

AmbigEUity – The EU and the Solidarization of International Society

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Panel 1J: EU Actorness Revisited

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Abstract:

Within the debate about the EU's role in the world, it is a common-sense and widespread argument that the EU needs to be consistent in order to exert a transformative impact on international society. Moreover, as a normative power, the EU is expected to indeed contribute to change in international society, in particular in terms of undermining or overcoming strictly state-centric structures of political order. This paper turns the consistency argument upside down and argues that ambiguity is an inevitable feature of processes of change because transformative moves necessarily need to engage with those structures that are supposed to be changed. To capture this idea, the paper puts forward a particular understanding of ambiguity as an innovative heuristic tool to study processes of change and the EU's contribution to them.

The EU itself as a global actor bears such an inherent ambiguity: From the outset, the EU was meant to bring about change in international society, but at the same time, it had to become part of a largely state-centric structure in order to develop any actor capacity in the first place. Therefore, what might look as policy inconsistency in the first place is more often than not a reflection of underlying ambiguities. Such ambiguities are not a detriment to the EU's transformative impact in international society, but its major precondition. Theoretically, the ambiguity argument is embedded in an English School framework: This paper uses the concept of international society to capture the international world as a social realm in which order has emerged and is constantly reproduced through primary institutions based on shared values and goals. As a secondary institution, the EU is constituted by the existing order in which it is embedded. At the same time, the EU also contributes to the constitution of this order and can thus contribute to change. Within such processes, embracing and accepting ambiguity is much more important than the common-sense predilection for consistency.

Introduction

The political world has for a long time been marked by a – presumably increasing – tension between state-centrism and alternative structures which exceed classical state-boundaries and thus push the political realm beyond classical Westphalianism. This tension is in various forms at the core of many crucial political issues which we are – willingly or not – confronted with today. Climate change, for instance, clearly exceeds the realm of state-centrism as the detrimental effects of global warming occur independently from state borders. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine that in addressing and regulating global warming we could overcome state-centrism. States matter. The evolvement of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a manifestation of a development towards greater international concern for human rights which are invoked on a universal level and thus claim validity beyond state borders. This evident development notwithstanding, contestation about legitimate invocations of human rights and about the legitimacy of intervening in sovereign states persist. Trends subsumable under the somewhat imprecise label of ‘globalization’ have increasingly fostered the permeability of state borders for goods, for financial flows, for people. States have cherished this development and have for instance promoted free trade to generate economic growth and benefit. Increased migration flows, which is just the other side of the same coin called ‘globalization’ has called states into action in a completely different manner and we have witnessed questionable attempts to diminish the effects of globalization and to re-emphasise national borders and sovereignty. The rise of populist movements, parties and prominent political figures throughout Europe and beyond is based on the same tension: One possible reading of this trend is that it constitutes an attempt to revert to national borders and less permeability as a putative solution for any kind of internal or external problems that people feel being exposed to. Populism plays with a diffuse feeling of unease within some parts of the society which seem to feel threatened by increasing transboundary activity and exchange and misguidedly take national belonging as a way to restore a sense of security that probably never existed.

For quite a while, it seems to me, whether in academia or in (dominant) political circles many have not paid sufficient attention to this tension but have rather thought along the lines of a straightforward and presumably linear shift from state-centrism to more open and most likely more liberal structures that increasingly render state boundaries less important. Maybe more than anything else, the European Union (EU) and the overall evolvement of European integration constitutes an epitomization of such thinking. The imagination or analysis of the EU as a different kind of power, a postmodern one with a predilection for a Kantian world order comes to mind in this context. Following this logic, the EU would in principle be the most suitable candidate to engage with the outlined tension and to actually contribute to moving the world closer to a post-Westphalian, post-state-centric order as some kind of post-Westphalian avant-gardist.

Now, it seems to me that the most enthusiastic era regarding the EU's post-Westphalian endeavour lies behind us and a number of developments also within the EU fundamentally challenge this idea and are grist to the mill for those who have actually never believed in any possibility of overcoming or fundamentally changing a state-centric and power driven world of international affairs.

Where to go from here? – One might either be inclined to turn a blind eye on these conflicting developments and continue to emphasise how post-Westphalian ideas matter within the EU as well as in its external action. Or, one might jettison the idea of post-Westphalianism including a crucial role of the EU in it altogether. However, both options would be flawed. Instead, we have to analytically engage with the fact that there is a deeply entrenched tension in – as stated at the beginning – a multitude of issues in international relations and maybe much more than anywhere else within the EU's internal set-up and its external action on the global level. Even though the EU has often been seen as *the* symbol for a postmodern order, it has actually never constituted such a thoroughly postmodern structure itself. Instead, from the onset of European integration there was a parallelism of contradicting structures, which are until today deeply entrenched in the EU as an institutional structure and as a global actor. World War II had brought the political and social order in Europe to a complete breakdown. Excessive nationalism was at the core of this outright collapse and had forcefully and in shattering terms proven its disastrous effects. The founding narrative of the EU, thus was to create a new political order which transcends the sovereignty of nation-states as the fundamental ordering principle, hoping that this would henceforth facilitate peace. Yet, at the same time there was resistance to the idea of overcoming a state-centric political order (Ahrens, 2019). This poses a fundamental tension: The EU was founded on the endeavour to overcome and transform a particular structure, yet in order to develop any capacity to act, it had to become part of this very structure. Completely ignoring the still prevailing idea of national sovereignty as a major ordering principle in the international realm, most likely would have brought the European integration project to an early and unsuccessful end.

