Discussion Paper

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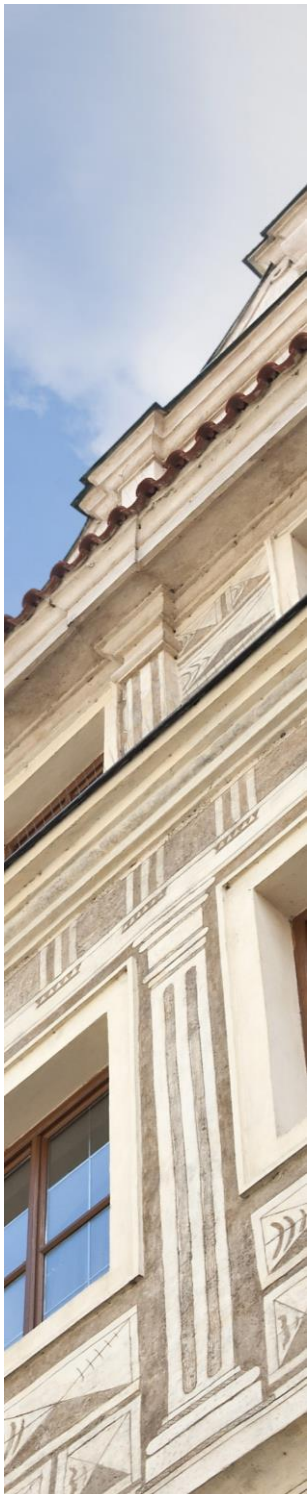
The EU Normative Power as a Shield for Dependency?



ABSTRACT

This paper aims to assess the substance of the claim that the European Union acts like a normative power in its relations with Colombia. The first section explains the reasoning behind selecting Ian Manners' normative power theory for approaching this topic, and compares the relevance of this theory to alternatives. The second section examines the EU's normative influence over Colombia based on the sub-regional and bilateral agreements made over the last 20 years. The third section contains a critical analysis of political and economic relations between the EU and Colombia, based on EU Country Strategy Papers, the EU-Colombia-Peru FTA, and EU-CAN relations in general. Having established that there is a gap between pure intentions and actual outcomes, the final section proposes the restoration of dependency theory as a useful means for examining this discrepancy.

Introduction

What kind of power is the European Union? This question, first posed in the 1970s, marks the beginning of a longstanding debate that would only intensify after the Maastricht Treaty's creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy pillar. The appellations given to the EU have been various and numerous: civilian, soft, transformative, postmodern, normative, and so on. In this article we will focus on the normative power theory. In short, the theory states that a global player's ability to act worldwide is defined by the extent to which its normative structure is acknowledged as universal, cosmopolitan, and in keeping with human rights. Its actions are primarily aimed at the rules and laws of other players.

Can the European Union be considered a normative actor? If we look at its acquis communautaire, and the human rights clauses retained in all of its bilateral, regional, and subregional accords, our answer would be "yes, of course". Yet one may wonder whether an analysis of official documents and constitutional charters is sufficient for explaining the essence of the European Union. This is especially problematic if a theory aims to portray an actor as a "force for good", but there is a risk of overestimating the actor's role and effective capacity. Furthermore, when it is not possible to find a clear distinction between a principle and an action, or between goal and result, the whole theoretical framework may become useless.

What is the actual validity of an appellation when concrete repercussions are not taken into consideration, or even worse, when asserted principles are not reflected in a coherent action? When such consequences are omitted from the discussion, a superficial analysis of a complicated picture may result. With this in mind, the following paragraphs seek to call normative power theory into question by looking at the EU's actual external actions.

The first section of this article explains the choice of normative power theory for researching the topic at hand: both by explaining the essence of the EU's normative power according to Ian Manners' understanding, and by comparing this understanding with civilian and soft power theory. The second section will stress the EU's normative influence over Colombia on the grounds of the many sub-regional and bilateral agreements that were signed between the two entities in the last 20 years. In the third section, the operational scopes of the EU's three principal actions towards Colombia (EU-CAN relations, EU Country Strategy Papers and the EU-Colombia-Peru FTA) will be analysed in order to highlight their main weaknesses. Lastly, in the final section, these investigations will lead us to conclude

that a seemingly outdated thesis such as the dependency theory can be restored and explain the revealed capabilities-expectation gap of normative power.[1]

1. The European Union as a normative power

The concept of normative power was created by Ian Manners in 2000, and it refers to a power that is neither militaristic nor purely economic, as it works through ideas, opinions and conscience. Essentially, normative power focuses on the ability of norms to influence an actor via his or her identity and behaviour. The norms in question stem from universally applicable and generally acknowledged principles: sustainable peace, freedom, democracy, rule of law, equality, solidarity, development and good governance (Manners, 2009).

The EU is predisposed to act as a normative power because of its three cardinal features: its unique historical context, its hybrid polity, and its political-legal constitution (Manners, 2002: 240). The EU is a new type of global actor that combines supranationalism with international forms of governance (Sjursen, 2006: 242); it embodies a post-Westphalian entity to the extent to which its way of being is not moved by a state-centric understanding, but by a pooling of interests and a preference for multilateral frameworks (Manners, 2002: 239). Furthermore, what makes the EU a special defender of universal principles is the use of these principles in its acquis communautaire. The entire EU normative frameworks, in particular the Treaty of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, follow the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and all the various conventions enshrining fundamental human rights. Therefore, the raison d'être of the EU cannot be dissociated from the concept of universal norms, and its principal aim is the promotion of peace, prosperity and progress through its normative experience (Manners, 2009: 22). The EU is indeed envisaged as playing a decisive role within this transformed world by shaping the concept of what is considered "normal" in international society. From another perspective, the EU's action can be justified by a general acceptance of its values, allowing the EU to further spread its global influence and promote the already mentioned principles. Consequently, to the extent to which the EU is deemed a "force for good", it has legitimacy to act anywhere, even for economic and political purposes (Diez and Manners, 2007: 176).

However, considering that the normative power theory is not the first theory which has tried to explain the particular and innovative kind of power represented by the EU, it is important to clarify our focus by defining the EU's current external attitude. In order to draw a better picture of the situation, two other relevant approaches should be considered as well.

[1] This term was introduced by Christopher Hill in 1993 in order to explain the existing gap between what the EC had intended to do and what it was actually able to deliver.

The first author who dealt with this issue was François Duchêne, who in 1970 described the European Communities as having civilian power. In the context of the EU this means non-military power such as economic, diplomatic and cultural policy instruments owned by a civilian group of countries that are long on economic power and relatively short on armed force (Duchêne, 1973: 19). An ideal type of civilian power is supposed to combine three necessary elements: democratic control over foreign policy, the conduct of this policy through non-military instruments, and strong cooperation with other countries in the pursuit of international objectives (Krohn, 2009: 4).

