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## **The European Union's soft power: Image branding or neo-colonialism?**

**Naomi Moreno**  
**Alejandro Puigrefagut**  
**Ignacio Yárnoz**

Estudiantes de International Relations, Univ. of Navarra; junior research assistants, Center for Global Affairs & Strategic Studies

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### **ABSTRACT**

The fundamental characteristic of the external action of the European Union (EU) in recent years has been the use of the so-called soft power. This soft power has made the Union a key actor for the development of a large part of the world's regions. The last decades the EU has participated in a considerable amount of projects in the economic, cultural and political fields in order to fulfil the article 2 of its founding Treaty and thus promote their values and interests and contribute to peace, security and sustainable development of the globe through solidarity and respect for all peoples. Nevertheless, EU's interventions in different regions of the world have not been free of objections that have placed in the spotlight a possible direct attack by the Union to the external States' national sovereignties, thus creating a principle of neo-colonialism by the EU.

# THE EUROPEAN UNION'S SOFT POWER: IMAGE BRANDING OR NEO-COLONIALISM

## 1. Introduction

In the late 1980's, Joseph Nye, an American political scientist, defined the term 'Soft Power' as an ability of a State to influence others to do what it wants without force or coercion. This concept could now be seen as an alternative to the traditional hard power based on the raw involvement of aspects such as military and economic means. Nowadays, international actors are becoming more and more aware of the great advantage dominating this form of power would imply, and a clear example of this is the European Union (hereafter, EU). This *confederation* of states is known for its civilian form of power. This type of power refers to the centrality of the economy to achieve goals, the primacy of diplomatic cooperation to solve international problems and the willingness to use legally binding supranational institutions to achieve international progress among others. Since journalist and political analyst of European integration Louis-François Duchêne linked the EU's *modus operandi* to this concept, soft power and civilian power have been two of the Union's most defining terms.

It is also true to point out that certain aspects of soft power have been identified with the forms featured in the so-called Neo-colonialism theory. The various meanings of this rationale suggest that the use of economic, political, cultural, or other pressures used by superpowers to control or influence other countries, especially former dependencies, can be interpreted as a form of new colonialism. Despite the ambiguity of the term, scholars in postcolonial studies have agreed that neo-colonialism originated with Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president and arguably one of Africa's most influential political leaders (Warrior, 2005). According to Nkrumah, the aim of neo-colonialism is economic domination at the satisfaction of a few. Nkrumah became aware that the gaining of independence and national sovereignty by African states were symbolic and in no substantial way changed the relationship between the colonial powers and the colonized state. In effect the formal granting of independence "created a more Manichean system of dependency and exploitation" (Nkrumah, 1965).

Furthermore, the idea of neo-colonialism has widened throughout time and goes beyond its predecessor's ideas. In "Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction", Robert Young sees neo-colonialism from a two-fold perspective in which "development and dependency theory" and "critical development theory" add up to Nkrumah's perspective. As follows, he suggests that aspects such as economic growth and the progressive linear model of development have been so profoundly established in the neo-colonized states, that they have no other option but to join the system. As a result, he expands the neo-colonialism concepts and adds that the term "development" can no

longer be theorized entirely in economic terms but has to incorporate other dimensions like culture, gender, society and politics as well (Young, 2016).

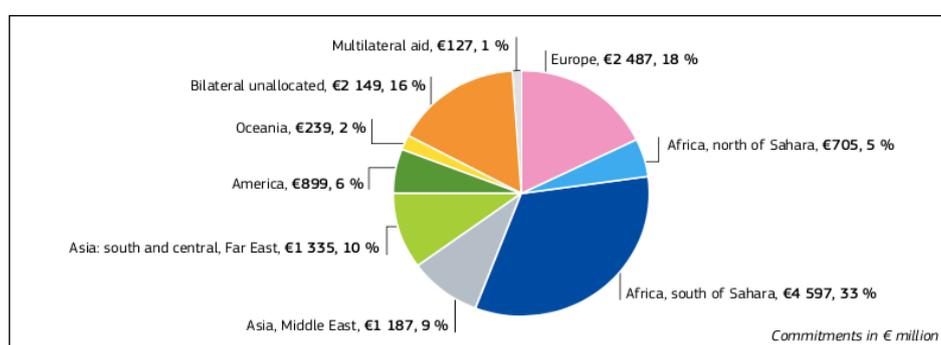
Thus, the aim of this analysis is to tackle three of EU’s soft power forms— economic policies, cultural initiatives and its role as a mediator—in its quest for strengthening its international image and to what extent these soft power forms could be related to the premises of neo-colonialism and its newly aroused sub-theories.

