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Conflicting Role Conceptions? The European Union in Global Politics[1]

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This article utilizes role theory for analysing the role(s) of the European Union (EU) in global politics. Specifically addressing the interplay of the EU's own role perception and the role expectations held by other actors, the article contributes two case studies of the role(s) of the EU in relation to two important but different actor groupings—Eastern Europe including Russia and the ACP countries in the developing world, respectively. The analysis points to the tensions that exist between self-perceptions and the perceptions of the EU's counterparts in Eastern Europe and the developing world, and how these tensions influences the interaction between the actors.

The European Union increasingly aspires to play a leading role in global politics. It engages itself in negotiations, cooperation schemes, and conflict resolution processes with a vast number of actors utilizing an expanding set of tools. Due to its unique nature, the EU is often said to be different great power. The degree to which it succeeds in its great power ambitions is a complex matter, however, related to both the character of the issue-area in focus (for instance in terms of EU competence and resources and the relative strength of other actors) and how it is perceived by others on the international scene.

The aim of this article is to investigate the EU's role(s) as an international actor. Utilizing role theory, we analyse both the EU's own role perception and the role expectations held by outsiders. We are interested in three interrelated aspects—the constitutive elements of a common EU role conception, possible role competition, and the degree of coherence between role conceptions and perceived role performance. Special attention is paid to the alleged normative power role of the EU and how, if at all, this role is reflected in outsiders' perceptions. We include case studies of the Union's roles in its relations with two important actor constellations: its eastern neighbors, notably Russia, and its ''partners'' in the developing world, specifically the ACP countries (the African, Caribbean, and Pacific states). We posit that the complex and dynamic interplay between an actor's own role conception, on the one hand, and the structurally guided role expectations of others, on the other hand, constitutes a main advantage of role theory and speaks directly to the issue of integrating foreign policy analysis and international relations theory.

[1] This article is a revised version of a paper that we presented at the ISA workshop ''Integrating Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through Role Theory,'' New Orleans, February 2010. We thank the participants of the workshop and three anonymous reviewers for FPA for constructive comments and criticism. Parts of the research for this article have also been published in Bengtsson and Elgström 2011.

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We emphasize the potential impact of outsiders' expectations, of perceived legitimacy and of role coherence on the effectiveness of EU role performance. Incoherence between self-perceptions and others' perceptions of EU actions may create tensions that influence the interaction between the parties and that hinder EU efforts to spread values and norms. We also address the issue of material versus ideational constitutive elements of roles and link role theory to leadership analysis.

Role Theory

Roles refer to patterns of expected, appropriate behaviour. Role *conceptions* encompass both an actor's own considerations of its place, position, and appropriate behaviour *vis-à-vis* others in a given social environment (cf. Wendt 1999; Harnisch, Frank, and Maull 2011) and the expectations, or role *prescriptions*, of other actors, as signalled through language and action (cf. Holsti 1970:238-239; Kirste and Maull 1996). Role *performance* is the actual policy behaviour of the actor in this social context. An actor's role conception tends to be persistent, but is reshaped through confrontations with others' expectations, for example during international negotiations (Aggestam 2006:16). In such contexts, anticipated attributes of a social role are constantly in a process of interpretation by the role beholder at the same time as external expectations are shaped by the actor's role performance.

An actor's foreign policy, while being to a large extent driven by internal ideas and processes, is also partly shaped in response to others' expectations and reactions in an adaptive fashion and thus represents a socialization game (Thies 2010), displaying characteristics of a learning process (Harnisch 2010). Thus, others' role prescriptions, related to actor characteristics and to the social context at hand, contribute to the development of specific international roles. Third-party understandings of an actor and its roles form a part of an intersubjective international structure that help shape the practices of this actor; in a dynamic fashion, it is the *recognition* by others that impact on future role performance, in turn affecting future recognition (Bengtsson 2009a: chapter 2). For example, external expectations of leadership, linked to a formal position (holding the Chair) or to great power status, inevitably have to be responded to—whatever you do or don't do will have consequences for your position in that particular environment. Vice versa, an actor that aspires to be a leader needs followers; it has to be perceived as a legitimate provider of guidance: ''/a/ leader is not only a party that fulfils theoretical criteria; a leader is one that is perceived as a leader'' (Gupta and van der Grijp 2000:67).

In the following empirical part, we start by detailing and assessing a role closely associated with the European Union: that of a normative great power. In the following sections, we scrutinize the specific role conceptions and the perceived role performance of the EU in relation to two distinct geographical and political environments, those of Eastern Europe/Russia and the ACP states. Here, we discuss how interaction between the parties has been affected by partly incoherent perceptions of EU behaviour.