This fundamental tension between a transformative impetus and the necessity to engage with existing state-centric structures lies also at the core of the EU as a global actor. Ian Manners' (2002) idea of a *Normative Power Europe (NPE)* considers the EU's transformational effects not to be regionally bound, but explicitly claims that it has an impact outside the EU's own borders. Thus, what later became the European Union, was always meant to bring about change also in the wider international realm. The ultimate basis of EU foreign policy is that it is on the one hand directed at overcoming state-centrism. Yet on the other hand, the EU is itself embedded in and therefore reflects a state-centric order at the same time.

For this kind of parallelism of contradicting, conflicting structures I want to put forward the concept of *ambiguity*, which will be defined in more detail below. Rather than a mere multiplicity of meanings, ambiguity as introduced here means that two options (i.e. structures, meanings, ideas, norms etc.) exist in parallel and that there is a fundamental tension between them, which is ultimately *unresolvable*.

Ambiguity as introduced here, thus, differs from the common usage of the word in everyday language. The parallel existence of opposing structures and the resulting unresolvable tension is an inevitable feature of order in international society and of any transformative processes within this order.

The aim of this paper can be summarised as follows: Assuming that ambiguity is an unresolvable core feature of international society, of many issues within the global realm and lastly also of the EU itself and its *raison d'être* as a global actor, what does this mean for the EU's potential to contribute to change in international society?

To conceptualise change, this paper builds on the English School of International Relations and essentially makes use of the debate between pluralism and solidarism as two versions of international society. Pluralism is close to a traditional state-centric understanding of international order, while solidarism entails a move towards a transformation of state-centrism. In this sense, in this paper I conceptualise change as the *saolidarization of international society*. This is not supposed to exclude the possibility of change as pluralization of international society. However, taking the EU's allegedly postmodern demeanour and transformative impetus as the starting point, the possibilities and limitations of solidarist change are of major concern in this study.

The core argument developed through the ambiguity lens is that consistency is not necessarily an inalienable prerequisite for the EU's contribution to transformative change. The EU as a global actor is indeed often inconsistent in the pursuit of its policies. Yet, rather than accepting without further substantiation that such inconsistencies must necessarily undermine the EU's potential to contribute to change in international society, this paper aims at thoroughly exploring the role of such inconsistencies. After all, I turn the consistency assumption on its head: I show that many of the inconsistencies, which indeed often form EU policies, can be linked to an underlying *Ambiguity* and I illustrate that such ambiguities are a necessary precondition for change to occur rather than a detriment to it.

More specifically, I will introduce three categories of processes of saolidarization, to which the EU has contributed: Constrained, contradictory and failed saolidarization. While all three entail examples of what would commonly be considered as inconsistent policy, the transformative impact of the EU is effectively undermined only in the last category, because there is no link to an underlying ambiguity. The first two categories, in contrast, illustrate that saolidarization does occur in spite of and sometimes through ambiguity. To illustrate the meaning of all three categories, I draw on empirical research that I have conducted within three issue areas: The EU's contribution to saolidarization in a) international human rights, b) international climate change and c) international trade policies.

Ambiguity as Analytical Lens¹

The Union shall *ensure consistency* between the different areas of its external action and between these and its other policies. The Council and the Commission, assisted by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall *ensure that consistency* and shall cooperate to that effect (TEU 21 (3); emphasis added).

[Member states] shall refrain from any action which is contrary to the interests of the Union or likely to impair *its effectiveness as a cohesive force in international relations* (TEU 24 (3); emphasis added).

In the context of EU foreign policy it is easy to detect requests for consistency and coherence, as demonstrated by both extracts from the Treaty on European Union (TEU). Also earlier legal documents, such as the Single European Act (SEA) reflect this idea: “Aware of the responsibility incumbent upon Europe to aim at speaking ever increasingly with one voice and to act with consistency and solidarity in order more effectively to protect its common interests and independence [...]”. Likewise, the academic literature calls for consistency, in order that the EU would no longer “punch below its weight” (Thomas, 2012). Academics as well as EU officials frequently go so far as to clearly establish a causal connection between the absence of inconsistency in EU external relations and its actual effectiveness as an international actor. Interestingly, however, when directly asked about the significance of coherence and consistency, EU policy makers frankly admit that consistency might indeed be less important than is generally assumed (Interview, 2016, 2017).

Such claims for coherence and inconsistency, more broadly, seem to reflect a tendency that has been called the *Flight from Ambiguity* (Levine, 1985) in modern times. It reflects a certain unease with ambiguous situations, statements or deeds as well as the resulting normative assumption that we should do our best to avoid ambiguity wherever this seems feasible, even if eradication is impossible. Policies should be consistent and unambiguous, otherwise they are likely perceived as deficient and non-effective at best or as damaging at worst. Ambiguity in this sense is a disrupting inconsistency and as such, it seems to reflect a crisis that should be addressed and solved. The negative connotation of ambiguity seems pervasive in the context of EU foreign policy, whereas for example the literature on norm development partly acknowledges positive effects of ambiguity (Chayes and Chayes, 1993; Wiener, 2004).

