
15 face" of European integration (Brunkhorst 2014) where the emancipatory ambition of a liberal
16 agenda is dialectically linked to expressions of local and national resistance. Such liberal
17 ordering processes are a reminder of Gramscian hegemony (Diez 2013) and are
18 "inescapably compromised" (Porter 2018). However, imperial rule may have its merits in
19 regions which are divided ethnically, confessionally, or along other lines. Furthermore, its
20 norms may be genuinely appealing (Beller 2017) – but at the same time its imperialist face
21 evokes scepticism. This ambiguity of empire is very observable in various current EU-ropean
22 conflicts, like Brexit, or the rule of law probe targeting Poland and Hungary. Thus, the Union's
23 liberal ordering processes are prone to provoke national opposition, but nevertheless, its EU-
24 niversal liberal norms provide a more convincing base for inclusive societies and economic
25 prosperity than exclusive and protectionist nationalist agendas. These tensions, therefore,
26 constitute the inescapable reality of empire-building processes in Europe.

37 The EU's Imperial Governance

38
39 Imperial governance feeds on asymmetrical power relations and constructs – based on
40 appeals to shared normative understandings – a hierarchical order through different
41 strategies of 'bordering' (Browning and Joenniemi 2008; Scott 2009). The EU-ropean liberal
42 order rests on a design of "institutions, norms, and patterned relationships that defines" the
43 balances of power on the continent and between the centre and the borderlands (Ruggie
44 1982, 380; Porter 2018). Often, imperial orders are marked by concentric circles, in which
45 each ring represents a reduction in integration from the centre to the periphery – along with
46 ever-lower degrees of 'civilisation'. Decreasing integration corresponds with shrinking
47 adherence to the common body of law and diminishing possibilities of participating in the
48 decision-making process at the core (Watson 1992, 16; Münkler 2005, 17).

49
50 Christopher Browning's (2018) concept of "mindscape" is useful to further illustrate these
51 ordering processes. Based on an "idealisation of European space", the EU's "mindscape"
52 rests on four elements: 1) a teleological vision which imagines the Union at the "forefront of
53 an universal developmental model" and as quintessentially 'normal'; 2) the EU itself as the

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3 representation and culmination of a liberal civilising process; 3) with each layer of the
4 concentric circles the 'worlds' of risks, insecurity, instability is enhanced; and finally 4) a
5 "restricted and geocultural conception of Europeaness" (Browning 2018, 120 f.). The Union's
6 "mindscape places the EU at the apex of a hierarchy, dispensing wisdom" (Browning 2018,
7 121) and establishes "semipermeable borders through the export of rules and practices"
8 (Dimitrova 2012, 252).
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12 Such concentric circles could be ascribed to the EU in various ways. The core seems to be
13 made up of the original founding members of the EC (EU-6). A first ring inside the Union is
14 constituted by the Southern states and the new member states (who could not opt out of
15 anything) in the Eastern peripheries. An EU-ropean hierarchy of states establishes itself
16 regarding the impact propensity in EU policy shaping (Adler-Nissen 2017). A second ring is
17 the European Economic Area (EEA), which integrates non-EU members in the single market
18 (Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland). A third ring is the candidate and associated countries of
19 the Western Balkans and Turkey. The fourth ring is the target countries of the ENP (with
20 privileges for the countries of the Eastern Partnership). And the fifth ring is states outside the
21 ENP.
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27 The history of empires shows that authority and sovereignty have been "shared out, layered,
28 overlapping" in these polities (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 17). The EU's flexible governance
29 and ideas of differentiated integration mirrors these observations as well:
30

31 1) enhanced cooperation, which allows a group of states to accelerate integration in any
32 area without other members being involved; 2) opt-out clauses (e.g. for Denmark and the
33 UK in the Euro zone or Schengen area); or 3) transition periods within the accession
34 treaties (e.g. for free movement of labour within the single market for the new member
35 states of 2004). (Pänke 2013, 117 f.)
36

