

In the EU's Image?

EUSA 2023

Francesco Duina

Charles A. Dana Professor of Sociology
Social Sciences Division Chair
Bates College (USA)

Crina Viju-Miljusevic

Associate Professor in the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies
Associate Director of the Centre for European Studies
Carleton University (Canada)

NOTE

This paper is the introductory chapter to our edited volume *Standardizing the World: EU Trade Policy and the Road to Convergence* – to be published in April of 2023 by Oxford University Press. The paper spells out the volume's approach and findings.

The other two papers (by Evgeny Postnikov and Charlotte Sieber-Gasser) on this EUSA panel are chapters in the volume.

We are thankful to the Jean Monnet Network on Transatlantic Trade Politics for funding support at various stages of this research project.

We seek reactions and feedback on all aspects of this work and thank in advance Achim Hurrelmann for his comments at EUSA

ABSTRACT

The volume offers a comprehensive assessment of the EU's efforts to standardize a wide array of economic, political, and social aspects of life through its trade agreements across the globe. Driven by economic sociology's insights into the making of markets, and by a clear definition of standardization (that is, standardization entails the articulation of definitional and normative stances towards any aspect of the world), the volume tackles three related questions: 1. What is being standardized as we consider the EU's major trade agreements with partners across the world? 2. Given the answer to #1, to what extent has the EU been able to project its worldviews, has there been resistance, and what seems out of reach? 3. What can explain the observable outcomes? The primary finding is that the EU has advanced via its trade agreements standardizing material (well beyond WTO or other international benchmarks) in a variety of policy areas. But a secondary finding is that compromises or even failures are also surprisingly common. Several explanatory factors can account for these outcomes. Among the most important are path-dependent and neo-institutionalist dynamics, business interests, and ideational/cultural variables.

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Introduction: In the EU's Image?

The European Union (EU) has pursued a large number of trade agreements across the world.¹ This has been part and parcel of its foreign policy: As the second largest economy (after the United States (US)) in the world and lacking “hard” power, the EU has relied on those agreements to project its interests and objectives across every continent (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014; Szymanski and Smith 2005). These are often complex and far-reaching initiatives that have the potential to shape not only economic but also political and social life in the EU and its trading partners.

One of their most important dimensions has involved regulatory standardization. Whereas the EU's “older” (i.e., pre-2000s) types of trade agreements focused primarily on tariff reductions, the “new generation” has sought to advance convergence in regulatory approaches to goods, services, capital, and labor (Siles-Brügge 2013; Young 2016). This is because regulatory divergences—for instance, around product safety or quality requirements—have historically prevented trade from happening (Young 2017). They have been “trade diverting” for two main reasons. On the one hand, divergences can mean that an item is categorized as non-compliant according to domestic laws, and thus as impossible to import. On the other hand, divergences can drive differences in production costs and thus prices. This can make those items that are more expensive due to higher regulatory standards less competitive (Efrat 2016). Regulatory standardization has sought to do away with those differences.

It seems reasonable to think of this process in mostly economic, legalistic, or technical terms. But regulatory standardization has entailed something more than that: The production of agreed-upon *definitional* and *normative principles* around a huge array of matters—many of which can be highly sensitive, extend beyond strictly market concerns, and have far-reaching implications for many aspects of social life. Issues from labor rights to the environment, consumer health, product safety, food quality, human rights, gender equality, e-commerce, and data privacy have all been affected. The very essence of regulatory standardization involves the elimination of definitional and normative differences in those and many other areas. What, for instance, constitutes “safe” or “sustainable” food? What is gender discrimination at the workplace? What uses should technology companies make of consumer data? How should manufacturers dispose of toxic waste?

Thus, in the broadest sense and consistent with economic sociology's insights into the making of markets, we may say that the process of standardization has entailed the articulation and acceptance, by the trading partners, of specific *worldviews*. At stake is ultimately how citizens, organizations, and governments make sense of and behave in the world around them. Put differently, we may say that EU trade agreements contain cultural material that contributes to the social construction of reality, as countless aspects of daily lives become defined and are subjected to normative perspectives of how things should be.

Not surprisingly, the EU has sought to promote its own regulatory approaches in those trade agreements—that is to say, it has aimed to project its own worldviews onto its trading partners across the globe. In this regard, the Lisbon Treaty's provisions, in Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Chapter 1 of Title V of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European

Union, linking more or less directly a series of high-level general principles (such as the promotion of human rights and sustainable development) to EU trade policy (and other dimensions of external policy), has provided an important driver (Leblond and Viju-Miljusevic 2019; Pelkmans 2021). The same can be said of the ambitious 2006 Global Europe Strategy communication formulated by the European Commission Directorate-General for Trade (DG Trade) on a more assertive EU in world markets (Siles-Brügge 2014), and the Commission's 2015 Trade for All Strategy. The European Commission's publication, in February 2021, of its Trade Policy Review, titled *An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy*, in turn will no doubt offer further impetus for this (Jacobs et al. 2022).

Also unsurprisingly, those trading partners have often sought to do the same—wishing to have their approaches serve as the blueprints or otherwise looking for compromises. The result has been an amazingly rich and complex tapestry of EU trade agreements across the globe, preceded in some cases by intense negotiations, lobbying, and varying degrees of public mobilization. It follows that the EU has not always secured what it wants, and efforts have not always led to the adoption of an agreement. As with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the US, failure and the abandonment of negotiations have also occurred.

This volume seeks to grasp and understand this process of standardization. In particular, it has two objectives. *First, it aims to generate an overall picture of the main contours of the standardizing content of the EU trade agreements across major policy areas and with major trade parties across the world.* Such a picture is currently missing from the existing scholarship which, as we shall discuss, is fragmented both when it comes to analytical approaches to standardization and regulatory convergence, and the empirical cases considered. We are interested, in other words, in identifying the worldview(s) that are emerging from those agreements. More specifically, this means answering a number of related questions: What issue areas appear to have been especially targeted by standardization in EU trade agreements? What are the main features (tendencies, positions, etc.) of that standardizing content? And what are the variations—in issue areas and features—of that standardization across trading partners?

