

# Problematizations in the EU's external policies: the case of Singapore as “the other”

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**Abstract** This article examines how othering is an imperative element in the external policies of the European Union (EU) in its relationship with Singapore. From a post-structural perspective, we look at these policies as problem-constructing processes and consider othering as the production of knowledge on “the other”. We focus on civil society engagement in the Free Trade Agreement and cooperation in the tax area in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the two countries. We find the EU to bring into reality a version of the country that interacts with these policies as problem producing.

## Introduction

The European Union (EU) and Singapore are set for a new phase in their bilateral relationship. The EU's relations with Singapore were for a long period of time predominantly embedded in the interregional context of the EU-ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) relationship. In recent years, the strictly bilateral aspects of the relationship have been strengthened and institutionalized. On the one hand, the EU and Singapore have negotiated (between 2010 and mid-2014) a deal on trade liberalization and investment. Given the decision of the European Court of Justice on the mixed competence regarding investment (European Court of Justice 2017; Van Loo 2017), the deal is now split in two: a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and an Investment Protection Agreement (IPA). These agreements demonstrate the trade and investment-related importance of Singapore for the EU as the ASEANs largest partner in trade in goods and services, and the number one location in Asia for EU investments (European Commission 2018b). On the other hand, article 16.18 of the FTA and 4.12 of the IPA link the agreements to a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in a common institutional framework. This agreement was negotiated (between 2005 and mid-2013)

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to strengthen political dialog and enhance cooperation in a broad range of areas (European Commission 2014).

This paper shows how these external policies of the EU can be viewed as “problematizations” that link with discourses of othering. From a post-structural angle, we investigate what “problems” these policies aim to address. This follows the WPR (What is the Problem Represented to be?) approach for policy analysis (Bacchi 2009). This approach looks at policies not as solutions for natural or objective problems waiting to be addressed, but rather as processes of producing problems of a specific kind. Such a view helps us better understand policy by tracing it back to underlying assumptions within problem representations (Bacchi 2012, p. 22). This means that we would not be looking at, for example, EU trade policy as a policy response to a taken-for-granted problem of barriers to trade, but rather at the process that produces specific issues as barriers to trade and thus as problems. Such an analysis is however not limited to this “constructedness” of problems and thus differs from constructivism as it looks specifically into the discourses on which the production of problems rely (Merlingen 2011, p. 153). From a Foucauldian perspective, discourse is viewed as the generation of “knowledge” that delineates what can be said and done (Foucault 1972, 1991). The central argument in this paper is that, for the EU, the set of “appropriate” speech acts and policy actions depends on the production of “knowledge” about an “other”, in this case Singapore.

Apart from adding Foucauldian insights to the study of the contemporary EU–Singapore relationship (cf. Hoang and Sicurelli 2017; McKenzie and Meissner 2016), this article critically engages with the Normative Power Europe (NPE, Manners 2002) concept and the debates surrounding it. It aims to add three points. Firstly, we agree with Diez (2005) that the normative identity of the EU is not an objective category; “[i]nstead, it is a practice of discursive representation” (p. 626). It entails a construction of the “self” and Diez identified the “need” for an “other” in doing so. What this paper contributes is an understanding of othering as knowledge production on the “other” in the process of policy making. Secondly, identity should not be considered a given to be empirically tested, but something that is practiced or “performed” in everyday contexts (cf. Mol 2002; Tietäväinen et al. 2008, p. 64). This also implies that there is no such thing as “the” normative identity of the EU, but rather a number of speech and policy acts which make what the EU is. We aim to show how an “EU identity” is thus heterogeneous, contingent, and open to change. Finally, we want to talk about power in normative power. Foucault views power not only in terms of repression and disabling but equally as productive and enabling in the sense of bringing realities into existence (Foucault 1984; Foucault 1990). This means that to produce discourse is to hold power and support a specific power relationship. This paper will put forward how othering discourses reflect this.’