37 Therefore, the Union establishes "its rule in a radial manner through differing zones of order"
38 (Wæver 1997, 64). The Union establishes a hierarchical order via geopolitical modelling of
39 different layers of influence and power. The Union's strategic interest of promoting "a ring of
40 well governed states" in the neighbourhood (European Council 2003, 8), its multi-
41 dimensional governance and 'variable geometry' indicate such geopolitical considerations,
42 which are realised in processes of constant negotiations, in bilateral frameworks, between
43 the imperial core and its subjects.
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47 The EU's Imperial Discourse

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49 Vincent Della Salla argued that "every form of social organisation requires narratives to give
50 it meaning and to provide reason for being" (Della Salla 2010, 1, cited in Miskimmon 2018,
51 154). Empires construct their hierarchical order as legitimate with the help of supranational
52 narratives; in Barkey's words, they are "the glue that offered the spiritual cohesion of the elite
53 upper classes of the empire, encouraging their participation". She also reminds us that
54 "[l]egitimacy is not maintained just by the actions of the ruler, but also by the willingness of
55 those who are subordinate to believe in the legitimacy of the ruler's claims" (Barkey 2008,
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3 98-99). In contrast to nation states, imperial polities may not refer to constructions of ethnic
4 or religious homogeneity but, rather, have to establish 'community' on the base of more or
5 less abstract norms and values. Thus, the creation of a sense of belonging – a 'we' –
6 becomes even more relevant for imperial external behaviour in comparison with a nation
7 state's foreign policy. As dominant powers in a Foucauldian sense, empires maintain social
8 peace in nationally heterogenous environments, and have to produce ethical truths in the
9 shape of norms. These norms are defended "at the borders against barbarians and internally
10 against the rebellious" (Negri and Hardt, 10; Ungureanu, 2012, 19).

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15 EU legitimacy very much rests on its idea of an EU-ropean identity already expressed in the
16 *Declaration on European Identity* published in Copenhagen by the nine EC Foreign Ministers
17 in 1973 (and now codified in Art. 2 of the Lisbon Treaty):
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20 The Nine wish to ensure that the cherished values of their legal, political and moral order
21 are respected, and to preserve the rich variety of their national cultures. Sharing as they
22 do the same attitudes to life, based on a determination to build a society which measures
23 up to the needs of the individual, they are determined to defend the principles of
24 representative democracy, of the rule of law, of social justice — which is the ultimate goal
25 of economic progress — and of respect for human rights. (Bulletin of EC 1993)

26
27 The main objective of Europe's 'normative power' is the diffusion of these universally
28 understood core values of the European integration project among its member states and to
29 third states (Diez 2005). The EU's 'normative power' depends on its 'defining authority' being
30 capable of establishing what is perceived to be 'normal' in the neighbourhood and beyond
31 (Manners 2002). Hence, the Union's external relations are a direct consequence of its
32 striving for internal community by establishing a "set of political and social values and
33 principles in which [EU citizens] recognize themselves as a 'we'" (Cerutti 2008, 6). Imperial
34 discourse therefore clarifies the EU's vision and role to the member states and its citizens.
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39 The historical assuredness of the Union's 'civilising mission' in an enlightened spirit and the
40 non-negotiability of its normative contents (Del Sarto 2016) continue the 'mission civilisatrice'
41 of 19th century imperialism, which felt 'responsible' for its imperial subjects. Just as in Paul
42 Leroy-Beaulieu's 1874 book *De la colonisation chez les peuples modernes*, Europe is often
43 "contrasted to a backward colonial world" which needs to be enlightened (Burbank and
44 Cooper 2010, 287).
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48 The energy, drive, curiosity and goal-directed desire for improvement rooted in the
49 Enlightenment were opposed to the lethargy, conservatism and disorder, however
50 picturesque, of the non-European order. (Okey 2007, 1)

