

The cost of a normless Europe
GEM-STONES – German Marshall Fund of the US Workshop

16-17 September 2019
GMF Brussels Office

Europe has projected itself globally as a normative actor, upholding universal principles, norms and standards in its external engagement. Whether in trade negotiations, by expanding its membership, engaging more closely with neighbours, or supporting multilateral institutions, the EU has played an active role in promoting norms such as human rights and democracy, labour, environmental and trade standards.

In many respects, this feature of the EU's engagement is unique, not least in so far as it is constitutionalised in its Treaties. Nonetheless, the EU has not been immune from critiques on its poor performance, double standards, and power asymmetries. In recent years, critical voices have grown within and around the world, while Europe's power to act normatively is waning. In a volatile geopolitical context, the demand for the EU to engage more 'strategically' is also growing, often to the detriment of upholding international norms.

While the impact of a normative Europe has been the focus of academic and expert literature on Europe's international role, the opposite trend has so far been explored mostly anecdotally. Aside from reputational damage, what is the impact of the EU's non-normative behaviour? How connected is Europe's internal performance with its external project and in what ways? The workshop aims to explore empirically and theoretically this 'dark side' of the EU external project. For instance, how do declining democratic standards affect the enlargement process? How do non-normative pursuits that deviate from the principles the EU claims to uphold change its influence abroad and relations with third countries, and how to conceptualise and empirically substantiate these patterns? In what ways do the EU's double standards affect its role in multilateral institutions?

The aim of the workshop is to bring together ongoing empirical and theoretical research on these questions to explore the processes whereby a normless Europe is of consequence and its implications for the EU as an international actor – be it 'normative' or 'strategic'.

The workshop

The workshop envisages the participation of both academic and non-academic experts as well as policy-makers in roundtable discussions, rather than the presentation of papers. It will be organized at the Brussels office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States from 2 pm on 16 September until lunch on 17 September.

Call for papers

To participate in the workshop, please submit an abstract by the 17th of June. The workshop is looking to include innovative ideas on how to conceptualize and theorize 'the cost of a normless Europe' as well as insights from concrete empirical research. Based on these abstracts, the final programme will be developed. If selected, participants will be asked to submit a 5-page outline of a possible paper by the 31st of July. In case the results of the workshop are promising, participants will be asked to submit full contributions for publication. Limited funding for travel and accommodation will be available.

Please send your abstracts to: mmatrakova@gmfus.org