Regarding the EU’s potential to have a transformational impact on international society, Nicolaïdis and Nicolaidis (2006, p. 348) have been very explicit in arguing that “[f]undamentally, normative power can only be applied credibly under a key condition: consistency between internal policies and external prescriptions and actions”. In this paper, my aim is to put this common-sense assumption into question and thus to detach ambiguity from its wide-spread negative connotation. While authors often implicitly support the indispensability of consistency in EU foreign policy (e.g. Smith, 2004; Smith, 2014), they cast

¹ This section heavily draws on Ahrens (2018).

doubt on the general validity of this claim elsewhere (Smith, 2006, 2010; Thomas, 2012). Hence, it seems necessary to put the request for consistency under scrutiny.

To this end, I introduce the concept of ambiguity as a specific analytical lens. I do not claim that ambiguity and inconsistency denote two empirical phenomena, which are always clearly distinct. Such a claim would require to set out exact criteria to differentiate between inconsistent and ambiguous policies, which I think is impossible. My endeavour is a more modest one: I claim that the concept of ambiguity provides an analytical perspective (on seemingly inconsistent policies), which points us to unavoidable underlying tensions in international society and in processes of change. The ambiguity lens, therefore, helps to debunk the common-sense assumption that consistency and effective foreign policy (or consistency and the EU's transformative agenda) must always go hand in hand. It allows us to identify processes of change in international society which are likely to be overlooked if we stick to the notion of inconsistency or the common sense understanding of ambiguity and their negative normative connotations. It is important to note that ambiguity in this sense entails particular theoretical assumptions which are not always implied in the usage of the word in everyday language. As its core feature, the concept entails that the tension between two different options is unresolvable. An ambiguity perspective on EU foreign policy acknowledges the unavoidable existence of such *unresolvability* and thus accepts it as a core structural condition. Taking this structural condition seriously allows for an alternative assessment of the prospects for the EU's transformative impact on international society. Thus, the ambiguity perspective challenges those arguments, which dismiss the idea of the EU's transformative impact based on the observation of inconsistent policies. Instead, by taking the EU's embeddedness in the existing structure of international society seriously, an ambiguity lens leads us to acknowledge that the EU's inherent ambiguity is rather a necessary precondition than a detriment to change and what is perceived as inconsistency in its policies should not come as a surprise. At the same time, change in and of itself is a highly ambiguous phenomenon because its normative implications are diverse and mostly not exactly clear. The fundamental change of the basic structure of international relations from strict state-centrism to a more thoroughly developed societal dimension, therefore, entails normative tensions in itself. Such transformations necessarily involve changes of power structures and consequently, a reconfiguration of positions of different actors in the game and most clearly such transformations cannot be normatively neutral. The norms and principles that are affected by such change are in themselves normatively ambiguous. There are, thus two dimensions of ambiguity in the given context: One is the *institutional or structural ambiguity* of the EU as global actor and the other is a *normative ambiguity* of norms, principles and of processes of change in and of themselves.

Taking up these two dimensions of ambiguity, this section develops the following argument: Ambiguity does not necessarily prevent change. In contrast, change is indeed not conceivable without ambiguous structures and constellations. Ambiguity – defined in more detail below – is understood as the parallel existence of particular structures, principles and ideas, in which this parallelism leads to tensions. Those

tensions can be the source of change, instead of being necessarily detrimental to such change. In any case, they are inevitable in processes of change. Applying this idea to the EU's potential to pursue a transformative agenda in international society, the argument can be specified as follows: The EU's internal structure and consequently its posture as global actor is ambiguous. Given the fact that processes of change to which the EU might contribute are in most cases normatively ambiguous, too, ambiguity within the EU and its policies is not necessarily detrimental to its transformative impact. Instead, when analysing change and the prospects of an EU contribution, it is necessary to uncover such ambiguities.

Defining Ambiguity

In order to define the concept of ambiguity in more detail, it is revealing to look briefly into theories of ambiguity as they are discussed in linguistics and literary studies. In a widespread common usage of the term, ambiguity is often understood as a piece of language or in broader terms a situation, which allows for a multitude of different interpretations and meanings. Etymology, however, suggests otherwise: The Latin origin of the word clearly entails a binary logic; a literal translation would be close to 'double meaning'. "*Amb-iguitas* is a condition in which something vacillates between two options, both equally close and far" (Weimar, 2009, p. 55; my translation). The oscillation between two options that seem equally valid, important or persuasive is extremely significant to fully understand what ambiguity entails: Ambiguity not only means that there are two different interpretations available, but it essentially means that there is an undecidability between these options. The two sides, poles, meanings or whatever it is that causes the ambiguity, are permanently present and it is impossible to ultimately and definitely decide between them. This presence of two options paired with the impossibility to decide between them indeed is what gives ambiguity its specificity and what adds an additional layer to the notion of mere inconsistency. The undecidability leads to a tension as a particular characteristic of ambiguity. This emanating tension is not just some sort of side-effect, but it constitutes the genuine core and essence of ambiguity which entails its own and particular effects. To illustrate this, we can use a simple everyday life example: a pun. Ambiguity is the core mechanism of puns. They gain their humorous effect exactly from the fact that there are two meanings of a word constantly present. The very moment the addressee of the pun would decide for one of the two options or in case she is not even aware of the existence of both options, the humorous effect vanishes into thin air or is prevented in the first place. What the example of a pun illustrates very well is that ambiguity is indeed the existence of two different meanings – quite often mutually exclusive ones – which leads to the emergence of something new. An instance of ambiguity entails that the two different options are no longer conceived of as independent from each other; but the undecidability between them combines them to something new (Scheffler, 1979, p. 17). Ambiguity, thus, entails emergence, i.e. a process which means that new features of a system come into being which are not clearly reducible to its parts, but arise from the interaction and the simultaneous