Several years after the aforementioned description, Joseph Nye coined the term soft power in order to describe the "second face of power": namely a country's practice of obtaining favorable outcomes solely through international admiration of its values, other countries' emulation of its example, and other nations' aspirations to reach its level of prosperity and openness (Nye, 2004: 5). Soft power is attractive; it relies on culture, political values, and foreign policies conducted with moral authority. While Nye used these terms in relation to US foreign policy, he argued that the EU (ibidem: 75–81) is a strong soft power because of its history, its market capacity, and its attachment to noble values such as democracy, human rights and freedom. Moreover, the EU's international image is much more positive than that of America's which is viewed as a coercive and unilateral power.

According to these remarks, it is undeniable that signs of both civilian and soft powers are present in normative power theory. All three of these concepts mentioned, when they are used in relation to the EU, portray an EU which prefers to deploy civilian means rather than military means without losing the capacity to participate in world affairs as an international great power. Nonetheless, Duchêne's thesis has never encompassed the EU's willingness to create an autonomous military capacity, whereas Manners accounts for such an eventuality by stating that it could occur in cases where the EU justifies the defence of universal rights (ibidem: 178). Moreover, Duchêne inserted his theory within a Westphalian framework by accepting an international society composed of states with different values, norms, and habits, which could be integrated within an open trade framework. On the contrary, the post-Cold War world boasts a new landscape, where one of the main abilities of a superpower is the legitimization of its own system, which may be "softly imposed" on the rest of the world as the only cosmopolitanly acceptable one (ibidem: 179). With regard to Nye's soft power focus, its shortcomings can become clear if one considers the EU's soft tools to be a mere cover for "hard" conquests in power and economics (ibidem). Overall the concept of soft power remains too vague for interpreting the particular nature of the EU.

It is for this reason that we are choosing Manners' theory as the most exhaustive one for explaining the spirit, the intention, and the operational mechanism of the

EU's external action. On these grounds, this article will use Colombia as a case study for analyzing the effectiveness and the results of the EU's external policy from a normative power approach.

2. The EU normative power towards Colombia

In this section we will introduce the most important outcomes of EU-Colombian relations, highlighting both the subregional and bilateral levels of their partnership. Nonetheless, even in this case it is essential to explain the reasoning behind choosing Columbia, considering the existence of "hotter areas" for studies of normative power ruling.

The answer lies in a major flaw within Manners' theory: pure normative power is the hardest to achieve when attractive political or economic interests are involved. The EU's normative power is indeed a weak and ambiguous concept when there is either a proximate threat to the EU or a desirable market, as therefore a counterweighting effect can be used in the field. Manners himself (2009: 15) concluded that the development and the use of the EU's material incentives and physical force sometimes follow the patterns and practices of a great power rather than using normative power in a justifiable way. Since it is necessary to focus on a region outside of the EU's proximate threats and major economic interests, an obvious choice of study is South America.

According to Fredo Arias-King, South America ranks sixth overall in the EU's list of political priorities, after "the EU itself, the US, Russia, the Middle East and the booming Asia" (2008: 2). Many scholars catalogue Latin America as a region that was abandoned by Europe (Freres and Sanahuja, 2005: 1–2), due to disinterest and pessimistic outlooks accompanied by a lack of helpful policies. The best efforts at cooperation thus far seem to be arrangements of poor, bilateral dialogues and signings of (mostly potential) trade agreements at the sub-regional level. In spite of several attempts at European-Latin American partnerships, the potential for a flourishing relationship has remained unfulfilled. Whether this situation may be considered deplorable from a "real-politik" perspective or not, the normative power perception is completely different. In this case, the weakness of the EU's relations with Latin America would represent an open playground for testing out instruments of pure normative power without any economic implications or hidden political agendas. Colombia, in particular, may be a prominent example of Latin America in this respect; it is a Western-biased country with a promising, but still limited market that is severely affected by many humanitarian and democratic problems that can serve as large targets for normative action. With these premises in mind, we may move on to our analysis.

The first contact between the EU and Colombia was fostered through the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), namely through the trade bloc gathering of Colombia,

Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia[2]. The first EC-CAN meeting took place in 1973, and the cooperation was reinforced ten years later by the construction of the Joint European Communities-CAN Committee. In 1993 a new generation of agreements was launched, confirming the guidelines of 1983, which were related to cooperation in industry, technology, and trade. In 1995 the High-Level Specialized Dialogue on Drugs was opened in response to the fact that Europe (together with the US) was the main consumer of cocaine produced in the Andean Region. This agreement followed the 1990 Generalized System of Preference – Drugs (GSP), which was a preferential trade system designed to help Andean countries develop alternatives to growing illicit crops through new export opportunities. It was a unilateral system (nothing had to come from the Andean countries), and it was renewed in 2005 with the name GSP Plus (GSP+). This system granted new incentives to the Andean countries in exchange for the ratification and effective implementation of 27 specific international conventions in several areas (human rights, labour standards, and good governance)[3]. In 1996 the Declaration of Rome was signed, which contained a provision that would set up a political dialogue mechanism with high-level interregional meetings. Then, a new Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) was agreed upon in 2003 in order to establish a bilateral mechanism aimed at strengthening democracy, fundamental rights, rule of law, sustainable development under the Millennium Development Goals, anti-corruption measures, and good governance. But nonetheless, even after eleven years the PDCA has not yet been ratified. In 2002 the European Commission launched the Andean Regional Strategy Papers (RSP) for the periods 2002–2006 and 2007–2013. They had the following aims: strengthening the Andean Parliament's social participation; working towards the creation of a custom union and a common market; constructing an Andean peace zone for tackling conflict; stemming drug production; and encouraging democracy, human rights and sustainable development.

Coming to EU-Colombian bilateral relations, it must be kept in mind that the EU is the most important member of the G24 group, i.e. the informal working group encompassing the donor community in Colombia, whose key objective is building a constant dialogue between the government and the civil society. The majority of the EU's funds and developmental projects come from Country Strategic Papers

[2] The CAN was founded in 1969 with the aim to achieve development and integration in the whole region. Chile and Venezuela were previously members, but the former became an associate state of it in 2006, whereas the latter withdrew from it for political reasons in the same year.

[3] The GSP was assessed as a failure by both of the parties in its aftermath. It did not produce the expected results for three main reasons: it did not include products that were of major interest for the Andean countries (primarily bananas); it was incompatible with the new WTO general principles; and its importance was lessened by the signing of association/free trade agreements with other South American countries. Besides this, none of the Andean countries ratified the 23 treaties about human rights, the environment, drugs, and corruption that they needed to ratify in order to obtain EU benefits.

