Connected in Freedom? Reconstructing a Foundational Value in EU and US Foreign Policy Discourses

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Abstract

The ideal of freedom has historically instituted the Transatlantic Community of Values spanning the United States and Europe. Given the framework of liberal crises that currently dominates Western mental maps, it is crucial to contemplate what has happened to this legacy of freedom and, consequently, to the very foundations of this value community. To achieve this, we draw on the theoretical debates on freedom to construct a novel conceptual framework of the potential uses of the notion in political discourses. This scaffold is then utilised as a tool to analyse, and ultimately compare, the employment of freedom in a selection of documents produced by the leaderships of the EU and the US since the turn of the millennium.

Keywords: freedom, transatlantic relations, liberal world order, European Union, United States, non-domination

Introduction

The ideal of freedom has, for all intents and purposes, instituted the Transatlantic Community of Values. The notion is enshrined in the foundational documents of both the European Union and the United States. Article 1 (Preamble) of the Treaty of Lisbon speaks of 'the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law'. The First Amendment to the US Constitution, in turn, lays out the freedoms of religion, press and assembly. Various categories of freedom are also

undeniably part and parcel of the political cultures of Europe and America; politicians on both sides of the Ocean regularly emphasise their importance in key public addresses, more or less deliberately. One can indeed expect that our primary field of interest in the ensuing analysis, EU and US foreign policy discourses, would spring from this historically shared commitment to freedom.

Given the frameworks of crises and liberal fractures that have begun to dominate Western mental maps, it appears pertinent to contemplate what has possibly happened to this legacy of freedom – and hence the foundations of the value community and even the world order it used to inform. We therefore ask in this article whether we can find meaningful differences between Europe and the USA in the ways in which political elites have promoted, evaded or even constrained 'freedom' since the turn of the millennium? More specifically, which different types of freedom seem representative for the EU and US in the context of their recent external affairs? Are we indeed approaching an inflection point, where the West's central actors can no longer agree on shared normative parameters to guide their foreign policy conduct and world order building?

We can easily differentiate between at least three types of intentions or objectives with which political elites employ the notion of freedom. They evoke it as a foundational value, they utilise it as a device to justify actual policy endeavours, and/or they refer to it in order to articulate an idealised vision for the future. By way of these analytically separable objectives, may assume a central role in the identity construction of a political community. On the other hand, different interpretations of freedom can also open deep fractures between societal actors. The connotations of freedom may clash, and someone's freedom may be interpreted as someone else's unfreedom; the fractures can even challenge the polity's very existence. Finally, the notion of freedom often remains a mere undefined signifier, a convenient slogan employed without any deeper reflection – but employed, for some reason, nevertheless. Perhaps because of this multifaceted discursive usage of freedom, scholars have all too seldom explored its actual meanings within real-life political constellations, much more seldom than has been the case with, say, democracy. In other words, although conceptions of freedom have been a central topic of inquiry for philosophy and political theory, this has not been so in empirically oriented political science or International Relations scholarship. We seek to rectify this state of affairs in the current article.

In the theoretical section of our exposition, we draw on a wide range of theory-oriented scholarship in order to construct a conceptual framework of the various ideal-typical dimensions of freedom. This framework informs the empirical part and its exploration of a selection of speeches and other documents produced by the leaderships of the EU and the US, focussing on the post-9/11 era. Hence, in addition to providing an analysis of the current constellation of the Community of Values, we also wish to elaborate on the ways in which the notion of freedom can possibly be used as *a heuristic device* for social scientific discovery.

Categorisations of freedom

In a short paper it is not possible to dive deep into the theoretical intricacies of freedom – the human condition of *liberté* is, after all, one of *the* philosophical questions of all times.[1]

Instead, we introduce two tripartite categorisations, triangles as it were, spiced with two other distinctions, meant to shed light on the possible uses of freedom in foreign policy discourses. Together these distinctions create a methodological framework of sorts, a specific perspective with the help of which we can make (some) sense of the selected empirical documents and their underlying political rationales.

The first of our tripartite categorisations is based on the classical distinction between *negative and positive freedom*, usually attributed to Isaiah Berlin.[2] The distinction appears highly pertinent with respect to the foreign policy agendas of such actors as the EU and the US. In many an official statement made to somehow protect or empower the speaker's homeland, to preserve its best qualities, freedom is defined in negative terms. The nation ought to be free from any outside constraints or external threats – *non-interference* should prevail. When Donald Trump, for example, declares 'America first', this indicates a need to liberate the US from global concerns. Fear, fear of the savage world, and a negatively defined conception of national freedom intertwine. From a normative standpoint, there is an inherent danger here: the desire by the powerful to be unbridled by external forces may in fact reduce the ability of others, those who are less fortunate, to strive for freedom.

However, equally importantly, a positive understanding of freedom – freedom as self-mastery or self-governance – also informs many programmatic political views. In European debates, above all, expanding the remit of freedom through external policy action has traditionally been a distinct objective. In the context of development assistance, for instance, the actually utilised term might read 'ownership': the Union supports the third country's own capacity to build welfare for itself.

Positive freedom has proved difficult to define with any sort of philosophical precision (Berlin himself remained ambiguous); it covers a wide range of approaches. One of the frequently mentioned takes of it, and one that undoubtedly appears relevant for the analysis of foreign policy discourse, maintains that the subject/actor needs to be in a position to freely choose between several existing options. Generating real *choices*, with appropriate conditions for making them, is, from this perspective, the ultimate concern of any foreign policy. Diplomatic efforts to guarantee visa-free travel in Europe for the Ukrainians might qualify as one example. This choice-centred view may, however, undermine the importance of the quality of the available options; being able to choose between bad alternatives can hardly be equated with freedom. Hypothetically, visa-free traveling in Europe would not increase the level of freedom, if the entire continent lied under a nuclear cloud.[3] The capabilities approach, usually attributed to Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, seeks to overcome this problem, by emphasising the individual's capacity to make reasoned choices – and get access to them.[4]

Useful as it may be, the distinction between negative and positive freedom often proves imprecise and insufficient (cf. note 2). Arguably the most pertinent effort to refine it, fulfilling what we call the *negative-positive triangle*, is that of *non-domination*: concrete interference by others may not be required in order for an actor to experience a sense of unfreedom if the actor feels itself somehow constrained by external forces, be they traditions, habits, laws, institutional norms, or even a hegemonic state. Philip Pettit,[5] who together with Quentin Skinner introduced the notion some 20 years ago,[6] even associates freedom with

what he calls antipower. By virtue of an actor's ability *not* to serve the powerful, true freedom becomes possible.

In the world of politics, however, the dividing line between (striving for) non-interference and (for) non-domination often proves difficult to localise or identify. Take, for example, the voices in the developing countries who say that 'the West should become more humble and stop bullying others around'.[7] We can interpret such an argument *both* as an expression against direct interference *and* as a call for a general change in the dynamics between the traditionally dominant and the dominated. Sometimes political actors, including states, even desire to be dominated – to fulfil their sense of freedom, as a matter of fact. The way in which Eastern European countries tried to adjust themselves to the real or imagined membership criteria of the European Union in the 1990s is a case in point.

The distinction or axis between what we call *systemic* and *individual freedom* provides the point of departure for our second tripartite categorisation (*the level of focus triangle*). The former form, usually not included in the philosophical categorisations of freedom, refers to formulations of freedom, or intimations thereof, that in one way or another seek to transform or regenerate the foundational principles of a given polity, usually in a top-down, elite-driven manner. 'Systemic' in this context signifies functionally *undifferentiated* (and often exclusive) categories of human societies, such as nation, state, civilization, culture, region, mankind, perhaps even progress and development. The referents of this type of freedom thus tend to be specific geographical or spatial entities and their properties. For example, the way in which the Anglo-American political spirit developed in the 20th century appears to have a lot to do with the faculty of freedom: Britain and the US primarily represented the world of liberty as opposed to the authoritarian, regulatory, corporatist tendencies of continental Europe.[8] More insidiously, through this mode of argumentation, freedom may also turn into a conflict-inducing civilizational category – it may be far too tempting to contend that 'we' (the 'West') are free and those 'others' (the 'Rest') unfree.