presence of these parts (Brodocz, 2005, p. 193). It is this process of emergence, which marks the difference between the ambiguity lens and mere inconsistency. Ambiguity may well convey the impression of inconsistency, but looking at a phenomenon through the ambiguity lens, draws our attention to something new, which is more than just the two seemingly inconsistent meanings or interpretations.

Apart from defining ambiguity, language and literary theory is likewise instructive regarding the assessment of ambiguity in normative terms: As indicated before, there is a longstanding tradition of scepticism, which conceives of ambiguity as an instance of inconvenience in situations of communication, a disturbing factor in social relations, in short, a problem to be tackled and solved. For this sceptical position we find famous supporters as early as in ancient times: Cicero sees ambiguity merely as a misfortunate inability of a speaker. A skilled rhetorician, in contrast, will always contribute to clarification when confronted with the risk that ambiguity conceals clear and distinct meanings (Cicero, [1962], II, XXVI, 111). As outlined earlier, Donald Levine traces this scepticism in modern times. At the same time, he criticizes what he calls the *Flight from Ambiguity*, because, as he points out, ambiguity indeed serves particular social and cultural purposes (Levine, 1985, p. 29). One such purpose stands out as particularly relevant for the context of this paper: “[a]mbiguity serves to promote community” (Levine, 1985, p. 42). The transformation of state-centrism which lies at the alleged core of the EU’s normative power, is exactly this – a form of community building on the global level. This indicates a presumably more significant role for ambiguity in processes of change than assumed hitherto.

Writing in the 1980s, Levine was not the first to discover that there may be more to ambiguity than a merely disturbing effect in social relations. There is, for instance, the tradition of early 20th century language scepticism, which rests on the core assumption of radical and omnipresent ambiguity because meaning can never be fixed (Wittgenstein, 1971, p. 41). Following this line of thought, Ivor A. Richards argues that ambiguity is an inevitable and omnipresent phenomenon because meaning can always only be generated in dependence of a particular context: “The context theorem of meaning will make us expect ambiguity to the widest extent and of the subtlest kind nearly everywhere” (Richards, 1965 [1936], p. 40). In Richards’ view there is an “old Rhetoric” which has seen ambiguity as a fault in language, but the “new Rhetoric” should instead accept ambiguity, embrace the controversies that arise from it and benefit from them (Richards, 1965 [1936], p. 39).

To sum up, this brief digression into theories of language has helped to develop two major points: First, the established understanding of ambiguity draws our attention to aspects, which are likely to be overlooked if we stick to the narrower label of inconsistency. Second, there is a theoretical basis in language theory for a rather positive, less sceptical assessment of ambiguity. Interestingly, the idea that ambiguity has positive effects has been taken up in different arguments brought forward in the context of social science or international relations more specifically (see for instance Carstensen, 2011; Gioia *et al.*, 2012; Mérand, 2012; O’Mahoney, 2014; Sandholtz, 2008). More often than not these arguments

suggest a positive connection between ambiguity and (social, institutional, normative) change. Thus, the idea of ambiguity as the source of a productive dynamic towards change is not an entirely new one. As stated earlier, in the context of EU foreign policy, however, demands for consistency and coherence as assumed precondition for effective change prevail. The ambiguity lens offers an alternative analytical perspective on the EU's potential to contribute to change in international society.

Two Dimensions of Ambiguity

I have suggested above that ambiguity in the context of the EU's transformative potential in international society comes in two different, but interrelated dimensions: a) the *structural ambiguity* of the EU itself as also reflected in its institutional set-up and b) *normative ambiguity* – meaning that norms in themselves and consequently also normative change bears ambiguities because the consequences of such change are diverse. Even a process of change that seems without any doubts normatively desirable, most likely brings normative downsides with it. An obvious example is that the strengthening of human rights norms can on the other hand also lead to a re-enforcement of existing power structures and inequalities.

In the following, I will elaborate on both dimensions of ambiguity, before I then flesh out two ways in which the ambiguity lens provides a valuable alternative perspective on processes of change in international society.

