

NORMATIVE POWER AS A MEANS OF A SMALL STATE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: THE ROLE OF SLOVENIA WITHIN ‘THE EU CONCERT’ OF NORMATIVE POWER IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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Abstract

As a new member state of the European Union (EU) since 2004, Slovenia has aimed to present itself as a benevolent and devoted “European” country. In order to be seen as ‘a normative power contributor’ in a wider framework of the EU’s normative power, Slovenia has predominantly relied on the means of normative power, which it has sought to apply, in particular, in the Western Balkans – the region where Slovenia claims to have comparative advantages (common history, culture, “understanding” of the region, geographical proximity, etc.). The aim of the present article is to analyse the role of a small country with regard to normative power in a wider context of the EU, which claims to be an institution of normative power. Though Slovenia seeks to obtain credibility both in the Western Balkans and in the EU, and has an aspiration to become ‘the normative power bridge’ between them (by adequately applying some measures of normative power), its chances of success are questionable due to some unnecessary mistakes Slovenia has made in recent years, especially in its relations with neighbouring Croatia (viz., the border dispute). To conclude, Slovenia’s sometimes inconsistent and rash policies are decreasing its chances to be perceived as a normative power in the framework of the EU and the Western Balkans.

Introduction

If something is characterized as “European” in the Western Balkans (South Eastern Europe),¹ it is perceived as achieving high standards, and, therefore, such kind of performance/behaviour is to be followed. The opposite holds

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¹ Although the term ‘Western Balkans’ is highly politicized, I am using it to refer to all countries of South Eastern Europe, which have stated that joining the EU is one of their most important foreign policy goals, viz., Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania.

true, too: if something is labelled as “non-European”, then such conduct breaks the rule of law or, at least, moves in muddy waters. Though not a typical country of the Western Balkans, in 1991, Slovenia was the most developed Yugoslav Republic and the first state to have successfully left “the Balkan barrel of gunpowder”. Slovenia’s declaration of independence in 1991 meant not only a political, but also an ideological departure from the Balkans, which even nowadays recalls images of violence, backwardness, corruption and other structural problems of the countries in transition from the socialistic to the capitalistic system. Some people would even argue that little has changed since 1969, when C. Sulzberger wrote his famous words that in the Balkans lived “*sprightly people who ate peppered foods, drank strong liquors, wore flamboyant clothes, loved and murdered easily and had a splendid talent for starting wars /.../ less imaginative westerners looked down on them with secret envy, sniffing at their royalty, scoffing at their pretensions, and fearing their savage terrorists.*”²

According to opinion polls from the 1990’s, the majority of citizens of the Western Balkans saw Slovenia as a role model, because its political and economic progress went the farthest in the region. Slovenians felt proud of that, and they sought to present themselves as a people who had never had much in common with that part of the world. Strong feelings that “being European” meant “being modern” prevailed in Slovenia; meanwhile, the “undeveloped and violent” Western Balkans was seen as an area where Slovenia could project its experience and show that it possessed skills that could be shared with the countries of the region. In contrast to the Western Balkan countries, which had already been independent states for at least several decades throughout history (e. g., Medieval Serbia, the Kingdom of Croatia, the Kingdom of Bosnia), Slovenia had never enjoyed statehood until 1991. Starting from the 1990s, a momentum to “guide”/“teach” was, therefore, strong in Slovenia, which sought to show to the EU that it was different from and “more European” than its Balkan brethren. In Slovenia, the countries of the Western Balkans had always been perceived as “natural pupils”; they were geographically close, most of them had relatively strong historical,

² Craig, J. S., *Peculiar liaisons: in war, espionage, and terrorism of the twentieth century*, New York: Algora Publishing, 2005.

economic, political and cultural ties; they were less developed; and, most importantly, they were all trying to leave the difficult past behind and reach the goal, which Slovenia had already achieved, viz., to join the EU. On the other hand, the Western Balkans still remained the so-called “*schwerpunkt*” of EU’s efforts, since the EU preferred to have its neighbourhood stable. In that respect, Slovenia was seen as a legitimate struggler, from the EU’s perspective, too.

The *main goals* of the present article are as follows: *first*, to analyse from the theoretical point of view what role a small state can play in its joint efforts with the EU (as well as its member states) to project normative power outwards to the neighbouring regions; *second*, to show how, employing measures of normative power, Slovenia (as an EU country) shapes its foreign policy towards the Western Balkans (the region where it claims to have comparative advantages); and *third*, on the basis of the present analysis, to evaluate how Slovenia’s contribution to the efforts of the EU *vis-à-vis* the Western Balkans (with regard to normative power) could be used more efficiently.³

The article proceeds as follows: (1) in the first section, I am elaborating on the idea *what makes the EU a (strong) normative power* and *how a small state can contribute to the normative power of the EU*; (2) in the second section, I am analysing *how Slovenia, as a small state of the EU, seeks to use its normative power vis-à-vis the Western Balkans* in order to obtain credibility in both the EU and the Western Balkans. In the conclusion, I am assessing what are the lessons-learned for Slovenia (that could be applied to other small countries of the EU and general theory) in terms of normative power.