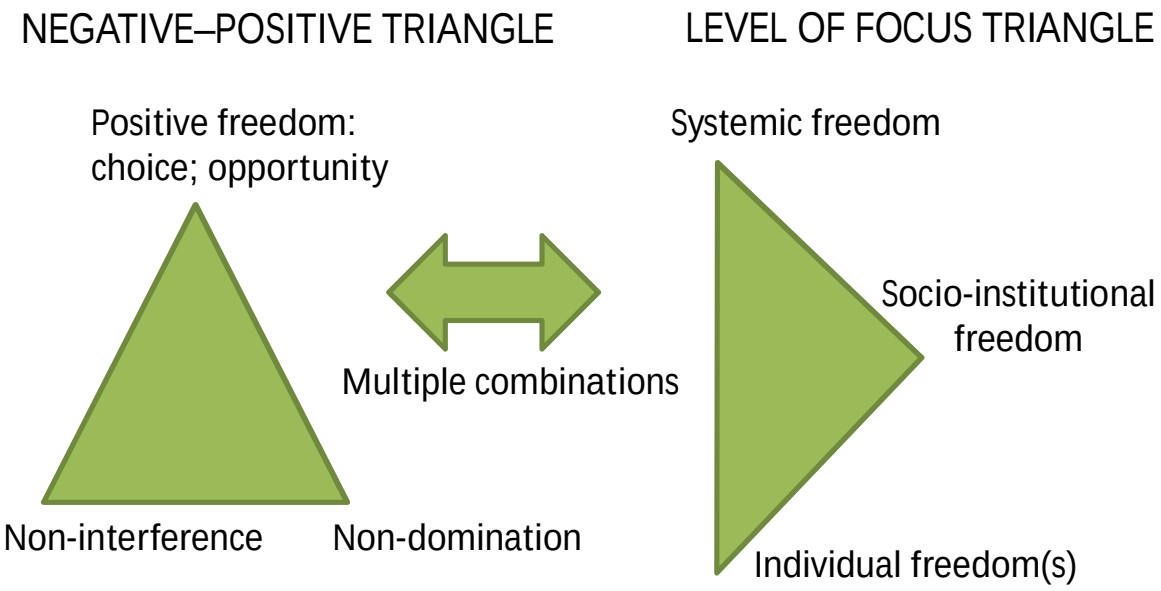
Turning to the other end of the axis, the liberal world order has, of course, been built on the foundation of *individual freedom* – or perhaps rather 'freedoms', civil liberties. The question is of a host of ideals or rights that proponents of liberal democracy tend to see as both self-evident and elementary: freedom of speech, freedom of religion, free movement of people, free inquiry, even equality before the law. These can be defined both negatively, say, as an absence of threats to one's religious conviction, and positively, as a reflexive possibility to make choices in a pluralistic society (e.g. regarding one's religion).[9] Freedom is also closely tied with the various embodiments of individualism or individual self-fulfilment, a vital aspect of late modern societies, including ideas such as autonomous self-direction, personal self-development, and hedonistic self-expression.[10]

When interpreting an actor's external policy aims, however, the distinction between systemic and individual freedoms easily proves insufficiently specified. A mid-category between the two ends of the axis thus appears necessary, the third term of the second triangle. We here employ the notion *socio-institutional freedom*, influenced by Axel Honneth's analysis of what he calls *social freedom*.[11] Large socio-political institutional arrangements – to the extent they are based on mutual recognition, communicative action, and ultimately shared interests – can function as realms of social freedom, sites where an individual may realise personal objectives *together with* others. A bottom-up logic applies: by way of these

permanent institutional structures, the collective seeks to be more than the sum of its individuals. Honneth uses broad institutional structures such as the public sphere and the market as examples, but the scale can also be smaller, say, the university system or the state's central organisation of sports clubs. What is important is that, as opposed to systemic freedom, we here refer to *functionally differentiated* sectors of human societies. If the US, for example, supports the work against economic corruption in a developing country so that markets can function and bring together people under fair conditions of exchange, it becomes possible to talk of socio-institutional freedom promotion.

It is evident that the two tripartite conceptual classifications of freedom that we have presented above possess a great number of bonds with each other, bonds that materialise in multiple combinations in political utterances. In spite of these family resemblances, the triangles can also be kept analytically separate, as has been done in Figure 1 below. The figure thus provides a cognitive map of sorts. It displays how multi-conceptual a space needs to be borne in mind as we leave the realm of the theoretical and turn to the real-life uses of freedom.

Figure 1: An effort to visualise the different articulations of freedom with two triangles



The two triangles form our primary framework of empirical analysis, but we also wish to mention two other distinctions relevant in the context of a state's foreign affairs. First of all, freedom can be seen as an *instrumental* means, a rhetorical device that one can employ in order to achieve something even more valuable; or, alternatively, it can represent an *intrinsic* value, the ultimate aim of human existence. To give an example of the former, a superpower can depict itself as the haven of all essential freedoms, and with this seek to both justify and reproduce its hegemonic position in the global system of economic exchange. The latter form, in turn, has informed or even determined a number of major philosophical systems,

from Kant's categorical imperative (establishing a connection between freedom and responsibility) to Sartre's existentialism. Hannah Arendt's republican understanding of politics may also belong to this category: in the realm of politics, in the space between individuals, people can experience a true sense of freedom; it is the ultimate *human* condition. One can wonder whether it is this intrinsic variant that we should think of when politicians evoke 'freedom' or 'liberty' without providing any real content for the terms?

Second, freedom may also appear *nationalistic and inward-looking* as well as *global and outward-bounded* (both of these are inherently instrumental). The prime goal of foreign policy, from the former perspective, is to guarantee and preserve the freedom of one's own national community. In the Europe of the new millennium, many political groupings habitually labelled as 'populist' appear to follow this line of argumentation in order to set themselves apart from others. The populist parties of Austria and the Netherlands even carry the term freedom (Freiheit, Vrijheid) in their names, and in the European Parliament the faction of this type of parties has chosen the name 'Europe of Nations and Freedom'. When one seeks to understand the causes of Brexit, one of the central explanations is certainly many Brits' desire to liberate themselves from the dominance/interference of the Eurozone countries; it was a matter of inward-turned independence.

Conversely, freedom can assume an outward-looking character when it becomes a central objective with which a specific foreign policy action is justified – e.g. 'we wish to bring freedom to others'; 'we fight for you in the name of freedom'. When current Western politicians express their staunch support for the liberal ethos of international society, and are willing to protect it by coercive means if necessary, their understanding of freedom is certainly not (only) nation-based.

Methodological remarks and selected documents

The reader may find the theoretical exposition of the preceding pages overly complex – although (s)he may have to admit that we have, in fact, crudely simplified the essences of our titular concept. What makes the picture even more problematic, however, is that other essential human concerns often undermine (elite-driven) efforts to realise freedom in any of its manifold forms. In the analysed documents, for example, it was evident that the global and local security concerns of recent years have often overshadowed hopes of achieving liberty. Closely related to this, there is a methodological problem that the distinctions above by no means solve. Freedom is occasionally only an underlying ideal in political parlance; we repeatedly need to analyse concepts that are only implicitly related to freedom. Besides, it is often challenging to interpret what the politicians' real intention of using freedom-related vocabulary has been.

Another methodological point also deserves note. In our analyses of the documents, primarily speeches, we pay only limited attention to the audience(s) that a particular text should speak to, and it may therefore be difficult to identify the ultimate aim with which it was drafted. It is obvious, though, that many of the views expressed – even in distinctly foreign-political addresses – are actually meant to make an impression on the domestic audiences rather than tell others what that particular actor has in mind.

The European Union's and the United States of America's political systems are so different, a hybrid versus a presidential system, that it is virtually impossible to find political documents that correspond seamlessly with each other. We therefore simply sought to select speeches and political documents that appear relevant to and representative of their systemic context over the past 10 to 15 years. We cannot claim, however, that the texts we eventually came to choose give an entirely truthful picture of their respective polity. They are simply meant to provide essential viewpoints, illuminating glimpses, about the system within which they appeared.

