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The study of EU foreign policy: between international relations and European studies

The European Union's foreign policy is an ongoing puzzle. The membership of the enlarging European Union has set itself ever more ambitious goals in the field of foreign policy-making, yet at the same time each member state continues to guard its ability to conduct an independent foreign policy. As far as the EU's ambitions are concerned, foreign policy cooperation led to coordination, and coordination in turn gave way to the aspiration of developing a common foreign policy. Concern over foreign policy was the precursor to endeavours to cooperate in matters of security and eventually defence policy. And the desire to maintain the national veto over decision-making within the 'second pillar' of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) gave way to the acceptance that, at least in some agreed areas, detailed policies – joint actions and common positions – would be determined by qualified majority vote.

Yet, despite these advances the reluctance of member states to submit their diplomacy to the strait-jacket of EU decision-making has remained. Individual states have maintained distinct national foreign policies, whether this is about specific regional interests, specific global issues or special relationships with other powers. This has been reflected in the institutional arrangements based on the principle of unanimity. Indeed, the very pillar structure of the EU treaties – separating the 'Community pillar' from the special regime that governs CFSP and parts of Justice and Home Affairs – is a hallmark of an arrangement in which member states have sought to minimise the role of supranational institutions and preserve national autonomy.

And yet, despite the sensitivity of member states in the area of foreign policy, and their caution to move beyond intergovernmental decision-making mechanisms in this field, foreign policy has been one of the areas in which European integration has made the most dynamic advances. This includes institutional innovations such as the establishment of the post of High Representative for the CFSP and the creation of an EU Military Staff, both based within the

Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, as well as the development of new approaches to humanitarian assistance combining the work of economic, civic and security policies.

What we have witnessed since the mid-1990s is a rapid expansion in the policy-scope and institutional capacity of EU foreign policy-making. However, it has been a development that has been about more than just the choices of member states to further integrate in this area. Structural changes in the international system – the end of the Cold War, the rise of new security concerns, the emergence of a unipolar world – as well as factors external to the EU – the violent dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the security implications of EU enlargement, the implications of economic and political instability on the southern and eastern borders of the Union (the aftermath of 9/11) – have combined to compel the EU to make greater strides at speaking with a single voice. Arguably, the single greatest push for reforming EU foreign policy-making has come from the experience of its performance in dealing with the wars that accompanied the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. Unity of purpose, on the one hand, and institutional and material capabilities, on the other hand, have been the key issues that the EU has had to confront in the development of an effective foreign policy, and the desire to address deficiencies with respect to both of these dimensions has engendered the institutional changes that have occurred over the past decade.

In addition, there has been the link between foreign policy, on the one side, and the Union's trade, enlargement, economic assistance and humanitarian aid policies, on the other side, which have been increasingly difficult to ignore. With the latter being made within the first pillar, and involving substantial input from the European Commission, the wish to employ these policies towards the wider foreign policy goals of the Union has also contributed to a greater push for the 'communitarisation' of CFSP.

The prospect of these first and second pillar policies being drawn together towards the outward projection of the Union's interests is one of the factors giving rise to the prospect of a European Union foreign policy. EU foreign policy, in this perspective, is more than just CFSP. It involved the totality of the EU's external relations, combining political, economic, humanitarian and, more recently, also military instruments at the disposal of the Union.

It is the study of this broader concept, going beyond the traditional, exclusive focus on CFSP, which is the purpose of this volume. In particular, the present volume addresses three challenges that arise from the development of foreign policy in the EU over the past decade: first, it suggests ways of reconceptualising the external relations of European Union as *foreign policy* and therefore to apply concepts to the study of this area that draw on the insights of approaches from the wider field of foreign policy analysis. Second, it discusses the positioning of the study of EU foreign policy in relation to the discipline of international relations, in recognition of the transformation that the European construction has undergone in the recent past. And third, it links developments

in the debate about integration theory, in particular the constructivist challenge to the established rationalist and intergovernmentalist approaches, to the study of the Union's foreign relations. Taken together, this volume suggests new ways in which European Union foreign policy can be studied in the context of the significant theoretical advancements and empirical developments that occurred during the 1990s.

