

Governing by Prizes: How the European Union Uses Symbolic Distinctions in its Search for Legitimacy

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Abstract

Since their creation and with an increasing intensity since the 1980s, European institutions have used prizes, labels and other distinctions as political resources to perform and legitimize their action. The purpose of this article is to make sense of this governance by prizes. It documents the occurrences, uses and meanings of European prizes and what it reveals of EU politics and policies. It shows how the EU mobilizes and updates the three usual functions of prizes as claim of centrality and authority by the prize-giver, creation of incentives and compliance for recipients and construction/solutions of/to social problems. The conclusion is that the European governance by prizes mirrors what happens at other levels of governance while adapting it to its politico-institutional singularity. The EU operates with its own logic of symbolic production but remains secondary to member states in the definition of hierarchies of honours and values.

European Governance, European Union, Prizes, Symbolic policy

'Men are ruled by toys' (attributed to Napoleon)

In 2011, the European Union (EU) received one of the most prestigious international awards, the Nobel Peace Prize, ‘for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe’.¹ More recently, in 2017, it was granted the Princess of Asturias Award for Concord. The jury praised the EU’s action in Europe but also beyond, explaining that it contributed to ‘introduc[e] and disseminat[e] values such as freedom, human rights and solidarity to the world’.² These prizes were perceived as reassuring messages regarding the validity of the European project shaken by successive challenges, from the debt crisis since 2009 to the migrant crisis since 2015. But the EU has developed into a prize-giver long before becoming a prize-recipient. Since their creation and with an increasing intensity since the 1980s, European institutions have indeed used prizes, labels and other distinctions as political resources to perform and legitimize their action. The purpose of this article is to make sense of this *governance by prizes*. It documents their occurrences, uses and meanings and what they reveal of the dynamics of EU politics and policies.

A prize is an award given to acknowledge the service or accomplishment of an individual, a group or an institution. It can come in the form of a sum of money, medal, trophy, certificate or any other form of symbolic distinction. The etymology of the word ‘prize’ is useful to situate the political and social functions of the prize-giving process. Like ‘price’ and ‘praise’, it derives from the Latin *pretium* meaning ‘price’, ‘money’ and from the Sanskrit *prati*, which is translated as ‘against,’ ‘in return’, thus referring to the exchange process (Huizinga 1949: 51). The term ‘prize’ conveys the idea of something intrinsically valuable, either in a material sense or symbolically like a laurel-wreath. Through this etymological root, ‘prize’ is therefore both connected to the economic dimension of ‘price’ as market value and to the honorary dimension of ‘praise’ as value bestowed through esteem. The prize can have an economic value but cannot be purchased like a common good. The prize has at least two common points

with a gift. First, the moment of prize awarding is often ritualized to indicate the exceptionality of the gesture (English 2005: 5). Second, it carries the same reciprocity. Mauss demonstrated how gifts both commit the donors and invite recipients to pay back, creating a mutual bond (Mauss 2002: 80). Likewise, the prize is indissolubly tied to the giver's identity and sometimes even bears its name, like in the case of the Nobel Prize. Conversely, accepting the prize means that the recipient acknowledges the values and ideas associated to it. Subsequently, the prize creates a symbolic association between the two parts (Best [2008]; English [2005]).

Governing by prizes is a long-standing technique of government that has intensified in modern times. There has been a 'prize proliferation' since the late 19th century, both in Europe and in the US, fuelled by all types of actors: government agencies, private corporations, non-profit organizations (see Goode [1978]; English [2005]; Best [2008]; Ihl [2007]). European integration is no exception. Immediately after WW2, the first prizes associated to the European unification project were created and their numbers has grown steadily before exploding in the 2000s.

Relying on the state of the art and on our empirical investigations, we distinguish two modes of governance by prizes that are largely overlapping. The first mode is 'governing by praise': it consists of honouring a figure of virtue to arouse admiration and trigger emulation. A distinction is granted *ex post* based on past achievements. An example could be the French *Légion d'honneur*. The second mode is 'governing with a price', when a distinction comes *ex ante* with a monetary incentive or material resources to support the realization of a project. An example could be the European Research Council (ERC) grants. However, the boundary between the two modes of governing by prizes is thin. The *Légion d'honneur* comes with material advantages and can create social and financial opportunities for the recipient. The

ERC is granted to support a future project but relies largely on the past achievements of the recipient and confers a prestige that is as important as the monetary resources.

In both cases, the functions performed by prizes are the same and can be summarized in three points. First, prizes are a resource of political domination to mark the centrality and authority of the prize-giver, the exemplarity of the recipient and the legitimacy of the cause and values that are honoured. Second, prizes work as a technique of government to create incentives, to mobilize civil society, private interests and individuals and to invite them to compliance. Third, prizes are public policy tools for the construction and the solving of social problems.

