The EU as a Global Actor: a Framework for Analysis

Paper presented at the ECPR Graduate Student Conference
Innsbruck, 3 to 5 July 2014
Section 09, Panel 100 – The EU as a Global Actor

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Abstract

Over the past decades, scholars and practitioners alike have been puzzled by the EU’s particular role in international affairs. By developing frameworks for assessing international actorness, researchers have tried to address this problem. Many of the established analytical frameworks have however proven to be too specific, or too complex and thus difficult to operationalise. In this paper, I trace the development of the most influential actorness concepts, pointing out their increasing emphasis on the intersubjective construction of an international actor. Based on these insights, I propose a parsimonious but nevertheless exhausting concept for defining a global actor. Firmly embedded in the tenets of social constructivism, it holds that actorness is sufficiently captured by two criteria: self-conception and recognition. The concept thus fulfils two basic criteria for an analytical framework of international actorness: Because it is applicable to any actor in global politics as well as to various policy fields, it allows for comparative analysis, mapping the EU’s position in the international system. At the same time, the proposed concept is relatively easy to operationalise and thus opens the floor for extensive empirical investigation of the EU’s actorness in international affairs.
Introduction

Ever since Gunnar Sjöstedt (1977) employed his concept of ‘actor capability’ for assessing the European Community’s performance in the world almost 40 years ago, many scholars of International Relations and EU studies have approached the intricacies of conceptualising the EC – and later the European Union¹ – as an actor from different perspectives (for the most influential contributions see for example Allen and Smith, 1990; Hill, 1993; Jupille and Caporaso, 1998; Ginsberg, 1999; Bretherton and Vogler, 2006). While conceptual and theoretically infused approaches abound, the empirical underpinnings of EU actorness have not yet been sufficiently explored. In fact, the concept of actorness has been claimed to remain “empirically underexplored” (Groen and Niemann, 2011, p. 1). Why then should we bother with yet another of these conceptual frameworks, rather than feeding the debate with a manifest empirical investigation of the EU’s activities in the international theatre? I argue that a reason for this is that the available frameworks prevent researchers from applying them to empirical phenomena, as they are either too specific or too complex and thus difficult to operationalise.

A framework for international actorness should fulfil two basic criteria: First, it should be applicable to any actor in international politics (state, non-state and quasi-state alike), and across various policy fields. This opens the floor for comparative analysis and enables us to move beyond the frequently employed sui generis/n=1 analysis that “cannot generate anything other than primitive, descriptive social science” (Jorgensen and Rosamond, 2011, p. 5). Secondly, it should be theoretically grounded, but relatively easy to operationalise. Crafting complex theoretical frameworks is a commendable exercise; their actual value for political analysis, in contrast, remains haplessly limited. This paper takes these two points of departure and sketches out an according framework to analyse the international actorness of the EU, and in fact of any other polity in global affairs. It claims that actorness can be understood by a parsimonious but nevertheless exhausting concept: Drawing on social constructivist notions of international politics, the core argument is that self-

¹ For the sake of simplicity I will refer to ‘EU actorness’ throughout this paper, well aware that earlier contributions addressed the actorness of the European Communities (EC).
conception and recognition define an actor to a sufficient degree. This way, it fulfils the above-mentioned criteria and paves the way for further research on the EU’s international actorness both across different policy fields and in relation to other actors on the global stage.

The paper proceeds in three major steps. Firstly, it reviews the previous debates and concepts about the EU’s international actorness. An in-depth analysis of the available frameworks is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the main contributions to conceptual thinking about actorness will be highlighted. Based on this, I will point to the strengths and weaknesses of existing frameworks. It will be shown that the approaches departed from an inward focus analysing the internal constitution of the EC/EU towards multi-dimensional concepts that also take external factors into consideration – albeit not to a sufficient degree. Subsequently, an alternative framework for analysis will be proposed. It is firmly embedded in the tenets of social constructivism. I argue that self-conception and recognition intersubjectively construct international actorness. In the final part, I will elaborate on the distinct features of the two criteria and the operationalisation of the proposed framework for analysis. Based on this, I will outline the implications for further research.

Reviewing some landmark contributions to conceptualising EU actorness

When the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics, supposedly the first chair of the discipline, was set up at Aberystwyth University in 1919, international politics were far from being less complicated than today. The world had just survived the first Great War, and the following years paved the way for yet another catastrophe of the twentieth century.

