

## How Europe can shape the global system

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Published: April 30 2008 19:28 | Last updated: April 30 2008 19:28

The end of the unipolar moment, underlined by the American fiasco in Iraq and by the ascendancy of China, Brazil and India, raises again questions about the structure of the global system and how Europe fits within it.

After the end of the cold war and with the accelerating pace of globalisation, Europeans were inclined to believe that greater economic interdependence would emasculate the power of nation states. The international system instead entered a peculiar period in which rising countries coexist, and there has been a return to a power politics framed by the US, China, India, Brazil and Russia. This baroque situation constitutes a challenge for Europe, which is better suited to dealing with intensified interdependence than with power politics. In such a context, what are the possibilities for Europe to influence the global system?

The first scenario could be called power in progress. A growing power becomes aware of its common interests and develops policies that go beyond the traditional realm of economics, such as exists in the US. This is the most improbable scenario for Europe. There is no demand for more political integration, a fact crudely revealed by the failure of the constitutional treaty. As long as there is no European polity, the development of a federalist Europe is unthinkable. This fact may dismay a lot of us, but is an inescapable reality.

So if there is no chance of having a super-federal state, what kind of expectations can we have for Europe?

The only credible scenario for Europe lies in its “normative power” – promoting standards that are negotiated and legitimised within international institutions. Norms aim to **discipline the behaviour** of state and non-state actors. To be efficient, those norms should rely on soft and hard mechanisms of enforcement. Of course, those norms could be biased in favour of the dominant powers, as some developing countries argue. There is a risk, for example, that stringent environmental rules in Europe will hurt the development of some exporting countries that have lower standards. That is why norms need legitimacy and mechanisms of compliance that allow weaker countries to have a say. The World Trade Organisation’s dispute settlement system is one example of a relatively unbiased enforcement process.

What are the domains in which normative Europe can make a difference and promote values reflecting its own social preferences?

Climate change is probably the most important global issue and is the area in which Europe has acquired undisputed leadership. Without its commitment to the Kyoto protocol, this crucial agreement would have been killed off by the US. The next step in negotiations, the Bali process, is likely to be even more complex.

To be exemplary in climate change, Europe needs to meet three conditions. It must achieve its aim to **reduce its emissions** of greenhouse gases by 20 per cent by 2020. By being the first region to commit itself to post-Kyoto targets, the European Union fixed the norm that will shape the global agenda. The second condition lies in the need to be unified in global negotiations in spite of contrasting national records. Finally it must develop the political and technical creativity needed to encourage emerging countries to get on board. Without their commitment to the Bali process, the chances of tackling climate change will be limited.

Multilateral trade negotiation is a second domain in which normative Europe needs be committed. The multilateral framework is the most equitable system, even if there are frustrations in the slow pace and temptations to go bilateral, as the US is doing.

Human rights are the potential third pillar. Here the results could be mixed because this issue is in the

hands of nation states torn between colonial guilt, economic greed and ethical concerns. Europe has both to respect national sensitivities and to keep its options open, including talking to all political stakeholders, such as Hamas. It also has to develop the power to name and shame rogue regimes by enhancing the role of the European parliament: what states cannot do, the parliament can.

There is a full range of global issues in which Europe can make a difference. We need to concentrate on them, rather than thinking in terms of a false alternative between a superstate that has no chance of emerging and scattered nation states faced with the law of national diminishing returns.

*The writer is a professor at Sciences Po. An extended version of this paper, *The Normative Empire*, was posted on Telos, a French think-tank ([www.telos-eu.com](http://www.telos-eu.com))*

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