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# **Expanding Actorness to Explain EU External Engagement in Originally Internal Policy Areas**

Simon Schunz and Chad Damro

## **ABSTRACT**

Despite its increasing importance for European integration, there remains a lack of scholarly attention to the growth of EU external action in originally internal policy areas. This article advances a comprehensive framework for understanding and explaining the emergence of EU external engagement in such areas. The framework combines insights from two sets of literatures: the EU external relations literature offers useful concepts – particularly ‘actorness’ – as building blocks for explanatory purposes, while the public policy literature provides relevant insights regarding policy entrepreneurship and agenda-setting. The article contends that EU external engagement results from a favourable interplay between an external ‘opportunity’ and the EU’s ‘presence’ in a given domain, which is identified and capitalized upon by a set of policy entrepreneurs, who are driven by interest-based and/or ideational motives. The article undertakes a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources to apply the framework across multiple policy areas.

**KEY WORDS:** European Union, Actorness, External relations, Presence, Policy entrepreneurship, Agenda-setting

## **INTRODUCTION**

At a time when multiple crises dominate the agendas of European Union (EU) policy-makers and scholars, considerable evidence exists that the scope and depth of European integration – especially in the relationship between internal policies and external action – is actually continuing to expand. Numerous internal EU policies have been developing significant external

dimensions, ranging from policy fields where the Union possesses exclusive competence to those where it has shared or only supplementary competence. They include, but are not limited to, asylum and migration, culture, economic and monetary policies, employment and social policies, energy, environment, gender, health, higher education, internal security, science, sports and transport. In all these domains, the EU has over time – in several cases (e.g. environment) since the 1970s and in many others since the 1990s (e.g. culture, science) – stepped up its external engagement.

This increase in external engagement is visible across a range of purposive EU activities in bilateral and multilateral contexts, right up to the development of ‘sectoral diplomacies’ for external engagement (for an overview, see Damro *et al.* 2018).<sup>1</sup> All of these policy domains represent areas in which the EU originally did not possess external policies. Instead, their historical trajectory has developed in the following sequence:

- (i) Initially, there was only a limited or no basis for these sectoral policies in the treaties founding the European Economic Community;
- (ii) Subsequently, internal sectoral activities and an EU treaty basis were developed. Often, sectoral activities preceded treaty reforms, which then codified pre-existing practice;
- (iii) Finally, veritable EU external engagement emerged in these fields, with degrees of variation as to the scope and intensity of that engagement.

Despite its importance, there remains a lack of scholarly attention to this trend of increased EU external action in originally internal policy areas (OIPA).<sup>2</sup> This neglect concerns notably the last step in the above sequence, that is, the move from the existence of a treaty basis and an internal EU policy to that of a sectoral policy with an external dimension. Among the few existing studies, most tend to focus on *what* the EU does and *how* it acts as a global player in

such areas, regularly neglecting the question *why* the EU expands its activities in these domains.

This lack of attention is surprising because the observed trend is remarkable in several ways. *First*, it represents a subtle, but important, deepening of European integration, understood as ‘the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities toward a new centre’ (Haas 1958: 16). It involves a further deliberate shift of loyalties, expectations and political activities concerning EU interaction with an external context. This exceeds the Court of Justice of the EU’s 1971 ERTA ruling, which stated that once the EU has defined common measures in a given policy field internally, it is legally empowered to enter into external contractual relations on matters on which it possesses internal competence (CJEU 1971). The ruling does not automatically lead to external engagement. The decision to engage externally must be taken – by someone – and subsequently affects the nature of the European integration project. The lack of attention to these policy areas is, *second*, surprising because each additional external sectoral policy alters EU external action, and the Union’s identity as a global actor. Though the EU is not a ‘military power’, it may indeed already be much more than simply a ‘trading power’ and instead be developing into a global actor with a broad and state-like portfolio of external activities. A *third* reason why this development is remarkable and deserves more attention lies in the potential it holds for the EU’s capacity to wield influence globally. The 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) identifies the emergence of EU ‘sectoral diplomacies’ and promotes their reinforcement, provided that a ‘joined-up approach’ can be guaranteed (EEAS 2016). It thus argues that, as long as it is coherent, a strongly differentiated and specialized external action enables the Union to face a more ‘complex, connected and contested world’ (EEAS 2015).

This article sets out to address this understudied phenomenon of European integration by asking: *how and why does EU external action in originally internal policy areas emerge?* To answer this question, it develops a comprehensive framework for understanding and explaining the emergence of EU external engagement in originally internal policies. The three-pronged framework draws from two sets of literatures: the EU external relations literature, which offers useful concepts – particularly ‘actorness’ as developed by Bretherton & Vogler (2006) – as building blocks for explanatory purposes; and the public policy literature, which provides crucial insights regarding policy entrepreneurship and agenda-setting. In so doing, it combines the strengths of both literatures while making up for their blind spots. The concept of actorness offers a starting point to combine the external ‘opportunity’ for external action with internal, EU-specific preconditions for such action. A recent edited volume by Damro, Gstöhl and Schunz (2018) capitalizes on these strengths, but – while providing the first comprehensive attempt at setting a research agenda on understanding and explaining the types of policies discussed in this article – does not fully address the major weakness of the actorness literature, namely that it pays little heed to the agency needed for EU external engagement to emerge. With its focus on entrepreneurship and the ways agents set the agenda, this is precisely where the public policy literature has its main strengths. This literature focuses however very much on the domestic policy cycle, neglecting ‘opportunity’-related factors. It would thus have difficulties accounting, on its own, for the transition from step (ii) to step (iii) in above sequence. We therefore contend that it is by combining insights from the two sets of literatures that both are enhanced, yielding an operational framework. This new framework then allows us to posit that EU external engagement results from a favourable interplay between an external ‘opportunity’ and the EU’s ‘presence’ in a given domain, which is identified and capitalized upon by policy entrepreneurs operant in the EU, who are driven by interest-based and/or ideational motives.

