

The Prize of Governance. How the European Union Uses Symbolic Distinctions to Mobilize Society and Foster Competitiveness

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Abstract

Since its origins, the European Union (EU) has increasingly relied on prizes to highlight the values and principles channelling European integration. In the last two decades, such symbolic tools of governance have shifted away from the kind of distinctions granted by elites to elites and aiming to honour prominent figures offered as role models mainly in the field of identity, memory and cultural policies. In an increasingly market-oriented Europe, prizes are used as incentives and disciplining instruments to enhance self-compliance of economic and social actors with an ethos of competitiveness and innovation. They work as a magnifying glass of the evolution of the EU towards a government at distance through policy instruments. The focus is on four areas where prizes have multiplied since the 2000s: research and innovation, economic governance, territorial and environmental policies, and communication policies. The article draws on a qualitative analysis of a corpus of ninety-one prizes, institutional documentation, parliamentary debates and media controversies related to prizes.

Keywords: European Union; governance; prizes; symbolic politics; policy instruments

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the European Union (EU) has multiplied the use of prizes as a symbolic tool of governance to highlight the values and principles channelling European integration. This boom in prize creation has been coupled with an evolution of their aims and fields of application. Based on the heritage of national states, the prize used to be a distinction granted in a circular top-down logic by and to institutions and elites. Its spheres of action were identity, memory and cultural politics. Its purpose was to distinguish persons, groups or organizations turned into role models and embodiments of collective values for the edification of the masses. These features are not totally obsolete but seem increasingly challenged by another kind of prizes.

Most of the recently created ones at European level such as the StartUp Europe Award or the European Social Innovation Competition are built on a logic that is less vertical and relies more on peer-recognition and emulation. Public institutions and elites are partnering more and more with private and local actors to distribute awards targeting an enlarged social constituency, with the purpose of creating incentives, mobilizing energies and

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encouraging entrepreneurship. Prizes are deemed to spur scientific innovation, economic competitiveness and pool possible solutions to policy-problems. In a nutshell, this systemic change in European symbolic politics can be illustrated by a shift from the iconic French *Légion d'honneur* rewarding great men and women to the grants distributed by the European research Council to foster frontier research and individual scientific achievements.

Our aim in this article is to analyse what the triggers, modalities and effects of the novel use of prizes tell us about evolutions in EU governance. Looking at the broader picture, we postulate that this reliance on prizes can be explained by shifts in the ends and means of European politics and policies. Regarding politics, the main mandate of national executives is no more to accomplish bottom-up popular will but to exercise an authority defined by externality, turning national states into member states as their first characteristic (Bickerton, 2013). It produces a framework where the national level has politics without policy and the European level cultivates policy without politics (Schmidt, 2006). The outcome is a constrained democracy deliberately keeping the universal suffrage under control and empowering bureaucratic and technocratic bodies (Müller, 2011) that are keen to govern by instruments (Lascombes and Gales, 2007) like prizes. Regarding policies, the legitimization of the EU as a regulatory power (Majone, 1996) is justified by outputs rather than inputs, advocating for competitiveness as the main driving force (Jullien and Smith, 2014) and establishing growth and jobs as the main goals of EU integration in the mid-2000s (Kinderman, 2013; Schutter, 2008).

Prizes as policy tools are especially congruent with the role, resources and functions of the EU for at least three reasons. First, prizes are a low-cost and bureaucracy-driven pattern of claiming mobilization and compliance from civil society, citizens and experts. As such, they give a capacity initiative and visibility to European institutions with limited resources and accountability. Secondly, they can be customized to fit the requirements of each policy sector while carrying the EU transversal market-friendly ethos of a self-starting, autonomous and adaptable social agent. Thirdly, most recent prizes aiming to encourage incoming achievements rather than to reward past deeds are fitted for the future-looking legitimization of the 'European project' (Shore, 2000, p. 50). In short, we argue that the boom in EU prize creation can be explained by an 'elective affinity' between prizes as a technique of government and EU governance.

We understand prizes as symbolic devices that express the cognitive and normative frames put forward by European institutions and civil society to justify and implement their action. As policy tools, they signal the desired values and efforts to be embraced by the population of potential recipients. Prizes exercise three main functions: to claim authority and centrality for the prize-giver engaged in a complex exchange of gratifications with the recipient; to mobilize civil society and individuals in desired directions; and to frame policy problems and their solutions (Best, 2008; English, 2008; Laroche, 2012). The literature on European prizes remains scarce and frequently focused on the cultural sector, for instance on the European capital of culture programme (Autissier, 2018; Patel, 2013; Sassatelli, 2009). By proposing a transversal analysis focusing on their recent evolutions in different policy fields, this article proposes to fill a gap in the literature and encourage further research.