The empirical material in this paper consists of an extensive “Singapore database” that covers all public references from the European Commission, the Council, and the European Parliament since 2008. For the latter, we have transcribed two INTA meetings (INTA 2013, 2014) and one Committee of Foreign Affairs (AFET 2013) that had EU–Singapore relations as their main topic. Moreover, we gathered all Agence Europe entries on Singapore between 1996 and 2015. Finally, 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted with policy officials, business representatives, and civil society actors from both the EU and Singapore.

The next section introduces Singapore as a case of which the technical aura of the relationship with the EU strengthens the argument of the central role of othering in policy making. Then, the theoretical section of this paper will discuss the WPR approach as a post-structural analytical strategy and specify how we view the role of othering in policy as problematizations. The empirical section has two examples of EU policy decisions vis-à-vis Singapore for which we investigate processes of problematization and discourses of othering: civil society engagement through the FTA and cooperation in the tax area in the PCA. The conclusions bring together the empirical findings with the theoretical argument.

## Singapore

The year 2019 will mark 200 years since Thomas Raffles secured British presence at a strategic point near the Straits of Malacca. The historical narrative is that Raffles' "foundation" of modern Singapore marks the start of the country's modern outlook based on free trade and global capital. However, local historians point to how the colonial period has been reinterpreted by the "Singapore story" of economic success (Guest 2018). This paper will inquire how much of the "Singapore story" is revisited in the knowledge production on the country by the EU in the setting of the contemporary relationship between the EU and Singapore.

This relationship was for a long period of time predominantly embedded in the interregional context of EU-ASEAN relations. In recent years, the strictly bilateral aspects of the relationship have been strengthened and institutionalized through an FTA, a separate Investment Agreement (albeit negotiated together with the FTA), and a PCA. Despite its small size, the importance of the EU-Singapore trade relationship is substantial and the goals the EU had set before the negotiations of the FTA ambitious. Contemporary Singapore, however, is not a liberal democracy. Albeit under the surface, one finds the lines between the ruling PAP (People's Action Party) and all-encompassing state authority to be blurred (Chong 2006; Rodan 2011). Other noteworthy elements of Singapore's political system are (1) a lack of freedom of expression (due to defamation laws and un-free press), (2) strong state power, (3) the use of capital punishment and caning in the criminal system, and (4) no real freedom of association for labor groups and other civil society organizations. This latter element (Han 2016) is what triggered the investigation into civil society engagement in the FTA, while tax cooperation was signaled as a contentious issue in the PCA negotiations by the interviewees.

How discourses of othering as discussed above take shape and take role in EU external policies vis-à-vis Singapore particularly is interesting for two interrelated reasons. I agree with McKenzie (2016) that the salience for many issues regarding Singapore is low. This is because, although the EU has been found to put issues such as the death penalty, discrimination of LGBTI people, and freedom of expression on the diplomatic agenda (EEAS 2015, p. 251; Interview 6), Singapore is not a case for the European Parliament to signal its normative principles, nor have European businesses lobbied for the FTA to be a transformative deal. The EU-Singapore relationship on the other hand is arguably the mundane, the usual, the day-to-day. Rather than testing the EU "true self" in a dichotomous norms versus interests setting, this paper investigates

what the EU “is” and is “becoming” in everyday practices. Moreover, as a consequence, most of the discourse on Singapore is of technical or apolitical nature. This paper investigates how reality about Singapore is made thinkable not predominantly through grand speeches, but rather through technical means of reporting, ranking, or committee meetings (Löwenheim 2008; Merlingen 2006).

