

# The role of domestic politics and national identity in EU actorness: a discourse-theoretical approach

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## Abstract

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Actorness in international affairs is traditionally held to be the preserve of states and based ultimately on the possession of military power. The EU challenges this assumption from two perspectives. Firstly, it is not a state and does not dispose directly over the conventional instruments of state power, but instead relies on cooperation among its member states. Secondly, the EU purports to be a different kind of actor, its power deriving from economic rather than military strength, and its approach to international relations based on the pursuit and transmission of certain norms of behaviour. To avoid a state-centric definition of actorness, this thesis focusses on the ability of the EU and its member states to reach consensus on external action issues, and uses this as the best measure of EU actorness. Existing theorizing on EU unity-formation is critiqued. Liberal intergovernmentalism assumes member states bargain over predetermined national interests that arise through a process of aggregation of sectoral economic interests, a shortcoming which is exposed in circumstances when economic outcomes are contested or difficult to predict, as is frequently the case for external action issues. Sociological institutionalism considers the socialisation of national political elites into common European norms of decision-making to be the driver of EU policy consensus-making, neglecting the significance of the Europeanization of national public spheres as a whole. To address these shortcomings an alternative theoretical approach is presented, derived from post-structuralism and discourse theory, which describes how EU policy unity is constrained by the interaction between domestic politics and public identity discourses at the member state level. This discourse-theoretical model is then tested on EU case studies representing a range of dimensions of actorness, including economic, environmental, military and normative actorness. The discourse-theoretical model is found to provide better explanations of the case studies than existing theories. The application of this model to the case studies yields a number of conclusions, including that EU actorness is hindered by the persistence of national constructions of economic questions, that EU actorness is often contingent on collaboration with the US, but that this is consistent with the key EU norm of multilateralism, and that the EU is potentially a more successful normative actor when pursuing norms of interstate relations, than regarding the norms of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights.

## Declaration

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Parts of chapter 7 were presented in an earlier form at the European Union Studies Association (EUSA) Conference, Boston, 2015 under the title 'EU normative power and the Iranian Nuclear program'.

Parts of chapter 6 were presented in a different form at the Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines (CADAAD) Conference, Budapest, 2014 under the title 'Hungary's othering of the EU'.

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