What was less complicated, however, is the concept of actors in the international system: States made politics, domestic just as well as international. Almost 100 years later, this has fundamentally changed. Traditional nation-states are no longer the only actors of international politics; they have been joined by a considerable number of alliances, international organisations, and non-state actors that increasingly shape the course of global affairs. ASEAN, BRICS, EU, MERCOSUR, NATO, SAARC, and UN are just a few acronyms to symbolise the diversification of international actorness.
Among them, the European Union (EU) is a notable one, in the sense that it has acquired state-like qualities over the past decades, and is at the same time put together by a number of nation-states, namely its 28 members. Regardless of the debates of whether the EU is best characterised as a federation, a confederation, or a *sui generis* ‘thing’ in the global political space, it has doubtlessly occupied an important spot in international affairs. The Union is present in several arenas of international politics, may it be trade, environmental or security policies. However, scholars and practitioners alike have been puzzled by the EU’s distinct character in global affairs; by looking at its “actoriness” many of them have tried to address this problem.

Tentative beginnings: actorness as the ‘actor capability’ and the ‘capacity to act’

Already in Wolfers’ seminal work on *Discord and Collaborations* in international politics (1962) one can discern an increasing awareness for the emergence of non-state actors in the global arena. Although firmly rooted in the realist tradition, Wolfers admits that

> By definition, the stage is pre-empted by a set of states, each in full control of all territory, men, and resources within its boundaries. Every state represents a closed, impermeable, and sovereign unit, completely separated from all other states. Since this obviously is not an accurate portrait of the real world of International politics (sic!), one can say that reality ‘deviates’ in various ways from the model, *because corporate bodies other than nation-states play a role on the international stage* as coactors with the nation-states.

(Wolfers, 1962, pp. 19–20; emphasis added)

It was however not until almost a decade later that these insights were transferred to the activities of the European Communities on the world’s stage. An often neglected contribution on the international actoriness of the – then – European Economic Community (EEC) was published in 1970. In a collection of influential articles on the United Nations (UN) and the EEC, Cosgrove and Twitchett almost casually drop their

2 For an extensive discussion of the “Nature of the Beast” see Risse-Kappen (1996).
conception of international actorness in their introductory chapter, which they later apply to EEC and UN activities. They establish three “guide lines...for determining an international organisation’s capacity to act on the global scene”, namely (1) the degree of autonomous decision-making power originating from the actor's central institutions, (2) the extent to which it has an impact on inter-state relations (and thus the international system), and (3) its significance in the formulation of foreign policies of states, and its members in particular (Cosgrove and Twitchett, 1970, p. 12). The authors’ undertaking to apply their framework to two fundamentally different actors is highly respectable; their weakness, however, lies in the narrow focus on their internal constitution. By looking at the actor’s autonomy, institutions and impact on member states, their focus on non-state international organisations is clearly exposed.

A comparable starting point was taken by Gunnar Sjöstedt’s landmark contribution (1977) that broke new ground in developing a theoretical framework for conceptualising the European Community (EC) as an actor in international politics. Similar to Cosgrove and Twitchett, he emphasises the importance of ‘actor capability’ in this respect. Steering away from the then widely acknowledged legal definitions of actorness, his concept takes behavioural criteria as the distinctive features of an actor in international politics. In other words, “if the EC is capable of behaving as an actor it must be considered as such” (Sjöstedt, 1977, p. 66). According to the author, actor capability is the necessary quality of an international actor. Its autonomy, defined by the degree of delimitation from the external environment as well as the degree of internal cohesion, serves as the threshold condition to acquiring international actorness. The actor capability on the other hand is determined by structural prerequisites, which can be both of an institutional and a societal nature (Sjöstedt, 1977, p. 17).

Nowadays, the concept still serves as a major point of reference for scholars evaluating the EU’s international actorness. However pioneering it was, it fails to address the interplay of internal and external factors, which crucially shape the EU’s international standing. While he argues that the assessment of actor capability “could not be focused on the Community as such” but had to “take into consideration its relations with the outside world” (p. 122), he does not substantially incorporate these parameters into his elaborate theoretical framework.
Sjöstedt’s mildly optimistic outlook on the EC’s development into a serious international actors is followed by Taylor (1982) who sheds some light on the EC’s actorness through an institutionalist lens – with different conclusions than his predecessor. Though only implicitly, he also employs a behavioural conception of actorness, pointing to “the regional organisation’s capacity for acting in a unified way” (p. 8). He clearly emphasises the Communities’ ability to produce coherent output, expecting an actor to be “capable of generating effective, coordinated action” (p. 8). Taylor concludes that diverging member state opinions mainly impinge upon the EC’s development into an actor in international society and sees little evidence that it will produce actor behaviour in the long-term. Although Sjöstedt and Taylor come to fundamentally different conclusions, their basic assumptions are largely similar: Both focus on the internal composition of the EC and do not account for the external aspects of actorness; they remain focused on the EC’s existence as a sui generis polity in international politics.