51
52 Robin Okey is describing the Habsburg empire's 'civilising mission' in Bosnia before the First
53 World War. Nevertheless, his descriptions are echoed in the 'liberal imperialism' of the EU's
54 current missions in the Balkans (Knaus and Martin 2003). The endeavour of imperial
55 bureaucracies is expressed in the general tone of system transfer during the EU's Eastern
56 enlargement of the 1990s. On their annual tours, EU representatives evaluated through
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3 “safeguards,” “benchmarks,” “monitoring,” and “screening,” the “progress” of the accession
4 candidates (Posener 2007, 94; Pänke 2015, 356).
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6 In this section I aimed to establish that the EU is a liberal empire. Both imperial features –
7 geopolitical modelling of hierarchical orders and supranational identity building – limit the
8 strategic options available to the metropolis. Imperial polities have to make sure that their
9 political orders are perceived as credible and legitimate – and due to their scale, these orders
10 cannot be sustained by relying solely on power capacities in a conventional, realist sense.
11 This will be further explored in the next section.
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15 **Norms and Interests in the EU’s ‘Dual Strategy’**

16
17 As the EU is a liberal empire, its foreign policies differ markedly from conventional, goal- and
18 possession-based state foreign policies with their clearly demarcated borders and their –
19 more or less – uncontested national identities in homogenised spatial contexts.¹ The second
20 part of this article briefly introduces the idea of ‘dual strategy’ in reference to the Roman
21 Empire. The three subsections establish the EU’s comprehensive strategy as the only
22 available strategic option for an imperial polity. First, Michael Williams’ concept of strategic
23 cultures is introduced to reconcile the constructivist and realist components within the EU’s
24 ‘dual strategy’ and discuss potential implications of changes in the EU’s strategic
25 environment for strategic thinking. Second, an analysis of the ENP reviews of 2011 and 2015
26 shows the inability of the Union to substantially alter its strategic outlook. Finally, the
27 importance of the normative component for supranational identity building and ordering
28 processes is highlighted. This inevitably creates a dilemma for EU foreign policy making, as
29 the EU’s ‘normative power’ has been severely weakened after the supportive ‘cultural field of
30 security’ (Williams 2007) has changed to an unfavourable geopolitical field of security.
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37 The unresolvable tension between norms and interests is well illustrated in Foster’s (2015,
38 11-12) reference to the original Roman understanding of empire. “Cicero distinguishes two
39 related yet theoretically separate ideas. These are the twin concepts of *imperium* and
40 *patrocinium*”. Only with a *patrocinium* – translatable as patronage and paternalism – to unite
41 its peoples and foster a collective identity is an empire likely to sustain its domination. Again,
42 empires in history oscillated between brutal *imperium* and utopian *cosmopolis* – occupying
43 an unclear position in between promoting “universalist co-operation, peace, and security –
44 but only so far as is permitted by the patronising interference of an established core
45 civilisation”. Norms and interests are in fact two sides of the same coin of an imperial
46 comprehensive strategy. For which, in her analysis of the bilateral action plans within the
47 Southern dimension of the ENP, Michelle Pace (2007) coined the term ‘dual strategy’. This
48 ‘dual strategy’ aims at the same time for an EU-isation² of the neighbourhood through norm
49 transfers *and* for the protection of the Union’s own security interests.
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56 **EU Strategy and Strategic Environments**

