

Normative sidekick Europe? Comparing EU and US external economic policy towards Central America

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Abstract

The role of the EU in the world is disputed frequently. Although the concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE) has been modified and applied widely in recent years, it still has its shortcomings. This paper develops a theoretical framework that aims at the application of NPE in the context of a comparative case study. It is argued that external perceptions on normative actors, relation to other normative powers, a broader geographical focus and the conceptualization of dimensions of norm diffusion are the major challenges that need to be tackled within a research design on NPE. The proposed cases that promise to deliver new insights are bilateral agreements between the US and Central America (CAFTA-DR) and the EU and Central America (EU-CAAA). The EU is assumed to take on the role of a normative sidekick in this constellation in comparison to the US as a normative power in Central America.

Keywords: *Normative power, external perceptions, norm diffusion*

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has taken on a variety of identities since the emergence of the ECSC. Whether it can be conceived as a civilian (Duchêne 1972), normative (Manners 2002), ethical (Aggestam 2008) or even military power (Bull 1982) remains disputed until today. This is not surprising, as the question about the EU's general role in world politics is quite an ambitious one and it seems doubtful whether it can be answered to a satisfyingly degree. For this reason, this paper brings forward the argument that the nature of the EU as an actor in world politics might be grasped more

accurately on a lower level of abstraction before one might ponder about its general role in the world. This means that single instances of external actorness should be examined in order to understand how the EU acts in dependence of different context variables such as external perceptions, power constellations and policy areas.

What kind of economic actor is the EU? Does it merely strive to enhance free trade with its partner countries or are there instances of normative influence beyond its backyard? This is especially an area of interest since the Lisbon Treaty enhanced the potential for a unitary external trade policy of the EU. Taking the literature on Normative Power Europe (NPE) as developed by Manners and his critics as a theoretical basis, this paper seeks to design a theoretical framework as a starting point for a comparative case study that tries to focus on the shortcomings of the NPE concept. These shortcomings are assumed to be a lack of external perceptions on the EU as an external actor, the lack of comparisons to other potential normative powers relevant to the respective cases, the lack of case studies that apply the concept beyond the geographical vicinity of the EU and often vague conceptualization of norm diffusion. The overarching question of this research project can thus be formulated as follows:

How does the normative role of the EU differ from other normative powers in world politics?

This rather broad question needs to be specified with regard to the two cases that are proposed in this paper as the basis for a comparative case study. The Association Agreement between the EU and Central America (EU-CAAA) and the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and several Central American states and one Caribbean state (CAFTA-DR) are believed to represent two cases that allow a fruitful application of a modified NPE approach. Consequently, the specified research interest can be summed up by the following question:

How does the normative role of the EU differ from the one of the United States in the case of bilateral trade agreements with Central America?

With respect to the expected normative impact of the EU, this case is a least-likely one. This opinion is derived from two assumptions. Firstly, because the US is clearly the most powerful actor in this region, both in economic and security matters, moreover due to its geographical vicinity. Secondly, the cultural and especially the political influences are mainly exerted by other Latin American powers such as Brazil and Mexico. Nevertheless, on the basis of a primary case description, this paper argues that the EU takes on a role of a normative sidekick in relation to the US. While the US has the power to push through its normative beliefs mainly in the economic realm by enforcing countries to change national laws despite massive opposition some CA countries, the EU profits on the one hand from the economic route already carved out by the US. On the other hand, the EU delivers additional normative contributions besides the norm of free trade. The regional integration process of the SICA¹ is gaining momentum again and the new development model introduced in the EU-CAAA reflects the EU expertise in the field of sustainable development strategies.

The relevance of this research project can be depicted along the following lines: From an academic perspective, two complement strands of research on the EU as an external actor have been carried out rather separately from one another until recently (Larsen 2014): The refinement and application of the NPE concept and the increasing interest in external perspectives on the EU. Thus, the concern to bring these two perspectives together can contribute to a most frequently led academic debate on the role of the EU in the world. However, from a social perspective it is also of utmost interest to gain more specific insights about the normative character of the EU in comparison to other powers, as the contest for convincing ideas on the economic and political organization of societies around the globe is heating up and getting inhabited by ever more potentially normative powers. For this reason, the understanding of the role of the EU in world politics, especially in relation to other powers, is still a highly important one from the viewpoint of international politics.