³ According to Gray (in Bučar, B., “Stroka in politika ob deseti obletnici slovenske zunanje politike (Profession and politics at the 10th anniversary of Slovenian foreign policy)”, *Teorija in praksa* 38 (1), 2001, p. 145), an expert in international relations can perform different roles; thus he or she may be: (1) an innovator who warns about new problems and suggests solutions; (2) a professional who provides answers to specific questions; (3) a promoter of official policies; (4) an advisor assisting in the decision-making process; (5) a “catalyst” trying to break the reluctance of the bureaucratic apparatus; (6) an institution for legitimization of certain policies; (7) a good-willing critic; (8) *advocatus diaboli* (defender of the opposing side); (9) a pure scientist trying to contribute to the development of the discipline. As the author of this article, I am not playing the role of a legitimizer/promoter of certain policies the government of Slovenia is pursuing *vis-à-vis* the Western Balkans, while all the other roles may better explain the purpose of this article.

1. “The EU concert” of normative power(s): the role of a small state

What makes the EU (and the whole Europe) a particularly intriguing case for analysis is the fusion of cosmopolitan ideas of universal rights with an emerging institutional capacity to protect those rights.⁴ The question is whether it is enough for a certain subject of international relations, willing to remain a credible player in the international community, to rely primarily on those liberal cosmopolitan ideas and the determination to protect them in dealing with the international community. In this section, I am going to define the concept of normative power and provide arguments why the EU can be described as an institution of normative power. Subsequently, I am proposing a theoretical framework demonstrating how a small state can approach its neighbourhood by means of normative power with the ultimate goal to show what role an individual state may play in “the concert of EU’s normative power(s).”

1.1. The European Union as an institution of normative power

First of all, we have to define what a normative power is in order to make a distinction from other types of power. A normative power is more than a rather vague notion that someone is “doing good”. More specifically, a country that would like to project its normative power shall possess moral authority, political capital and a norm-building ability. The construction and promotion of norms is a strategy for setting international normative standards and thereby influencing the world order.⁵ According to a synthesis of definitions proposed

⁴ Dunne, T., “Good citizen Europe?”, *International Affairs* 84 (1), 2008, p. 14.

⁵ According to Björkdahl (2007: 540), norm entrepreneurship is exercised in three steps. First, the norm entrepreneur selects a morally convincing idea as a foundation for its foreign policy and norm-building exercise. Second, the norm entrepreneur then uses norm advocacy, which is a combination of diplomacy, communication and coalition building to persuade other states to embrace the norms. Once substantial support has been achieved, the process gains momentum and operates to alter the convictions of the reluctant states. Third, the norm entrepreneur strives to find an organization home for the newly established norm in order for it to become self-sustaining.

by certain authors⁶, normative power can be defined as the normative, civilizing and ethical power of actors who exercise it to change normative convictions and set normative standards through processes of norm diffusion.

The growing political weight of the EU in international relations has triggered a lot of discussion about the nature/sources of its power. There are a vast number of authors⁷ who analyze EU military capabilities and argue that the EU lacks the means of hard power (in the opinion of many scholars, this results in difficulties for the international organization to be seen as a credible actor in the international community). On the other hand, there are authors who argue that the EU is 'a normative power'⁸ or/and a "soft power"⁹ or/and "a civilian power".

It is interesting to note that questions regarding the normative, soft and/or hard power capacities of the EU are not new. In 1972, Francois Duchene argued that the then European Community was a civilian power and that, given a change in the nature of international politics and the declining utility of hard power capabilities, it was well-positioned to become a major international actor. If we paraphrase the saying "*Speak softly and carry a big stick*;

⁶ See, for example: Manners, I., »Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?«, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2), 2002; Manners, I., »Normative power Europe reconsidered: beyond the crossroads«, *Journal of European Public Policy* 13 (2), 2006; Björkdahl, Annika, "Swedish Norm Entrepreneurship in the UN", *International Peacekeeping* 14 (4), 2007; Sjursen, H., "What kind of Power?", *Journal of European Public Policy* 13 (2), 2006.

⁷ See, for example: Lindley-French, J., "Boosting Europe's Military Muscle – the Build-up and future role of the EU Rapid Reaction Force, 2000. <<http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/p4lindleyfrench.html>>, 15/4/2011; Keohane, D., "Europe needs an avant-garde for military capabilities", London: Centre for European Reform, 2003; Wulf, H., "Have the European Union and its member states put arms control on the back burner?", *European Security* 12 (3/4), 2003; Menon, A., "Empowering paradise? The ESDP at ten", *International Security* 85 (2), 2009; Giegerich, B., Wallace, W., "Not Such a Soft Power: the External Deployment of European Forces", *Survival* 46 (2), 2004.

⁸ Manners, I., »Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?«, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2), 2002; Manners, I., »Normative power Europe reconsidered: beyond the crossroads«, *Journal of European Public Policy* 13 (2), 2006; Dunne, T., "Good citizen Europe?", *International Affairs* 84 (1), 2008; Chandler, D., "Normative Power and the Liberal Peace: A Rejoinder to John O'Brennan", *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations* 22 (4), 2008; Hyde-Price, A., "A 'tragic actor'? A realist perspective on 'ethical power Europe'", *International Affairs* 84 (1), 2008.