The study of CFSP

Many texts on the international capacity of the EU focus upon the development of decision-making and policy within CFSP, Peterson and Sjursen (1998), Regelsberger, de Schoutheete, and Wessels (1997), Nuttall (1992) and Holland (1991 and 1997) being among the leading examples. Such studies are important because they provide an analytical insight to the way in which business is conducted within CFSP and how the process has developed – at least in terms of how policy-making and decision-making have evolved. They frequently highlight the gap between what the member states formally aspire to in the realm of European political cooperation (EPC)/CFSP and what decision-making capacity they actually give to EPC/CFSP as a policy process. What is often missing from such accounts, however, is a reflection upon how EPC or its successor CFSP thus related to the process of European integration more broadly and what such cooperation says about the relationships between EC/EU member states and their evolution as international actors.

Another larger segment of the literature relates to thematic/regional case studies or those looking more broadly at the Union in the world (Allen and Pijpers 1984; Ifestos 1987; Buchan 1993; Nørgaard, Pedersen, and Petersen 1993; Holland 1995; Piening 1997; Smith 1998; Bretherton and Vogler, 1999). The critical value of this category of study is that it provides the empirical meat of substantive analysis. What the Union does (or does not do) is crucial to any serious understanding of the Union as an actor. Its failures, more often than its successes, provide the analyst with an important 'reality check' in any assessment of the EU's capacity in the international environment. Such studies, however, may miss crucial aspects of foreign policy change. By focusing upon policy outputs there is a danger that the evolution of policy-making and, crucially, the impact or significance of that evolution upon the member states is undervalued or dismissed.

Fewer studies have sought to make explicit theoretical claims upon CFSP and to situate it in broader debates within either European studies or international relations. Certainly the realist school is dominant – whether or not this is explicit (Ifestos 1987; Pijpers 1991)). Even where theoretical ambitions are more modest, an interest-based/rationalist approach predominates in the mainstream texts on the subject (Hill 1996a; Eliassen 1998). In terms of integration theory, there have been recent attempts to return to older ground with the

application of neo-functionalism to EPC/CFSP (Øhrgaard 1997) while the only other significant theoretical challenge has come from a neo-Marxist or world systems perspective (George 1991; Smith 1995). These accounts privilege the socio-economic interests of the Union and its member states over the political but they have the added advantage of – appropriately – seeing CFSP as part of the broader foreign policy process – a component of the Union’s foreign policy. Other writers who have chosen to make theoretical claims from analyses of either CFSP or its predecessor EPC have employed domestic politics models (Bulmer 1983; Holland 1987).

In sum, the field of study in EPC/CFSP has been dominated by empirical accounts of decision-making, policy-making and regional or issue-based case studies. Only infrequently are such accounts grounded in an explicit theoretical framework and even then such analyses are, more often than not, dominated by realist/rationalist accounts of state behaviour (Bretherton and Vogler 1999 is an important exception from a social constructivist perspective).

Just as much of this literature lacks an explicit theoretical focus, so the broader literature on European integration theory lacks a clear emphasis on the specific circumstances of foreign policy. Book publications on integration theory are few and far between in any case, and the few anthologies that do exist (O’Neill 1993; Nelsen and Stubb 1998) do not pay any special attention to EU foreign policy. While there is a much greater abundance of theoretical writing in journals, the picture there is the same. Most integration theorists – to the extent to which they study policy-making at all – are concerned with the internal development of the EU rather than with its external relations.

When, however, EU integration specialists do focus upon the international capacity of the Union they are immediately faced with the same fundamental questions that underpin any study of the Union: are we looking at something that is comparable with other social institutions such as the state or international organisations, or are we looking at something wholly unique for which no rule book currently exists? Something that is, in the jargon of the discipline, *sui generis*?