## 2. The EU’s soft power in the economic area

With regards to the first form of power, the European Union (EU) is one of the most advanced and stable economies in the world. Being composed of 28 States, it can be considered the first commercial and economic power in the world (European Union, 2018).

The economy of the Union in terms of production of goods and services, that is, its GDP, is above the GDP of the United States, with approximately 15,327,219 million euros (Eurostat, 2018). In addition, trade accounts for a great significance regarding the Union’s performance in the international sphere. These outstanding economic data may be the reason why the Union has decided to focus on economic international policies as one of the backbones of its soft power policy.

The EU is involved in both: in trade agreements to encourage cooperation and in several cooperation and development projects using its great economic potential. This is EU’s way of doing soft power. As follows, more than half of the global development aid comes from the EU and it goes to the middle and low-income countries. In 2013, the EU spent 56,200 million euros in development aid (European Commission, 2014), coming from its own funds and from the national budgets of the member States.



In the development of this first part of the analysis, out of all these programs and projects carried out by the Union, we will focus our attention on two designs: the EU's regional cooperation with Latin America and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Also, by adding its further presence in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa or even Oceania the EU can be considered an international actor which scope reaches the whole globe.

Following these lines, the EU has cooperated with Latin America over the last two decades, contributing with more than 1,000 million euros of investment (European Commission, 2014). This approach between both parties implies a positive collateral effect in both diplomatic and economic relations. As follows, taking into account neo-colonialism features, this type of direct collaboration with the EU as a promoter, could be interpreted as an attempt of regional hegemony as well as a greater European influence in the Americas. Nevertheless, in this soft power context, European capital investments are seen as a privileged tool to share the experience and know-how of regional Europe with Latin American partners.

Since 2007, approximately 556 million euros from the EU were earmarked for development in the field of social cohesion, water management, private sector development and higher education (European Commission, 2014). As evidence has shown, this type of investment in these specific projects has worked quite well. The improvement in these fields, especially in the development of the private sector and water management seems like they have caused a better perception of the EU in Latin America.

Also, in the current stage (2014-2020) the EU will allocate almost 2,500 million euros to the Latin American region. These grants are intended to be used in the fields of security, good governance, social equity, environmental sustainability and the region's inclusive economic growth (European Commission, 2014). These economic aids are directly aimed at both society and the States. A fundamental element of EU soft power that is taking part in the strategy is the need to perform as closer as possible to the society. If actions are taken closer to the people, then it is easier to influence the actions or interests of that region. Nonetheless, by over influencing on issues of relative importance such as good governance or security, Latin American society can interpret these approaches as threats to the control of its region. The truth is that these economic projects do not mean a direct takeover by the EU, but are an economic contribution to enhance development. The EU, following its democratic and solidarity principles, considers that the aim behind the EU strategy is to help foreign societies to learn how to help themselves, so that they are able to develop their structures once they have received the aid. Therefore, with an absence of EU internal interference taking place, there should be no fear of the loss of power by nationals.

Finally, the priorities of the EU's cooperation with Latin America are the fight against poverty and social inequality; the consolidation of good governance and the promotion of peace; and an economic cooperation for regional and commercial integration (European Commission & European Parliament, 2014). The most controversial priority may be the donation of European capital to the consolidation of good governance. As previously mentioned, this priority can entail a negative image of the EU—wanting to manage regional governance—,thus creating a distrust in Latin American society for the establishment of EU's will.

