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Form and substance in the EU’s multilateral diplomacy

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Part I

The EU in international institutions
Form and substance in the EU’s multilateral diplomacy

Simon Duke

The literature on the EU and international organisations is beset with what Knud Erik Jørgensen (2009a) notes is ‘an unsatisfactory state of affairs’ suffering from being ‘more scattered and compartmentalised than comprehensive, systematic and integrated’. The need for a more systematic approach to the role of the EU in international institutions can be made on several grounds. First, the shift of influence and power to Asia and the rise of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) as regional and increasingly global players have changed the dynamics of international politics and this is gradually being reflected in demands for representation in international bodies that reflects the new global constellations. The rise of these powers may also change the dynamics of multilateralism with growing importance being attached to regional international organisations, or conferences, where the EU risks being marginalised.

Second, the EU consistently puts multilateralism and the precepts of good governance as a prime objective of its external action. Much of the influence when it comes to multilateralism is, however, moving away from formal international organisations towards more ad hoc groupings, such as the Gx formats, or coalitions of the willing when it comes to peacekeeping tasks. New forms of multilateralism are emerging that, so far, are not reflected in much of the literature.

While there is obviously a need to guard against faddishness, there is nevertheless a sense of urgency about the need for a rethink of the EU’s role in international institutions since there are clear indicators of change. One obvious example is the December 2009 Copenhagen climate change summit which resulted in embarrassment for the EU as it was effectively sidelined on an issue where it has prominently claimed global leadership. Another more recent example would be the demands in October 2010 for a reallocation of seats and votes in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) led by the BRICs and supported by the United States. A limited revision of the allocation of seats is due in 2012 with a more substantive one following eight years later.

The changing international constellations and the impact on representation and the role of international institutions are, generally, not represented in the current literature (for notable exceptions see Chapter 22 and Youngs, 2010). This is, in part, a reflection of Jørgensen’s observation regarding the compartmentalisation of the literature and, no doubt, a certain path dependency that has grown up over the years. A further compelling reason lies in the dominance of rich EU–United Nations (UN) literature (see Part III of this volume). The EU’s relations with the UN are some of the most closely scrutinised (Laatikainen and Smith, 2006; Wouters,
The two organisations have even been characterised as ‘natural partners’ in multilateralism since they mirror each other’s values and precepts (Wouters, 2007, 2).

A second and rather less apparent reason for compartmentalisation is the tendency to stress process over substance. The establishment of 249 multilateral treaties and 649 bilateral treaties by the EU, as recorded by the European Commission, threatens to become a form of international virility test (figures from Emerson et al., 2011: 3). In one particular egregious case, the routine meeting of the Political and Security Committee and the North Atlantic Council, where the agenda is normally restricted to Bosnia-Herzegovina, belies the parlous state of EU–NATO relations (see Biscop and Renard, 2010). The pertinent point is what this dense network of ties to international institutions actually accomplishes. The more empirically inclined work on international institutions, which undoubtedly has its value in helping us to understand how such bodies work (again, with an emphasis on the UN), nevertheless risks ignoring the critical question of whether the EU’s multilateral roles really lead to ‘effective multilateralism’ or ‘good governance.’ These two basic issues will frame the following sections.

The final point concerns the Lisbon Treaty which opens up a potential window of opportunity to rethink not only the EU’s internal ‘cuisine’ but also its representation in international institutions. The introduction of legal personality for the EU, the advent of a number of new senior external relations positions and the European External Action Service (EEAS), may prove to game changers in terms of a more coherent, effective and visible approach to the Union’s multilateral roles. Even if the opposite proves to be true, the broader changes in the international system as well as the internal post-Lisbon dynamics of the EU both promise further rich research fields.

The EU and the UN: tilting the field?

The heavy concentration on the UN in much of the literature should come as no surprise for three reasons.

