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REVIEW ESSAY

Civilian Power Europe

Review of the Original and Current Debates

JAN ORBIE

François Duchêne's notion of a 'civilian power Europe' (CPE) has dominated the debate on Europe's role in the world for several decades (Whitman, 1998: 11; Nicolaïdis and Howse, 2003: 344). For example, in Council documents and speeches of the Union's High Representative Solana, the prevailing European discourse is constructing the EU as a civilian power (Larsen, 2002). The CIDEL workshop 'From civilian power to military power: the European Union at a crossroads?' and the subsequent Special Issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy* (2/2006, edited by Helene Sjursen) illustrate the so-called 'renaissance' (Whitman, 2002) of the CPE idea.

Duchêne's Original Idea: the Attractiveness of Vagueness

At first sight it seems surprising that the CPE idea continues to inspire both policy-makers and academics. After all, Everts' early observation that 'it is difficult to find out what exactly the supporters of a CPE have in mind' (1974: 11) is still applicable today. Although references to Duchêne's 1972 and 1973 articles are ubiquitous (though rarely elaborated on) in the literature on EU external relations, they only offer a short and descriptive account of Europe's possible role in the world. 'Duchêne never developed his vision into a detailed and comprehensive scheme' (Zielonka, 1998: 226) and his CPE concept 'is most striking for the unsystematic manner in which it was advanced' (Whitman, 1998: 11). Even the term 'civilian power Europe' is remarkably absent in the (sub)titles of his book chapters.¹ And notwithstanding the 'CPE renaissance' since the 1990s, Duchêne's last book² and recent commentaries³ do not explicitly mention it.

Before focusing on its substance, the question emerges why the CPE role concept finds so much resonance, even 30 years after Duchêne's original idea (rather than ideal type). One element of explanation is that it forms a plausible lead for addressing a topical subject: what (distinctive) role for the EU in the world? The increased relevance of this question ensues from Europe's growing international aspirations (in trade and environmental,



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but also in security matters), on the one hand, and the declining legitimacy of America's power, on the other. Secondly, as also suggested by Burckhardt (2004), precisely the vagueness of Duchêne's notion allows for different interpretations by policy-makers and academics. The enduring resonance of the CPE role is thus *because of*, rather than in spite of, his rather imprecise description. From this perspective, diverse readings of the CPE concept also reflect a discursive struggle (e.g. about the desirability of European defence and of normative foreign policy goals), where 'historical' references to Duchêne's articles may give the author's interpretation some legitimacy.

But before looking at these different readings, Duchêne's original concept should be situated vis-a-vis other foreign policy roles that have been applied to Europe since the 1970s. Here the three classical schools in International Relations theory are *grosso modo* represented. Duchêne's narrative (with its emphasis on low politics, non-state actors, ideational influences, international interdependence, etc.) clearly fits within the 'pluralist' tradition. Just like Galtung's 'structuralist' account of a European capitalist superpower — also elaborated in 1973 — the CPE idea challenged the 'realist' or 'Gaullist' notion of a *Europe puissance*. On the one hand, Duchêne's work then reflects the general emergence of pluralist IR accounts in the context of increasing economic interdependence in the 1970s. On the other hand, the civilian power Europe scenario explicitly reacts to Duchêne's observation that 'collective sentiments' in Europe might entail a 'European super-state' or a 'Gaullist Europe'. Later, Bull's (1982) scathing criticism of Duchêne's concept as 'a contradiction in terms' joined in with this 'Gaullist' or realist approach to Europe's world role (Moisi, 1982: 165). During the 1980s this vision was 'uncritically accepted', reflecting the rising dominance of realist approaches (Tsakaloyannis, 1989: 242–6).

Duchêne, Galtung and Bull are in a way the 'founding fathers' of present-day conceptualizations of Europe's international role. For example, Bull's characterization (EU military integration is desirable but infeasible) resembles Kagan's (2002) famous account of Europe's 'Kantian paradise', whereas the antiglobalist movement's criticism of EU trade policy echoes Galtung's analysis of Europe as an economic wolf in sheep's clothing.

A closer look at alternative European role concepts *within* the pluralist school further clarifies the contours of a CPE. Schematizing the 'means of power' dimension on the one hand and the 'foreign policy objectives' on the other, the main differences between a CPE and other pluralist scenarios emerge. Analogous to the 'Trading State Europe' (Telò 2001: 256), a CPE exercises a considerable amount of non-military power. Looking at trading states' foreign policy objectives, however, it is clear that 'economic interests are in the driving seat' (Duchêne, 1994: 388). Analogous to the 'Scandinavian Europe' ideal type, a CPE attempts to promote international values. In terms of impact, however, such a Scandinavian Europe constitutes 'a nice, decent periphery of the world, with little power but some good ideas' (Therborn, 1997: 382). The combination of these two characteristics — the power dimension (as in the European Trading State) and the normative

perspective (as in the Scandinavian ideal type) — constitutes the core of a CPE. Completing this matrix, the ‘Swissified Europe’ role (Telò, 2002) — ‘rich, selfish, boring and essentially trivial’ (Moisi, 2002) — contrasts with both the ‘means’ and the ‘ends’ elements of a civilian power Europe.

Linking Civilian Means and Ends: Any European Commitment?

These dimensions are useful to structure the current ‘CPE debate’. Regarding the means of power, the question whether further military integration is compatible with a CPE role provoked a fierce debate. Under what conditions (if any) could a CPE use military force? And what about the Petersberg Tasks and operations under a UN mandate?

