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**THE CHALLENGES OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY
IN THE NEW INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT: THE
EUROPEAN UNION PERSPECTIVE**

Abstract

This article investigates the challenges of the liberal democracy in the new international context, provoked by the emergence of the new great powers (Russia and China), and especially the establishment of the BRICS grouping in the world political scene. Namely, this article “clashes” the both paradigms of BRICS and the EU, in order to conclude their performances in relation to the values of liberal democracy. In that context, especially is stressed the liberal axiological set of the EU, as a postnational and postmodern entity, with typical soft power in the international relations. The EU soft power stems from its axiological set, which predominantly is composed by the values of liberal democracy. The new international context is characterized by the establishment of liberal and illiberal actors. The IR theorists treated the USA and the EU as main represents of the liberal democracy, whilst Russia and China, as illiberal democracies, or simply, autocracies. This article concludes the forthcoming challenges of the liberal democracy in the new international

context, as well as the place, role and the international political capacity of the EU, in relation to its mission for safeguarding and advancement of the liberal democratic values.

Key words: EU, international relations, BRICS, liberal democracy

THE EU POSTMODERN NATURE AND ITS AXIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The permanent attempts for defining the role of the European Union (Union; EU) in the international relations, assumes the necessity for its constitution as a state (federation or confederation) or its stagnation in the form of atypical political community, as it is today. Therefore, if the EU would constitute itself as a state, we could speak about the political centralization of its powers and competencies and the building of an independent military capacity. Thus, the EU could become a real political actor recognized in the international relations in accordance with the modern or *realpolitik* concept. This concept refers to international relations, based on coercive power and on practical or material factors and considerations, rather than ethical and *axiological foundations*. **Apart from this, the EU highly affirms its axiological (value) foundations, creating the image of itself as a postmodern actor, which rather cooperates and communicates with other international actors, instead of forcing its way.** In this sense, theorist Robert Cooper in the book “The Breaking of Nations” (2003), stated that: “what is called ‘modern’ is not so because it is something new – it is in fact very old fashioned – but because it is linked to that great engine of modernization, the nation state” (Van Damme, 2013: 2). Consequently, the EU is not a nation state, and therefore cannot be treated as a modern actor (Table 1). Consequently, several factors confirm the EU postmodern nature: “*first*, blurring of the distinction between foreign and domestic politics; *second*, voluntary mutual intrusiveness and mutual verification; *third*, a complete repudiation of the use of force in settling disputes; and *fourth*, security built on *transparency, mutual openness and interdependence*” (Grajauskas and Kasčiūnas, 2009: 4). More precisely, the postmodern foreign policy means a break with the modern concepts. In this sense, nationalism and national markets are “being increasingly replaced by cosmopolitanism and the globalized economy, national interest is complemented by humanitarian or environmental concerns, principles of non-interference and sovereignty are being undermined by the pooling of sovereignty, *realpolitik* is being complemented by ideational / normative / *axiological* considerations” (Grajauskas and Kasčiūnas, 2009).

Table 1.

	Modern foreign policy	Postmodern foreign policy
Means	Military instruments and hard power	Non-military instruments and soft (structural) power
Actors	Sovereign nation-states	Nation-states of contingent sovereignty, international (supranational) organizations, non-governmental actors
Sovereignty	Protective about sovereignty; avoiding mutual verification mechanisms	Less cautious about sovereignty; positive about transferring part of sovereignty to an international regime
Raison d'état	Emphasis on the nation state and on the defense of national interests (instead of values or norms)	Emphasis on norms and values
Openness	Efforts to minimize dependence on other international actors, as well as to maintain as more self-sufficient the political and the economic life as possible	Open to international cooperation and positive about increasing interdependence (seeing interdependence as a key to security)
Centralization	Substantial state control over the political, economic, and social life; tendencies of centralization	More pluralistic, democratic and decentralized domestically
International law	Skeptical about international law; predisposed to using force in international relations	Attaching great importance to international law (no fear of being bound by international legal norms)

Source: Grajauskas and Kasčiūnas (2009: 85) *Modern versus Postmodern Actor of International Relations: Explaining European Union - Russia negotiations on the New Partnership Agreement*, available at: www.lfpr.lt/uploads/File/2009-22/Grajauskas_Kasciunas.pdf