First, historically, relations between the European Community and the United Nations were some of the first to be subject to concerted coordination between the member states and the UN bodies under European Political Coordination (EPC), as documented by Simon Nuttall (1992) in ways that are difficult to find parallels to. The extensive coordination network, centred on the EU delegations in Geneva and New York, with thousands of annual coordination meetings results in a unanimous vote by the EU members on 95 per cent of all General Assembly resolutions during the 1990s (although, unlike Security Council resolutions, they are not binding) (Luif and Radeva, 2007: 28). The EU remains the single largest financial contributor to the UN with the EU members financing around 38 per cent of the regular budget and around 40 per cent of the peacekeeping operations, and around 50 per cent of the UN member’s contributions to UN funds and programmes (European Union, 2011). The UN also remains the only international organisation that is global in terms of membership (with 193 members) and it is thus the ‘primary forum within which effective multilateralism can be achieved and enforced’ (European Parliament, 2011: 9). From the Commission’s perspective the Union’s attachment to multilateralism is a ‘defining principle’ of its external policy and the UN is seen as ‘the pivot of the multilateral system’. The same document also outlined the potential of the Union as ‘a central pillar of the UN system’ (European Commission, 2003: 3).

The UN provided an obvious homologue to the European Community around which external goals as well as the internal identity-strengthening of the Community could coalesce. As Deudney and Maull (2011: 117) observe, ‘European efforts to develop common policies on external issues have long focused on the United Nations, with a view to bringing member-state
positions in the General Assembly and the Security Council closer together.’ The suggestion that association with multilateral organisations was as important for internal identity and construction, perhaps even more so, than the external impact is intriguing and under-explored. This may explain why in those areas where there could be a legitimate expectation for more EU-UN traction, it has not always transpired. Overseas development aid and assistance is one such example, where together with the member states, the EU is the world’s largest donor but its ability to promote multilateral consensus on the Millennium Development Goals has proven limited. This may be accounted for by the fact that development is a shared competence with the member states or, more critically, that much of the EU’s aid and assistance does not go to the right places since the poorest now live in the developing countries. Other developments, such as the rapid rise of China and India, have challenged the development consensus supported by the EU with ‘South-South cooperation’ based on non-interference and non-conditionality (see Laatikainen, 2010). The lack of any effective response to the new models of aid and assistance might therefore be found in the slowly emerging internal debates about the EU’s role on the international scene.

Trade, another important area for the EU has also remained lightly (internationally) institutionalised, aside from the WTO and increasingly the loose G7/8 format. In this case the lack of a strong role for international organisations can partially be explained by the tension ‘between commitments to global trade institutions and commitments to favourable preferential trade agreements with former European colonies in the grouping of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries’ (Jørgensen, 2009b: 193). This observation supports the idea that there has not yet been adequate reflection in the literature of the internal role of the EU’s association with multilateral organisations and the extent to which the bilateral diplomacy of the member states supports or undercuts the EU’s notion of effective multilateralism.

The reflection of the role of the member states in the literature is primarily directed towards the coordination of national positions, often in the UN context. Coordination between the EU members, the Commission, the Council, the General Assembly and its six main committees, resulted in around 1,300 coordination meetings in New York and 1,000 in Geneva per annum (Gstöhl, 2011: 183). Many authors have noted that with the exception of differences over Iraq, the general picture is one of convergence in the UN General Assembly, albeit with differences in a number of areas (Rasch, 2008: 220–53).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the EU tends to be most cohesive when it has exclusive competences (such as the common commercial policy) and notably less cohesive when it comes to foreign or security policies which are predominantly intergovernmental (see Hoffmeister, 2007). Thus on issues such as the Kyoto Protocol, the creation of the International Criminal Court or the preparation of the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development, the EU demonstrates higher levels of cohesion, although often in a rather reactive manner. Cohesion on CFSP matters tends to be far more problematic, sometimes even when a common position exists within the EU, due to the vested national interests and the intergovernmental nature of the policy area (see Part 6 of this volume).