On the other hand, the ENP is a cooperation project which aims to improve prosperity, stability and security for the States bordering the Union. This cooperation is based on EU's fundamental principles: democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights (European External Action Service, 2016). One of the instruments used by

the ENP to achieve the objectives is through financial support, in this case of 15,400 million euros for the period 2014-2020 (European External Action Service, 2016). In this specific case, outside the European Union there seems to be a lot of fear about the Union's approach with other countries which come from different roots and heritage. There are many societies that see democracy or the rule of law as Western values created by Europe.

Elseways, it is difficult but not impossible to establish security and stability in the ENP partner countries. As follows, if the EU manages to help prosperity of the border regions, then its image could be directly benefited.

In order to avoid instability and contribute to opening the relations of the partner countries with the Union itself, the ENP also acts in bilateral cooperation manner with the States (European External Action Service, 2016). The particular concern of the EU in each State gives the opportunity to approach and show the European reality and, consequently, the improvement of welfare. These economic joint actions with the partner states are very important to show the real face of Europe.

Cooperation in the economic field is a great tool for the use of soft power. The EU is the largest economy in the world and should take advantage of this aspect in order to expand its capacity to influence the actions or interests of other actors. The policy of regional cooperation of the EU with Latin America is a clear example of economic soft power made by this supranational organization. The economic aids and the concern for the prosperous development of Latin America mean a rapprochement of the Union in the region, showing an image of solidarity, friendship and neighbourhood with the developing countries. These practices have two objectives or meanings: on the one hand there is real collaboration to solve Latin American problems, and on the other hand, the creation of the image of the EU abroad. It is clear that the EU wants to help eradicate all the problems of America, but at the same time its economic strategies are clearly focused on the foreign perception of the organization and its influence in the near future.

In the case of the ENP, a lot of emphasis can be placed on the use of this program to expand the conception and image of the EU around its frontiers. The positioning of the EU is very clear: it seeks to help developing societies to grow exporting its instruments beyond its borders. With the ENP the Union knows that it has a great opportunity which they ought to take advantage as a means to influence and become part of foreign societies, always understanding the primacy of fulfilling the main objective of cooperation policies. However, this type of economic cooperation can be seen as a hard power as it has certain similarities. In reality it cannot be considered hard power, the EU does not collaborate economically with others to force them to carry out certain measures, but to persuade them. The EU starts from the basis of solidarity and neighbourhood; its goal is to help societies to grow and not blackmail them in order to adopt their measures and values.

Both economic cooperation projects outline a good image. However, economic cooperation in Latin America has a better effect in terms of the perception of the organization and its integration in the region compared to the ENP, where it creates a rather annoyance atmosphere due to the perceived interference in those societies.

There are several characteristics of the two economic projects that resemble neo-colonialism. Neo-colonialism means taking effective and direct control of decision-making in regions outside one's own territory or State. In terms of direct collaboration in Latin America, the use of investments can be characterized as a form of economic neo-colonialism, where foreign investment in developing countries can lead to a situation of dependence on developed countries. In this case it would be difficult to think of an economic neo-colonial movement which promoter is the EU since nowadays it has no interest in taking effective control of the territory.

In the case of the European Neighbourhood Policy, a characteristic of neo-colonialism can also be detected: the promotion of acculturation. Exporting European values and ideas to other places can be seen as a tool to establish the EU in the region and convert those territories into subsidiary regions. Substituting local values and culture, in this case of governance, is largely assimilated to a change in order to establish more advanced values.

Today, economic cooperation could be seen as a new form of colonialism. This perception has been disclosed very easily but the reality is very different. The EU is based on solidarity, on the foundations of good neighbourliness and all the support it generates is in order to improve both societies and their own image. The EU believes in diversity, so it is thus difficult for it to be, a hegemonic power that resulted after a neo-colonial application of its economic means. This in a nutshell, the European Union, in terms of its external economic and trade relations, does not work to implement its ideas and transform the rest of the globe into its satellite, but works to help the other regions to reach an advanced level of development and thus achieve greater equity and equality, then eradicating problems such as poverty and increasing the index of human development.