A majority view suggests that ‘military means are embedded in a civilian power context’: a defence capacity transforms the EU from a civilian power ‘by default’ (making a virtue out of necessity) to a civilian power ‘by design’ (Larsen, 2002: 292). Stavridis (2001a) equally argues that military means are necessary, as a last resort, to uphold ‘civilian values’.⁴ Some (e.g. Hill, 1990: 42) have pointed out that Duchêne himself was not opposing European defence policy integration. Duchêne indeed considered EU military integration as a necessary evil to promote East–West cooperation. Others contend that military integration repudiates a (potential) CPE role:

[...] the stated intention of enhancing the EU’s military resources carries a price: it sends a signal that military force is still useful and necessary, and that it should be used to further the EU’s interests. It would close off the path of fully embracing civilian power. And this means giving up far too much for far too little. (Smith, 2000: 28)

Smith warns that this could entail a security dilemma with neighbouring regions, undoing the potential ‘magnetic force’ effect of a CPE. European states could cooperate in defence matters, but not in connection with the EU: one alternative option is direct participation of EU members to UN missions. Smith’s critique that EU defence schemes distract Europe from its ‘comparative advantage’ in the non-military sphere is shared by Moravcsik (2003), who wrote that ‘European civilian power [...] could be an effective and credible instrument of modern European statecraft [...] Europe might get its way more often — and without a bigger army’ (see also Zielonka, 1998: 195–6, 226–9).

Stavridis (2001a) correctly argued that the second CPE core dimension, namely its normative foreign policy ‘ends’, was long overshadowed by this debate on the ‘means’.⁵ Analysing Europe’s policy towards Cyprus and Turkey, he illustrates the relevance of this separate perspective, concluding:

Even without the defence dimension, [...] the discrepancy between the EU’s rhetoric and reality is such that it does not deserve the label of a civilian power. [...] The EU, despite the many civilian means at its disposal, is not promoting civilian values. (Stavridis, 2001b: 98)

He quotes Duchêne's remark that Europe 'must be a force for the international diffusion of civilian and democratic standards' and promote values that belong to its 'inner characteristics', such as 'equality, justice and tolerance' and an 'interest for the poor abroad' (Duchêne, 1973: 20). Although Manners, in a much quoted article, acknowledges this normative dimension in Duchêne's work, he claims that the ability to use 'civilian instruments' forms the main characteristic of a CPE. Therefore he pioneered the term 'normative power Europe', implying the 'ability to shape conceptions of "normal" in international relations' (Manners, 2002). In recent years, as Youngs (2004: 415) convincingly shows, many other scholars have emphasized Europe's 'normative, value-driven external policy. Many — probably, most — analysts have come to posit a pre-eminence of ideational dynamics as key to the EU's distinctiveness as an international actor'. But although some current CPE accounts stress the normative dimension (e.g. Holden, 2003: 349; Sjursen, 2004: 68–9; Hill, 2003: 245), the 'new normative power Europe literature' hardly makes any linkage with the idea of a CPE. Although this literature pays much attention to the ideational ends component of EU external action, it somehow neglects the linkage with Europe's instruments for achieving these objectives.

Concluding, the CPE debate provides a starting point for the raising of some interesting questions: what role is there for the EU in the world, what about military integration and normative foreign policy goals? But to be a useful framework for further research on Europe's international role, we conclude with three suggestions. First, this ideal type needs a clearer definition, starting from the above-sketched core characteristics. This is not so much to define what a CPE 'is' — as indicated above, the answer to this question is inevitably influenced by the author's preferences — but rather to construct an analytically sound framework. Secondly, and more specifically, clarifications regarding a CPE's power (any role for defence capabilities? what about 'soft power' and 'persuasion?') and objectives (global public goods? human rights?) should be made. Subsequently, we advocate a more explicit linkage between the power and goals dimensions, rather than considering them separately. The basic research question then reads: to what extent does the Union make use of its available means of power *with a view to* achieving a CPE's normative objectives? Briefly, what about the Union's *commitment* to these goals? Finally, more empirical case studies should examine this central question. These should broaden the traditional focus on the EU's (in)capacity to act in security and defence issues, to include research about Europe's international role in environmental, development, humanitarian, trade, competition and other policies.

Thus, by relating Europe's putative pursuit for normative objectives with its power capacity in different external policy domains, well-defined and applied to detailed cases, scholars could test the common criticism that the new normative power literature merely confirms EU rhetoric. So, contrary to what Smith (2004) argued, an elaborated CPE framework would not 'close down critical analysis of actual EU foreign policy'. It could indeed lead to a more critical assessment of Europe's foreign policy objectives.

Notes

1. The titles are respectively 'Europe's Role in World Peace' (Duchêne, 1972) and 'The European Community and the Uncertainties of Interdependence' (Duchêne, 1973). The 1973 article's subtitles are 'The Ambivalence of Europe', 'A European Super-power?', 'A Neutral Community' and 'Europe as a Process'. Only this last part describes the CPE idea.
2. Even the chapter on 'Europe in the World 1958–1979' (Duchêne 1994) has no reference to the CPE concept.
3. E.g. 'Mars, Vénus et l'Olympe' (Commentaire, 100, 2003) and 'Quelle place pour l'Europe dans la politique mondiale' (Commentaire, 95, 2001).
4. Maull (1999) developed a similar argument with respect to Germany.
5. A recent example is Treacher's (2004) analysis of Europe's transformation 'from civilian to military actor'.

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