The question of the Union’s cohesion in the UN Security Council is largely subject to the extent to which the two permanent EU members, France and the United Kingdom, represent national positions or common positions of the Union where they have been defined (notwithstanding any treaty obligations to this end implied by Article 34 TEU). Differences between France, the United Kingdom and Germany over the use of force in Libya, or the successful bid for membership of UNESCO by the Palestinian Authority, illustrate the difficulty of reflecting the positions and interests of the Union when it is divided over major foreign or security policy questions.
Even in those areas where allegedly close cooperation has been established, such as the EU’s contributions to peacekeeping operations (PKOs), the Union’s role is actually declining. Although there are examples of the EU meeting UN demands for PKOs, such as Operation Artemis in 2003, the record since then is far from stellar. This included a subsequent refusal of UN advances for a follow-on mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2008. The following year the EU members refused support for an operation in Somalia. The portion of EU military forces involved in Africa has declined significantly, with the overall EU contributions only being buoyed by the ongoing operations in the Western Balkans (see Hyde-Price, 2007).

The question of coordination of national positions within the UN is undoubtedly important (see Chapter 8) but it runs the risk of propagating actor-centric and bottom-up perspectives, whilst ignoring the rapidly changing global constellations, including the rise of the BRICS, in which international organisations must now operate. Although the EU has propagated the idea of strategic partnerships with these and other countries, they often do not consider the multilateral aspects in enough detail. Perhaps, as Richard Youngs suggests, ‘Europe’s bilateral relations with such powers are in reality used as a substitute for, rather than a step towards, “effective multilateralism”’ (Youngs, 2010: 27; see also Wouters et al., 2008).

A further curious omission from much of the literature concerns the question of why, given the financial contributions the EU makes to the UN in various ways, this has apparently failed to result in any significant political leverage (as an exception see Gstöhl, 2011). The Commission itself observed that while the EU has moved ‘progressively towards speaking with a common voice in UN debates, its real influence – and its ability to project European values – on the world stage still falls short of its economic and combined political weight, or indeed its contribution to the funding of UN organisations’ (European Commission, 2003: 3). Indeed, this argument could be extended beyond the UN to a number of international financial institutions, such as the IMF or the World Bank (for thoughtful exceptions see Horng, 2004 and Smaghi, 2004).

The second reason for the prominence of the EU–UN literature lies in the frequent references to the UN and their prominence in the EU treaties. A cursory reading of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) makes it apparent that the UN is vital to any interpretation of the rule of law, effective multilateralism or good governance in external relations. The EU itself aims to foster respect for the ‘principles of the United Nations Charter’ (TEU, Article 3.5) and ‘international law’ (TEU, Article 21) and to promoting ‘multilateral solutions to common problems, in particular in the framework of the United Nations’ (TEU, Article 21). The same article makes it incumbent upon the EU to ‘promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance’. When it comes to CFSP, member states are ‘obliged to coordinate their action in international organizations and at international conferences’ (TEU, Article 34.1).

The role of the UN is also strengthened in a number of key policy documents. The European Security Strategy of December 2003 attributes the United Nations Security Council ‘the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security’ and ‘strengthening the United Nations, equipping it to fulfill its responsibilities and to act effectively, is a European priority’ (European Security Strategy, 2003: 9). Subsequent documents emanating from the EU underline the importance of ‘effective multilateralism’ and even go so far as to state that it is ‘the guiding principle of European external action’ (European Parliament, 2011: 4).

In spite of the hyperbole, it should be noted that unlike the General Assembly, the EU has often demonstrated profound divisions when seeking to establish common positions in the Security Council where any resolutions are binding (see Biscop et al., 2005). The reluctance of the EU’s members to entertain the notion of fundamental reform of international institutions is reflected in much of the literature (Télo, 2007: 60). This is particularly notable in the reluctance...
of the EU and its members to advocate the constitutionalisation of norms and principles at
the multilateral level and to widen the cast of interlocutors beyond the state-to-state level.
The curious effect of the stalemate over the reform of the UN is that the principles of
multilateralism and good governance have effectively been separated – an aspect that is less
commonly noted.

Third, the sheer scope of the UN and its agencies often imposes understandable confines on
any research agenda. The extension of any study beyond the UN leads to the obvious problem
of what to include and what to exclude, given the plethora of international organisations of
which the EU is either a member (rarely), an observer (more frequently) or a partner through
the provision of funding and/or expertise. A number of more recent publications illustrate the
complexity of trying to choose a representative cross-sample of international organisations for
analysis (see Kissack, 2010; Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2011; and Lieb, von Ondarza and
Schwarzer, 2011).