The EU as a Normative Great Power

In both academic and political circles, it has become standard practice to label the European Union a normative great power. Politicians commonly refer to the normatively desirable values that the EU stands for—such as peace, human rights and democracy—and often also include a normative mission in spreading these values to the world outside of the Union (Bengtsson 2008, 2009a). In academic circles, following Dûchene (1971), Manners (2002) and others, the notion

of EU actorness as normative has been readily adopted [although Manner's approach has recently been subject to criticism and revisions in light of developments since 2002 (Sjursen 2006; Aggestam 2008)]. In the context of role theory, we can thus posit that the notion of a normative great power is a generalized role referred to not only by EU representatives themselves but also by academic analysts. Much less is, however, known about how politicians and diplomats from outside the EU evaluate the Union's normative aspirations. To form a conceptual basis for the following empirical analysis, this section seeks to critically examine the role of ''normative great power'' and link it to the issue of leadership.

What is a Normative Great Power?

In short, a normative great power is an actor that influences the thinking of other actors in the international system rather than acting through coercive means to achieve its goals. The normative great power seeks to promote values that are deemed desirable by the actor and gains acceptance for this ambition by other parties and holds the ability, to paraphrase Manners (2002:240; Manners and Whitman 2003:389), to shape conceptions of ''normality.'' By publicly promoting core values, defining key concepts and labeling—framing—actors and processes in certain ways, an actor may come to occupy a key position in a given policy area. This logic runs close to Joseph Nye's notion of soft power, based on persuasion rather than coercion (Nye 2005, 2008), but also underlines the potential long-term, ideational implications of actions. What is ultimately decisive is whether other actors internalize the ideas and conceptual meanings put forth—in essence, if there are signs of ideational impact—which in turn has effects for the further power projection of relevant actors. In the context of this article, it is particularly important to note that not all attempts at normative power projection succeed; not all actors that want to be normative great powers are seen as such by outsiders. An actor attempting to be a normative great power may hold a role conception as ethically and normatively superior, but this need not be mirrored by others' role expectations.

The policy instruments used in the process of normative power projection can be of material and immaterial kind, or more concretely, civilian as well as military in character. In consequence, the common distinction between civilian, military and normative power is misleading—whereas civilian and military power refer to tools of statecraft, normative power concerns the ambition/agenda of an actor (cf. Sjursen 2006:170). ''Normative'' is thus related to civilizing, but need not rely (only) on civilian means. A case in point concerns the EU, which has a normative agenda in the sense that it encompasses a set of core values, notably peace, democracy and rule of law, and an ambition to spread these to the rest of the world (Bengtsson 2008, 2009a). Neither these core values nor the ambition to spread them are uniquely European, however, but shared by other actors, notably the United States (another potential normative great power). The setup of instruments for attempting to promote these values is many times quite different however, with the EU taking on more of a civilian approach and the US a more comprehensive approach.

Playing the Role of Normative Great Power

In line with the reasoning above, being a normative great power is not necessarily related to a specific form of instruments but can potentially make use of civilian as well as military means and resources—the ability to shape ''conceptions of normality'' is not *a priori* founded on a certain kind of power base. The analysis in this article thus rests on a fundamental distinction between the EU as a

civilian power—in the sense that it mainly has diplomatic and economic instruments at its disposal—and a normative/civilizing/ethical power.

Two points regarding power need further elaboration at this juncture. One is that it can be hypothesized that a combination of power resources may positively contribute to the success of power projection. Actors who are in possession not only of rhetorical means but also in a position to use, for instance, international institutions, technical assistance, or military practices to further their interests can be expected to have greater preconditions for influence than an actor that can merely draw a few power bases. This differentiation becomes all the more interesting as it can be expected that different forms of power may reinforce each other. By way of an example, the success of the EU in the enlargement field is often attributed to the ability of the EU to combine socialization (expressing European values and practices) and positive conditionality (the promise of further material rewards if adjustments are made); in parts of the world where membership is a non-issue, the EU is in a much weaker position.

The second—and contrary—point is that different means may actually contradict each other. For instance, the use of military or coercive economic means may impact negatively on the recognition by others of the ideas promoted by the actor in question. This is obviously sometimes the case in American foreign policy, for instance in Kosovo or Iraq. Regarding the EU, it thus becomes an intriguing question whether—in the eyes of others—the development of military means for external operations through the creation of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) in 1999 weakens the ideational impact of the EU. Drawing on the idea by Manners (2002:252) that what ultimately contributes to the international profile of the EU is not what it says or what it does but what it is, such militarization may contribute to a perception of the EU as becoming more of a conventional power in international politics. Zielonka, for one, argues that this development weakens the EU's distinct profile of having a civilian international identity (Zielonka 1998:229; cf. Manners and Whitman 2003:389). This process is further brought about by the increasing territorialization that the Schengen arrangement and the search for internal security imply (Bengtsson 2009b).

Which of these two logics that ultimately is at play for the normative great power is an open question. We can, however, conclude that any process of power projection feeds into the status of the normative great power through the perceptions and recognition by others, either strengthening or weakening its power.