⁹ See, for example: Shepherd, A. J. K., "A milestone in the history of the EU: Kosovo and the EU's international role", *International Affairs* 85 (3), 2009; Chandler, D., "Normative Power and the Liberal Peace: A Rejoinder to John O'Brennan", *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations* 22 (4), 2008.

you will go far” that became popular with Theodore Roosevelt in the early 20th century, the EU has been aware of the necessity to develop some robust capacities, too, in order to be a credible player in the international arena. Nevertheless, the civilian power narrative remains important in the self-understandings of the EU’s role. Such stance of implying a uniquely non-military identity can sometimes be perceived as not ready to stand up for what the Europeans believe in.

EU member states have reached a broad consensus that the EU plays a distinctive role in the international politics, eschewing traditional power politics and acting as “a force of good in the world”. The conceptions of the EU as an ethical or normative power tend to rest on the assumption that there are cosmopolitan norms and values that transcend the particularistic claims of discrete political communities. Not only politicians, but also members of the academia follow the saying that the EU is “an ethical power”. However, it is not difficult to find serious arguments that speak in favour of a “not-being-so-ethical power”, for instance: 1) the EU does not recognize Hamas officially and is not willing to negotiate with this political organization although the latter has won the parliamentary elections in Gaza; 2) “an average cow” in the EU receives a subsidy of a 2,2\$ a day – more than what 1,2 billion of the world’s poorest people live on each day (some experts have suggested that if the EU acted “ethically” to bring about genuine reform of the CAP, over 140 million people could be lifted out of poverty); 3) the Common Strategy of the EU on Russia was agreed more than a decade ago (in 1999) – although strong on declaratory principles of common action *vis-à-vis* the Russian Federation, the major powers pursued their own policies towards Moscow regardless of the concerns of Poland and the three Baltic states, and have shown little willingness to subordinate their national interests to CFSP; 4) with regard to Iran, the negotiations of the EU Troika over its uranium enrichment programme have been fruitless although there is a common stance that Tehran shall not develop a nuclear bomb.

It is apparent that the EU serves three primary purposes for its member states, at least in the realist perspective of the world politics.¹⁰ First and fore-

¹⁰ Hyde-Price, A., “A ‘tragic actor’? A realist perspective on ‘ethical power Europe’”, *International Affairs* 84 (1), 2008, p. 31.

most, it functions as an *instrument for the collective economic interests* of those states in the context of global economy. Second, the EU serves as an *instrument for collectively shaping the regional milieu* (e. g. the Western Balkans, the North Africa etc.). Finally, the EU has come to serve as *the institutional repository of the second-order normative concerns* of EU member states (these include human rights, abolition of death penalty, democracy promotion, environmental protection and tackling poverty in the developing world).

The latter category can also subsume the countries aspiring for EU membership, since the countries of the Western Balkans do take the “European model”, whatever it encompasses, as a good thing (why it is so, is a matter of another discussion). EU membership was proposed to all the countries of the Western Balkans at the Feira European Council (June 2000). In the following Zagreb Summit (November 2002), the EU established a ‘contract’ with the countries of the Western Balkans: in return for the prospect of accession – and assistance to achieve it – the countries of the region would commit themselves to implementing political and economic reforms. Thus, specifically for the Western Balkans, the EU developed a framework of Stabilization and Association Agreements. However, it has to be noted that these agreements are considered an exploratory phase of pre-accession negotiations. In 2003, the Thessaloniki Summit bolstered EU’s commitment to integrate the Western Balkans by enriching the agreements with new instruments for the promotion of institutional reform.¹¹ This kind of support for the “European” means an important credo to the EU, though certain authors argue that the EU will not remain “the only game in town” for good.¹²

1.2. Normative power as a foreign policy means of a small state (in the EU)

Most of the authors quoted above perceive the EU as a homogenous and unitary normative power actor. This perception is only partly correct. The EU is far away from becoming a centralized and unified power that could be re-

¹¹ Roubanis, I., Koppa, M., “Dark Knights in the Balkans: for how long will the EU remain the only ‘game’ in town?”, *Etudes helleniques / Hellenic Studies* 18 (2), 2010, p. 97.

¹² *Ibid.*

ferred to as the “United States of Europe” (though calls for stronger Europe are heard in many EU countries), and because it does not speak with one voice, it is interesting to analyse how a single state, relying on “European backing”, seeks to reach a desirable position in the international community with the measures of normative power. More specifically, by joining the EU in 2004, small states of Central and Eastern Europe fulfilled one of their most important foreign policy goals and are nowadays trying to find a new *raison d'être* in their foreign policies, aiming to show that they have turned from ‘policy recipients’ into ‘policy shapers’.

According to the theory of small states in international relations, small states do not have as many means as larger states do in order to fulfil their foreign policy goals. This relatively deep-seated belief is in accordance with the realist theory of international relations. Yet despite this belief and precisely because of its ‘(political) smallness’, a small country can possess certain advantages in the world of big interests; certain niches in international relations can be filled up only by small states, and one of the important advantages of small states that have reached a certain level of development is to rely on normative power.¹³

Firstly, a small country that does not possess relative power can achieve its goals on the basis of its normative (structural) power in the region, – of course, providing it has such power.¹⁴ This primarily concerns the stance of the country: it has to set an example by consistently implementing, advocating and promoting policies in the subject of normative power which comply with the values the country holds. For example, a country could credibly encourage the rule of law in a third country only if it itself has an exemplary record in that area. Thus, a small EU country can ‘enable’ another country (e.g., one

¹³ See, for example: Vital, D., *The Survival of Small States: A Study of Small Powers in International Relations*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967; Keohane, R. O., “Lilliputans’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics”, *International Organizations* 23 (2), 1969, p. 291–310; Ingebritsen, C., *Small states in international relations*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, 2006; Steinmetz, R., Wivel, A., *Small states in Europe: challenges and opportunities*, Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2010; Cooper, A. F., Shaw, T. M., *The diplomacies of small states: between vulnerability and resilience*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

¹⁴ Strange, S., *Države in trgi (States and Markets)*, Ljubljana: Znanstveno in publicistično središče, 1995.

of the European neighbourhood) to position itself in the network of institutions and interdependence. This can also indirectly strengthen the power of international law, which is *de facto* one of the rare advantages of small countries in international relations.