The purpose of this article is to show how the EU combines the two modes of ‘governing by praise’ and ‘governing with a price’; and performs the three functions of prizes as claim of centrality and authority, creation of incentives and construction/solutions of/to social problems. Our hypothesis is that the European governance by prizes mirrors what happens at other levels of governance while adapting it to its politico-institutional singularity. The analysis suggests that the EU operates with its own logic of symbolic production but remains secondary to member states in the definition of hierarchies of honours and values.

The study focusses on EU institutions (European Council, Council of Ministers, Commission, Parliament as well as other institutions when relevant) and on other components of the European political system which can be creators, recipients or disseminators of prizes: member states, agencies, organized civil society, private interests, territorial powers, media, intellectuals, artists, citizens. The EU is also to be understood in interaction with its wider context of multi-level governance: the Council of Europe (CoE) is a major source of prizes

and global institutions like the UN or third countries like the US can also be important models.

The article adopts an approach of European studies inspired by historical and political sociology and combines both inductive and deductive methods. It draws inspiration from approaches which advocate a ‘practice turn’ in the study of the EU and call to go beyond dualisms such as agency/structure, individual/institutional, free will/determinism, replacing substantialism with processualism and rethinking power from above and from below (Adler-Nissen 2016: 87–103). Prizes constitute an example of the way a political system creates incentives to mobilize individuals and groups directly or indirectly and to frame structures of opportunities and constraints, hence shaping representations and behaviours well beyond its realms of competencies but doing so, reflect also social, cultural and technological changes. Our approach also enhances the importance of understanding processes that lead to the production of symbolic distinctions, both in the genesis and history of polities. Finally, it insists on the relevance to trace our research object from the macro to the micro level and back, from what is explicitly political to everyday practices, from the creation of a prize by an institution to its potential legitimizing effects and social impact.

The study of the existing scholarship dedicated mostly to prizes in national contexts cast light on the types of existing prizes and their social and political usages. The inventory of the prizes created since 1945 either by European organizations or in the name of Europe allowed us to identify policy domains in which prizes are the most commonly created: politics, culture, human rights and research. This inventory was conducted through a systematic exploration of the official documents and websites of the public and private organizations, in which their various prizes are presented. We subsequently analysed these European prizes through the two modes of governance (‘governing by praise’ and ‘with a price’) and functions

(claim centrality, mobilize, construct and solve problems) that we have defined, in order to assess the specificity of the EU's 'governance by prizes'.

The article is organized as follows. The first part presents the functions of prizes. The second part describes the genesis of European prizes and how they have performed these functions. The third part develops a systematic analysis of their uses and effects in the four policy sectors particularly representative of this 'governance by prizes': politics, culture, human rights and research. The conclusion sums up our findings and assesses the singularity of the EU as a regulatory system of political symbolism.

The functions of prizes: to claim centrality, to mobilize, to construct and solve problems

A longitudinal analysis suggests that three main functions are operating with an unequal salience across time: to claim authority and to assert a symbolic domination by the centre or other actors; to mobilize civil society and citizens and lead them to compliance; to define problems calling for public action and relevant policy answers.

Prizes as claim to authority and centrality

State- and nation-building processes were famously described by Elias (1994) as a civilizing process disciplining individuals and collective emotions and habits. Courts were matrixes that encouraged individuals to adjust their behaviours following incentives given by authorities and elites under the forms of distinctions and rewards (Elias 2005). Every act of the king and other notabilities dictated by the etiquette was a way to grant favour and dignity that had a direct impact on the allocation of resources. The race for distinctions channelled loyalties towards the centre.

With the development of larger and more diversified polities, the symbolic institutionalization of domination has taken impersonal and rationalized forms. The space of distinction has been enlarged from the court to the whole society. Distinctions as a tool to ensure loyalty and compliance became organized in a more bureaucratic and codified mode (see Deloye et al. 1996). In this modern logic, honours have no longer been used to singularize an elite only but became virtually accessible to anyone. Since the late 18th century, revolutionary and then Republican France has arguably been the archetype of such a configuration where prizes are bureaucratically rationalized as means to discipline a population (Ihl 2006). Distinctions mark the official recognition of qualities turned into a public model of virtue and granted to a mass elite. The administration has the responsibility to define and disseminate this model of virtue that is the counterpart of coercion to secure loyalty (Ihl 2007).