The EU's structural ambiguity: As indicated before, the EU's founding narrative and *raison d'être* entails a transformative impetus, which aims at overcoming a classical state-centric order, hoping that this will henceforth facilitate peace. Yet, assessing the EU's potential to live up to these expectations, doubts have increasingly been raised based on the argument that instead of contributing to a transformation of state-centric structures, the EU would rather reproduce these structures on a higher level (see for instance Borg, 2014; Shore, 2004; Tiilikainen, 2014). Dealing with European citizenship, Shore (2004, p. 28), for instance, indicates that in order to bring the idea of European integration closer to the people, typical national ideas and symbols, such as a flag or a hymn are reproduced. So far, so true. Yet, does this reproduction of state-centric features really prevent change? Or is it not much more a precondition to such change because legitimate change needs to tie in with previously existing structures? Tiilikainen (2014, p. 130), who is herself sceptical of the EU's potential to induce fundamental change, points to this argument: In order to be able to change the norms and principles of the existing structure, the EU has to become part of this structure and acquire sufficient actor capacity within it to be recognised as a legitimate actor in the first place. Taking this argument seriously, the ambiguity between a transformative agenda directed at overcoming state-centric structures and the reproduction of those very structures is not a detriment to change, but its explicit precondition. Working in a thoroughly consistent manner towards change without such elements of reproduction of the order that is to be changed, thus, would

most likely not strengthen the EU's transformative impact, but undermine it and eventually deprive the EU of its capacities as an actor for change in international society.

Thus, the EU is and must necessarily be built on the parallel existence of societal and of classical state-centric structures. Both dimensions are constantly present structural elements within the EU and within its external action. In addition, they are deeply entrenched in the EU's self-understanding and institutional structure. Thus, there is no option to dissolve this dualism once and for all – resulting in the undecidability between two poles, which I have identified before as the characteristic feature of ambiguity.

Normative ambiguity: Norms and normative change are in themselves ambiguous. The kind of change entailed in the idea of the EU as a normative power seems at first glance desirable – according to a liberal logic it aims at promoting lasting peace. But this normative desirability is not self-evident. As mentioned above, the promotion of human rights is one such example that seems on the one hand normatively beneficial, but on the other hand, it also comes with normative downsides, such as the re-enforcement of existing power structures and related to this, accusations of neo-colonialism. It is impossible to solve this tension. Neither a complete renunciation of the promotion of human rights, nor a simple ignorance of its potential downsides appears to be a viable option. After all, this tension is unresolvable, undecidable.

Based on these two dimensions of ambiguity, I suggest that the ambiguity lens offers a valuable alternative perspective on change in international society in two ways.

First, ambiguity in both variations implies the emergence of tensions, which need to be debated and dealt with in one way or another. This necessity to deal with such tensions brings about a potentially dynamic picture because – as the definition of ambiguity entails – an ultimate solution to these tensions is not possible. Thus, this requires constant debates and disputes which entail the option for change. In this sense, the undecidability between two poles constitutes a constant source of change.

Second, regarding the EU's potential to contribute to change in international society, it is crucial to understand the potential interrelatedness of both dimensions of ambiguity. In the interaction between these different dimensions, seemingly inconsistent EU action in specific policy contexts is not necessarily detrimental to change. Instead, to the extent that such alleged inconsistencies are a reflection of deeper underlying ambiguities, it might prove beneficial to embrace such ambiguities and the resulting contestation rather than to push forward with a strong and clear agenda, which veils such contestation. This allows for greater legitimacy in processes of change, whereas attempts to pretend the absence of ambiguity where this is just not given and to enforce absolute clear positions where actually contestation prevails, rather risk impairing the legitimacy of processes of change and thus the change itself. In short, in light of prevailing normative ambiguity, ambiguous EU action – which results from its own ambiguous nature as well as from normative ambiguities – can be conducive to change. This is because a seemingly unitary EU with a strong agenda for change, which is based on an alleged moral superiority, would lead to a strong inequality within the relation between the promoter of change (the EU) and the object of

change (international society). Such a constellation would most likely evoke even more resistance, which would eventually slow down or inhibit change.

Conceptualising Change as Solidarization

The English School differentiates two versions of an international society: Pluralism denotes an order that emphasises (cultural) difference among the members of international society, i.e. sovereign nation states. Non-intervention and a traditional understanding of sovereignty are fundamental norms in such a conceptualization. In contrast, in a solidarist international society, a broader basis of shared values and norms exists, which enables the universalization of ideas beyond national borders. Understanding pluralism and solidarism as ‘ends of a spectrum’ (Buzan, 2004, p. 49) rather than distinct categories (see also Weinert, 2011), allows us to exploit the pluralist-solidarist debate as analytical tool to identify change in the fundamental order of international society as moves towards one or the other direction, i.e. as solidarization or pluralization. Given the fact that international society was traditionally envisioned as predominantly pluralist, the paramount empirical question is whether we can identify processes of solidarization within the fundamental order of international society.

In the remainder of this section, I suggest three indicators to specify, what the solidarization of international society means. I take these indicators from the English School literature (Ahrens, 2017; Ahrens and Diez, 2015), which provides extensive discussions about solidarism and pluralism (Bain, 2014; Buzan, 2004, 2014; Weinert, 2011; Wheeler, 1992; Williams, 2005). Ultimately, all three of them rest on Bull’s contention that solidarism means the transfer of classical features of domestic societies to the international level (Bull, 1966, 2002, pp. 230–232).

Enhanced degree of cooperation amongst states: For Bull’s understanding of international society his tripartite typology of rules is paramount (Bull 2002, 64–86): Apart from ‘constitutional normative principles of world politics’ and ‘rules of coexistence’, there are ‘rules concerned to regulate cooperation’. This third layer of rules is crucial in a solidarist conception of international society:

Rules of this kind prescribe behaviour that is appropriate not to the elementary or primary goals of international life, but rather to those more advanced or secondary goals that are a feature of an international society in which a consensus has been reached about a wider range of objectives than mere coexistence (Bull, 2002, p. 67).