### **3. International Cultural Relations Strategy**

Secondly, following soft power's wide variety of forms, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines culture as "a form of soft power that strives to foster the exchange of views and ideas, promote knowledge of other cultures, and build bridges between communities" (Culture Sector Knowledge Management, 2016). It, ultimately, pursues to enhance a positive vision of cultural diversity, highlighting it as a source of innovation, dialogue and peace. Culture has been previously defined as one of the tools used to control or influence other countries in the neo-colonialism theory (Molag, 2014). Hence, this second part of the analysis will try to tackle to what extent the EU-cultural soft power can be related to the concept of neo-colonialism.

As follows, on 8 June 2016, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the ex officio Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini, jointly with the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor Navracsics, presented the 'Strategy for International Cultural Relations' (ICR) in the European Union which aims to encourage cultural cooperation between the

EU and its partner countries. The EU High Representative highlighted the fact that culture is the fool proof engine that will guide the Union as a whole when dealing with common challenges and will thus build and alliance of civilizations against those trying to divide the European society (European Commission, 2016). As a result, in a new European era threatened by matters such as the integration of refugees and migrants, countering violent radicalisation and European scepticism, the Union features cultural diplomacy as a tool that will contribute to making the EU a stronger global actor, in line with the ninth priority outlined by the President of the Commission Jean-Claude Juncker in the ‘2014 Ten Priorities’ (European Parliament, 2016). Thusly, the Joint Communication read by the HR/VP at the 2016 European Culture Forum (European Commission, 2016), puts forward a three-pillar model for cultural cooperation with Member States, national cultural institutes, private and public operators from the EU and its partner countries.

Hence, following the first pillar of the ICR strategy, the European Union has always been an international actor that puts its principles at the heart of its behavioural standards and an example of such actions is the way article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty (TEU) goes hand-in-hand with the ICR scheme. Along these lines, the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities have been considered the first pillar of the cultural action-plan by its own architects. (Lisbon Treaty, article 2). By putting its own constitutional values and principles at the core of the strategy, the Union thus gives its own touch to this soft power framing.

Furthermore, as history has shown, the EU carries out its civilian power in the rest of the world through cooperation and development forms that have been present since its origins (European Commission, 2018). Such is this that these two tools are now taking part of the Union’s second pillar proposed for the ICR approach. Hence, supporting culture as an engine for sustainable social and economic development, promoting culture and intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations and reinforcing cooperation on cultural heritage are the three main strands which will provide focus for advancing cultural cooperation with partner countries, IPR’s second grand stanchion (European Commission, 2016).

By executing this second section of the strategy, the European Union highlights the fact that culture and creative industries are well able to prompt sustainable and inclusive growth (European Commission, 2016). The EU is without a doubt in favour of investment in cultural projects as a means to grant some kind of assistance in the contributing of attractiveness and social cohesion of cities and regions. As a result, by recognizing these industries as drivers of regional development and local employment, more than 70 EU regions have elected culture and creative industries as the focal point of their strategies.

Moreover, the Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC) is cultivating a mechanism for auditing cultural and creative initiatives at city level with the aim of supporting more targeted investments and learning from best practices (European Commission, 2016). Besides, by carrying out these means, the Union is underlining the fact that the entire cultural ecosystem is relevant as a whole, such is this that, rural areas

with genuine traditional skills and arts can definitely help ease poverty. As an example of this soft power strategies in Latin American countries, the EU has encouraged the allocation of audio-visual programmes with the aim of confronting social problems that arose from unfair disparity in urbanised regions. Moreover, in Africa, art and architecture have demonstrated how they can make urban development inclusive and sustainable (European Commission, 2016).

At the same time, by applying its main principles, the European Union has managed to fit inter-cultural dialogue, including inter-religious dialogue, as a means of helping in the creation of a fair and peaceful atmosphere in which societies value cultural diversity and respect of human rights (European Commission, 2018). Through international cultural cooperation projects, the Union has become an international actor that is able to create intercultural dialogue. In the context of soft-power-as-tool, this kind of intercultural dialogue will be able to alleviate tensions; prevent crises from getting worse; promote national reconciliation and encourage new narratives to counter one of today's most present threats in the Union, radicalisation (European Commission, 2016).