Normative Power and International Leadership

To be a normative power requires leadership. Leadership may be defined as ''an asymmetrical relationship of influence in which one actor guides or directs the behavior of others towards a certain goal over a certain period of time'' (Underdal 1994). This definition signifies that the leader needs to have a *vision*, or at least clear objectives, which are to guide its interactions with others in negotiations. The values and ideas that are enshrined in the notion of the EU as a normative great power may constitute such a vision. On the other hand, all leadership is not *intellectual*—leadership performed by providing visions and inspiration and by constructive formulation of problems and solutions (Young 1991). *Structural* leadership is closely linked to the material and immaterial resources of the leader, as translated into negotiating strength. *Entrepreneurial* leadership takes place by the use of informational advantages and by shaping procedure and institutional frames.

Leadership is basically a relationship between a leader and followers (Underdal 1994:181). This relationship is shaped by the responsiveness and demand of

followers as well as by the supply of leadership services by a potential leader (cf. Tallberg 2006). The emphasis on the need for leaders to have followers brings other actors' expectations and perceptions to the fore. Other governments have to acknowledge the leader's vision of international order but also the values and regime principles that it seeks to pursue (Nabers 2008). More generally, leadership aspirations have to be perceived as *legitimate*. Legitimacy is ''a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions'' (Hurd 1999). Legitimacy is typically seen as based on ''inputs'' (the extent to which decisions are deemed to reflect the will of the people or the correctness of the decision-making process) or ''outputs'' (the extent to which decisions are satisfying the demands of the constituents). It may, however, also rest on perceptions of fairness or, more generally, of an evaluation of the values and norms a certain actor is associated with (Hurd 2007:69-70; Cottrell 2009). If an actor is widely perceived to act in accordance with principles of fairness, and if it is seen as driven by widely accepted ideas and norms, its leadership potential increases.

The notion of what we propose to call ''ideational legitimacy'' creates a link between the EU's potential leadership role in specific international negotiations and its role as a normative power. While EU legitimacy in international negotiations may partly be due to outputs produced (linking favorable outcomes to the Union's contribution of resources or to its prominence in the decision-making process), we posit that its reputation as a normative power may be an equally valuable asset. EU leadership may thus be based on external expectations that associate EU action with fairness and the promotion of noble goals.

Case Study I: The EU, the Eastern Neighborhood, and Russia[2]

Point of Departure: Normative Superiority and Strategic Partnership

While the impact of EU external policy on a global scale is a matter of considerable dispute, in the European context, the EU is often acknowledged as a normative great power. This is most obvious in the enlargement process, which is practically defined by perceived EU normative superiority and leadership role in the transformation of candidate countries. This case study deals with EU interaction in the greater European context beyond the enlargement circle and seeks to demonstrate what the substantive components of the normative power role are, how the EU is perceived by other actors in the area, and to what extent the EU can be said to perform a leadership role. As will be evident shortly, EU interaction follows two principally different but interrelated tracks. One concerns the neighboring states within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the other the so-called strategic partnership with Russia. Let us take a brief look at the development and institutional setup of each.

The European Neighbourhood Policy can be traced back to a communication from External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten and High Representative Javier Solana to the Council in 2002 about the need for the EU to ''fully exploit the new opportunities created by enlargement to develop relations with our neighbours'' (Patten and Solana 2002:1). At the time labelled ''Wider Europe'' and focused on Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia, as thoughts progressed, the countries south and east of the Mediterranean were also included and the ENP took form, formally endorsed by the Council in 2004. The Council then also

[2] The empirical material for this section primarily consists of official documents from the EU, Russia, and relevant Eastern European countries as well as speeches by and printed interviews with EU representatives and leaders of the various countries. Additionally, approximately ten semi-structured interviews have been conducted with EU officials and representatives of the Russian mission to the EU.

decided to include Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the process, thereby sending a significant signal about increased EU engagement in the Southern Caucasus. Russia, on the other hand, voluntarily opted out of the process. The ENP is thus a common framework for sixteen partners, but substantive cooperation essentially rests on individual so-called Action Plans that mirror the rather diverse nature of cooperation—varying from a relatively speaking advanced level (as in the case of EU–Ukraine interaction) to more or less non-existent (as in the case of the relationship between the EU and Belarus, which has yet to conclude an Action Plan to put the ENP into effect at all) (Bengtsson 2009a: chapters 3–4, 6). Recent developments display a turn for regional considerations within the ENP, with the so-called Eastern Partnership established in 2009 for the six ENP countries in focus here (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine).

EU–Russian cooperation has a longer—and indeed more complex—history. While still based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement from 1997, practical cooperation is based on the four Common Spaces agreed to in 2003 and implemented from 2005 onwards, covering economic matters, societal cooperation, and internal and external security matters. The relationship is quite heavily institutionalized, with the biannual summit between the Russian President and the EU Troika thus far the politically most important channel for interaction. Negotiations for a renewed partnership and cooperation agreement are under way, but progress slowly.