Taking into account **the EU postmodern nature**, the author **Rokas Grajauskas** (2011) **underlined that** the EU “acts as an umbrella, placing EU Member States under a postmodern framework. When EU countries want to act in a ‘modern’ way, they go on their own. In other words, *in those areas where the EU is acting as a single actor, EU’s action is postmodern*” (Grajauskas, 2011). Today, this debate has “become less dominant in the integration literature and most scholars agree that the EU should be characterized as something in between an international organization and a federal state” (Rieker, 2007: 3). Otherwise, the postmodern states are “generally striving to establish a post-Westphalian order where state sovereignty is constrained through legal developments beyond the nation-state” (Sjursen, 2007: 2). Accordingly, in a post-Westphalian or postmodern world:

[F]oreign policy transcends the state-centric view of international relations, and there is a wider specter of foreign policy actors, ranging from nation-states of contingent sovereignty to international (supranational) organizations to

non-governmental actors. Postmodern international actors are not interested in acquiring territory or using force and rather choose to build their security relationships on cooperative grounds. They prefer to use non-military foreign policy instruments and focus on soft power, as well as structural power. More generally, postmodern foreign policy tends to focus more on structures, contexts and immaterial aspects of power and influence (such as identity, beliefs, legitimacy) (Keukeleire and Jennifer McNaughton, 2008: 20).

As a result, the *affirmation of norms and values* is becoming equally important as the affirmation of national interest (*raison d'état*). Foreign policy in the Westphalian modern age, "was characterized by states as the main actors, by a clear distinction between foreign and domestic politics, by the protection of sovereignty and by the pursuit of national interest, power and *raison d'état* using mostly hard power, military means" (Grajauskas and Kasčiūnas, 2009: 4). As opposed to the modern concept, we can define the EU interest as a *raison de valeur* or a *value* interest, directly derived from its axiological foundations, stipulated in its constitutive treaties. Based on that, in the wider integration literature, the EU is mainly defined as a civilian, normative power or just soft power. Regarding the soft power, the author Frank Vibert (2008: 3) stressed: "soft power comes from international relations theory and refers to accomplishing international aims through *persuasion* and *co-option* rather than through the use of armed force or other forms of coercion such as the use of economic sanctions". This confirms that the EU soft power stems from its axiological (postmodern) set, predominantly composed by the values of liberal democracy.

Consequently, the civilian / normative power model is the most adequate for defining of the nature EU as an actor, taking into account its determination for using *negotiations* and *persuasion*, based on its axiological foundations, not by a military means. Automatically, the EU cannot be defined through the prism of hard (military / coercive) power, because of the serious lack of the European army and military means for achievement of its international goals and objectives. According to Robert Kagan, the military deficit is one of the main deficiencies of the EU as an international actor, and a main obstacle for its positioning on the international political scene (in the new international context) as a hard power.

THE EU'S AXIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Considering the EU's axiological foundations, we will investigate the EU constitutive treaties, in order to extract and to reveal the axiological provisions regarding the EU foreign policy. In this sense, the Lisbon Treaty prescribed the systematized *axiological (value) framework* that requires the EU and its Member

States to affirm and to respect its values. Such values are not always named as “values” but sometimes referred to by terms such as “objectives”, “tasks”, “principles”, “duties” and so on, which have an indisputable axiological essence. The *Treaty on European Union* (TEU) specified the EU values in Article B, stating that the EU shall: “promote economic and social progress which is balanced and sustainable, in particular through the creation of an area without internal borders, through the strengthening of economic and social cohesion and through the establishment of economic and monetary union, ultimately including a single currency in accordance with the provisions of this Treaty”. Likewise, the *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe* (TeCE) in Article I-2 listed the following *values*: respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. This Treaty also confirmed the values of the previous *Treaty establishing the European Community* (TeEC), such as: “promotion of scientific and technological development, opposition to social exclusion, the promotion of social justice and social protection, equality between men and women, solidarity, the promotion of economic, social and territorial cohesion, and respect for cultural and linguistic differences”. Article 21 of the *Lisbon Treaty* (LT) noted that the EU’s actions on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired “its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the UN Charter and international law”. This article also confirms that the EU shall define and pursue its common policies and actions and shall work for a high degree of cooperation in all fields of international relations, in order to achieve the following *objectives*:

(a) safeguard its values, fundamental interests, security, independence and integrity; (b) consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law; (c) preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter (...) promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance.

On this basis, the Union itself finds as a “savior” of humanity and the fundamental axiological system of the western civilization in the new millennium, while propagating its concept of principled, constructive and effective multilateral world order, constituted on the mutual respect, international cooperation and global solidarity. But, despite the EU’s liberal and democratic *weltanschauung*, the forthcoming international context seems more complex and not so cooperative. In

that sense, in the text below we will try to introduce BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and the South African Republic) grouping, as a paradigm of the emerging international context, in order to compare / challenge it with the EU's liberal - democratic *weltanschauung*.