This issue is one which underscores much analysis in EU studies generally but is, perhaps, overplayed. The task of this text, which the authors have undertaken with some enthusiasm, is to set aside these meta-debates about the comparability of the Union’s foreign policy and instead to attempt to analyse it using a range of newer analytical tools.

The puzzle of European Union foreign policy

How can we describe, explain and foresee the development of a process that was originally conceived and constructed as being strictly intergovernmental and yet which now aspires to the creation of a ‘common defence’? Moreover, in what spatial context is this occurring – is it a policy emerging from amidst the

cooperation of distinct national agents or should it be viewed as a policy deriving from an emerging single polity? In addition, that aspect of EU foreign policy that is defined as CFSP is unique in terms of its process and nature. As Jørgensen notes in his contribution to this volume, ‘communication and argumentation are essential features of the system’ (original emphasis). Thus a large part of what passes for European foreign policy is about the way in which information is gathered, analysed and shared, the way in which member state representatives interact and debate issues amongst themselves and, finally, the ways in which language is used to give effect to the conclusions of those deliberations.

This contrasts – as highlighted by Larsen (chapter 5 of this volume) – with the extent to which a significant part of the Union’s foreign policy can be dismissed by rationalists who often decry it as being ‘just words’ or ‘declaratory diplomacy.’ This text seeks to offer a reflection upon an EU foreign policy complex that seeks both to address the major definitional issues surrounding the nature and direction of the EU’s external relations but which also draws our attention to contemporary theoretical debates in both international relations and European integration. The text might have developed in a number of directions but the choice has been made to establish the subject in terms of a debate between different approaches and disciplines. This chapter offers one reading of the theoretical debate based, first, on the differences between IR scholars and Europeanists and, second, on the epistemological grounding of the respective approaches.

Subsequent chapters illuminate a number of theoretical and analytical frameworks that can be brought to bear on the vast empirical material of EU foreign policy. Most of these do so from a constructivist vantage point, not so much as *deus ex machina* but as something of a redressed balance against the rationalist-based approaches which predominate in the field.

EU foreign policy: a novel regime in international relations?

While the 1993 Treaty on European Union (TEU) declared unambiguously that ‘A common foreign and security policy is hereby established which shall be governed by the following provisions’ (Treaty on European Union, Article 11), there is considerable and obvious distance between that ringing political declaration and the reality of subsequent policy formulation (Hill 1993a; Peterson and Sjørnsen 1998). If one can, however, restrain a naturally resulting scepticism, it is striking to consider the empirical development of this policy-making regime along at least three axes: bureaucratic structure, substantive policy remit and decision-making capacity.

First, we have witnessed a significant strengthening in the policy-making structures underpinning EU foreign policy. Since the inception of EPC there has been an ongoing debate as to how firmly this process needed to be grounded in bureaucratic structures and how closely such structures needed to be linked

with those of the central institutions in the European Community/European Union (Nuttall 1992). The trajectory of such development has been – and continues to be – towards greater institutionalisation and greater coordination. The development of a complex political/military committee structure, the establishment and growth of the political secretariat, the increasing coordination between Community instruments and broader foreign policy goals, and the introduction of a policy planning cell and the office of High Representative for CFSP are all testament to this increased institutionalisation (Keatinge 1997b). Moreover, this has occurred alongside much greater coordination/integration with other Community institutions and policies.

The committees that underpinned much of the work of both EPC and CFSP, for example, have now been integrated with those that operate within the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER). The Commission, which participates at all levels of policy planning within CFSP, is now closely associated with the revised Presidency Troika and may propose foreign policy initiatives to the Council. Indeed, in broad swathes of foreign policy implementation, the Commission is the key interlocutor and focus of policy development. For its part, the Parliament is consulted on policy issues, its views must be taken into account and it must accede to certain foreign policy-related budgetary expenditures. With greater coordination across policy portfolios (e.g. development, trade, economics, human rights and security) it is therefore less than surprising that participants in this policy-making system sometimes see themselves as operating within an EU ‘foreign policy’ (White 2001).