Thus, any moves to push for the stipulation of more far-reaching regulations and ambitious objectives in international society constitute an indication of solidarization. Solidarization in this sense is restricted to the substantive level and hence entails only the most evident, yet not the most far-reaching kind of change. Any enhancement of international law provisions in the concrete context of specific issue areas would constitute solidarization in this sense.

Enhanced role of individuals and non-state actors: This indicator's meaning is twofold: Solidarism 'ties together state and non-state actors' (Buzan, 2004, p. 48). Thus, attempts to enhance the role of non-state actors in international politics, which challenge the primacy of the state, constitute solidarizing moves. Furthermore, individuals can become subjects of international law if the notion of legitimacy in international politics is not only based on the rights of states, but on those of individuals, too (Armstrong, 2006, p. 132). Essentially, in a solidarist conception, 'the development, the well-being, and the dignity of the individual human being are a matter of direct concern to international law' (Lauterpacht, 1946, p. 27). This second dimension goes beyond the procedural one and entails further qualifications: Following the first dimension, in principle any procedural involvement of non-state actors indicates solidarization. This fits Buzan's (2004, 147) broad understanding of solidarism, which he seeks to detach from an explicitly liberal-democratic interpretation. He argues instead that any kind of values can underpin solidarism as long as this leads to greater convergence among a group of states. While this makes absolute sense theoretically, it makes the practical application of solidarization as an analytical tool difficult: The procedural involvement of particular non-state actors could ultimately undermine solidarization (as captured by the first indicator) if these actors' objectives do not aim at the well-being and the dignity of the individual human being. Hence, this indicator entails two different dimensions, yet, both dimensions are intertwined in that the orientation towards individuals' well-being constitutes a qualitative restriction to the mere inclusion of non-state actors.

Re-interpretation of national sovereignty: Linking sovereignty to responsibilities rather than understanding it as an absolute principle, is part and parcel of a solidarist conception of international society (Buzan, 2004, p. 124; Reus-Smit, 2001; Vincent, 1986, pp. 113–118; Wheeler, 2000). Moreover, solidarization takes place if '[s]overeignty is pooled in the sense that, in many areas, states' legal authority over internal and external affairs is transferred to the Community level as a whole, authorizing action through procedures not involving state vetoes' (Keohane, 2002, p. 748; see also Armstrong, 2006, p. 130; Bull, 2002, p. 142; Falk, 1998). Thus, solidarization in this sense means that principles are implemented which emphasize commonalities among states rather than constantly pointing to sovereign differences between them.

The EU's Contribution to Saolidarization

In my research, I have looked at three empirical case studies. All three of them constitute concrete and issue-specific manifestations of global international society, in which the EU's contribution to the evolution of their institutional and normative structures can be studied and traced. To this purpose, I have studied the existing literature on the development of all three global governance issues as well as the development of EU policies within them to uncover processes of change. Furthermore, I have used content analysis of EU documents and communications as well as qualitative expert interviews with EU policy makers and civil society representatives to trace the EU's role within such processes of

saolidarization. For the purpose of this paper, rather than providing the respective analyses in full detail, I will first give brief general introductions to each policy field in the context of the EU's potential contribution to processes of saolidarization. Second, I provide concrete examples from my research on all three case studies to illustrate the three categories of saolidarization that I have suggested.

Human Rights: While the EU has emerged, is widely expected to be and constantly constructs itself as a progressive human rights actor, its policies within the international human rights regime are rife with inconsistencies. It is certainly not this paper's objective to reason away obvious failures of EU human rights policies. They exist and should time and again be brought to the fore and openly criticised. Yet, my research reveals that despite such flaws, we can identify several saolidarizing processes in the international human rights regime, to which the EU has often contributed. I have for instance looked at the EU's contribution to the promotion of R2P, to the establishment of the International Criminal Court and the EU's contribution to promote and safeguard solidarist diplomatic practices within the UN human rights machinery, notably the Human Rights Council. In view of the highly politicised nature of human rights issues, the EU has frequently made a larger contribution to saolidarization, precisely if it pushed for the solidarist agenda with caution and under the serious consideration of pluralist concerns, reservations or even outright resistance. Saolidarization in the context of human rights bears normative ambiguities and is thus not inherently good or desirable. It is important – for researchers and (EU) policy makers alike – to understand and address such tensions. The ambiguity lens as suggested in this paper is a helpful tool to this effect.

Climate Change: The EU has evolved as a climate change vanguard since the late 1980s and has for example been indispensable in the context of the ratification process of the Kyoto Protocol. The Copenhagen climate summit, in contrast, is remembered as a devastating failure of EU climate diplomacy. Despite such inconsistencies, the EU has contributed to the saolidarization of international society in the issue area of climate change. Counterintuitively, my research provides evidence that contributing to saolidarization is often enabled rather than inhibited by a partial reproduction of pluralist structures. This logic is mainly reflected in the Paris negotiations and the ultimate structure of the Paris Agreement as the latest climate change treaty. The EU has embraced this ambiguity and has thus contributed to processes of saolidarization, which are likely to be overlooked (and have indeed been overlooked) without the ambiguity lens.