Transition: external impact on internal developments

The first contribution to the debate that fundamentally takes the external dimension into consideration is Allen and Smith’s work on Western Europe’s presence in the contemporary international arena (1990). Their central argument is that

Western Europe is neither a fully-fledged state-like actor nor a purely dependent phenomenon in the contemporary international arena. Rather, it is a variable and multi-dimensional presence, which plays an active role in some areas of international interaction and a less active one in others.

(Allen and Smith, 1990, p. 20)

The concept moves along two lines: an international entity in the form of a presence can be tangible and intangible, as well as positive and negative. When those two qualities are combined, an international presence can take on the form of an initiator (positive – tangible), a barrier (negative – tangible), a shaper (positive – intangible), or a filter (negative – intangible). The authors conclude that a lot of Europe’s presence is based on intangible factors. However, its mere existence in the global system impacts on third parties; it influences their actions and expectations.
This is a clear reference to the interplay of internal and external factors, which is also reflected by their definition of presence. According to the authors, it is composed by “credentials and legitimacy, the capacity to act and mobilize resources, the place it occupies in the perceptions and expectations of policy makers” (Allen and Smith, 1990, p. 21). A further commendable feature of the concept is that it detaches the idea of presence from the notion of statehood; in fact, it is at work regardless of decision-making powers, the distribution of competences etc. within the object under investigation. This way, it can equally be applied to states, non-state actors, and particular creatures like the European Union. Furthermore, they account for the variance of Europe’s presence across various policy fields.

However influential the concept has been in the debate on EU actorness, it suffers from two fundamental flaws. First, it fails to establish a clear-cut connection between presence and actorness. In fact, Allen and Smith emphasise that presence makes “no assumptions about ‘actorness’” (1990, p. 22), thus explicitly delimitating the two concepts. While it has been assumed that “presence is central to an understanding of the construction of actorness” (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, p. 217), Allen and Smith let us groping in the dark about how the actual relationship of the two approaches is to be understood. Despite this, they heavily draw on works on EU actorness by employing factors similar to Sjöstedt’s ‘actor capability’, namely the “capacity to act” (Allen and Smith, 1990, p. 21). The second weakness is immediately derived from this: While the notion of presence combines some internal features of the actor with the influence it exerts in the outside world, the relationship between the two dimensions remains obscure. As I argue in this paper, the two are inextricably linked; Allen and Smith fail to account for this connection.

Another core contribution on actorness targets this interplay more explicitly: Christopher Hill (1993) assesses the role of the European Community in international politics by its ability to fulfil external expectations towards it. He draws a rather pessimistic picture of the EC’s performance, pointing to a considerable gap between outsiders’ expectations and the Community’s capacities to live up to them. As the main reasons for this capability-expectations gap (CEG) he identifies a lack of substantial resources, for instance money and arms, as well as the ability to make and implement decisions (Hill, 1993, p. 318). The conception of actorness that underlies this conclusion rests on three factors that constitute actor
capability: the actor’s ability to agree, its resources, and the instruments at its disposal (Hill, 1993, p. 315).

While this is still a widely used definition of international actorness, it fails to tread on the path that the intersubjective conception of the CEG had paved: Hill measures the EC’s performance along the gap between its internal capabilities and external expectations. In a review of his concept he even emphasises that “the external cannot be divorced from the internal” (Hill, 1998, p. 36); this multidimensional understanding however remains restricted to the empirical evaluations of the article(s). It is not expanded to the conceptual level of defining actorness. Here, the author adheres to the traditional features of actor capability that take an exclusive focus on the internal constitution of the actor in question.

**Constructed actorness: the interplay of internal and external factors**

More recent contributions on EU actorness emphasise the interrelation of internal and external factors more explicitly, and incorporate both dimensions in their developed concepts. In their study of the EU’s role in global environmental politics, Jupille and Caporaso (1998) present a comprehensive analytical framework for actorness, which is based on a combination of internal and external factors as well as their interaction. Four essential elements of actorness are identified: recognition, authority, autonomy, and cohesion.