The EU's Role Conception in Relations with the Eastern Neighborhood

In essence, the EU's own role conception in relation to the Eastern neighborhood (here Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) can be summarized as a *normatively superior, potent leader*. This fundamentally rests on three interrelated dimensions. One concerns the EU as *the primary contributor to the European peace*. This is mainly linked to the successful Eastern enlargement—''the greatest contribution to sustainable stability and security on the European continent,'' to quote Commission President Romano Prodi (2002)—and points to the leading role of the EU in the transformation of post–Cold War Europe. Along the same lines, External Relations Director General Eneko Landaburu later stated: ''We are a 'pole of attraction' for our region—countries along our borders actively seek closer relations with us'' (Landaburu 2006:5), and in the same vein, ENP Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner has noted the EU's ''growing role as an anchor of stability and modernization, which is the logical consequence of … enlargement'' (Ferrero-Waldner 2006b). A second aspect focuses on the EU as *a value community, centred on a set of core norms*. Judging by official EU documents, most recently in the preamble of the Lisbon Treaty, a list of central EU values encompassing democracy, human rights, freedom, equality and the rule of law can be found (Lisbon Treaty 2007). These values can be recognized from enlargement negotiations and are at the centre of the conditionality of the ENP.

The third element is about *the moral imperative for promoting these values* in the neighborhood as well as on a global scale (Ferrero-Waldner 2006a). In short, this can be interpreted as the civilizing element of the normative great power—the EU seeks to export its ideals and practices to outside parties against the background of the perceived success of the EU, the need in the Eastern neighborhood for further security and welfare, and the moral obligation of the EU to help out. The ENP framework, built on socialization and positive conditionality, is an obvious illustration of how EU role conception is expressed and translated into regional policy. In conclusion, then, EU representatives consider the EU a normative great power in relation to the Eastern neighborhood (Bengtsson 2008, 2009a).

The Eastern Neighbors' Role Conceptions of the EU

To what extent is this role conception mirrored by the countries at the Eastern rim of the EU? In short, there is no uniform conception among the six counties in focus here. A fundamental distinction can be drawn, however, between Belarus and the other five countries. Belarus is not acknowledging the normative superiority of the EU and takes little or no interest in concrete cooperation with the EU. The EU has attempted a number of times to draw on its standard incentives—promises of better trade agreements, substantial economic assistance, easing up of travel restrictions—if improvements in the fields of democracy and rule of law were to take place, but has so far been unable to induce change in Belarus. Explanations for the lack of EU success can be found in the close relationship between Belarus and Russia and, importantly, in that the developments the EU asks for (democratization, in short) clearly would jeopardize the power standing of the Lukashenko government.

The perception of President Lukashenko as regards the EU is at odds with the self-image of the EU, as the following interview passage displays:

> Belarus helps to protect its [EU] borders in the East. We catch most of the illegal migrants and criminals, streaming into the EU from the East and send them back to where they come from. We use a considerable amount of financial resources for this end and form a protective barrier for Europe.... And how does the EU thank us for that? It imposes economic sanctions and withdraws preferential tariffs. (Die Welt 2007)

In essence, the Belarussian role conception of the EU is in open conflict with the self-image of the EU, and the role performance of the EU in relation to Belarus is weak—there are no signs of effective EU leadership and policy impact.

In sharp contrast, the other five countries readily recognize both the great power status of the EU and the attractiveness of its normative agenda. This means that the civilizing mission of the EU is perceived in positive, albeit not unproblematic, terms as a contribution to a desirable transformation (at least if judging from government policy responses) and that the EU is the undisputed leader in the different relationships. As a further sign of ideological impact, the values promoted by the EU can also be found at the centre of regional initiatives by the states themselves, such as the GUAM initiative by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova in 2006, and in the ''Borjomi Declaration'' by the Georgian and Ukrainian Presidents in 2005, establishing the Community of Democratic Choice (Bengtsson 2009a: chapter 4).

Having said that, there are interesting variations among the five countries. Ukraine stands out as the country that has the most advanced relationship with the EU, not only in terms of comprehensive and close bilateral cooperation with the EU, but also in that the Ukrainian government publicly and repeatedly motivates policy reorientation and reforms with EU standards and requirements and the long-term goal of EU membership. Furthermore, Ukraine has frequently aligned itself with CFSP statements by the EU; a sign, it could be argued, of both value compatibility and EU leadership. The same kind of positive recognition of the EU applies to Georgia; the Saakashvili government has consistently pointed to the long-term goal of European integration as a basis for its reform policy, and the authoritative ''National Security Concept'' explicitly points out EU membership as ''an important guarantee for [Georgia's] economic and political development'' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2006). The concrete role of the EU in the form of its rule of law mission to Georgia (EUJUST THEMIS, 2004–2005) is further acknowledged—it ''has been instrumental in fostering Georgia's reforms in a variety of spheres'' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia 2006). In addition, the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia made the

Georgian government publicly express its European orientation and appreciation of European solidarity as six EU leaders, among them the French President holding the rotating EU Presidency at the time, went to Tblisi to publicly express the EU's support for Georgia. As the EU also negotiated the cease-fire with Russia, led the post-conflict donor conference for Georgian reconstruction, and initiated a civilian monitoring mission (EUMM, still in operation), it can be concluded that the EU provided leadership of both intellectual and structural nature in this context. Subsequent statements by Georgian representatives underline the legitimacy of EU leadership (Bengtsson 2009a).