## On problems and “others”

The WPR (What is the Problem Represented to be?) approach is a post-structural analytic strategy that puts in question the common view that the role of government is to solve problems that sit outside them, waiting to be addressed. Rather, it considers how governmental practices produce “problems” as particular kinds of problems (Bacchi 2009). Gender mainstreaming as an EU strategy in development cooperation, for example, is found to address a “problem” of limited employment and access to education and training programs for women (Calvo 2013 in: Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, pp. 65–66). This is not about intentional issue manipulation, conspiracies, or strategic framing. Instead, the aim is to better understand policy by paying attention to the forms of knowledge that substantiate public policies. In the example of gender mainstreaming, Calvo directs to discourses of efficiency, independence, and labor market participation in place that support a problem representation that values labor market skills over care work (Ibid.). A WPR analysis has policy (proposals) as a starting point to inquire about problem representations and the presuppositions/assumptions that underlie this representation. It further investigates how such a representation has come about: what practices have produced it? Moreover, a WPR analysis looks into silences (what is left unproblematic) and effects of problem representations. It also focuses on the how and where of dissemination and defense of a particular representation. Finally, a WPR approach motivates the researcher to reflect on her own problematizations (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 20).

The reference to governmental practices indicates the affiliation of the WPR approach to the Foucauldian concept of governmentality and a particular understanding of discourse where knowledge production and strategies of power come together (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, pp. 27–53; Dean 2010; Foucault 1990, 2007, 2008). In short, governmentality denotes a set of rationalities and techniques for the exercise of power (Ejodus 2017) which make governing possible (Walters and Haahr 2005). It brings together the practice of governing and the necessary rationality of government that makes governing possible. It is therefore not just about how institutions “do” policy, but is also about the discourses that construct particular objects or subjects of governance (Joseph 2010, p. 223). This links to where the WPR approach specifically focuses on what Rose and Miller (1992) called the problematics of government, the production of problems to be addressed.

A number of scholars have, from a governmentality perspective, zoomed in on EU external policies as problematizations. Joseph (2014) has studied how EU resilience building in the Horn of Africa produces a representation of “the problem” as one of the local institutions, capacity, and governance while silencing external conditions or the wider international environment (p. 290). Merlingen (2011) investigated the construction of countries as problem spaces in external security governance with the problem

represented as shortfalls of the local (Macedonian) police. Moreover, he described the practice of fact-finding missions as knowledge-producing practices in which the room for intervention was defined, yet certain questions were not asked (pp. 157–158). What these have in common is what İşleyen (2015), in her study on EU twinning projects in Egypt and Tunisia, called framing the local as a problem sphere rather than addressing the instrumental role of the EU and other international organizations in the reform processes of both countries (pp. 678–680). In a view on external policies as problematizations, the EU is found to produce problems of a specific kind, namely “local problems.” An essential building block of these “local problems” is knowledge on “the other.”

Otherring as discourse is a form of knowledge production about the “other” that in our understanding underlies EU external policies as problematizations of the local. It sets the limit upon what it is thinkable, sayable, and doable. We investigate what the EU knows about Singapore, but equally how it comes to know what it knows. Otherring encompasses discursive practices that set the stage for an EU intervention in the form of statements in the European Parliament and press releases by the European Commission, but also reports, charts, tables, or maps often perceived as apolitical. These are both constructing and acting upon reality (Merlingen 2011, p. 153). At its core, the discursive construction of “the other” or othering draws on Hegel (cf. Williams 1992), yet the concept gained prominence through the writings of Edward Said on Orientalism (Said 1978). Orientalism represents the knowledge production by the West on the East (the Arab World and Asia, viz. the Orient) which sustains dogmas of an Orient that is aberrant, underdeveloped, eternal, incapable of defining itself, and something to be feared. This is in absolute difference with the West that is rational, superior, scientifically objective, and able to control the former (pp. 300–301). In our interpretation, othering *can* produce knowledge on the other that is positive. But othering as the invention of “the other” is more than the discursive abstraction about a specific group. It is also a mechanism of power founded on knowledge on the other (Castro-Gomez 2002) including a hierarchy of knowing and moral sentiments (cfr. Spivak 1988) which prepares the groundwork for an “intervention” of some kind.

