

The Role of Soft Power in EU Common Foreign Policy

International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy Berlin 30.7. 2009

Dr. Erkki Tuomioja

As a historian I always stress the importance of knowing one's history, because those who do not know where and how they have arrived to where they are now, will not know how to move forward either. Thus, paradoxically, the less you know and understand history, the more likely you are unwittingly to become a prisoner to it.

It is my central thesis that, for many reasons, we have arrived at a turning point in history, where much of what was once relevant and applicable in conducting foreign policy and managing international relations, has now become irrelevant and even dangerous.

For several centuries world politics have been analysed and conducted on the basis of a Westphalian world order, supposedly created in 1648 by the Treaty of Westphalen - where sovereign actors - originally sovereign rulers rather than sovereign nations states - were the sole actors who counted, or had the right to be counted.

Today in a globalizing world characterised by growing interdependence the whole concept of absolute sovereignty is becoming more and more a theoretical construction as interdependence has inevitably eroded its foundation.

Many people have tried to analyse and define globalisation, but most of them overlook the growth of the world's population as a central factor in globalisation. It is, to my mind, the most obvious reason why we are today living in a world where interdependence - like or not, in both things good and bad, is a reality that no-one can escape. This applies to all and any countries, big or small, armed with nuclear weapons or not, and irrespective of whether they embrace globalisation or would want to opt out of it.

For many years now I have been trying to wake people up about the challenge that population growth entails by telling them, that the world's population was 2,3 billion when I was born after WW2, and it was 6 billion when I first started to use this comparison not too long ago, gradually revising it to 6,3 billion. But when I a few weeks ago had reason to check the figures I found out that the correct figure was 6 929 326 155, as of 8 AM last Monday - give or take a 150 million, depending on your source. And although demographers now forecast that this growth has begun to even out the number of people on earth will reach at least nine billion before we will have attained zero global population growth.

This has enormous consequences for how mankind interacts with its natural environment. We have only very recently become aware of how unsustainably we have managed our natural resources since the start of the industrial revolution a few centuries ago, neither recognizing the depletion of non-renewable resources nor managing renewable resources so as to safeguard their reproduction. This awareness has been largely brought about by climate change, which is the number one challenge to our security and survival in the world today.

It may be that, even at best, we have only a few decades time in which to adapt our behaviour to the exigencies of ecologically, socially and economically sustainable development. I ask you to bear this in mind, not only because our failure to adapt will make any deliberations on soft or hard power irrelevant in the long run, (this is meant in a more profound sense than Keynes' well-known reminder that, in the long run, we are all dead), but also because it is centrally relevant to arguments about the relative merits and efficiency of hard and soft power.

I do not know, nor do I think anyone else can know for certain, whether we can achieve this sustainable balance in time to save the world or not. But what I do know is, that if we can achieve this, hard power of the military kind will not have played any positive role in bringing it about, whereas soft power may have had quite a significant part in it.

Military Power ain't what it used to be

For the purpose of my subject today it is important to recognize, that what was still possible and workable in a world with a few hundred million or even with 2 billion people is no longer of use in a world with 6,9 billion people, let alone with more than 9 billion. This undermines one of the defining features of the Westphalian order, namely the use of power politics, including resorting to war to further your national interest to and gain advantage at the cost of other nations or the environment.

In history many nations have sought to gain advantage at the cost of others. This has taken place by occupying their agricultural land, grabbing their raw material sources, stealing their accumulated wealth and/or making them into slave labour for your profit. Advantage has also been sought through thoughtless destroying of the ecological environment and moving on to other locations once this was done.

Leaving all moral and ethical considerations aside one cannot deny that this way of furthering one's national interest, and the power politics used as its instrument, could, in many cases bring benefits for limited periods of time anyway - limited, because no empire in history has lasted for ever. But the complex nature of today's post-industrial societies make reliance on military power and force more and more unproductive as software and knowledge, rather than hardware and muscle power, are the key to success and well-being.

In addition one must also recognize how Weapons of Mass Destruction - not only nuclear weapons, but also biological and chemical weapons - have changed the scope and context of power politics. We have become much too proficient in sowing destruction with WMD for these weapons ever to be used as a rational instrument, without putting your own existence in peril at the same time. But even without resorting to WMD also the development of so-called conventional weapons has drastically changed the nature of war. If the aim of power politics is to defend civilians and society then it has been progressively failing as casualties in today's wars mainly affect those not in uniform. Of all casualties in the First World War less than 30 % were civilians, the Second World War already about 65 %, in the Vietnam war perhaps 90 % and in the Lebanese civil war 98 %.