The framework does not aim to provide a probabilistic ‘model’ in the neopositivist sense of the term, but offers orientation involving both understanding and *plausible* explanation regarding a complex extract of social reality. It follows ‘a problem-driven approach featuring the extraction, adaptation, and integration ... of discrete concepts, mechanisms, logical principles and interpretive moves normally embedded in ... research traditions’ (Sil 2009: 649). Combining useful concepts taken from different relevant scholarly literatures, the framework provides sufficient firmness for explaining the emergence of EU external action in OIPA, while allowing for flexibility to account for variation between the individual domains.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it develops the key components of the framework and discusses case selection and methodology. For illustrative purposes, the article then undertakes a plausibility probe (Levy 2008) to investigate the salience and potency of this framework for enhancing the understanding and explanation of an emblematic case, namely EU external cultural policies. Subsequently, the article employs other illustrative examples – energy, migration and asylum, and science – with evidence from secondary sources, to investigate further the plausibility of the proposed framework. The conclusion summarizes key findings, discusses their relevance in academic and political-practical terms, and advances a research agenda on the emergence of sectoral EU external action.

## **THE FRAMEWORK: UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLAINING THE EMERGENCE OF EU EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT**

The emergence of EU external action in originally internal policies does not involve radical disruption, but incremental change. It follows a sequence from ‘no policy’ to the *de facto* and *de jure* development of an internal sectoral policy on to that of an external policy. To understand and explain such change, this article identifies a combination of multiple explanatory factors related to both the structural (internal and external) context and to agency

at the EU level. Such an approach is preferred because monocausal explanations might over-emphasise structures at the international or EU level and minimize the role of agency needed to commit the EU to external action. Alternatively, they might focus on agency, privileging one set of agents (member states) over another (supranational institutions), and hence underestimate structural factors and the entrepreneurial role that other agents might play in mobilising support for EU external engagement.

We therefore argue that any explanation of the emergence of EU external engagement in OIPA must involve the interplay between structural features at two levels of analysis – the global and the EU level – and relevant agency. To combine external and EU-internal structures with agency, we develop a framework that starts with actorness, and combines it with insights from the literature on policy entrepreneurship and agenda-setting.

### **Grounding actorness**

As a starting point, the framework draws on the seminal concept of ‘actorness’, which captures ‘the extent to which the Union has become an actor in global politics’ (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 13). Since its introduction in the 1970s, many variants of this concept have been developed.<sup>3</sup> The most resilient and widely used of these conceptualizations has arguably been proposed by Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler (2006, 2013; Drieskens 2017). While individual studies have been guided by tailor-made adaptations of this framework, none of them has ‘caught on’ to rival the notoriety of the Bretherton and Vogler conceptualization.

Actorness as developed by Bretherton and Vogler is considered a relevant concept for the purposes of this article in three main respects. First, as it focuses on the development of an EU capacity to act externally that previously did not exist, it implicitly addresses the puzzle of policy change while considering the EU in the context of an ‘evolving multi-actor global

system' (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 13). Second, a certain degree of actorness may be perceived as a (necessary, but not sufficient) condition for the EU to act externally (Damro *et al.* 2018). It thus holds the potential to provide insights on *why* the EU might be pursuing external action. Third, as the concept comprises constitutive features at the global level – paying particular attention to how the external context co-determines EU actorness – *and* the EU level of analysis, it can usefully provide building blocks for the framework developed in this article.

Bretherton and Vogler distinguish between three constitutive features that comprise EU actorness: 'opportunity', which 'denotes factors in the external environment of ideas and events' and 'signifies the structural context of action' (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 24); 'presence', depicting the EU's capacity 'by virtue of its existence, to exert influence beyond its borders' (*ibid.*); and 'capability', which refers to 'the internal context of EU external action or inaction' (*ibid.*: 29) and implies 'those aspects of the EU policy processes that, by constraining or enabling action, govern the Union's ability to capitalise on presence or respond to opportunity' (Bretherton & Vogler 2013: 381). As a short-hand formula, EU actorness depends thus on a favourable external structure (opportunity) plus favourable internal EU structures of being (presence) and having (capability).