The functioning of prizes can be related to Bourdieu's definition of the state as 'a central bank for symbolic credit', which makes social division, privileges, and domination universally valid within a given territory and for a given population (Bourdieu 1996: 376). Bourdieu analyses political action as consisting mostly of symbolic action (rituals, speeches, writings, and other symbolic interventions) and political capital as a symbolic capital where credit is founded 'on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person (or on an object) the very powers that they recognize in him (or it)' (Bourdieu 1991: 192). Prizes and awards are therefore part of 'systems of sponsorship, evaluation, and consecration by means of which power euphemizes itself as merit (as intrinsic and proper rather than imposed and arbitrary) and thereby secures its symbolic efficacy' (English 2002: 111).

In giving a prize, an institution arrogates for itself the right to consecrate social, political or cultural value. It is a *mise-en-scene* to publicly declare 'what is worthy'. The dimension of

publicity is pivotal in the award-giving process to display the authority at work. The most famous international prize, the Nobel established in 1895, is an example of a coalition of two actors in search of prestige, the Swedish crown and the industrialist Alfred Nobel, to gain credit for themselves and to raise the international profile of Sweden (English 2005: 55).

Prizes as a technique of government

Prizes aim at asserting the authority and centrality of the prize-giver but also at acting on their recipients and on the public. The ‘politics of honour’ is based on two assumptions: that honours can motivate individuals and govern them ‘at a distance’ (Ihl 2007: 16). The prize is not addressed to its sole recipient but to its entire group of belonging – namely all those who are eligible to the prize or at least likely to be impacted by its meaning, and hence can ‘dramatize a group’s values and, in the process, affirm its solidarity’ (Best 2008: 8). The prize sanctions behaviours and practices that respect the highest standards and norms set for this specific group.

Prizes as construction of and solutions to social problems

A prize may be both a way to flag an issue as worth of public attention, and a call for solution. The award proclaims the social significance of a problem and defines the rules to solve it through the conditions established to grant it. Since the 1980s, a pattern of governing through prizes has developed in policy sectors like research or innovation: to launch a competitive process to conquer an award by resolving a specific technological or societal challenge. These so-called ‘challenge prizes’ or ‘inducement prizes’ are not new. For instance, the recognition of the potato as a human foodstuff in Europe was an outcome of the *Académie de Besançon*’s Prize for substitute foods awarded in 1773. This tool has the advantages to mobilize beyond the ‘usual suspects’ and the established elites. This management technique is nowadays

increasingly popular among governments to solve problems while coping with budgetary limits. The US has been a leader in the development of such political devices which the Obama administration turned into a full-fledged mode of governance (Verhulst and Young 2015).

In the following part, we implement our analytical model to European prizes. First, we reconstitute their genesis to show the motivations leading to their creation. Second, we analyse their uses and effects to establish whether they play the usual functions of prizes and to which extent they alter or confirm established hierarchies of actors and values in European politics.

The genesis of European honours: which prizes for which Europe?

The reasons leading to the creation of prizes by European political entrepreneurs, be it institutions or private actors, can be explained first by looking at the period of their establishment, at the general state of European affairs – the crisis or momentum in the process of European integration at this time – and finally at the priority structuring its agenda. The creation of prizes can next be better understood by considering the policy field and the level of competences and resources of the European institutions in this field.

Four generations of prizes

Since the early 1950s, four main ‘generations’ of distinctions can be identified that deal successively with politics, culture and human rights before flourishing in all policy sectors. This timeline of the governance by prizes is to be understood against the background of the evolution of the EU as a polity and of its competences. Until the 1970s, only three prizes of the first generation were created, all related to politics and celebrating in very general terms

contributions to European integration by preeminent political leaders or by local actors. A second generation of prizes developed from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, with four distinctions all in the fields of culture and media. This is congruent with the general quest for European identity and symbols to legitimate a process of integration then in disarray. In the late 1980s and 1990s, a third generation of prizes emerged to celebrate the defence of human rights and freedom of thought in the world, revealing a concern to promote the EU's normative power on the global scene. With the decade 2000s started a fourth generation, which continues today and which is characterized by a proliferation of prizes in all domains of policies, usual ones like culture but also new ones like research.

European prizes, prizes as usual?

The study of European prizes reveal that they largely correspond to the three main functions of prizes observed in other polities. The creation of European prizes is an effort to assert and legitimate a European power. This asks whether European institutions can play this role of 'central bank of symbolic capital' to the extent that they undermine state sovereignty (Kauppi 2003). In the field of diplomacy, the European External Action Service questions the state's 'monopoly on symbolic power' (Adler-Nissen 2014). The European Court of Justice resembles a 'bank of symbolic capital' from which its members draw 'a portion of the social authority required to take part in debates on 'the future of Europe'' (Vauchez 2010). Giving a prize in the name of Europe is part of the same empowerment conferring a 'European' credit to an individual or an organization to challenge national symbolic strongholds.

