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## Compte rendu de "EU Policy Responses to a Shifting Multilateral System"

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**Esther Barbé, Oriol Costa and Robert Kissack (Eds.),  
EU Policy Responses to a Shifting Multilateral System**

(Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 246 ISBN 978-1-137-54757-6

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*EU Policy Responses to a Shifting Multilateral System* is a current issue. This book – edited by three Professors of International Relations at IBEI (Institut Barcelona d’Estudis Internacionals): Esther Barbé, Oriol Costa and Robert Kissack – is definitely useful to understand topical trends in international politics, such as the intensification of contradictions between the transnational and the national or between the economy and the political. The question is refreshing; the Spanish, or rather the Catalanian view, is probably helping with this. They ask: “How can the European Union (EU) survive the rise of the Rest?” – echoing the question of Fareed Zakaria<sup>1</sup> in the case of the United States (US). Given the progressive repolarisation of the international system – with the continuous political assertion of emerged countries such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) – how will the EU, a major actor of the Western hegemonic bloc, react? The answer is explicit: either the EU endorses the shifting of the international system and acts accordingly: it *accommodates*; and/or it rejects the structural evolution and excludes diverging voices: it *entrenches*. The focus of the question is stimulating: for once, European integration does not influence the international; on the contrary: it is conditioned by it or rather it is “provincialized” as anti-colonial thinker Dipesh Chakrabarty likes to express it. This non-Eurocentric perspective brought by non-Anglo-Saxon researchers is very welcomed.

The specific approach taken by the authors is actually the main contribution of the book within the literature on European foreign policy. This generally focuses on the complexity of the decision-making process inside member states and EU institutions with a liberal institutionalist perspective at the micro-level. Usually, the “black box” is opened, without questioning the effect. This book, on the contrary, legitimately raises the question of *the effect*, the effect of the macro – international structures – on the micro – foreign policy decisions –, of the external on the internal.

Drawing from Robert Cox’s Gramscian critical theory,<sup>2</sup> the explanatory variable – the international structure – is understood as a combination of three factors: power,

1 Fareed Zakaria, ‘The future of American power – How America can survive the rise of the rest’, *Foreign affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 18 (2008).

2 Robert W. Cox, ‘Social forces, states and world orders: Beyond international relations theory’, *Millennium : Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1981).

ideas and institutions. This multi-causal analysis brings back temporality to foreign policy analysis: international structures can vary across time – from hegemony (congruence between ideas, institutions and power) to dysfunctional structure (misalignment between the three factors). The main hypothesis is the following: depending on the type of structure, the EU will react differently. In this sense, there is a proposition of articulation between agency and structures. This theoretical framework is presented in the introduction written by the editors of the book.

There are eight case studies, all bring new empirical data: nuclear regimes (Benjamin Kienzle), the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) (Anna Herranz-Surrallés), the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Gemma Collantes-Celador), the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Patricia Garcia-Duran, Montserrat Millet and Jan Orbie), climate negotiations (Oriol Costa), United Nations Security Council debates on gender (Esther Barbé), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Robert Kissack) and child labour (Jean Grugel). The last thematic chapter (Natalia Chaban and Michèle Knodt) is different from the other parts as it deals with the perception that Southern elites - from Brazil, India and China – have developed while seeing the EU acting as a global energy governance actor.

From the case studies, some general conclusions can be drawn. But the authors are clear: the ambition of the book is not explanatory but exploratory. It aims at understanding the implications and motives of each option, rather than systematising. The comparison of case studies reveals first that the EU tends to act pragmatically and accept the inclusion of other players in the multilateral game (nuclear case, ICC and IMF) whereas the opposite reaction of protective entrenchment is not common (gender and ECT). It is worth noting that in 2008, the EU decided to reject the inclusion of other states in trade negotiations, which was not the case before the crisis. Second, there is a systematic normative entrenchment in some cases (nuclear arms, Child labour, the IMF, the ICC) of the EU except on climate change. Finally, the EU equally accommodates (nuclear case) and entrenches (ECT) regarding the demand of new institutions.