Secondly, if a small country enjoys a high level of credibility in the region, it can act as an unbiased broker in conflicts and consequently contribute to the peaceful resolution of disputes with the means of normative power. This, of course, is hard to achieve alone, and in our case, it is vital for a small state to have the institutional backing of the EU. Generally, chances of success are higher if these efforts are backed by other (influential) actors of the international community. Given this situation, a small country can act as a coordinator of joint actions in the international community (not only of the EU) if it has cultural, linguistic, historic etc. ties to the region or conflicting parties. In this light the case of Slovenia, which is inseparably connected with its southern neighbouring countries and enjoys quite a substantive credibility in the Western Balkans, is a good example.

Thirdly, with appropriate legitimization by the international community (e.g., UN Security Council), a small country can contribute peacekeeping forces to troubled regions. More specifically, many small countries are *per definitionem* less encumbered by ideology than many major forces, which often come under attack because of their uncompromising pursuit of national interests. A good example to illustrate this point are activities of the Nordic Battalion (NORDBATT) in the peacekeeping operation UNPROFOR/UNPREDEP in Macedonia in 1990s, which not only contributed to the prevention of armed conflict in the country, but also provided an example of how certain countries (Nordic in that case) can be set in a position of benchmarks in terms of impartiality, high standards of (military) professionalism, ethics and commitment to international peace, which surpasses the confinements of following national interests in the narrow sense.

And fourthly, a small country which is particularly well-connected to a certain region (cultural, historic, economic, political etc. ties) can become a strong norm advocate by sending its experts to the region or, *vice versa*, by inviting politicians, opinion leaders, experts or students from the region to different forums where the necessity of "striving for good norms" is emphasized (e.g., conferences and seminars on fighting organized crime, corruption, etc.).

2. Normative power of Slovenian foreign policy in the Western Balkans

Slovenia, a country which, according to most definitions,¹⁵ falls under the category of small states, took over EU Council Presidency on 1 January 2008. It was the first country of the so-called “communist bloc”, which was assigned an important role of chairing the work of all the configurations of the EU and representing the institution in the international community. Therefore, the question whether a small country, contributing less than 0.5% to the common population of the EU, and producing 0.3% of the GDP of the EU, with the professional army of about 7 thousands soldiers, could perform its foreign policy goals adequately was legitimately highlighted at the time not only in Slovenia, but also in some larger countries of the EU. As a small state, Slovenia soon realized that, in international relations, it was difficult to rely on measures other than those of normative power.

Due to the historical, geographical, economic, and cultural proximity to the Western Balkans and owing to vested interests within the EU in stabilizing the region, the Western Balkans was a logical choice for Slovenia to project its normative power. Thus, Slovenia sought to find its niche in the geographical area where it used to belong from the end of World War I (after the break-up of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, it seemed a reasonable choice to join other South Slavic nations in the framework of the so-called ‘State of Slovenians, Croats and Serbs’, later Yugoslavia), till 1991, when Slovenia declared independence and broke away from once ‘a happy family’. Besides strengthening the economic ties with the Western Balkans, Slovenia wanted

¹⁵ See, for example: Brglez, M., *Lessons learned from small state's research for contemporary diagnosis, prognosis, therapy*, Vienna: University of Vienna, 2005; Bučar, B., Šterbenc, P., “Relations between large and small states in a multilateral context: a case study of U.S. – Slovenian relations concerning NATO”, in Šabič Z. (ed.), Bukowski, C. J. (ed.), *Small states in the post-Cold War world: Slovenia and NATO enlargement*, Westport, London: Praeger 2002, p. 103–127; Grizold, A., Vegič V., “Small states and alliances: the case of Slovenia”, in Reiter E. (ed.), Gärtner H. (ed.), *Small states and alliances*, Heidelberg; New York: Physica-Verlag, 2001; Šabič, Z., “Small states aspiring for NATO membership: some factors influencing the accession process”, in Šabič Z. (ed.), Bukowski, C. J. (ed.), *Small states in the post-Cold War world: Slovenia and NATO enlargement*, Westport, London: Praeger, 2002; Udovič, B., Svetličič, M., “Majhne države v novih teorijah mednarodne trgovine (Small states in the new theories of international trade)”, *Teorija in praksa* 44 (1/2), 2002, p. 29–48.

to be perceived, both within the EU and in the Western Balkans, as a credible country that could help other countries of the region reach their goals.