(CSPs). So far, two CSPs have been drawn for Colombia (for the periods 2002–2006 and 2007–2013) with a total cost of €240 million. Peace and stability, rule of law, human rights, productivity, and competitiveness were the declared operational targets, and they were symmetrically aligned with the National Development Plan (NDP) that was settled on by the Colombian government[4].

Finally, the recent Free Trade Agreement signed by the EU, Colombia, and Peru on June 26th, 2012 promotes trade in goods and services by eliminating tariff barriers, thereby supporting economic growth. Many sectors are addressed in it, including those of produce, agrofuels, mining, fisheries, automobiles, textiles, electronics, machinery, wines, spirits, services (telecommunications, construction and financial), and banking. In addition the market package is complemented by a set of rules guaranteeing intellectual property rights, trade defence, and competition. Provisions on human rights and sustainable development are an essential part of the agreement, entitling the parties to adopt "appropriate measures" in cases of violations of these provisions.

Returning to our initial assertion, we can claim that elements of European normative power towards Colombia stand out at all levels in this case. Principles such as human rights, developmental and environmental sustainability, free market trade, equal conditions, democracy, good governance, rule of law, protection for minorites, gender equality, etc. are inserted in all of the above-mentioned documents. Behind every political dialogue, strategic partnership, declaration or trade agreement, a clause or an appendix dealing with a basic normative background is always present. These are typically the essential conditions for triggering new concessions or opening new cooperative frameworks. Furthermore, we may talk of normative power reaching beyond conditionality within agreements and into the involved countries' own normative systems. In all of these documents it is possible to see a "counter-directional effect." It is not the EU which forces someone to accept its own rules; on the contrary, other countries (in this case, Colombia) take the initiative to change their own internal rules and wear a more pro-European dress.

In this respect, there are two prominent examples. In the Andean Regional Strategy Paper 2007–2013 we can read that CAN had a keen interest in learning about the EU's experience on the social front in terms of method, policy, governance, and financial instruments. The EU is therefore supposed to assist further development of regional economic integration policy and rule-making, and this should be

[4] The National Development Plan (NDP) is aimed at setting the guidelines for growth and improvement in the country and determines the processes to be carried out to meet these goals. The NDP is executed by the State Government and the National Planning Department in the security and defense, economy, environmental management and citizen participation sectors (extract from www.proexport.co).

accompanied by an implementation of rules and the monitoring thereof by regional CAN institutions and individual CAN countries; the EU has to provide financial support for a program of activities that would enhance the regional economic integration as well as facilitating EU-CAN trade negotiations in the context of a future EU-CAN Association Agreement. In other words, there is the consideration of whether the EU is seen as an inspiring model of social politics and regional integration. The Andean Community would benefit from European monitoring and evaluation to help solve its shortcomings and ineffective policies. The ideal solution would be a normative adjustment of CAN institutions so that they would be as similar as possible to the successful EU polity. Similarly, the clause on human rights and Title IX, art. 267 on "Trade and Sustainable Development" of the EU-Colombia-Peru FTA led the Colombian government to adopt a strict road map in order to improve its human and environmental rights, labour standards and justice system. Also, the Colombian EU Ambassador Rodrigo Rivera wrote a letter to Martin Shultz in 2012, the President of the EU Parliament, assuring him of the undertaking of considerable measures to tackle Colombian humanitarian crises[5]. In this case, we have a broad spectrum of clear legislative measures that were taken to reduce EU perplexities so as to guarantee an easier implementation of trade relations.

Both of these examples are proof of the positive hegemony in Manners' thesis. We can envisage the EU not as an imposing power, but rather as "water on stones" (2009: 2) spreading its weight through persuasion, example, and prestige. However, as stated in the introduction, our analysis will move beyond power typology to the effectiveness of soft power. Unfortunately, by comparing the real effects of the EU's policies on the Colombian political situation and population, the European normative coherence leaves much to be desired. We will assert our criticism thereof in the next section.

3. A critique of the EU's actions

This section is divided into three different parts in order to cast different perspectives on the major weak points concerning the EU's relations with Colombia.

[5] From among the measures undertaken by the Colombian government, we can mention the creation of a National System of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law to formulate the Comprehensive National Policy on Human Rights and consolidate sectoral public policies with a human rights approach; the activation of the Victims and Land Restitution Law; the enforcement of the measures for assistance, care and comprehensive reparations for victims; the strengthening of regional institutions for assistance and restitution of land through the Offices of the Land Restitution Unit and the Regional Victim Assistance and Reparation Centres; the provision of transitional justice guaranteeing truth, justice and reparations to the victims of former members of illegal organisations; granting legal benefits and issuing other provisions; and the implementation of the National Registry for Missing Persons.

3.1 EU-CAN relations

It is clear that the primary concern of the EU in regards to the CAN has always been political integration and social stabilization. Institutional strengthening and good governance have been the most important items in all of the EU-CAN documents, from the First Joint Committee to the 2002–2006 Regional Strategic Paper. The EU is aware of its prominent role in promoting good governance and democracy, and the whole Andean region constitutes an excellent opportunity for operating in this regard due to the weakness of the regional political framework and the social instability of the region. Nevertheless, the political dialogue between the EU and the Andean countries has been unproductive thus far, and none of the settled projects have achieved their desired results.

We can attempt to understand the reasons for this by following José Antonio Sanahuja's (2008: 52) words: "the EU model cannot be reproduced in the Latin American reality. (…) The relevance of that experience does not lie in a model for imitating or an objective image that should guide public policies." In substance, the European experience is not applicable to the Latin American regional organizations. Firstly, a unified political idea is totally lacking here; political recipes vary deeply from country to country, and most importantly, there are great differences within CAN itself. Furthermore, the EU cannot rely on the participation of the Andean civil society, as it is characterized by serious social disunity and narrow involvement in state politics. As remarked by Latinobarómetro in 2007, the low voter participation rate in the Andean region shows a lack of political interest among its population, which is further confirmed by a decreasing confidence in democracy among the people (especially in Colombia and Peru, where the answers to the survey question "Is democracy preferable to any form of government?" have revealed a decrease in confidence in democracy[6]). Therefore, European attempts to involve non-state actors in the region have not resulted in any measurable developments.

Likely aware of these political complications, the EU began to work toward an Andean Association Agreement in 2003. The initial request was issued by the CAN General Secretariat in 2000, but the EU decided to endorse this prospect only through the ratification of the new Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement. Understanding the reasons for the endorsement is not easy, as the Andean

[6] "As a result, there is an increasing skepticism over democratic model in Andean countries. Low voter participation rate shows lack of interest among its population. Latinobarómetro a private-held pollster company reflected the Andean citizen's loss of confidence in democracy. Comparing the survey results to the question 'is democracy preferable to any form of government?' from 1996 to 2007, it turned out two different trends in the subregion. First in Colombia (60%–47%) and Peru (63%–47%) where there has been a decreasing confidence, and secondly in Bolivia (64%–67%) and Ecuador (52%–65%) with an increasing support on democracy (mostly through populism). (extract from A.J. Molina Echeverria (2009)", "The Interregional Association Agreement between the European Union and the Andean Community", p. 13).