Second, this volume seeks to explain the observable outcomes. What can account for the emerging patterns? More specifically, what explains what issue areas are subject to standardization, the content of that standardization, and the variations we see across geographies (where we find that considerable differences in the amount and content of that standardization)? As we address these questions, we also wish to understand why the EU has succeeded in some instances at securing a projection of its worldviews but not others. Importantly, while we view the process of standardization in sociological and constructivist terms, we start from the premise that a number of rather different driving forces have shaped that process. Political, institutionalist, economic, civil society, and other factors all have an impact. We foresee *multiple causal pathways*. Moreover, we expect the relevant factors to be at work at various levels: the subnational, national, and international/global. Our aim is to shed light on this complex causal reality.

To be clear, our intent is not to catalog and then account for every instance of standardization in every EU trade agreement. Rather, we wish to identify and explain major patterns of standardization (that is, definitional or normative passages) in those agreements. Our focus is on the overall tendencies in EU trade agreements that could not possibly be understood by simply

producing an exhaustive list of all things subject to standardization, or, for that matter, by examining any one trade agreement or a set of agreements in a given policy area.

Given this, we are interested in “positive” cases where we see standardization but also “negative” ones, where the EU has not been able to project its worldviews or there has been a broader failure to reach trade agreements in the first place. The negative cases can reveal important information about what the EU can and cannot achieve.

In addition, we are not assuming a static picture. Indeed, we recognize the likelihood that the EU’s standardizing efforts in a particular subject area or vis-à-vis a given trading partner can change over time due to a variety of factors. If so, we wish to understand and explain that variance. Thus, we also expect multiple methodologies—quantitative and qualitative, historically oriented and time-specific, single versus multiple case studies, etc.—to be useful for analysis as we move across the relevant empirical cases.

Throughout, we direct our spotlight squarely on EU trade agreements and not broader policy statements, speeches, press releases, and other such materials. Trade agreements are binding under international law. They are consequential and represent the outcome of concerted negotiations and efforts. The same cannot be said of the other materials. With that said, those other materials can, of course, be relevant for our analysis because they can inform the explanation or may serve as background context that can help grasp the content of the agreements.

Consistent with that, we are, above all, interested in the mandatory regulatory passages in trade agreements. At the same time, we recognize that those agreements often include aspirational passages that may offer some context for the binding ones or point to what may come in the future. To the extent that it seems useful to note these sorts of passages, we do so.

Our aims in this volume are obviously considerable. To achieve them, we (the editors) invited contributions from leading experts in Europe and Australia in political science, economics, and law, and at trade institutes. With their help, we refined the analytical framework that guided their empirical analyses.

We proceed in this Introduction as follows. First, we specify how this volume speaks to existing literatures on the EU, standardization, and globalization. Second, we detail the analytical framework guiding the contributors in their work. Third, we offer a brief overview of the organization of the volume. We then report on the findings both in terms of observable outcomes and driving factors.

Why This Volume? Understanding the Existing Research

This volume is in “conversation” with several research strands, overlapping with some of their key concerns but also contributing a new perspective that is currently missing from them.

Most obviously, there exists a substantial body of research, largely informed by International Political Economy (IPE), on the EU’s new generation of trade agreements. Given the significant

departure that these agreements represent from their tariff-reduction-oriented predecessors, scholars have sought to account for that shift, what their primary aims are (partly due, as already noted, to the priorities set out in the Lisbon Treaty but also later documents such as the 2006 Global Europe Strategy statement, and, most recently, the 2021 Trade Policy Review), and the contestation that some have generated (see, for example, De Bièvre et al. 2020; Young 2017). A subset of these works has certainly considered standardizing principles as understood in this volume. Yet, those analyses share important limitations: They either focus on trade agreements with single trading partners (e.g., the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) or Japan) or partners in a particular region (e.g., North America or East Asia), or they consider single-issue areas (e.g., standards on labor rights or services). Such selective focus is reasonable if the objective is to illustrate how EU trade agreements have shifted toward substantive regulatory harmonization as a result of new ways of approaching market integration with external partners. It makes it difficult, however, to arrive at an overarching assessment of those agreements *based on what they actually contain* when it comes to standards across issues and trading partners.

This is especially so given that these works adopt different analytical perspectives and theoretical orientations. Many do not differentiate between soft and hard requirements, for example, while others largely ignore definitional standardization in favor of normative passages. Most do not appreciate the cultural dimensions of standardization. As such, though certainly useful as references, these works amount to a valuable but disparate and disconnected set of insights and data with only limited relevance for this volume. Simply put, when it comes to standardization within trade agreements, they cannot be weaved together into a coherent whole in general or given our objectives.

This volume speaks to a second strand in EU research: the EU's "normative" power in the world (see, for example, Lenz 2021; Neuman 2018; Poletti and Sicurelli 2018; Velluti and Martines 2020; Whitman 2011). In this literature, scholars have sought to identify, account for, and assess the impact of a number of high-level principles (such as democracy, good governance, and sustainable development) that the EU has over time advanced through a variety of means, such as foreign policy initiatives, the provision of international aid, influence over the institutional design of other trade blocs (e.g., MERCOSUR or the Southern African Development Community), enlargement to future member states, and trade itself. This is a rich and well-developed literature. Yet, we note that when trade agreements do appear in the analyses they do so as part of a broader consideration of the tools available to the EU (see, for example, Whitman 2011), or with a focus on specific issue areas, such as labor and human rights (see, for example, Manners 2009). This volume contributes to this research program by turning specifically and systematically to EU trade agreements and by subscribing to a more expansive concept of "normative" that includes much more than abstract and high-level principles of interest in this literature.

Third, this volume connects to the rather specialized literature on standardization and the EU. These works tend to subscribe to a rather narrow understanding of "standards" as involving mostly technical requirements for products or activities (see, for example, Bradford 2019; Drexler et al. 2014; Egan 2001; Eliantonio and Cauffman 2020; Van Leeuwen 2017). The focus, moreover, is on the EU's internal market or, in some cases, how the EU's internal standards indirectly influence corporations and other actors outside the EU because they must trade with the EU, or selected regions with which the EU trades. Our view is

that there is no inherent reason to limit the notion of “standard” to technical considerations. Statements setting acceptable or unacceptable behavior, for example (around discrimination based on gender for instance, or ethnic origins), or definitional statements on what is meant by “the right to strike” can certainly be viewed as setting standards. We also see considerable merit in broadening the analysis beyond the EU internal market and to trade agreements.