In the case of the European Union, we primarily rely on the most important, agenda-setting speeches by the Presidents of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy (2009 – 14) and Donald Tusk (2014 –), as well as the heads of EU foreign policy Javier Solana (1999 – 2009), Catherine Ashton (2009 – 14) and Federica Mogherini (2014 –). In addition, the new Consensus on Development of 2017, the EU Global Strategy of 2016, and its predecessor The European Security Strategy and its implementation report (2003/2008) compress EU views in a distinct manner. We have also carefully read a number of other documents, including the EEAS annual reports (2011 – 2016) and reports on the CFSP (2009 – 2014), but these play only a limited role in the actual analysis.

In the case of the US, we examine a selection of key foreign policy speeches and remarks delivered by Presidents George W. Bush (2001 – 2009), Barack Obama (2009 – 2017) and Donald J. Trump (2017 –). These are complemented with key policy documents, such as the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Reviews (QDDR) undertaken by the Obama administration (2010 and 2015), and the five National Security Strategies (NSS: 2002, 2006, 2010, 2015 and 2017) produced by the Bush, Obama and Trump administrations during the period under scrutiny. We have also explored a number of other White House and State Department sources, including speeches by Vice Presidents and Secretaries of State, but these factor less prominently in the analysis.

The resilient logic of the European Union

It is certainly not the easiest of tasks to provide an overview of the applications of freedom in the case of such a hybrid political actor as the European Union, an actor the identity of which is, paradoxically, both post-national and intergovernmental. It was the preservation of peace rather than the glorification of freedom that offered the process of European integration its original *raison d'être*, although the four (individual) freedoms, those of persons (or, rather, labour), services, goods, and capital, already constituted a central part of the Treaty of Rome (1957). The wisdom read that technocrats – i.e. the European Commission – can make well-founded decisions in order to turn the continent into an area of peace. Democracy, the unexpectedness that democracy implies, was not to have too central a role. Over the first three decades after the establishment of the European Communities, technocracy and democratic liberalism were the two main, but often conflicting, logics that informed the process of integration.

In the 1990s, however, as a result of people's successful, fearless struggle for liberation from Soviet-style communism, an awareness of the importance of freedom grew significantly stronger across the European continent, both in terms of the economy and as an

overarching guideline for politics. For the majority of Eastern Europeans, strive for membership in the European Union developed into the ultimate confirmation of the victory of freedom, although by the end of the 1990s many of them also bitterly realised that capitalism and democracy are by no means able to solve all problems of society. At the same time, voices for the democratisation of the European Union became louder, and guaranteeing political freedoms in third country contexts assumed a central role in the EU's external policies. Moreover, as peace had begun to look virtually self-evident in the EU member states, particularly the younger generation began to see European integration through the lenses of personal freedom rather than those of a peace process.[12]

A decade of hope and freedom in many respects ended with 9/11, 2001, and the subsequent War on Terror; novel security concerns began to dominate European public debates. In spite of this, as we now turn to a detailed analysis of the selected documents, it is evident that we can recognise specific and even strong schemata of freedom in the official discourses of the European Union since that historical turning point.[13] At least three important storylines, based on varying ideas of freedom, appear identifiable; we have labelled them 'The EUropean Dream', 'An Enabling Actor', and 'Seeking Sovereignty'. It is noteworthy that EU patterns of argumentation have displayed a great deal of continuity over the analysed period, at least when compared with the clear variation between the presidential outlooks in the US. However, the 2014 crisis in Ukraine did seem to transform political leaders' rhetorical centres of attention in Europe. Within the general impression of continuity, it is also possible to identify utterances that can be interpreted as explicit, critical reactions to current (2018) political predicaments in the US.

The EUropean Dream

The first storyline is probably what usually comes to mind to anyone familiar with the rhetoric of the European Union. In pro-integration circles, generally an elite stratum, cultivating the category of freedom represents *the* historically induced essence of the entire process of integration. That essence materialises in both systemic and individual terms: it is about an open European civilization, and about the increasing number of choices individuals possess because of 'Europe' and that, by and large, make their lives happier. It is also a matter of existing together as 'Europeans', in whatever way defined; in one of his speeches, Javier Solana even noted how Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with Schiller's 'Ode to Freedom', 'has captured the sense of community and brotherhood that is central to the European spirit'.[14] In this respect, there is clearly some sort of an intrinsic and inherently 'positive' accent in the understanding of freedom in respect of Europe, rather than an absence of interference in terms of (individual) freedoms. This may, in fact, be comparable to the mythology of an 'American dream'.

A range of articulations of this reasoning can be found in the documents. To celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome in March 2017, President of the European Council Donald Tusk gave a very personal speech in which he started off by recollecting his youth as an activist in the Solidarity movement, founded in his hometown Gdansk in 1980. The movement fought for 'human dignity, freedom and democracy', and paved the way for the collapse of communism. He concludes his memories by stating:

> I am recalling this brief course in history today only to make everybody aware that for millions of people […] the European Union is not about slogans, it is not about procedures, it is not about regulations. Our Union is a guarantee that freedom, dignity, democracy and independence are no longer only our dreams, but our everyday reality. I lived behind the Iron Curtain for more than half of my life, where it was forbidden to even dream about those values. Yes, back then, that really was a two-speed Europe.[15]

The values of freedom are, of course, universal, but in this European context they often arise in an inherently particularising manner: Europe's freedom brings the continent apart from others, makes it specific. Or, perhaps, we should rather talk, as Stefan Borg does, of a peculiar oscillation between universalism (of values) and particularism (in terms of their application).[16] It remains, however, a moot question to what extent we here witness some sort of qualitative ordering between different cultures, or even efforts to reproduce European hegemony at the world stage. In the analysed documents, in any case, such a logic is hardly present; their mechanisms of particularisation evolve from within Europe.

President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy sought to had a more down-to-earth tone in the speech that he gave at the Stockholm School of Economics in 2012, to a youthful audience. He speaks of everyday aspects of life with an individualistic loop of *opportunities*, but the final remark that he makes is in a sense comparative, if not systemic: an (unfounded) belief that people of the world expects 'Europe' to remain something special.

> But let's be concrete. What can we do for a 18 year old in Spain, Slovakia or… Sweden? First: invest in education and training, bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace. Secondly, we must make it easier for young people to get the first foot on the ladder: apprenticeships, work experience, first proper contracts. […] Thirdly: we must make it easier to go where the jobs are. […] Our objective is clear and shared by all: Europe must remain that very attractive continent in which to live and work, create wealth and spend it, for all citizens. *Our global partners also expect this from us.*[17]

Democracy and freedom are naturally closely intertwined in the views that emphasise Europe's distinct nature. It seems, however, that in recent years awareness of the importance of the *nature* of democracy has increased. A minimal form of democracy does not suffice to generate a positive freedom agenda – or support the realisation of socio-institutional freedom – or 'deep democracy'. Catherine Ashton took on the leadership of the EU's foreign affairs in December 2009, and only a year later she was faced with a major challenge as revolutions engulfed the Union's Mediterranean neighbourhood. In an important speech on Europe's responses to these events, Ashton proposed two principles as points of departure for European policy makers. With the first of these, Ashton emphasised the difficulty of discovering the road towards liberty – Europeans themselves know what it means 'when democracy breaks down'. Her other point was more analytical as she underscored people's willingness to build institutions together as necessary for a stable democratic system based on, one can deduce, freedom:

> What we in Europe have learned the hard way is that we need "deep democracy": respect for the rule of law, freedom of speech, respect for human rights, an independent judiciary

> and impartial administration. It requires enforceable property rights and free trade unions. It is not just about changing governments, but about building the right institutions and the right attitudes. In the long run, "surface democracy", democracy that floats on the top – people casting their votes freely on election day and choosing their governments – will not survive if "deep democracy" fails to take root.[18]

An obvious question arises, one that here remains unanswered: what is, in fact, the relationship between deep democracy and socio-institutional freedom?