Concerning the first parameter the authors hold that, “whenever a third party interacts with the Union, rather than, or in addition to, going to one or more EU member state(s), the criterion of recognition has been satisfied” (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998, p. 216). Authority concerns the EU’s legal competence in the respective policy fields. According to this definition, one can expect the Union’s actorness to vary across different subject matters. The third parameter, autonomy, is achieved through a combination of institutional distinctiveness and a certain degree of independence. In other words, “these institutions should make a difference” (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998, p. 217). The final prerequisite is cohesion, i.e. some level of internal agreement, which Jupille and Caporaso consider to be the feature that distinguishes an actor from a presence in Allen and Smith’s sense.
Two important lessons can be learned from this contribution. First, the authors emphasise that the four criteria are inherently interrelated (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998, p. 216). This suggests that there is a close connection between internal and external factors; in fact actorness can only be acquired by a combination of both, and thus an interaction of insiders and outsiders. Second, ‘recognition’ is the first factor explicitly focusing on the external dimension that is introduced in a concept on international actorness. Conceived as “outsiders’ acceptance of EU competence” (Ginsberg, 1999, p. 447), it can occur in a de jure or de facto shape. While the first is component of sovereign statehood and could at the time of their writing only be fully acquired by nation-states, the Lisbon Treaty introduced some important changes in this respect. Since its entry into force, the EU was awarded legal personality and is now able to join international organisations as a full member, or can become a cosignatory of agreements and treaties (Art. 47 TEU; European Union, 2009). More significant, however, is the de facto recognition of the EU by third parties. Despite its peculiar nature and legal status, many of the world’s players interact with the Union in several arenas of international politics. It is only this interaction that opens space for political action of the EU; this is why the nature and scope of it should form part of any understanding of the Union’s international actorness.

Bretherton and Vogler’s elaborate framework for EU actorness is even more explicitly based on social constructivist assumptions. The authors hold that this approach is particularly useful as it

...conceptualizes global politics in terms of the processes of social interaction in which actors engage. These formal and informal processes shape the evolution of actors’ identities and provide contexts within which action is constrained or enabled.

(Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, p. 19)

Consequently, they note that “the capacity to act, or actorness, is a function both of external opportunities...and internal capabilities” (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999, p. 29; emphasis added). They base their framework for actorness on a set of external and internal factors, namely opportunity, presence and capability.

Opportunity is considered a structural prerequisite that constrains or enables actorness. Changing external environments, like the impact of globalisation or the
changing global balance of power, fall into this category. Their understanding of presence draws heavily on Allen and Smith’s concept. It is considered as “the ability of the EU, by virtue of its existence, to exert influence beyond its borders” (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, p. 24). Notably, it firmly rests on internal as well as external factors, which are assumed to be “intimately linked” (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, p. 27). The authors conclude that the EU has indeed acquired considerable presence that has however been mitigated by internal factors, namely the capabilities of the Union.

Here, they identify a set of four key parameters that constitute international actorness (2006, pp. 30-35). First, there must be a demonstrated shared commitment to a set of overarching rules and principles. Second, decision-making processes and priorities of EU foreign policy must be legitimated domestically. Third, actorness requires the ability to identify policy priorities and to formulate coherent policies. While in general this capability is not questioned, it varies across policy sectors and issue areas. In order to be able to identify these variances, the authors use the two parameters of consistency (compatibility of EU and member state policies on a given subject matter) and coherence (complementarity of EU policies across policy sectors, formerly pillars). The fourth criterion is the availability, and capacity to use, policy instruments, namely diplomatic, economic and military means.

Bretherton and Vogler’s concept of international actorness significantly advances from earlier contributions in the sense that it accounts for the interplay of internal and external parameters in constructing an international actor. Moreover, they combine structural and agential factors influencing actorness and therefore take advantage of the theoretical middle ground that social constructivism sets out. They claim quite rightly that it is “precisely the interconnection between structure and agency which is of interest in a study of the evolving identity, roles and actorness of the EU” (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, p. 22).

However they do not make full use of the opportunities that social constructivism opens up for conceptual approaches to international actors. Namely, they confine their understanding of actorness to their third criterion, capability: “Our treatment of capability draws upon the work of Gunnar Sjöstedt...we propose four basic requirements for actorness” (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, p. 30; emphases added); the
rather intersubjective criteria of opportunity and presence are merely considered as 'intervening variables' and not firmly integrated in the definition of international actorness. In addition, their framework is overly complex. If adhering to it, researchers would have to operationalise no less than seven different parameters.\(^3\) The proposed factors are highly sophisticated, and will any research make an unnecessarily intricate and lengthy undertaking.