As for the remaining three countries in the group—Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova—the same kind of role conception as regards the EU applies. The main differences compared to Ukraine and Georgia is on the one hand that domestic developments have not progressed as far and that the three countries lack administrative capacity and other resources to interact with the EU in the same way as Ukraine and Georgia and, on the other, that the three countries (especially Armenia and Azerbaijan) actively entertain their relationships with Russia (Bengtsson 2009a, ch. 4). In short, it can be concluded that all five countries under consideration here share the role conception of the EU as an *anchor of security and prosperity*, but that the degree to which EU action has induced manifest policy change varies.

The EU's Role Conception in Relation to Russia

Turning now to the EU–Russia relationship, the EU's own role conception to a large extent builds on the elements of normative leadership that are of relevance in the Eastern European context. This means that from an EU perspective, the EU's role is to promote ideas and frameworks of interaction that reflect EU core values and contribute to liberal democracy, good governance, market economy, etc. (against the background that these values do not hitherto characterize Russian politics and society). This role conception is however compromised by the fact that the EU also recognizes its dependence on Russia, especially in the energy sector. In consequence, the EU has to balance its normative ambitions with the realities of interdependence. Moreover, as EU representatives readily acknowledge the great power status of Russia—reflected in the notion of ''strategic partnership''—another aspect of EU's own role conception is that of *great power partner* to Russia in global political matters, such as combating terrorism or trying to improve the situation in the Middle East through the UN quartet. In other matters—not least regarding European/regional security, Georgia again being a primary example—the two powers are at odds as the EU's role conception as a promoter of values are in opposition to Russian interests. In conclusion, in this complex and partly contradictory context, the EU's own role conception is that of a liberal (and hence normative) great power that interacts with a Russia that is driven by a different set of interests and values. As explained by Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner: ''while we pursue our common interests with Russia, we must nevertheless remain clear and firm on democracy and human rights...'' (Ferrero-Waldner 2008).

Russia's Role Conception of the EU

In short, Russia's role conception of the EU rests on two partly contradictory elements. On the one hand, Russia recognizes the EU as a great power and strategic partner with which Russia enjoys a set of common interests, not least regarding international security, and a bilateral relationship based on advanced interdependence. As President Putin noted in late 2006:

> In the past few years, the EU and Russia have become important political and economic partners... I do not see any areas that are not open to equal, strategic co-operation based on common objectives and values... We will not be able to turn a new leaf in the history of our cooperation if we succumb to fear of growing interdependence. (Putin 2006)

After the Russia–EU summit in Mafra, Portugal, in late 2007, he concluded that the ''main thing is that the immutability of the strategic partnership between the European Union and the Russian Federation could be reaffirmed'' (Putin 2007). This is significant not only because it mirrors EU's own role conception, but also because here are obvious signs of a changing Russian understanding of EU actorness, in recent years attaching much more weight to the EU than some years back, while still considering individual member-states significant in their own respects (Bengtsson 2004, 2009a: chapter 6).

On the other hand, the Russian leadership also perceives the EU as a competitive actor with a clearly normative agenda that contradicts Russian key interests, interferes in domestic Russian affairs, and is insensitive to Russian uniqueness in a historical perspective. In the eyes of Russian leaders, EU claims for ideological leadership are not seen as legitimate—as argued by President Putin: ''When speaking of common values, we should also respect the historical diversity of European civilization. It would be useless and wrong to try to force artificial 'standards' on each other'' (Putin 2006). In consequence, the EU support for the Orange revolution in Ukraine, its siding with Georgia in the conflict culminating in the August war of 2008, and its criticism of the domestic political situation inside Russia, to take but a few examples, contribute to the Russian recognition of EU as a *normatively aggressive actor* (Bengtsson 2009a: chapter 6).

Comparing EU Role Conceptions in the Greater Europe

What do these short analyses tell us about EU role conceptions? Three main conclusions can be drawn. First, the EU tries to play the role of the normative great power in all its greater European relations ranging from Russia to Eastern Europe, indeed also in the Middle East and North Africa. It portrays itself as a promoter of a set of core values and a potent and leading actor that can make a difference in the greater European context.