The article is based on a corpus of all (to the best of our knowledge, to be updated on a permanent basis) 91 prizes created or co-created by EU institutions since the 1970s and focuses particularly on the prizes created since the 2000s onwards, since the vast majority

of EU prizes in our corpus (82 out of 91) were created in this period. The list of prizes and a more detailed note on methodology can be found in the Appendix). Our reflection is organized as follows. In the first part, we set prizes into the context of European symbolic governance. The second part shows how the recent boom in prize creation is connected to the shift from old-style EU symbolic politics to a new legitimization strategy relying on numbers, incentives and government-at-a-distance in congruence with its market-oriented ethos. In the third part, we analyse four policy areas where the creation of prizes has been most important: research and innovation; economic governance; communication; territorial and environmental policy. In the conclusion, we discuss our findings regarding the extent to which prizes reflect the general evolution of EU governance and alter the usual logics of European symbolic politics.

I. Prizes as the Latest Avatar of European Symbolic Governance

European institutions have relatively early developed symbolic policies aiming to frame loyalties and identities of citizens in a sense congruent with the legitimization of the EU as an emergent political system (Foret, 2008). Social sciences have documented the mutations of symbolic governance throughout centuries towards more indirect and incorporated forms (Elias, 1994). The founders of European studies have documented the new step represented by European integration (Deutsch *et al.*, 1957) before leaving the floor for decades to approaches reducing it to a materialistic and interest-driven process (Kuhn, 2019) and rationalizing communication as a component of a potential European public sphere (Fossum and Schlesinger, 2007; Koopmans and Statham, 2010). The identity-turn in the EU studies at the beginning of the 21st century has brought the symbolic dimension back to the fore with the debate on European identity (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009; Fligstein, 2009; Risse, 2010). The EU has been depicted as a form of biopolitical governance, a Foucauldian pattern of domination and government at-a-distance (Haahr and Walters, 2005; Hardt and Negri, 2000). The consensus prevails that while the EU is not duplicating the nation-state model in the impossible search for a congruence between culture and politics (McNamara, 2015), identity politics is now impossible to ignore (Börzel and Risse, 2018). Views are more diverging, however, as regards the extent to which the block is relying on and updating traditional symbolic resources.

Prizes are the last-to-date symbolic instrument favoured by EU institutions. They allow the mobilization of the stock of available ideas, affects, memories and representations to propose a worldview serving the exercise of power, the implementation of policy or the response to demands for meaning and reassurance from their social constituency. Among other instruments, prizes allow EU institutions to offer to European citizens and civil society a kind of identity usually defined both as a 'mirror'; and a 'wall' defining the Self as related to Otherness and structuring the relations with the external world (Cerutti and Lucarelli, 2008, p. 12).

European identity remains weak at personal level, but has become increasingly routinized as a floating signifier instrumentalized for various purposes (Gaxie *et al.*, 2011). It means that European institutions as symbolic entrepreneurs are secondary to member states and may be in competition with a variety of public and private actors. Recognition and political leadership gained at the supranational and transnational levels may therefore

complement the legitimation resources gained at national level but neither overpower nor replace them (Cowles *et al.*, 2001; Herrmann *et al.*, 2004; Kuhn, 2015).

These limits have not prevented the EU to draw on a repertoire of symbols inspired by the nation-state models. They relate to discursive elements (narrative, motto); codified attitudes, behaviours and rituals; or physical objects (from flags to architectural settings). Prizes loom large across the three categories as they are most frequently given material (medal, logo) and discursive forms and aim to shape individual and collective practices (Ihl, 2007).

We propose to study these European prizes as reflecting four specific features of European symbolic politics. The first feature is the indirect and limited dimension of European communication that has constantly searched to enlarge the debate to the masses but with means circumscribing its impact to the elites (Aldrin and Dakowska, 2011; Schrag Sternberg, 2013). The propensity of European institutions to empower civil society already socialized to their ethos as carriers of the European discourse often leads to speaking to the already convinced (Barnett, 2001).

Prizes indeed mostly pass unnoticed with the wider European publics and only seem to reach limited sectorial audiences. When controversies arise, they are mostly linked to the money involved, as for instance around the LUX prize awarded by the Parliament to filmmakers. Awarded since 2007, it was regularly contested by MEPs themselves, mostly coming from right-wing groups, as an unnecessary expense. A resolution adopted in 2014, for instance, ‘Considers prizes not to be a core activity of Parliament and requests that a cost–benefit analysis be carried out before any new prize initiatives are developed.’¹ The resolution in 2015 reiterated calls on reducing the budget of the LUX prize, while asking for ‘a representative survey of Members to be conducted by the end of 2015 to determine whether the LUX Prize is well known and how, if at all, it is viewed in their respective Member States’ (European Parliament, 2015, p. 59), thereby suggesting that the visibility and prestige of the prize are too weak to justify the expense.