The multiplication of European prizes also illustrates the EU's attempts to mobilize civil society and individuals, especially through the techniques of 'government at a distance'. Prizes can be compared to other tools of European public action such as benchmarking or

ranking. Benchmarking was imported in Europe from the US as an element of the ‘new public management’ (Bruno and Emmanuel 2013), especially as core item of the ‘Lisbon agenda’ launched in 2000 to turn the EU into the most efficient knowledge economy in the world. It is a way both to set Europe as an integrated field where actors compete to establish and/or emulate standards. It marks also an apparent withdrawal of the institutions which set the standards but leave the private sector and civil society in charge of reaching them. Political rulers are no more accountable rule-makers but referees of the game (Walters and Haahr 2005: 168; Broome and Quirk [2015]). Likewise, European prizes are devices creating both incentives (possible gains) and constraints (material and psychological costs of non-participation).

Finally, the EU institutions also resorts to prizes as construction of and solutions to social problems. This agenda setting through prizes put forward general problems related to the common good, or more specific issues in a policy sector. The European prizes do cover this large spectrum. Some honours given to politicians or to cultural productions like films or books are granted according to vague requirements: the contribution to European construction or to European identity. Other prizes appear in the form of open calls to foster the quest for ‘best practices’ in various fields (justice efficiency, drug prevention, heritage preservation, etc.) without designating beforehand more specific policy issues. In this case, what matters for the award-giver is essentially the development of activities in a given policy field. For EU institutions, it may be a way to push for creeping integration in a sector where they have no direct competences.

Creating a European prize: a claim for authority by default rather than a sign of strength

The genesis of European prizes reveals that they mostly emerged in fields in which the EU has big ambitions but limited competences and limited financial resources: politics, culture, human rights and research. Besides, these fields are not, or to a lesser extent than others, market-driven. It means two things. First, the relative weakness of economic interests and the scarcity of money lead to the mobilization of normative incentives and symbolic resources. Second, the distance from the market means distance from the core regulatory competences of the EU, centred on the economy. It suggests that the creation of a prize is an ersatz for the lack of legal and financial capacities. It is a way for European institutions or actors to claim authority and centrality as brokers in EU policy-making and as advocates of European unity, with limited success.

In the following case studies, we analyse the constitutive characteristics of each prize: the context of its creation; the organization or group of actors which created it and their motivations (assert authority; create incentives; build and/or solve an issue); the audience targeted by the prize; its message in terms of values and norms; and finally, its effects. The focus is on the policy fields identified in the four generations of prizes: politics; culture; human rights; and research. While prizes have proliferated in all EU policy sectors of policies since the 2000s, we take the example of research for three reasons. First, it is a field where the technique of governance by prize has particularly flourished, especially through ‘inducement prizes’. Second, research shows how the lack of resources can motivate the creation of a prize, as the EU has limited competences in the scientific domain. Third, this sector hosts arguably one of the most successful European prizes: the grants of the European Research Council (ERC).

Exploring European prizes

Each of the four fields illustrates a major evolution in the European governance by prizes that mirrors broader policy trends. Politics shows the ambivalent enlargement in terms of targets from the elites to the masses (Schrag [2013]; Risse [2010]). Culture indicates a shift from direct public action to the ‘government at a distance’ through the empowerment of civil society and individuals (Barnett [2001]; Sassatelli [2009]). Human rights exemplify a move from internal to external affairs when the promotion of fundamental rights worldwide has tended to take precedence over their application at home (Whitman 2011). Research policy illustrates the transition from rewarding past achievements to encouraging future ones (Bruno 2011).

Prizes in politics: from the few to the many

The dynamics of governing by prizes in politics reveal the permanent attempt (and resilient difficulties) to enlarge the social constituency of Europe.

The first prizes created in the name of Europe relied essentially on ‘governing by praise’ to celebrate in general terms contributions to European unification. The oldest, created in 1949, and most famous is the **Charlemagne Prize**, established by an elite literary society in Aachen to reward annually ‘the most valuable contribution to West European understanding’.³ The reference to Charlemagne has a twofold purpose: to defend the idea of the Christian Occident against the threat of communism; to reassert the symbolic status of Germany as a member of the European community after Nazism. The elitist profile of the recipient was established with the first one, the European federalist and aristocrat Coudenhove-Kalergi. In the following

decades, the prize has been given mostly to political leaders, kings and queens, heads of states and governments, with a predilection for high-level officials of the EC/EU institutions. An underlying affinity with Catholicism is confirmed by the role of Catholic dignitaries of Aachen in the process of prize-granting and the number of religious recipients including two Popes, John Paul II and Francis. The Patrons of the Foundation of the Charlemagne Prize give an aristocratic imprimatur to the distinction: the King of the Belgians, the King of Spain and the Grand Duke of Luxembourg. The Charlemagne Prize hence mirrors the old-style governance by prizes since traditional religious and secular elites reward political rulers and bureaucrats for their contribution to European unification.