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union does little to help the research
challenge when it states that, ‘The Union shall establish all appropriate forms of cooperation
with the organs of the United Nations and its specialised agencies, the Council of Europe, the
Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Organisation for Economic
Cooperation and Development. The Union shall also maintain such relations as are appropriate
with other international organisations’ (TFEU, 220). Given the diversity of the organisations
and policies represented, scholarship tends to become highly specialised either along institutional
lines or according to whether the primary interest is human rights, climate change, security
issues, trade or development.

One of the most curious outcomes of the predominant concentration on the UN and its
agencies is that the results of the EU’s contributions towards effective multilateralism and
broader global governance through the UN and its agencies are far from clear. In terms of
governance, it is the coherence of the overall multilateral system (linking economic, social,
security, environmental and other objectives) that appears to be largely missing from the literature.
This would suggest that research agendas are often too narrow. Notwithstanding the evident risks
of over-generalisation that may emerge from overly ambitious research agendas, a recent
volume by Wunderlich and Bailey (2011), examining the role of the EU as a ‘multidimensional
actor in world politics, actively shaping and influencing the emerging global governance
complex’, is inspirational.

Too much Europe?

The EU’s representation in multilateral institutions ranges from instances where all the member
states are members and the EU is an observer (the Council of Europe, the IMFC, Development
Committee), to a few rarer cases where both are members (FAO, WTO and the Commission is
represented in the Codex Alimentarius Commission) or full participants (G8 and G20, in so far as
they qualify as international institutions). In other cases the EU members enjoy full membership
privileges and the EU none at all (the UN Security Council or a number of IFIs). When it
comes to the World Bank the EU is a major donor, contributing more than any of the member
states. Yet it does not even enjoy observer status on the bank’s executive board.

The relative advantage that the EU members enjoy in representation in a number of inter-
national institutions, such as the IMF, the WTO, the UN Security Council (see Blavoukos and
Bourantonis, 2011) where at least four of the fifteen members are EU members or the General
Assembly where the EU commends one-eighth of the votes, as well as less formal groupings
such as the G8 or G20, have seen demands for a fairer distribution of membership and voting
rights (spearheaded by the BRICs and the US). A joint statement issued by the BRIC leaders are their first summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in June 2009 stated clearly that, ‘We are committed to advance the reform of international financial institutions, so as to reflect changes in the global economy’ (Joint Statement, 2009). The IMF quickly became the first target, supported by the United States.¹

The danger of the over-representation argument is that it will be accepted uncritically with too little attention paid to how a re-distribution of seats and voting rights would influence the development of the international organisations in question or the precepts of (good) global governance and effective multilateralism. Although such arguments could be misconstrued as a defence of post-war largesse from which the larger EU member states have undoubtedly benefited, there is nevertheless the need to move away from the political-ideological aspects of this delicate question toward more rigorous analysis.

The passage of UN General Assembly resolution 65/276 on the participation of the EU in the work of the UN with enhanced observer status suggests a more dynamic way of thinking about EU representation. The resolution marks a modest but significant increase in the influence of the EU in the Assembly which, in time, may lead to demands for other regional or international organisations to also seek enhanced observer status (such as the Arab League, CARICOM or the Pacific Island Forum) (UN General Assembly, 2011). As Emerson et al. (2011) note, the passage of the above resolution also serves to emphasise those cases where the EU’s competences and its financial contribution might also lead to demands for adjustment to full member status as a Regional International Organization (RIO) or a Regional Economic International Organization (REIO). Examples include the ICAO in civil aviation, the IMO in maritime affairs, the ILO in labour markets and social policy and WIPO for intellectual property (Emerson et al., 2011: 7).

The over-representation issue is also linked to the generally neglected issue of how the ‘Gxs’ will impact upon the UN, its agencies and other organisations (such as the IFIs). The G7/8 and G20 (and even looser coordination with the G77) have expanded beyond their original economic orientation to discuss an expanding range of political and security topics. With regard to the G7’s meeting of finance ministers specifically, or the G20 more generally, the EU has extensive competences, yet these are not reflected in the composition of any of these bodies. But, the emergence of the G7/8 and G20 and the relative weight enjoyed by the EU members also pose more awkward questions about transparency and the type of effective multilateralism that the EU wishes to promote (see Kissack, 2010).