A second feature of European symbolic politics reflected by prizes is the double constraint represented by the systematic imitation of and submission to national symbols, as illustrated in the institutionalization of the European External Action Service by the way its agents bow to the role model of the ‘true diplomat’ (Adler-Nissen, 2014).

A third feature is that the dramatization of European unity is frequently done through a narrative of competition between national actors, like in the mediatization of the European Council as ‘gladiatorial politics’ between divergent national interests (Foret and Rittelmeyer, 2013); the largest pan-European media ritual, the Champion’s League of football (Vonnard and Laborie, 2019); or Eurovision as a simulacre of competition reflecting actual political conflicts and rivalry through the patterns of voting (Le Guern, 2004; Pajala, 2012).

Finally, a fourth feature of European symbolic politics is the reversal of spatiality and temporality. Regarding time, political powers tend to claim credit for pushing innovation to prepare the future or to contain potential future threats rather than to fulfil missions inherited from the past (Beck, 1992). The multiplication of European prizes as incentives rather than rewards reflects this tendency. The spatiality of symbols has also been altered

¹Point tabled as an amendment to the draft report adopted in the Budget committee, by MEP Dennis de Jong (European United Left - Nordic Green Left), one of the most active critics of the LUX Prize (European Parliament, 2014, p. 40).

as they increasingly target external audiences (markets, international institutions, global public opinions). Giving priority to external constraints over domestic demands and advertising global success to compensate for internal failure has been exemplified for instance by the promotion of fundamental rights worldwide taking precedence over their application at home (Whitman, 2011) or the presentation of the euro, labelled as ‘Money for Mars’ (Hymans, 2006) due to its lack of historical and spatial anchoring, as a tool of global competition and an attribute of external power.

Prizes have proven to be highly compatible with these political shifts. Since the beginning of the 2010s, they have been turned into hybrid instruments combining features of old-style symbolic politics with those of neoliberal and public management policy. The second part of this article gives an account of this evolution.

II. Shifting Purposes: From the Celebration of Political Heroes to the Emulation of Innovators

In a previous article, we showed that the creation of European prizes can be explained first by looking at the historical juncture of their establishment and at the then prevailing vision of politics; at the general state of European affairs – crisis or momentum of European integration; and, finally, by looking at the priorities structuring the EU agenda (*reference erased for the purpose of the blinded peer review*). 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. The article identified four main ‘generations’ of distinctions since the early 1950s that deal successively with politics, culture and human rights before flourishing in all policy sectors (*reference erased for the purpose of the blinded peer review*). The first generation of prizes (1950s–mid-1970s) relates to politics and celebrates in very broad terms contributions to European integration by prominent political leaders or by local actors. A second generation of prizes (mid-1970s–late 1980s) in culture and media is congruent with the general quest for European identity and symbols to legitimate a process of integration then in disarray. A third generation of prizes (late 1980s–1990s) 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. A fourth generation (since the 2000s) is characterized by a proliferation of awards in all policy domains. We focus here on this last generation and identify the four most prolific policy fields.

Prizes created since the 2000s have in common to be inspired by the ethos of the market and to reward entrepreneurship, innovation and economic competitiveness. They are showcases of the shift from the reward of past achievements to incentives for future ones; from the production of values and role models for the internal political community to the address to an external audience; of the increasing sharing by European institutions with civil society of the responsibility to grant awards; and still, of the resilient claims by these European institutions to set the rules and to control the symbolic meaning of these distinctions.

European Prizes at the Crossroads between Governing by Numbers and Symbolic Politics

The rise of European prizes exemplifies the global trends in public management of a reliance on numbers more than on law (Shore and Wright, 2015; Supiot, 2015), and the

diffusion of ‘best practices’ and rankings rather than rule-making (Lascoumes and Gales, 2007; Radaelli, 2004), and testifies to the enthusiastic adoption of these resources by European institutions. Meanwhile, the functions and modalities of prizes also reveal the resilient tensions between these new forms of regulation and long-standing patterns of symbolic legitimization; and the resistance of policy and social sectors to the implementation of ‘one-size-fits-all’ tools.

At first glance, most European prizes have been put in place by the European Commission in policy areas where the EU’s competence is shared with the member states. Prizes have indeed served as a soft standard-setting tool to circumvent national governments and signal ‘good practices’ directly to the regulated entities, citizens, companies or institutions.