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3 The tension between interests and norms in EU policies is linked with the wider debate
4 between rationalists and constructivists regarding factors shaping international politics
5 (Kratochvil and Tulmets 2010, 15; Katzenstein and Keohane 1999; Pollack 2000; Sicurelli
6 2010). A fruitful attempt to reconcile rationalist and constructivist thought is Michael Williams'
7 study on "Culture and Security" (2007). Williams develops a framework that emphasizes the
8 links between culture, power, and strategy. Similar to ideas of the Copenhagen School, or
9 Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot's "international practices" (2011), Williams utilises Pierre
10 Bourdieu's theory of practice. He diagnoses that within the constructivists' focus on norms
11 and identities, "concepts of power and strategy have largely been lost" (Williams 2007, 1-2).
12 Bourdieu's 'structuralist constructivism' helps with "overcoming the divide between strategy
13 as pure instrumentality, and visions of culture as 'embedded', norm- or rule-governed action
14 that lack a sense of the strategic action of agents" (Williams 2007, 3). According to him,
15 agents are possessing a set of dispositions, semi-conscious orientations, which make them
16 act and react in certain ways (habitus). The 'cultural field of security' then describes the
17 dominant strategic thinking patterns of a specific temporal and spatial context structuring the
18 agents' habitus. Williams draws our attention to the fundamentally changed contexts of the
19 post-Cold War strategic environment which favoured the EU's liberal empire and its
20 'normative power' by establishing a liberal 'security field of democratic peace'.
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Unlike those who stress either the dominance of norms and values, or the absence of
power and strategy, I suggest that what took place in the 1990s was a reconfiguration of
the 'field' of security where military and material power, while remaining significant, were
repositioned within what might be called the 'cultural field of security' that privileged
cultural and symbolic forms of power. (Williams 2007, 2)

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

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

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

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

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

25 26 27 28 The EU's Quest for Strategy: ENP reviews 2011 and 2015

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

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

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47 However, "differentiation" and "flexibilisation" and a departure from a problematic one-size-
48 fits-all model remained key messages much in line with the 'old ENP' (see Schumacher
49 2012; Tömmel 2013). The promised 'more for more' principle basically indicates intensified
50 relations with willing ENP partners. "It must be a *differentiated approach*. Despite some
51 commonalities, no country in the region is the same so we must react to the specificities of
52 each of them" (European Commission 2011, 2). This section reemphasizes the bilateral
53 approach of the ENP in difference to the multilateralism of the Euro-Mediterranean
54 Partnership (see e.g. Del Sarto and Schumacher 2005).