Returning to research on EU trade agreements, we note that large number of works have paid attention to what those texts might state on a wide range of policy areas—from the environment to finance, agriculture, and competition (see, for example, Ferraris 2020; Griller et al. 2017; Jordan and Gravey 2021; Papadopoulos 2010). While potentially relevant for this volume, these works tend to be siloed in their respective subject areas. Moreover, they are not easily comparable in terms of findings because they adopt different investigative approaches. Some, for example, certainly focus on regulation; others, however, may focus on other dimensions of those agreements, such as their broader links to the EU foreign policy goals or its officials’ discursive practices. It is difficult to draw overarching conclusions across these works when it comes to regulatory standardization.

In the broadest sense, this volume speaks to the various research strands on globalization and cultural, political, and economic convergence (see, for example, Meyer et al. 2021; Turner 2010; Holzer et al. 2015). These constitute the high-level “intellectual home” of this volume. Scholars have examined the general tendency toward homogeneity at the world level from many angles. A recent example is Yates and Murphy’s (2019) work on the spread of voluntary private standards in many industries across the globe since the late 1800s. Much attention is also devoted to power dynamics and which actors seem especially influential. Here, a good deal of research tries to assess the competition between US and the EU when it comes to standard settings around a wide variety of areas (e.g., the automotive industry in relation to the environment (Crippa et al. 2016), banking, or internet service providers). Such influence, scholars observe, may be direct or indirect. Instances of direct influence include the EU seeking to shape global regulatory bodies (Newman and Posner 2015). Indirect include cases of the “Brussels Effect” (Bradford 2020), whereby actors around the world embrace EU standards not because they are necessarily required to by law but, rather, because of the size of the EU market and the advantages of adopting EU standards in all their operations.

It is clear that some of these works on globalization and convergence focus on the EU itself as a driver of those processes (Fahey 2020). What is still missing, however, is an appreciation for the EU’s contribution via its trade agreements to such global convergence accompanied by a systematic in-depth analysis of those agreements (for an initial brief analysis, see Hoffmeister 2020). Again, this volume is thus unique in its sustained and pointed analysis of standardization in EU’s trade agreements. What has been the EU’s contribution? How extensive has it been, substantively and geographically? What can explain its patterns? *Standardizing the World* seeks to answers these questions with a clear analytical framework and methodical empirical assessment.

The Guiding Analytical Framework

We draw from economic sociology as our starting point. Economic sociologists have argued for some time that market exchanges, to occur, require an alignment among participants in the perceived characteristics of what is being traded. Goods, services, labor, and capital are not simply “there.” Markets are not “spontaneously generated by the exchange activity of buyers and sellers” (Abolafia 1996, 9). Instead, what is exchanged must be endowed with ascribed properties—from very specific ones around functionalities, for example, to more abstract ones such as “healthy,” “safe,” or “environmentally sustainable” (see, for example, Beardsworth and Bryman 1999; Brown 2011; Fourcade and Healy 2007; Spillman 1999). Sociologists thus refer to markets as being “embedded” in cultural, and then often institutional in informal or regulatory terms and/or contexts (Duina 2011; Granovetter 1985).

Historically, when it came to the expansion of trading routes or exchanges between distant societies, the process of alignment occurred gradually (Curtin 1984). Initial contacts became more permanent; trust was established, and a small volume of products was first exchanged. As mutual understandings grew, so did the exchanges, along with contracts that specified expectations more formally. In national economies, markets have been embedded in shared cultural and existing regulatory contexts that have evolved in fairly organic fashion over time. By contrast, the planned process of establishing integrated markets via trade agreements at the international level poses special challenges. Those agreements commit the partners, who typically subscribe to different perspectives on what is being traded, to deeper integration in short periods of time. Once agreement is reached on the economic goals, attention must necessarily go to those disparate perspectives (Duina 2007). How should those be addressed?

The explosion of regional trade agreements (RTAs) after the end of the Cold War shows the emergence of two distinct approaches (Duina 2016). In some cases, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, the member states have tried to rely on the principle of mutual recognition or, as with Association of Southeast Asian Nations, a combination of mutual recognition and extensive standardization through regulation. That route to market integration has proven successful but of course has been limited: Much that could be traded is not, since non-alignment, especially when significant, can act as a barrier. Put differently, many non-trading barriers have thus been left intact—a limitation experienced, we can note here, by the World Trade Organization (WTO) at a more global level over time given its focus on tariff-barriers and struggles to go beyond those.

By contrast, in many other cases the preferred approach has been one of significant standardization. Among the most prominent examples are the EU itself (with its push for the completion of the internal market starting in the 1980s) and then MERCOSUR and the Andean Common Market. Here, the participants have committed to deep levels of standardization through regulation, as scholars have documented in great detail, especially when it comes to the EU but also the other cases.

The EU’s pursuit of trade agreements across the globe represents the latest step in the expansion of markets. The EU has turned outward, seeking integration with potential partners across the world. This, as we have already observed, has come in the form of the “new generation” of trade

agreements (i.e., in deeper integration by way of standardization through regulation). The move is, of course, logical: Having essentially completed its own market integration through a good deal of standardization, the EU is seeking something similar, albeit not as comprehensive, with many of its trading partners. Given this, and in line with our sociological understanding of markets, a major challenge in this pursuit has been precisely that of standardization. What has been standardized across the EU's various trading agreements? And what seems to be driving the observable patterns?

The question, which by now should be clear, is more than a technical or legal one. At stake is the construction of worldviews—of ways of understanding and making sense of the world, and of aspirations about what should and should not happen in the world. The spotlight is on the articulation of what, in line with economic sociology, we would call elements of culture that concern the EU and its trading partners.

We note that this perspective on EU trade agreements is not only consistent with economic sociology's basic insights about markets but also echoes constructivist accounts in IPE of the constitution of actors and markets in the international arena. While realists assume pre-constituted and unitary actors and markets, constructivists see these as emergent and composite outcomes. Rather than taking them as "givens," constructivists recognize that they must be "built" (Katzenstein 1996, 4–6). Accordingly, their accounts pay considerable attention to the way norms, values, and cognitive processes interact and overlap with market and political processes (Jacobs et al. 2022).

