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Ben Tonra
University College Dublin
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The Study of EU Foreign Policy: Between International Relations and European Studies

BEN TONRA AND THOMAS CHRISTIANSEN

Introduction

The European Union's foreign policy is an ongoing puzzle encompassing a number of paradoxes. 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 their ability to conduct an independent foreign policy. As far as the EU's ambitions are concerned, basic foreign policy co-operation led first to co-ordination, and later the goal of creating a 'common' foreign policy. However, behind each raised level of ambition was an unsatisfying reality of continuing policy incoherence and ineffectiveness. Similarly, early ambitions that Europe should develop a single foreign policy 'voice' have been supplanted by aspirations to create a common security and defence policy – even as the Union's voice continues to be often fragmented and frequently tentative in its expression. Moreover, while the desire to maintain the national veto over decision-making within the 'second pillar' of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) remains, it is increasingly challenged by the realisation that without extended use of qualified majority voting a common policy may prove illusory.

The reluctance of member states to submit their diplomacy to the straight-jacket of collective decision-making remains. Individual states have maintained distinct national foreign policies, whether this is about specific regional interests, specific global issues or special relationships with other powers (Hill, 1996 and Manners and Whitman, 2000). This has been reflected in the institutional arrangements being 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 in recent years. This includes institutional innovations like the High Representative for CFSP, the development of an EU Military Staff and the creation of an early warning and policy planning unit based within the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. Tremendous work too has gone into coordinating the work of CFSP with that of the Union's External Relations portfolio in developing new approaches to humanitarian assistance combining the work of economic, civic and security policies.

What we witnessed over the course of the 1990s was a rapid expansion in the policy-scope and institutional capacity of EU foreign policy-making and a consequent raising of expectations in what the Union might be able to accomplish in the area of foreign, security and defence policy. This was then underpinned by assumptions about 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 – all of which 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 came 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, were the key issues the EU 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.

As in so much of the Union's development, however, a few steps forward were followed by several steps back. The 2003 invasion of Iraq may be seen has having either split Europe between 'old' and 'new' allies or simply sharpened pre-existing cleavages that had been cleverly obscured by skilful diplomatic language and untested institutions. The Union's failure to maintain a coherent collective policy, the crude unilateralism which became evident and the obvious disarray within the Union's institutional structures was a salutary warning and yet, Member States remain divided over the lessons to be learned from that experience. For some the experience underscores the danger of premature ambition while for others it demands ever greater attention to creating an 'institutional fix' which will forge the kind of political will necessary to sustain serious progress towards a collective policy.

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. While the logic appears indisputable, the political challenges raised in pulling these two sides of foreign policy together are considerable. Fusing offices such as those of the Commissioner for External Relations with that of the High Representative for CFSP are appealing – but the downstream implications in terms of institutional responsibility,

democratic control and public accountability are cirircally important and too often overlooked. Moreover, constitutional and institutional tinkering does not address the key question of the Union's collective interest and/or identity.

The prospect of first and second pillar policies being drawn together assumes that there is indeed a common set of interests or a common identity to which a voice must be given. It creates a substantive EU 'foreign policy' (White, 2001) which incorporates CFSP and a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) into an apparently seamless, coherent and effective policy matrix.. It promises to break the 'Chinese walls' that have – so often in the past – been blamed for incoherence and lack of effectiveness in the Union's capacity to project itself internationally. However, if no truly collective interest and identity exists we may well find that this simply sets into stark relief the more fundamental explanation for the Union's international inadequacy.

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), (Nuttal 1992), (Holland 1991 and 1997) and (ME Smith) 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 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 relates to the process of European integration more broadly and what such co-operation 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 (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999), (Smith, 1998), (Piening 1997), (Holland 1995), (Allan and Pijpers 1984), (Nørgaard, Pedersen, and Petersen 1993), (Buchan 1993) and (Ifestos 1987). The critical value of this category of study is that they provide 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 (Pijpers 1991), (Ifestos 1987). Even where theoretical ambitions are more modest, an interest-based/rationalist approach predominates in the mainstream texts on the subject (Hill, 1996; Eliassen, 1998 and Ginsberg). In terms of integration theory, there have been recent attempts to return to older ground with the application of neo-functionalism to EPC/CFSP (Ohrgaard, 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 componant 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 (Holland 1987 and Bulmer 1983).

In sum, the field of study in EPC/CFSP is 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).

A newer variant in the study of CFSP focuses upon the nature of the Union's international action and the ways in which it acts as a normative exporter of values, beliefs and norms. This focus on identity has opened new pathways to a discussion of the Union's international capacity looking at the growth of a common 'European' identity in foreign policy (Joergensen), an analysis of the role of public opinion and discourse in the creation of such an identity (Larsen, 1997 and H Smith, 1995) and the implications of such a development in creating the Union as a normative actor – driven by identity and values rather than interests (Manners, 2002; and Matlary, 2002)

Just as so 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 (Nelsen and Stubb, 1993; O'Neill, 1993) do not pay any special attention to EU foreign policy. While there is 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 that 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 – which are prisoners neither of the comparability school, nor the sui generists.

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 (2003) 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 in used to give effect to the conclusions of those deliberations.

This contrasts – as highlighted by Larsen (2003) – 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 has also drawn 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, firstly, on the differences between IR scholars and Europeanists, and, secondly, 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 *deux ex machina* but as something of a

redressed balance against the dominant rationalist-based approaches which predominate in the field. Contributions feature the development of alternative approaches to and indicate the way in which these may be applied in the course of empirical research.

EU Foreign Policy: A Novel Regime in International Relations?[1]

While the 1993 Treaty on European Union declares unambiguously that "A common foreign and security is hereby established which shall be governed by the following provisions." (Treaty on European Union, Article 11), there is some distance between that and the reality of policy formulation (Hill, 1994; Peterson and Sjursen, 1999). It is nonetheless striking to consider the 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 1970 inception of European Political Co-operation (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 continues to be towards greater institutionalisation and co-ordination. 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, introduction of a policy planning cell and the office of High Representative for CFSP are all testament to this.

The committees that underpinned much of the work of both EPC and CFSP have been integrated with those that operated within 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 co-ordination 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 any aspect of security

[1] See Ben Tonra, Constructing the Common Foreign and Security Policy: The Utility of a Cognitive Approach in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, September, 2003

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 now include a range of options from diplomacy through economic and trade mechanisms. Following the Amsterdam Treaty, it also includes military options within the rubric of the so-called Petersberg Tasks.

Third, decision making procedures have also evolved. A hierarchy of decision-making procedures linked to "Common Strategies", "Common Positions" and "Joint Actions" has replaced 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 who 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 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 (that is 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 (Moravscik 1994). 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 interests 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 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, p.208). These rationalist/positivist approaches both see state interests and identity as having been exogenously given i.e. 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 stark 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 are 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, p.280).

This approach to the study of social phenomena and its utility in the broader study of European integration has been well documented (Christiansen et al, 2002). By taking such an approach we can consider the significance of interests, values, ideas and beliefs. 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 to be not 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 a foreign policy society - a European diplomatic republic (Jørgensen 1997). This approach offers 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 is an ideal empirical testing ground for what might be called a hard-core cognitive or *constructivist* approach.