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3 In 2011, the ENP was focussing on democracy promotion by, for example, intensifying
4 bottom-up initiatives with the aim of listening “not only to requests for support from partner
5 governments, but also to demands expressed by civil society” (European Commission 2011,
6 3). However, central instruments remained focussed on financial support (*money*), sectoral
7 cooperation and access to the single market (*markets*) as well as visa facilitating
8 arrangements to enhance *mobility*. The interest-driven components of the ‘dual strategy’
9 remained present, both in the concluded bilateral action plans and in local implementation of
10 EU policies (e.g. Pänke 2016). Therefore, the 2011 ENP review had shown an inability to
11 initiate a substantial change in the Union’s ‘dual strategy’.
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16 Throughout the EU’s institutional history, central and sensitive policy areas within ENP
17 remained vague. Examples include the formulation of concrete incentives of conditionality,
18 the cooperation with authoritarian regimes and the access of citizens of the target countries
19 to the Union’s labour markets. Areas of cooperation relevant to security – energy security,
20 migration management and counter-terrorism – remain largely unspecified.
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24 In 2015, newly elected president of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, declared, with
25 great fanfare, a revision of the EU’s neighbourhood policies during his first year of tenure.
26 Again, a revised ENP would need to take into consideration the often diverging interests of
27 its partner countries. In its language, the strategy paper of 2015 seeks to distance itself from
28 the last review in 2011, “recognising that not all partners aspire to EU rules and standards,
29 and reflecting the wishes of each country concerning the nature and focus of its partnership
30 with the EU” (European Commission 2015b, 2). The paper recommends a more pragmatic
31 approach, and cooperation with the neighbourhood “should be given a tighter, more relevant
32 focus” and “greater flexibility” (European Commission 2015b, 3). This sounds familiar, but
33 what it actually means becomes apparent a few lines later when there is mention of a “new
34 focus on stepping up work with our partners on security sector reform, conflict prevention,
35 counter-terrorism and anti-radicalisation policies” (European Commission 2015b, 3). The
36 Union aims for a more pragmatic, realist, and therefore de-politicised, approach to relations
37 with its neighbours.
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44 The Union rhetorically promises to concentrate on fewer but more relevant fields of
45 cooperation, which serve the interests of both sides. Furthermore, EU interests, particularly
46 in regional stability, security, and controlled migration, are now much more explicit than
47 before.
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50 Growing numbers of refugees are arriving at the European Union’s borders hoping to
51 find a safer future. Energy crises have underlined the EU’s need to work with
52 neighbours on energy security, including diversification of energy sources, routes and
53 suppliers. There have been acts of terror affecting the EU and the neighbourhood, most
54 recently the heinous terrorist attacks in Paris on 13th November. (European
55 Commission 2015b, 2)
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57 Similarly, the new security strategy, which was presented on 28 June 2016, shortly after the
58 British EU referendum, emphasises the need for clear strategy and concedes that “the idea
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3 that Europe is an exclusively 'civilian power' does not do justice to an evolving reality"
4 (European Council 2016, 4). Thus, both papers indicate a significant rhetorical change and
5 "turning point" (Schumacher 2016). The "political idea at the heart of the ENP – Europe's
6 transformative power" was replaced by a "new realism" (Furness and Schäfer 2015). The
7 Union now appears as a 'normal' security actor, which is significantly developing the
8 capacities to act upon more conventional models of geopolitical foreign policy making.
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12 Nevertheless, the 2015 ENP review appears much less depoliticised in substance. The
13 explicit emphasis on self-interest does not indicate that the Union has put its norms and
14 values on the back burner; the 'dual strategy' remained largely intact throughout. Repeated
15 references to democracy, the rule of law and human rights appear prominently in the new
16 review. Moreover, the Commission acknowledges the relevance of the ENP for the
17 construction and protection of its own EU-ropean identity: "The EU's own stability is built on
18 democracy, human rights and the rule of law and economic openness and the new ENP will
19 take stabilisation as its main political priority in this mandate" (European Union 2015, 2).
20 Norm transfer consequently needs to play a decisive role in the EU's external behaviour.
21 "[R]egulatory convergence" and "harmonisation" in trade and environmental policies remain
22 central objectives of the ENP (European Commission 2015, 10, 13, 14).
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28 Similarly, the new Global Strategy indicates a continuation of the Union's 'dual strategy'. The
29 paper emphasizes at the same time the common interests of EU citizens as well as the
30 transfer of norms and values. The central concept of the Union's new strategy – "principled
31 pragmatism" – is, in essence, a re-formulation of the very nature of the familiar 'dual strategy'
32 by promoting norms and interests at the same time, as the Union will be "guided by clear
33 principles. These stem as much from a realistic assessment of the strategic environment as
34 from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world" (European Council 2016, 4, 16). EU
35 foreign policy continues to be based on its fundamental liberal principles, as the paper
36 emphasises its will to "invest in win-win solutions, and move beyond the illusion that
37 international politics can be a zero-sum game" (European Council 2016, 4).
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42 Upon closer inspection, the language in both 2015 documents reveals a continued
43 commitment towards the transformative appeal established during Eastern enlargement. The
44 Council demands in its conclusions on the ENP review, a "comprehensive approximation
45 with [...] EU legislation and standards", and at the same time the need "to strengthen the
46 security dimension of the ENP" (European Council 2015). The ongoing tensions between the
47 two drivers of EU foreign policy and the EU's quest for strategy are hardly surprising. Both
48 components are constantly present in the Union's 'dual strategy' and mirrored, as is evident
49 throughout the revisions of the ENP in the last decade, in the continued tension between a
50 normative democratisation agenda and the formulation of rational self-interests.
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55 EU Strategy and Identity Building