With all this in mind, we specify below the two dimensions of standardization used in this volume for empirical investigation: definitional and normative standardization as present in trade agreements between the EU and its partners. We then identify a priori (based on existing paradigms in IPE, comparative politics, and sociology) a set of possible explanatory frameworks for the observable patterns. The contributors were asked to keep those in mind in their work, so as to subscribe at least at the start to similar disciplinary and analytical concepts in their analysis in order to enable fruitful comparisons across the findings.

Standardization

"Standardization" is the core object of our interest. Specifically, drawing from our earlier work (Duina 2006), by standardization we mean the presence in the relevant EU trade agreements of two sorts of passages. The first are those passages that state something *definitional* about objects/things (e.g., "green energy," "monopoly," "human rights," "fresh fish"), processes/actions (e.g., "investing," "discriminating," "data streaming"), or actors (e.g., "driver," "doctor," "farmer"). This means that those passages specify something about the essential qualities of those objects/things, processes/actions, or actors. This can include listing key ingredients or components, purposes, origins, and other such defining factors.

The second are those passages that state something *normative* about the world: desired practices/outcomes (e.g., pollution thresholds, maximum hours worked, admissible pesticides, required safety features) or unacceptable practices/outcomes (e.g., unfair use of consumer data,

racism, abusive market practices). Rather than describing aspects of the world, therefore, these passages describe how the world should be.

By “standards,” we therefore mean anything from a very specific set of technical requirements to statements about very high-level matters. Standards can apply to many aspects of “reality,” and we are looking to see, ultimately given all that we can observe, what “worldviews” are emerging in EU trade agreements. We are interested, then, in understanding what is being standardized (definitionally and normatively) and, given that, the content of that standardization.

Three additional specifications are in order. First, while our attention is squarely on mandatory or binding passages, we recognize that trade agreements often include aspirational passages (both definitional and, more often, normative). To the extent that these seem worthy of note because of what one day may follow, for instance, or because they help contextualize (and thus better grasp) the mandatory passages, it seems useful to consider them in our analyses.

Second, we understand that texts can vary from very explicit to implicit. Certain perspectives—especially normative ones—can be advanced indirectly, perhaps less powerfully so, as a way to introduce them into the framework of what is important. Again, we wish to be sensitive to this and capture, when it seems consequential, implicit statements.

Third, the spotlight is on the standardizing content of EU trade agreements and not on the question of how those passages are implemented in practice. Implementation can, of course, vary a great deal and, as a subject matter, connects to the rich literature on compliance with EU law as well as international law. As we discuss in our concluding chapter, the issue should certainly inform future research efforts.

Explaining the Patterns

We wish to explain why standardization looks as it does across EU trade agreements, including if the EU has failed to advance its views. We stress that, while we have described the outcomes of interest in sociological and constructivist terms, we recognize that *multiple causal pathways* are certainly at work in influencing the observable patterns of standardization. Thus, we identified, a priori, for our contributors a varied set of possible frameworks in which to “house” or ground their explanations. The frameworks drew from basic insights in IPE, comparative politics, and sociology about causal dynamics in economic and political life, and international trade more specifically (see, for example, Allee and Elsig 2019; Buonanno 2017; Dür 2019; Gamsö and Postnikov 2021; Lechner and Spilker 2021; Milner and Mansfield 2012).

This was in no way intended to constrain what the contributors would discover and argue but was instead meant to provide them with shared analytical terms and tools that hopefully were useful and enable them to categorize their explanations in ways that we, the editors (and ultimately, the readers), could then connect. Put differently, we wanted to ensure the contributors used, to the extent possible, a similar social scientific language in their investigations. With that said, we also engaged in early conversations with the contributors themselves to gather what they thought might

be especially important causal factors given their expertise and knowledge. This helped us refine the articulation of the guiding explanatory frameworks.

We identified five such frameworks:

1. Rational choice/political economy frameworks, with attention to the interests of especially powerful economic or political actors in the EU and its trading partners. Here, the preferences of powerful business groups are often seen as shaping outcomes. Explanatory power is also assigned to national political leaders and officials in the EU and its trading partners who are able to take positions that are consistently reflective of their constituents' economic or geopolitical interests.
2. Frameworks that focus on the political dynamics and power asymmetries *between* the EU and its trading partners. Here, attention goes to market-size differences, collective action problems, the available resources for bargaining, and various dependencies on the EU (from aid to the possibility of accession).
3. Frameworks that see institutional contexts as especially important: Drawing from historical and sociological institutionalism, neo-functionalism, and related traditions, these explanations put a premium on legacies, path dependencies, bargaining rules and structures, modes of representation, regulatory contexts, and the linkages between issue area. The focus is less on interests or intentions, and more on structural and temporal dimensions.
4. Frameworks that emphasize the impact of interest groups and other civil society actors, who may operate internationally or at more local levels.
5. Cultural and identity-driven accounts: Values, norms, discursive frames, myths, and other such factors are presented as independent causal variables that influence what actors want and how they pursue their goals.

Importantly, these explanatory frameworks not only focus on distinct causal factors but also point to the different levels at which they are at work: the transnational, national, and subnational. In one case, for instance, attention might go to the balance of power between the EU and the trading partner, while in another case it might turn to the relevance of certain food traditions in particular countries or regions. This is to be expected: The process of “construction” is complex, multi-faceted, and even messy. It proceeds according to multiple logics and at different levels from the local to the international.

The Organization of This Volume

What follows are ten chapters from many leading scholars from across the world. Each chapter offers answers to the two driving questions of this volume: What has been standardized? What explains the observable outcomes? Throughout, special attention goes to what the answers reveal

about the EU's ability to project its interests onto the world. Has the EU been able to standardize the world according to its preferences?

Given this, the first five chapters (Part 1) are substantively focused. They examine the EU's standardizing efforts in some of the most important issue areas across a large number of trade agreements: agriculture and food quality, services, rule of law and anti-corruption, investments, labor rights, and the environment. The analyses reveal broad outcomes in those issue areas as well as the possible drivers of those outcomes.