**An alternative framework for analysis: actorness through self-conception and recognition**

Reconsidering the most influential academic approaches to the concept of international actorness, it has become clear that an increasing emphasis has been put on the intersubjective mechanisms that constitute an actor in world affairs. Whereas initially the focus was on the internal composition of the EU and its capabilities, external factors gained ground incrementally. This very much resonates with an emerging agreement that actorness is created where the two dimensions meet. It has been claimed that “[t]he very conception of international ‘actorness’ depends on bringing ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ into a relationship with each other, just as agents and structures are mutually dependent” (Hill and Smith, 2005, p. 5). Similarly, Bengtsson states that “[f]ocusing solely on developments in the internal capacity of a given actor misses the fundamental point - what is ultimately decisive is how other actors perceive such developments” (Bengtsson, 2008, p. 603).

Based on this, my understanding of international actorness rests on two factors: internal self-conception and external recognition. In other words, the core argument of this paper is that an actor is sufficiently defined if ‘ego’ and ‘alter’ agree on it.

I have already pointed to the added value that social constructivism brings to the debate. Considering actorness as an intersubjective construction enables the researcher to overcome the *sui generis* debate on the EU’s international role. Any

\^[3\] Opportunity, presence, capability; as the components of capability: shared values, domestic legitimation, ability to identify priorities and formulate policies (consistency and coherence), availability and use of policy instruments.
polity – state, non-state, or quasi-state – has a self-image in international affairs, which may or may not be recognised by other actors in the global system. This implies that actorness varies along several lines: First, it is dependent on the respective counterpart. ‘Alter A’ might perceive of ‘ego’ differently than ‘alter B’. At the same time, ‘ego’ might conceptualise itself differently in its relations with ‘alter A’ than with ‘alter B’. Both dimensions impact on the actorness of ‘ego’. The results of these processes can be seen in various international relations. The U.S., for instance, is perceived as a close ally and partner by the EU, while may be considered a competitor from the Chinese point of view. As a result, its actorness differs in relation to its respective counterparts. Secondly, actorness exposes variance across policy fields (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006, p. 22; Groenleer and Van Schaik, 2007, p. 992; Allen and Smith, 1990, p. 20). For example, the EU predominantly acts (and is perceived) as a trade power in Asia, while it increasingly represents a comprehensive security actor on the African continent.

These assumptions position the concept of actorness close to the tenets of role theory. Introduced to the analysis of foreign policy by Holstii (1970), it considers the roles that an actor assumes as inherently intersubjective concepts, which are constituted by social relationships. They are both based on normative prescriptions by ‘ego’ (role conception) and expectations by ‘alter’ (role expectation) that can vary across time and issue-area (Aggestam, 2006). In a similar vein, Elgström and Smith point out that

...it could be argued that it is the complex and dynamic interplay between the actor’s own role conception and actor autonomy, on the one hand, and structurally guided role expectations, on the other hand, which constitutes the main advantage of role theory.

(Elgström and Smith, 2006, p. 5)

This is very much in line with my understanding of international actorness, which assumes that it is exactly this interplay of self-conception and recognition that defines an international actor. In the following, I will shed some light to the features of its two core criteria as well as their operationalisation.
Self-conception and recognition: definition and operationalisation

First and foremost, an international actor has to conceptualise itself as being one. The way in which it does so, critically impacts on its development as a global actor (Larsen, 2002, p. 286). In other words, self-conception as an actor requires a decisive expression of the actor’s self-image as a relevant player in the respective policy field. Such expressions can occur in the form of official documents and statements but also as speeches delivered by officials of, for instance, the European Union. It is quite obvious that ‘the EU’ is not able to claim actorness, but rather individuals will do so ‘on behalf of the EU’. The procedure outlined here will ensure that the official position is represented rather than the subjective opinion of the speaker. In addition, such speeches should be comments on the actual state of the Union rather than the expression of visions and aspirations. Hopes and ideas on the future of the EU certainly diverge significantly between different authorities. Referring to ‘status reports’ rather than to comments on future prospects will allow for a minimal contestation of such issues.