I sincerely hope that we in Europe understand better than many other the profound nature of this change and the limits to hard power politics, and I would also argue that there is quite a lot of substantial evidence to support this statement.

A statement such as this, of course, instantly identifies me as one of the weakling Europeans from Venus that Robert Kagan in his 2003 bestseller "Of Paradise and Power; America and Europe in the New World Order" castigated, comparing us unflatteringly to the Americans from Mars, who understand, that the world is a jungle rather than a garden and that to survive we need hard-nosed realism and reliance on power politics so as not to let down our guard. As Kagan put it: "It is time to stop pretending that Europeans and Americans share a common view of the world, or even that they occupy the same world".

As Kagan quite correctly wrote, the U.S. is quicker to use military force, less patient with diplomacy, and more willing to coerce (or bribe) other nations in order to get a desired result. Europe, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on diplomacy, takes a much longer view of history and problem solving, and has greater faith in international law and cooperation.

As a European I can regard this as a compliment, even if Kagan did not mean to flatter us. He makes it clear, that this is in his opinion not due to any moral superiority or a reflection of inherent differences in national character, but rather a consequence of the fact that Europe no longer has the same kind of power that the US can use, and therefore has been obliged to make a virtue out of necessity. Europe believes in multilateralism because it has no choice. The "UN Security Council is a substitute for the power they lack," he writes, also deriding Europeans for hypocrisy in running down their own defence while enjoying the protection of American military power and criticizing it at the same time.

Since then the neo-cons have been chastened by the appalling blunders in Iraq and have grudgingly learnt to recognize, that unilateralism and military power alone do not deliver sustainable solutions anywhere. After the Bush-Cheney people were booted out of power multilateral cooperation and soft power are no longer dismissed as sissy stuff by the White House. With the Obama administration in office, the transatlantic divide no longer looks as dramatic as it did during the days of the Iraqi war.

The divide is undeniable, but it was and is not as clear-cut as it has been made out to be. There are many people on both sides of the Atlantic who during the Bush years felt more at home with the views and policies of the other side - Tony Blair being the obvious European example - and not even the most pronounced protagonists denied the importance of hard or soft power respectively, but differed more on evaluations as to their effectiveness and on how and in what proportion they can and should be deployed.

Having said this it is also necessary to remember, that notwithstanding all the huge resources - economic, human, military - which Europe and the USA combined have at their disposal, and even if there no longer is a Soviet-Union challenging this duopoly, we are not the only actors who count. On the contrary we have to recognize that no global governance can be achieved without the full participation of all the important players in what used to be called the Third World. Hence the emergence of the G 20 as the most relevant of all the different G-fora.

This has been a long but hopefully relevant introduction to the subject at hand, stating that hard power is not what it used to be, and that hard and soft power are not contradictory to each other, certainly not for the European Union and its member states.

But what do we actually mean when talking about hard and soft power? The instantly accessed Wikipedia says "Soft power is the ability to obtain what you want through co-option and attraction. It is in contradistinction to 'hard power', which is the use of coercion and payment", while Joseph S. Nye, has also used a slightly different definition, saying that America's soft power is in its "ability to attract others by the legitimacy of U.S. policies and the values that underlie them". I am not too happy with either of these definitions, as they are both prisoners to outdated concepts of power politics, but the more common Wikipedia definition is clearly less satisfactory in this respect. Nye's definition at least refers to legitimacy and values and actually implies, that while hard power may get others to do what you want it will, neither increase your attractiveness, legitimacy nor the adoption of your

values. This can be condensed in the conclusion, that neither hard nor soft power can be assessed without also knowing and evaluating the aims and goals of their use.

Hard and soft power in the EU

While the European Union is not a military super-power or even a lesser one, nor does it have any plans or need to become one, all the member states of the European Union do employ national armies. The military capabilities of the EU countries are increasingly oriented towards crisis-management operations and not towards traditional territorial defence. There is, however, one odd man out and it is my country Finland, where conscription and territorial defence are still the basis of our defence, even if this has not prevented us from being one of the top contributors to international peace keeping operations, particularly in relation to our population.