By contrast, the first prize created by the European institutions can be seen as an emancipation from this traditional pattern, but has still an elitist dimension. In 1976, the European Council bestowed the title of **Honorary Citizen of Europe** to Jean Monnet, for its extraordinary work to promote European cooperation. This time, the purpose was to give the European project a human dimension to overcome a context of crisis for the integration process. This prize, as part of the construction of the ‘father of Europe’ myth (Cohen 2007), offers a figure of identification to an enlarged public. It followed however a logic of exceptionality, the title being later granted only to two other exemplary Europeans: Helmut Kohl in 1998, and Jacques Delors in 2015.⁴

European institutions maintained this exceptionality and did not create other prizes to European leaders. Private foundations took up the creation of such distinctions as part of their pro-European activism. The Yuste Foundation launched in 1995 the **Carlos V European Award** ‘to be bestowed to renowned European figures who have excelled in their creative or research work, thereby promoting the construction of the European cultural heritage and the

progress and development of the sciences'.⁵ Despite this original reference to heritage and science, the prize resembles the Charlemagne Prize on two points. First, it focusses on leading political and bureaucratic figures of the EU institutions, Mikhail Gorbachev being the exception in 2002. Second, it is also strongly connected with royalty and the Church, through its very name, Charles V, leader of the Holy Roman Empire founded by Charlemagne, through the place of its awarding ceremony, the Royal Monastery of Yuste in Extremadura where Charles V died, and finally through the protagonist of the awarding ceremony, the King of Spain, from whom the laureates receive their medal. The pattern is still the empowerment of new European elites by traditional ones and the ex-ante consecration of good and loyal service to the European cause, following the 'governing by praise' model.

The last-to-date political prize is however emancipated from royal or religious references. In the **Gold Medal of the Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe**, European integration is more autonomous and self-referential. The tutelary figure is no longer a historical leader but the technocrat who promoted the functionalist unification of Europe. The Gold Medal was created in 1996 and is awarded at the University of Lausanne in presence of secular political authorities.⁶ Still, as an evidence of the resilience of old elites, its first recipient was Juan Carlos of Spain. This reveals the circularity of these political prizes. Juan Carlos who, as King of Spain, bestowed the Carlos V Award, had been himself the recipient of the Charlemagne Prize in 1982 and later of the Jean Monnet Gold Medal. More generally, a restricted number of personalities appear as recipients of several political European prizes, with one who received all the four: Helmut Kohl, as protagonist of the French-German reconciliation, of the German reunification and of European integration. This illustrates the narrative of a top-driven integration process populated by old and new elites co-opting each other.

Alternative narratives enlarging the social scope of prize recipients emerged. Six years after the first Charlemagne Prize, in 1955, the CoE created the first award granted by a European institution: the **Europe Prize**. It is bestowed to a municipality involved in an ‘active promotion of the European ideal’ through twinning agreements, European events, exchange visits, etc.’.⁷ Following the European Diploma, applicant municipalities should subsequently apply for the Flag of Honour then the Plaque of Honour in order to compete at the highest level: the Europe Prize. This hierarchy of prizes implies that there are different degrees of Europeanness, and that the accession to a fully recognized ‘Europeanness’ makes necessary several achievements, or ‘rites de passage’. The prize rewards an existing European engagement but aims above all at stimulating the Europeanness of citizens on the ground through emulation, especially of young people. One dimension of the prize is for instance scholarships to be spent on a study visit within Europe for young people from the winning municipality. The Europe Prize is hence innovative regarding the profile of the recipients and the dynamics it tries to create. It combines the two modes of governance: ‘governing by praise’ since it rewards past deeds and ‘governing with a price’ since it encourages further commitments with financial incentives.

The analysis of political prizes shows that the shift from elite- to citizen-oriented awards was launched by the CoE and civil society rather than by EU institutions. Among the latter, the European Parliament (EP) is the keenest to reach out for a larger constituency. It is confirmed by the creation in 2008 of the **European Charlemagne Youth Prize** under the aegis of the Foundation of the Charlemagne Prize and the EP. This distinction is the declination of the elitist Charlemagne Prize for rulers into a version encouraging young Europeans to compete with projects ‘promoting European and international understanding; fostering the development of a shared sense of European identity and integration; and providing role

models for young people living in Europe and offer practical examples of Europeans living together as one community'.⁸ This time, the emergence of exemplary Europeans is envisaged through a horizontal emulation between generational peers. There is a double trend towards the enlargement of the social constituency of Europe but also towards the empowerment of award recipients, which clearly induces an evolution of the modes of governance by prize, from 'governing by praise' – more elite-oriented symbolic endorsement – to 'governing with a price' – more citizen-oriented material support.