Another pitfall must be avoided: actorness is more than a discursive practice, but must be reflected by manifest political action. In other words, “both the ideational and the material need to be taken into account by attempts to explain and understand the subject” (Hill and Smith, 2005, p. 7). The statements, which are conducive to the EU’s actorness, will thus have to be measured against political reality. Assessing if the EU lives up to self-established standards, i.e. the degree of implementation of official objectives and conceptions, constitutes the first parameter of international actorness.

The second dimension of actorness is external, as it concerns the recognition of the polity as an actor by third parties. More concretely, it refers to “the identification as an actor by others” (Bengtsson, 2010, p. 29). Actorness is thus also dependent on external opinions, expectations and perceptions. Recognition as an actor is in a first step undertaken discursively in most cases, for example by identifying the EU as a relevant actor in an official statement or speech. Again, gaps between the official rhetoric and actual behaviour are likely to be observed. Here, Jupille and Caporaso’s definition of recognition (“whenever a third party interacts with the Union, rather
than or in addition to, going to one or more EU member state(s)”; 1998, p. 216) gains ground as it covers the dimension of political reality, namely interaction.

It is important to note that any relationship with the EU must not be exclusive in order to satisfy this criterion. It can complement, or even contradict bilateral ties between member states and external partners. Furthermore, the interaction can be manifold. It can be expressed in a highly institutionalised manner, backed by a multitude of treaties and agreements, or in a rather loose way in which the Union interacts with its counterparts in an informal way. It is important to note that recognition as an actor is by no means an exclusively cooperative concept. Conflictual or even hostile encounters are just as much an expression of actorness as amicable partnerships. This resonates with Wendt’s ‘three cultures of anarchy’ – Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian – that are merely different expressions of one phenomenon, i.e. anarchy in the international system (Wendt, 1999).

The importance of the external dimension has been repeatedly emphasised. Some researchers even claim that the perception as an actor is the overriding criterion: “A leader is not only a party that fulfils theoretical criteria; a leader is one that is perceived as a leader” (Gupta and van der Grijp, 2000, p. 69; emphasis added). While I agree with the influence that external perceptions and expectations have on international actorness, it is however more the interplay with the internal that constitutes an actor. Groenleer and Van Schaik point to the interrelations between the different components of actorness: “The EU, for instance, cannot have a high degree of international actorness if it is autonomous but not recognized by other actors” (2007, p. 972).

To summarise, in order to achieve actorness the EU has to fulfil both outlined criteria. It has to have a clear self-conception as an actor with regard to the respective subject matter and it must be recognised as an actor. Neither of the two dimensions is a sufficient indicator for actorness on its own. A reason for this is that perceptions of a polity’s role (and indeed any perceptions) are inherently subjective and therefore “Actor A’s self-image may or may not correspond to actor B’s image of A” (Bengtsson, 2010, p. 27). I claim that both dimensions are equally constitutive for the concept of actorness; it can only be achieved when the interplay of internal and external factors support it.
How is such a parsimonious definition sufficient for encompassing a complex concept like international actorness? I have already indicated that many of the established analytical frameworks are overly sophisticated. Bluntly speaking, why should the researcher worry about the subtleties of EU decision-making in a particular policy field, when both the EU and its external environment agree that the Union is a relevant player regarding these matters? Why is it important whether all member states' opinions on the respective EU policies correspond, when, again, the Union and its partners acknowledge the institution as an actor (even if only besides its members)? For these reasons, previously suggested factors like authority, presence, member state coherence, or capabilities are not included into this framework – at least not explicitly.

I argue, however, that these criteria are indeed present in the developed concept, as they directly influence the two constitutive criteria. The absence of member state coherence, for instance, will glaringly impact on the EU’s self-conception as well as on its external recognition as observable following the internal divisions over the Iraq crisis in 2003, or more recently the EU’s behaviour in the Ukraine crisis. Another example is the Union’s legal authority. If it did not have any law-making competences, how then should it effectively interact with other powers? Many of the criteria that scholars have used for their concepts of international actorness are thus implicitly comprised by the two factors of this analytical framework.

Analysing the EU as a global actor according to its self-conception and recognition thus fulfils the established criteria for a basic framework for international actorness. It allows for comparative analysis, as it is applicable to any actor in international politics as well as to various policy fields. Only when this is the case, meaningful analyses can be executed, which will help us to map the EU’s position in the international system, relative to its partners and other third parties. At the same time, the proposed concept is relatively easy to operationalise and thus opens the floor for extensive empirical investigation of the EU’s actorness in global affairs.
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