Community of Nations was not a priority for EU commercial interests. Indeed, all economic polls made before 2009 confirmed the relative weakness of EU-CAN trade relations: they pointed to the low FDI, the historically small percentages of trade, and the relative inconsistency in Andean import and export markets (EU-Andean Trade Sustainability Impact Assessment, 2009: 5). Nevertheless, the EU accepted the proposal and required CAN's commitment to political and social stability in order to deepen the regional integration process and reduce poverty within a sustainable development framework. A communication presented at the Guadalajara Summit recalled the need for a stronger integration process; it was not possible to establish a bi-regional free trade area if there was no free, effective circulation of goods, services, and capital in one of the two concerned regions. In addition, the Andean countries had to accelerate the process of trade liberalization. At the Vienna Summit three working chapters were officialized (the working chapters on political dialogue, cooperation, and trade agreements) and the trade competitiveness goal was inserted in the Andean RSP 2007–2013. The EU implemented its cooperation programs and technical assistance in order to harmonize the Andean market rules with European standards. Despite these premises, further internal divisions arose owing to enormous asymmetries and different development speeds. Bolivian President Evo Morales filed a complaint against an "uneven agreement" and accused the EU of neglecting the pre-existing differences among the CAN member states, gathering Colombia and Peru on one side, and Bolivia and Ecuador on the other. In actuality the two groups are deeply divided by political and economic issues[7]. In June 2007, the four CAN members succeeded in adopting Decision 667[8], according to which the Association Agreement would need to consider internal asymmetries. In this way, a special treatment would have been granted to Bolivia and Ecuador. One year later, however, the EU decided that it was no longer convenient to continue the negotiations in a multilateral framework, but rather with each country individually. In light of this, Bolivia abandoned the negotiations in February 2009, and was soon followed by Ecuador in July of the same year. Finally, in March 2010, the EU reached the already mentioned agreement on trade with Colombia and Peru.

At this juncture, comprehending the EU strategy towards the Andean Community becomes a difficult task. After claiming a lack of interest in the CAN market and confirming a substantial focus on regional integration as its main duty, the EU originally tried to concentrate its efforts toward an Andean Association Agreement,

[7] Bolivia and Ecuador are also members of ALBA, i.e. the alternative political alliance that also includes Venezuela, Cuba and other leftist countries.

[8] According to this decision, the association agreement with the EU would need to consider the asymmetries within the Andean Community, thus allowing each member state commitments of varying scope. The bi-regional treaty would need to grant "special and differential treatment" to Bolivia and Ecuador, which is a recognized principle of international trade law that is also enshrined in the WTO treaties.

but then carried out a trade agreement with only two Andean countries, leading to a further break in CAN's unity. What was the European justification for this? Was insisting on a normative and political convergence too strenuous and unfruitful? The difficulty does not justify such a sudden and incoherent change. The EU betrayed its initial normative goals regarding the CAN: instead of bringing its example of political and economic unity to the Andean countries, it broke up a regional integration by adopting the stance of a mere commercial power (the results of this will be analyzed in the third sub-section).

3.2 EU-Colombia relations in 2000–2009

Peace, regional development and justice reform are the foremost targets of the EU's bilateral policy towards Colombia. To this extent, the EU has always been reluctant to cooperate with the US's "Plan Colombia," which provided strong military support to the Colombian army and allowed for the further destruction of 1300 square kilometres of coca fields by means of aerial fumigation, which had a questionable impact on Colombia's environment[9]. On the contrary, the EU decided to pursue a peace policy without any military implications by establishing a "structural diplomacy" based on the promotion of long-term changes, both in the central state and in the country's various regions (Keukeleire, 2003). Its policies aimed to support and transfer the ideological governance principles which characterize the European system, creating the social, economic, and cultural conditions for peace at a grassroots level. Along with a bilateral dialogue on policies and human rights, the EU set up a bottom-up approach, seeking to eliminate the root causes of the conflict at the micro level. Overall, according to the Evaluation of the EU Commission (2012), the EU provided €215 million towards fighting poverty, reducing economic inequality, and promoting civil rights in the areas affected by conflict, while distributing its main efforts in the field of "Conflict Prevention and Resolution".

The EU relied on Peace Laboratories as its principal peace-building tool. In reality, however, these were not a European creation, as the first Peace Lab, „el Programa

[9] One notable aspect in discussing the aerial spraying of illicit crops in Colombia is the size of the areas sprayed. Forty thousand hectares are said to have been sprayed in a single department – Putumayo. As for the whole nation, in 2003, chemicals were sprayed on 139,000 hectares, 17,000 people were displaced as a result of aerial eradication, and their incomes and food supplies were threatened. Even from a general standpoint, Colombia's Council for Human Rights and Displacement showed that in 2001 and 2002, aerial eradication left 75,000 people displaced nationwide. It is not easy to picture such a broad area covered by grey clouds of glyphosate sprayed from airplanes, or the desolate image of the destruction left behind. One need not be a harsh critic of aerial spraying to admit that spraying such an extensive area with this chemical must have some impact. Those are the effects that the residents, fauna and flora of the extensive affected regions of Colombia have been suffering for years (extracted from Gary Leech, "Death Falls from the Sky", Colombia Journal, 23 April 2001).

de Desarollo y Paz del Magdalena Medio" (PDPMM), was established in 1995 by the initiative of the Ecopetrol oil company, its labour union USO, and the Diocese of Barrancabermeja (and financed by the World Bank). The EU, after refusing to take part in Plan Colombia, decided to assume the reins of this existing project by testing it as a possible second way for the peace dialogue. The Peace Laboratory was never intended to substitute for national negotiations with the armed actors, but rather to facilitate them through a participative methodology in every single region.

As stated above, the first Peace Laboratory was settled in Magdalena Medio – a northeastern region of Colombia that had historically been affected by the influence of insurgent groups such as the FARC, the ELN and the ELP. As of the 1980s, the main problems in the area were the extreme poverty of its population (70% were under the poverty line), an unequal distribution of lands, and the daily escalation of local violence. The EU and the PDPMM attempted to manage these issues by fostering civilian participation in alternative economic activities and strengthening the peace dialogue. Concretely, the operators in Magdalena Medio sought to develop public services, reinforce local institutions, and protect poor citizens by giving them land and a job (De Roux, 2005). The EU judged this Peace Laboratory to be extremely positive, and thus it proposed the same pattern for two further projects.[10]

Judging whether the Peace Laboratories were successful or unsuccessful, however, would be incorrect for many reasons. First of all, evaluating a Peace Laboratory is a difficult task. Both reductions of violence and positive development are contingent on many factors: political processes, micro and macro policies, economic conjunctures, market dynamics, etc. In other words, it is impossible to calculate the weight of their impact. Regarding the PDPMM, Jorge Ivan Gonzalez asserted that "42 million euros cannot transform a region like Magdalena Medio. The resources the Laboratory deals with are small. It is a large amount in development aid terms, but it represents very little on the regional economy. Comparing it to Barrancabermeja's municipal budget, to the regional income, to the coca economy, to the oil money, it represents cents" (Barreto Henriques, 2007: 34). Therefore "it is irrational to think that the laboratory will transform the region's structures" (Interview with J. I. Gonzalez 2007).

