



Assessing the prize winner six months on from the EU's Nobel Peace Award: a bad joke or a richly deserved accolade in times of crisis?

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Assessing the prize winner six months on from the EU's Nobel Peace Award: a bad joke or a richly deserved accolade in times of crisis?

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On the 10th of December 2012, the Nobel Peace Prize 2012 was awarded to the European Union for contributing to "the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe" for over six decades ("The Nobel Peace Prize 2012: European Union (EU)", 2012). The purpose of this essay is to review recent discussions as to whether the EU's Nobel Peace Prize was a richly-deserved accolade or just a bad joke in times of crisis. Firstly, a brief overview of the historical development of the European Union will be given. Secondly, the EU's contribution to world peace will be looked at. Thirdly, its foreign policy will be examined and lastly, present challenges the Union is facing will be discussed. Considering the arguments for and against the EU's Nobel Peace Award, the hypothesis of this essay states that the European Union has deserved the award for its long-term role in uniting Europe and its past and present peacekeeping ambitions.

First of all, in order to evaluate whether the EU has deserved the Nobel Peace Prize, the criteria of the award need to be identified. As stated in Alfred Nobel's will, the award should be dedicated to "the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses" ("Facts on the Nobel Peace Prize", 2013). Since 1901, the Nobel Peace Prize has not only been rewarded to individuals but also to various organisations, such as the European Union for its successful struggle for peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights ("Nobel Peace Prize 2012", 2012).

According to Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, the Nobel Peace Prize recognises the EU as the "biggest peace-making institution ever created" ("Nobel Peace Prize 2012", 2012). In order to evaluate the Union's long-term contribution to peace and prosperity, its historical establishment needs to be briefly examined. Starting on the 9th of May in 1950, when the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed the pooling of the coal and steel production, the first step towards a lasting union among the people of Europe was taken. The establishment of the supranational European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) followed in 1951, an organisation consisting of the six European countries, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Italy (Dedman, 2010), and which was

designed to "turn raw materials of war into instruments of joint prosperity and enduring peace" (Patrick, 2012). With the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the European Economic Community (EEC) emerged. In 1986, member states agreed on the Single Market and the deepening of a greater economic union in the Single European Act (SEA) and with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the European Union (EU) was established. The idea behind the Union was that if people and governments from different countries worked together, the chances of peace could be improved (Smith, 2012). With the single currency, the euro, coming into operation in 1999, a further major step towards a deeper European integration was taken. In addition, since the 1970s, the Union has expanded through the accession of new member states. These enlargements have played a crucial role in greater integration of Europe by peaceful means and have provided an exceptional opportunity to promote political stability and economic prosperity in Europe (Archik, 2013, p.1).

Supporting the hypothesis of this essay that the EU has richly deserved the Nobel Peace Prize, three main aspects of the EU's contribution to world peace need to be considered. As defined by Patrick (2012) the first significant achievement is certainly the continuing cooperation between France and Germany. Since the Schuman Plan to pool the coal and steel production, war between the two countries has not only been made unthinkable but also materially impossible (Bache, George, Bulmer, 2011, p. 92). Both countries have emerged as vital motors in European integration.

Enlargement as the second contribution to the achievement of world peace is also of high importance as expanding the boundaries of the Union seems to significantly enhance the stability of peace and relative prosperity in Europe (Patrick, 2012). Generally, an interdependent world can be described as a "zone of peace" as shared interests ease the conflict management at an early stage of dispute or even potential war (Väyrynen, 2004). In the 1980s, Greece, Spain and Portugal joined the EEC and since the end of the Cold War, the European Union has expanded from 12 to the current 27 members. Hence, the EU turned former authoritarian and communist states in Europe into democracies. As nowadays the EU is comprised of most of the European continent, the emergence of another devastating war can be considered as practically impossible (Berman, 2012).

The third aspect to be stressed is the EU's significant role as an example of and a driving force for peace on a global level. The Union has played a crucial part in aiming to overcome historical hostilities and cultural and ethnic varieties of sovereign states, without them losing

their own national identities, but pursuing common perspectives (Patrick, 2012). Given these points, regarding the EU's historical contribution to peace and prosperity, the criteria of the Nobel Peace Prize have been met as the European Union has done significant work for the fraternity between nations and the promotion of peace congresses. What the EU has achieved so far can be summarised in three main points: the long-standing peace between former hostile nations who fought many destructive wars on the continent, including two world wars; the establishment of lasting freedom, justice and democracy for 500 million people; and the creation of a political system that brings people together across their national borders in a supranational community and through the sharing of sovereignty ("Viewpoint", 2012).