¹ Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana. Its member states are Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

The following chapters will consequently first outline the concept of normative power with a focus on its shortcomings that are considered relevant for the research question. The paper then proceeds with a proposed framework for the application of the modified NPE concept. Afterwards, the selection of the two cases will be justified and some raw case depictions will be sketched. On this basis the argument about the EU as a normative sidekick will be forwarded. At last, the concluding outlook sums up these preliminary results.

Normative Power Europe revisited

The question about the role that the EU holds in an international environment has been repeatedly debated, mainly by scholars interested in European Integration. While the concept of military power was deemed to be inappropriate from the beginning due to the lack of empirical correspondence (Hill 1993; Rosecrance 1998), the notion of a “civilian power” (Duchêne 1972: 43) was quite appealing due to the means by which the EU represented its interests internationally.

While these two concepts mainly adhere to two different types of material power – military, diplomatic and economic – the ideational dimension of power has been introduced to the discussion basically by Manners' suggestion to think of the EU as a normative power (Manners 2002). In contrast to the two 'traditional' frames, normative power is concerned with the capability of actors to influence other actors' ideas about norms.

Manners thinks about normative power as “the ability to define what passes for 'normal' in world politics” (Manners 2002: 236). This is quite a general statement, which does not specify the broad area of 'world politics' any further. The genuine development and nature of the EU as a type of political system without fellow species predisposes it to exert influence in a predominantly normative way (ibid. 240). Developed by Manners deliberately with a normative purpose (Manners 2008), many authors that try to operationalize this concept comprehend it “as an ideal type - which the EU approximates” (Forsberg 2011: 1184; for variations of ideal types see also Niemann and Junne 2011: 112-114).

The openness towards a broad range of interpretations might have contributed to the appeal and diffusion that this concept experienced within in the academic community as well as among policy-makers (Forsberg 2011: 1186). But simultaneously this has led to a certain vagueness of meaning and subsequently to a lack of clarity when it comes to empirical applications of the concept (De Zutter 2010: 1107).

Various strands of critique have been brought forward against the normative power concept (for an overview see Niemann and Junne 2011: 121). This paper focuses only on those of them that are considered essential for a reconsidering the classification of the EU as a normative actor with regard to the proposed cases. These points are:

1. Lack of external perspectives
2. Blindness to other potential normative powers
3. Geographical bias and uncertainty about least likely cases
4. Conceptualization of norm and their diffusion

Lack of external perspectives

From a constructivist viewpoint, the normative power debate is concerned basically with the identity of the EU on the international level and how the concept NPE itself contributes to the construction of this identity (Diez 2005: 614). Sometimes it is not clear whether the search for identity is seen as the starting point for empirical research, whether normative power is an ideal type designed to employ research related to this ideal or whether it is an attempt to construct a normatively desirable identity of the EU from within European Integration scholarship (Sjursen 2006: 236ff.). Whatever the aim in any specific case might be, identities are given meaning not only by the actors who own them but also by other actors involved in interactions with the respective actor (Wendt 1992: 421). Also, the identities of the respective countries or regions in which the EU could be influential depend on the possible perception of the EU as a normative power (Diez and Manners 2007: 183).

In the case of NPE, this aspect of identity formation has received astonishingly little attention until recently. Larsen argues, that the two existing strand of research about NPE and external perceptions need to be integrated in order to gain a clearer picture of the EU in the world (Larsen 2014). The results of recent studies that engage with questions about external perceptions of the EU point at some interesting findings that could help to specify research about the normative role of the EU in international relations. Lucarelli for example finds that the perception of the EU within the civil society of countries such as Brazil, India and South Africa, is characterized by the EUs attractiveness as a trading partner, by its institutional achievements and by its

commitment to a world coined by multipolarity, while the 'classical' NPE attributes like democracy or human rights do not play a relevant role (Lucarelli 2007: 268-269). Another study indicates that that perceptions about the EU as a leader vary across policy areas as well as across regions (Chaban et al 2013: 443-446). Asian and African political elites for example often perceive the EU as a leader with respect to diplomacy and economy although they are doubtful whether it is good or not that the EU takes on this role (ibid.: 446).

In order to be able to spread norms and influence other countries, regions or institutions, recognition from the counterpart of an interaction is also needed. This might occur on an ideal basis as certain normative aims or principles are prescribed to the politics of an actor. The external perspective might show which norms are perceived in connection with an actor but also point to blind spots as some norms that are desired to be represented by an actor might not play a roll at all while at the same time unexpected norms might be attributed to an actor.

