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**Article (Published version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Kyris, George and Maltby, Tomas (2011) *The European Union as a global actor: present and future challenges - special issue edited by George Kyris and Tomas Maltby*. [Political perspectives](#), 5 (2). ISSN 2049-081X

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Available in LSE Research Online: May 2013

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The European Union as a Global Actor: Present and Future Challenges



Keywords: European security, EU actorness, EU enlargement, European Neighbourhood policy, energy security.

This edition of *Political Perspectives* focuses on the European Union (EU) as a global actor. Four authors have addressed aspects of the present and future challenges that the Union faces, and the effectiveness of EU instruments utilised to achieve strategic objectives. The theme is a broad one, and relates to a selection of the contemporary challenges the EU faces with regards to its international role and affairs. The edition aims to contribute to the debate on the global role of the EU, which, in post-Lisbon era, has obtained increased relevance.

The EU has expanded from six members in the 1950s to twenty five in 2004 and twenty seven in 2007. The Union's international role includes bilateral relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP, since 1957), the promotion of economic integration and democratic reform within sixteen neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East as part of the Union of the Mediterranean (EUROMED, previously known as the Barcelona process launched in 1995), and the launching of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 to enhance cooperation with sixteen neighbours, and the Eastern Partnership with six former Soviet republics launched in 2009. These initiatives have the objective of promoting democratic and economic reforms, increasing stability and security and

developing political and economic integration, particularly in the case of EUROMED and the ENP. They are examples of the EU's attempts to project its influence outside of the strongest incentive, that of the prospect of eventual EU membership (restricted at this stage to the Western Balkans, Turkey and Iceland).

With regard to security and defence, the EU is developing from the pre-enlargement 2003 European Security Strategy's emphasis on 'preventive engagement' which signified a 'preference for positive civilian rather than coercive military measures' and a lack of an equivalent to 'North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)'s Article 5 in regard to territorial defence' (Kirchner, 2006: 959). The Lisbon Treaty, which came into force in December 2009, has introduced the 'mutual defence clause' (Article 42 (7)) and a 'solidarity clause' (Article 222). If one of the Member States is attacked or experiences a human or natural catastrophe or terrorist attack, all others are obliged to provide assistance. The Lisbon Treaty has also introduced a European Defence Agency to add to the existing Union commitment for the creation of a rapid reaction force, battle groups and a military procurement agency, and to increase operational capability. The European External Action Service has the objective of providing the Union with a common, coherent voice in common foreign and security policy (Article 27), and through Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO, TEU, Article 42) the aim of developing the EU's Common and Security Defence Policy capacities. Overall, institutions and Treaty provisions in the EU are developing greater potential community action, but there remains an enduring lack of capacity (Ginsberg, 1999) and intergovernmental decision-making rules that continue to inhibit the successful implementation of common EU policies. With twelve of the EU's members having participated in the Union for a less than a decade, there remains the potential for socialisation pressures to affect the development of the EU as an international actor over time, thus Europeanising member states and contributing towards a convergence of member states around common norms and preferences, and encouraging a Union better able to face international challenges through projection of both normative and more traditional 'hard' power.

The articles in the volume address the EU's actorness and the various instruments the Union has in order to project its preferences in its near abroad. As the articles illustrate these include those of the 'soft', cultural dimension and of those which demonstrate 'harder' power projection. Addressed by Wisniewski are plans to increase the EU's energy security through pipeline diversification projects, which fall into the latter category. Also considered by Bouris and Simao is the role for the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Mediterranean policy in the face of debates regarding enlargement and absorption capacity, and the implications for conditionality as an instrument of soft power on accession and aspirant accession states (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004).

The first article of this volume, by Nick Wright, is a study of the EU's capacity for international roles. Conceptually, the article discusses three main trends of analysis with regards to the topic of the EU as a global actor: the realist tradition, and the approaches of the EU as a civilian and normative power. The author takes a critical stance towards the realist approach as a 'tool' to understand the EU's international actorness and, instead, he proposes a theoretical framework that combines the civilian power and normative power debates, which fits better the economic and diplomatic aspect of the EU's international presence. This conceptual template is then tested against the EU's regulatory and competition policy, and security. The author's conclusion is that the EU has a role to play as a global actor in a multitude of policy areas, with its scope greatly increased when reflecting an area of deep internal integration, though it is far from impotent in areas such as foreign and security policy, where internal integration is at an embryonic stage. The contribution of this work also rests on[?] the elaborate literature review and conceptual framework proposed for the study of the EU as an international actor. Along these lines, this work offers an open conceptual dialogue with the article that concludes this volume and discusses the concept of normative power with regards to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (see below).