### Aims and objectives of EU involvement in international organisations

What are the EU and its members trying to achieve through membership or participation in international organisations? This deceptively simple question exposes a broader division in the literature about the Union’s global role. Broadly speaking, the literature remains undecided about whether the EU seeks to project its values or whether they are fundamentally interest based (see Chapter 32). The former is often encapsulated in the extensive literature on the EU as a normative actor in international relations whereby international institutions, regimes and law provide a ‘normative framework’ structuring international relations (Risse, 2000: 15).

This, in turn, echoes Duchène’s (1973) earlier notion that the EU is a ‘civilian power’ operating through complex contractual structures, norms, law and international institutions. Some, like Fraser Cameron, have observed that the practice of multilateralism at the EU level makes the Union more inclined to work with and through international organisations (Cameron, 2004: 158).
A number of authors have pointed out that the EU’s actions are also interest-based since they involve the member states who may act in a complementary manner, but also antagonistically to the EU. In this respect ‘multilateralism is no Holy Grail per se but rather an instrumental means to pursue specific policy objectives related with distinctive EU or member-states’ interests’ (Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2011: 1). The latter approach is reflected in the principal agent theory whereby the EU is an ‘agent’ for the member states (see Kassim and Menon, 2003). This approach is, in effect, an extension of intergovernmentalism.

The issue of values versus interests is though, in many ways, a false dichotomy. The Lisbon Treaty makes it clear that the EU is to ‘assert its interests and values on the international scene’ (TEU, Article 32, emphasis added). The EU’s values are elaborated upon in far more detail than in the previous treaties, notably in Articles 3 and 2 of the TEU. The interests of the EU at the multilateral level are altogether more difficult to define. In the absence of any ‘grand strategy’, of the types called for by Jolyon Howorth or Sven Biscop, the path by which the EU strives to attain the broad objectives outlined at the beginning are far from clear (Howorth, 2009; and Biscop et al., 2009). The extent to which the European Security Strategy, mentioned above, qualifies as a strategy is open to debate. Nevertheless, it is the nearest that the EU has come to an overarching vision of the EU’s role in the world. In a particularly important passage the ESS states that ‘We need to pursue our objectives both through multilateral cooperation in international organisations and through partnerships with key actors’ (European Security Strategy, 2003: 14, emphasis added). The ESS goes on to mention that, ‘In particular we should look to develop strategic partnerships, with Japan, China, Canada and India as well as with all those who share our goals and values’.

The literature on the EU’s bilateral ‘partnerships’ and the multilateral elements have, generally speaking, yet to be satisfactorily joined up. The literature on strategic partnerships is, justifiably, often critical of the notion. Bendiek and Kramer (2010: 453) have suggested that the new emphasis upon bilateral strategic partnerships is a belated attempt by the EU to ‘address its underperforming partnerships with so-called ‘newly emerging powers’. Not only is there little agreement on the number or nature of such partnerships or the criteria that are applied, there is also the suggestion that ‘it often appears as if the existence of a partnership is more important than its content and its potential for the EU and for the bilateral relationship’ (Biscop and Renard, 2010: 14). In one of the rare attempts to link the two notions, Renard and Hooijmaaijers (2011: 2) note that in the UN General Assembly during the period 2004–9 the ‘process of establishing a strategic partnership has no visible impact on the voting patterns within the UNGA’. Of the partners, Canada, Japan and South Korea were the EU’s closest natural allies; while China and Russia tended to vote less in line with the EU and the United States, ‘the essential partner’, demonstrated very low levels of cohesion with the EU.