The concept of othering has already gained traction in the study of the formation of European or EU identity with Russia (Neumann 1999) or Turkey (Tekin 2010) as the “other”. For both, the European region is an “imagined community” in need of imaginary borders. In a contribution to the normative power debate, Diez (2005) points to the interdependent constructedness of the EU normative identity and “the other.” He problematizes this othering as justification for (military) intervention, over moral evaluation implying the superiority of the “self”, to a process of convincing or otherwise brought to accept the other of the principles of the self (pp. 628–629). From such a constructivist perspective, one might look at the construction of the self/other as it “may help analysts and policy-makers acknowledge the limits of the EU’s global reach based on such a construction” (Pace 2007, p. 1044). A post-structural analysis shares the argument that ideas and norms matter, but does not look for a historical origin or the explanatory value of these constructions (Merlingen 2011, p. 153) but rather focuses on how policies represent a “problem” of a certain kind made possible by discourses of, among others, othering.

## Singapore as the “other” in EU external policies

This paper continues with an in-depth investigation into two policy actions by the EU with regard to Singapore. These are the chapter on trade and sustainable development in the FTA and the cooperation in the tax area in the PCA. As outlined above, we look at policies as the production of “problems” of a specific kind depending on and sustained by othering.

### Trade and sustainable development

This first section investigates how the Trade and Sustainable Development chapter of the FTA addresses civil society engagement in trade agreements. We show how this engagement serves to address a specific problem, namely the lack of knowledge on the impact of the FTA on sustainable development. Then we scrutinize what assumption underlies this specific problematization through the leading questions of the WPR approach. Again, this approach asks what the problem is represented to be, how is this representation sustained by discourses and practices, and what are the effects of this representation?

#### 12.14. Review of Impact on Sustainable Development

1. Each Party undertakes to monitor, assess and review the impact of the implementation of this Agreement on sustainable development, jointly or independently, through its relevant participative processes and institutions, in accordance with its existing practices.
2. The Parties will exchange views on methodologies and indicators for trade sustainability impact assessments. (European Commission 2018a)

The starting points for our analysis are points 1 and 2 from Article 12.14 (“Review of Impact on Sustainable Development”) from Chapter 12 on Trade and Sustainable Development of the EU–Singapore FTA. This chapter puts emphasis on the importance of the fundamental Conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and multilateral environmental agreements. Moreover, it sets up an institutional framework for domestic consultation with relevant stakeholders on both sides (*infra*). The “problem” in 12.14 is represented to be the lack of knowledge on the impact of the FTA on sustainable development. This problematization draws on sustainable development as a discourse and comes about through the practice of the “solution”, namely civil society engagement, while both interact with discourses of othering.

What does sustainable development mean? The *Guide to the EU–Singapore FTA* stipulates that “the agreement promotes sustainable development: economic growth going hand in hand with strengthening of people’s rights at work and protecting the environment” (DG Trade 2018, p. 10). Sustainable development as a concept is considered to have a contested meaning (Jordan 2008) in which for some it means increased public participation in decision making, a mark to the environmental limits to growth, or improvement of equity within and between generations (p. 20). Sustainable development as a policy thus has a combination of “what” elements in relation to

social, ecological, economic, and resource management, and “how” elements on the role of major groups and implementation (Summerville et al. 2008). On the origin of the concept, major reference is usually made to the so-called Brundtland report which put forward sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, p. 3 in: Jordan 2008, p. 20). Such a broad definition has proved to be useful in a strategic sense in how it allows different groups to rally behind the concept (Jordan 2008).

More importantly, sustainable development as a discourse sustains a new era of economic growth, one in which limitations to current social organization and technology in relation to environmental resources can be managed, governed, and improved (Luke 1995, p. 23). Luke (1995) investigated how sustainable development as a discourse delineated our thinking about the environment and its relation with economic growth. Interestingly, instead of interlinking economic growth and the environment, this discourse actually “invented” nature and the environment as something separate from the economic system. It puts forward economic growth as having an impact on the environment, and thus as two separate “things” rather than economic growth as part of a system that is our planet. In the context of the EU's trade policy and sustainable development, Ford (2013) also finds the economic system to be viewed as a space with an artificial boundary. This makes nature something external to this system, and environmental (and social) problems externality problems or market failure which in turn can be internalized or fixed through the market (pp. 583–584). Moreover, the sustainable development discourse envisions (un)sustainability as measurable and subject to organizationally embodied expert management (Luke 1995, p. 25). It puts forward that we can and should give close attention to the impact of economic growth, in this case through an FTA, on sustainability, for the EU clearly in the meaning of both “what” and “how” (*supra*). It makes Ford (2013) conclude that “the onus is on the environmental impact assessments of trade agreements to mitigate negative impacts rather than rethink trade policy and trade agreements themselves” (p. 586).