Finally, the EUropean Dream also seems to inform the causal analysis of the current (perceived, propagated, constructed?) crisis of the EU. Van Rompuy sought to capture the nucleus of 'Europe' in his conclusive speech as Council President, by making a distinction between *space* – a space for openings and opportunities – and *place* – a protective home and instance of one's primary identification. He argued that a balanced, positive understanding of the European Union would require that both these metaphorical views of Europe be simultaneously affirmed, despite prevailing global turbulence. There is

> […] a dramatic and rapid shift: whereas for decades Europe had been all about opening, liberating, unlocking, emancipating, empowering... today it is suddenly seen as meddling, judging, prescribing, dictating, correcting, even punishing… Europe, the great 'opener' of opportunities is now perceived by many as an unwelcome 'intruder', the friend of freedom and space is seen as threat to protection and place.[19]

An enabling logic

The second storyline is more explicitly attached to the external policies of the EU. The Union seeks to conduct its policies in the world so as *to enable other actors to do things*, achieve things, realise themselves – and this type of external impact eventually also serves the pursuits of European citizens, in the name of enlightened self-interest. The Union's agenda is extremely *comprehensive* in this respect; the range of different measures with which lasting impact should be achieved hardly leaves anything more to desire. The European Consensus on Development of 2017, a true, if not naïve, à la carte list of global benevolence, explicates the presumed benefits for Europe itself with particular clarity:

> The EU and its Member States are committed to a life of dignity for all that reconciles economic prosperity and efficiency, peaceful societies, social inclusion and environmental responsibility. In doing so, efforts will be targeted towards eradicating poverty, reducing vulnerabilities and addressing inequalities to ensure that no-one is left behind. By contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda [for sustainable development], the EU and its Member States will also foster a stronger and more sustainable, inclusive, secure and prosperous Europe.[20]

This type of attitude inevitably requires a sense of optimism with respect to the overall development chances of the global system of states, even in the Trump-post-Ukraine-global-warming era. Possibly the most important EU document of recent years, the Global Strategy of 2016, for example, after having drafted a gloomy picture of the current state of

affairs and the great challenges humanity is now facing, offers an unashamedly hopeful description of the world, with an explicit reference to freedom:

> Yet these are also times of extraordinary opportunity. Global growth, mobility, and technological progress – alongside our deepening partnerships – enable us to thrive, and allow ever more people to escape poverty and live longer and freer lives.[21]

To utilise, even exploit, this realm of opportunities, of positive freedom, it is necessary to postulate a worldview that is *not* based on enmity between states and regions, but on nurturing of cooperation and recognition of mutual benefits, a liberal world order indeed. In the most recent documents, these ideals are explicitly meant to counterbalance US unpredictability under President Trump. Donald Tusk formulated this with remarkable conciseness in the first sentence of his 2017 UN address: 'The European Union stands for freedom and a credible rules-based global order'.[22] Federica Mogherini, the former Italian foreign minister currently in charge of EU foreign policy, uses a greater number of (compelling) words to make the point in a recent speech:

> So, the choice ahead of us is very clear. On the one hand, there is a confrontational approach to the issues of our times. A mind-set based on transactions, on zero-sum games, where my success requires somebody else to fail. On the other, the hard work that leads to win-win solution[s], compromises and multilateral approaches. It is clear where the European Union stands, not because we are naïve, or because we don't like power politics. We understand it. It is not a matter of being in the field of idealism versus realpolitik. No, it is because we know what works better. It is not because we are nice – even if I do not find anything bad about being nice –, but it is about our self-interest, our own self-interest.[23]

One wonders whether the EU here promotes a form of *systemic freedom*, or perhaps a world of *non-domination?* Or would such a conclusion give, in fact, too much credit to the (or any) liberal global order it purports to defend?

Mogherini's reference to the EU's ability to understand power politics may be seen to reflect one more recent aspect of the EU's approach to the world, namely the emphasis on *resilience*, a society's ability to actively adapt and develop itself in its own terms. This may also reflect the broader international agenda for development (which the European Union shapes to a significant degree); the promotion of resilience seems to be *the* new catchword of this agenda, replacing but also incorporating such earlier notions as 'ownership', 'capacity-building' and 'dialogue'.[24] The EU's recent *Global Strategy* is virtually saturated with references to resilience, such as the following:[25]

> Societal resilience will be strengthened by deepening relations with civil society, notably in its efforts to hold governments accountable. We [i.e. the EU] will reach out more to cultural organisations, religious communities, social partners and human rights defenders, and speak out against the shrinking space for civil society including through violations of the freedoms of speech and association. Positive change can only be home-grown, and may take years to materialise. […] We will nurture societal resilience also by

> deepening work on education, culture and youth to foster pluralism, coexistence and respect.[26]

It is noteworthy that this emphasis on resilience presupposes a pragmatic attitude towards the nature of change in existing societies, that is, a disbelief in – or liberation from – overly ambitious social engineering projects conducted by outsiders; the expectation is that existing cultural traditions and societal inertia will at some point undermine such projects. Development efforts should settle for piecemeal changes in society; concrete outcomes are more important than the ideology on the basis of which they will be attained.[27] *The Global Strategy* even talks of 'principled pragmatism' as the guiding ideology of the EU. Pragmatism can lead to utopia, appears to be the conclusion – in a deeply instrumental manner:

> We will be guided by clear principles. These stem as much from a realistic assessment of the current strategic environment as from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world. *Principled pragmatism* will guide our external action in the years ahead.[28]

Seeking sovereignty

The third storyline that we wish to pay attention to here is the importance of Europe's sovereignty, which can and even should also materialise in terms of hard power. For this paper, we have not studied change over time in any robust manner, but it seems to us that this emphasis has grown stronger in recent years, even though already in the early 2000s, vocal demands for Europe to upgrade its capacity to shape things at the world stage gained ground in public attention.[29] Such voices did not, however, really manage to reconfigure the general understanding of the functioning of the world system. In the following extract from a speech by Javier Solana given in 2009 in the USA of Barack Obama, the speaker expresses a thoroughly intriguing idea: less power means a more open world – and a stronger sense of freedom from the point of view of the individual:

> In all this, there is a paradox. In previous times, if you won a political or ideological battle, you could expect more influence. This time, our intellectual and political victory requires us to share the leadership of the world with others. Our success at spreading markets, open societies and the desire for people to shape their own lives, means less power for ourselves.[30]

Again, one wonders what the relationship between the faculty of freedom and this kind of argumentation is – could less (systemic) power in fact mean more (individual) freedom, more freedom of action? And in which ways is the notion of non-domination, *mutual non-domination*, possibly relevant here?

The main trigger of the increased emphasis on sovereignty has certainly been the crisis in Ukraine since 2014. The crisis has meant that some countries, particularly the Baltic States, feel themselves less secure than before, and even in countries such as Finland expectations towards the EU's ability to protect in a military crisis have intensified. Guaranteeing the security of the Member States has thus risen in importance on the Union's

internal agenda, coupled with concerns over its concrete capacity to support other (state) actors, too. In her speech to the European Parliament towards the end of her term as HR/VP in spring 2014, during the most dramatic weeks of the Ukraine crisis, Catherine Ashton reflected this in the following words:

> I do want to turn for a moment to our issues of security and defence. Because I think the situation in Ukraine has cast fresh light on this. In my final report ahead of the December 2013 European Council on Security and Defence I said that "the peace and security of Europe has always been a prerequisite for its economic welfare; for the EU to live up to its role as security provider means that European citizens and the international community need to be able to trust and rely on the EU to deliver when the situation demands. We must move from discussion to delivery." […] Honourable Members, this was never more true.[31]

Since Ashton's speech, the situation in Ukraine has hardly improved and challengers to the existing world order seem to be more numerous and powerful than before. The need to increase the Union's ability to provide security and thereby act in the world continue to determine the nature of many a European foreign policy debate, with concrete implications in the field of security and defence integration.[32] The Global Strategy's first aim, for example, is that of the security of the Union; in a sense all other aims remain subordinate to it. The EU thus seeks to guarantee non-interference in the traditional sense of negative freedom.