The subsequent five chapters (Part 2) are geographically focused. The spotlight is aimed at EU agreements with major trading partners: the US, Canada, MERCOSUR, Japan, South Korea, and India. Smaller trading partners are also considered, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. These chapters allow for more in-depth analyses of outcomes given any one trading partner, as well as for the possibility of comparisons across trading partners—in terms of factors such as developing and developed economies, market sizes, and different political economies. Some cases also allow for consideration of policy areas (e.g., intellectual property rights (IPR), public procurement, the auto industry, rules of origin) not highlighted in the first chapters.

We discuss the main findings from these analyses in the following section. A concluding chapter reflects on the implications of these findings for future trade agreements, the EU's place in the world, and lines of future research.

The Main Findings

Let us consider the observable outcomes first and then causality.

Outcomes

We identify here four primary outcomes.

The *first* is that the EU has, indeed, used trade agreements to advance standardizing material in a variety of policy areas. Sometimes this has been done in reference to standards found in the WTO's, International Labour Organization's (ILO), World Health Organization's (WHO), and other international organizations' materials. But, in many cases, we also see an expansion beyond international standards or a more original process of articulation that does not "take off" from those international standards. The result has been the articulation of new definitional and normative content. We observe this not only across policy areas but also with different types of trading partners in terms of economic development, market size, and political economies.

Our contributors present highly detailed data in their chapters. We highlight here some of the most important findings:

- **Services:** Sieber-Gasser (Ch. 2) reports that the EU has ratified 20 preferential trade agreements (PTAs) across the world covering services between 2000 and 2021, a period

where it gained near-exclusive competence in this area thanks in part to the 2017 Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)'s Singapore Opinion. The pattern has been to include the definitional and normative materials found in the Trade in Services Agreement (an initiative launched in 2013 by a subgroup of WTO members now with over twenty members, including the EU, with the hope of turning it into a WTO agreement for all members) but also, as Sieber-Gasser puts it, to go cautiously beyond it.

- This has happened in various aspects of services. The PTAs offer definitions, for example, of new services that did not exist at the time of previous WTO agreements in areas such as e-commerce and computer services, services and services-related economic activities, “cross-border services trade,” the establishment or investment, and the temporary presence of natural persons for business purposes. The PTAs offer new normative notions around electronic communication services and internet-related services more generally. By contrast, areas such as sustainability in services and culture-related services are not covered in the PTAs.
- **Investments:** As Polanco (Ch. 4) reports, post-TTIP negotiations the EU—with its increasing, though not exclusive, competence in this area—has entered into a growing number of PTAs with EU-driven content on investment liberalization and on investment protection. Previous agreements in the 2010s did not have such scope. Among other things, important principles now recognize the category of investments as different than services and extend equal treatment rights to foreign investors.
- **Geographic Indications (GIs) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures around Food Safety, Animal Health, and Plant Health:** Alons (Ch. 1) writes that EU trade agreements contain definitional and above all normative principles that go beyond WTO baselines and reflect EU internal standards, which, among other things, treat GIs as a class of intellectual property. This can be seen in the agreement with Japan but also those with MERCOSUR and Canada, and especially around GIs. When it comes to food safety (such as around genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and hormones), the agreements with Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and MERCOSUR point to considerably more limited alignment with EU normative standardization preferences. Those preferences entail an understanding of consumer rights and food quality as deeply related to the rejection of GMOs, hormones, and other practices that are seen as potentially harmful.
- **Rule of Law (RoL) and anti-corruption with developing countries:** Rabinovych (Ch. 3) reports that the EU has projected internal principles (as articulated in a 2004 Commission Framework statement as later reinforced by the CJEU) onto trade agreements with a large number of developing countries across the globe. These principles translate into definitional and normative standards around transparency, non-discrimination, accountability, legal certainty, and judicial independence.
- **Labor and environment:** Both Postnikov (Ch. 5) and Sicurelli (Ch. 8) present evidence of considerable standardization in labor and the environment. Grübler (Ch. 9) also notes the overall commitment to sustainable development in EU FTAs with East Asian

economies (Korea, Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam). While the EU has employed mostly (but not only) the ILO's standards when it comes to labor, it has secured more stringent and pronounced standards in the case of the environment since the Global Europe Strategy of 2006. Biofuels, fisheries, biodiversity, and forestry are examples.

- **Trade facilitation and IPR:** The EU-MERCOSUR agreement, finalized after negotiations stretching over two decades, contains extensive provisions on trade facilitation and IPR. Bianculli (Ch. 7) observes that on trade facilitation the agreement relies on established international standards (e.g., the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and the International Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System). This is something that Grübler (Ch. 9) notes as well in relation to EU agreements with East Asian economies, whereby the parties agree to follow the standards set by the World Customs Organization. Importantly, though, the MERCOSUR agreement also articulates notions around transparency, good practices, and the need for consultation with business communities that—though consistent with preexisting international principles—represent novel specific articulations.
- **Rules of Origin:** Grübler (Ch. 9) finds that the EU-Japan chapter on rules of origins makes no referral to WTO agreements on the matter. Instead, it is rich with definitions for terms as basic as exporter, importer, material, product, and production in order to then elaborate articles on requirements for originating products and their sophisticated technical specifications (e.g., for wholly obtained products, insufficient processing of goods, or the treatment of packaging materials).
- **Intellectual Property:** In relation to IPR and especially patents, Bianculli (Ch. 7) writes that the EU-MERCOSUR agreement leverages existing WTO and WHO principles. In the case of patents, it encourages (thus in non-binding fashion) further regulatory compliance and commitments that are consistent with, but also extend beyond, international principles as set in the Patent Cooperation Treaty. Importantly, the agreement also articulates principles around GIs that cannot be reduced to existing international standards. In addition, the text expresses a commitment to social and economic welfare, and the advancement of the public interest. Thus, when it comes to IPR, the EU-MERCOSUR agreement includes new standardizing material worthy of note.
- **Digital Commerce and Auto:** Turning to East and Southeast Asia, Grübler (Ch. 9) observes that agreements with Japan and Korea not only build significantly from existing international standards and the work of standard-setting bodies when it comes to the auto industry but also lay the groundwork for additional standardization (e.g., around safety and with the aspiration of influencing global standards). In the case of digital commerce, aspirations for future and novel standardization are asserted in agreements with Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Singapore (e.g., in relation to the liability of intermediary service providers, intellectual property, and electronic government). Moreover, with Japan in particular, the principle of technological neutrality in e-commerce is recognized as important. It also contains normative notions on topics that are featuring in plurilateral negotiations at the WTO, such as access to source code, electronic contracts, e-signatures, and unsolicited commercial electronic messages. Thus, regarding digital commerce

specifically, though specific standards have yet to be really agreed upon, the groundwork appears set for future work and output.

