

ETHNOCENTRIC EVOLUTION IN THE FOREIGN POLICY OF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract. *The article covers the periodic development of ethnocentrism in the foreign policy of European states in specific periods. The study analyzes the development of ethnocentric views from ancient antiquity, the Middle Ages, the great kingdoms, colonialism, imperialism, the World Wars, The Cold War era, and the modern era. The fact that Europe promoted its values as a dominant model gave rise to foreign policy dominance, which caused controversy. Ethnocentrism occupies a place and has a significant impact on international relations as a permanent component of European foreign policy.*

Key words: *Ethnocentrism, foreign policy, colonialism, modernization, universal norms, secularism, the Mediterranean, democracy, capitalism, human rights, constructivism, postcolonialism, Europe, normative power, national narcissism, cultural relativism*

Introduction

Ethnocentrism is a tendency to evaluate other cultures, societies and elites based on the values and standards of one's own culture. Introduced by sociologist William Graham Sumner in the 20th century, the concept can manifest in positive and negative forms.¹ On the one hand, ethnocentrism can raise social cohesion and solidarity. On the other hand, it can cause to different societal problems from cultural misunderstanding, racism to the incorrect decision making by elite of one country in the foreign policy.

Theoretical framework

In political science, ethnocentrism can be seen as an attitude that one's own ethnic group is superior and its values, culture and experiences are the correct standard for other nations. According to British anthropologist Ken Booth ethnocentrism is the concept of considering other cultures, societies and elites from the point of view of the paradigmatic foundations of their own culture.²

¹ Sumner, W. G. "Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals". Boston: Ginn and Co. 1906. Available at: <https://share.google/8ivE9JAL9t3ifuq7M> (accessed 18.07.2025).

² Kenneth B. "Strategy and Ethnocentrism". London: Holmes & Meier, 1979. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315769738/strategy-ethnocentrism> routledge revivals ken booth (accessed 24.06.2025).

Ethnocentrism, one of the main points of European foreign policy, has determined the place of European countries in international relations in various periods, from ethnic history to the modern era.³

European foreign policy is historically based on the ethnocentric view of “us and them”. Today, these views continue primarily as exports of democracy, human rights, and values.

Inayatullah and David, in their book “International Relations and the Problem of Difference (2024), threaten the problem of difference, arguing that Europe presents itself as a “center” and others as a “periphery”.⁴ In the foreign policy of European countries, there are paradigmatic foundations on which “We – civilized, the rest – backward.”

Maja Zehfuss believes that Europe is a constructive self-image built as a center of values, democracy, and freedom, while it sees the rest of the states as “others”.⁵ Theories of difference (Inayatullah) and identity construction (Zehfuss) serve as methodological tools for studying ethnocentrism in European foreign policy. The aim of the research is that to analyze the historical evolution of ethnocentric views in the foreign policy of the European countries.

Main analysis

In the foreign political relations of European states, ethnocentrism manifests itself in different forms in different historical periods. At first, it prevailed as a social concept, but later it also began to be prominent in the political activities of states. William Graham Sumner argues that ethnocentrism is based on this principle of “seeing one’s own group as a center and evaluating other groups in relation to it”.⁶ This approach is evident in the colonial and post colonial policies of European powers.⁷

Scholars such as Inayatullah and Zehfuss have proposed the study of ethnocentrism in association with theories of international relations.⁸ Modern research, on the other hand, interprets it as an active political discursive strategy. Therefore, when analyzing the ethnocentric periodicity of the foreign policy of European states, it is necessary to divide it

³ Bicchi, F. “Our Size Fits All: Normative Power Europe and the Mediterranean”. Journal of European Public Policy, 2006. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247087659_Our_size_fits_all_Normative_power_Europe_and_the_Mediterranean (accessed 24.06.2025).

⁴ Inayatullah, N. & David L. International Relations and the Problem of Difference. New York: Routledge, 2024. Available at: <https://share.google/5nB7oQfUKc3UgiZrZ> (accessed 24.06.2025).

⁵ Zehfuss, M. “Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality”. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Available at: <https://share.google/xgT7lG7AT6y3pdeGG> (accessed 18.07.2025).