> Member States remain sovereign in their defence decisions: nevertheless, to acquire and maintain many of these capabilities, defence cooperation must become the norm. The EU will systematically encourage defence cooperation and strive to create a solid European defence industry, which is critical for *Europe's autonomy of decision and action*.[33]

The United States and the shifting tides of freedom

Freedom is, arguably, *the* foundational idea of the American experiment, of the belief that the country is different from, or even superior to, the rest of the world. The documents drafted upon the independence of the nation worshiped 'the dignity of the individual human being', 'the fundamental equality of all men' and the 'inalienable rights to freedom, justice and fair opportunity'.[34] Since the dawn of the 20th century, as the US gradually assumed a leading role in the world, freedom has taken centre stage in all the grand international projects the country has embarked on.

Examples abound. Woodrow Wilson famously justified US entry into the First World War by insisting that autocratic governments presented a 'menace to […] freedom' (1917).[35] Before World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt articulated 'four freedoms' (of speech and worship as well as from want and fear), which ultimately lay at the base of the new international order that emerged in the late 1940s.[36] As the communist systems began to show signs of fatigue in the 1980s, Ronald Reagan's assertive foreign policy *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union was framed as 'a forward strategy for freedom'.[37] By the late 1990s, against the backdrop of America's perceived unipolar power position in the international system, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright argued that the US was 'the indispensable nation'.

America had become the ultimate guarantor not only of global security, but also the forward march of liberty, 'always prepared to sacrifice for freedom, democracy and the American way of life'.[38]

When it comes to freedom discourses of US administrations after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, three thematics emerge. They reflect *both* change *and* continuity between successive presidencies. In the documents analysed, two of these storylines, which we term 'A Shining Example for the World' and 'Active Promoter' stretch across the George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump administrations, although they produce different subplots. The third trope that we wish to pay attention to – that of a 'Civilizational Leader' – remained largely dormant during the Obama years, but has resurfaced recently under President Trump's tutelage.

A shining example for the world

It is impossible to discuss America's relationship with freedom without reference to the notion of American exceptionalism. This belief in the unique nature of the American project has often been termed *the* common denominator, even essence, of US political culture. However, exceptionalism has historically served as a scaffold for *both* an aloof approach to the world espoused by the proverbial 'city on a hill' that would shine as an example for others to emulate, *and* a more activist – at times proselytising – brand of foreign engagement.[39]

America eagerly embraced a hegemonic role during and especially after the Cold War.[40] Yet the 'city on a hill' tradition, implying a reflexive and even passive approach to the world, has proliferated in US policy discourse. It is illustrative that during his presidential campaign George W. Bush – a man whose legacy remains marred by (failed) post-9/11 interventionism – actually criticised Bill Clinton for overzealous foreign engagement.[41] In his inaugural address, for example, Bush spoke of a distinctly American way of being in the world, 'the American story', while also acknowledging the country's fallibility and the need to strive for an ever better union at home.

> It is a story of a new world that became a friend and liberator of the old, the story of a slaveholding society that became a servant of freedom, the story of a power that went into the world to protect but not possess, to defend but not to conquer.[42]

This constitutes a form of modesty, in fact, 'the modesty of true strength', as Bush himself had earlier formulated it.[43] Freedom, or more aptly the perfection of freedom, remains intimately connected to the narrative of the American dream, which sets the US apart from the rest of the world.

Assuming power on the heels of Bush's military adventurism in the Middle East, the War on Terror and the 2007/8 financial crisis, this belief in 'the tempering qualities of humility and restraint' as generators of true leadership was also characteristic for Barack Obama.[44] He emphasised – perhaps most eloquently in the inaugural address – the importance of putting petty differences aside and rebuilding America as the country of opportunities, restoring people's confidence in the nation in the process.

> What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility – a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task. […] This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed, why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall; and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served in a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.[45]

A new responsible approach to the world would thus mean embracing America's professed values *both* at home *and* abroad in order to preserve the nation's essence. A similar message appeared in his first speech before the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, 2009). Obama pledged 'a new era of engagement with the world', where 'America will live its values, and […] lead by example'.[46] The President thus established an explicit link between the perfection of (systemic?) freedom at home and America's sustained ability to act as a just, prudent and fair leader on the international arena.

Donald Trump's inauguration speech, where he famously rehearsed the 'America First' moniker of the presidential campaign, contained a message whose stark difference in tone hides its family resemblance to Obama's vision – America's greatness would be reclaimed by building prosperity at home.

> From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land. From this moment on, it's going to be America First. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families. We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products, stealing our companies, and destroying our jobs. Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength.[47]

In contrast to Obama's positive agenda of opportunities, Trump clearly embraces a negative understanding of freedom, spiced with fear. He ties Americans' ability to enjoy the maximum amount of liberty at home not only with non-interference by the federal government, but also with the need to protect the homeland from negative diffusions from other countries, whether these be in the form of products, people or cultural contagion.[48] The realised policies of the Trump administration have thus far followed this maxim. During his first year in office, the President revoked US participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), withdrew the country from the Paris Agreement on climate change, and continued to entertain visions of building 'the Wall' on the US-Mexican border.

The desire to protected from the savage world was also reflected in Trump's 2017 address to the UNGA, where he stressed the virtues of sovereignty and patriotism, and also asserted that '[i]n America, we do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to watch'.[49] Despite their reminiscent messages, the founding premises of Obama's 2009 speech and Trump's equivalent are fundamentally different. The former articulated a broader vision of non-domination. Stressing peoples' freedom to decide their own way of life was framed in terms of the toleration of other

cultures' customs as well as American re-engagement with an increasingly complex and interconnected global system.[50]

In the case of Trump, the message remains underpinned by an agenda of disengagement from that very system, it idolises non-interference and national awakening.[51] This America, 'America Made Great Again', appears different in nature from the 'consensual hegemon' that provides global public goods, one that Europeans came to know over the course of the post-Second World War era.[52] The view harkens back to the isolationism of the interwar years, and to the founding days of the republic, when foreign engagement was viewed with suspicion and deemed potentially harmful for the future of the nation.[53] It is also noteworthy that Trump's approach does *not* seem to comprise a socio-institutional category of freedom. Non-interference is not complemented by an articulated understanding of how, under which societal arrangements, people, the Americans, should come together to share their interests and specific identities.[54]

Active promoter of freedom

In the 1990s, discussions over America's place in the world coalesced around the globally engaged understanding of exceptionalism. Two argumentative blocs formed: multilateralists preferred broad-based international solutions and universal applicability of international legal rules, while unilateralists maintained that the only remaining superpower should fashion the world in a manner *it* saw fit.[55] The two sides thus disagreed over the extent to which the US should remain privy to the qualms of others and restrain the one-sided use of (coercive) power in the pursuit of a better world. Both agreed on a core premise, however. The US would retain a 'moral responsibility' to use its superpower prerogative to further a 'higher good' in the world.[56]

In the controversial 2002 National Security Strategy, arguably a culmination point for US unilateralism, the George W. Bush administration laid out the path for the *Freedom Agenda*. This approach was based on a Wilsonian belief in the inherent appeal of liberal ideals that would – so the administration's logic went – ensure a symbiosis between America's national interests and security, on the one hand, and the nation's foundational values, on the other.[57]

> The United States possesses unprecedented – and unequaled – strength and influence in the world. Sustained by faith in the principles of liberty, and the value of a free society, this position comes with unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunity. The great strength of this nation must be used to promote a balance of power that favors freedom.[58]

The idea was to ensure the maximum amount of leeway for the US to conduct its policies on the international arena as the lone hegemon in a unipolar system.[59] Against the backdrop of the War on Terror, the strategy translated into a (hyper)active foreign policy that used military instruments, along with economic and diplomatic ones, to promote democracy, development, free markets and trade. According to this logic, American security would be realised if and only if citizens of faraway polities – in the Middle East in particular – were

given the opportunity to taste the sweet nectar of freedom.[60] 'Freedom and democracy' were deemed 'the only ideas powerful enough to overcome hatred, and division, and violence'.[61] The value of freedom appeared *both* intrinsic and instrumental.