It is then clear that the primary goal of the EU in regards to Colombia, namely the creation of humanitarian spaces, has not been fulfilled. On the contrary, the majority of the Laboratory's projects have been set up on productive fields (Rudqvist and Van Sluys, 2005: 32). The Laboratory has therefore turned into a

[10] The Second Peace Laboratory was set up in Eastern Antioquia in 2004, while the third one (2011) was settled in the region of Montes de María, and it covered over 440 civil society organizations and close to 12,600 people (3,500 of them were internally displaced persons).

mere development process and regular aid project. Peace has an economic layer, of course, but it is composed of much more than that.

The unsuccessfulness of the construction of the peace area is further revealed by the many attacks the project has had to deal with from both guerrillas and paramilitaries. There have been instances of violence against Peace Laboratory participants (including European citizens) with people being killed, kidnapped and/or threatened (De Roux, F. 2005: 39–40). Because of this, some officers called for a stronger European political position in regards to the issue, but on several occasions the EU preferred to privilege its diplomatic relations with the Colombian government instead, thus manifesting at least a partial lack of political will (Henriques, 2007: 38).

Regardless, calling into question the Peace Laboratories' good faith, or their merit, is not up for discussion. If we want to catalogue them as an alternative framework of regional aid, they surely represent a noteworthy attempt to involve a targeted Colombian population in constructive activities. What is different, however, is the evaluation of them as a principal political tool managed by a normative power with the aim to build development and peace. In contrast to the political expectations for them, indeed, the EU Peace Laboratories do not even come close to the effectiveness reached by the US through its aerial fumigations or its military support. We may criticize the hard American attitude, but we cannot turn a blind eye on the Peace Laboratories' weaknesses. These tools have neither generated any advantages for the Colombian government, nor improved the dialogue between the conflict's sides. In this way, the EU has surely shown its deep humanitarian nature, but it has likewise lost ground in terms of political efficacy, which is especially evident if we compare its political efficacy to that of other superpowers.

The efforts to reach the second target, concerning rule of law, justice, and human rights (20% of the budget), sought to reform the Colombian legal system by increasing judicial and policing actions in line with the "Justice and Peace Law" program promoted in 2005 by then-President Alvaro Uribe[11]. The main objective was to simplify a usually overloaded judicial apparatus in order to restore public confidence and avoid both penal impunity and extrajudicial actions.

In particular, the EU and the Colombian government subscribed to the project "Strengthening of Justice Sector for the Reduction of Colombian Impunity" on the 21st of December, 2004. The specific goal of the project was the improvement of the newly reformed Colombian penal system through several steps: modernizing the Center of Judicial Documentation, strengthening the Unities of Investigation for

[11] "Justice and Peace Law" is a program supplementing the legal mechanism for the demobilization of illegal armed groups, and its adoption had been required by the international community when the Cartagena Declaration was signed on February 5, 2005.

the Population's Defence, creating a center for studying the Accusatory Penal System, training judges for the specific treatment of minor conflicts, enhancing the coordination between national judges and indigenous authorities, and so on.

Unfortunately, as assessed by the EU Commission in its final report about the cooperation with Colombia, it was not possible to determine the impact of the EU's interventions in this field. In particular, with respect to the impunity situation, there was no evidence of improvement. This was most likely due to an ongoing lack of investigative means, little coordination between the ordinary and military systems, a limited access to justice in rural areas, and a scarcity of civilian trust in government institutions.

Even in this case, however, declaring the EU guilty of causing this situation would be unfair. The real weakness is not in the project's intent, but rather in the capabilities of its tools in dealing with this longstanding matter. The judicial problem in Colombia is a multi-faceted phenomenon that is deeply rooted within the society, and which can neither be solved in ten years, nor rely on the classic "top-down approach" of other countries (which is exactly the approach of the counter-movements of the Peace Laboratories). In other words, in this case, satisfactory outcomes cannot be achieved through external reforms, but instead they require a long educational program that would involve all the different parts of Colombian society in order to address the system's shortcomings through internal devices.

The final assessment issued by the EU Commission in 2012 admitted that there was defective internal coordination between the aid instruments and tools, while underlining the limited EU leadership at the political and managerial level[12]. What is the actual scope of a normative power when it gets involved in delicate issues such as civil conflicts or a lack in rule of law? Its strategy is certainly more hesitant than a hard power's strategy, which would be able to obtain more tangible and rapid results. In contrast, a pure normative power needs a long period of time, a favourable educative attitude from its recipients, and a lack of competing interests in the country of action. The EU decided to follow the difficult path of being a normative power in Colombia, and it may still persevere in this challenge, even

[12] The weaknesses in the EC's organizational, strategic and political capacities are "defective internal coordination between aid instruments and tools, projects and sectors; reduced application of Aid Effectiveness principles, mainly as regards coordination and complementarity (harmonization) between the EC and EU Member States (and other donors), constraining any possibility of designing and effectively implementing a 'joint' strategy; the fact that EC value added has never been assessed nor recognized, making notions of division of labour between donors and subsidiarity unrealistic; the EC's limited leadership at political and managerial level in order to push for sensitive but essential issues such as human rights; the lack of a structured, results-oriented and cross-sectoral actor-inclusive policy dialogue" (extracted from the Final Evaluation of the Commission of the European Union's Co-operation with Colombia – Final Report, October 2012, p. 73).

without quick results. Contrary to this, however, the relatively new Free Trade Agreement seems to betray the EU's former approach.

3.3 The EU-Colombia-Peru FTA

According to Semana International, the decision of the European Commission to create the Free Trade Agreement was based on the insistent demands from Colombia and Peru to have separate negotiations due to divergences with the other two CAN countries. On the one hand, it is possible to comprehend Colombia's aims: finding new access to the global economy, finding alternatives to US influence (with whom Colombia had an Association Agreement) and, above all, marking a clear distinction between itself and the neighbouring "socialist" countries (Szegedy-Maszák, 2009). On the other hand, understanding the reasoning of the EU is much harder. Colombia is not a major market, as it accounts for only 0.48% of the EU's exports. As asserted in the Trade Sustainability Assessment (Directorate B, 2012), the Free Trade Agreement will not have any significant effects on the EU's trade flow and sectoral output, while the estimated gain for Colombia would be up to 1.3% of its GDP. Looking at these statistics, the FTA could be understood as an act of generosity from the EU, as it retains slim hopes for a flourishing partnership with Colombia in the future.