Not all members of the European Union are in Nato and almost all Nato- and non-Nato members are content to leave it at that, accepting the need for close cooperation but keeping the two organisations separate. More important is, that all of the EU member states are without exception full participants in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as in the ESDP, European Security and Defence Policy. Ireland is not really an exception as the guarantees it was accorded recently to get it to ratify the Lisbon treaty do not make the country's status vis-a-vis the ESDP any different from that of all the other countries', save perhaps that of Denmark, which is now trying to rid itself of the four exceptions it was granted when the previous amendments to the treaties encountered difficulties with the Danish electorate.

So the European Union does also have hard power in the form of its military crisis management capabilities that can be employed collectively, up to 60 000 troops based on the headline goals adopted in Helsinki already ten years ago - on paper anyway - including the rapid deployment Battle Groups of which two are in stand-by readiness at all times. And, incidentally, this progress has not been impeded by the fact the the new Lisbon treaty has not yet come into force, as almost all provisions in the treaty on ESDP have been implemented already, with, for example the European Defence Agency in operation for many years now.

But this hard power does not, nor should it, define the EU's role. On the contrary, the EU as an international organisation of a *sui generis* kind - less than a federal state, but with a large degree of super-national decision-making and pooled sovereignty that no other international organisation has - is also unique in its capacity to bring to international crisis-management tasks a comprehensive variety of different instruments which no other international organisation or nation state can match: its military crisis management capabilities continue to be enhanced, but at least as important and in many instances more important are its wide-ranging civilian crisis management capabilities, which have been developed on the basis of a similarly adopted headline goal for civilian crisis management, including police, rescue teams, judiciary experts, and the resources available for economic aid, trade and so forth; capabilities which need to be deployed together and be well coordinated.

Nor should we overlook what is perhaps the most powerful instrument in the EU's arsenal: the so-called *European perspective* of membership in the European union it can offer to countries in its neighbourhood. The EU is, after all, arguably the most successful peace project in world history, having put to an end the sceptre of war between its members states, who have between them started two world wars and countless lesser ones.

Each time new countries have joined the European Union this sphere of peace and stability has also been extended. This has been a powerful incentive for many countries to opt for opening accession negotiations. This is evident in the Western Balkans, where the European perspective has already contributed to enhanced stability and in finding peaceful solutions to unresolved conflicts. And while the problems of Cyprus have not been solved, and one can argue that enlargement to the island should have waited until there was a comprehensive solution accepted by all parties, with Cyprus in the Union and Turkey seeking to join it has meant, that no-one any longer seriously entertains the notion that the conflict could be solved by military means.

There are geographical limits to how far the European perspective can be extended, and countries beyond the geographical boundaries of Europe should not be misled to expect, in the Caucasus for example, that they could one day members of the European Union. But even for these countries partnership and cooperation agreements with benefits for their economies and trade and support for their democracy and rule-of-law are soft power instruments that can be employed for mutual benefit.

There are three ways in which the EU can nullify the positive potential of the European perspective and effectively disempower itself.

Firstly, by drawing its shutters and declaring that the limits of enlargement have been reached, closing the door on those European countries who wish to join and fulfil all the criteria. That is why I think that to saying no to Turkey on principle is acting against Europe's own interest.

Secondly, by seeking to build unequal treaty relationships and/or seeking to draw countries into its own sphere of influence by excluding others. It is important that Europe acts openly, with no hidden agendas, and that we convince others by our words and deeds that we have no other interest than seeing peaceful and stable democratic countries as our neighbours with whom we can trade and cooperate on an equal basis.

Thirdly, by not living up to the values it preaches and the standards it sets for others. The fact that the EU has members states like Bulgaria, Italy or Romania seriously damages our credibility when trying to further good governance, human rights and democratic values in our neighbourhood, or the world at large. [Granted, it may perversely increase the attraction of the European perspective for those who are worried about the potential negative effects of EU legislation for old elites and/or new oligarchs.]

There is a *sine qua non* for any influence the EU may hope to exert, with any kind of power, hard or soft. That is of course that the EU needs to be able to take the decisions necessary and talk with one voice and implement a single common policy. The EU cannot deploy military or civilian crisis management instruments or take any relevant decisions on CFSP without unanimity. While the Lisbon treaty, when it hopefully is finally adopted, will bring concrete benefits to the management of the EU's CFSP, namely the external service and amalgamating the posts of High Representative and the Commissioner in charge of external relations, putting an end to the rivalry between the two which has seriously hampered the EU in the past, it will not change this basic fact, that the EU has to have unity to be able to conduct any foreign policy and use the instruments at its disposal.