- **Procurement:** In relation to the EU-Japan agreement, Grübler (Ch. 9) mentions government procurement as an example where the level playing field of WTO agreements is extended to a greater number of goods, services, and institutions to include central and subcentral government authorities, bodies governed by public law (such as universities and hospitals), additional services, and the transport sector.

Taken together, the evidence suggests considerable and original standardizing content in EU trade agreement. Importantly, some of the contributors point to an additional trend—one that suggests an “amplification” of the relevance of those agreements well beyond trade among the partners onto other agreements among other partners or in multilateral settings. This is the case for labor and environmental standards as well as investments, and it is the stated ambition in the auto industry and digital commerce (Postnikov, Ch. 5; Polanco, Ch. 4; and Grübler, Ch. 9). This is reminiscent of the “Brussels Effect,” but, in this case, with the baseline being EU trade agreements with other partners (rather than the EU’s internal rules) and the adopting actors being non-EU partners entering into agreements amongst themselves.

In addition, at least in the case of services (Sieber-Gasser, Ch. 2), the resulting standardization in EU trade agreements has actually enabled the EU to introduce measures within its internal market that for various reasons (including a lack of competence internally) the EU has not been able to advance. A similar point can probably be made around investments (Polanco, Ch. 4): An active EU on the international stage has offered opportunities for further EU internal regulatory consolidation in an area where competency has been contested with the member states.

The *second* central finding is that the standardizing material in EU’s trade agreements has particular characteristics. Most obviously, it is often highly granular and specific. In line with the expectations of economic sociology, definitionally the objective is clearly to identify, categorize, and ascribe the key properties of objects, processes, and actors—often in those areas left vague or untouched by existing international arrangements for various reasons, not least of which is the fact that certain industries or sectors are rapidly evolving due to technological innovations. In the same vein, normatively, while high order principles are frequently present, we also see the articulation of specific parameters for desired or inadmissible practices and outcomes. The EU, along with its partners, has explicitly recognized the need to produce for market participants detailed blueprints for the world that ultimately facilitate—and indeed, in many cases make possible—economic exchanges. The world must be defined, and behavior guided, for international markets to deepen.

In addition, especially when the content is a projection of the EU’s existing internal regulatory or otherwise stated approaches to market liberalization, we observe a tendency toward a measured and socially minded approach to trade and capitalist markets. This is in contrast to what might be viewed as a more direct neoliberal approach. Examples include RoL and anti-corruption measures (present in broad terms already in the TEU and later echoed in the Commission’s 2015 Trade for All Strategy) and RoL principles with developing countries (Rabinovych, Ch. 3), standards for digital trade and emerging technologies with a view to ensuring high levels of consumer protection (Grübler, Ch. 9), sustainability standards in general and as set out in 2009 with the Renewable

Energy Directive and the case of biofuels (and its links to palm oil and deforestation) (Postnikov, Ch. 5; Sicurelli, Ch. 8), and a whole host of labor standards (Postnikov, Ch. 5).

Such characterization of the standardizing material in EU trade agreements deserves qualification. Some might view it as consistent with neoliberal objectives, in so far as the material might be seen as a tool to ensure market access to the benefit of EU businesses, and to protect domestic interests from otherwise more competitive foreign businesses or ones that might challenge existing domestic standards. The EU wants its trading partners to be ultimately attractive in economic terms, and this cannot happen when corruption, for instance, or poor environmental practices are widespread, or when opening its markets to products that might undermine current food or health standards. If so, we could describe this standardizing material as serving market-making liberalization ends—not unlike the apparently more technical standardizing material in other areas, and, according to some, the entire EU internal market project itself (Jacobs et al. 2022).

Third, the chapters ahead show that while the EU is quite successful at advancing its views, in several cases—both across policy areas or when it comes to specific partners—the results speak to compromises or even failures to reach agreement. Important examples include the following:

- The US and Canada: The EU has achieved very little in terms of standardization when it comes to transatlantic trade. As De Ville (Ch. 6) observes, early ambitions at standardization with the US with TTIP were quickly abandoned. Mutual recognition was instead pursued—with that, too, ultimately failing. The less ambitious CETA with Canada, which does include provision for potential future standardization, proved more palatable. The EU and US have now set up the Trade and Technology Council, with the hope of developing standards together for future services and products.
- GIs and food safety: As Alons (Ch. 1) writes, with CETA over 1,000 existing EU GIs have been permanently excluded from future consideration. Only 173 EU GIs were included. With Japan and MERCOSUR additions are allowed but only after consultations and mutual agreement. Most consequentially perhaps, GIs and food safety were primary causes (along with investor protector clauses) for the failure to reach a deal (TTIP) with the most important trading partner in the world: the US.
- Procurement and human rights with India: As Khorana (Ch. 10) reports, negotiations with India collapsed around public procurement and human rights. While the EU pushed for principles in those areas, India resisted. Ultimately, the entire agreement project was shelved.
- Sustainable biofuels: While the EU secured standards with Vietnam, it failed with Malaysia and Indonesia (Sicurelli, Ch. 8).

Importantly, as the above data points suggest, such mixed or negative outcomes have happened not only with partners of considerable economic size or geopolitical relevance but developing countries with limited resources can clearly also shape outcomes. The EU has standardizing powers yet experiences obstacles as well.

Fourth, we observe that even in cases where the EU shows considerable success, the resulting outcomes do not always amount to a consistent pattern. This contrasts with the consistency we can see in some areas, such as services, where, regardless of trading partner, most EU free trade agreements follow a similar blueprint (Sieber-Gasser, Ch. 2).

