

BOOK REVIEW

Elaine Fahey and Isabella Mancini (eds.), *Understanding the EU as a Good Global Actor. Ambitions, Values and Metrics*, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022, 314 pages, ISBN 978-1-80220-297-7

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The European Union (EU) has emerged as a prominent supranational power, wielding influence and shaping the international agenda in various domains. Since its inception, the EU has evolved from an economic community to a multifaceted entity with a wide range of competencies and a global presence. Its response to recent crises, such as economic downturns, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine demonstrated its resilience and commitment to peace, democracy, human rights, sustainable development and multilateralism. Thus, its role in promoting a more stable, prosperous and inclusive world gained increased attention which allowed for various interpretations of its position as a proactive and influential global actor.

In this context, scholars began using concepts such as `normative power` (Manners, 2002) or `ethical power` (Aggestam, 2008) to describe the European Union, as its actions are driven by norms and principles that member states respect and promote (Herlin-Karnell, 2013). These shared beliefs include the rule of law, democracy, human rights, liberty and peace which makes the EU distinct from other political institutions and likely to act in a normative way. However, debates over the consistency in actions of these conceptualisations emerged as oftentimes the internal and external policies have not been integrated into a coherent perspective (Bicchi, 2006; Hyde-Price, 2006; Sjursen, 2006).

To a large extent, “Understanding the EU as a good global actor” falls into this discourse, as it presents the EU’s mission to promote ‘good’ governance across the global scene, asking what its metrics and values are. Based on the provisions of Article 21 of the Treaty on the European Union, the authors explore the complexities and challenges imposed by the EU’s external agenda that may compromise the achievement of ‘goodness’. As the book focuses on the EU’s external trade agenda and its link to other dimensions such as governance, digitalisation and institutions, it explores normative, analytical and descriptive perspectives on the intricacy of being

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a ‘good’ actor and aims at generating a comprehensive and critical analysis of EU’s mission in the international arena.

Against this background, the edited volume by Fahey and Mancini argues that the EU has gained its ‘good’ global actor status although it tackled many limitations and complexities. The book does not support the idea in which the EU is a good actor but aims to generate critical understandings on the topic while building a comprehensive framework for assessing the ‘goodness’. Presenting results from various interdisciplinary studies, as well as contributions from legal, economic and political science, the authors are searching for answers to a set of highly relevant questions related to the EU’s trade agenda.

The book comprises four parts and 15 chapters and despite its diversity it is well structured, accessible and highly coherent. The first part discusses the limitations and complexities of the EU’s actorness in trade, the second part examines the trade agenda focusing on its governance and external dimension, the third goes further into the data governance structure and their integration into policy frameworks and the fourth part explores the role of institutions in shaping the EU’s good global actorness.

Drawing on richly contextualised analyses from comparative and international relations perspective, the first part of the book offers well-structured theoretical insight into the external challenges that the EU tackles as a global trade actor. The main idea that lies at the heart of the four chapters comprising this part is that the EU’s internal dimension, focused on values, interests and laws and its external one are interdependent. The first chapter presents an overview of EU’s external regulatory impact and provides suggestions for its maximization. The authors also discuss the ‘good’ governance model driven by principles and values in regards to regulatory power surplus. The following chapter argues that external pressures have pushed the EU to compromise on its core values in order to maintain its international status and trade power. Chapter three is constructed on the idea that the EU constitutes the Market Power Europe and the export of disciplines on domestic regulations on services contributes to this status. In the fourth chapter, the author compares the EU and the US in regards to the trade-climate nexus and analyses the two governance models examining the different approaches used by each power.

Aiming at developing the existing knowledge on the emerging discourse on deeper trade and its link to good governance, the second part of the volume examines the EU’s external agenda. Therefore, chapter five provides an overview of EU’s values that drive its external actions and assesses how these values contribute to the ‘good’ global actorness. The sixth chapter analyses the impact of free trade agreements on public procurement, in terms of promoting social and environmental sustainability. Drawing on the EU-Korea Expert Panel findings, chapter seven confirms the EU’s ‘goodness’ in its exertion of market and normative power. The following chapter looks into the intricacy of being a ‘good’ climate and trade actor, as distinct from the role of a ‘good’ global climate actor. Based on the Carbon Border

Adjustment Mechanism, it argues that the alignment of EU law and international law is just as important as the one on trade and climate. Chapter nine provides a critical but constructive perspective on EU's gender responsiveness in external trade policies. The author argues that certain challenges related to measuring the impact of trade on gender must be overcome in order to fully develop the EU's transformative gender responsive trade policy.

The third section of the book has a rather novel focus, analysing the EU's governance model in regards to data flows. It discusses the evolution of the individual privacy standards in the EU and the difficulty of their integration into its trade policies. Chapter 10 examines the EU's role in drafting the Council of Europe normative activities on cybersecurity and privacy. Drawing on two case studies, the author argues that the EU has been a 'good' actor in promoting the Council of Europe treaties worldwide, yet greatly challenged by issues born from the coexistence of EU and international legal provisions. The following chapter compares three cross-border data flows governance models, of the EU, China and the US and presents their reflection in the trade policies. The article demonstrates that the similarity of regulatory exceptions from free data flows commitments, in all three cases, can support further multilateral consensus on this topic. Chapter 12 discusses the EU and China's perspectives on data governance, comparing their approaches and impact on data governance at the global level. The authors underline both differences and similarities in European and Chinese actorhood, providing suggestions on how the EU can outline its 'good' global vision in data governance.

Covering the institutional dimension of the EU's 'good' trade governance model, the final part of the book explores the extent in which the EU institutions can shape the normative dimension of external trade. Chapter 13 discusses the EU's increasing parliamentarism in both internal and external trade policies and argues that this implies greater demand for democratic legitimacy in this area. Thus, building on the hypothesis that the EU is a 'good' global actor, fostering accountability and democratisation across other regions, the author suggests that inter-parliamentary cooperation mechanisms could strengthen its vision for stronger trade governance. The next chapter explores the role of the European Parliament in shaping the EU's international economic relations, its trade objectives and agreements. The author also considers how a closer cooperation between the supranational and national parliaments can improve policymaking in trade. Chapter 15 focuses on the openness of the Court of Justice of the EU to international law, moving beyond the 'openness/hostility' debate towards context-specific approach. Thus, the authors call for further nuanced analysis in cases in which CJEU engages with international legal instruments as a way of assessing the EU's 'good' global actorhood. The final chapter looks at the trade and sustainable chapters of the FTAs, analysing their impact in two disputes: Korea - Labour Rights and Ukraine - Wood Products. The author argues that settling disputes by using FTA procedures contributes to the EU's profile as a sustainable trade actor.

Overall, this volume is highly relevant for the current debates around conceptualising the EU actorness at the global level. By identifying many of the limitations and complexities that emerged between trade and other dimensions, this book provides a framework to understand both factual and normative aspects of the EU's ambition to be a 'good' global actor. It represents a valuable addition to the literature as it opens new opportunities for further research on the EU's trade policy and adjacent fields. Moreover, the book serves as an excellent source for both scholars and experts and is of interest for all those wishing to understand the EU's role in shaping economic, social and environmental policies worldwide.

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