Additionally, one of the structures of this second ICR strategy is the importance of cultural heritage as a manifestation of cultural diversity that needs to be protected. *In varietate concordia* (in English: United in diversity) is the official motto of the European Union (EU) which was adopted in 2000. By strictly applying this European philosophy in the shaping of the framework, it is this essence in the international cultural relations of the Union that serves as guidance when achieving the soft power enhancement. The Union has thus identified European ancestry and heritage as key in the preservation and respect of culture within the diversity of its international sphere. Along these lines, tourism is one of the Union's most effective forms of cultural soft power that co-opts and attracts outside the Union. By truly committing to aspects such as tourism, the Union is proving that it has a legitimate and authentic interest in flourishing its soft power cultural form. Cooperation and development on cultural heritage plays an important role in international relations and in the creation of policies as outlined in the Commission Communication: 'Towards an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe' (European Commission, 2018). Cultural heritage has thus become one of the main focal points in the ICR framework which develops opportunities for joint action by partnering with countries in the quest for creating sustainable strategies to preserve cultural heritage through training, skills, development and knowledge transfer (European Commission, 2016).

Lastly, with regards to ICR's third pillar, a strategic EU approach to cultural diplomacy is seen by the Union as a final mean to successfully make the previous two pillars work effectively and achieve the intended goals (McMillan, 2018). The European Union is, as a result, taking advantage of its cooperation and diplomacy skills to advance successful cooperation with partner countries in the three work streams proposed. The civilian power character of the Union is thus at the heart of this strategy. The EU acknowledges that it is crucial for its relevant stakeholders to join forces and ensure the creation of a soft power ecosystem that considers cultural diplomacy as the engine that will make the scheme work as a whole. As a result, evidence suggests that the EU integrates within its modus operandi the potential for cooperation and

coordination in the quest of advancing this genuine type of cultural diplomacy; and as time flies by, it is up to the Union to keep track with one of its most effective tools, its diplomacy.

All things considered, regarding the ICR framework the Union is resembling UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression which highlights 'the need to incorporate culture as a strategic element in national and international development policies, as well as in international development cooperation (UNESCO, 2005). In the quest for carrying out the respect of its values and principles, the Union is taking cultural expression as an unconditional factor. This unconditional treatment seems to be bringing the EU to where it wants to be with regards to its soft and civilian power. The respect for cultural diversity and freedom of expression that is fostered by culture provides important support for democratisation processes and socio-economic development (European Commission, 2016). With regards to this approach of cultural international relations, although it would be rather extreme to state that the ICR and neo-colonialism have nothing in common, the Union suggests it is deviating from neo-colonialism concept. If we take into account the most-accepted definition of neo-colonialism, the EU's cultural platform as a means of soft power differs from the definition which sustains that a neo-colonialist power is the one which in the quest for aspects such as cultural hegemony over an independent nation or extended geographical area (Yu Huang, 2015).

For the most part, if we take into account the Union's own cultural essence, the ICR soft power mechanism is more about becoming an international actor that is genuinely known and admired for its civilian use of soft power than an international actor that applies this kind of power merely as a means for obtaining global hegemony and a super-power status quo.

#### **4. The EU as a mediator in global politics**

Finally, as far as the EU soft power in mediation process is concerned, the EU has advanced in several ways in the external policy action as an institution. Since the Lisbon Treaty (2007), there has been a dramatic change in terms of cohesion and institutionalization of the tools of external diplomacy and conflict prevention in the EU. The aim of the reform itself was to give more influence and representation to the Union in the international sphere as well as to show cohesion and unity of the Union in the eyes of the rest of the countries. One of the most prominent innovations in the treaty of Lisbon is the role of the High Representative of Foreign and Security Policy under the legal umbrella of articles 18, 24 and 27 (Treaty of the European Union). The HR/VP is the Vice-president of the commission and a counsellor of the European Council. Among the duties of the HR/VP, stated in Articles 18 and 27 already mentioned, she shall:

- Conduct the Union's common foreign and security policy, contribute by her proposals to the development of that policy, which she will carry out as mandated by the Council, and ensures implementation of the decisions adopted in this field.