⁶ Sumner, W. G. “Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals”. Boston: Ginn and Co. 1906. Available at: <https://share.google/8ivE9JAL9t3ifuq7M> (accessed 18.07.2025).

⁷ Robert J. “Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction”. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/998920/postcolonialism-an-historical-introduction-pdf> (accessed 24.05.2025).

⁸ Inayatullah, N. & David L. International Relations and the Problem of Difference. New York: Routledge, 2024. Available at: <https://share.google/5nB7oQfUKc3UgiZrZ> (accessed 24.06.2025).

into historical periods and consider the ideological foundations and political practices of each period.

When we discuss the foreign policy of the Greeks and Romans in antiquity, mainly as European peoples, we must understand their relationship to other states. This period saw the first manifestations of ethnocentrism in Europe. The Hellenes (Greeks) referred to themselves as “barbarians”, while those who remained “civilized”. This view was also dominant in external relations.⁹

Analyzing through Inayatullah's and David's theory of personality building, the Romans saw themselves as a “center of civilization” and would recognize the rest of the peoples as “other”.¹⁰ In antiquity, a phrase was popular: “All roads lead to Rome”. Roman citizens and rights were placed above other peoples and given high status. The policy of assimilation of the conquered peoples was dominant. This is consistent with Sumner's “we” and “they” concept of differentiation.¹¹

Middle Ages: Christianity and relations with the Islamic world

Most peoples of Europe were in the Christian faith and they classified themselves as “Christians” and the Muslim world as “other” or “enemy”. Crusades are a clear example of this and are seen as an expression of religious and political ethnocentrism.¹² The National states is also a clear example of the fact that the first European emergence and international relations (equal relations) are carried out only between them).¹³

During these periods, a hostile mood that saw itself as superior in Western relations with the East created a “clash of civilizations” in his later contacts between the Byzantine va Muslim caliphates and the Mogh'uls.¹⁴

Great discoveries and colonial period (beginning of the 15th-19th centuries)

The manifestation of Western superiority as a normative force is also shown by the era of the great discoveries of the XV-XVI centuries. Robert J. (2001) argued that colonialism was

⁹ Kenneth B. «Strategy and Ethnocentrism». London: Holmes & Meier, 1979. Available at: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315769738/strategy-ethnocentrism> routledge revivals ken booth (accessed 24.06.2025).

¹⁰ Inayatullah, N. & David L. International Relations and the Problem of Difference. New York: Routledge, 2024. Available at: <https://share.google/5nB7oQfUKc3UgiZrZ> (accessed 24.06.2025).

¹¹ Sumner, W. G. “Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals”. Boston: Ginn and Co. 1906. Available at: <https://share.google/8ivE9JAL9t3ifug7M> (accessed 18.07.2025).

¹² Thomas D. “Constructing the Self and Changing others: Reconsidering Normative Power Europe”. Millennium: Journal of International Studies 33, 2005. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031701> (accessed 24.05.2025).

¹³ Zehfuss, M. “Constructivism is International Relations: The Politics of Reality”. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Available at: <https://share.google/xgT7IG7AT6y3pdeGG> (accessed 18.07.2025).

¹⁴ Mann, M. “The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing”. Cambridge University Press, 2005. Available at: <https://share.google/lXdGyIwKtV9Npi6vr> (accessed 18.07.2025).

not only an economic but also an ideological process based on ethnocentrism.¹⁵ Europeans attempted to re-educate the “backward” peoples in the way of their ideology during this period.

Escobar's (1995) concept of “development”, however, denotes the interpretation of colonialism as a new type of development path. “The West exports its system to other regions- thus strengthening its supremacy”. This idea defined the European model as a universal system and aimed to assimilate it into other nations.¹⁶ Thus, this milestone in European history was the period of globalization of the Eurocracies and the formation of Eurocentrism.

19th century imperialism and world wars

The era of imperialism “legitimized” European ethnocentric politics. Being interpreted as a “civilized” people, European countries continued to assimilate their “progressive” policies into “backward” states. This grounded economic exploitation, cementing political dominance. Michael Mann (2005): “The ‘dark side’ of nationalism is most visible during this period: ethnic cleansing, ideas of racial superiority, and the view of colonized peoples as second-class citizens were widespread.”¹⁷

This dark side was one of the main trends that led to World Wars. The Second World War embodied the most tragic manifestations of ethnocentrism. As Michael Mann (2005) notes, Nazism and fascism came to the surface as extreme forms of ethnocentrism.¹⁸ The Germanic race, in particular, was the concept of the German nation as the “superior race”, and as proof of this, the discovery of a Neanderthal man, close to the current human appearance, was found in Germany.