Second, this role conception is shared by a majority of the neighbors under analysis here. Thus, primarily Ukraine and Georgia, but also Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, repeatedly express their commitments to EU values and interact with the EU through institutions designed by the EU, founded on socialization and positive conditionality. In contrast, the role conception held by Belarus is one of the EU as hostile and disrespectful. Russia's EU conception is ambiguous, involving both the image of the EU as a great power partner and as a normative competitor.

Third, in terms of role performance, the EU utilizes a spectrum of resources, for instance institutional power through the design of the ENP and structural power in the form of economic and technical assistance. Perhaps most importantly, at least in a long-term perspective, is the discursive power of arguing, framing, and attaching meaning to a set of ambiguous concepts, such as democracy, human rights, and good governance—indeed, attempting to shape conceptions of ''normality.'' The EU also utilizes compulsory power in relation to individual countries, generally regarding Belarus in our sample (in the form of a visa ban), but also towards Russia after the Georgia war (breaking off negotiations). Expressed differently, the EU exercises intellectual, structural, and entrepreneurial leadership in relation to the eastern European neighborhood, although with somewhat varying degree of strength, and with the clear exception

of Belarus, a case in which the EU thus far has been unable to have any significant impact. In relation to Russia, the EU leadership is much weaker—if present at all—both due to Russian great power strength, EU concerns over energy dependence and because individual EU members pursue national policies that undermine a common approach.

Case Study II: The EU, the ACP, and Economic Partnership Agreement Negotiations[3]

The History of the EPA Negotiations

For almost 30 years, the so-called Lomé conventions constituted the most significant part of the EU's relations with the Third World (Ravenhill 1992; Grilli 1993; Holland 2002). These aid and trade agreements were considered to be of major importance for the development efforts of a large number of countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP). Trade was in these agreements used as an instrument of growth and development, notably by abandoning the otherwise sacred General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) principle of reciprocity. The ACP group thus enjoyed non-reciprocal preferential access to the EU market. The Lomé regime mirrored a European partnership identity that emphasized the special ties between the EC and its less developed partners (many of which were former colonies of EC members), a special responsibility for the EC and interdependence between rich and poor. The result was a rhetorical emphasis on Lomé being a contractual relationship between equal partners (Ravenhill 1992; Grilli 1993:93; Elgström 2005:188).

In the early 1990s, a growing scepticism over the effectiveness of the existing Lomé regime developed. As a result, the EU's positions in the negotiations that led to the Cotonou agreement in February 2000 reflected a new normative framework (Holland 2002:186-189). The Union now wholeheartedly adopted liberal principles of free trade and democracy. The concrete consequences were the EU's insistence on the abandonment of the non-reciprocity, on WTO compatibility, and, in general, on the introduction of a trade regime based on liberal principles and on good governance (Holland 2002:167–186). On all these points, the Union saw its general approach win through. The Cotonou Partnership Agreement foresaw the initiation of negotiations on regional Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The Parties to the Agreement had thus agreed ''to conclude new WTO-compatible trading agreements, progressively removing barriers to trade between them and enhancing co-operation in all areas relevant to trade'' (Article 37.5 of the Agreement).

Negotiations between the EU, represented by DG Trade, and six ACP regions started in 2002. The idea was to have EPAs in place no later than January 1, 2008, when the WTO waiver that covered the preferential aspects of the trade chapters of the Cotonou agreement was to expire. In the end, the Commission realized that full-fledged EPAs would be impossible to achieve within the time-limit set. Interim, two-step agreements, that almost totally reflected the EU offer, were initialled with most of the ACP partners in December 2007. The only full EPA agreement was concluded with the Caribbean ACP states. The interim agreements focused on trade in goods and included a decision to remove all remaining tariffs and quotas to the EU for all exports from the ACP, but with transition periods for sugar and rice and a gradual liberalization in ACP countries while excluding a number of sensitive products from liberalization.

[3] The account of EU perceptions in this section is based on speeches by and printed interviews with EU representatives and on five interviews with Commission officials. The description of ACP images is mainly based on seven interviews with ACP ambassadors to the EU, on interviews with Pacific elites (see Chaban and Holland 2009), and on printed interviews with ACP officials.

They also included chapters on development that endorse a range of development-supporting measures. Commitments on assistance in specified forms, quantities, and time-frames are, however, not part of the agreements.

The EU's Own Role Conceptions in the EPA Negotiations

The self-image of the EU, expressed primarily by the Commission (which represented the EU in these negotiations, as these were defined as trade talks), can be described as including two major, though interrelated, contextual roles. The first is that of a *partner for development*, the second that of a *promoter of norms*. Both are consistent with the role of being a normative power.

The partner aspect is both a heritage from the ''spirit of Lomé'' and a response to current themes and key words in development theory, such as ''local ownership'' and ''dialogue.'' It has always, bearing in mind its colonial legacy, been important for the EU to portray the agreements with the ACP countries as the result of negotiations between equal, sovereign actors. All parties have to work together for the relationship to function. ''Partnership is the basis of the Cotonou Agreement and it is the foundation of the EPAs… If we are going to do something about this, we have to work together. The word Partnership in the 'Economic Partnership Agreement' is not there by accident'' (Mandelson 2006).