In international relations, principles that are followed by the states are indispensably determined by the specificity of a certain state, as well as by the international environment. I argue that the Slovenian foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the Western Balkans has recently been guided by three main normative power principles: 1) *internationalism*;¹⁶ 2) *flaccid reliance on normative power in the case of bilateral disputes with Croatia*; 3) *an aspiration to become 'the bridge' between the EU and the Western Balkans*.

2.1. Internationalism

Although rarely referred to explicitly, internationalism is embedded in the framework of Slovenian foreign policy towards the Western Balkans both in *lexis* (i.e., what is written and said about it), as well as in *praxis* (i.e., what it means in terms of everyday action, from policies to tactics on the ground). However, theories of social morality are always the product of a dominant group which identifies itself with the community as a whole, and which possesses facilities denied to subordinate groups or individuals in order to impose its view of life on the community. For that reason, one needs to be aware of certain incorporated limitations of internationalism. More specifically, the concept of internationalism may be perceived as hegemonic, or even postcolonial, by others, having, on the one hand, the EU, which claims 'to know how to cure the diseases of the others' (following the logic of 'what is good for the EU is also good for the world as a whole'), and on the other hand, an uneducated and ignorant 'recipient' of that approach.¹⁷

With Danilo Türk assuming office as President of Slovenia in 2007, internationalism became embedded in Slovenian foreign policy, even at the top political level. As an expert in international law, who has worked in the office of Secretary-General of the UN Kofi Annan as Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the necessity of internationalism, especially the necessity of

¹⁶ By internationalism, I mean, in particular, emphasizing support for multilateral action anywhere in the world.

¹⁷ As H. E. Carr notes, clothing one's »own interest in the guise of a universal interest for the purpose of imposing it on the rest of the world is nothing new. «

protection of human rights, is reflected in his speeches, as well as in the continuous support of multilateral action within the framework of international organizations. Emphasis on internationalism, proposed by Türk, is generally speaking global; however, in practice, Türk seeks to fulfil Slovenia's ambitions in terms of internationalism/normative power primarily in the Western Balkans. He frequently uses the opportunity to mention that "a Balkan identity" is one of the three identities Slovenia has (the other two being Mediterranean and Central European).¹⁸ However, he warns of overestimating the fact that Slovenia is the only and most knowledgeable actor that could help the Western Balkans on its way towards the EU.

A brief analysis of Türk's activities shows that he frequently meets his counterparts from the Western Balkan countries. He has been continuously emphasizing the necessity of respect for the rule of law, human rights and minority protection in the relevant countries and has stressed on various occasions that, with its institutions and capacities, Slovenia is willing to help.¹⁹ He also frequently states that the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU would provide them with important opportunities in terms of stabilization processes. At the same time, Türk emphasises that the Western Balkan countries should fulfil certain criteria dealing with the rule of law, such as full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

In addition, other ministers who are inherently related to international affairs, especially, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Defence, strongly support the 'internationalistic' endeavours of Slovenia in the Western Balkans. In *praxis*, with regard to normative power *vis-à-vis* the region, internationalism is also reflected in the engagement of Slovenian troops in peacekeeping missions, with the Western Balkans serving as a primary hosting region of Slovenian soldiers and police officers, who not only act as a 'force of good and peace', but also teach the armed forces throughout the region

¹⁸ Türk, D., "Predavanje "Slovenska zunanja politika v času sprememb (Lecture: "Slovenian Foreign Policy in the era of change)", 2010. <<http://www.up-rs.si/up-rs/uprs.nsf/dokumentiweb/45AD5AC0F5508D3EC12577D600509036?OpenDocument>>, 20/2/2011.

¹⁹ Türk, D., "Govor predsednika Republike Slovenije dr. Danila Türka na 15. srečanju predsednikov srednjeevropskih držav (Speech of the President of the Republic of Slovenia Dr. Danilo Türk at the 15th meeting of Central European countries)". <<http://www.up-rs.si/up-rs/uprs.nsf/dokumentiweb/29436D72F4D7EADCC12574410032AB77?OpenDocument>>, 1/4/2011

about good standards, the rule of law, the importance of respect for human rights, etc.²⁰ These 'normative power actions' are supported by other means that contribute to the enhancement of credibility in the eyes of the people in the Western Balkans, such as Slovenian official development assistance to the Western Balkans and certain projects of civilian nature, which are mushrooming throughout the region (building schools and roads, student exchanges, scholarships, etc.).

2.2. Flaccid reliance on normative power: an example of Slovenian-Croatian territorial dispute

Two decades after the break-up of Yugoslavia, the border between Slovenia and Croatia has not yet been clearly demarcated. The dispute concerns a few square kilometres of land along the border and the demarcation of the maritime border in the Gulf of Piran on the Adriatic Coast. The latter is of a greater importance for Slovenia, as it means a junction to international waters. Since 1991, attempts at settling the dispute have been made by all Slovenian governments, as well as by various joint commissions, international facilitators (including the EU, viz., by then Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn); however, none of these attempts has been successful.

Excessive emphasis on the dispute with Croatia and politicization of the issue has dominated general discussion about Slovenian foreign policy for years. Thus, the necessity for Slovenia to engage in "other-than-Croatian" international affairs was put aside. If the Slovenian Foreign Minister said that he devoted most of his time to the Slovenian-Croatian issues, one would think that Croatia is either a strong country, which is endangering the national interests of Slovenia, or that it is of urgent importance to provide an immediate resolution to the problem, and that there is no possibility to postpone it to a future time when emotions are less strained.