Yet many concerns were expressed at the initial stage of the negotiations owing to Columbia's delay when it came to human rights protections and environmental safeguards. According to the World Bank data covering the period 2006–2010, Colombia is the 3rd most unequal country in the world, with 37.2% of its population living in poverty, and 16% in extreme poverty. The largest part of the population living in extreme poverty is the Afrocolombian community, and 80% of this minority lives in privation and must cope with violent attacks by armed groups seeking to seize community land (Ohidaco, 2011: 5). Displacement was another principal concern in the Colombian situation. Since 1985, more than 4.6 million people have been expelled from their homes and lands by paramilitaries and guerrillas. Between 2007 and 2010, 1,499 displaced people were murdered (Ohidaco, 2014). The situation faced by farmers is likewise alarming. Small producers accuse the government of driving them into bankruptcy blaming a "too liberal" policy that has made their production uncompetitive and weaker. Strong protests by the farmers have been growing since December 2013 up until the present (BBC, 2014). Finally, Colombia is the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists. Indeed, two-thirds of all trade unionist killings in the world occur in Colombia. Unsurprisingly, Colombia's levels of trade union membership and collective bargaining are incredibly low (Ohidaco, 2012). Using these facts, many NGOs and associations claimed that there was a lack of fair conditions for an FTA, forecasting a likely worsening of such matters with its signing. We will now provide a brief overview of the main criticisms and draw a final assessment of them in the last part.

Human rights clauses

The FTA establishes enforceable human rights obligations (Title I) and contains a trade and sustainable development title (Title IX). Article 1 states the following: "Respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights, as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and for the principle of the rule of law, underpins the internal and international policies of both Parties. Respect for these principles constitutes an essential element of this Agreement." Besides ensuring mutual recognition, the human rights clause contains a positive obligation; in the face of violations, parties can adopt "appropriate measures" that are in accordance with international law, proportional, and as non-disruptive as possible to ensure the implementation of the agreement. Nevertheless, these measures have never been defined. The entitled instrument for the discussion and defence of human rights should have been settled by the Political and Cooperation Dialogue, but as we have already seen, this agreement has never entered into force. In the FTA, Article 8(2) states that when a party considers another party to have failed to fulfil its obligations under the agreement, it shall exclusively have recourse to the dispute settlement mechanism established under Title XII. Unfortunately, this Title does not deal with human rights issues but rather with economic ones, and its main judicial body is the Trade Committee. Thus, the only body entitled to monitor and enforce human rights compliance remains the Sub-Committee on Trade and Sustainable Development (art. 280, Title IX). The Sub-Committee is designated to set up consultations on labour, biological diversity, regional fisheries management, and climate change, while involving the civil society at different levels. Therefore, it is appointed to manage several topics without any particular focus on human rights (as assessed by the EU, the human rights and sustainable development titles are "overlapping"[13]). Operationally, if the Sub-Committee's consultations are not successful, the matter may be referred to a Group of Experts (art. 284) that should examine the case, publish a report and, finally, dictate to the responsible party an action plan in order to remove its state of non-compliance. Here, too, the Group of Experts is quite undefined in regards to its composition and its relevant immediate remedies for non-compliance. Besides this, no right of individual petition is encompassed at all in the FTA, though such rights are common in US free trade agreements.

The dairy sector

Milk is the most important agricultural product in terms of value; stockbreeding represents 20% of the country's farming GDP and directly employs 950,000 citizens

[13] "As indicated above, there is a substantial overlap between the human rights clause and the sustainable development title. Core labour rights and certain environmental rights all fall under the human rights clause, and are enforceable by 'appropriate measures' while at the same time falling under the sustainable development title" (extracted from the EU-Andean Trade Sustainability Impact Assessment – Final Report, October 2009, p. 52).

(ALOP, Grupo Sur, APRODEV, 2010: 2). Yet the dairy sector is a deeply poor one, as it lacks modernization and public incentives. The FTA has allowed for the gradual entry of European dairy products into the country without a tariff for over 15 years, with a constant pace of a 10% in the imports per year. Even though the European Commission granted an additional €30 million toward restructuring Colombia's small scale industry, the producers are afraid of losing their internal market because the EU refused to apply the "Andean Price Range System," whereby dairy products' import prices would have been adjusted (whereas the EU has not modified its internal subsidies). The impossibility of competing in fair conditions with subsidized European dairy products, in terms of both quality and price, will increase the sector's vulnerability, jeopardizing the 400,000 Colombian families living on dairy production (TNI, 2012: 11).

Palm oil

Colombia is the largest palm oil producer in Latin America and the fourth largest in the world. Europe is the second largest importer of palm oil (Germany and the Netherlands stay at the forefront in this respect). The Colombian government promoted the expansion of palm oil production by developing the needed normative framework and by giving political support to employers' associations. On the dark side of this booming market, though, is the appropriation and usurpation of farmers and indigenous people's lands, which is mostly carried out by paramilitaries. The illegal seizure of rural lands has made the property available for multinational companies, and the the apparent incapacity of the Colombian government to eradicate this phenomenon suggests a likely complicity on its part[14]. Palm oil production raises environmental issues as well, due to the forced transformation of rural areas into arid one-crop regions. On the one hand, Colombia risks compromising its ecosystems, and on the other hand it jeopardizes its food production capacity by becoming increasingly dependent on foreign markets. Regarding labour rights, the International Labour Organisation has stated that "[t]here are frequent reports of denial of rights at work, poor quality employment, high levels of unemployment, unsafe working conditions and lack of income security, and inadequate representation of agricultural/plantation workers in social dialogue." Indeed, the Colombian employers' associations have always abstained from investigating denunciations of human rights violations, yet they have never hesitated to rely on the army to ensure security in their productive zones.

[14] Since 2006, the parapolítica (paramilitary politics) scandal has brought to light the very close ties between state representatives and paramilitary groups. Politicians used paramilitary forces to eliminate social activists and political opponents in order to get public offices. In return, they channelled information and public funds to the armed groups. By the end of 2009, there had been criminal investigations against 93 of the 286 members of the Colombian Congress (extracted from Fritz, Thomas, "The Second Conquest. The EU Free Trade Agreement with Colombia and Peru", FDCL-Verlag, October 2010, p. 6).