Actor identities are not only shaped in dyadic constellations but they also depend on their perception in relation to third actors. From a neorealist perspective, it is also argued that the mere emergence of the EU can be interpreted as a reaction to a bipolar world and therefore only came into existence as a consequence from prevailing power relations (Hyde-Price 2006). By paying attention to how actors are seen in comparison to others, the power axis comes into play. Valid inferences about the relative power of actors can only be drawn if they are related to other potentially powerful actors. This argument leads to the second important strand of criticism: The blindness towards other relevant powers.

Blindness towards other potential powers

International relations and subsequently also interregional relations are not exclusively cultivated by the EU. The central questions about the character of the EU as an actor that are implied by the concept of normative power, albeit seldom taken into account equally, establish themselves along two axes: One axis represents the spectrum of the normative where questions about the kind of norms that are represented and the manifestation of norms that are diffused. The second axis can thus be conceived of as

the degree of power that an actor has at its disposal to spread norms. As power can only be conceived of in relation to other contextual factors such as for example to other actors or geographical restrictions, many criticisms have been expressed along this axis.

Other global or regional powers such as the US or the BRIC states cannot be left out of the picture when the power status of the EU is being scrutinized. Especially the role of the US is believed to challenge the normative role that the EU would like to reserve for itself with regard to democracy or good governance (Niemann and Junne 2011: 122-123). Especially if normative influence is being pursued via bilateral or biregional free trade agreements these two powers have got at least similar approaches. The EU's orientation towards the promotion of economic aims under the umbrella of association agreements has been observed as a consequence from the strategic shift by the US away from multilateral agreements towards bilateral or biregional trade agreements (Lenz 2009: Chapter 4).

Whether the US still represents a normative power or whether they are not concerned with norms any more is disputed, although Diez and Manners conclude that the US does not represent a normative power in world politics (Diez and Manners 2007). But how can the US be characterized then? Is it accurate to think of the US as primarily a military power? What about areas of US foreign policy that do not include military enforcement, like the promotion of free trade agreements where the US outnumbers every other powers in terms of number and scale? According to Sjursen, “emphasis on the diffusion of norms, values and ideas is a characteristic that is not particular to the EU’s foreign policy” (Sjursen 2006: 240). Thus, the US can be equally framed as a normative power depending various contexts and issue areas (ibid.). As the normative impact of both the EU and the US may vary within different cases, it is crucial to observe the normative actorness of the EU also in cases that are geographically and culturally more distant than its immediate neighbor countries.

Geographical bias and less-likely cases

The NPE argument can be expected to work best with regard to EU neighbourhood policy especially the application to former or actual EU membership aspirants. These most-likely cases represent an empirical prerequisite for the application of NPE in a wider geographical context. The fact alone that EU enlargement policy works via normative adjustment in regions where states have got realistic outlook to become member states does not necessarily need the concept of NPE for a valid explanation. But what if the concept is applied to less-likely or least-likely cases? There are two likely outcomes: The normative traces left by the EU remain negligible or there are evidence for at least some influence can be found. In the latter cases, it becomes clear that NPE does only operate a continuum where the actual power varies and takes on different forms across different cases. Therefore, a view should be applied to that tries to cope with the manifold (normative) roles that the EU might take over in the international realm beyond the concept that is implied by the relational power configurations. A plead is also made for a more impartial style of studying the EU's normative character on the international level. Instead of adhering to a certain ideal outcome, the role that the EU plays in the world should be decided on primarily by empirical findings on the basis of case studies. It is after the process of empirical evidence collection that patterns or generalizations of findings should be developed, not before this empirical process has reached a satisfying stage.

Norms and norm diffusion

The understanding of norms differs enormously among scholars that try to apply NPE to real world politics. The delineation of norms from other concepts concerned with immaterial influences remains unclear in many cases. Often, norms are implicitly equated with the good norms and thus normative power as the deliberate commitment to promote certain norms that are to considered to be good in a general sense such as it is the case with the Manners idea of the EU as a promoter for instance of good governance, democracy or human rights (Manners 2002). As it has been proposed already by Aggestam, the idea of “ethical power” (Aggestam 2008) could be used to describe an actor who behaves according to a specific understanding of what is right.