Later Surkhandarya, although it is revealed that a man of the same species was found from Boysun's hollow cave, the Germans came out as a “supreme race” demanding that other peoples serve them. This call from Hitler caused unprecedented oppression and great looting in the world – the world saw another World War, the massacre “Holocaust” took millions of lives. The racial political system has changed the world order and has become a “civilization mask” for the interests of the West.

Cold War era

Two blocks promoting two ideologies separated by the “iron curtain” drew geopolitical boundaries for the United States-led European states in favor of capitalist ideology and the

¹⁵ Robert J. “Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction”. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/998920/postcolonialism-an-historical-introduction-pdf> (accessed 24.05.2025).

¹⁶ Escobar, A. “Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World”. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. Available at: <https://share.google/m9KMSIk9jqxAhfS63> (accessed 18.07.2025).

¹⁷ Mann, M. “The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing”. Cambridge University Press, 2005. Available at: <https://share.google/lXdGyIwKtV9Npi6vr> (accessed 18.07.2025).

¹⁸ ibid

eastern states – the bipolar world-led by the USSR, which supported communist ideas. As Ikenberry (2001) commented, West sought to ensure his “normative superiority”.¹⁹ Western dominance has weaponized the massive introduction of democratic institutions, human rights, and market economies that embody “universal” values to the world. Europe, as the center of Western civilization, has made the ideas of “democracy and freedom” the basis of the global order.

Modern era

The post-Cold War period shows a period in European politics where “normative power” is evident and expressed through soft power. Thomas (2005) found that “the EU is advancing human rights, rule of law and democracy as a global standard, presenting its values as a universalized norm”.²⁰ Bicchieri's (2006) research criticizes European foreign policy and argues that the concept of “Our Size Fits All” is based on an ethnocentric view of the European model. Politics in the Mediterranean in particular make this clear.²¹

Escobar's (1995) concept of “development” is also prominent in modern political processes. For example, in the process of European construction of democratic institutions in Afghanistan, this model turned to zavor due to the fact that the ethnic composition of the “free” Afghan people, formed for thousands of years, religious factors and cultural environment were not taken into account.²²

In addition, while the model it presents in development projects in Africa is promoted as a “single path”, it faces competition from a Chinese project like One Belt-One Road and some other states. The “only way” did not take into account Political Cartoons, historical factors and local culture. Thus, in modern times, European ethnocentrism is manifested in the process of globalization as a “developmental” path and “normative superiority” in post imperialism.

Conclusion

The following key aspects are prominent in the analysis of the evolution of European ethnocentrism from antiquity to the modern period. As Michael Mann points out, the overexpression of national identity led to racist and ethnic cleansing processes during

¹⁹ Ikenberry, G. “After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars”. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Available at: <https://share.google/bPRlg5XDbH2XESxwH> (accessed 18.07.2025).

²⁰ Thomas D. “Constructing the Self and Changing others: Reconsidering Normative Power Europe”. Millennium: Journal of International Studies 33, 2005. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298050330031701> (accessed 24.05.2025).

²¹ Bicchieri, F. “Our Size Fits All: Normative Power Europe and the Mediterranean”. Journal of European Public Policy, 2006. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247087659_Our_size_fits_all_Normative_power_Europe_and_the_Mediterranean (accessed 24.06.2025).

²² Escobar, A. “Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World”. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. Available at: <https://share.google/m9KMSIk9jqxAhfS63> (accessed 18.07.2025).

imperialism.²³ As successors of the historical states of Rome and Greece, which were cradles of “civilization” in antiquity, during World War II, the German came out claiming that “All roads lead to Berlin”. The “Iron Curtain” of the Cold War did not block and save the world from the “universal” values of the West. The modern era is playing an important role in the global order on the principle of the “progressive” European Union “Our Size Fits All” - European states provide a “universal” development path, which is the “only way” for the whole world.

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