Any hard and fast conclusions based upon limited data (in the form of rather limited UN General Assembly resolutions) over a fairly short period of time, are perhaps best resisted. Nevertheless, they point to a divide in the literature between the primarily inwardly oriented, concentrating of the cohesion (or not) of EU members within international organisations, and the more externally oriented perspectives looking at broader questions of cohesion between the EU and its partners. A further lacuna is evident from the lack of analysis about how the EU members themselves may complicate the adoption of genuine EU partnerships through their bilateral diplomacy and positions (the United Kingdom and its policies towards India being an obvious example). Hence, there is a need for more thinking about how the EU could leverage bilateral relations between the EU members and their partners so that bridges can be constructed with the multilateral aspects of the Union’s external relations.
In a further geostrategic shift, it remains to be seen whether the ongoing aftershocks of the Arab spring will have an effect on the EU’s broader multilateralism. The rapid responses on the part of the EU to events in 2010 led to the adoption of two documents, the first *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity* (European Commission, 2011a) and the second a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (European Commission, 2011b). The former is full of proposals to support civil society (such as the Civil Society Neighbourhood Facility) while the latter warns that, ‘Increased EU support to its neighbours is conditional. It will depend on progress in building and consolidating democracy and respect for the rule of law. The more and the faster a country progresses in its internal reforms, the more support it will get from the EU’ (European Commission, 2011b, emphases added). The use of such conditionality in this context is of enormous potential significance since, for reasons of consistency, it will have to be extended beyond the southern neighbourhood since the potential promulgation of potential double-standards will erode the EU’s standing, including in the multilateral context.

The inevitable result of confusion at the strategic level and the employment of largely hollow terms such as ‘strategic partnerships’ is that it is very difficult to assess the substance of EU positions and policies advanced through international organisations. The suggestion here is that the emergence of new global constellations, the struggle to identify the nature and content of strategic partnerships and the ramifications of the Arab spring, will all define what type of actor the EU is on the global stage. These are issues that will have profound implications for not only the Union’s bilateral diplomacy but its standing in the multilateral fora. The precise nature and meaning of these changes are admittedly difficult to understand, especially when they are still evolving. The difficulty of grappling with these fundamental questions may deflect continuing attention towards processes. The questions of how the EU coordinates in international organisations, whether it does so effectively or not, how the positions of the member states are coordinated, whether there are coherent structures and processes in place to promote coherence in international organisations, are all legitimate questions – but also secondary in nature.

**Lisbon: pressing the EU reset with international institutions?**

The Lisbon Treaty introduced a number of fundamental changes in EU external action. These are well chronicled elsewhere so there is no need to dwell upon them at length (see Cremona, 2008; Duke, 2008; Woolcock 2008; Carta, 2011). The treaty elaborates further upon the question of competences raised in the discussions above (TFEU, Arts. 3–4). In those areas where the EU has exclusive competence, most notably the common commercial policy, the EU has developed into an actor in its own right, as is the case with the WTO. The European Commission also has separate diplomatic representation in Geneva for issues of multilateral trade. In a number of other areas, like monetary policy, where the EU has exclusive competence the picture is quite different with the member states taking the front seat. Where there is shared competence (with the member states) the picture is even more confusing, as in the case of development cooperation or humanitarian aid.

The Lisbon Treaty will change this somewhat through the introduction of legal personality for the EU as a whole (TEU, Article 47). Under the treaty the High Representative represents the EU in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Commission those areas that fall under Commission competence (with, as noted, the exception of monetary policy). Furthermore, the enhanced status of the delegations, which are now EU delegations, allows them to represent the full spectrum of the Union’s external interests (see Chapter 2). This will take some time to achieve, not only due to the sensitivities of the member states when it comes to issues of foreign policy and security discussed above, but also because the Commission
promoted specific communautaire aspects of EU–UN relations early this decade in an effort to move mutual relations into a higher gear, such as the partnership with the UN in the field of Development and Humanitarian Affairs, adopted in 2001, aimed at increasing policy dialogues in these areas and to attaining the broad objectives of the Millennium Development Goals of the previous year (European Commission, 2001).

In response to the advent of the Lisbon Treaty there is a growing body of literature assessing the impact of the treaty upon international organisations, most notably the UN (Hoffmeister and Kuijper, 2006; Laatikainen, 2010). The introduction of new posts, such as the President of the European Council, the expanded roles of the High Representative who is now also a Vice-President of the Commission, the explicit granting of legal personality to the EU and the corresponding diminution of the role of the rotating Council Presidency will inevitably reshape EU representation in the UN context and the exercise of any more general multilateralism.