Water

Colombia is characterized by high indeces of water access inequality and water scarcity in spite of its relative richness in terms of this resource. Nevertheless, any consideration of this is absent from both the Trade Assessment and the Agreement itself. The fundamental human right of access to water should emerge in this case due to the increase in water-intensive economic activities that the FTA entails (agrofuels, mono-cultivations, and extractive industry). Furthermore, there is no explicit exclusion of water privatization schemes in the services and investment chapters, nor is there any guarantee that water shall remain a "public common good" under all provisions of the agreement.

Mining

In 2008, Colombia exported 5.416 billion dollars worth of minerals. Europe is the main destination of Colombian coal, and of all the coal produced in the country, 67% is extracted by European transnational companies (TNI, 2012: 3). Nonetheless, despite all the revenues from mineral exports, Colombia is only left with negative environmental, social and economic effects. In fact, a major part of these revenues are not paid in taxes (instead, they run towards tax havens in the Falklands and the Cayman Islands, as assessed by the Colombian Ministry of Mining in 2009[15]). The FTA does not provide any measure to control mining companies. On the contrary, these multinational corporations can file a suit against the Colombian state if it refuses to issue an environmental licence for a mine, arguing that such a refusal is an unjustified restriction on investment. In terms of the human and environmental aspects, the effects of mining in the productive regions are similar to those caused by palm oil production: displacement of indigenous communities, an elimination of their ways of life, alterations of water routes, contamination of water sources, a reduction of land for agriculture, expropriation of land for mining use, and workers' exploitation. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed its concern about this issue in its Concluding Observations of 2010: "infrastructure, development and mining mega-projects are being carried out in the State party without the free, prior and informed consent of the affected indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities".

[15] The Regulatory Decree 2193 of 2013 established the criteria for which jurisdictions are considered as tax havens. Article 1 of the Decree provides that 44 jurisdictions are considered tax havens, including the Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, the Republic of Mauritius, the Republic of Cyprus, Trinidad and Tobago, Yemen, Oman, Hong Kong, the Principalities of Andorra, Liechtenstein and Monaco, among others. The jurisdiction's qualification as a tax haven implies, among other effects, that (i) certain payments made to the jurisdictions included in the Decree will be subject to the highest withholding tax rate; (ii) the deductibility of such payments will be subject to certain limitations and (iii) the operation is automatically subject to the transfer pricing rules.

Intellectual property

Regarding medicine, five years of exclusivity is granted to pharmaceutical companies for their test data. Comparing it to the usual amount of time laid down by the TRIPS Agreement (approximately 20 years), such a conditionality in terms of time seems to be a fairer condition. Yet we are talking about a "free trade" accord, and the underlying competitive difference between European and Colombian companies would suggest an avoidance of any temporary gap at the starting point. In this case, however, smaller local producers must wait five years if they want to obtain approval from the responsible authorities for their cheaper generic products. Otherwise, they have to repeat the same trials that were already done by the producers of the original medicine, i.e. an expensive and redundant procedure that only prolongs the monopoly of the pharmaceutical corporations. This provision follows the US-Colombia-Peru FTA's legacy, which was already condemned by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as uneven and negative regarding the people's enjoyment of the right to health, particularly those with a low income. In addition, the agreement introduces so-called "precautionary measures", whereby any company has an easier capacity to initiate proceedings against competitors alleged to have infringed on their own property rights. Such measures enable penalties that involve a withdrawal of the implicated goods and their destruction at the expense of the infringers, even during their transit in other countries. It is clear that larger European companies have greater opportunities to take advantage of this law. The FTA also threatens farmers' access to seeds, requiring Colombia to ratify the 1991 version of the International Convention for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV). UPOV 1991 limits the right of farmers to save and reuse farm-saved seeds by allowing their development and multiplication only upon the right-holders' authorization, i.e. the authorization of the commercial breeders. Implementing UPOV 1991 may endanger Colombia's food security and agricultural biodiversity by depriving Colombia of the option to develop its own systems of plant variety protection that would be adapted to the needs and the traditional knowledges of its population. On April 15, 2012, President Juan Manuel Santos signed into law a bill approving Colombia's accession to the UPOV 1991 Act. On December 5 2012, though, the Constitutional Court struck down the law (Law No. 1052), stating that it violated the constitution because the indigenous and Afro-Colombian ethnic groups who would be directly affected by the law were not consulted prior to its enactment (Sullivanlaw.net, 2012). The court based its decision on the ILO's Convention No. 169. The matter is still open, however, and it seems far from reaching any conclusion in the near future.

4. Resumption of dependency theory

Now that the main outcomes of the EU's policy towards Colombia have been illustrated, we can attempt to make an overall assessment on normative power's effectiveness. Unfortunately, the assessment cannot be fully positive; the breach of the CAN's integration, the dubious effectiveness of the CSPs' developmental programs, and the hidden business affairs standing behind the FTA are undeniable blemishes upon the idea of ethical normative power. The last problem is rather straightforward: all the projects drafted for development and human rights improvement have been pushed aside by the FTA, whereby the European companies can easily exploit Colombian raw materials and sell their end products into a new growing market. Colombia, in turn, is not being helped in its efforts to build an alternative economic policy; it will remain dependent on European resources (the European market, technology, private Financial Direct Investments, and public aid projects), while only a small elite will take any advantage thereof. Besides, the EU's normative power creates a new level of dependency, as the acceptance of the EU's normative framework is directly transferred to Colombian laws. This condition represents a deeper trap from which an exit would be extremely difficult, and such an exit would mean that Colombia would risk losing the EU's political endorsement, including its precious funds. This means that Colombia is left with a damage-limitation decision, as its exclusion from the EU would be more damaging for it than its inclusion in the EU, and the forced acceptance of conditionality clauses remains Colombia's only choice. It represents a further decline in Colombia's political independence, as it strengthens its dependence on the EU system. Rather than working for true Colombian development, the EU seems to only pursue its own interests, thus solidifying the insurmountable gap existing between itself and the South American state. Otherwise, the general EU approach and its political means would have unfolded differently. These are the reasons for why normative power appears to be a cover for maintaining the historical division between the European countries and Colombia rather than a tool created to ensure true mutual benefits between the two sides. To some extent, the EU normative power can be evaluated as a shield that serves to preserve the degree of dependency that growing countries feel towards Europe.

In this context, introducing the concept of dependency theory can be very useful. Dependency theory was developed in the late 1950s by gathering together the work of Robert Prebish and Hans Singer about the deteriorating terms of trade between developed and underdeveloped countries. Although dependency theorists, come from several schools of thought, they converge on three ideas: the international system comprises two sets of states, which are variously described as the center and the periphery; the dominant states are the advanced industrial nations; and the dependent states are the states in Latin America, Asia, and Africa which have low

per capita GNPs and which rely heavily on the export of a single commodity for foreign exchange earnings (Ferrero, 2008). Dependistas believe that the solutions proposed to underdeveloped countries may only favor the interests of the central ones. The rich countries can sell their products in peripheral markets and, at the same time, access natural resources on the periphery. The relation is maintained through a complex network of political, cultural and economic means, and military measures (Corradi, 2009). Furthermore, as assessed by Vincent Ferrero (1996), the diversion of resources over time is maintained not only by the power of dominant states, but also through the power of the elites in the dependent states. These elites are typically trained in the dominant states and share similar values and cultural affinities with the elites in the dominant states, insomuch as their own private interests coincide with the interests of the dominant states.