At the same time, the EPA negotiations are described as a very special kind of negotiations, in which the EU is not acting as in ''traditional'' trade negotiations (Sheahan, Chaban, Elgström, and Holland 2010). In Trade Commissioner Mandelson's words, ''the EPAs are not typical, hardnosed free trade agreements. I see them as tools for development and the promotion of regional economic integration'' (Mandelson 2005a, 2007a,b). The main difference is that EPA negotiations are not, according to the Commission, about promoting EU self-interests. While ACP regions will open their markets to and among themselves, and the EU will remove fully all tariffs and quotas on ACP exports, the Union is ''not seeking commercial advantage'' (Mandelson 2005b). At the same time, DG Trade officials take care to emphasize the development aspect of EPAs. These aim to be ''pro-development, pro-reform instruments'' (Mandelson 2005c) and are furthermore backed by a very substantial development assistance package (Mandelson and Michel 2006).

Besides being a ''partner for development,'' the EU also portrays itself as a promoter of norms and values. The stated goals of the EU in the EPA process are to encourage a process of ''economic reform, regional integration and progressive trade opening'' (Mandelson 2007b). Behind these goals lie some overarching principles that seem to guide DG Trade: a belief in the developmental potential of free trade and liberalism, combined with an equally strong belief in the benefits of regional integration, stemming from the EU's own experience. According to Mandelson, ''my overall philosophy is simple: I believe in progressive trade liberalization. I believe that the opening of markets can deliver growth and the reduction of poverty'' (Mandelson 2005a,b). Regional integration, meanwhile, will build markets where economies of scale and enhanced competition stimulate employment and development (Mandelson 2005b). In brief, the EU's own role conception includes being a *champion of global free trade* and, as trade liberalization is hypothesized to lead to poverty reduction, a *champion of development*. It also includes being *a model for and a promoter of regional integration*.

The ACP Countries' Role Conception of the EU in the EPA Negotiations

The picture of the EU's role drawn by its counterparts, the ACP, is much more complex and heterogeneous than the uniformly positive EU self-conception. The ACP role expectations include images of the EU as a benevolent contributor to

development and a generous donor but also images of the EU as a patronizing, potentially dangerous and even imperialist great power (cf. Sheahan et al. 2010). In a characterization of the view of the EU in the Pacific, Chaban and Holland (2009:5) indicate a perception that is ''very different to that often presumed in Brussels,'' that of the EU as ''Buddah'':

> It is always there, it is remote, big and powerful, it is watching closely, guiding, caring if you obey, but at the same time it is able to harm if you are not following the directions given from above, teaching, pushing, punishing. You do not argue with Buddah—you either worship, or show that you do, but then secretly practice your own faith. Such a perspective is a very distant reality from the ''partnership'' so typically found in the EU's own rhetoric on relations with the developing world.

Far from being seen as an equal partner, the EU is thus perceived as a *benign master*, a friendly great power that is confident that its own visions and policies are ''correct'' and that do not really listen to you in negotiations and dialogues.

The EU is widely perceived as a leading aid donor with good intentions (Sheahan et al. 2010). It is also often favorably compared to other aid givers, both the US and China. In the Pacific, the EU is seen as ''very benign'' compared with China, Australia, and New Zealand (Sheahan et al. 2010). At the same time, the criticism raised against EU role performance in the EPA negotiations has been massive. In December 2007, just after the agreements had been initialled, the ACP Council of Ministers collectively ''deplore/d/ the enormous pressure that has been brought to bear on the ACP States by the European Commission … contrary to the spirit of the ACP-EU partnership'' (ACP 2007). Many other statements echoed disquiet and frustration over EU ''undue pressure'' and a ''rushed process'' (Elgström 2009; cf. Stevens, Meyn, Kennan, Bila, Braun-Munzinger, Jerosch, Makhan, and Rampa 2008:70-85).

The EU's intentions and official goals have been repeatedly questioned. In the eyes of many ACP officials, the EU is clearly driven by commercial concerns and its main goal is to safeguard (against notably Chinese competition) and open up ACP markets (Elgström 2009). DG Trade is claimed to have carried out EPA negotiations with a narrow trade approach, in the process giving scant attention to the ACP's development agenda (ibid). The EU is thus seen as a self-interested actor that utilizes its superior power to further its own ''mercantilist interests'' (ACP 2007). The partnership ideal is fine, but there cannot be a partnership ''between a horse and a horse rider'' (Elgström 2009).