For the purposes of this article, this concept of actorness yields two major insights: first, for the EU to engage externally, there needs to be an external 'opportunity'; second, this opportunity must coincide with some form of EU presence. There has to be 'something' on the basis of which the EU can engage externally. Capability might then follow from this, but it is not in itself necessary for external engagement to emerge. The EU develops this capability once it has begun to engage externally, and the strength of this capability may then moderate the degree of its external engagement (Damro *et al.* 2018). However, the co-existence of an



external opportunity and of internal EU policies in a given domain do not automatically lead to external engagement. Such structures at the global and EU level may enable and constrain action, but they do not determine the precise nature of the activities of those operating within their boundaries (Dessler 1989: 452-452), as ‘EU institutions are not just passive venues waiting for issues ... to come their way’ (Princen 2009: 30). To account for EU external engagement, it is therefore necessary to consider agency, an aspect that is not explicitly touched upon in conceptualizations of actorness in general, nor in the one advanced by Bretherton and Vogler. The question of agency is about *who* identifies the structures provided by the interrelationship between opportunity and presence as relevant and prone for EU external action. In other words, who drives the development of EU external engagement in OIPA?

This is where the public policy literature provides useful insights. Agency and policy initiative are at the heart of this literature interested in policy entrepreneurship and agenda-setting processes (Kingdon 1995). Its key concepts relate to the notion of ‘policy window’ – which resonates strongly with Bretherton and Vogler’s notion of ‘opportunity’ – and that of ‘policy entrepreneurs’, that is, ‘advocates who are willing to invest their resource – time, energy, reputation, money – to promote a position in return for future gain in the form of material ... or solidary benefits’ (ibid.: 179). Such entrepreneurs ‘are able to bring new policy ideas into the open and promote policy change’ by joining ‘problems, policies and politics’ to push items on the agenda, ultimately making political action happen (Mintrom 1997: 738; Kingdon 1995: 182).

In an EU context, agenda-setting processes and policy entrepreneurship take specific forms, given the complexity of its political system. Scholars of EU agenda-setting acknowledge this complexity and strive to understand and explain *which actors* (‘who?’) use *what sort of processes* (‘how?’) *for which reasons* (‘why?’) in order to bring certain issues (‘what?’)

successfully on the agenda (Princen 2009). Although this EU-specific literature has mostly focused on the ‘rise of new issues on the EU agenda’ (Princen 2015: 125) and has therefore not dealt with existing internal policies that are ‘simply’ expanded externally, it can provide significant insights for the design of the framework.

### **Expanding actorness**

Importantly, the literature on agenda-setting poses the ‘*what*’ question. Regarding the policy domains studied here, what comes on the agenda depends very much on what the EU’s treaties say about these issue areas. In that sense, the transition from step (ii) to step (iii) in the sequence outlined in the introduction concerns the external extension of a policy domain that is internally already clearly defined. This domain (e.g. ‘the environment’) could be placed on the agenda *per se*, if the agenda-setters desire to trigger a debate about EU external action in such an area. Alternatively, specific sub-domains of a broader issue area could be designated as ‘agenda items’ (e.g. ‘species loss’), which could then build into a broader external engagement in the entire field over time.

A second important insight from the literature on agenda-setting and – particularly – policy entrepreneurship relates to the ‘*who*’ question. For an agenda item to be raised in the context of a ‘policy window’, a ‘transnational policy network’ of policy entrepreneurs, for instance pro-EU external action entrepreneurs, needs to form (Princen 2009: 15-16). This network or coalition can be broad in scope and comprise public and private actors. Importantly, it must incorporate players from within the EU political system, with the decisive dividing line ‘not drawn between EU-level actors and national governments, but between coalitions of actors at different levels of government that share a certain perspective’ (ibid.: 161). These levels of government may include EU, national and sub-national levels.

A third insight relates to the *'how'* of agenda-setting, that is, the process by which issues that have been identified and are being pushed by policy entrepreneurs emerge on top of decision-makers' agendas. This process requires institutionally favourable conditions that enhance the receptiveness of the policy demands brought into the system. In an EU context, and *a fortiori* in a context of EU decision-making on external action, consensus among member states tends to be the rule. *De facto* this implies that policy entrepreneurs have to mobilise strong majorities in favour of policy expansion while minimising the risk of 'vertical blockade' and incoherence – situations 'when member state governments are reluctant to allow the EU to play a role on the issue' (ibid. 2009: 16). Why issues are kept off the agenda (or not raised at all) often has to do with the veto power of member states. *Ceteris paribus* one may assume that the stronger the external opportunity and the presence of the EU in a given domain, the higher the receptiveness of the political system for the demands of the policy entrepreneurs.

A final insight touches upon the *'why'* question and the motivations of entrepreneurs for promoting certain agenda items such as the notion that the EU should become externally active in a given issue area. Classical public policy analyses point to the 'material ... or solidary benefits' that policy entrepreneurs hope to obtain (Kingdon 1995: 179). This resonates closely with observations made by the scholarship on EU agenda-setting processes, which distinguishes material interests, such as the desire to 'Europeanize ... regulatory standards', from 'idealistic or missionary considerations' (Princen 2009: 29). This in turn brings the discussion to a consideration of actors' fundamental motivations and logics of action. Ultimately, policy entrepreneurs may be motivated to mobilise for expanding European integration by interests and a logic of consequence, either self-interest or the interest of the entity they are defending, or values and norms in accordance with a logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen 1998), or both.