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT AND THE EMERGENCE OF BRICS

The BRICS is a relatively young grouping of nations and fast-growing economies. At first, the foreign ministers of the initial four BRIC nations (Brazil, Russia, India and China) “met in New York City in September 2006, beginning a series of high-level meetings” (BRIC summit, 2009). The BRIC diplomatic meetings focused on international challenges and “on joint efforts to fight the global economic crisis” (Lukin, 2009). The leaders of the BRIC nations got together for the first time “on the side-lines of a G8 summit at Tokyo, Japan, in July 2008, and soon after that [...] Russian President Medvedev said during a visit to Rio de Janeiro that BRIC leaders would like to have a separate summit in Russia” (Lukin, 2009). The Republic of South Africa (RSA) joined the group in December 2010 and BRIC finally became BRICS. As a curiosity, Jim O’Neill, a senior economist at Goldman Sachs, proposed the very acronym BRIC, using it “to denote the four major fast-growing economies, the combined power of which might exceed that of the West sometime in the future – Brazil, Russia, India, China [and later South Africa]” (Lukin, 2009). The BRICS group is constituted on the following documents: 1) First Joint Statement; 2) Second Joint Statement; 3) Sanya Declaration; 4) Delhi Declaration; 5) eThekweni Declaration; and 6) Fortaleza Declaration (BRICS Information Centre, 2015).

At the First Summit (2009) held in Yekaterinburg (Russia), the BRIC nations stated: “We are convinced that a reformed financial and economic architecture should be based, *inter alia*, on the following principles: 1) democratic and transparent decision-making and implementation process *at the international financial organizations*; 2) solid legal basis; 3) compatibility of activities of effective national regulatory institutions and international standard-setting bodies; and 4) strengthening of risk management and supervisory practices. Regarding this statement, it can be concluded that the principle of democracy is affirmed only in terms of international financial organizations and their structuring and functioning, urging for a greater involvement of the BRIC nations in them. The Second Summit (2010) held in Brasília (Brazil), promoted the need “for corresponding transformations in global governance in all relevant areas”. At this Summit (2010), the BRIC nations underlined their support and will to create “*multipolar, equitable*

and *democratic world order*, based on international law, equality, mutual respect, cooperation, coordinated action and *collective decision-making of all States*". This is illustrative example of how the BRIC(S) political elites understand democracy. Democracy is understood as legitimacy for equal participation in the world affairs, based on the sovereignty rights of all states. This stance is in compliance with the Russian (semi - autocratic sovereign democracy concept) and Chinese (autocratic) understanding of international relations. While, the term multipolar is used as legitimacy basis of such reasoning, hoping that Russia and China will impose themselves on the international political scene as great powers, entitled to its share in the international affairs, as a separate political poles (as opposed the USA and the EU). The Sanya Declaration (2011), promulgated on the Summit held in China, acknowledged that the BRICS (and other emerging and developing countries) "have played an important role in contributing to world peace, security and stability, boosting global economic growth, enhancing multilateralism and promoting greater democracy in international relations". While, at the Summit held in India on 29 March 2012, BRICS nations adopted the Delhi Declaration (2012) emphasizing their vision for "global peace, economic and social progress and enlightened scientific temper", as well as the urgent need for greater involvement of the emerging and developing countries in the institutions of global governance (especially in the UN). Shortly after, at the Durban Summit (2013) South Africa, BRICS nations adopted the eThekweni Declaration, reaffirming their commitment to the "promotion of international law, multilateralism and the central role of the United Nations", and stressing the BRICS contribution in the maintenance of "global peace, stability, development and cooperation". And finally, the Fortaleza Declaration (2014), adopted at the BRICS Summit held in Fortaleza (Brazil) 15-16 July 2014, reaffirmed their views and commitments to "international law and to multilateralism [...] global peace, economic stability, social inclusion, equality, sustainable development and mutually beneficial cooperation with all countries". The BRICS nations emphasized that they align with the UN system and values, while seeking to enhance the role of its members in it, especially their efforts for strengthening Brazil, India and South Africa's status and role both in the UN and international affairs. This stance is previously defined at the Second BRICS Summit (2010), stating: "We express our strong commitment to multilateral diplomacy with the UN playing the central role in dealing with global challenges and threats. In this respect, we reaffirm the need for a comprehensive reform of the UN, with a view to making it more effective, efficient and representative, so that it can deal with today's global challenges more effectively. We reiterate the importance we attach to the status of India and Brazil in international affairs, and understand and support their aspirations to play a greater role in the UN". The Fortaleza Declaration (2014)

confirmed this with the following statement: “We reiterate our strong commitment to the UN as the fundamental multilateral organization entrusted with helping the international community maintain international peace and security, protect and foster human rights and promote sustainable development (...) We reaffirm the need for a comprehensive reform of the UN, including its Security Council, with a view to making it more representative, effective and efficient, so that it can adequately respond to global challenges”.