The second contribution of this volume, by Licínia Simão, represents an analysis of the EU's relation to the region of south Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). The author uses the conceptual debate on the security communities in order to assert Brussels' involvement in the region and efforts to build a shared European security and political community with south Caucasus. Along these lines, the article accounts for stimuli, limitations and dilemmas of the EU's actorness in the area. The paper's contribution includes the rich empirical findings with regard to EU-south Caucasus relations as well as the critical and theoretically informed study of the ENP, a 'totemic' external policy of the EU, which is defined by integration strategies different to enlargement. The paper concludes that the EU's present role in the region does not address the expectations raised in these countries, while an assertive EU policy towards the south Caucasus is undermined by the unique political context in place and the lack of consensus between EU member states with regard to what strategy the EU should adopt.

The third contribution, by Jaroslaw Wisniewski, also focuses on the region of south Caucasus but, alternatively, strips the analysis from theoretical considerations and, instead, provides a concrete examination of the EU's energy policy. The author investigates the external aspect of the EU energy security and focuses on the example of Nabucco – the EU's initiative of an energy route, which could provide European markets with gas from Central Asian resources, bypassing the existing pipeline system within the territory of the Russian Federation. The article sheds light on the historical context of Caucasus as an energy transit route and expands on the contemporary political dynamics, both internal (of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and external (Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan), that shape the region. The final assertion of the author is that Nabucco provides an important opportunity for the EU to promote stability in the region, through the deployment of 'carrot and stick' practices. It is argued that the stabilisation in the region will not only provide a stable alternative energy transit route but will also address one of the focal objectives of the ENP.

Dimitris Bouris' contribution, the final in this volume, is a theoretically informed discussion of the EU's international role with reference to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In order to engage with the popular discussion on the EU as a normative power, the paper investigates the EU's policy in the region of the Middle East,; from the one hand, the promotion of democracy and, from the other hand, the development of socio-cultural links between the EU and the region, with particular focus on the inter-youth dialogue and cultural understanding. Often in contrast to the article that opened this volume, the author adopts a critical stance towards the discussion of normative power, which, here, is considered not enough on its own to explain the EU's role in the region, which drives increasingly away from normative rhetoric.

The contested nature of the EU's actorness is likely to continue, and its policies and instruments will continue to evolve. Since 2004 the Union has expanded from 15 to 27 member states, and from a population of 380 million to one of 500 million. Significant further challenges for the EU lie ahead. Entry negotiations with three more candidate countries; Turkey, Croatia and Former Yugoslavic Republic of Macedonia (F.Y.R.O.M) began in 2005, and Iceland followed in 2010. This further enlargement is set to expand the EU's borders in the short term. However, enlargement fatigue and debates over widening versus deepening could delay Turkish and further Western Balkan state accession (despite the Stabilisation and Association Agreement offering a membership perspective to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo). There is also a risk that the intergovernmental nature of foreign policy decision-making combined with Permanent Structured Cooperation (Article 42) could create a two-speed EU in this policy sphere, with the clause allowing member states to 'proceed more intensively to develop its defence capacities'. The EU faces continuing pressures in the field of economics, as the financial crisis continues to undermine the objective outlined in the Lisbon Strategy (2000) to create 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion', and its replacement, the Europe 2020 strategy (2010) to create jobs, and encourage 'green' economic growth and create

an inclusive society. These momentous internal developments will also reflect on the international image and role of the EU. In this post-Lisbon era, perhaps more than ever before, the EU's global actorness will be tested. The present volume aspires to contribute to the vivid academic debate on this complex yet highly interesting topic of contemporary EU studies.

Acknowledgements:

We would like to acknowledge the efforts of the authors who contributed their high quality papers to this volume, to the reviewers for volunteered their time to offer valuable feedback, and to Katherine Allison and Ralph Young for their support in helping to compile this edition.

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University of Manchester, March 2011

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