On the level of practice, however, such grandiose pledges hardly materialised. Especially when it came to America's authoritarian allies, the Freedom Agenda seemed to connote piecemeal economic reforms that would allow the free market to function better and free trade to flourish.[62] As Hassan aptly describes it, Bush's project ultimately opted for *liberalisation*, guaranteeing more room for individuals to conduct themselves in the sense of non-interference, instead of *democratisation*, enhancing the ability of individuals to participate in political processes.[63] Fostering negative freedom(s), would incrementally lead to realisation of other (positive?) freedom(s) some years down the line.

For Obama, speeches to foreign audiences during the first year of his term presented an opportunity to exorcise the unilateral demons of the George W. Bush era. He sought to revive America's global leadership role by making a plea for its cherished values and multilateral cooperation, while also forsaking excesses committed under the rubric of the War on Terror. This sentiment was most profoundly on display in Obama's 2009 speech in Cairo, possibly the most important international address of his first presidential term.

> [J]ust as America can never tolerate violence by extremists, we must never alter or forget our principles. Nine-eleven was an enormous trauma to our country. The fear and anger that it provoked was understandable, but in some cases, it led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals. We are taking concrete actions to change course. I have unequivocally prohibited the use of torture by the United States, and I have ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed by early next year.[64]

Such acknowledgments of American shortcomings warranted a qualitatively different policy stance. The US would forgo coercive democracy promotion in faraway lands, but this would not entail giving up support for freedom around the world. In the speech, Obama framed the realisation of individual freedom not only in terms of the positive ability to make informed choices about how they are governed, but also in light of non-domination and non-interference. The American hegemon would no longer 'presume to know what is best for everyone', while the governments of the Middle East should foster 'the ability to speak your mind' and 'the freedom to live as you choose'.[65]

The Obama administration also sought to address the perceived shortcomings of the Freedom Agenda by emphasising the link between development – a form of systemic freedom, perhaps – and the realisation of freedom for the individual citizen. The 2010 *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*, the first of its kind, pledged that America's 'policy will be focused on sustainable development outcomes with a premium placed on broad-based economic growth, democratic governance, game-changing innovations, and sustainable systems for meeting basic human needs'.[66] In this vein, Obama emphasised the empowering potential of institutions in generating 'genuine and inclusive democracy'.[67] The president's words delivered at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate in 2013 also spell out this logic.

> Our efforts have to be about more than just charity. They're about new models of empowering people: to build institutions; to abandon the rot of corruption; to create ties of trade, not just aid, both with the West and among the nations that are seeking to rise and increase their capacity. […] Our fates are linked, and we cannot ignore those who are yearning not only for freedom, but also prosperity.[68]

These kinds of appeals bear considerable family resemblance to the EU's calls for societal resilience – and perhaps socio-institutional freedom. The remit of liberty needs to be broadened to encompass the ability of people to make meaningful choices in their everyday lives, and this should be guaranteed by an effective system of governance at both local and national levels.

So embedded is the tradition of active freedom promotion in America's political psyche, that even Barack Obama's *sui generis* successor Donald Trump has been forced to pay lip service to it. The Trump administration's National Security Strategy, for instance, maintains that the US will continue to both 'champion American values' and 'remain a beacon of liberty and opportunity around the world'.[69] Likewise, according to Vice President Pence, 'promoting religious freedom [is] a foreign policy priority of this administration',[70] particularly with respect to the plight of Christians in the Middle East.

However, the prevalent view is that the current administration is respecting such statements, by and large, in the breach.[71] Trump's first Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, in remarks delivered at the State Department, admitted as much by appearing to downgrade the promotion of American values, freedom included, from a foreign policy priority to an *ad hoc* exercise:

> If we condition too heavily that others must adopt this value that we've come to over a long history of our own, it really creates obstacles to our ability to advance our national security interests, our economic interests. It doesn't mean that we leave those values on the sidelines. It doesn't mean that we don't advocate for and aspire to freedom, human dignity, and the treatment of people the world over. We do. And we will always have that on our shoulder everywhere we go. [...] But that doesn't mean that's the case in every situation.[72]

Saviour of civilisation

Beyond being representative of the two faces of American exceptionalism, freedom has also played the role of a civilizational marker in US foreign policy discourse. The War on Terror waged by the Bush administration is a poignant case in point. It was framed as an epic battle between the forces of freedom and non-freedom, a struggle against 'radical Islam' and 'evil and lawless regimes'.[73] For President Bush, America's role was to lead this fight to save civilisation, for, as he argued at the UN in 2001, '[c]ivilization, itself, the civilization we share, is threatened'. He also reminded the audience: '[w]e face enemies that hate not our policies, but our existence; the tolerance of openness and creative culture that defines us'.[74] A few years later, Bush made an explicit link between freedom and civilisation in an address on the fifth anniversary of 9/11 to the American people:

> They [the terrorists] know that given a choice, people will choose freedom over their extremist ideology. So their answer is to deny people this choice by raging against the forces of freedom and moderation. This struggle has been called a clash of civilizations. In truth, it is a struggle for civilization. We are fighting to maintain the way of life enjoyed by free nations. And we're fighting for the possibility that good and decent people across the Middle East can raise up societies based on freedom and tolerance and personal dignity.[75]

In this manner, the President tried to stress that the ensuing battle was *not* reminiscent of Samuel P. Huntington's controversial clash of civilizations thesis, where incompatible cultural identities are seen to produce enmities between (essentialised) civilizational entities.[76] Instead, freedom as an emblem of civilization would serve as a foundation for a superior global system, 'a world beyond terror, where ordinary men and women are free to determine their own destiny', as Bush himself portrayed it.[77]

Civilizational tropes basically disappeared from US foreign policy discourse during Barack Obama's tenure; they obviously do not fit into a framework of genuine multilateralism. President Trump, in turn, has resurrected the notion of civilizational leadership. For him, in a not-so-subtle reference to Huntington, civilization appears to symbolise an almost mythical category of sovereign Western nations that share a Judeo-Christian heritage. Trump ties the realisation of freedom – presumably both the freedom of sovereign nations in the international system and the freedom of populaces residing within said states – to the sustainability of such civilizational affinities against the challenges of terror, rogue regimes, globalisation and regulation imposed by governments. Such thinking was most profoundly on display in Trump's speech in Warsaw in July 2017:

> Americans, Poles, and nations of Europe value individual freedom and sovereignty. We must work together to confront forces, whether they come from inside or out, from the south or the east, that threaten over time to undermine these values and to erase the bonds of culture, faith, and tradition that make us who we are. [...] Our own fight for the West does not begin on the battlefield, it begins with our minds, our wills, and our souls. […] Our freedom, our civilization, and our survival depend on these bonds of history, culture, and memory.[78]

Of particular relevance for Trump has been the threat of 'radical Islamic terrorism', which the President has pledged to 'eradicate completely from the face of the earth'.[79] In this vein, the inter-civilizational battle is garnering biblical overtones, as was the case when Trump announced the US missile strike on Syria in April 2017 by summoning 'all civilized nations [...] to end the slaughter and bloodshed in Syria' and pleading for 'God's wisdom'.[80] Trump's civilizational compass thus points to a struggle between freedom and non-freedom, reminiscent of the Bush era, but this time around the incumbent sees little need to downplay the othering impulse built into Huntington's thesis. For the Trump administration, therefore, freedom is again framed in individual and negative terms – non-interference into a state's affairs from the outside and in the lives of citizens by the government. A systemic component remains insofar as these freedoms can best be realised within a civilizational entity (the

West?), whose existence necessitates eradicating the scourge of radical extremism from its societal body.

Conclusion

The explorations above may in the end foster more open questions than offer clear-cut answers. Nevertheless, we can claim to have enhanced, however incompletely, understanding of how the EU and US have been utilising and sometimes even exploiting a range of freedom conceptions in order to recreate the conditions for their acting and being in the world.