Not only has the European Union achieved significant developments within its borders but also, as indicated by Tonra (2006, p.130), it has tremendous potential as a global actor. The EU's foreign and security policy plays an important role in preserving peace and strengthening international security, developing and consolidating democracy, promoting international cooperation, respecting international human rights and the fundamental freedoms and the rule of law ("Foreign and Security Policy", 2013). Under its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) the Union has mainly been successful with its peacekeeping missions to various trouble spots in the world. Over the years, the role of the EU as a security player has been expanded as events such as the Arab Spring in 2011 have shown. Having re-launched its European neighbourhood policy, the Union supports countries in the Middle East, such as Tunisia with the transition to democracy and with the restart of their economies ("Foreign and Security Policy", 2013). Of great significance is the fact that the Union does not have a standing army. Referring to the Nobel Peace Prize criterion, which emphasises the abolition of standing armies in order to deserve the award, the EU certainly meets this principle ("Facts on the Nobel Peace Prize", 2013).

Nonetheless, the European Union has also been criticised in terms of the effectiveness of its foreign policy. According to Dedman (2010), since its inability to limit or even prevent the mayhem in the Western Balkans in the early 1990s, the Union has not been very successful at peace-making. However, its ambitions in peacekeeping, as seen in Bosnia for instance, have been more effective. Furthermore, the role of the EU as a powerful lobby in promoting human rights worldwide should also not be forgotten, for instance the support of the rights of ethnic minorities such as those of the Roma in Europe (Patrick, 2012). All in all, considering its foreign and security policy ambitions, it can be argued that the EU has deserved the Nobel Peace Prize.

However, the announcement of the Nobel Peace Prize in October 2012 also caused great surprise and controversy internationally regarding the Union's immense problems within (Smith, 2012). The financial crisis that struck economies worldwide in 2008 brought into question the effectiveness of the Eurozone as states struggled to find appropriate economic and monetary instruments in order to respond to this crisis (Bache, George & Bulmer, 2011, p.216). The current inability to resolve the Eurozone's sovereign debt crisis by creating a greater union is dividing the 27 member states of the European Union, with the creditors on the one side and the debtors on the other ("Beyond the Crisis", 2013). Hence, this international crisis which firstly started as solely financial, has developed into an economic, social and political crisis in the European Union (Thies, 2012, p.225).

At the moment the European continent seems to be facing the problem of a "Bermuda Triangle" of debt, a demographic challenge of an ageing and shrinking population and weak economic growth (Thies, 2012, p.226). Eurosceptics, peace activists and former winners of the Nobel Peace Prize in particular have questioned the efficiency of current EU policies and hence, see the Nobel Peace Award rather as a bad joke. They argue that the record unemployment and the harsh austerity measures that are supported by most European institutions, cause serious social tensions in certain member states ("EU collects Nobel Peace Prize", 2012). Especially over the last few years, various kinds of violent expressions of hostility towards recent developments in the EU have taken place, such as resentment of anti-austerity, anti-government riots in Greece or violent actions of right-wing extremists against immigrants in Germany (Smith, 2012). In particular, the emergence of right-wing populist parties in Europe underlines the rising scepticism of the euro and the European Union in general ("From War to a Continent of Peace", 2012). Following the tough austerity policies, especially among poor and young people, job perspectives and the belief in a better future seem to be decreasing. As argued by Fox (2012) the Eurozone crisis certainly has had a crucial impact on the record levels of unemployment and recession.

Critics have also argued that the intergovernmental decisions on austerity and debt relief show a certain level of democratic deficit and thus, have called for reform. Across the continent, the popular support for the EU is falling, especially in the UK, where talks about loosening its ties with the Union have started (Charlemagne, 2012). Prime Minister David Cameron argues that a treaty change is needed in order to solve the problems in the Eurozone and also to improve the relationship between the UK and the European Union. However, Cameron's plans to compose new EU arrangements are facing extensive resistance

particularly from the dominant countries in the Union, France and Germany (“Cameron and Merkel set for EU talks”, 2013). Nevertheless, as stated by *The Economist* in 2004, a collapse of the European Union is highly unlikely, but a split could be possible if no agreements regarding not only the debate over British membership but also solving the problems of the financial crisis, are made (Thies, 2012, p.226).

In conclusion, assessing the question of whether the European Union has deserved the Nobel Peace Prize, many supporting and opposing arguments have recently been raised. On the one hand, the Union undeniably has not qualified for a Nobel Peace Prize in economics concerning the current Eurozone’s sovereign debt crisis (Volkery, 2012). Other challenges, such as the issue of a possible democratic deficit in the EU decision-making and the current debate over the British membership have led to further questioning of the Union’s legitimacy. Hence, although the timing of the Nobel Peace Prize given to the European Union seems to be rather controversial, the award should more be seen as urgently needed motivation in the Eurozone crisis. Not only shall it be seen as a reminder of the achievements of the EU in helping to transform Europe “from a continent of war to a continent of peace” (Charlemagne, 2012) by promoting the principles of liberty and democracy, the respect for human rights and the rule of law, but also as a warning not to let these principles be demolished when confronted with internal difficulties, such as the emergence of extremism, nationalism and rising euroscepticism.

Words: 1924

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