Beyond this global pattern, divergent logics are at work. Some prizes are tailored according to standards that fit differently across member states and activity sectors. A prominent example is the ‘inducement prize’ flourishing in ‘research and development’ public and private policies but less usual elsewhere. Inducement prizes are usually endowed with large sums of money and aim at encouraging inventions and innovation in response to a pre-defined problem.² This model coming from the US has inspired the proliferation of ‘challenge prizes’ created by the EC since 2014 (Mäkelä, 2017). It has proven unequally accepted by national cultures more or less welcoming to partnerships between private and public sectors and empowerment of economic actors to produce public outcomes (Bruno, 2009; Bruno *et al.*, 2016).

Beyond their unequal reception, prizes have been contested due to their instrumentalization for regulatory purposes. From tools in free use to foster innovation, they have progressively been turned into instruments of a ‘Better Regulation’ driven by new public management principles of flexibility, efficiency, and the output orientation of expenditure (European Commission, 2018a). This is attested when looking at the evolution of the spending rules since the 2000s. Since 2007, an increasing number of provisions in the Financial Regulation codify and encourage the use of prizes, with a whole section on prizes as spending instruments added in 2012 (FR of 2012, Title VII). This codification appears as an attempt to restore some order in reaction to their proliferation. Prizes are thus increasingly mobilized by bureaucratic hierarchies to make EU spending more flexible, output-driven and privileging lump sum payments. The encouragement to use such devices became explicit in the 2018 revision of the Financial Regulation that facilitates the creation of prizes worth 1 million euros or more (which *de facto* is the case of the Horizon Prizes), as a part of the Commission’s ‘Better Regulation’ agenda (European Commission, 2018a) and also supported by the European Court of Auditors (European Commission, 2017a; European Commission, 2017b). In short, what started as an incremental bottom-up multiplication of prizes by all branches of European bureaucracy in search for policy self-empowerment led to a top-down re-regulation by central authorities in the Commission.

Still, in terms of expenditure, the EU prizes remain a rather modest addendum to other policy and funding tools. They only make up a small fraction of all Horizon 2020 research spending and in other policy fields, financial rewards rarely exceed 100,000 euros. In the

²The inducement prize is understood as ‘a payment funded out of general revenue that is made to a researcher conditional on delivering a specified invention’ (Gallini and Scotchmer, 2002, p. 53).

field of communication and journalism, the prizes granted by the Commission usually come with no or little financial reward (a few thousand euros only or a study trip to Brussels). Overall, in most policy areas, the symbolic function of distinctions prevails over the material incentives they provide - prizes must indeed be worth more than their money if they intend to produce effects.

European prizes thus remain on the side of symbolic politics due to their dual capacity to empower both actors that are recipients and those who are prize-givers, in a complex exchanges of gratifications and interdependences. Their strengthened regulation after a first anarchic boom highlights that they are instruments of power both in the interactions between institutions and society and within institutions. Finally, their polysemy and status of open signifiers as symbols is illustrated by the variations of their uses and meanings and the resistances they met across policy sectors. The next section highlights the characteristics of the new generation of prizes.

III. Prizes across Policy Sectors: The Inescapable Fragmentation and Backlashes of Symbolic Governance

In order to grasp changes in EU's symbolic politics through the analysis of one of its tools, prizes, it is necessary to look more closely at the role that prizes have been assigned in the policy areas where their boom has been most significant: research and innovation; economic governance; communication; territorial and environmental public action. Each case highlights specific features of the European symbolic governance through prizes. Research and innovation illustrate the capacity of prizes to enlarge the spatial outreach of a power and to reverse its relation to time from a legitimizing past to an enabling future, as well as to strengthen its indirect control over actors through the diffusion of role models. Economic governance emphasizes the double function of prizes as a unity maker in the building of a single European market, and as an emulation resource to enhance competition. Communication exemplifies how prizes make possible a shift in the doctrine of legitimation (from internal to external outputs) and of social constituency (from internal to external audiences). Territorial and environmental policies show that prizes are triggers of alliance-building by European institutions with local and civil society actors to enlarge their societal basis but also to share the burden of decision and accountability.

Research and Innovation: Governing by 'Challenges' for the Future and by Role Models

The 'research and innovation' policy field encapsulates all EU's support of research activity, from individual grants to multi-million network projects. It is mostly managed by the DG Research and Innovation, but also relies on a series of specialized institutions, such as the Joint Research Centre, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology or the European Research Council (ERC). Most of EU funding targets research that promises to solve industrial or societal 'challenges'³. European institutions are thus able to shape a large part of the scientific agenda by defining these challenges and to appear as triggers for innovation. As a part of the Horizon 2020 Programme, first 'Horizon Prizes', then a

³About two thirds of the Horizon 2020 budget are currently allocated to programmes with a 'top-down' approach, that is with pre-defined goals, as opposed to what the Commission calls 'bottom-up' programmes, such as the ERC or Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. (European Commission, 2017c, p. 58).

pilot version of a European Commission (2018a, 2018b) were launched and ran a series of highly-funded awards deemed to seek out 'market-creating innovation' (European Commission, 2019) and 'identify and scale up breakthrough and disruptive innovation' (European Council conclusions, 28 June 2018). As the recommendations of the High Level Group of Innovators that partly inspired their creation suggest, such instruments are linked to ambitions of playing the role of a 'global actor' in industrial innovation (report 'Europe is back: accelerating breakthrough innovation', 2018).