While the traditional political prizes worked as mechanisms of co-optation between old and new elites and sought to offer top-down role models to the masses for a vertical identification with institutional leaders, new citizen-oriented prizes rely more on identification through emulation and incite individuals to embody European values and to fix the problem of democratic deficit by direct participation to public action. The usual functions of prizes are performed in a fresh way: it is less about claiming centrality and authority and enforcing a given narrative, and more about offering symbolic resources and creating structures of opportunities for citizen mobilization. This evolution may allow European institutions to reach out for new social categories but makes their control on the meaning and effects of their message looser.

Prizes to culture: from the celebration of European civilization to the "do it yourself"

The evolution of prizes in the sector of culture suggests a shift from initiatives highlighting a common high culture to foster a sense of belonging to an increasing delegation to local actors, artists and civil society to encourage Europeanization from below. The first EU initiatives date back from the early 1980s. The title of **European Capital of Culture** was set up in 1985

by an intergovernmental coalition of EU Ministers of Culture to promote a common European identity. In the initial editions, the title was granted to cities which were *de facto* nexus of European culture (Athens, Florence, Amsterdam, Paris). To this extent, it corresponded to the more elitist ‘governing by praise’ mode, sanctioning an already existing contribution to Europeanness. The choice of Glasgow in 1990 was a turning point with the opportunity given to a city with a degraded image to prove its modernity, dynamism and hence its ‘Europeanness’ (García 2005). In the programme ‘European Capital of Culture’, the adjective ‘European’ qualifies the city and refers to the process by which it becomes more European (Sassatelli 2009: 99). This is particularly clear in the context of the Eastern enlargement process. In 2000, the title was given to cities in candidate countries (Krakow and Prague) as a ‘rite de passage’ allowing to prove their Europeanness. Meanwhile, the programme evolved to become a symbolic framework to mobilize energies and attract public attention. Local cultural actors were empowered to organize a cultural festival aiming at urban regeneration, socio-economic development and city branding (Sassatelli 2009: 94). The capacity to find sponsors and to solve policy problems became increasingly important in the selection of the cities, moving away from a focus on a shared European identity. Like in the case of political prizes, the shift from the ‘governing by praise’ towards the ‘governing with a price’ was a condition for the enlargement of the social and symbolic scopes of cultural prizes.

This evolution does not mean that EU institutions abdicated the position of legitimate authority to bestow ‘badges of Europeanness’. In 2013, the **European Heritage Label** was created and granted to prestigious sites (Parthenon, Cluny Abbey, etc.). The label is less to increase their already established fame but to root the EU in history and in national memories. Cultural and memorial landmarks are carefully selected for their symbolic value, the role they have played in the European history and the activities they offer that bring the EU and its

citizens closer together.⁹ The objective is to expose the European narrative that underlies local and national ones.

Like political prizes, cultural prizes are also created by private actors. In 2007, the foundation Esprit d'Europe launched a **European Book Prize** granted to a novel or essay 'giving a positive image of Europe'.¹⁰ Esprit d'Europe is a civil society organization but closely related to the EU institutions, as it was created by Jacques Delors. The prize is supported by the EP which hosts and sponsors the awarding ceremony. It hence bridges the political, technocratic and intellectual spheres. Writers are both rewarded for their work and enlisted to legitimize the EP and the European project. This example illustrates the actuality and limits of the enlargement of the social constituency of European prizes. Like in other legitimizing initiatives, the 'entrepreneurs of Europe' happen to be close to the EU institutional system (Aldrin and Dakowska 2011).

By comparison, the **European Union Prize for Literature** created in 2009 by the DG Education is more a cultural policy tool than an instrument to promote the EU. It relies also on a collaboration with civil society as the Commission has no legitimacy to judge the artistic value of books and hence mandates a consortium of European writers', publishers' and booksellers' associations to do so. The symbolic role of institutional actors is however preserved since the authors receive the prize from the hands of the Commissioner for Culture and the Vice-President of the EP. The goal of the prize is to promote the circulation of literature within Europe and to encourage greater interest in non-national literary works.¹¹ In this sense, it can also function indirectly as a tool of European identity promotion.