In the case of RoL, the EU has, for instance, pursued different standardizing objectives (Rabinovych, Ch. 3). Investments offer a second clear example: After 2010, we see a general move toward protection of investments and a definitional split between the right to establishment and capital movement. However, differences abound across agreements. Consider investor protection. CETA provides protection, but the agreement with Japan and others (including the EU-Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States Partnership Agreement initiated on April 15, 2021, as a replacement for the Cotonou Agreement) do not (Polanco, Ch. 4). Similar variations appear in terms of investor dispute settlement mechanisms, where we see them missing in the case of China (Agreement in Principle with China—the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment—made public in January 2021). The automotive industry offers a further example: Very detailed streamlined standardization is pursued but is applicable to a substantially varying product space across trading partners (Grübler, Ch. 9).

To this, we can add that the EU has systematically excluded, a priori and not because of failed negotiations, from trade agreements certain industry sectors. Services (Sieber-Gasser, Ch. 2) offer an illustration: audio-visual services (themselves often related to cultural material), health services, and education services are not covered in the PTAs. This is less a matter of consistency in terms of content across PTAs and is more one of whether the EU has in fact sought to standardize in a particular subject area.

Overall, the picture that emerges is one of a sustained effort towards standardization that is, however, still in process, given the partial successes and multiplicities of substantive outcomes. We should hence resist the temptation to attribute to the EU a single, coordinated intentionality. We will turn to the question of whether it may be attainable in the future in the Conclusion.

Explanations

What might explain the observable patterns? Are there certain kinds of explanatory frameworks that appear to be especially important? We are interested in accounting for the presence and specific characteristics of the standardizing principles, the varying extent to which the EU manages to assert itself, and the unevenness in consistency in the EU's preferred outcomes as we move across cases and time. To varying degrees, all five causal frameworks identified earlier in this chapter have explanatory power.

Several chapters point to various *institutional* factors as particularly relevant. We consider each institutional factor in turn.

Path dependency and neo-functionalist dynamics appear especially important. These sorts of explanation shed valuable light on the growth on standardizing material while also allowing for

more open-ended substantive outcomes: They are more revealing about the impetus and opportunities for more standardization than the specific content it takes.

Rabinovych (Ch. 3) argues as much when considering standardizing principles around RoL and anti-corruption in EU agreements with developing countries. The new generation of trade liberalization expands beyond goods to areas such public procurement and financial markets. This, logically, spills over into the RoL anti-corruption domains—with subnational actors mobilizing to lobby for good principles in trade agreements (we return to this point later on when discussing interest groups). The result is a considerable amount of definitional standardization. Evidence comes from RTAs with developing countries, from Vietnam to the EU-Central America Trade Agreement, to Ukraine.

Polanco (Ch. 4), in turn, discusses an unintended spillover effect caused by the Maastricht Treaty, which established a common external capital regime governing capital flows between the member states and third countries. This gave the EU a shared competence to regulate investment market access, even when member states had expressed opposition to the idea beforehand. In a similar vein, Bianculli (Ch. 7) observes that standardization around trade liberalization rules in the EU-MERCOSUR agreement cannot be understood without appreciating the fact that it emerged from twenty years of negotiations. She describes processes of socialization, communication, persuasion, and learning-by-doing whereby earlier steps informed later ones. Inertia built and eventually the negotiators were able to agree on a number of standardizing principles.

Institutional factors also include internal EU constitutional and regulatory tendencies and shifts that open the way for standardization in trade deals with external partners and also explain some of its specific content and consistency. Polanco (Ch. 4) offers examples in the area of investments, where increased EU competency has allowed the EU to move forward with standardizing material that it deems necessary for trade liberalization. Postnikov (Ch. 5), in parallel, points to the Commission's ability to limit, via its organizational design (and in a path-dependent fashion), the influence of civil society actors when it comes to labor and environmental standards. DG Trade has had considerable latitude to advance particular visions in tune with business interests.

In the case of services, Sieber-Gasser (Ch. 2), rather counterintuitively at first, suggests that the EU's limited competence to regulate services internally has prompted it to move forward externally with noteworthy substantive consistency (at least in part to eventually turn inward and have a conceptual road map). Thus, she notes, EU trade agreements look remarkably similar in their definitional and normative standards regardless of trading partners, market size, or other factors. At the same time, she writes that the EU has held back from standardization in certain areas, such as audiovisual and education, because of entrenched national protectionism within the EU. Polanco noted something similar when it comes to investments.

Still on the institutional front, Alons (Ch. 1) views regulatory “gaps” on GIs between the EU and its trading partners as limiting what the EU has managed to project onto its trading agreements. The bigger the gaps, the less the EU has attained. More GIs could thus be protected with MERCOSUR and Japan than with CETA.

Similarly, in the case of India and public procurement, Khorana (Ch. 10) describes that country's multi-layered and fragmented regulatory and administrative environment as making any agreement with the EU very difficult. To that, she adds that procurement was in any event essentially closed to foreign competition until recently. Regulatory "gaps" also figure in Sicurelli's account (Ch. 8) on sustainable biofuels. The EU's limited influence on that front is partly due to the perception, among some trading partners, of questionable scientific legitimacy and suspicions of protectionism as driving forces of standardizing priorities that have no equivalents in those partners.

A final institutional factor is the presence or absence of international standards in any given area. We see that international standards already in place can serve as the core or the basis for eventual agreements. The cases of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement serving as the basis for EU-MERCOSUR (Bianculli, Ch. 7) is one example, as are United Nations regulations on motor vehicles in CETA and FTAs with East Asian economies (De Ville, Ch. 6; Grübler, Ch. 9). While the EU may have been influential in shaping those international standards in the first place, their existence appears to serve as a ready-to-take model that the EU (and its trading partners) can find convenient to use. At the same time, the case of services (Sieber-Gasser, Ch. 2) suggests that when relatively little exists internationally (because of factors such as the relevance of that sector for global trade, or the difficulty associated with regulating matters), the EU may be limited in its aspirations with its partners. With this said, it is also the case that the EU may also take advantage of that absence by taking the initiative, as has happened in the emerging area of digital trade.