But actually, the term 'normative' does not necessarily imply that a certain behavior is in line with particular ethical ideas.

In order to distinguish normative power from military and civilian power, it has been argued that normative power relies neither on military nor on economic capacities but solely on “ideas, opinions and conscience” (Diez and Manners: 175). Nevertheless, the distribution of these norms can be enforced or supplemented by the use of material forces, such as for example the use of military power by the US in order to spread democracy.

Surprisingly, the norms that have been identified by Manners and taken up by subsequent articles on NPE are very broad and abstract principles such as liberty, peace or good governance (Manners 2002: 242;) without further positioning towards specific policy areas. The reason for the identification of such vague categories might lie in the formulation of these norms within the treaties that haven been used by Manners as the prime source of reference. Nevertheless, it is astonishing how normative conceptions about economic policy, trade and investment have largely been ignored by the NPE concept. This is even more surprising if the EUs uniqueness in terms of an integrated market is taken into account. Moreover, the ability of the EC to develop an own agenda on trade agreements and its competences to act rather autonomous in the area of external trade policy predestines the external economic policy as an area where the EUs very own normative orientation might become more apparent than in other areas where there is comparatively little potential for unique actorness.

However, as norms occur in different states and with varying degrees of significance or even develop according to a “life-cycle” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998), different approaches about their diffusion haven been designed. The mechanisms described by Manners include contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion and cultural filter (Manners 2002: 245). Forsberg breaks these mechanisms down to four, which are persuasion, activation of international norms, shaping the discourse and leading by example (Forsberg 2011: 1184). Even a more narrow conception thinks of NPE as a form of ideational diffusion that can be observed by the mechanisms of simulation or emulation (Lenz 2013: 214-215), whereby the focus

is in this case the diffusion of regionalism. Thus it could be argued that certain mechanisms might be more appropriate than others with respect to specific norms.

How strong and credible certain norms are connected with an actor might be of interest too, but it should not be a primary interest of NPE research whether norm commitment is due to idealistic, self-interested or any other reasons as the quest for motives is not of central relevance to the explanation of whether normative power is carried out or not.

In the case of free trade agreements and association agreements, the relevant mechanism that should be taken as a starting point for the empirical analysis is assumed to be procedural diffusion in the sense of “the institutionalization of a relationship between the EU and a third party” (Manners 2002: 244). By analyzing this dimension, the norms that are represented by the EU or the US should be identified as well as the external perceptions of the hypothesized normative powers. The next step of analysis must then deliver insights in the institutional change that might have been activated by normative powers. Institutional change might comprise norm implementation (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998) as well as the mechanisms of simulation and emulation (Lenz 2013: 214-215).

Case selection and case descriptions

The aim of this research project is to gain insights about the nature of the EUs external trade policy by comparing its normative strategy to the one of the US. This will be done by analyzing trade agreements that these actors have negotiated with Central American countries (CA). Actually, this is a least-likely case for the EU to have any normative effect on CA if the following circumstances are taken into account: The US is by far the most important economic partner of CA. Neither security issues nor considerable welfare benefits are at stake for the EU. In addition, the recent setbacks and resignation about the regional integration process within CA reduce the exemplary appeal of the EUs institutional achievements.

In comparison to the US, the EU in general does not possess the same actor quality. Nevertheless, in the realm of external trade policy, the European Commission is equipped with rather strong competences, especially since the coming into effect of the Lisbon Treaty. Thus, negotiation processes for bilateral or biregional trade agreements are characterized by a degree of actorness that can be compared to traditional state actors. As both the EU and the US have advocated the norm of free trade through bilateral agreements rather than multilateral agreements since the end of the twentieth century (Behrens 2011: 241), both actors share the understanding about free trade as a measure to increase economic wealth on the one hand. On the other hand, both actors use trade agreements also to promote social and political norms while the EU does this more overt as free trade agreements are usually framed as association agreements where the norm of free trade appears as one of several normative pillars.

In order to compare the normative role of the EU to the one of the US, selected cases are needed where both powers negotiated an agreement with more or less the same region. In the case of Central American, both powers maintain agreements with a similar intersection of states. The following table shows some key data about the free trade agreement between the US and several Central American countries (CAFTA-DR) and the Association Agreement between Central America and the EU (EU-CAAA).

