Synthesizing EU Global Governance and Higher Education

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For the purposes of the Jean Monnet Seminar entitled ‘The EU’s Global Strategy: From Vision to Action’, Jean Monnet scholars were invited to consider a variety of approaches to the EU’s growing external roles and capabilities, from state/societal resilience in the Ukraine to internal/external policy connections regarding migration and Africa. Topic 3 encouraged us to consider the concept, the application and the ‘reinvigoration’ of global governance in ways both suitable for the 21st century, and relevant to the EU itself.

Global governance is an exceptionally fluid concept. In recent years, it has fluctuated from broad-based ideas of constructing effective multilaterals, to promoting strategic associations between key institutions (both states and non-state actors). Effective multilateralism poses a number of questions, all relevant to an expanding international system of states, non-state actors, international organizations, financial institutions, large, medium and small companies, and tens of thousands of local, regional and national communities.

In Europe, particularly within the Lisbon Treaty era, effective multilateralism poses the question of ‘the highest international actoriness the EU can achieve’ to influence and transform its constituent Member States, and its political and economic regional counterparts. Equally, the networked interrelation of IGOs and states poses the question of what kind of EU is required to operate effectively within the existing international system in order to allow the EU to authentically develop its international actoriness. Global governance and EU actoriness are therefore intrinsically connected, even if the sequencing varies. The EU is sometimes the means, sometimes the ends, but more often than not, simply part of the broader international fabric facilitating the basic continuance - and progress of - multilateralism as an emerging, legitimate, workable method of trans-national governance.

As such, while the EU can make a difference as an actor on a case-by-case basis across a whole range of international policy areas, its overall actoriness is hugely bound up by the varied global perception of the EU’s own coherence, and its unity of action by others interacting with the EU. The visibility of the EU therefore is crucial; it has to be seen not only engaging, but engaging in a manner that is purposively strategic. This moves us beyond effective multilateralism where the EU is simply part of the system, to global governance in which the EU is an active player whose modus operandi is identifying multi-thematic, multi-regional strategic challenges by decade (2020, 2030, 2050). Or in others words, global governance makes itself available as an integrative, guiding, and comprehensive concept for the EU’s global ambitions. The risk however, is the same for the EU as it is for global governance – that of an overly-wide interpretation of where and what should be included. The EU needs to select from the existing system of inter-related institutions and regimes
and bodies of law, and select those partnerships, networks and value-based objectives which can definitively contribute to effective collective action in a given area. Facilitating problem-solving at the international level is the point, rather than dissipation via overstretch resulting from trying to support virtually all formal and informal arrangements. An obvious beginning is EU patronage of regional cooperation in key areas, as a meso-level method of supporting effective global governance, with the EU’s own approach to difficult issues (migration, banking regulation, student mobility etc.) being used to frame possible solutions for other regions, as well as keeping the EU prominent in its role as a global problem-solver. The EU needs to use the opportunities afforded by global governance judiciously: not via overstretch, but on the basis of a few, key strategic relations that it wants to build with other institutional actors, and national poles of power, within a multipolar system. A second consideration of course, beyond HOW the EU deploys its actorness is the overall goal to be pursued, of ensuring an equitable approach to global public goods, and simultaneously the continuous diminishment of global public ills (climate change, terrorism, failed states, cross-border instabilities, financial contagion).

One way of assessing the appropriateness of the EU’s role as an agent of global governance is via a level-based approach. Within the major and established IOs, including the UN, NATO, and standard IFIs (WTO, IMF, World Bank), ICJ the main message the EU needs to promote is to that of reform on an individual basis, and much needed inter-connection from an inter-institutional perspective. The EU is approaching its own process of change and reform, and on this basis needs to lead from the front as well as encouraging institutional integrity among other conventional IOs. Among mid-level regional and thematic groupings (G20, G7/8, African Union, Commonwealth groupings, BRICs, Arctic Council, Gulf Cooperation Council), the EU needs to support key themes in which these groupings are themselves leaders (e.g. Commonwealth and literacy), and offer itself as a template for others requiring more of a regional integrationist ‘buy in’ (African Union). Among the newer and more informal issue-specific forums, the EU needs to work more actively as a partner, a balance, or possibly counterbalance depending on the envisaged contribution to global governance as a whole: various tribunals, New Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, etc.