In this respect the situation has actually vastly improved, which I was able to observe at first hand when sitting as foreign minister on the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council for a period of seven years. I find that there is a growing recognition, that for the EU to be taken seriously by any one and for our policies to have any effect on other actors, we need to agree on a common policy and also not undermine it by actions of national governments not in line with the common policy.

This has not always been the case, nor is it automatically the case today either. European relations with Russia has been a difficult issue where member states interests vary considerable and reaching and holding on to common positions has been particularly challenging, but all the more important as Russia is always quick to exploit any differences to its own advantage. But even with Russia the EU has made some, or some might even say considerable, progress on better keeping its act together.

One area where Europe has been relatively successful in acting coherently is the Middle East. While positions do still differ, it has been my experience that when the stakes are high enough the EU does somehow deliver. This was evident during the War in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, during Finland's EU-presidency, which was the first crisis in the region where strong expectations were directed towards the EU in bringing an end to the fighting and making peace. The US as the traditional power broker in the ME - not because its regarded an honest broker, but because its the only player that can put effective pressure on Israel - was for several reasons unable to take the lead and this role fell on the EU. Happily, by and large we were able to deliver, both on the political front and then in deploying the new UN force to replace the discredited and weak old UNIFIL operation. I vividly recall some of our long crisis meetings where the members states initial views looked almost incompatible, but where at the end of the day we were able to agree on our decision unanimously. This was because everyone recognized, that the EU would lose all its credibility and make itself irrelevant if we come out of the meeting with no common position.

Obviously soft power does not always deliver the results wanted - and the list of failures is too long to be repeated - but neither does hard power - Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya being some examples - nor in many instances does any combination of the two.

Some lessons I think can be learned from all our failures. On is, that while they may have had some sort of United Nations mandate behind them, they have not truly universal efforts to which the international community as a whole has committed itself. A second lesson is, that our aims have not always been clear and well-thought and that we have sometimes reached for the best at the cost of achieving even a good result. A third lesson is, that all too often our efforts have failed because of a lack of mutual understanding, sometimes because of our inability to reach it, but some times also because of our unwillingness to do so.

The Role of Diplomacy

A common denominator for these failures is, that they are failures of diplomacy. The use of soft as well as hard power always begins - and ends - with diplomacy, that is (and here I resort again to the Wikipedia definition), "the art and practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of groups or states". diplomacy is thus in effect an instrument, through which different actors conduct policy.

And what about cultural diplomacy? I am quite pleased that the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy has adopted the definition used by Milton C. Cummings, who describes 'cultural diplomacy' as: "the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding". This makes it explicitly clear, that we are talking about a two-way street, for no matter how convinced we may ourselves be about the superiority of our values, practices and achievements, we must still approach others with an open mind and a readiness to engage with everyone on equal terms.

But, like diplomacy itself, cultural diplomacy is also about negotiations, where the intention really goes beyond the need to reach mutual understanding, meaning, that on the basis of this understanding, we have also be able to

agree on the set of rules needed in today globalizing and interdependent world, so as to be able to effectively deal with all the crises I referred to at the beginning of my remarks. Thus all our diplomatic efforts, cultural and other, must oriented towards defining and implementing the set of multilaterally agreed universal rules global governance need for our survival in a world of nine or ten billion people.

To conclude I want to add a strong caveat about the limits of mutual understanding. It must not be interpreted as implying "anything goes". Accepting multiculturalism, for example, cannot mean adopting the kind of cultural relativism that can be used as an excuse for human rights violations, big or small. Understanding the reasons, why people can become suicide bomber in the name of the Islamic God, or steal Palestinian land and make other people homeless because they think they are God's Chose People cannot mean condoning or giving impunity to people whose deeds violate the life, liberty or other Human Rights of anyone, be it for any religious, ideological or whatever reason. We can and should tolerate many thing, but not the kind of intolerance which infringes other peoples rights and is happy to condemn half of mankind, namely women, or any other groups or individuals, to inferior status.

Thus all our diplomatic efforts, cultural and other, must be made within the framework of the set of basic values and principles such as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Subsidiarity is a good principle, which the EU should respect more than it does today, when dealing with many economic, social and cultural policy issues. But human rights violations are neither a subsidiarity issue nor the internal matter of any state.

International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy Berlin 30.7. 2009