Although the EU is generally acknowledged as a ''promoter of development and regional integration,'' development and integration do not necessarily mean the same thing to ACP as to EU decision makers (Sheahan et al. 2010). While the EU declares direct causality between trade liberalization and poverty reduction, the ACP is generally much more sceptical. The ACP emphasized that they first needed assistance to build development-enhancing structures before free trade could be to their advantage. They foresaw the need for very substantial investments in infrastructure, as well as for resources to meet adjustment costs, as a result of more trade competition. As a result, the ACP side had an increase in development assistance (to be cynical, ''more money'') as its main preoccupation during most of the negotiations. In a similar vein, the type of regional integration favored by the Commission, advocating an ''EU model'' also for ACP regions, has not been met with enthusiasm.

Comparing EU and ACP Role Conceptions

In the EPA case, we see a relationship where the role conceptions of ego and others may seem to coincide—but do so only on a superficial level. The EU has

a conception of itself as a partner for development and as a promoter of norms (''a normative power''): of free trade, of regional integration, and of good governance. The ACP holds high expectations of the EU as a contributor to development and officially gives its blessings to the norms pursued by the Union. Auspicious conditions for a shared role conception thus seem to exist.

Looking behind the scene, another picture emerges. The symmetrical partnership image of the EU confronts ACP experiences of EU role performance indicating an asymmetrical master–servant relationship. The EU's conception of a harmonious relationship between trade liberalization, regional integration and economic development and poverty reduction confronts the ACP's images of a relationship where development assistance is prioritized and trade liberalization has to be postponed for as many years as possible to enable the creation of more favorable circumstances for trade-driven development. Furthermore, the ideal of a benign, generous partner has been challenged by a ''bargaining reality'' where the EU is perceived by the ACP to act as a patronizing, condescending and tough negotiator. We can thus discern fundamental incongruities regarding perceptions of both basic values and role performance. The fact that different meanings and connotations are attached to basic values like development increases the risk of misperceptions and unmet expectations (on both sides) and diminishes the probability of effective norm transfer. The perceived inconsistency between partnership rhetoric and actual behaviour in terms of pressure and bullying tends to weaken the legitimacy of the EU, indirectly affecting its ambitions to be a norm entrepreneur.

Concluding Remarks

This article has investigated the roles of the EU as an international actor. Employing the notion of normative great power as a generalized role for the EU, our empirical analyses focus on EU interaction with Eastern European countries and the ACP group of countries. The resulting picture leads to a number of principal conclusions.

First, the EU's own role conception rests on a set of central elements irrespective of empirical context. The EU sees itself as a normative great power, with the interest, capacity, and obligation to impact on developments in the various empirical settings. It actively seeks to promote a set of core values through utilizing a combination of power resources, in drawing on institutional structures (partly of its own creation), structural means (such as trade centrality and economic and technical assistance), and discursive framing of central concepts (such as development and security). In so doing, it illustrates the relevance of material as well as ideational elements of roles and furthermore underlines the value of rationalist as well as constructivist analysis.

Second, this role conception is, however, only partly mirrored by the perceptions of the outsiders. In most Eastern European countries—but, importantly, not in Russia and Belarus—there is high degree of similarity in role conception. The EU is readily acknowledged as a normative leader and performs the role of normative great power as these countries arrange their transition towards democracy and market economy along the lines stipulated by the EU. In Russia and Belarus, on the contrary, the normative approach of the EU is perceived in hostile terms (while Russia also entertains a conception of the EU as a great power partner in issues external to the relationship itself). There are no signs that the Russian and Belarussion governments internalize the ideas promoted by the EU; here, the EU is (thus far) incapable of inducing change. In the ACP group of countries, the role conception of the EU is rather complex, in that the EU is seen simultaneously as a friendly great power with good intentions and willingness to contribute to development, and as patronizing or at least self-confident

in that its own conceptualization and rationality is the superior one. In consequence, the ACP group views the EU as a benign master rather than an equal partner.

Third, perceived incoherent role performance means that EU action is only partly legitimate in the eyes of many countries outside of the EU. The EU is often perceived as saying one thing and doing another. This is, we tentatively argue, a consequence of policy incoherence (such as pursuing a protectionist trade policy in agriculture while in principle promoting free trade) or contradictory elements in the development of EU integration (for instance that the militarization and territorialization of the EU weaken the normative framing of the EU). This in turn impacts negatively on the effectiveness of the EU as an international actor. This observation underscores the importance of incorporating internal (domestic) elements, including conflicting policy preferences and competing elites (Cantir and Kaarbo 2010), for understanding external impacts of roles. In the case of the EU, the degree of common and conflicting interests among member states is a primary explanation for the profile of EU external action.

Fourth and final, there is a complex relationship between the role of normative great power and some of the specific roles that the EU is seen to play in actual negotiations, especially in relation to countries where EU leadership legitimacy is low or problematic. As there is a strong need for political actors to seek cognitive balance (Vertzberger 1990:137–143), persistent role incoherence may in the end lead to role change, in this case endangering the EU's role as a potential normative power.

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