The framing of research as a driver of economic competitiveness is by no means novel. The ECSC (1951), EURATOM (1957), Treaty of Rome and the Single European Act (1986) paved the way in this direction. The first Framework Programme (FP) for research was launched in 1984 with a focus on biotechnology, telecommunications and industrial technology and following FPs enlarged to many disciplines with the same logic.⁴ Progressively, European programmes have gained budgets, prestige and visibility and structured national scientific policies.

The multiplication of prizes in this field since the beginning of the 2010s has contributed to the Europeanization of research as well as industrial research & development activities.⁵ Prizes have also contributed to enlarging the social and geographic outreach of European scientific policy as recipients may be non-Europeans and often no or little restrictions apply as to the identity of recipients (companies, institutions, individuals). Overall, 23 inducement prizes have been created as a part of the Horizon 2020 programme. They have proposed to reward accomplishments in technology innovation and research, from warning systems for epidemics to solutions for a 'low-cost space launch' (European Commission, 2018b). Arguably, ERC grants launched in 2007 can also be considered as inducement prizes.⁶ They are distributed after a selective process crowning the winners as frontier researchers and leaders of innovation, but also strongly linked to the past achievements of candidates. Such awards come with substantial budgets for the laureates and have a big impact on the status of winners but also of their teams, working environment and even disciplines (Beerens, 2018; König, 2018). In short, they are rewarding the past as much as the future, with symbolic as well as material means. They enhance scientific references and objectives that may unify the scientific profession but also create tensions and frustrations in hierarchies and professional fields. While ERC grants have fostered attention to rigorous peer review and international dimension of research, their portability has produced a 'clustering of research talent and reputation towards some institutions and some states' (Follesdal, 2019, p. 245), creating imbalances, structural changes in the social organization of science leading to oligarchization (Hoenig, 2017) and doubts on their ability to increase innovation at societal level.

⁴Third Framework Programme (1990–1994), Fourth Framework Programme (1994–1998), of which 28 per cent is directed to information and communication technologies, 18 per cent to non-nuclear energy, 16 per cent to industrial technologies, 13 per cent to life sciences and technologies and 9 per cent to environmental sciences and technologies (Nugent, 1994, p. 287).

⁵Since 2011, 27 mostly one-time prizes have been created, as compared to only 2 previously existing ones in this policy area.

⁶Some more expansive definitions of 'targeted prizes' or inducement prizes also include research grants (Khan, 2015, p. 636) and the difference between the two is not clear-cut (see for example prizes known as 'blue-sky prizes', Scotchmer, 2004, p. 42). At EU level, the distinction between the two is a matter of policy. The current definition by the DG Research and Innovation reads as follows: 'Prizes are awarded for the delivery of a pre-defined result (included in the prize application), while grants are funding research and/or innovation projects based on a grant proposal that will be carried out in the future.' (<http://ec.europa.eu/research/horizonprize/index.cfm?prize=clean-engine>).

Although research and innovation prizes represent a small proportion of all EU's funding of R&D activity, their importance is likely to grow due to the definition of EU scientific policy as mission- and output-driven in order to foster industrial innovation and profits. The increasing use of prizes can thus be interpreted as the general mobilization of research to foster economic competitiveness and the global attractiveness of the EU, while tightening the control of European institutions on scientific activities through incentives and guidelines.

Example: Better Use of Antibiotics (2015–16)

One of the first Horizon Prizes focused on reducing the consumption of antibiotics. The reward would go to any entity worldwide presenting the best diagnostic solution that would solve the challenge and help doctors identify the origin of an upper respiratory infection by a simple test and thus avoid prescribing antibiotics in cases of viral infections. In a top-down logic, an emblematic 1 million euro was thus to be awarded to the best method proposed to achieve a pre-defined result. At the same time, this case shows how the resort to innovation prizes is a part of the positioning of the EU towards extra-European audiences as a global player active on 'global challenges'. The EU prize indeed ran parallel to similar inducement prizes launched by the UK and the US in 2014 and 2016. Compared to the EU prize, however, the latter presented much higher rewards (£10 million and \$20 million respectively). The prize thus appears as fuelled by the emulation with other scientific powers, while circumscribed by the limited resources of a transnational administration.