## **Explaining the emergence of EU external engagement**

Combining these insights on structures at the global level (opportunity), the EU level (presence) and agency yields a three-pronged framework for theorizing the emergence of EU external action in areas with originally internal policies. To operationalize this framework, we suggest three sequential analytical steps, while accounting for the fact that the three components are strongly interconnected. For each step, we propose proxies to unpack the key concepts. Given our approach aimed at orientation in view of understanding and plausibly explaining the emergence of EU external action in OIPA, the proposed operationalisation should be understood as offering a framework allowing for systematic interpretation of empirical evidence.

The *first step* involves the assessment of the EU's opportunity, 'the external environment of ideas and events' (Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 24). Evaluating opportunity thus requires an understanding of the constellation of ideas and norms in the global sphere on a given issue, but also of interest constellations, and of specific 'events', especially crises, in search of possible overtures or incentives for EU external engagement (Schunz *et al.* 2018: 17). Examples to illustrate potential patterns providing such overtures include a constellation of ideas pointing to an intersubjective agreement among actors on the necessity to tackle jointly an issue like climate change, or a constellation of interests that leads to competition between actors around an issue like energy resources. Both may in theory provide an opportunity for an actor's external engagement. However, as argued in steps two and three below, to qualify as a veritable opportunity for *EU* external engagement, it must be perceived as such in light of an existing EU presence and by relevant entrepreneurs within the EU. This in turn depends on how an event or constellation resonates with actors' interests and norms and is subsequently framed by policy entrepreneurs.<sup>4</sup> Framing is also crucial when it comes to 'events': any event is in the first place a neutral occurrence that does not *per se* require a reaction unless it affects actors in

some way. To do so, it must be perceived (and/or convincingly portrayed) as pertaining to norms or interests in order to serve as a ‘trigger’ for external action. This perception as a ‘problem in need of treatment’ can be analytically captured through the study of relevant actors’ reactions to events in a given domain. For example, a ‘proxy’ for establishing whether the interruption of gas delivery to the EU by a major third-country supplier is perceived as a problem in need of EU external engagement would be the public and private reactions of relevant policy-makers to this event, and the types of reasons offered for the need to engage, whether related to the desire to have the EU jointly ensure ‘energy security’ (interests) or to that of demonstrating solidarity with the member states affected by gas interruptions (norms).

This perception and framing of an ‘event’ or constellation might lead to the understanding that external engagement is desirable and that it is to be conducted by the EU and not by the member states (this will also depend on the EU’s presence). Alternatively, the opposite may occur, namely an understanding that external engagement is not desirable or that the member states rather than the EU should act externally on a given issue. Against this backdrop, strong EU opportunity exists when the external environment offers incentives for EU action that resonate considerably with EU presence as well as the motivations of potential entrepreneurs. Moderate EU opportunity involves external trends and events that resonate to some extent with EU presence as well as potential entrepreneurs’ motivations. EU opportunity is weak to non-existent in the absence of such resonance with EU presence and would-be entrepreneurs. It can be assumed that the stronger the opportunity, the more conducive it is to EU external engagement. However, even a strong opportunity provides only a necessary condition for such engagement.

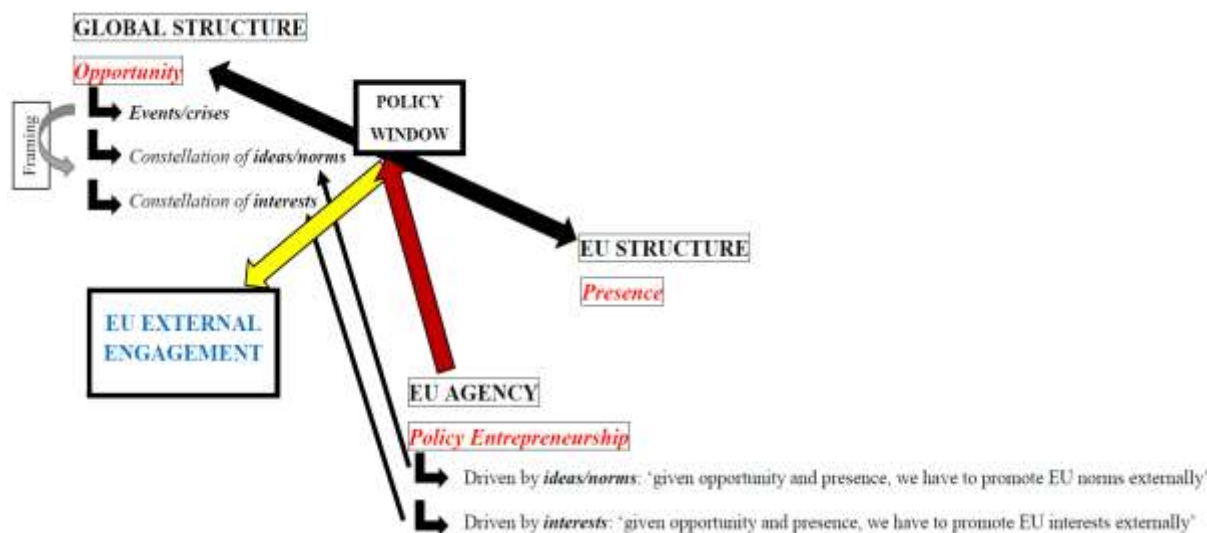
The *second step* in the analysis relates to another necessary condition, that of presence. Presence represents ‘what the EU is and stands for’ in a specific policy area. What the EU ‘is’