It is through such impact assessments that knowledges on Singapore are produced. De Ville and Siles-Brugge (2015) already showed how the commonly used computable general equilibrium (CGE) models are not necessarily reliable economic outcome estimates but rather serve the pro-liberalization agenda of the European Commission. Moreover, through these impact assessments, we come to “know” Singapore: “often rated as one of the easiest country in the world with which to do business and in terms of transparency and corruption issues, Singapore is one of the world's leaders ranked 4th in the Global Enabling Trade Report 2008” (DG Trade 2010, p. 1). It is very common for knowledge on Singapore to be in terms of, usually topping, rankings on competitiveness, corruption, or trade openness. “All in all, the World Bank ranks Singapore in its annual [Ease of] Doing Business report to be the top performer in the world when it comes to ease of trading across borders” (European Commission 2013, p. 19). Such references reveal certain ideas about links between good governance and economic growth, and what can be considered normal (Löwenheim 2008).

Although Singapore usually comes on top of these rankings, to have them as the source of our knowledge about the country holds both the legitimacy of such rankings and the silencing over “un-measurable” elements of Singapore. Because for those countries that come at the bottom of such rankings, responsibility is put with the

“examined” country for the negative classification and its future improvement (Löwenheim 2008, p. 259). Moreover, it is the “un-measurability” of the (micro-)impacts of country-level economic performance that silences them. In terms of social impact of the EUSFTA, a study does, for example, mention that “any increase [in the textiles sector] will in any case exert a pull on workers from other Asian countries, given the dependence of the TCF [textiles, clothing and footwear] sectors on foreign workers in Singapore” (DG Trade 2010, p. 3). What it fails to address however are the grave working and living conditions for the close to one million unskilled and semi-skilled workers in the country (Han 2018).

Thus, the problem of limited knowledge on the impact of the FTA on sustainability depends on the idea of sustainable development where firstly “the environment” and “social conditions” are separated from the economic system, to then secondly be internalized through market-based management. Moreover, the quest of knowledge on this impact produces knowledge on Singapore in a measurable, comparable way, yet silences issues that are inherent to a certain economic system.

In addition, this problematization is in interaction with its solution: engaging civil society through the FTA. It delegates the monitoring of and reporting on the implementation of the chapter on trade and sustainable development. This might arguably be more efficient given that these often have more expertise on the ground than the signing parties do (Orbie et al. 2018, p. 144). On the other hand, others have found the EU’s civil society engagement in different policy fields to hold “power of the technical” (İşleyen 2015) in facilitating the “right kind” of civil society (Kurki 2011). Moreover, although not yet implemented for the EUSFTA, “this kind” of engagement puts the responsibility of producing impact knowledge with civil society regardless of what we find are limited *de jure* capacities to do so. Chapter 12 (Article 12.14) firstly sets up a Board on Trade and Sustainable Development with senior officials which meets within 2 years after entry into force and thereafter “as necessary”. Each meeting of the Board includes a public session with relevant stakeholders. However, if “not necessary”, the Board will only meet this one time. Secondly, each Party commits to establishing a new or making use of existing consultative mechanisms to seek advice from relevant domestic stakeholders. It opens the door for the continuation of the status quo. The result is no real prospect for institutionalized transnational consultation of civil society; the word “civil society” has been left out of the chapter altogether. This was at the request of Singapore (Interview 3; 5) and has set a low bar for, among others, the EU-Vietnam FTA (Martens et al. 2018).