A level-specific approach may facilitate genuine partnerships, rather than the A-Z encyclical of global governance issues that the EU has a likely interest in. This will also allow the ‘personalities’ and goals of IOs divided across these 3 levels to emerge more clearly, as well as revealing the sheer flexibility of engaging with these groups. Global Governance after all permits myriad modes of engagement, which should serve as an inspiration for the equally multi-faceted approach of the EEAS in the implementation of its Global Strategy, and the EU as a whole in its broader foreign affairs. These include for example:
• bottom-up multilateralism (a shift away from traditional IOs) looking for opportunities to cooperate with emerging parallel policies, or playing a complementary, burden-sharing role with other IFIs;
• bottom-up trade deals facilitating and consolidating greater clarity in trade and fiscal rules;
• bilateral and plurilateral arrangements as a catalyst to more effective multilateral frameworks;
• redefining and deploying economic diplomacy at the heart of key global governance initiatives: trade, investment, sustainable development, public/private partnerships, micro-finance, etc.
• encouraging wider non-member partnerships by region-specific agencies: Europol, Eurojust, EIB, BRICS credit-rating agency, broadening range and connections;
• institutionalizing better region-to-region contacts and agreements on key areas (trade, development, and sustainable development ideal here);
• greater clarity in the EU’s ability to transition from ownership of its homegrown policies to ‘sponsoring’ policy developments in key regions: e.g. EPAs in sib-Saharan Africa;
• creative, but temporary use of ad hoc coalitions as a catalyst to forming a clear issue-based group within an other IGO; rather than the proliferation of coalitions for the sake of networking
• clearer situating of the EU’s own strategic partnerships within its global governance ambitions

The 2016 EU Global Strategy outlined global governance as a key ambition for the 21st century, bringing together norms held in common at global level, with transnational actors themselves bound by common interests and facing collective risks: inheritors and facilitators alike of the global commons. Three modes of enhancing the governance of the multilateral rules-based order were suggested: reforming, responsiveness and interconnectedness that produces a ‘joined-up Union’. The need to enhance the integrity and functioning of key IGOs via vigilant reform was briefly outlined above. Failing to do so will erode the stature and capabilities of these IGOs at a critical time. The attributes of responsiveness and interconnectedness however devolve from a sharper sense of EU-based ownership regarding its role in the global compact, and its ability to facilitate genuine change. Neither of those endeavors can possibly occur unless the EU and its constituent Member States works to both skill and school the emerging generation of students, undergraduates, graduates, new workers and citizens. Just as the EU works to systematically mainstream key values abroad, so also it needs to more methodically work to mainstream key principles, and programmes, at home, designed to increase real engagement with Europe as a market, and enhanced commitment to supporting the strengths and remedying the weaknesses of the EU as a political entity.

To do so, it is necessary to connect the EU’s global governance ambitions with the opportunities that higher education facilitate. It should be borne in mind that
education is a singularly potent form of soft power, and the impact that education affords in this respect should not be underestimated. The following are key areas where the EU as a regional example of, and facilitator for global governance, can make greater inroads in promoting progressive policies:

- Awareness / access to the digital economy, and e-commerce not merely as a market dynamic, but a key area for 21st HE curricula
- Vocational training that begins (rather than ends with) apprenticeships that explicitly link education and enterprise and entrepreneurialism
- SME and micro-business support and financing
- Greater teaching of EU labour standards in the curricula as part of the broad fabric of business teaching
- Sharper sense of the European ‘market and method’ being taught that explores employee/employer histories and current dynamics, against the backdrop of EU labour directives and regulations
- Political economy of both markets and the globalized structure
- Greater use of Life Long Learning far beyond high school and university / vocation and employment, not merely to stimulate enterpreneurial market-savvy Europeans but civic-minded, institution-savvy global citizens
- Enhanced use of digital economy to facilitate digitized, multi-user education system

To conclude this brief overview, the ideas emerging from the European Commission’s *Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation* (25 March 2017), in terms of Europe’s internal response to the challenges of the 21st century are worth repeating. As the paper suggests, ‘robust social and education policies are key to ensuing resilience and fair distribution of wealth’ (p. 16). In terms of moving forward, the paper suggests a number of new and exciting ways forward, including Germany’s dual vocational training, Scandinavia’s flexicurity welfare state, the e-school system flourishing in Estonia, greater use of European Structural and Investment Funds to boost investment and employment, education and training funding drawn from the ESI’s strands, and retraining and career support derived from the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. These capture very nicely the goal of schooling and skilling, of training and skills development that blends current and emerging digi-skills, and which captures the generational goal at the heart of lifelong learning.

But connecting a brighter, more response Europe to its global responsibilities means bringing better-educated youngsters into the very heart of global governance: familiarizing them from the outset with the norms, principles, actors and scope of global governance. The means synthesizing every facet of the soft power that the EU has at its disposal: normative, economic/trade-based, and educational in the most progressive form of ‘sustainable development’ available. It means investing in education in order for European students to subsequently invest in the EU, and by consequence, permitting the EU itself to invest as a patron of the
emerging global system. The closest synthesis at this point is a description of the 2017 EU Consensus on Development, in its ability to genuinely draw together external and internal goals. Here, ‘development efforts’ could just as easily be replaced with ‘global governance ambitions’:

In order to effectively address the challenges of a globalized world, the EU’s development efforts need to go beyond aid. They need to bring together investment and trade, private sector contributions, domestic resources mobilization, the promotion of good governance, the rule of law and human rights, including a particular focus on youth, gender and equality and the empowerment of women (p.13).

Investing in youth, in education, in progressive policies and sustainable systems is the first step to creating genuinely win-win situations which were the original goal of global governance, when it first emerged as a working concept. Time for us all to go back to school for a refresher, perhaps.