derives from its material being (e.g., in the energy domain, a geographical entity with limited fossil fuel resources). What the EU stands for is embodied in the extent of European integration that already exists in an internal EU policy domain. To use a proxy for assessing this extent, one can assume that it transpires from – and can be evaluated by assessing – the EU’s legal and policy *acquis* (Schunz *et al.* 2018: 18). If the EU possesses a comprehensive *acquis*, this implies a solid material and ideational basis for external action. Following the logic of the ERTA judgement, such an internal basis endows the EU with a strong competence to act externally in such a domain. A comprehensive *acquis* therefore entails a strong EU presence, whereas a partial *acquis* implies a moderate EU presence. To distinguish between a comprehensive or a partial *acquis*, the degree of communitarisation of a policy domain needs to be assessed. For instance, in a domain like the environment, one would need to ask to what extent the EU *acquis* covers all relevant issues (e.g., air, soil, water) and to what extent it does so through binding legal instruments. The absence or minimal nature of such an *acquis* would point to weak EU presence. We assume that the stronger the EU’s presence, the more likely its external engagement.

Finally, where the interplay between (a high degree of) opportunity at the global level and (a high degree of) presence at the EU level provides the structural ‘policy window’ that can enable or constrain action, this window must be used by active social agents. It is these agents that will interpret whether an event or given international constellation is – considering the EU’s presence – significant enough for the EU to act. Their action will be driven by motivations related to interests and/or norms, which are often not mutually exclusive. Public policy analysts have long understood that ‘many policies are supported by coalitions of actors who support the same policy but for different reasons’ (Princen 2009: 29). Therefore, in a *third step*, the analysis needs to focus on *who* exploits the opening of that window, and *how* (in the sense of mobilising majorities) and *why* (driven by interests and a logic of consequence or by norms and a logic of

appropriateness, or a combination thereof) they do so. Such policy entrepreneurship successfully mobilizing in favour of EU external engagement represents a third necessary condition that completes the framework for explaining the emergence of EU external engagement. Together, the co-existence of (i) an opportunity for the EU, (ii) EU presence – which together form a structural policy window –, and (iii) pro-external engagement policy entrepreneurship within the EU is sufficient for EU external engagement to emerge in OIPA (see Figure 1). The policy window can be strong – when at least one component (opportunity or presence) is strong and the other moderate –, moderate (when both are moderate or one is strong and the other weak) or weak (with either opportunity or presence being weak and the other no more than moderate). To provide an overture for entrepreneurs seeking EU external engagement, the policy window needs to be at least moderate.

Figure 1: Framework for explaining the emergence of EU external engagement



The potency of this framework for understanding and explaining the emergence of EU external engagement will be probed with an illustrative case of EU external action in an OIPA, namely cultural policy. As a plausibility probe, this case allows us to ‘to give the reader a “feel” for a

theoretical argument by providing a concrete example of its application, [and] to demonstrate the empirical relevance of a theoretical proposition' (Levy 2008: 6-7; see also Eckstein 1975).

Cultural policy represents a particularly useful illustrative case because, at the outset of the European integration project, it was not even planned as an internal policy. It only became part of the EU's policy portfolio with the Maastricht Treaty and moved on to develop forms of external engagement since the 2000s (see Isar 2015). The case is suitable as a plausibility probe for three reasons: (i) it clearly followed the historical trajectory noted in the introduction of this piece, seeing the EU move from no policy to becoming increasingly externally active over time; (ii) given the weak (supplementary) EU legal competence in this domain, it is an unlikely case for EU external engagement and yet such engagement has emerged; (iii) it is understudied, despite ongoing policy debates about a full-fledged external cultural policy strategy.

The discussion of cultural policy relies on a combination of documentary analysis and two semi-structured interviews as well as further informal exchanges with potential policy entrepreneurs in the field. Where available, the analysis also draws on secondary literature. To probe further the plausibility of the framework, the case of cultural policy is then supplemented with additional examples of EU external action in OIPA. This additional empirical work serves to assess and sharpen the framework by further clarifying its potential for generalizability.

## **EXPANDING EU EXTERNAL ACTION: EMPIRICAL CASES**

### **Explaining EU external action on culture**

Culture did not form part of the European Economic Community's original treaty framework. It was only with the 1991 Maastricht Treaty that the issue was given a primary legal basis as a supplementary EU competence (then Article 128 TEC, now Article 167 TFEU; for a historical



overview, see Schwencke & Rydzy 2015). Subsequently, the EU started to operate internal cultural funding programmes culminating in the 1.46bn Euro ‘Creative Europe’ programme (2014-2020) while initiating reflections on external cultural activities that have most recently resulted in the 2016 Joint Communication ‘Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations’ (European Commission & High Representative 2016; for an overview, see Isar 2015). These reflections were paralleled by an increasing EU activity as an external cultural player, which nowadays covers large parts of the globe with a focus on neighbourhood and developing countries, but also cultural diplomacy efforts in strategic partner countries like China (for details, see Schunz 2018).

### *The structural ‘policy window’*

#### Opportunity

Since the end of the Cold War, culture as a subject of international political action has been oscillating between two ends of a spectrum ranging from its use for competitive *versus* cooperative purposes.