Table 1: CAFTA-DR and EU-CAAA in comparison

	CAFTA-DR	EU-CAAA
Signatory states/regions	USA and Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua Dominican Republic	EU and SICA (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama)
Year of signing	2004	2012
Year of entry into force	2006 ² /2007 ³ /2009 ⁴	2013
Normative pillars	Free trade, primacy of investors and property rights issues over national law	Political dialogue, free trade, regional integration, sustainable development

With respect to the concept of NPE, it could be argued that this constitutes a least-likely case for the EU. This argument becomes clear if the following circumstances are considered: (1) In terms of economic importance, the EU falls back behind the US. Almost half the exports from Central American states go to the US. Although the EU represents the second most important export market for CA, only 12 percent of exports are traded to the EU (2) Culturally and politically, CA countries are influenced by regional powers such as Brazil, Mexico the Andean States and in a increasing way by the US due to geographical vicinity and historical ties.

In both cases, asymmetry is given in favor of the US and respectively to the EU. In both cases, agreements can be described as biregional whereas in the case of EU-CAAA it could even be argued that the the case is not only a biregional but also a biorganizational treaty as the concerned CA countries taken together represent SICA (Sistema de la Integración Centroamerica).

Case I: CAFTA-DR

Even if the normative agenda in the case of CAFTA-DR appears rather straightforward and stripped down to economic aims (especially in comparison to the EU-CAAA agenda), the idea that liberation in trade politics will increase economic welfare for all

²With El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua

³With Dominican Republic

⁴With Costa Rica

parties involved is still a strong normative point of view that is promoted offensively by the US and might lead to considerable normative pressure in some participating states. Besides the demands for the phasing out of custom duties within ten years and non-discriminatory principles for imports from all participating states, the agreement entails also some more specific elements (Office of USTR 2003). Emphasis is put on intellectual property rights, especially with regard to digital sources and E-Commerce and also extensive mechanisms for investor protection are entailed (ibid.: 3-6). With regard to the Central American and Dominican textile production sector, imports to the US will only be duty free and unrestricted if raw materials from the US are used. This condition is included explicitly with the aim for “uniting to compete with Asia” (Office of USTR 2005: 1).

The reception among the affected Central American was informed by a high degree of scepticism with regard to the promised economic gains from the free trade agreement. Civil protest have been violently defeated in some countries, for example in Guatemala, while in Costa Rica protesters were able to express their concerns freely in public (Huhn and Löding 2007: 1). Despite the doubts that were connected with CAFTA-DR as well as among political elites and in civil society, the free trade agreement could enter into force in most participating countries in 2006 (El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) and in 2007 (Dominican Republic). However, the massive protests and the stated concerns by many social groups in Costa Rica culminated in a referendum on the entry into force of CAFTA-DR which resulted in a narrow decision in favor of the agreement (ibid.). Thus, CAFTA-DR came fully into force in 2009, five years after its signing. The reasons of concern during the ratification process in the participating countries were issues the lack of transparency during the negotiations, the fear of negative effects on employment and environment and also the anticipated direct effect on domestic laws (Ribando 2005: 4-6). In Costa Rica alone thirteen national laws have been altered in order to fulfill demands on trade barriers and intellectual property rights (Huhn and Löding 2007: 3). Also the Dominican Republic and Guatemala had to abolish laws on specific product taxes and genericas beforehand (Ribando 2005: 6).

Case II: EU-CAAA

The norms promoted by the EU via the association agreement with CA are categorized into three pillars according to the EC. The first pillar according to the text of the agreement is political dialogue, the second one is the promotion of regional cooperation and the third one is the free trade agreement. The core and most extensive pillar is the free trade agreement which is not only believed to provide increased economic exchange between the two regions but also to be “a fundamental tool to address the root causes of many problems our partners in Central America faced” (De Gucht 2012: 2). In comparison to the other two pillars, the part about the free trade agreement comprises over 300 pages, whereas the others consist of 12 (political dialogue) and 76 (cooperation) pages respectively. The demands in the area of free trade are quite similar to the ones entailed in CAFTA-DR: The withdrawal of tariffs on manufactured and agricultural goods, improved market access to government procurement, services and investment markets and the protection of intellectual property rights (EC 2011: 1-3). The content of the free trade agenda entailed in the EU-CAAA is in many regards normatively identical with CAFTA-DR. For the benefit of the EU, many necessary norm modifications have already been pushed through by the US. This circumstance makes it easier for the EU to implement such far-reaching economic demands and might be the reason for the rather positive, or at least value neutral, attitudes that were brought forward towards the EU with regard to EU-CAAA. In addition to a normative economic attitude that resembles the one of the US, the EU-CAAA entails also specific means to further regional integration process such as for example the demand for a single import duty for member countries of SCIA and the introduction of a single administrative document for customs (ibid.: 3.).