Trade: The trade case constitutes a 'hard case' for the ambiguity argument. In the course of the time the EU has developed from a reactive and protectionist actor towards a major force for stronger trade liberalization as well as for a multilateral framework to govern these processes. Liberalization per se bears solidarist moments because it entails an increased permeability of national borders. As part of such developments, we can identify further saolidarizing tendencies to which the EU has made noticeable contributions. The creation of the WTO is a case in point. The EU has played a major role in the establishment of the WTO, as well as in developing its concrete institutional features, such as the dispute

settlement mechanism (Mortensen, 2009). As Baldwin (Baldwin, 2006, p. 933) points out: “But most of all, the WTO ‘feels European’ in its mission and even in its politics: starting from the opening of trade between members on a largely voluntary basis, arriving at binding rules (with consequences), and the pooling of sovereignty, but this time on a global scale”. The WTO, thus, is relatively far-reaching in terms of fostering international cooperation and transforming the role of national sovereignty within it.

Yet, the EU in some cases – mostly in the context of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – pursues policies, which clearly hinder saolidarization. Another discovery, however is, that in some cases EU policies which evidently contravene saolidarization at the same time also entail saolidarizing processes. Promoting environmental standards or other values, for instance, can foster saolidarization in terms of protecting the well-being of individuals, yet at the same time it runs counter to saolidarization because it can serve as a detriment to further liberalization.

Overall, my research within all three policy fields leads me to suggest three different kinds of saolidarization processes, which I will briefly illustrate in the remainder of this section.

Constrained Saolidarization

This type of saolidarization refers to a situation in which the EU indeed actively promotes a solidarist agenda, but at times appears as if it was not fostering saolidarization as much or as strongly as it probably could. The reason behind such constrained saolidarization is that there are eminent pluralist reservations against a thoroughly solidarist agenda. The human rights case, in particular has revealed instances of such constrained saolidarization. For instance, my analysis of the EU’s promotion of R2P has uncovered that presumably, it is more effective after all, if the EU takes a rather cautious and reflective approach to R2P rather than advocating it from a position of moral superiority. This is because R2P is underpinned by several fundamental ambiguities, such as the fact that it ultimately implies the use of force as a last resort. Using force, however, can never be normatively neutral and while it may be justifiable it cannot even be normatively unproblematic. The R2P entails saolidarizing moments because it enhances the role of individuals in need of protection as subjects of international law and because it entails the idea of sovereignty as a conditional rather than an absolute principle. At the same time, however, R2P also contributes to a reproduction of rather pluralist power structures within international society, because it is ultimately *states* that have the capacities to implement it. In light of such obvious normative ambiguities, R2P’s legitimacy is contested. A discussion of the human rights situation in Darfur at the Human Rights Council in 2006 reveals this contestedness and illustrates that under such conditions, the EU is more effective if it promotes R2P with caution (#ref). In the course of the discussions, the EU had to backpedal on its obviously outspoken and principled promotion of R2P because it had otherwise risked that the HRC would have remained completely silent on devastating atrocities that were committed in Darfur.

And this would have impaired the idea of sovereignty as responsibility to an even greater degree and would have thus meant an even greater hindrance to the saolidarization of international society.

The HRC's Special Procedures, and in particular country specific mandates, provide another example: The EU actively promoted such mandates and defended the continuation of the Special Procedures, including their relative independence from state control. This, however, required a cautious rather than a thoroughly forthright approach because the risk of a politicised use of such mandates cannot be simply dismissed. In instances of constrained saolidarization, the EU might well appear as a rather weak promoter of solidarism – especially as measured against the usually high expectations that are directed towards it. Yet, it still was such a promoter of saolidarization.

Contradictory Saolidarization

In this kind of saolidarization, EU policies appear as seemingly contravening saolidarization – but counter-intuitively, this ultimately helps to bring about saolidarization. The most evident example of this type is the EU's promotion of a bottom-up approach in the Paris Agreement (PA) on climate change. In contrast to the previous climate change regime, the PA establishes a logic that focuses on states' voluntary contributions instead of continuing the regulatory approach of the previous Kyoto Protocol. This has been interpreted as a reversion to more pluralist structures (Falkner, 2016, 2018). While this interpretation is indeed correct, it tells us only half of the story because the PA re-introduces solidarist elements through the backdoor, mainly with its ambition mechanism. The PA clearly stipulates that states must increase the ambition of their *Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)* and it puts the submission of the NDCs under international review and exposes them to public naming and shaming, thereby restricting the exertion of fully sovereign national decision-making. Prior to the successful negotiation of the PA, the international climate change regime has been essentially deadlocked. In this case, thus, a partial reversion to pluralism served as a door opener towards the continuation of solidarist elements in the regime rather than their abandoning. A clear consequence from this example is that in order to contribute to saolidarization it is indispensable to be considerate of existing pluralist structures. Incorporating such structures, more often than not enhances the prospects for solidarist change rather than undermining it. Similarly, in trade, the promotion of environmental and labour standards as part of the *Deep Trade Agenda (DTA)* seems to have contravening effects on saolidarization, because it poses certain limits to trade liberalization. On the other hand, the enhanced consideration of concerns of individuals – and this can at least be one possible reason behind such policies – enhances saolidarization on a different level. Here, two dimensions of saolidarizing processes are contravening each other to some extent. Nonetheless, saolidarization has still taken place. That the EU has after all not been very successful with the inclusion of such issues in the DTA and thus the Doha negotiations, is due to actual inconsistencies, which brings me to the last type of saolidarization.