Economic Governance: Unity through Competition, at the Risk of Backlash

EU institutions have also significantly expanded the use of prizes in market policies over the past decade. Prizes are mobilized in this area mainly in pursuit of two goals: the completion of the European single market by encouraging the free circulation of goods, services, persons, ideas and practices; and the bolstering of the global attractiveness and competitiveness of EU's economy. Prizes mostly fall under programmes carried out by DG GROW (Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs) and DG CONNECT (Communications Networks, Content and Technology). They mostly aim at boosting the growth potential of businesses, and to the difference from the 'best in class prizes' in research and innovation, they focus on identifying 'good practices' and ideas that are 'replicable' (European Commission, 2017c, p. 14). Instead of large sums of money, these prizes offer laureates a 'seal of quality' that may then attract new business partners and investors.

The creation of the European common market obviously has a history much older than that of a generalization of prizes. This explains why their instrumentalization to serve economic unification is especially due to most recent issues. For example, the world of new technologies is fond of prizes as incentives to build the 'digital single market'. In the same way, efforts to turn the EU into a virtuous and performing knowledge economy took full speed in the 2010s, the period of flourishing of prizes. The 2008 financial crisis also enhanced the use of prizes as low-cost instruments for encouraging competitiveness and adaptation of workers and companies to the market. In short, in the economic domain where competences are both shared and contested between national and supranational levels of

governance, prizes enable the Commission to stress the importance of economic growth and of the orientation of welfare states towards economic efficiency while circumventing national actors.

The market ethos is reinforced by the collaboration of the Commission with private foundations or associations such as Eurochambers, the UEAPME or the Finnova Foundation on awarding distinctions. Such collaboration is more frequent in this policy area than in others in both absolute numbers and proportionally.⁷ At the same time, such collaborations make it possible for the Commission to position itself as a relevant actor steering Europe to adapt to the ‘new economy’. The Startup Europe Awards, dubbed by the Commission as ‘the Eurovision of Startups’, the European Digital Skills Awards or the STARTS Prize (2016) rewarding projects where artistic use of technology contributes to its conversion into new products or services, are examples of such collaborations with private sponsors. The STARTS programme is in addition a good example of how the notion of innovation pervades a number of areas of activity to define their criteria of quality and legitimacy, and enrol them in the pursuit of competitiveness.⁸ Innovation and creativity are merged in the STARTS programme and exemplify the conception of art and culture as ‘embodying tradable economic value’ (Schlesinger, 2017, p. 86). As the 2010 Green Paper on creative industries suggests, ‘if Europe wants to remain competitive in this changing global environment, it needs to put in place the right conditions for creativity and innovation to flourish in a new entrepreneurial culture’ (European Commission, 2010). Overall, prizes in economic governance are used as resources to complete the single market and reinforce European competitiveness. However, as such they do not always succeed in de-politicizing the agendas of public action they aim to frame. They are also participating in building up tensions between divergent interests competing for awards and between social and economic purposes of European integration.⁹

Example: The European Social Innovation Competition

The award launched in 2012 by DG GROW is meant to encourage companies to innovate on a theme selected each year ‘to advance Europe’s growth model’ (European Commission, 2015). Most themes revolve around the advancement of employability of young people or vulnerable groups of society, such as the elderly or people with disabilities. In 2018, candidates were asked to show how they were creating ‘market opportunities based on local specifics’ and proposing solutions to ‘empower young people to participate fully in a changing economy’ (European Commission, 2018c). The rather symbolic financial support of the award (50,000 euros to each of the three winners) attests to a difference between excellence prizes rewarding exceptional performances and those encouraging ‘good practices’ at the scale of the society. This competition enables the Commission to mobilize a pool of EU companies around values and goals contributing to global competitiveness, while highlighting that they are compatible with social goals and thus

⁷Overall, one in four EU prizes in the corpus was set up in collaboration with a private sector partner. In market-related policies, 10 out of 14 prizes are co-organized and/or co-sponsored by private partners.

⁸An ethos of innovation is present in the definition of one in two prizes of the corpus (46 out of 91). While most belong to the research and innovation area, communication, market policy and territorial and environmental prizes are also concerned.

⁹See for example the criticism of the STARTS programme by The Guild, an association of research-intensive universities, arguing that the aim of Horizon Europe, the successor of Horizon 2020, should remain the funding of research and innovation, and not ‘subsidizing sectors’ (EP Horizon Europe briefing).

suggesting that innovation will help European societies navigate through the transformations of global capitalism.