After failing to reach an agreement with Croatia, Slovenian politicians started to approach bilateral relations from the position of (hard) power, thus

²⁰ For more information on the involvement of Slovenian Armed Forces in foreign countries, see: Grizold, A., Zupančič R., "Five Years in the Alliance and 60 Years of the Alliance: Slovenia and NATO", *Bilten Slovenske vojske* 11 (3), 2009, p. 197-216. <http://www.slovenskavojska.si/fileadmin/slovenska_voj-ska/pdf/bilten_sv/bilten_sv_11st03.pdf>, 1/2/2011; or Vuga, J., "Cultural differences in multinational peace operations: a Slovenian perspective", *International peacekeeping* 17 (4), 2010, p. 554-565.

breaking the tradition of relying on arguments and normative power. When as an EU candidate, Croatia was hoping to open new chapters of its accession negotiations package with the EU in 2008, Slovenia threatened it would block further accession talks with Croatia due to the border dispute. In the following months, the tensions between the two states escalated to such an extent that some authors claimed that Slovenian and Croatia were witnessing the lowest point in their mutual relations.²¹

After the ambiguous resignation of the then prime minister of Croatia Ivo Sanader from his post and the subsequent nomination of Jadranka Kosor as the new prime minister in 2009, a new wave of optimism was brought into the bilateral issues between the two states. If the high-level meetings between the Slovenian and the Croatian governments were rare and somewhat tense during Sanader's era, a new momentum took place between Slovenia and Croatia, though it remained questionable when major specific steps/actions forward would take place. Another wave of optimism for bilateral relations spread with Ivo Josipović assuming the office of the President of Croatia in 2010. Since then meetings with his Slovenian counterpart Danilo Türk have occurred on a regular basis.

The Slovenian and the Croatian governments have recently improved bilateral relations and decided to resolve the border dispute by means of international arbitration, which is a major step forward. Since the border problem is highly politicized on both sides, such a decision seems wise from the viewpoint of an outsider. However, it is questionable from the theoretical viewpoint, because, since it joined the EU in 2004, Slovenia has tried to approach this issue by means of normative power and, in the subsequent years, following the unsuccessful resolution of the dispute, relied on tougher measures. Such a fluctuant policy does not speak in favour of Slovenia raising its status as a normative power either in the region, or in the EU. The policy of blocking in 2008, incited by the inability of Slovenian politicians to present the arguments for such a policy within the EU and in the Western Balkans, was not only a mistake from the perspective of normative power, but also from the

²¹ Gaube, Aleš, "Božični premor med Slovenijo in Hrvaško: Pahor želi čimprejšnje srečanje s Sanaderjem (Christmas Break between Slovenia and Croatia: Pahor wants immediate meeting with Sanader)", 2008. <<http://www.dnevnik.si/novice/slovenija/1042231269>>, 15/4/2011.

perspective of public diplomacy, as Croatia managed to persuade many countries across the EU that Slovenia was blackmailing the candidate country. With such an unstable policy, once relying on normative power, then on tougher measures, and then again on normative power, it is difficult to perceive Slovenia as a credible partner in international relations, especially within the EU and in the Western Balkans, since it cannot successfully deal with problematic bilateral issues, but rather pursues a non-self-confident foreign policy. However valid and solid the arguments of the Slovenian government in the bilateral dispute are, it might have made better use of its capacities of normative power, instead of pointing its finger at the other side.

2.3. Slovenia as a potential bridge between the Western Balkans and the EU

After declaring its independence in 1991, Slovenia shifted the focus of its political and economic orientation from Yugoslavia towards the West. With interethnic wars rampaging across the region in 1990s, the Western Balkans became the main area of security concerns for Slovenia. However, from the economic point of view, Slovenia, as the most developed republic of Yugoslavia, lost important markets in the region. Only after the war did Slovenia begin to rediscover the Western Balkans again. Though a lot had been lost, it was not too late, as Slovenia still enjoyed a substantive reputation throughout the region, especially because of higher standards it had enjoyed throughout history comparing to other nations of the Western Balkans.

During its first years of independence in 1990s, Slovenia mostly relied on limited hard power instruments in relation to the Western Balkans (military instruments, such as deployment of peacekeepers), although the troops were sent to the Western Balkans “in the name of human rights protection”.²² The first Slovenian troops were sent to Albania in 1997 to the operation ALBA in the framework of the OSCE mission, then a few months later to

²² The main reason why Slovenia contributed ‘boots on the ground’ first, and only later the instruments of normative power, were mainly two: first, it is easier to deploy troops than forge (and pursue) a prudent and coherent strategy; and second, the soldiers were already at disposal within the framework of Slovenian Armed Forces, while Slovenia was lacking an adequate number of properly trained and experienced experts/diplomats, who could act in the region thereby fulfilling interests of both Slovenia and the EU.

SFOR's (later EUFOR) operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to Kosovo in 2000. In 2011, the majority of foreign-deployed troops were placed in Kosovo (slightly more than 300). Comparing their efforts in the Western Balkans with the military mission ISAF in Afghanistan, Slovenians have strongly supported the activities of the Slovenian Armed Forces in the neighbouring region (opinion polls show constant support for peacekeeping engagement of Slovenian troops in the Western Balkans, ranging between 35% and 40% in the past 6 years), while support for Slovenian soldiers in NATO's mission in Afghanistan (ISAF) has been traditionally low (about 10 % from 2005 till 2009).