On the one hand, culture has become the subject of many countries’ ‘soft power’ strategies, with China’s embrace of cultural diplomacy through its ‘Confucius Institutes’ at the forefront (Tao 2015). Governments increasingly use soft power, ‘the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment’ (Nye 2004: 5), to enhance their country’s image as a political entity, an attractive market (of cultural and other export goods), a tourist destination etc. (Maaß 2015). From this perspective, external cultural action is employed to pursue material interests in a competitive and multipolar global context.

On the other hand, culture has been subject to intensified international ‘cultural relations’ involving states and intergovernmental institutions, but also cultural actors. From this perspective, intercultural exchange and mutual learning in bi- and multilateral contexts are believed to serve as means to build trust and ameliorate relations between peoples, for instance in post-conflict or transition situations such as those following the 2010/2011 Arab uprisings (Ang *et al.* 2015). These normative motives also drive many of the activities of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), especially when it undertakes global rule-setting efforts via culture-related conventions such as the 2005 ‘Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions’, negotiated with strong EU input (Cavicchioli 2006). It commits parties to strengthening cooperation to promote cultural diversity.

Altogether, the tension between a specific constellation of interests that drive international cultural activities for competition purposes and a constellation of ideas in which parties embrace culture as a means for cooperation provides the key global window of opportunity for the EU’s external action in this domain. This opportunity is indeed at least moderate, if not strong because these external trends provide a variety of incentives for the EU to engage with other actors. The incentives for EU external action offered by this structural environment moreover resonate strongly with EU presence as well as with the motivations of various policy entrepreneurs, as discussed below.

## Presence

EU presence on culture has steadily developed since the Maastricht Treaty. Given the supplementary nature of its legal competence, which excludes policy harmonization, as well as the Lisbon Treaty’s broad definition of ‘EU culture’ as the pursuit of diversity,<sup>5</sup> the EU does

not conduct coherent, ‘*dirigiste* policies ...’, as the individual states prefer weaker intervention’ by the EU (Sarikakis 2009: 109). Its presence thus derives from ‘what it is’ as a cultural actor and from ‘what it stands for’ in this domain, namely its comprehensive funding programmes.

Relying on a combination of member states’ cultures and the EU’s cultural heritage and founded on a distinct set of values and fundamental rights, the Union’s global attractiveness as a cultural actor is indeed non-negligible. It is reinforced by a series of cultural action programmes that the EU has run since the mid-1990s: ‘Kaleidoscope’ (36.7 million ECU), ‘Ariane’ (11.3 million ECU) and ‘Raphaël’ (30 million ECU) (all 1996-1999), ‘Culture 2000’ (2000-2006, 236 million Euro), the ‘European Agenda for Culture’ (2007-2013, 400 million Euro) and ‘Creative Europe’, which saw its budget tripled compared to its predecessor. Where previous programmes were focused on the promotion of cultural cooperation, Creative Europe also emphasizes the role culture can play in the creation of ‘jobs and growth’ within the context of the Europe 2020 strategy. It has therefore been perceived as promoting a ‘commodification’ of culture, understood as a catalyst for enhanced EU competitiveness (Littoz-Monnet 2012). Involving considerable amounts of money, all these programmes have provided opportunities for European consortia to compete for funding on a variety of cultural activities, ranging from networks to translation projects. Through this funding, the EU has been creating a ‘European cultural space’ which, though respecting diversity of forms and substance, requires attention for ‘pan-Europeanness’ and common, European practices of cultural management while contributing to the construction of EU cultural heritage (Sassatelli 2009).

In sum, and although the EU may be constrained by its limited legal competence and *acquis*, the combined effect of a highly visible and attractive cultural space and an increasing, large-scale cultural funding programme makes EU presence moderate, that is, solid enough to form the basis for external action in this policy area.

*Agency: a coalition of entrepreneurs*

The structural policy window opened by (i) an at least moderate, if not strong external opportunity embodied in the two-fold trend of culture as driver of interest-driven competition and of norm-driven cooperation in bi- and multilateral contexts and (ii) an expanding, moderate EU presence in the cultural domain has not gone unnoticed by policy-makers in the EU and its member states. This section discusses, who they are, and how and why they have exploited that policy window.

The mid-2000s, as the starting point for EU external cultural action, coincided with the adoption of the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity. In this context, it was above all the European Commission's Directorate-General for Education and Culture (DG EAC), supported by a civil society coalition involving the European Cultural Foundation (Isar 2015), but also the newly founded European Union National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) network, which seized the opportunity to bolster EU external cultural action around the theme of cultural diversity. This impetus resulted in the European Commission's 'European Agenda for Culture in a Globalising World', which argued that culture was 'a vital element in the Union's international relations' (European Commission 2007), and subsequent Commission (and Council) Action Plans alongside initial external activities.

In the wake of the Arab uprisings and the Lisbon Treaty's creation of the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and the European External Action Service (EEAS), a new actor joined this pro-EU-external action coalition: the European Parliament. Driven by individual policy entrepreneurs such as Dutch MEP Marietje Schaake, the rapporteur for the 2011 'Resolution on the Cultural Dimensions of the EU's External Action', Parliament argued for a

joined-up approach on a genuinely European cultural diplomacy involving the Commission and the newly established EEAS (European Parliament 2011; see also Isar 2015).