Failed Saolidarization

This refers to a situation in which EU policies actually and strikingly undermine processes of saolidarization. This happens largely in trade. Policies, such as a sustained system of subsidies or import tariffs, for which there is no evidence that this serves any other higher-ranking goals, such as concerns for health or environmental issues, are not in line with a solidarist agenda. And they indeed diminish the EU's credibility as global trade power, but more specifically also its transformative impact on international society and thus its contribution to saolidarization. The EU's reluctance to also liberalise its CAP more thoroughly clearly is an important factor for the stalemate into which the Doha negotiations have run.

EU poultry trade with Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is an illustrative case of failed saolidarization (Goodison, 2015). The demand for chicken meat in SSA has increased markedly, creating aspirations to develop a local, profitable chicken meat production sector. However, in spite of severely increased consumption, this economic sector has not grown accordingly. The EU is blamed to have undermined such development through a sophisticated system of trade restrictions – formally all in line with WTO laws. Specifically, there are no direct subsidies for poultry industry, but the sector benefits from direct aid to farmers, which helps reducing feed costs. Furthermore, a “tightly managed, high tariff, import regime” (Goodison, 2015, p. 2) is in place for the European market. While in the EU the demand for poultry is limited to particular parts (chicken breast), other parts and offal are exported mostly to the SSA market because this has proven much more profitable than any other disposal of the unused parts. In addition, also food safety standards and health provisions seem to play a role as trade barrier (GLOBUS, 2018; Goodison, 2015). The EU's action in this case clearly undermines saolidarization according to several indicators. It limits free trade. More importantly, it most likely has devastating effects on local industries in SSA and thus prevents people from making active use of their right to development, which evidently ranks high on the EU's developmental agenda (Goodison, 2015, p. 12). This limits the chances of the local population to improve their socio-economic living conditions. Rather than any underlying, fundamental ambiguities, it seems to be pure economic interests of the EU and European producers that lie at the core of failed saolidarization. The poultry case is highly problematic, and it reveals EU action in trade policy that is normatively extremely questionable.

The following table summarises the three categories of saolidarization processes.

Constrained S.	Contradictory S.	Failed S.
Saolidarize with caution	Saolidarize by contravening saolidarization	Undermining saolidarization
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Safeguard legitimacy in light of pluralist reservations - Avoid a position of moral superiority in light of stark normative ambiguities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accept reversion to pluralism, introduce saolidarization through the backdoor - Processes that contribute to, but likewise run counter to saolidarization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy action fundamentally undermining saolidarization
Can be linked to underlying, unresolvable ambiguities		No links to ambiguity

Conclusions

There are two major lessons to be learnt from this typology of saolidarization. First, while many aspects of EU foreign policy might indeed appear as inconsistent, we need to take a much closer look in order to be ultimately able to assess, whether the EU contributes to solidarist change in spite of these ambiguities. There are two cases of seemingly inconsistent EU action, which must be linked to underlying fundamental ambiguities. And in these cases, the EU cannot only exert solidarist change in international society in spite of ambiguous policies, but even *through* them. Second, there are also aspects of EU policy that are essentially contravening saolidarization without that this is based on any underlying ambiguities. This is deeply problematic and should in each case be brought to the fore. However, even such deeply problematic and actually inconsistent policies, do not eliminate all other contributions of the EU to saolidarizing processes in the same field.

The ambiguity lens, thus, has provided me with a tool to develop a comprehensive and multidimensional conceptualisation of processes of solidarist change. Ambiguity as an analytical perspective points us to understand, accept and to deal with tensions that are an inevitable feature of international society, of actors within this society and of processes of change. To dismiss the EU's potential of contributing to change in international society simply based on the observation that its policies exhibit inconsistencies and incoherence, seems unjustified. Ambiguity as analytical perspective helps overcoming the widely spread, yet theoretically unfounded assumption that change would require absolute consistency and clarity all the way down. Ignoring the insights that an ambiguity perspective provides, will more often than not lead us to underestimate or fully overlook ongoing processes of change.

Finally, the claim that the EU contributes to saolidarization – and that it does so in spite of inconsistencies and at times through ambiguous policies – should not be confused with the claim that the EU is a

permanent force for good in international society. Saolidarization bears a multiplicity of normative consequences and thus does not entail an inherent normative desirability. Sure enough, my analyses of human rights and climate change, both convey some normative preference for a solidarist dimension in international society. The ambiguity lens in combination with my different indicators of saolidarization are a convenient tool to bring such diverging normative consequences to the fore.

In sum, the framework presented in this paper enables me to study processes of change (i.e. saolidarization) in international society, which are likely to be overlooked if we stick to the notion of inconsistency. Essentially, the ambiguity perspective poses a fundamental challenge to those arguments, which dismiss the idea of change in general or of the EU's transformative impact more specifically based on the observation of inconsistent policies. Yet, the ambiguity lens also facilitates normative research that wishes to neither blindly support a eurocentric vision of liberal world order nor to demonize attempts to promote saolidarization.

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