Anyway, Slovenia started to consider the Western Balkans seriously only a few years ago, slightly less than two decades after becoming an independent state (this does not mean that previously no attempts were made to define the policy towards the region; rather, those attempts were uncoordinated and inconsistent, changing with the changes of the governments).²³ More weighed and rational "thinking" culminated as late as 2010, when Slovenia had adopted the so-called *Directives of the Republic Slovenia towards the Western Balkans*. Although the document is, for the time being, more *lexis* than *praxis*, it has to be noted that it is the very first approach to a coordinated strategy of Slovenian economic, political and other subjects towards the region. Some important aspects of the document are as follows: a) a call to enable the visa-free travel regime for all countries of the region;²⁴ b) scholarships and other education opportunities for young people of the region; c) other incentives, such as promotion of human rights, democracy, the rule of law etc. For that reason, the position of the national coordinator for the Western Balkans is to be institutionalized within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Last, but not least, the

²³ In addition, during its Presidency of the European Council in 2008, Slovenia's priorities were vaguely defined, with the Western Balkans only as one of the priorities – and certainly not the first one. The most important goal of the Slovenian Presidency was the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and then the revived Lisbon Strategy, climate change/energy policy and intercultural dialogue.

²⁴ An especially positive role was played by Slovenian member of the European Parliament Tanja Fajon who won in her struggle that the visa-free travel regime for Serbians, Macedonians and Montenegrins enter into force before 1st January 2010, as planned by the EU. In 2010, she was actively working on enabling the visa-free travel regimes for citizens Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania as well. For that reason, she, at least in Bosnia and Herzegovina, enjoys very high reputation – according to certain people, even a reputation of a national hero.

Western Balkans is also defined as the priority area in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia.

Although the Slovenian foreign policy towards the Western Balkans has only recently become more elaborated and defined (at least, at a normative level), some critics argue that Slovenia is acting too independently, and that it lacks coordination with other EU countries. At first glance it seemed that the EU recognized aspirations of a small country, since it was also in the interest of the EU to have another contributing actor in the stabilisation processes of the troubled region, where, according to some authors²⁵, criminal networks, corruption and other illegal activities are part of everyday life. In the later period it became obvious that, when Slovenia wanted to act independently, using its own diplomatic initiatives (and at the same time the label of the EU!) and trying to influence the agenda-setting disproportionately²⁶. Subsequently, strong signals came from the EU that a small country, though pursuing the general will of the EU, had better coordinate policies towards the region with the EU.

A vivid example is the conference on the Western Balkans at Brdo (Slovenia) in March 2010, organized by the Government of Slovenia. The conference itself was not that successful as it could have been had it been organized with less emotion and more political prudence. It was a kick-start of the so-called Brdo Process, which aimed to interconnect the region at all possible levels of cooperation. The majority of leaders of the region took part at the conference (Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina Nikola Špirić, Prime Minister of Albania Sali Berisha, Prime Minister of Macedonia Nikola Gruevski, Prime Minister of Montenegro Milo Đukanović and Prime Minister of Kosovo Hashim Thaci), which was a good signal for Slovenia, a country that would like to be perceived as a normative power.

However, a major blow came from the EU, on whose behalf Slovenia wanted to speak at the conference. More specifically, only on the eve of the conference, the European Council president Herman Van Rompuy and the

²⁵ See, for example Dobovšek, B., Eman, K., "Mreže organizirane kriminalitete na Zahodnem Balkanu (Organized criminal networks in the Western Balkans)", *Varstvoslovje* 10 (1), 2008, p. 178.

²⁶ More about agenda-setting, esp. through the means of mass media in Leichtova, M., "Agenda-setting v masovych mediich v globalizovanem svete (Agenda-setting in mass-media in globalised world)", in Rosulek P., ed., *Media a politika*, Pilsen: University of West Bohemia, 2009.

Foreign Minister of the then-presiding country of the European Council Miguel Angel Moratinos cancelled their participation at the conference. There was no official explanation, but between the lines, the message read that the EU (and some of its influential countries) did not want Slovenia to act on its own as a 'statesman' in that respect, without coordinating its actions with the rest of the EU. It was a clear sign that the EU did not see Slovenia as an independent bridge between the EU and the Western Balkans. Another grey spot on the conference was probably too ambitious and unrealistic a desire of the Slovenian government to have the highest political representatives of Serbia and Kosovo seated at one table. In the end, Serbian representatives did not show up at the conference at all.

Due to the proximity of Slovenia to the Western Balkans, it is of strategic importance for Slovenia to have a stable neighbourhood. This goal can also be achieved by means of normative power. At the declaratory level, Slovenia has never questioned the integration plans of the Western Balkan countries into the EU (except in the aforementioned dispute with Croatia). This is consistent with the official position of the EU. After joining the EU, Slovenia began applying its Common Foreign and Security Policy, which essentially has to do with the promotion and protection of human rights. The EU implements this policy in compliance with the EU Guidelines (death penalty, torture, children's rights, children in armed conflict, human rights advocates; guidelines on violence against women are being drafted), in dialogues and consultations with third countries, by integrating human rights into other foreign policy segments and through active involvement in international forums – and Slovenian diplomats are stressing that on various occasions related to the Western Balkans, as is testified by the speeches quoted in this paper.