THE INNER DIVERGENCES

Considering the inner state, the value systems of one part of the BRICS nations are in contradiction with the other part of the BRICS. Some of them accept the values of the liberal world order (democratic freedoms and human rights, identical to those of the US and EU), while others; anticipate more or less autocratic, illiberal values. Only Brazil, India and the Republic of South Africa (RSA) can be considered as states that highly appreciate today’s liberal order values. Russia and China are different from the other states. Both states seek to improve their political, economy and military performance, seeking to gain power to impose their influence on the international political scene. Moreover, the creation of a BRICS common value system would appear to be a luxury for Russia and China, and an obstacle to the intensification of their political, economic and military power. The Director of EU-Russia Centre in Brussels, Fraser Cameron (2011), acknowledged: “two democracies, Brazil and India [and later the RSA], a democracy with authoritarian leanings [Russia] and an outright authoritarian state [China] cannot rally around the ‘shared values’ that such gatherings like to espouse” (Table 2). The grouping of India, Brazil and South Africa is a “much more natural grouping” (Stern, 2013), compared to Russia and China, as stressed by the former Ambassador of India in Brazil, Amitava Tripathi. BRICS is “heterogeneous lot, consisting of energy exporters and importers, democracies and autocracies, aspiring hegemons and demographic disasters. This is not an easy group to keep together, and the evidence suggests that they don’t have much of a common policy agenda” (Drezner, 2009). The heterogeneity of this group is especially evident in the sense of freedom and liberty (as highest liberal democratic values). According to the Freedom House Report (2015), Brazil (2.0), India (2.5) and South Africa (2.0) have status “Free”, while China (6.5) and Russia (6.0) have acquired status “Not Free”. As opposed to Russia and China, Freedom House Report ranked the USA and the EU Member States with highest freedom rates (Table 3). Each country score is based on two numerical ratings (from 1 to 7) for political rights and civil liberties, with 1 representing the *most free* and 7 the *least free*.

Table 2.

DEMOCRACIES	AUTOCRACIES
Brazil	Russia
India	PR China
South Africa	

Source: own depiction, based on the statement of Fraser Cameron (Director of the EU-Russia Centre in Brussels)

Table 3.

COUNTRY / EU MEMBER STATE	STATUS	FREEDOM RATING
USA	Free	1.0
Austria	Free	1.0
Belgium	Free	1.0
Bulgaria	Free	2.0
Cyprus	Free	1.0
Croatia	Free	1.5
Czech Republic	Free	1.0
Denmark	Free	1.0
Estonia	Free	1.0
Finland	Free	1.0
France	Free	1.0
Germany	Free	1.0
Greece	Free	2.0
Hungary	Free	2.0
Ireland	Free	2.0
Italy	Free	1.0
Latvia	Free	2.0
Lithuania	Free	1.0
Luxembourg	Free	1.0
Malta	Free	1.0
Netherlands	Free	1.0
Poland	Free	1.0
Portugal	Free	1.0
Romania	Free	2.0
Slovakia	Free	1.0
Slovenia	Free	1.0
Spain	Free	1.0
Sweden	Free	1.0
United Kingdom	Free	1.0

Source: *Freedom in the world 2015: Discarding Democracy: Return to the Iron Fist, Freedom House Report*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2015#>.