Drawing from these results, the first conclusion allows us to deconstruct the myth of the natural inclination toward entrenchment: in half of the cases, the EU accommodates. This supranational entity is not impassive vis-à-vis the changing structure of the international context, even if its decision-making process is complex. This accommodation does not come automatically from a static identity but from substantive goals, even if the EU frequently frames adaptation in terms of its commitment to multilateral practices. It means that the EU is not naturally inclined to save multilateralism if some interests are at stake. In the other half of the cases, the EU entrenches for two reasons: when its internal equilibrium is threatened or when accommodation is not a positive sum game. More generally, it is clear that the authors adopt an interpretative approach, leaving the “why” question for deeper research. However, these first results confirm their intuition on the limitation of nomothetic explanations, such as the liberal theory of identity. Nuancing Ian Manners<sup>3</sup> “normative power Europe”, Richard Young’s<sup>4</sup> “European liberal internationalism”

3 Ian Manners, ‘Normative power Europe: A contradiction in terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2002).

4 Richard Youngs, *The EU’s role in the world politics: A retreat from liberal internationalism* (London: Routledge, 2010).

and Knud Erik Jørgensen's<sup>5</sup> "multilateral power", the authors of the book remind us that identity is a social construction that can be manipulated when the opportunity arises.

The conclusion written by Knud Erik Jørgensen aims at enriching the theoretical framework. First, he suggests that negative reactions of the EU, such as silences or exits, should be included in the model, along with the positive reactions of accommodation and entrenchment. I add that among *the EU responses to a shifting multilateral system*, non-institutional reactions – EU wars – could be integrated in the case studies, because, contrary to neoconservative thoughts, the EU is not only Venus – soft power – but also Mars – hard power<sup>6</sup>. Since the end of the Cold War and the numerous US wars, particularly the 2003 Iraq war, European member states have tried to build a common foreign and defence policy partially independent from NATO. The absence of this consideration denotes another shortfall in the analysis. Even if the authors are cautious about reifications of EU identity, they implicitly acknowledge an ideational difference between the political avowals of Russia and of the EU. However, the opposition is not a given and needs to be elucidated.

Another criticism formulated by Jørgensen derives from the distinction that is made between the external as structural and the internal as intentional. Both external and internal are structural and intentional. The challenge is to theorise both. In this sense, the conclusion is not explicit. The author also calls to take into account more domestic factors such as internal politics, the weight of civil society and particularly NGOs etc. However, one can easily question the legitimacy of the "forgotten factor" criticism. The theory that is proposed in the book explicitly addresses this issue, by showing that external factors shape the domestic and, in doing so, establishes a hierarchy between factors. The theoretical power of a theory does not come from an "all-inclusive package" of factors that would make it un-falsifiable following Karl Popper's idea of science. The other criticism made by Jørgensen regarding the subsuming power of ideas does not work either: the authors of the book show explicitly the limitation of the "identity" theory. More globally, it seems that the contributors to the book have different theoretical backgrounds, even if the introduction is based on the work of critical political economist Robert Cox. The latter uses Gramsci's ideas on civil society at the international level. For Gramsci, the economic sphere determines the social and political spheres in "the last instance". If Jørgensen and others do not share this basic assumption, another conceptual framework should have been used. The concept of "structural power" as defined by Susan Strange<sup>7</sup> might have been a better option because according to her, there is no hierarchy between the factors of security, production, finance and knowledge. Finally, Justin Rosenberg's uneven and combined development<sup>8</sup> can be useful in order to articulate structures and agency. He shows that the international system is structured by differences of development inside and among societies. Interactions between societies do not reproduce the same social forms: political and economic development is combined. Agency resides in

5 Knud E. Jørgensen, 'Does Europe have foreign policy traditions?' in F. Bynander and S. Guzzini (eds.), *Rethinking foreign policy* (London: Routledge, 2013).

6 Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (London: Atlantic, 2004).

7 Susan Strange, *States and markets* (New York: Bloomsbury, 1988).

8 Justin Rosenberg 'Why is There No International Historical Sociology', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2006).

the choices that elites can make to adapt to international pressures. In this sense, reproduction of societies is also international.

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