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3 As argued above, one of the key objectives of empire is to export political order to the
4 peripheries with the objective of establishing credibility and durability. Empires do have
5 material interests – among them the extraction (or provision) of various kinds of resources in
6 the peripheries – but they have to balance these against their normative survival strategy.
7 Thus, empires follow their rational interests, but are less free to do so than nation states are.
8 Another way of looking at this would be the application of Watson's (1992, 14) idea of the
9 'raison de système', a counterpoint to 'raison d'état', which is defined as "the idea that it pays
10 to make the system work" within its given normative boundaries.
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15 The outcomes of this dilemma are clearly observable in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood,
16 where the Union has material interests in energy security, hindering migration, and fighting
17 terrorism, but is always in danger of losing its EU-niversal appeal and credibility in the
18 perspective of local actors, thereby destabilising the established hierarchical order. The EU's
19 export of political practices and habits has created "dependable expectations of peaceful
20 change" (Adler 2010) but also raised concerns about applications of 'double standards'. This
21 is similar to imperial governance in the past, e.g. Austria-Hungary in Bosnia (e.g. Okey
22 2007). Empires legitimise themselves by stabilising and appeasing their peripheries. They
23 therefore have to invest a considerable share of their wealth into the development of
24 neighbouring regions. It is a key objective of an empire to make its peripheries as interested
25 as the imperial core in the continuation of the empire (Münkler 2005; Pänke 2013, 115).
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31 Empires are furthermore primarily concerned with maintaining their internal cohesion and
32 legitimacy. Their foreign policies are therefore less "the expression of interests in the external
33 environment" (Ungureanu 2012, 26). In a similar way, Adler and Barnett (1998, 43) suggest
34 that regional integration projects can function as security community-building institutions as
35 they provide "sites of socialisation and learning [which] foster the creation of a regional
36 'culture' around commonly held attributes". Again, the EU has successfully linked these
37 attributes to a liberal ideology claiming EU-niversality.
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41 This idea suggests a concentration on the intersubjective construction of social reality, which
42 emphasises the impact of identity on interests. Compared to nation states, an imperial polity
43 therefore has to adopt a different strategy to project its power; power then means – as
44 highlighted by Filippo Andreatta and Lorenzo Zambarnardi (2017, 75) – "to construct by
45 persuasion particular normative frameworks and meanings at the social level and to change
46 actors' identities and interests accordingly". They usefully separate notions of 'destructive
47 power' within realist theory from 'productive power' in liberal scholarship, and crucially
48 'integrative power' – as 'the social construction of Europe'. Their ideas resonate in Williams'
49 attempt to reconcile norms and interests, culture and security. Imperial discourses then
50 appear as reflexive processes which are:
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55 concerned with the *production* of legitimate forms of subjectivity that performs subtle yet
56 powerful disciplinary functions. In this process, Kantian liberalism generates specific
57 practices of identity and substantial, if often overlooked, forms of power that can become
58 the basis of strategies exercised by dominant actors. (Williams 2007, 5)

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3 The Union's 'normative power' thus becomes part of a process reproducing a 'we'. The EU
4 therefore operates within a field of identity, understood as "a relational structure" in which
5 various forms of *inclusion* become crucial. A key part of EU power lies in this articulation of
6 an identity "that any state could, and indeed should, aspire toward"; according to Williams
7 (2007, 43), "[t]hese processes are not just sociological puzzles: they are overtly political
8 practices, practices entailing and enabling the exercise of considerable power". In this
9 reading, the EU's ENP, with its normative and self-interested components, coalesces as a
10 'multi-layered strategy' which appeals at the same time to states and entities inside and
11 outside the imperial polity "to recognize their true identities as part of a [...] community whose
12 principles are chosen and freely accepted, not dictated" (Williams 2007, 60) – despite the
13 subordination of these states and entities due to an imbalance of power.
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19 Thus, the EU's 'dual strategy' qualifies as a proper strategy and aspires, at the same time, to
20 the EU-isation of the neighbourhood through approximation of norms *and* the defense of its
21 rational self-interests. EU-isation is mainly about identity construction, a long term process of
22 harmonisation and norm convergence. Such norm transfers and constant norm
23 communication stabilise the Union itself and the neighbourhood as well, but crucially they
24 create a 'we' and therefore legitimise the European integration project overall. ENP then
25 "acts as a disciplinary structure whereby the moral community is maintained and reproduced"
26 (Williams 2007, 51) – the establishment of this imagined "civilizational community of practice"
27 (Adler 2010) under the reality of asymmetrical power distributions exposes the EU's
28 normative imperialism. At the same time the EU asserts its rational self-interest. In the
29 neighbourhood these interests remain consistent and focus on conventional security threats,
30 energy security, and migration management. In this second reading, ENP follows neorealist
31 assumptions of 'milieu-shaping' in the neighbourhood and does create a bufferzone (Del
32 Sarto and Schumacher 2005; Hyde-Price 2006). Both objectives are inseparable in imperial
33 strategies.
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41 **Conclusions**