This article does not aim to address the debate regarding the ways to escape the dependency circle. Debate has deeply deteriorated the unity of the pure theory, the legacy of which has been fragmented among Neo-Marxists, Structuralists and Post-Dependentists. Nevertheless, we can retain the underlying theoretical framework, adapting it to the current world order and Manners' normative power.

Although the world has seen the emergence of new regional powers and the relative weakening of the European countries, it seems that the depicted framework may still be applied. Two separate categories of states still exist, and the numerous agreements made between them appear to only benefit the central countries, among which are the European ones. With these differences, European countries can use the reputation of the EU as a "good model" to perpetuate their influence in underdeveloped countries. In this light, the creation of the European Union should essentially be seen as a response by its member states to a world of complex politics. If we accept that member states play a crucial role in the empowering of EU agency at the global level, we also have to recognize that the European integration process is just as much driven by instrumental reasons as by a normative ethos (Menon, 2008). In other words, the EU can be viewed as a vehicle through which its member states maximize their own interests, and the EU normative power theory can effectively work to legitimize such dependency and imbalance of power.

Conclusions

After having seen the focal passages of the EU's external action towards Colombia and the contact points between normative power and dependency theory, we can come to several important conclusions. First of all, we can confirm the foundation of normative power, which is well-reflected by the EU's political insistence in regard to the Colombian normative structure. The EU undertook many efforts in order to

provide Colombia with its Western rules about human rights, rule of law, and economics. All the documents we have assessed contain traces of universal claims and generally accepted values. The EU offers its normative pattern to the extent to which Colombia can be inspired and tackle its main problems by using it. The Colombian political establishment wants to accept such proposals, considering the EU to be one of the best examples of civilization and justice. Nevertheless, the coherence between the purpose and the effect is flawed and inadequate in this case, as all the examples testify. Regarding the EU-CAN relations, the EU's decision to suspend its diplomatic work with the Andean states is rather unintelligible. The crisis of unity and legitimacy experienced by the CAN represented a great opportunity for the EU; it could have leveraged its historical experience through political-diplomatic support aimed at strengthening CAN institutions. The EU normative power could have supported and financed the CAN framework in order to cement a closely-packed group of countries ruled by democratic values and common principles, thus averting the danger of further isolated dictatorships. Indeed, populist and personal regimes are always around the corner in Latin America. On the contrary, the only pragmatic decision was to set up an Association Agreement, which upon failure was soon replaced by the decision to fulfil a "country-by-country" FTA. This choice has further divided the CAN members, while placing the EU in a bad light, as it is now seen by them as a power that is solely interested in economic affairs. Regarding the Country Strategic Papers, it is necessary to call into question their political weight. Shall we consider them as strategic parts of a multilevel normative plan or as a simple basis for aid projects? The latter seems to be a more adequate answer. The presumption of solving Colombian issues with soft and toothless instruments is just fantasy. Perhaps it would be better to spend the bulk of the EU's resources on smaller (but more concrete) activities such as the Peace Laboratories, thereby cataloguing them as merely aid projects. Lastly, regarding the contested Trade Agreement, on the one hand the EU Commission claimed a lack of economic interest, but on the other hand it laid out provisions which led to all of Colombia's economic sectors opening their doors to European companies on favorable terms. Furthermore, the lack of adequate social conditions should have stopped the negotiations. Colombia is a growing country full of natural resources, yet it is still characterized by overwhelming social problems and an underdeveloped agricultural sector. Signing an FTA as such means putting an economic giant and a developing country on the same footing. Of course Colombia will be able to exploit many of the possibilities given by the broad European market, but on the other side the weight and the contractual power of the European companies will grant Europe even stronger advantages. A pure normative power would have paid far more attention to the underlying social and environmental conditions by giving stronger evidence to the Colombian reform plan. An adequate protection for the smaller party should have been the essential term of the FTA, whereas the EU pulled down barriers only with

mere letters of intent and uncertain pledges. Even in this case, concrete interests seem to have overwhelmed fundamental rights.

Coming back to the theoretical debate, we can consider normative action as a sort of "free pass" allowing the EU to participate everywhere with the excuses of soft political partnership and human rights policies. As assessed by Helene Sjursen (2006: 239), norms promoting democracy and human rights rest on strategic considerations and can be explained as the outcome of mere rational utility calculations. The promotion of norms dealing with human rights may indeed have destabilizing effects that end up contradicting the original objectives. Norms and economic interests tend to be deeply interlinked and therefore difficult to separate clearly (Young, 2004). Furthermore, one might expect that a cosmopolitan normative power would develop standards, mechanisms, and policy instruments that would be widely recognized and shared (ibidem: 248). If that was the case, the EU would first bind itself, and not only others, to common legal principles, and it would then take into account the real repercussions of its policies. Instead, however, the EU normative power mechanism behaved as a mere unilateral actor which has only a very narrow thought process with regard to the positive and negative sides of the EU's coherence and of the consequences of its policies. That is why EU normative power cannot be anything other than the EU promoting its own norms to the extent to which, conversely to Manners' thesis (2002: 240), it reflects the attitudes of historical empires and other contemporary powers. It is a form of cultural imperialism which does not care about the development of other countries, but rather enhances the Third World's dependency on the suggested polity. Finally, we can criticize Manners' assessment of the EU's normative power's transformative attitude. According to him (2008: 45), "simply by existing as different in a world of states and the relations between them, the EU changes the normality of international relations. (…) In this respect, the EU is a normative power: it changes the norms, standards and prescriptions of world politics away from the bounded expectations of state centricity." However, as far as we have seen, the first objective of normative power goes straight to the opposite side, namely towards a total lack of change. The EU normative power plays as a strategic engine, preserving the old gap that still stands between the EU and other players, although it is put forward as the most appropriate policy, which also bears a new kind of convergence.

In conclusion, we can use Lisbeth Aggestam's (2009: 35) words: "the clarity, the coherence, the simplicity and the uniformity that Manners calls for in the quest for normative justification underestimates the contradictory, conflictual and ambiguous ethical practices that the EU will encounter as a global actor". In truth, analysing normative power without evaluating its effective scope is rather useless. Only through looking at its real outcomes would it be possible to conclude that the EU normative power is not an egalitarian political device, but an extraordinary

stratagem whose purpose is to uphold the EU's influence worldwide, as this influence is aimed at maintaining the historical status quo between rich and poor countries.

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