As of 2011, a pro-external engagement coalition of policy entrepreneurs had thus formed that comprised the two main supranational EU institutions, civil society actors from the European Cultural Foundation and EUNIC. In line with the assumptions of the public policy literature on agenda-setting, this coalition would require additional support from key players within the EU system and – especially – major member states to attain a commitment to more wide-reaching EU external action. With the 2013-2014 Preparatory Action ‘Culture in EU External Relations’, which had resulted from the 2011 European Parliament resolution (European Commission 2014), the coalition managed to obtain additional visibility and subsequently mobilise further policy entrepreneurs to reinforce its camp. Most notably, shortly after taking office in 2015, the new High Representative Mogherini and the EEAS provided additional support to this coalition (Mogherini 2016; Interviews with Senior EU Officials, DG EAC, EEAS). Moreover, key EU member states, including Germany and Italy, came to either tacitly support EU external cultural action or at least not to oppose it, as long as such action remained ‘supplementary’ (ibid.). With ‘supplementarity’ being respected, no other member state actively resisted (ibid.). This coalition and a cooperative approach between the Commission and the EEAS enabled the drafting of the 2016 Joint Communication outlining key contours of an EU cultural diplomacy strategy (European Commission & High Representative 2016). While the EU undertook initial external cultural activities – notably in a development policy context – already during the late 2000s, when the group of entrepreneurs was vocal but comparatively smaller, the successive growth of this coalition – in parallel to the further opening of the structural policy window – coincided with an increase in EU external action, notably vis-à-vis China, Latin America and in its neighbourhood (Crusafon 2015).

If the ‘who’ and the ‘how’ of the emergence and evolution of EU external cultural policy can thus be accounted for, the question remains as to *why* this coalition formed and grew over time. With regard to these entrepreneurs’ motivations to exploit the structural policy window, the domain of EU external cultural action illustrates the observation that ‘many policies are supported by coalitions of actors who support the same policy but for different reasons’ (Princen 2009: 29). Indeed, different actors seem to be driven by diverging, sometimes multiple motives. A subset of the group of pro-external cultural action policy entrepreneurs is motivated by the global window of opportunity that is opened by the norm-driven understanding of culture as a means for cooperation. Actors within the Commission’s DG EAC in particular, but also from the European Parliament and the EEAS, fall primarily into this category (Interviews with Senior EU Officials, DG EAC, EEAS). However, there are also those, from the EU institutions and supportive of the ‘jobs and growth’ potential of Creative Europe, but especially from the member states and their national cultural institutes, who form part of the entrepreneurial coalition because they think the EU collectively needs to play its part in the global competition for attention and market shares in the cultural and creative sectors (ibid.). Logics of appropriateness and consequence for EU external action in the cultural field therefore clearly co-exist among the current coalition of policy entrepreneurs.

To conclude, in the case of culture the suggested framework helps to explain the emergence of EU external action in an OIPA. This emergence is the result of an interplay of a structural ‘policy window’, relying on an at least moderate, if not strong opportunity and moderate EU presence, which was taken up by a group of norm- and interest-driven policy entrepreneurs that has steadily been growing since the 2000s.

### **Explaining EU external action in other originally internal policy areas**

A brief consideration of three other policy domains – energy, migration and asylum, and science – further underscores the utility and potential generalizability of the proposed framework. All three cases conform to the historical trajectory discussed in the introduction, and, in each case, the EU has developed external activities in recent decades. Likewise, all three cases involve a moderate to strong structural ‘policy window’ for pro-external action, resulting from a combination of at least moderate EU opportunity and presence, paired with solid pro-EU external action policy entrepreneurship.

When it comes to opportunity, both global norms and/or interest constellations provide strong incentives for EU action. In the case of energy, increasing global competition for resources provides a structural context that incentivizes an import-dependent actor like the EU (and each of its member states) to engage externally (Herranz-Surrallés 2015; Batzella 2018a). Together with particular events such as repetitive ‘gas crises’ triggered by one of the EU’s main energy suppliers (Russia), this context has been interpreted over time by policy entrepreneurs as threatening EU interests (Beyer 2012). A similar structural context characterizes the area of migration and asylum. Rather than energy flows, flows of human beings in the context of the 2014-2015 ‘refugee and migrant crisis’ have triggered a reaction by an EU that normatively upholds international law and the right to asylum while seeking to ‘defend EU interests’ by managing migration in ways that respond to mounting public pressure for limiting inflows into the EU (Emiliani & Linck 2018; Lavenex 2018). Finally, the science domain is *par excellence* an area in which competition among major science players (US, Japan, emerging economies) for innovation and market shares, but also for ‘the best brains’, has provided the structural context, and in which – similar to the areas of energy and (partially) culture – the EU primarily wishes to promote its interests (Prange-Gstöhl 2018; Stein 2002).

In all three areas, the EU possesses at least moderate – in the case of science even strong – presence founded on solid treaty bases and an *acquis* that transcends that of the cultural domain. In the energy domain, a partial internal market exists that is in the process of being upgraded with the 2015 Energy Union proposal (Batzella 2018a; Judge & Maltby 2017). In the migration and asylum case, and although the ‘crisis’ may have exposed the flaws of existing EU rules, the Union has a series of legal acts and policies in place that amount to the basic contours of common migration and asylum systems (Emiliani & Linck 2018; Monar 2014). Finally, in the science domain the EU not only runs the world’s largest international funding programme (Horizon 2020, EUR 79bn for the period 2014-2020), but it is also in the process of creating the ‘European Research Area’, an internal ‘science market’ in which researchers and ideas are supposed to move freely (Prange-Gstöhl 2018; López de San Román & Schunz 2018).