Communication: Shift from Internal to External Advocacy for Europe

Prizes in the sector of communication refer to rewards given by EU institutions to journalists. They epitomize historical tensions in the EU's relations with the media from the very outset of integration (Harrison and Pukallus, 2015). The necessity imposed itself to overcome the ignorance, indifference and increasing reluctance of citizens following the progressive replacement of the 'permissive consensus' by the 'constraining dissensus' (Foret, 2017). Interactions with the press evolved from a complicity between European institutions and special correspondents in Brussels towards a mutually critical relationship while EU policies were impacting all policy domains and given more public exposure (Sobotova, 2017). As such, EU news were more and more subjected to usual rules of journalism (Bastin, 2002). An excessive proximity between institutional sources and journalists, or any initiative likely to influence the production of information (for example by granting a prize) have been increasingly perceived as an attack against the freedom of the press. The European Parliament Prize for Journalism is emblematic in this respect. It sparked heavy criticism, including by MEPs themselves, as an inappropriate claim of European institutions to hierarchize information, leading to its suppression in 2012. Several smaller and less visible prizes disappeared as well in the same period: the EU Health Prize for Journalists created by the DG Santé (last one in 2012) and the EU Journalist Award 'For diversity. Against discrimination' created by DG Justice (last one in 2011).¹⁰ Sporadically, criticism of journalism prizes also appeared on other grounds - a prize awarded by the EU Delegation in Riyadh in 2014 to the Bahrain National Institution for Human Rights was criticized by MEPs for the NGO having allegedly justified human rights violations perpetrated by the Bahraini Government.¹¹ These cases remain rare, however, the Parliament having paid little attention so far to the prizes distributed by the Commission.

Journalism prizes have been created by the EU institutions at a steady rhythm since the beginning of the 1990s. At the beginning of the 2010s, however, a shift appears regarding the constituency of recipients targeted, from journalists reporting about EU affairs for European audiences to non-European journalists. This migration of journalism prizes to extra-European audiences is even more striking because it mirrors what happens in other fields (for example in research and education with the transformation of Erasmus to Erasmus Mundus and the global outreach of scientific grants). Looking at the broader picture, it can be interpreted as a structural move in the modalities of legitimation of the EU. Struggling to gain the loyalty of its citizens along the traditional principles and channels of representative democracy, the European polity increasingly puts forward a justification by outputs and the necessity to cope with external challenges (be it competition on global markets, contestation of Western values by emerging powers or geopolitical threats).

¹⁰In both cases, the prizes were meant to bring visibility and attention to the importance and transnational character of public problems on which the EU only has a very weak competence. In this way, prizes were contributing to conveying the message of a need for more and stronger common policies in these areas.

¹¹See the Question for written answer E-004872-18 to the Commission asked by Barbara Lochbihler (Verts/ALE), Michel Reimon (Verts/ALE) and Jordi Solé (Verts/ALE) on the 27 September 2018.

After the disappearance of a series of intra-European prizes, journalism prizes reappeared as a tool in the EU's foreign policy. This fresh use is far from homogenous depending on the country concerned. In bilateral relations with established democracies (Canada, Australia, but also the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States), these distinctions have for long reward local junior or senior journalists for their coverage of EU affairs and have thus represented a tool of EU promotion abroad. By contrast, in other countries considered as less advanced in terms of democracy and human development, journalism prizes started to be used as soft tools of supporting the freedom of the press and fundamental rights. Prizes launched by EU Delegations in Georgia (2012), Indonesia (2018), Philippines (2014), or the Balkans (2015) are thus given to reporters who unveil human rights abuses, corruption or contribute to conflict resolution and thus 'contribute to promoting a better understanding of the values of the European Union'¹². In other words, the advocacy for universal principles goes hand in hand with a self-serving message.

Example: 'EU Awards for Journalists' in Indonesia and South Korea

Two recent one-off human rights prizes framed as EU awards for journalists were created by the European External Action Service in relation to major sports events – the 2018 Asian Games and Asian Para Games in Indonesia, and the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics and Paralympics in South Korea, both encouraging reports on 'non-discrimination related issues'. The participation of sportswomen or athletes with disabilities were given as examples of causes to support. The winners are not awarded prize money but are invited for a study trip to Brussels 'to meet EU experts and institutions in the human-rights and sports field as well as European civil society organizations'.¹³ Overall, these prizes dramatize with little cost the preoccupation of the EU with human rights towards external audiences. Meanwhile, they may meet criticism of double standards between advocacy for human rights in external and domestic affairs.