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The political scientist Robert Gilpin emphasized that as a nation's power increases; it "will be tempted to try to increase its *control* over its environment. In order to increase its own security, it will try to *expand* its political, economic, and territorial control; it will try to *change* the international system in accordance with its particular set of interests" (Zakaria, 2008: 114). It was stated (Financial Times, 2012) that the more BRICS become part of the "globalised world the more they want to keep their distance from western values. It is both a matter of identity and interest because they fear that the infringement of sovereignty might be used against them". Or as Ben Cormier (2012) acknowledged: "BRICS are too economically various and politically conflictual to form a cohesive and politically meaningful entity". The BRICS thus looks like a club that seeks to protect the political sovereignty of its states, in relation to the liberal West (USA and EU), aiming to gain more political and economic influence in the international affairs. Based on that, it can be concluded that three (Brazil, India, RSA) of five BRICS nations share same or identical values with those of the EU and USA (liberal values), which additionally make this group of nations more controversial in terms of common values. The liberal order currently "overrides state sovereignty, to a certain degree, in the name of values such as democratic freedoms and human rights" (Cornier, 2012). The political integration of BRICS is something that will have to wait a while, considering the evident political and value divergences inside. Or as is stated in the "Laying the BRICS of a New Global Order" (Bohler-Muller and Kornegay, 2013): "complicating this mix is an absence of long-term commitment to shared values among the BRICS nations. The concept of a world built on interdependence may be acceptable in the context of economic interaction, but there is a lack of consensus on the extent to which the BRICS wish to cooperate in the political sphere.

There are differences in the political, economic and social paradigms that individual BRICS members are willing to follow. Simply speaking, in this group there are *no* common values or a value-sharing practices, that would produce political cohesion or a unique worldview in due time. Or as the author Walter Ladwig emphasized: "[BRICS] economic characteristics are too different and political ambitions too much at odds to yield cooperation" (Cornier, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The EU foreign policy derives its own legitimacy from the values installed in its constitutive treaties, as its axiological foundations. Moreover, this kind of axiological construction of the EU foreign policy is supplemented by its postmodern nature, which highly differentiates the EU in relation to other international actors,

especially the states. Taking into the nature and the worldview of the EU, we can conclude that the EU constitutive treaties contain a set of values (axiological foundations) which promotes and affirms cooperation instead of conflict, and also, respect for international law instead of the power politics (hard power: *realpolitik* or *machtpolitik*). Unlike the other international actors (the states, in particular), which promotes the national interest or *raison d'état*, moreover, the EU possesses *raison de valeur* or *value* interest, which is directly derived from its axiological foundations, established in the constitutive treaties. Moreover, the axiological foundations of the EU, also represents and the power source - the source of its soft power. Many theorists noted that such axiological foundations of the EU foreign policy, enables an opportunity for promoting a good global governance and liberalization / democratization of the international relations, in order to remodel / transform the current world order in a new, more just, more democratic and a more cooperative world order. Those values make the EU foreign policy distinctive and authentic in comparison with other international actors on the international political scene, and thus, emphasizing its axiological engagement in the international relations.

Whereas, the value provisions of the BRICS do not coincide with the basic values of the liberal order and to the EU liberal – democratic worldview, but they refers to the values of the UN. The BRICS has no authentic set of values, and therefore, this group emerges as a derivative title of values. Moreover, it is complicated by the internal divergences among the BRICS nations, in terms of internal value harmony or disharmony and their potential for sharing of the mutual values. The BRICS is internally “stretched” between the liberal vs. illiberal value trends, which basically disables all attempts to create a coherent political structure and common values system. The type of democracy to which implies this group, refers only to the need for strengthening of its presence in the UN and other global financial institutions, as a way for imposing the international political power of specific BRICS nations on the world political scene. Precisely, it refers to Russia and China. Under the leadership of Russia and China, this group is heavily geared towards the strengthening of its influence in the UN, and strengthening of the sovereign powers of its constitutive nations, making an efforts to reform the international financial system, and building a new, parallel financial institution, aiming, these nations to grow into global political power centers, despite the USA and the EU. Currently, all efforts of the BRICS nations are directed towards the creation of BRICS’ New Development Bank, as a counterpart of the International Monetary Fund. However, founding of a political organization, based on common values, interests and political power “patterned after NATO or the EU, is impossible. China, India and Russia are competitors for power in Asia, and Brazil and India have been hurt by China’s undervalued currency. Thus BRIC is not likely to become a serious

political organization of like-minded states” (Bohler-Muller and Kornegay, 2013). On that basis, it can be concluded that BRICS seriously lacks an authentic set of common values, even in a rudimentary form. However, the BRICS cooperation is an important phenomenon in terms of the future development of international relations, especially in terms of their decentralization and pluralization.

Taking into account the EU perspective, the new international context seems to become more complex and confusing for understanding, and more heterogeneous one, composed of various pro-active actors (USA, BRICS, Russia and China), and also less liberal compared to the present. One of the main challenges of the EU for the future will be transformation of its power in a more *hard power direction*, in order to consolidate itself as a pro-active keeper of the liberal democratic values of the West, in the face of incoming autocracies such as Russia and China. Today liberal democracy is challenged by the incoming autocracies, but its sustainability for the future, will directly depend of the international role and activity of both the USA and the EU.

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