Second, the remit of policy discussion within EU foreign policy has expanded considerably over time. From a point at which member states were unable to discuss formally any aspect of security issues in the early 1980s, debates now include ‘all questions related to the security of the Union, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy which might lead to a common defence’ (Treaty on European Union, Article 17). This broadening of the EU thematic agenda has been accompanied by an extended agenda for action. Policy tools at the disposal of the Union include a range of options from diplomacy to economic and trade mechanisms. Following the Amsterdam Treaty, they also include military options within the rubric of the so-called ‘Petersberg Tasks’ (Keatinge 1997a).

Third, decision-making procedures have also evolved. A hierarchy of decision-making procedures linked to ‘common strategies’, ‘common positions’ and ‘joint actions’ has replaced an earlier formalistic and ritualised intergovernmentalism. These procedures include an expanded scope for the use of qualified majority voting within CFSP, the introduction of ‘constructive abstention’ and participation as-of-right in military decision-making for those member states outside the framework of the Atlantic Alliance but which choose to participate in a military action of the Union. In all instances these developments are predicated upon the fact that the decision-making processes of CFSP remain distinct from those in operation under the ‘Community’ pillar of the European Union.

While there is therefore no formal ‘communitarisation’ of CFSP decision-making, a system is under construction that is certainly moving way from formal intergovernmentalism and which seeks to forge a coherent and effective foreign policy.

A key question thus arises from this evolution in the structure, policy remit and decision-making capacity: ‘What is the nature of this foreign policy-making and decision-making regime?’ This is the puzzle for which a cognitive approach may offer some considerable assistance.

At least three options are open. First, it has been analysed as a power-based regime based upon a straightforward neo-realist calculation (Pijpers 1990). In this zero-sum analysis, the rules and purpose of the game are established by the most powerful players (i.e. France, Germany and the United Kingdom). Smaller member states have no choice other than to play at the margins of the game and to adapt themselves to it (Mouritzen 1991). It will be the hegemonic impulse of larger players that will determine policy outputs while smaller players can only be consoled – at best – by various side-payments (Mouritzen 1993). Within such an analysis EU foreign policy can only be conceived of as the expression of lowest common denominator politics that can challenge no state’s core foreign policy interests. Should it do so, the system must, by definition, collapse. It can therefore only operate through a strict adherence to forms of intergovernmental decision-making.

Employing an interest-based regime approach provides an alternative perspective (Moravcsik 1993). Such a neo-liberal model looks at EU foreign policy through the lens of absolute gains. Participating states arrive at the negotiating table with a pre-established hierarchy of preferences and proceed to bargain these interests against those of their EU partners. A more or less complex incentive structure is then established in which member states trade foreign policy interests but these may also entail cross-policy bargains in the wider EU policy agenda. The most useful analogy of this situation is that of an especially complex poker game – where the member states bring their cards to the table and must then deal amongst themselves to construct the best possible hand. Policy outputs can be characterised as median-interest bargains – beyond the lowest common denominator but falling short of a truly ‘common’ foreign and security policy.

While debate between these two perspectives is ongoing – especially at the margins of the absolute and relative gains debate – both these approaches share an inherent rationality. Rationality makes important assumptions about the way in which the world works. It begins by assuming that what exists is material, concrete, observable and measurable. Reality is therefore composed of things that we can perceive and that are external to ourselves – reality is ‘out there’ to be discovered. This assumption about what exists (ontology) is, in turn, based upon a particular philosophy of science (epistemology) that argues that we can only claim to know that which we can measurably observe. This kind of positivist science makes it difficult – if not impossible – to consider ‘ideas, norms, culture

– the whole socially constructed realm – [which] are inaccessible to an empiricist form of knowledge’ (Williams 1998:208). These rationalist/positivist approaches both see state interests and identity as having been exogenously given that is, an opening set of conditions/parameters for which no explanation is provided and which – crucially – remain sealed off from external influence. In other words, little or no scope can be provided for the evolution of interests or identities resulting from contact, negotiation or even partnership with other states/actors.