Our contributors highlight, in turn, the importance of *political economy*. Most prominently, business interests, including in developing countries, play a role in shaping the amount and content of standardization. We see this with GIs and Southern European producers (Alons, Ch. 1; Bianculli, Ch. 7), biofuels in Malaysia and Indonesia (Sicurelli, Ch. 8), MERCOSUR over trade facilitation (Bianculli, Ch. 7) and the protection of domestic providers when it comes to procurement in India (Khorana, Ch. 10). Regarding India, for example, the fact that government procurement comprises 30 percent of India's gross domestic product is of enormous importance, as is the fact that that market was essentially closed to foreign providers through the late 2000s, even as the EU began negotiations with India. Such interests can significantly shape the extent and content of standardization.

Asymmetries of power must in turn always be taken into consideration. The chapters show that the EU gets a good deal of what it wants especially when it comes to aid-dependent countries (Rabinovych, Ch. 3), countries hoping to join the EU (Rabinovych, Ch. 3), and to some extent economically weaker partners such as MERCOSUR, though often by having to offer something in return (as we explain in the next paragraph) (Bianculli, Ch. 7). By contrast it can fail when dealing with stronger countries who might have divergent perspectives. These include the US around most issues (with whom the initial attempt to pursue regulatory convergence set the negotiations up for failure, as De Ville writes in Ch. 6), autocratic partners like China and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Rabinovych, Ch. 3), Canada with CETA and GIs limits (Alons, Ch. 1, though some were secured, as De Ville, Ch. 6, notes while pointing out as well that Canada was the weaker negotiator at the table given its smaller economic size), and India to a good extent in relation to procurements (Khorana, Ch. 10).

But our contributors report surprises too. The EU does not always get its way with developing or weaker countries. On sustainable biofuels, Sicurelli (Ch. 8) writes that while the EU secured its preferred standards with Vietnam, it did not with Indonesia and Malaysia. With MERCOSUR, a compromise was struck around IPR—and was indeed explicitly mentioned in the texts themselves. Specifically, the EU agreed to yield when it came to patents, with MERCOSUR negotiators pushing (based on a consensus between the member states, the business sector, and civil society) for what they thought was an important public health matter (Bianculli, Ch. 7). Those outcomes are thus explained by different causal factors—above all political economy ones, such as the strength of the relevant business interests, what else might be on the table, and the low dependence on the EU for exports.

The EU is continuously evolving, growing in reach and taking more pronounced and public steps to articulate what it stands for. Values, norms, discursive frames, and myths inform and advance that process. The EU has strong elements of *culture* and *identity*. Our contributors stress that these have shaped the standardization found in its trade agreements. Hence, Rabinovych (Ch. 3) highlights the relevance of the “power through trade” idea, as set out in the Commission’s 2015 Trade for All Strategy, as especially important for normative standardization. The EU’s overall successful push so far for good governance and human rights in its trade agreements can be directly linked to those visions. Sicurelli (Ch. 8) notes something similar when it comes to sustainable energy: Many scholars have linked the EU’s “green” objectives to an internal understanding of environmentalism and managed economic growth. When assessing the regulatory depth of the EU-MERCOSUR agreement, Bianculli (Ch. 7) assigns causal relevance to the ideas expressed in the EU’s Global Europe Strategy and its earlier foundations. In the context of FTAs with East Asian countries, the EU stresses the designation of “like-minded” partners, repeatedly underlining shared normative values such as consumer protection and safe and ethical use of emerging technologies (Grübler, Ch. 9).

Relatedly, the EU’s approach to GIs is deeply rooted in longstanding farming and food traditions of its southern member states, as Alons (Ch. 1) argues. It is impossible to understand the existentialist position of the EU vis-à-vis Canada and the US around GIs—but also GMOs and other food matters—without an appreciation for their cultural significance, and long history of importance to the EU itself over time. They have become in part a symbol of what the EU in a global world is. This is why they jeopardized an agreement with the US despite their relatively minor economic significance and why the EU sought to secure some concessions around GIs with Canada (Alons, Ch. 1; De Ville, Ch. 6).

Our contributors point to some degree of influence by *interest groups* and *civil society*. Specifically, consistent with neo-functionalism expectations, spillover dynamics have invited democracy-oriented actors to pressure the EU for RoL and anti-corruption measures (Rabinovych, Ch. 3). TTIP’s failure and various CETA’s features around investor rights and food were, in turn, considerably affected by the mobilization of interest groups and civil society (Alons, Ch. 1; De Ville, Ch. 6). Bianculli (Ch. 7) notes in turn the relevance of non-governmental organizations when it comes to MERCOSUR and pressuring the EU on patents.

Multiple factors, then, shape outcomes. These factors are obviously distinguishable from each other in terms of the sorts of actors and dynamics that they point to. But close analysis also suggests

that they differ in term of whether they see causality at work at the *subnational, national, regional, or international levels*. Explanations that emphasize power asymmetries between the EU and its trading partners are global/international in nature, for instance, as are those explanations highlighting the centrality of WTO or other international organizations' standards. Those that point to the EU's effort to craft an identity and sets of values are more regionally focused. But nations are also depicted at times as being particularly impactful. Southern European countries, for instance, have been the driving force behind the EU's GIs regime.

Yet, the subnational can also be highly relevant: Business groups, interest groups, and civil society actors mobilize sometimes within, and influence the position of, an EU member state or that of its trading partners. Subnational administrations may have distinct regulatory powers and contexts, along with control over markets in certain sectors—as we saw in India and the public procurement sector. If correct, all this suggests that we must also view the standardizing outcomes of EU trade agreements, while themselves existing at the *international level*, as reflective of forces that extend from the global to the rather *local levels*.

Taken together, the findings paint a picture of a dynamic EU that is nonetheless not always consistent or successful. Multiple causal factors are at work, complicating the picture and precluding easy predictions. We are, of course, still in the early phases of the new generation of trade agreements, and it may seem reasonable to expect the EU to continue pushing for standardization in future agreements. But perhaps other approaches may prove attractive too, including unilateral standardization by the EU with the expectations that business and other actors will comply. Overall, the findings thus raise questions about the future of multilateral trade, competition with other standard setters such as the US and China, the EU's own future interest and abilities to pursue standardization, the design of trade agreements among non-EU countries, and more. We turn to these points in the concluding chapter.

Notes

1. For an updated list of the EU's current trade agreements (including those being negotiated or awaiting adoption/ratification), see https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/negotiations-and-agreements/#_in-place.

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