Given, as I said earlier today, the underdeveloped nature of civil society in Singapore, I am concerned that the working of the domestic advisory group will be difficult and I would like to hear the Commission’s views on how we are going to make sure the DAG functions effectively. (INTA, Martin 2014)

[...]we don’t want to be told either by other parties how we constitute our domestic advisory groups. I think this is a bit much of interference. But that doesn’t mean; we will hold Singapore accountable to a process which is clearly working and which is credible. [...] The whole point of the sustainable

development chapter and the cooperative approach is the cooperative approach, and that is also for the question who is there and do we have a credible process. The last thing we want is window dressing. (INTA, Schlegelmilch 2014)

In the process of establishing the civil society solution, there is again the production of knowledge on Singapore. As this interaction illustrates, this knowledge (“the underdeveloped nature”) is there to accompany the strength of the solution (“clearly working and which is credible”). It silences the civil society that is there in the country and supporting migrant workers, fighting for LGBT rights, or campaigning against the death penalty. One could argue that civil society in Singapore is not underdeveloped, but rather outside the structures of the government (Interview 10) and, as a consequence, this FTA.

### Cooperation in the tax area

In this section, we investigate how the stance of the EU on banking secrecy in Singapore is contingent on internal problem constructions and sustained by othering. The former sets the stage for the “problem” of banking secrecy, while the latter makes an EU intervention an appropriate thing to do. This is not simply a question of why the EU is doing this, but rather an inquiry into the discursive practices that delineate how this issue is problematized.

The PCA also contains provisions on cooperation in the tax area. In view of the developments at the international level on a new global standard of automatic exchange of information for tax purposes, it is deemed appropriate that, at the time of signature of the PCA, both sides sign a Joint Declaration on this issue. While not an integral part of the PCA, the Joint Declaration shall express a firm political commitment on the intention of both sides to adhere to the new standard in their bilateral relations. (European Commission 2014, p. 2)

The starting point for my analysis is the following part of the Explanatory Memorandum in the Proposal for a Council Decision on the PCA. The problem is represented to be an uncertainty over whether the parties will adhere to this new global standard.<sup>1</sup> That this is predominantly about the commitment of Singapore will become clear below. This problematization stems from the history of the “problem” of banking secrecy, which calls for this cooperation in the tax area, and knowledge on Singapore that make this linkage in the PCA appropriate.

The history of the “problem” of banking secrecy in Singapore first relates to the EU Directive on Saving Taxation (2003/48/EC). Sharman (2008) looks at this directive as a case study of the EU responding to challenges of globalization and how decision-making is embedded in broader discourse on the irrepressibility of globalization (cf. Hay and Rosamond 2002). Sharman substantiates the role of a policy narrative of a “displacement of the problem”. The problem at hand was (is) the differences among the

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<sup>1</sup> This is an OECD Standards which “draws extensively on earlier work of the OECD in the area of automatic exchange of information. It incorporates progress made within the European Union, as well as global anti-money laundering standards, with the intergovernmental implementation of the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) having acted as a catalyst for the move towards automatic exchange of information in a multilateral context” (OECD *nd.*).

EU Member States regarding banking secrecy. “Fiscal degradation” and “harmful tax competition” were enabled as “problems” as discourses on the harmful economic effects of globalization (with the Member States) and the needs for the functioning of the single market (with the Commission) came to overlap in the mid-1990s (Sharman 2008, p. 1054). After hard negotiations (Austria, Luxembourg, and Belgium were notorious opponents), the consensus in the directive involved the possibility to comply via either automatic exchange of information or a withholding tax (keeping banking secrecy tightly in place). From there, however, proponents and opponents of the directive alike subscribed to the narrative of “displacement of the problem”. In this narrative, it is put simply that those willing to avoid taxes will move their savings to another tax haven outside the EU. According to Sharman, this motivated initiatives to convince non-EU countries to foresee equivalent measures, but at the same time shows the inability of intra-EU legislation to deal with these kinds of issues (p. 1052).