There are, of course, both similarities and differences between the elite discourses of the two powers, but similarities tend to dominate, at least prior to the Trump presidency. Above all, it proved difficult to uncover differences between these two actors in terms of attaching *intrinsic* or *instrumental* value upon freedom. It is *both* an end in itself and a means to an end. It is a rhetorical and at times essentialist device, but its employment can also be justified in terms of enlightened self-interest when it leads to, say, an improved sense of national security. Indeed, one can still talk of a shared discursive commitment to freedom in its various constellations among EU and US political leaders. The bond seems to endure in spite of the apparent strains in the transatlantic consensual-hegemonic bargain.

The two conceptual triangles, our primary theoretical framework, brought a few important viewpoints to the fore. With regard to the emphasis on *negative* and *positive freedom*, fluctuations that are symptomatic of changes between US presidential administrations appear virtually invisible in the case of the EU. The Union generally (re)produces freedom discourses that stress the *positive* components of freedom over the negative. The idea is to generate choices and opportunities in society, although the *level of focus* is primarily that of the individual. In the US, by contrast, Republican administrations tend to underline negative freedom defined as *non-interference* as a general maxim of politics at both the individual and polity level. Especially with respect to the former level, the historical divide across the Atlantic over the role of government in ensuring equal opportunity for individuals seems to persist; Europeans tend to retain more faith in that role than Americans.[81] Moreover, given the deepening rift between the left and right of the US political spectrum, it is no surprise that the Obama administration's freedom narrative came close to that espoused by the EU.

Turning to *systemic freedom*, we again see a number of similarities in the EU and US elite discourses. Whether one looks at the Union's stated aim of fostering democratisation processes in its near abroad or perhaps even its recent resilience approach (to the extent it represents a new mode of 'neocolonial neoliberalism'), the underpinning logic is *system (re)generating* and at times transformative – a system based on the values of liberal democracy. For the US, a comparable rationale underpinned Bush's Freedom Agenda and, to an extent, the Obama administration's call for 'genuine democracy' in the Middle East. The systems in question may obviously reside on different levels. For instance, the Bush administration idea of a 'balance of power that favours freedom' sought to alter the cultural logic of the international system/society (the 'third image' in Waltz's terms), but its realisation would have required comparable changes within states (the 'second image') or a regional group of states.[82]

Civilizational tropes represent another systemic component that merits a note. It is, above all, the US of Donald Trump and, to a lesser degree, George W. Bush that purports to speak and act as a vanguard for civilization. They construct a hegemonic and essentialist freedom narrative, one with little reflexivity vis-à-vis the less fortunate regions of the world. The civilizational and 'America First' agendas of President Trump not only stand in stark contrast to the globally engaged US of Barack Obama, but also to the at least rhetorically non-hegemonic nature of the European storylines. The American example also affirms the usefulness of the analytical distinction between state/multilateral interference and hegemonic domination: the current US administration resists the former, while the latter does not spell any problems whatsoever.

The European and American foreign-policy discourses also establish a link between *socio-institutional freedom* and visions of *non-domination*. Fostering 'deep' or 'genuine' democracy necessitates bottom-up processes, where institutions come to function as nodes in a network of social bonds that sustain a mature democratic system. There is a caveat, however. It is perhaps legitimate to question whether the pragmatic bent of the EU's resilience agenda embodies more than mere semantic juggling. It remains to be seen whether it really denotes a re-assessment of the value of local ownership and incremental 'bottom-up' change in place of grand ideological projects. Similarly, it would be possible to interpret Obama's narrative of non-domination and emphasis on local empowerment through institutions in a negative manner, as one (more) avenue for trying to escape the legacy of Bush's all-encompassing Freedom Agenda.

In both polities, the notion of freedom is also intimately tied to sovereignty. The logic is inward- *and* outward-looking: realisation of non-interference from the outside, on the one hand, and guaranteeing freedom of action (or at least a modicum thereof), on the other. The former form, freedom understood as non-interference from the outside, has been gaining more purchase within the EU and even more profoundly in the US in recent years. For the Union, Ukraine served as a wake-up call that neither freedom of European societies from outside interference nor freedom to act in the Union's neighbourhood can be, at the end of the day, taken for granted. For President Trump's 'America First' agenda, protection from diffusions that emanate in the world outside is the *sine qua non*. Simultaneously, however, he seems to relish the prospect of the US casting aside constraints to its international freedom of action by questioning the value of liberal institutional structures.

We hope that our comparative account has managed to shed light on the current trajectory of the Transatlantic Community of Values in an out-of-the-ordinary manner. In spite of the fluidity of the notion of freedom, and the inherent challenges in operationalising it, our analytical framework provided a useful tool for comprehending the complexity of political discourse and concomitant value structures. Besides, perhaps we also had a normative point in mind: thinking analytically in terms of freedom might be the first step towards reinvigorating the concept in our international mental map – and thereby help preserve whatever is worth preserving in the existing world order from the perspective of those who traditionally did *not* participate in defining its foundational principles.

Notes

1. We are naturally aware of the different connotations of the notions of freedom and liberty, prevalent in the English language – but not in, for instance, French, German or Finnish. The latter would seem to relate to unrestricted (political) action and the former more generally to the contractual nature of political community. This difference, however, proved limitedly relevant for our analysis.
2. Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). There is a lively and still ongoing debate on Berlin's own interpretation of these notions, as well as efforts to introduce more nuanced categorisations of freedom. See e.g. Philip Pettit, 'Freedom as Antipower', *Ethics* 106, no. 3 (1996): 576–604; Eerik Lagerspetz, 'Seitsemän vapauskäsitystä: Isaiah Berlinin 'positiivisen' ja 'negatiivisen' vapauden kritiikki', *Politiikka* 40, no. 2 (1998): 87–104; Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume 2: Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Alexandros Kioupkiolis, 'Three Paradigms of Modern Freedom', *European Journal of Political Theory* 8, no. 4 (2009): 473–491; Efraim Podoksik, 'One Concept of Liberty: Towards Writing the History of a Political Concept', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 71, no. 2 (2010): 219–240; Horacio Spector 'Four Conceptions of Freedom', *Political Theory* 38, no. 6 (2010): 780–808.
3. Cf. e.g. Keith Dowding, 'Choice: Its Increase and Its Value', *British Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 3 (1992): 301–314.
4. We could also talk of an 'essentialist paradigm' as one form of a positive understanding of freedom. 'Essentialism', however, can turn out to be highly problematic, a way towards the acceptance of the existing state of affairs. In other words, '[c]ritical and imaginative autonomy renounces essentialist preconceptions which posit absolute limits on the choice of norms, and it rectifies negative ideas which bypass the need to wrestle with present constraints'. Kioupkiolis, 'Three Paradigms,' 481.
5. Pettit, 'Freedom as Antipower.'
6. Quentin Skinner, 'A Third Concept of Liberty', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117 (2002): 237–268.
7. Kishore Mahbubani, *Has the West Lost It? A Provocation* (London: Penguin, 2018).
8. William Wallace, 'Are Values Diverging Across the Atlantic?', *European Foreign Affairs Review* 21, no. 3 (2016): 355–364.
9. Honneth uses the attribute *reflexive* to denote the type of freedom usually labelled as 'positive'. See Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriss einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2011).
10. Henri Vogt, *Between Utopia and Disillusionment. A Narrative of the Political Transformation in Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2005), chap. 5.
11. For Honneth, *social freedom* is the third main category of freedom, along with the negative and reflexive classifications. See Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit*.
12. Sten Berglund, Joakim Ekman, Henri Vogt and Frank Aarebrot. *The Making of the European Union. Foundations, Institutions and Future Trends* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2006).
13. To a degree, we in fact here disagree with Ian Manners, the initiator of the debate on Normative Power Europe. For him, 'freedom is always just one of several rights, held alongside other equally important principles such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law'. Ian Manners, 'The Normative Ethics of the European Union', *International Affairs* 84:1 (2008), 49.
14. Javier Solana, 'Speech by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Inauguration of the Academic Year 2005–2006', October 19, 2005, https://www.coleurope.eu/speeches#nid1811 (accessed March 21, 2018).