For a polity striving for and justified by the opening of borders, giving importance to the circulation of cultural goods as much as to their content is logical. The **Lux Prize** established in 2007 by the EP further illustrates this dynamic. Its original purpose was ‘to celebrate the universal range of European values; to build a stronger European identity’.¹² But progressively, the concern to foster identity has left precedence to the circulation of films as central objective. By financing the subtitling and distribution of winning movies, the EP intends to increase first the exchanges of European cultural goods and secondarily a rather elitist public sphere, with a modest number of spectators attending festivals and cine-clubs.

Contrary to the Lux prize, the **Council of Europe Film Award**, created the same year, has a normative stance as it is bestowed to a film ‘that raises the profile of human rights in accordance with the values of the CoE and the principles it stands for: individual freedom, political liberty and the rule of law’.¹³ Another significant difference is that the CoE Film Award is awarded during the Istanbul Film Festival. While the EU holds its ceremonies in its capitals to create interactions with Brussels and Strasbourg as symbolic centres, the Council of Europe holds it in a city that constitutes a disputed cultural boundary and designates fundamental rights as delineator of Europeanness.

Facing political backlashes against an even closer union and intrinsic resistances in the integration by culture, European political entrepreneurs invested increasingly human rights as a consensual source of soft power abroad. A wave of prizes illustrates this trend, marked by the outward-looking perspective of a Europe defined more and more by external challenges.

Prizes in human rights: promoting values within and beyond Europe

Since the mid-1980s, a series of distinctions have explicitly advocated European values through human rights. The **Sakharov Prize**, created in 1988 by the EP, falls into the ‘governing by praise’ category as it celebrates defenders of freedom of thought and seeks to highlight exemplary citizens or organizations. There was originally a debate regarding the limitation of the prize to EU borders, but it was argued that there could be no boundaries in the promotion of universal of human rights (EP 2013). It is also politically less risky to tackle human rights externally than internally with potential angry reactions of the member states to supranational intrusion. The list of the recipients reveal that the international dimension became indeed predominant: all recipients of the Sakharov Prize to date are non-EU based organizations or personalities, at the sole exception of the Basque NGO ¡Basta Ya! which received the prize in 2000 for its fight against ETA terrorism. This list shows a focus on democratic transition in the EU neighbouring countries and on the resistance against illiberal regimes worldwide. The Sakharov Prize has become an instrument of the EU’s normative power on the global stage. Moreover, it is also the opportunity for the EP to catch public and political attention since the awarding ceremony takes place during a plenary session of the assembly.

The Sarkharov Prize is also interesting in that, for once, the EU was pioneer to create a prize in human rights, before the CoE that established its Human Rights Prize only in 2009. This is a further indicator that when an organization has strong competences in a field, as it is the case with the CoE regarding human rights, the need of symbolic gestures like prizes is weaker. The distinction of the CoE, renamed the **Václav Havel Human Rights Prize** in 2013, differs also by its focus on recipients stemming from its member states.¹⁴ The CoE does not have the global pretention of the EU as a quasi-federal entity developing its own diplomacy of influence.

Prizes in human rights give evidence of EU institutions' attempts to expand their role in sectors where they do not have strong direct competences and beyond the borders of the Union. This strategy is an explanatory factor for the proliferation of European prizes to virtually all policy sectors.

Prizes in research: encouraging the future as much as rewarding the past

Research is an emblematic example of this generalization of prizes to a variety of sectors. It is all the more interesting that it is more market-driven than the other sectors under study and also illustrates the influence of foreign models, mainly the US. Finally, the grants given by the ERC represent arguably the most successful EU action in governing by prizes in terms of visibility and policy impact.

The creation of the ERC in 2006 is a success story combining symbolic devices and financial incentives to structure a policy sector at the crossroad between market, science and politics. The ERC is both an institution and a symbolic label. As an institution, it exemplifies the EU's propensity to rely on agencies which are less submitted to heavy procedures and scrutiny by other institutions and member states and can develop a creeping influence in new domains. It is the outcome of a coalition between scientists in search for more money and less constraints and Eurocrats aiming at gaining leverage on scientific policy. As a symbolic label, ERC grants quickly gained prestige through a strategic use of peer-review, the emphasis on 'frontier research', high-risk/high gain projects and talented young scholars giving a human face to research. It contributed to give to ERC-funded research a glamorous image

contrasting with other European funding frames taking the form of bureaucratic machines and anonymous networks (König 2017).

ERC grants are also emblematic as policy tools combining the ‘governing by praise’ and ‘governing with a price’ modes: they consecrate past merits with a strong symbolic endorsement but also make future achievements possible through financial means. The most promising researchers are given generous funding to perform even better. These grants have heavily contributed to establish a pattern of assessment for researchers duplicated at all levels of scientific governance. This pattern invites individuals and institutions to develop long-term strategic behaviours to comply with requirements. As such, it constitutes a model of ‘governance at a distance’ mixing material and symbolic incentives, as the reputation linked with an ERC grant matters as much as the material gains.