This paper does not link policy narratives to policy outcomes in an explanatory relationship. A Foucauldian analysis has more of an interest in discourses as knowledges, thus not as an explanatory variable but rather in function of denaturalizing and destabilizing terms we might take for granted (Walters and Haahr 2005). In other words, we are not just looking for explanations for the EU’s policies vis-à-vis Singapore with regard to taxation; we also want to demonstrate how these policies represent a “problem” of a certain kind made possible by discourses of a certain kind. This way, there is more potential to show how these policies are not solutions for given problems waiting to be addressed but are rather problematizations made possible by knowledges on, in this case, the harmful economic consequences of globalization and the needs of the internal market. Sharman’s timeline of the “problem” is thus essential to understand how “harmful tax competition” became a “thing” for the EU to address in its external policies. How this “thing” then became the unreliability of Singapore to adhere to global standards is another example of othering.

The provisions in the PCA on cooperation in the tax area is policy that problematizes Singapore’s banking secrecy. It represents the “problem” as an issue of limited good governance and is made possible by knowledge production on Singapore and the enactment of “the EU” as a needed intervener. Firstly, Singapore has been mentioned in relation to savings taxation and banking secrecy since June 2001. At that time, the implications of the future directive discussed above were becoming clear in Switzerland. The Swiss (represented by their Bankers Association) would only agree to a compromise if it would be equally applied by certain Asian countries such as Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. In response, an observer at the time added that it is “not out of the question that such agreements would be negotiated with these Asian countries which, for the time being, do not represent a significant danger for tax evasion” (AE, 13.06.01). As the directive was to take effect, the need for agreements with third countries came to the forefront again. Commissioner Kovacs visited both Singapore and Hong Kong “to see whether [they] are prepared to adopt equivalent measures to the directive on taxation of savings income.” To come to an agreement on this, however, the Commission would need a mandate to launch negotiations (AE, 25.10.05). The official authorization followed on the 25th of October 2006 with a mandate allowing exploratory talks. The Commission also noted that, despite the existence of extended double taxation conventions linking Singapore to several Member States, these do not allow for a broad exchange of information (AE,

26.10.06). These talks however were still in an exploratory phase by late 2008 (AE, 14.11.08; European Commission 2009) and help [from Singapore to] make European tax evaders pay tax to their home countries on interest earned offshore (Reuters 2007) necessary. Whereas we saw above that the “problem” in the 2003 EU Directive was represented to be fiscal degradation and harmful tax competition, it came to represent money laundering and organized crime in Singapore:

If I was looking for somewhere to do my money laundering, Singapore would be getting towards the top of my list these days [...] Singapore need[s] to step up transparency of its financial sector to avoid the possibility of attracting organized crime given that it was due to open the first of two multi-billion dollar casinos in late 2009.

The big money laundering hubs in the world are disappearing and nobody wants Singapore to replace them. And, of course, nobody is accusing Singapore now, but that's a reality not only in terms of financing of terrorism, but also in terms of organized crime. (Reuters 2007 quoting MEPs Ford and Guardans-Cambo)

At the same time, the EU Finance Ministers, at a meeting on 14 May 2008, defined good governance in the tax area as the principles of transparency, exchange of information, and fair tax competition. In future agreements, partner countries should “recognise and commit themselves to implement the principles of good governance in the tax area as subscribed to by Member States at Community level” (Council of the European Union 2008, p. 23).

Banking secrecy in Singapore became not only a problem of limited good governance but also one that justified an EU intervention. Othering as knowledge production on Singapore again plays a central role. Not only in identifying the “problem” as we just discussed but in how this is substantiated further. Singapore finds itself at the bad end of a ranking as it takes 6th place in the Tax Justice Network Financial Secrecy Index 2011 mentioned in a study for the European Parliament (Blomeyer and Sanz 2013, p. 44). Moreover, the study treats Singapore as a case study of a tax haven jurisdiction in which Singapore is classified by the OECD as “another financial center, committed to the internationally agreed standard but which had [...] not yet substantially implemented it” (pp. 94–95). These discourses put forward Singapore's banking secrecy as a problem and supplement it with a problem of unwillingness to respond to this problem.