42 Through critical engagement with EU scholarship, new imperial history, and EU strategy
43 documents of 2011 and 2015, I have tried to demonstrate that the Union, due to its imperial
44 nature, has to adopt a 'dual strategy'. European external relations are therefore deeply
45 enmeshed with the construction of an EU identity, as is typical of imperial polities. This article
46 aimed to show the added analytical value of the imperial paradigm to explain the perceived
47 strategic limitations of the EU. As an imperial polity the Union has to adopt a comprehensive
48 'dual strategy' which needs to integrate large scale geopolitical core-periphery models,
49 narratives to establish a supranational identity, and conventional rational security and
50 economic self-interests. Tensions between the norm- and interest-driven components of
51 imperial strategies are therefore unavoidable and will continue to shape the EU's strategic
52 outlook despite changing international contexts, as in 2011 and 2015. Thus, the perception of
53 a European "holiday from strategy" (Williams 2007, 130) and calls for strengthening either of
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3 the components of the EU's strategy are deeply misleading. Rather, we have to revisit our
4 understanding of strategy, which crucially depends on the actor in question and the nature of
5 its strategic environment.
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8 The EU's 'normative power' provides an indispensable tool to build and consolidate the
9 necessary consensus among member states, and also to strengthen the overall "legitimacy
10 of the integration project by externalising 'common' norms and values" (Pänke 2016, 196).
11 Therefore, adopting a merely rationalist foreign policy – along with the formulation of an
12 explicitly securitised set of interests – would furthermore weaken the legitimacy and
13 credibility of the European project. In the last years the Union has rather failed to reassure
14 the world and, more importantly, its own citizens of the sustainability of the integration
15 project. Nevertheless, EU foreign policy does face a dilemma. The imperial 'dual strategy'
16 qualifies as good strategy if the prevalent strategic environment is favourable. After the
17 geopolitical turn, the impact propensity in the neighbourhood appears much diminished.
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20 Reading the EU as a liberal empire – furthermore – reminds us of the ambiguity of the EU's
21 'normative power' – the undeniable tensions between the emancipatory quality of EU norms,
22 and their imperialist undertones within the hierarchical framework of the EU-ropean order.
23 "As it happens, the pursuit of 'liberal order' is not just an antidote to the current difficulties
24 suffered by the international system but a source of them" (Porter 2018). Still, the Union's
25 liberal norms establish a more convincing base for inclusive societies and economic
26 prosperity than exclusive and protectionist nationalist agendas. Bearing this in mind, the
27 longevity of the EU will depend to a great extent on its capacity to play to the strengths of any
28 imperial power: governmental adaptability and flexibility, based on a consistently applied
29 normative supranational ideology. Currently, the EU's 'normative power' should perhaps be
30 more actively projected inside the Union, rather than outside it.
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41 ¹ A few nation states, particularly large states like the United States, Russia or China with their
42 federated arrangements, indeed share some features of imperial foreign policy making with the EU.
43 This comes as no surprise, as US, Russian, and Chinese politics and foreign policies have been
44 discussed as different manifestations of imperialism in the literature. The concept of 'hybrid empire'
45 captures the reality of their external behaviour quite well. For the USA see e.g. Negri & Hardt 2000; for
46 Russia see e.g. Morozov 2013, Oskanian 2018.

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