Territorial and Environmental Policy: Building Alliances and Sharing Accountability with Local and Civil Society Actors

Prizes of the last category come from two policy fields that share a series of characteristics. Both relate to the political management of space; both are structures of opportunities for European institutions to bypass member states to bridge alliances with infra-national authorities and actors from the private sector and civil society. Also, such policies aim to counterbalance negative effects of the market and fill in gaps in living standards across the EU. They are managed mostly by the DG Regional and Urban policy and the DG Environment, relying on the European Environmental Agency.

Both policies have developed since the 1970s, were strengthened through the Single European Act (1986) and structured by the Maastricht Treaty (1993). They have for long represented typical areas of shared competence where the Commission has been trying to expand its action and stretch the treaty provisions. Connecting with the regions was the Commission's strategy for circumventing nation states already in the late 1980s (Keating *et al.*, 2015). This direct connection with non-state actors also proved to be an important element in the field of environmental policy, especially since the promotion by the EU of

¹²<https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/news/eu-names-winners-2017-prize-journalism-georgia>.

¹³https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/indonesia/49404/eu-invokes-olympic-spirit-human-rights-journalism-award_id.

self-regulation of the private sector and civil society. The governance by prizes flourishing in territorial and environmental policies thus fosters ‘government at distance’ and self-compliance of actors as well as alliances between territorial and functional levels of powers to get around national authorities.

Both policy sectors are characterized by a tension between market and sustainability, as the purpose is to produce public goods which current generations are accountable for to the future ones. Besides, each sector plays a role in the strategies of EU’s economic growth based on innovation and the adaptability of industry and workforce. The regional policy has evolved from a pattern of solidarity between rich and poor regions towards a strategy of ‘activation’ of the lame ducks in territorial competition (Coman and Sbaraglia, 2018). The environmental policy is more on the regulatory side without direct redistributive effect but has a potential significant impact on the productive force after an intense production of norms in the 2000s (Steinebach and Knill, 2017, p. 430).

Prizes in environmental and regional policies enable the Commission to increase its own visibility in areas of shared competence and to gain margins of initiative by getting around national authorities to build coalitions with regions, cities and companies. Secondly, they let the Commission share the burden of accountability for coming to terms with globalization and environmental challenges with third parties. Prizes display that the EU is not the only one in charge and cares for local initiatives trying to fill the gaps.

Example: The European Green Capital.

The European Green Capital was established in 2008. The prize works as an incentive for key actors to act towards defined environmental policy goals. Only cities and towns from member and candidate countries (plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland) can apply, usually three years ahead, to become ‘role models’ and ‘EU ambassadors’. If they are selected, they do not receive any special funding, but the title is supposed to help them pool funding from other sources. Also, former green capitals network and continue exchanging ‘good practices’, transgressing nation-state borders in an effort to pursue an EU policy agenda.

Conclusion

Our purpose was to understand the triggers, modalities and effects of the multiplication and mutation of European prizes as the expression of changes in the legitimization of the EU. European prizes work as a magnifying glass of the changing political priorities and ways of functioning of the EU, which itself reproduces and amplifies the structural mutations of political governance at all territorial and functional level, from the local to the global.

In a nutshell, the reliance on such policy instruments indicates a shift towards an output-based and market-oriented legitimation register. Our empirical case studies confirm largely our hypotheses. R&I illustrates the way prizes express the reversal of the relation of the EU to time (from a constraining past to an enabling future) and the reliance on indirect regulation by incentives; economic governance embodies the function of prizes as ‘unity in competition’ enhancers; communication exemplifies the shift in legitimation from internal to external affairs; and territorial and environmental policies show the way prizes can be used by the EU institutions to bypass the national level and share accountability with local and civil society actors.

Still, symbolic politics is not easily reducible to market and bureaucracy logics. Even customized as tools of competitiveness under global constraints and culturally neutral regulatory devices, European prizes meet the same resistances and limits than previous EU communicative resources. They neither eclipse nor alter existing hierarchies of power and inequalities of access to the outputs and opportunities offered by European integration.

Prizes are instrumental to assert the centrality and agency of European institutions in political and symbolic terms, but within the familiar limits of its policy networks and already existing social constituencies. European institutions are no matrix of collective identity and public action at societal level - they tend to keep a low profile in the public sphere by choice, necessity or impossibility to gain audience.

In a nutshell, European prizes condense all the features of contemporary European multi-level governance and usual symbolic practices. These features are exacerbated at the supranational and transnational levels which are less covered by tradition and culture and unveil functionalist logics in plain view. European prizes express the revolution (in the physical sense) of the justification of political orders that shift from the past to the future; from the internal to the external sphere; from the consent of the people to its compliance; from a reliance on the inputs to ultimate reference to the outputs. As such, beyond their frequently limited range and effects, European prizes cast a crude light on the current mechanisms of domination and action at work in Western democracies that the EU merely reproduces.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Data S1. Supporting information