Normative sidekick Europe?

At this point, a deeper empirical analysis would be needed to specify the role of the EU in relation to the one of the US in the cases of Central American bilateral agreements. Nevertheless, on the basis of the theoretical framework and the case descriptions, the assumption is being made that the EU takes on the role of a normative sidekick in comparison to the US in this region. But why should it be called a sidekick? A sidekick plays a supplementing part. As the main power in the region sets the main agenda in terms of normative economic views, the sidekick follows this agenda and profits from the achievements of the 'lead character'. Despite being only of minor importance in relation to the main actor, the sidekick often enjoys greater popularity. And if this is the case, it might be possible to become influential in other realms than the one that is dominant in the agreement. This would be the case, if the regional integration process would actually be strengthened by EU-CAAA and if the claim of sustainable development as a norm that adheres to “the interrelation between trade and social and environmental policies” can be established in the relations between the EU and SICA.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to develop a theoretical starting point for a comparative case study that aims at answering the question how the normative role of the EU differs from the one of the United States in the case of bilateral trade agreements with Central America. In a broader research context, such a case study could contribute to the more far-reaching question about how the normative role of the EU differs from other normative powers in world politics.

Building on Manners' concept of Normative Power Europe (NPE), the paper argues that the idea of a normative power needs to be specified in the context of several factors that are believed to be central for the analysis of the role that the EU plays in the world. One of the shortcomings of existing studies on NPE are the lacking inclusions of external perspectives on the respective actor that is believed to exert normative influence. Although the research on external perspectives of the EU has been increasing recently, a systematic synthesis with the NPE is yet missing. By investigating the case of the EU-Central American Association Agreement (EU-CAAA), a new external perspective on the role of the EU as a normative actor could be explored. The comparison of the EU to other potential normative powers has also gained too little attention in NPE research.

Therefore, this blindness towards other regional or world powers needs to be taken into account in future research. The proposed comparative case study design therefore to analyze the normative role of the US and the EU during the negotiation and implementation process of bilateral trade agreements with Central America.

By choosing Central America as a region for a case study another shortcoming of prior NPE research will be addressed: The bias towards most-likely cases with regard to the presupposed impact of the EU. Shifting the focus of empirical studies away from EU neighborhood policy, the case of EU-CAAA might deliver valuable insights on the normative impact of the EU beyond its backyard. Furthermore, the different conceptions of norms and norm diffusion have been identified as subject which bears various challenges for the measurement of normative impact. It has been argued that two dimensions are essential for analysis of the respective cases: These are on the one hand the procedural dimension that focuses on the normative claims and demands that are forwarded by the normative power under scrutiny and on the other hand the dimension of norm implementation that is concerned with institutional changes that might occur during the implementation process of the respective agreements. However, the specification relevant norms and their delineation from other codes of conduct needs to be employed in more detail in the research process.

Following this theoretical premises, the case selection reflects the goal to inquire into the normative role that the EU takes on in relation to other relevant powers. The cases selected are on the one hand the free trade agreement between the US and Central American countries and the Dominican Republic (CAFTA-DR) and the association agreement between the EU and Central America (EU-CAAA). It was argued, that this selection includes a least-likely case with regard to the respective performance of the EU. The case descriptions showed already, that the US is likely to be the undisputed normative power in this region with regard to economic ideas. At the same time, the establishment of CAFTA-DR was characterized by resistance and various concerns in most participating countries. The EU in contrast profits from the norm changes that were pushed through by the US although its normative agenda in the economic area does merely differ from the one of the US. A task for future research would thus be to find out, whether additional norms that the EU aims at with EU-CAAA such as reinforcement of regional integration process and the introduction of a new trade model characterized by sustainable development are actually being implemented since the

entry into force of EU-CAAA. If this would be the case, the assumption about the EU as a normative sidekick could be confirmed, at least with regard to its role in Central America.

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