The European Commission recently introduced a new type of prize that also target a realization in the future, the **Horizon Prize**. This prize strongly resembles the American model of ‘challenges’ which offers awards to whom will be able to solve ‘a technological or societal challenge for which no solution has been found’. For instance, a German company that proposed a solution to keep vaccines at a stable temperature to allow a proper use in developing countries received a 2 million euros Horizon prize from the European Commission¹⁵. Horizon prizes are thus not oriented towards strictly European problems and therefore symbolically enhance the contribution of the EU as a global actor to the welfare of mankind.

Overall, European prizes in the research sector fulfil usual functions of prizes through the assertion of European institutions as a centre of governance and recognition; they favour indirect integration and homogenization as the ERC and to a lesser extent H2020 contribute to reshape national scientific policy and professions well beyond its immediate range by

imposing standards of evaluation and merit; they mobilize scientists and related interests in frameworks combining reward of past deeds and incentives for future accomplishments; their effects on identification to and territorialisation of the EU are more uncertain.

Conclusion

This article has shown how European prizes fulfil and update usual functions of prizes. Each generation of prizes makes further step in this update in congruence with the general evolution of the European polity and policy-making. Each sector illustrates particularly one dimension of this evolution while reflecting all the others. Political prizes highlight the shift from top-down legitimization through elite role models to search for horizontal identification. Prizes in culture emphasize the ‘government at a distance’ and the delegation of the regulation of meaning to civil society and third parties. Human rights prizes show the change of focus from internal to external outputs in the justification of the EU. Research prizes put forward the increasing salience of the market in the definition of the hierarchy of honours and the combination of past merits and future achievements as criteria for the selection of the recipients.

Looking at the broader picture, the EU displays prizes as part of the symbolic arsenal that is necessary to any political system from the past or the present, and does so by resorting to contemporary forms of domination and mobilization. European prizes tell something of the status and nature of the EU as a polity subordinated to national spheres of belonging and loyalty, risk-averse and as such keen to delegate to member states and civil society the role of symbolic producers, but still able to develop efficient techniques of government to support its policy processes and enlarge its constituencies, if not to alter fundamentally its patterns of legitimization. Our findings suggest two main transversal conclusions questioning further the

dynamics of European politics. First, the European governance by prizes functions as a magnifying glass of transformations in the legitimization of the EU. Originally devices of co-optation between old and new political elites, prizes have been later used to reach out to the masses. They have evolved from top-down identity politics to empowerment of civil society aiming at producing grassroots common belonging. They illustrate the struggles and failures of the European institutions that lead to the progressive shift from the search for participation and internal consensus to justification by meeting external challenges. Considering their limits as communicative devices, prizes appear more efficient as policy tools of a 'governance at the distance' relying less on direct rule by a centre than on self-compliance by individuals and civil society to models of merit and performance. Second, the EU itself appears as an amplifier of societal and policy trends at work at the national and global levels rather than as a trigger of change. It adapts to its systemic specificities patterns of symbolic governance forged in nation- and state-building processes and sometimes in non-European contexts. On the one hand, honours mimicking the ones displayed by national states in a subdued and almost nostalgic way emphasize the resilient temptation and limits of the search for a European founding 'grand narrative'. On the other hand, honours as policy tools cast occasionally some gloss on the austere mechanisms of EU public action and are instruments to increase political leverage and social constituencies of European institutions without upsetting existing hierarchies of values and actors between national and supranational levels of governance.

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Notes

- ¹ <http://www.fpa.es/en/princess-of-asturias-awards/laureates/2017-european-union.html?texto=acta&especifica=1>
- ² https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/history/2010-today/2012/eu-nobel_en
- ³ <http://www.karlspreis.de/en/>
- ⁴ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-17-1680_en.htm
- ⁵ <http://www.fundacionyuste.org/en/the-european-carlos-v-award/>
- ⁶ <https://jean-monnet.ch/en/mario-draghi-receives-the-gold-medal-of-the-foundation/>
- ⁷ <http://website-pace.net/web/apce/the-europe-prize>
- ⁸ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charlemagneyouthprize/en/introduction.html>
- ⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/actions/heritage-label_en
- ¹⁰ <http://www.livre-europeen.eu/>
- ¹¹ <http://www.euprizeliterature.eu/>
- ¹² <https://luxprize.eu/why-and-what>
- ¹³ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/film-award-face-istanbul>
- ¹⁴ <http://website-pace.net/web/apce/vaclav-havel-human-rights-prize>
- ¹⁵ <http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizonprize/index.cfm>

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