These rather solid policy windows for EU external action in the three cases had to be capitalized on by policy entrepreneurs. In the energy case, these policy entrepreneurs were arguably the Eastern European countries, led by Poland, but also the European Commission, pursuing a joint interest in promoting European energy security (Batzella 2018b). However, common EU external energy action remains constrained because this entrepreneurial group has been unable to overcome the ‘vertical blockade’ of some member states – such as Germany – who are *de facto* ‘reluctant to allow the EU to play a role on the issue’ (Princen 2009: 16). They insist on Article 194.2 TFEU, which preserves a member state’s ‘right to determine the conditions for exploiting its energy resources, its choice between different energy sources and the general structure of its energy supply’ (Herranz-Surrallés 2016). In the case of migration and asylum, the coalition of policy entrepreneurs in favour of external action is much larger, and consists of different factions: those attached to international asylum law who saw a strong role for the EU in the negotiations on a ‘Global Compact on Refugees’ – from the Commission and the foreign ministries of certain member states – are as much in favour of (a certain type of) EU



external action as those who wish to protect EU interests by securitizing migration and shifting its management ‘up and out’ (Lavenex 2006). To this latter group belong the Commission’s DG Home and the majority of member states’ interior ministries. Finally, in the case of science, policy entrepreneurs have primarily for competitiveness concerns pushed the EU to engage more externally (López de San Román & Schunz 2018; Stein 2002). In this area of shared parallel EU competence, however – and similar to the energy and migration cases – member states at times still provide ‘vertical blockades’ (Prange-Gstöhl 2018; 2010), making it difficult to develop coherent external action.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article develops an original framework to analyse and explain an increasingly important but understudied area of European integration. The comprehensive three-pronged framework – drawn from literatures on the EU as a global actor and public policy – helps to reveal how and why EU external action develops in OIPA. In particular, the framework takes seriously the international and domestic structural factors (opportunity and presence) as well as agency (policy entrepreneurship) as accounting for the emergence of EU external engagement in these policy areas.

Taking a problem-driven approach, the article undertakes a plausibility probe to investigate the salience and potency of this framework in the case of EU external cultural policies. This case clearly followed the historical trajectory typically found in OIPA with external dimensions. It shows considerable evidence of a structural policy window created through international opportunity and domestic presence. A varied coalition of policy entrepreneurs then follows logics of appropriateness and consequence to drive the emergence and increase in EU external engagement over time.

While the plausibility of the framework is supported in the area of cultural policy, additional evidence from other illustrative cases further substantiates the propositions and hints at the generalizability of the framework. The findings from energy policy, migration and asylum policy, and science policy indeed underscore that the co-existence of (i) an opportunity for the EU, (ii) EU presence, and (iii) a sizable pro-external engagement policy entrepreneurship within the EU that identifies and capitalizes on (i) and (ii) is sufficient for EU external engagement to emerge in areas with originally internal policies. To explore further the generalizability and explanatory power of the findings and the framework, further research – including specification and analysis of interest and ideational motives – is encouraged across additional policy areas.

The findings help to reveal important aspects of the oft-overlooked external dimensions of OIPA. First, they speak more generally to our understanding of European integration – as external engagement increases in these policy areas, so too does the depth and nature of the regional integration process change. Second, they show how changes in these policy areas affect the nature, behaviour and impact of the EU in its global context – EU external relations are more than traditional foreign policy, trade and development. Third, they provide a step towards explaining the emergence of EU external engagement that might inspire more theory-driven ways of accounting for EU external relations, including cases in which external engagement does not emerge (due to the absence of a policy window or strong resistance to pro-EU external action entrepreneurship) and in policy areas that do not follow the historical trajectory posited at the outset of the article. Finally, in practical terms, this article highlights the potential for internal policies to contribute to EU external relations. For the EU to achieve its objectives set out in the 2016 Global Strategy, concerted efforts by various policy

entrepreneurs must be undertaken to pursue sectoral diplomacies in a more joined-up approach by effectively capitalizing on future windows of opportunity.

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## NOTES

1 This article focuses on understanding and explaining *intended* EU external action, excluding unintended forms of external action.

2 Only in a few of these policy areas have scholars begun to scrutinize external action. For example, on energy, see Herranz-Surrallés 2015, 2016; the environment, see Adelle et al. 2018; migration, see Lavenex 2018, 2006; science, see López de San Román & Schunz 2017; and higher education, see Damro & Friedman 2018.

3 For a review of the state of the art, see Drieskens (2017). See also da Conceição-Heldt & Meunier (2014) and Niemann & Bretherton (2013).

4 On framing in the context of agenda-setting, see Kingdon (1995).

5 Article 167(1) TFEU defines ‘EU culture’ as comprising the tangible and intangible cultures of its member states and its own ‘common cultural heritage’. Policy domains in which the EU shall encourage member state cooperation, supporting and supplementing their activities, include: improving the knowledge of the culture of the European peoples and safeguarding cultural heritage of European significance (Art 167(2) TFEU).

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