The rationalist/materialist approach leads to questions that focus upon why certain decisions, leading to certain courses of action, were made. It searches therefore for explanations of choice and behaviour. In terms of foreign policy these explanations may be found in global structures or in the choices made by individual policy-makers. By contrast, a cognitive approach may ask how such decisions are possible – what are the bases (in dominant belief systems, conceptions of identity, symbols, myths and perceptions) upon which such choices are made (Doty 1993: 298)? In getting behind the rationalist/materialist questions – by lifting the metaphorical ‘Wizard of Oz’ curtain – we can then begin to understand how it is that the range of ‘possible’ policy choices is defined and, crucially, how these may be limited by a dominant belief system. All of this underlines a sense that ideas have a directional power or that ‘... very frequently the “world images” that have been created by ideas have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest’ (Weber cited in Goldstein (1989)).

This approach to the study of social phenomena and its utility in the broader study of European integration have been well documented (Christiansen et al., 2002). Moreover, there are a number of debates that relate to the precise relationship that exists between material and social structures, of which a cognitivist approach is just one (Price and Reus-Smit 1998).

By taking a cognitivist approach we can consider ways in which the interests, values, ideas and beliefs of actors are themselves explanatory variables. This does not necessarily exclude rationalism. In other words it might not *just* be about side-payments but it might *also* be about the origins, dynamics and evolution of actors’ beliefs and interests. EU foreign policy might also be seen not to be about rationalist calculation at all but be understood as being all about identity creation. In the case of the EU this entails looking at the creation not simply of a foreign policy system but of a foreign policy society – a European diplomatic republic (Jørgensen 1999). This post-positivist turn need not necessarily go so far as some post-structuralist approaches: those far countries of postmodernism where language is everything and there are no material constructs, only discourse. It does, however, offer a fundamental challenge to rationalistic accounts with which several of the authors in this text engage. It is thus our contention that the European Union’s foreign policy is an ideal empirical testing ground for what might be called a hard-core cognitivist or *constructivist* approach.

Conclusions

In the early twenty-first century, the EU is making massive leaps to expand both geographically and sectorally. The accession of ten new member states in 2004 is accompanied by moves forward on a new constitutional treaty which in parts codifies previous practice in the Union, but also pushes the boundaries of integration forward. The EU's management of foreign policy has been one of the key issues in this constitutional debate, not only because the negotiations in the Constitutional Convention coincided with the EU's very public display of disunity before and during the 2003 Iraq war, and thus the need for a more effective handling of foreign policy issues was apparent to many, whether supporters or critics of the war. But foreign policy would have featured in the constitutional debate in any case because of the intrinsic significance of this particular policy area to the constitutional foundations of the European polity. The compromises that have been proposed – the creation of the posts of EU President and an EU 'foreign minister' to represent the Union externally, the dual competence of Commission and Council in this area and the tentative moves towards the greater use of qualified majority voting in this area – are a further development of the trajectory that has taken CFSP from Maastricht through Amsterdam and Nice. And constitutional debate and institutional change will certainly not end here, given the way in which the global context continues to challenge the EU to manage its foreign affairs effectively without neglecting the sensitivities of national governments and the wider public in the member states.

EU foreign policy is in a process of constant evolution, and the recent period is testimony to the fact that this evolution can be both rapid and cumbersome. The scholarly challenge in the face of this evolution is to be able to re-think the models and approaches used to analyse it. The various contributions to this volume offer ways of re-thinking European foreign policy from a number of different perspectives, but based on the shared concern of seeking to study the underlying dynamics and subtleties of this process. Collectively they reveal the multi-faceted and changing nature of foreign policy-making in the European Union today.