- Ensure the consistency of the Union's external action. She is responsible within the Commission for responsibilities incumbent on it in external relations and for coordinating other aspects of the Union's external action.
- Represent the Union for matters relating to the common foreign and security policy, conduct political dialogue with third parties on the Union's behalf and expresses the Union's position in international organizations and at international conferences.
- Exercise authority over the European External Action Service and over the Union delegations in third countries and at international organizations.

As stated in the last duty of the High Representative, she is the head of the European External Action Service (EEAS), a *sui generis* committee in charge of the diplomatic representation of the Union (article 27.3 of the Treaty of the European Union). The European External Action Service has regional representations in more than a hundred countries and several institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the United Nations, the OECD, the Council of Europe, the Africa Union and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). In addition, the European External Action Service along with High Representative has deployed several civilian and military operations such as EUNAVFOR MED operation SOPHIA, EU NAVFOR Somalia or EUTM-Mali along with Election Observation Missions (EUEOMS). The last two principle elections observed by the EUEOMS were in Lebanon and Tunisia (May 2018).

But far from being the only missions deployed by the European Union, the EEAS has a more important role as a mediator power. The EEAS and the High Representative have gone beyond this and also committed to international mediation of conflicts as a neutral actor between the parts. A clear example of its soft power capabilities.

As 2009 EU Concept on Mediation explains, the policy reference to this matter ever since, “the EU is engaged in the entire spectrum of mediation, facilitation and dialogue processes. While, in practice, mediation is thus already an integral part of EU external action, the EU has so far used this tool in a rather ad-hoc fashion. On the basis of this Concept the EU aims to develop a more systematic approach to mediation and to strengthen its mediation support capacity which will allow it to contribute in a more efficient and effective way to preventing and resolving conflicts” (Council of the European Union, 2009).

This statement, translated from words to facts has meant the creation of the Mediation Support Team (MST) within the EEAS in 2011, a key group to the mediation knowledge. Furthermore, the European Parliament has created the European Parliament Mediation Support Service to assist mediation initiatives undertaken by Members of the European Parliament and have also created the European Institute of Peace to illustrate that mediation remains a vibrant field of EU foreign policy.

Although EU mediation efforts are still weak compared the work done by the UN, the EU has nevertheless achieved some victories as mediator. In particular, the EU has facilitated a dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina (capital cities of Kosovo and

Serbia) that shows the most prominent example of EU mediation success. As the HR/VP declared referring to the words of the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, "The European Union commitment is stronger than never." The EU has been taking the initiative of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue mainly through the outstanding role of the HR/VP, that acted as a strong but neutral mediator. The final outcome of the process led to a common agreement on the promotion of cooperation and mutual recognition through a standardisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo in August 2015.

Although the EU was believed not to be an impartial mediator due to the fact that the opinions among its member States over the international recognition of the Republic of Kosovo as a sovereign state were antagonist, the EU used the parties' common interest in closer integration into the European Union as the main source of attractiveness to a final agreement. The membership candidate status for Serbia, visa liberations and the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo served as powerful and positive incentive for both parties to start a dialogue and to maintain the communication channels even when tensions arose between them. Therefore, it seems easy to argue that the EU has worked in favour of the peace process. Nevertheless, there are some who oppose to this highlighting the fact that the agreement reached is so empty in its content that each party has interpreted it differently, preventing its effective implementation. This approach has been termed the "Brussels house style" (Bergman, 2016).

If we address to what extent the agreement has settled the conflict, we have to admit that the EU-facilitated dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia has been relatively effective. The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue has led to several agreements between the parties. Among others, compromises include issues such as Kosovo's participation in regional fora, freedom of movement and the governance over the region of Northern Kosovo (Bergman, 2016). Most importantly, the EU fostered the First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations in April 2013. This historic and ground-breaking step led to an international appreciation and applause. All in all, even though the parties are failing to accomplish the entire document, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue is still a success story which can, at least partly, be attributed to the EU's soft power incentives to tackle the conflict and move parties towards agreement. Especially when it comes to their aspirations for EU accession and economic partnerships.