Last, but not least, it has to be noted that Slovenia does not have real ambitions that go farther than the immediate neighbourhood (for example Africa, the Caucasus, the Middle East or Central Asia).²⁷ In that respect, Slovenia usually "jumps on the train" and joins the initiatives of certain EU countries or the EU itself, having no specific policies towards distant regions, where it is more difficult to define (and pursue) national interests.

²⁷ It cannot be much different given very limited (human) resources at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For example, at the Department for African Affairs at the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, only three persons were employed in 2011.

Conclusions

A small country with limited financial and human resources cannot act on its own if it seeks to become a credible partner in international relations. There are certain conclusions that could be drawn from the analysis, first with respect to Slovenia, and then with respect to the general theory of small states in international relations in light of normative power.

Firstly, one of the most important means of small states to influence world politics (at least to some extent) is to rely on normative power; however, a state that wishes to be perceived as a normative power and 'a force of good' in global/regional affairs should rely on normative power at all times, and not only when it is appropriate for it to do so (and when it is not, to rely on means of hard power, as happened with Slovenia's foreign policy towards Croatia in the case of the border dispute). Why, for example, are the Nordic countries nowadays seen as credible and benevolent contributors in the field of conflict resolution, while Slovenia is not? The answer is easy: because they have been (quite) decisively pursuing a consistent foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the countries of the EU neighbourhood. Slovenia (as well as other small countries) could learn from that example.

Secondly, when relying on normative power, small states should focus on feasible political goals (e. g., in the neighbourhood), rather than on long-reaching and over-ambitious goals that can easily 'die away' (if not before, then when the government changes). A small state can have certain comparative advantages (such as Slovenia in the case of the Western Balkans) that can have wider success providing they are applied promptly (e.g., attempts of Slovenian members in the European Parliament to reach an agreement on the visa-free regime for citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina; good governance trainings; promotion of human rights; high standards set by Slovenian soldiers in the region; actions of the President of Slovenia and his meetings with his counterparts from the region etc.). For that reason, a small state should adequately coordinate its foreign policy actions with other relevant actors of the international community, even though such a state acts exclusively/predominantly by means of normative power, which is usually seen as less 'dangerous' in terms of *realpolitik* by larger states (in this light, Slovenia has made some unnecessary mistakes by setting an over-ambitious goal of becoming a bridge between the Western Balkans and the EU, regardless of the fact that the latter

sees Slovenia as a country that does have comparative advantages in the Western Balkans and can therefore make the difference). In addition to that, a small country could strengthen its role in the framework of international organizations (international relations) in the fields where it can fill niches and avoid unnecessary spending of energy/resources on issues where other countries can contribute better.

Thirdly, for a small country to achieve success in foreign policy and be a credible provider of normative power in international relations, it is important not only to coin a long-term strategy stating its goals, but also to intertwine the activities and work of existing institutions, such as research institutes, universities and think-tanks, etc. with political (decision-making) institutions at all levels, as well as with business, which is an important factor of the “presence” of a country in a foreign country. Only then can ‘a real power’ (Joseph Nye would probably refer to it as ‘a smart power’) of a certain country, i.e., a combination of different elements of normative, soft and hard power, become effective. Recently, we have witnessed certain positive initiatives in Slovenia with regard to normative power towards the Western Balkans, where Slovenia still enjoys quite considerable level of confidence. If a good combination of short- and long-term “necessities” in foreign policy thinking (and acting) is found, Slovenia could effectively use its sources of normative power again, which would be beneficial for both the countries of the Western Balkans and Slovenia. And only then would the EU entrust Slovenia the role of a trustworthy subject, which could bring the Western Balkans into the EU and, conversely, the EU into the Western Balkans.

It remains to be pointed out that international relations should not be perceived exclusively in the black and white scenario. The EU as well as its small states, such as Slovenia, does not need to accept the binary explanation, usually emphasized by its fierce critics saying that the EU should either become a good old fashioned proto-superpower or retreat to EUtopia.²⁸ The EU should

²⁸ Eutopia, a homophone of utopia, expresses the idea of a perfect human existence. Rarely used outside of academic circles, this word combines the Greek prefix *eu* meaning *good*, *happy*, or *pleasing*, with the Greek suffix *topia*, referring to a place or localized region. In 1516, Thomas More paired this word with a different one, *outopia*, meaning “no place,” to coin a fresh term, *utopia*. While More’s term is used to describe one of any number of idealistic, fictional political systems, eutopia simply refers to a place of happiness (Wisegeek, “What is Eutopia, <<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-eutopia.htm>>, 2010).

find a middle way, which is not based on the choice of being *normative, soft* or *hard* power (in this respect, the latter referring primarily to positive elements of hard power, such as peacekeeping, etc.). If the EU (as well as its small member states), which strongly promotes cooperation and mutual understanding, reacts too vigorously to such distressed calls for a binary choice, critics would gain grounds and could rightly argue that the EU understands the world affairs in the same fashion as other international actors do – in the realm of competition (as a zero-sum game) – and, therefore, cannot effectively blend aspects of idealism (which is the concept of normative power *per se*) in foreign policy thinking.

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