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Fake, partial and imposed compliance: the limits of the EU's normative power in the Western Balkans

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Abstract

This article examines the EU's external power through the prism of perceptions by non-EU countries of the aims of EU's foreign policy, as shown in the Western Balkans. It argues that the EU's policy in the Western Balkans lacks a strong normative justification, which affects the degree of compliance with the EU's demands in areas related to state sovereignty. The perceived lack of legitimacy opens up political space for domestic actors to contest the positions taken by the EU on normative grounds. The Western Balkan countries have responded by giving preference to internal sources of legitimacy and asserting domestic reasons for fake compliance, partial compliance or non-compliance with the EU's conditions, with the latter provoking imposed compliance. The article links the enlargement literature with the study of EU foreign policy by offering a new approach to analysing the normative and strategic dimensions of the EU's external power.

Keywords:

Compliance

EU conditionality

European foreign policy

Europeanization

legitimacy

‘normative power Europe’

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