[The European Parliament] [c]onsiders a resolution to the problem of banking secrecy in Singapore, which is blocking the conclusion of a PCA, to be essential if there is to be a real prospect of a region-to-region FTA. (European Parliament 2008)

[...] prior to conclusion of an FTA and related PCA [Partnership and Cooperation Agreement] with Singapore, it will evaluate the degree to which Singapore is providing sufficient cooperation in the field of taxation of savings. (European Commission 2011, in: Blomeyer and Sanz 2013, p. 96)

The issue did hold up the negotiations for a while (Interview 6), yet the negotiations were concluded by mid-2013 (EEAS 2013). Moreover, at the end of 2016, Singapore adopted the Income Tax Regulations that allow for the implementation of the Standard for Automatic Exchange (Ministry of Finance Singapore n.d.). This came even before the official signature of the PCA which is pending due to the Court of Justice case of the FTA.

## Conclusions and discussion

This article aimed to critically investigate the EU's external policies towards Singapore as they have institutionalized their relationship through trade, investment, and political agreements. Guided by the leading questions of the WPR approach, we showed that these policies are best to be approached as problematizations. As such, we could, among others, uncover how othering forms an essential part of the underlying assumptions of such problem constructions.

We have presented an empirically rigorous investigation into two highly relevant elements of the EU–Singapore relationship. With regard to the engagement of civil society to review the impact of the FTA on sustainable development, we saw that the meaning of sustainable development and the responsibility of civil society are presuppositions of this policy. It shows the productive power of the EU to produce discourses (and thus knowledges) on Singapore and thus bring into reality a measurable, technical version of the country in relation to impact and an underdeveloped one regarding civil society. Moreover, the othering never falters to accompany policies as the “appropriate” ones. On the topic of cooperation in the tax area, we discussed how unreliability of Singapore to comply with a global standard was constructed as a problem. This history of this problem is contingent on internal ideas on the tax competition and later the global scale of the problem. Moreover, the problem of banking secrecy in Singapore specifically was dependent on a shifting perception of the country as lacking good governance or even a hub for criminal activity. Finally, the EU came to “know” Singapore as a country that needed an incentive to address this problem which laid the groundwork for an EU intervention. Whether or not the changed legislation in Singapore was the result of this EU intervention, the latter's willingness to do so indicates a form of disciplinary power.

Theoretically, this paper makes a contribution to the analysis of the EU external policies by introducing the post-structural WPR approach and by focusing on othering. The WPR approach takes policies as problematizations and views them as the starting point of an analysis that meticulously takes steps back to the assumption that underlies these “problems.” Here is room for further inquiry for comparison with other elements of the EU–Singapore relationship, or other comparable countries. There is also room to follow up these policies and look at shifting problematizations as implementation proceeds. We have also particularly focused on othering in the broad meaning of knowledge production on “the other.” There were examples of negative representations of Singapore (“underdeveloped,” “attracting organized crime”) but also positive even admiring accounts of the country (“Ease of Doing Business”). Nevertheless, all these had a part in the construction of the problems EU policies aim to address. This is, one might argue, an inherent part of policy making: understanding the country that your

policy is dealing with. What a post-structural account adds is the critical view on this understanding. The knowledge that the EU produces on Singapore is not neutral, technical, or apolitical background information, but the bringing into reality of a version of the country that interacts with policies as problem producing.

List of interviews

No.	Date	Function
1	3/02/2014	European Commission
2	19/08/2014	Business representative
3	20/08/2014	European Commission
4	22/08/2014	Business representative
5	19/02/2015	EEAS
6	23/02/2015	EEAS
7	13/03/2015	Embassy Singapore
8	4/08/2015	European Commission
9	4/08/2015	Embassy Singapore
10	17/06/2016	Civil society Singapore
11	23/06/2016	European Commission
12	23/06/2016	MS Embassy

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