However, other initiatives have not been successful so far. The EU Delegation's support to the National Dialogue Conference in Yemen proved to be ineffective for instance. In Yemen, until the 2015 crisis, EU officials had been facilitating different events and meetings of all the conflict parties in the EU's Delegation in Sana. These events and meetings were opportunities to hear and understand their views and demands, and finally helping to establish certain communication and dialogue between the contenders or belligerents (Girke, 2015). There were two factors that helped this to happen. Firstly, the pro-activeness of the successive Heads of Delegation. Secondly, the positive image of the EUD among all Yemeni stakeholders, who viewed it as an impartial third-party with certain stable relations with Yemen and with an enormous reputation for being a great defender of democracy as well as for the human and cultural development of current societies (Girke, 2015). This second factor is one the EU main

tools for soft power in fact, its neutrality and reputation as an institution committed to democracy and liberal values instead of selfish interests.

However, since March 2015 when the Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen began, the EUD operating from Brussels engaged in “low-key diplomacy in trying to reach out to some of the conflict parties, most importantly the Houthis, building upon dialogue channels that had been established earlier on in the transition process” (Eshaq/El-Marani, 2017). What it seems as willingness to maintain a neutral position but hesitancy to impose any pressure against those damaging the political transition process, looking for solutions that seem to please conflicting local and regional power centres instead of what really interested to the majority of the Yemeni people (Göldner-Ebenthal & Dudouet, 2017).

Having analysed the facts mentioned, we have to admit that EU's commitment with the world as a supranational institution has to be admired and shared regardless if they do not reach their objectives always. For its neutrality and pureness of its values, we cannot assume that the EU is acting as a neo-colonialist as far as mediation is concerned. The simple word of mediation shows a commitment to peacekeeping through dialogue and soft power, the philosophy of sympathy with both parties and a comprehensive approach to reality. The EU is viewed and welcomed by nations for its contribution to peacekeeping efforts and its compromise with conflict mediation. It can never be argued that EU mediation comes from the belief of an intellectual supremacy of European values against the rest of the world, which would be a naïf and extremely suspicious belief of how the world and human nature works.

## **5. Conclusions**

All things considered, in this analysis through EU soft power capabilities in the economic, cultural and diplomatic field, it can be clearly demonstrated that EU engagement in World Politics as a supranational institution does not resemble a neo-colonialist behaviour. Although the three approaches EU soft power we have tackled could share some common points with the already mentioned theory of neo-colonialism, reality is different. European Union's good will under the Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union is a clear statement of a compromise with the world but with the best intentions of the European heads of States.

Regarding EU economic policies to help development in Latin America and Northern Africa, the EU, as far as we are concerned has no ambition to create an economic dependency of these countries to achieve control and hegemony. Although it could possibly be inferred that those policies could have a double intention, what the EU supposedly pursues comes from the belief in solidarity, good neighbour and willingness to promote free trade and economic development.

As far as its cultural promotion is concerned, if we take into account the cultural essence of the Union, the ICR soft power mechanism is about becoming an international actor that is genuinely known and admired. This would be opposed to the conception

that the EU may be acting as an international actor that applies this kind of power as a means for obtaining global hegemony and a super-power global position.

Finally, regarding the EU role as a mediator in international conflicts, the EU ambition to act as the judge of the world with its cultural superiority, although possible in some cases, doesn't represent what in general seems to be. The EU is rather a strong believer in peace promotion that believes that can help the UN in its mission to prevent conflicts among actors of the International sphere.

So what can be inferred as a final conclusion is that the UE is a civilian power with no ambition. Although it can be seen externally as if it were to follow neo-colonialism terms, it has rather a strong believe in dialogue, diplomacy, mediation of conflicts, promotion of culture, development of supranational capabilities and economic partnerships with developing countries. All these methods aim to achieve the promotion of democracy, solidarity and peace to the world, not to become the global hegemon of the world. However, it could be the case that those policies could give a second interpretation and turn something that was created with a good intention to a perverse self-interest.

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