The Lisbon Treaty codifies some existing practices, such as those contained in Article 34 TEU, which reflect earlier informal agreements with France and the United Kingdom, whereby, ‘When the Union has defined a position on a subject which is on the United Nations Security Council agenda, those Member States which sit on the Security Council shall request that the High Representative be invited to present the Union’s position’. Although the symbolism of the High Representative’s appearance should not be under-estimated, the EU is nevertheless excluded ‘from the most important stages of negotiations and deliberation, which take place during the most informal consultations of the Security Council, the “sancta-sanctorum” of national sovereignty’ (Marchesi, 2010: 102). The broader debate which stands behind the High Representative’s ability to represent agreed EU positions at the Security Council, which is that of the reform of the UN Security Council, would appear to have been closed by the specific recognition of the roles and tasks of the two existing permanent members who are also EU members.

The longer-term impact of the UN General Assembly resolution (65/276) of May 2011 on the participation of the work of the EU in the work of the UN will perhaps be of far greater significance than the apparently endless debates about the reform of the Security Council. The resolution guarantees the EU the right to be inscribed on the speaker’s list among representatives of major groups; it grants the right to participate in the General Debate of the Assembly (at the end of the morning or afternoon); the right to have written communication distributed as official UN documents; the right to present proposals or amendments orally (including procedural motions); the right of reply (limited to a single intervention) and the right to a reserved seat at all UN meetings. In spite of some inevitable concessions, many of which can be worked around through careful coordination by the EU delegations in New York and Geneva with the EU member states, the resolution is an important landmark. It is worth noting that in a pre-Lisbon assessment of the EU’s role in multilateral fora the lack of ‘formal access to the playing field’ was seen as the largest constraint facing the EU (Wouters et al., 2008: 37).

One of the legacy issues is therefore how to rebalance the EU’s post-Lisbon approach to the UN to reflect the broad changes introduced by the treaty and a changing international order. If the argument above, forwarded by Hoffmeister amongst others, that the EU should put the emphasis upon those areas where it enjoys full competences, it may well be that the Union will continue to concentrate on these areas. This still leaves open the issue of how the EU should be represented in international institutions in the case of shared competences (Van Langenhove and Marchesi, 2008). The growth of CSDP and the demand from the UN for peacekeeping assistance, suggests that a series of broader dialogues may be necessary incorporating the responsibility to protect (see Chapter 11). In anticipation of such dialogues, there is still an obvious need for more strategic guidance regarding where the priorities lie for the Union and its members. Given the role of the European Council which involves providing the Union ‘with the necessary
impetus for its development and shall define the general political directions and priorities thereof, it should be the logical first stop for such guidance.

Conclusions

This chapter has painted a picture of a tremendously challenging time for scholars with an interest in the EU and multilateral institutions. It has portrayed a field that, understandably, has tended to be dominated by a concentration on EU–UN relations which reflect the importance the Union itself attaches to the UN. But, it is also a field that is being challenged by external and internal changes. On the former the rise of China and India may prove to be potential game changers, while the nature of international ‘organisations’ itself is shifting away from the more formal international organisations that tend to reflect the dominant role of the western powers, towards more informal fora (like the Gx system) and regimes.

At the same time the EU is being challenged internally. One obvious challenge arises from the ongoing financial crisis in the Eurozone which has global ramifications. Another crisis, that is almost existential in nature, has elicited far less comment – the question of who the EU is on the international stage and what it is trying to achieve.

The compartmentalisation of the literature, mentioned at the outset, is in part a testimony to the richness and diversity of the scholarship concerning the EU and multilateral institutions. The possibility of that a confluence between the internal and external challenges mentioned above will lead to less compartmentalisation cannot be ruled out, but, until then the value-added of this handbook lies in its diversity, eclecticism as well as its complementarities.

Note

1 France, Germany and the United Kingdom have single seats in the IMF but the remainder of the EU members are spread across seven groupings. The EU has a combined total of 30 per cent of the votes within the IMF while monetary policy is an exclusive competence of the Union.

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