15. Donald Tusk, 'Speech by President Donald Tusk at the Ceremony of the 60th Anniversary of the Treaties of Rome', March 25, 2017, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25/tusk-ceremony-rome-speech/ (accessed March 21, 2018).
16. Stefan Borg, 'European Integration and the Problem of the State: Universality, Particularity, and Exemplarity in the Crafting of the European Union', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 17, no. 3 (2014): 339–366.
17. Herman Van Rompuy, 'Speech by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council at the Stockholm School of Economics', May 4, 2012, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/130057.pdf (accessed March 21, 2018) (emphasis added).
18. Catherine Ashton, 'Speech on Main Aspects and Basic Choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence policy', May 11, 2011, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-11-326_en.htm (accessed March 19, 2018). See also the European Commission's definition of 'deep democracy' at European Commission, 'A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A Review of European Neighbourhood Policy', European Commission, May 25, 2011, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0303&from=EN (accessed June 8, 2018), 3–4.
19. Herman Van Rompuy, 'Looking Back, Looking Forward: Speech at the Conference "Dove va l'Europa" – "The State of the Union"', November 7, 2014, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21280/145686.pdf (accessed March 21, 2018).
20. European Union, 'The New European Consensus on Development: "Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future"', European Commission, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/european-development-policy/european-consensus-development_en (accessed March 21, 2018): §4.
21. European Union, 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy', European Union External Action Service, 2016, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf (accessed March 21, 2018): 7.
22. Donald Tusk, 'Address by President Donald Tusk at the 72nd United Nations General Assembly', September 20, 2017, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/09/20/tusk-speech-un-general-assembly/ (accessed March 21, 2018).
23. Federica Mogherini, 'Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini', September 4, 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/31635/speech-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-2017-bled-strategic-forum_en (accessed 21 March 2018). Cf. Mogherini in the Foreword to European Union, 'Shared Vision, Common Action,' 4.
24. Ana E. Juncos, 'Resilience as the New EU Foreign Policy Paradigm: A Pragmatist Turn?' *European Security* 26, no. 1 (2017): 8.
25. For many scholars, resilience represents a neoliberal justificatory device; it makes it possible for the EU to pursue its policies without being accused of neo-colonialism. There are, however, others who see the notion in much more positive terms, a source of real societal critical potential. Of these two interpretations, the former seems to represent a systemic logic – misused systemic freedom – whereas the latter proponents think in terms of social/institutional freedom. Cf. Anthony Mckeown and John Glenn, 'The Rise of Resilience after the Financial Crises: A Case of Neoliberalism Rebooted?' *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 2 (2017): 193–214; Philippe Bourbeau and Ryan Caitlin, 'Resilience, Resistance, Infrapolitics and Enmeshment' *European Journal of International Relations* 24, no. 1 (2018): 221–239.
26. European Union, 'Shared Vision, Common Action,' 27.

27. This form of pragmatism may also echo the 'pragmatic turn' of International Relations scholarship (whatever that may mean); the ideas of academia do make an impact occasionally.
28. European Union, 'Shared Vision, Common Action,' 8 (emphasis added).
29. The debate initiated by Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida in the aftermath of the Iraq war in 2003 is the most famous example in this respect, see Daniel Levy, Max Pensky and John Torpey, eds., *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations after the Iraq War* (London: Verso, 2005). It might also be possible here to refer to the establishment of the EU's defence/military dimension in the late 1990s, beginning from the St. Malo Declaration by the British and French leaders in December 1998. However, as e.g. Henrik Larsen argues, the logic of action at the time was primarily based on problem-solving – crises such as the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s should not be possible in the EU's neighbourhood – rather than identity-building in terms of sovereignty. See Henrik Larsen, 'The EU: A Global Military Actor?' *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 3 (2003): 283–302.
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33. European Union, 'Shared Vision, Common Action,' 11 (emphasis added).
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39. See e.g. Charles A. Kupchan, 'The Clash of Exceptionalisms: A New Fight over an Old Idea', *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (2018): 139–148; Taesuh Cha, 'American Exceptionalism at the Crossroads: Three Responses', *Political Studies Review* 13, no. 3 (2015): 351–362.
40. Hal Brands, 'Choosing Primacy: U.S. Strategy and Global Order at the Dawn of the Post-Cold War Era', *Texas National Security Review* 1, no. 2 (2018): 8–33.
41. Daniel S. Hamilton, 'The Domestic Setting of American Approaches to Europe', in Riccardo Alcaro, John Peterson and Ettore Greco, eds., *The West and the Global Power Shift* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 135.

42. George W Bush, 'President George W. Bush's Inaugural Address', January 20, 2001, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/inaugural-address.html (accessed March 21, 2018).
43. George W. Bush, 'A Distinctly American Internationalism', November 19, 1999, https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm (accessed June 14, 2018). On the failure to realise this attitude of modesty from the perspective of third countries, see Mahbubani, *Has the West*.
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46. Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President to the United Nations General Assembly', September 23, 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-united-nations-general-assembly (accessed June 14, 2018).
47. Donald J. Trump, 'The Inaugural Address', January 20, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/ (accessed March 13, 2018).
48. See White House, 'Fact Sheets: President Donald J. Trump's Foreign Policy Puts America First', January 30, 2018, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-foreign-policy-puts-america-first/ (accessed March 13, 2018).
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50. Obama, 'United Nations'. See also White House, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America', NSS Archive, 2015, http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2015/ (accessed March 21, 2018).
51. Trump, 'United Nations'. See also Donald J. Trump, 'Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland', July 6, 2017, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-people-poland/ (accessed March 16, 2018).
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55. Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2003), 12–13.
56. Chris Brown, 'Do Great Powers Have Great Responsibilities? Great Powers and Moral Agency', *Global Society* 18, no. 1 (2004): 11, 13–14.
57. Oz Hassan, 'Bush's Freedom Agenda: Ideology and the Democratization of the Middle East', *Democracy and Security* 4, no. 3 (2008): 271; Christian Reus-Smit, *American Power and World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 52–53; Tony Smith, 'Wilsonianism after Iraq: The End

of Liberal Internationalism', in G. John Ikenberry, Thomas J. Knock, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and Tony Smith, eds., *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: Wilsonianism in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 53–88.

58. White House, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America', NSS Archive, 2002, http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2002.pdf (accessed March 21, 2018).
59. Charles Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment Revisited', *The National Interest* 70 (Winter 2002/03): 5–18.
60. See especially US Department of State, 'Institutionalizing the Freedom Agenda: President Bush Calls on Future Presidents and Congresses to Continue Leading the Cause of Freedom Worldwide', *US Department of State Archive*, October 9, 2008, https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2008/oct/110871.htm (accessed June 14, 2018).
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62. Emiliano Alessandri, Oz Hassan and Ted Reinert, 'U.S. Democracy Promotion from Bush to Obama', *EUSpring Working Paper* no. 1 (2015), https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/irs/euspring/publications (accessed June 14, 2018).
63. Oz Hassan, *Constructing America's Freedom Agenda for the Middle East: Democracy and Domination* (London: Routledge, 2013), 143.
64. Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President at Cairo University', June 4, 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09 (accessed June 14, 2018). Obama ultimately failed to deliver on this pledge, largely due to domestic political constraints. At the time of writing, October 2018, Guantanamo Bay remains in operation, and there is little prospect of closure during President Trump's term(s).
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66. US Department of State, 'Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR): Leading through Civilian Power', US Department of State, 2010, www.state.gov/documents/organization/153108.pdf (accessed June 14, 2018), 21.
67. Barack Obama, 'Remarks by the President on the Middle East and North Africa', May 19, 2011, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-middle-east-and-north-africa (accessed June 15, 2018).
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78. Donald J. Trump, 'People of Poland'.
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81. See e.g. Richard Wike, '5 ways Americans and Europeans are different', *Pew Research Center* (April 19, 2016), http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/19/5-ways-americans-and-europeans-are-different/.
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