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Inter-organisational approaches

Joachim A. Koops

Introduction

It is fair to claim that since the publication of the European Security Strategy and the adoption of the core foreign policy concept of ‘effective multilateralism’ in 2003, research on the European Union in global affairs has undergone something of an ‘inter-organisational turn’. An ever-growing number of empirical case studies have underlined that when the EU engages in core foreign policy activities it rarely does so on its own, but rather in cooperation or competition with other major international organisations.

Yet, for scholars interested in analysing the EU’s inter-organisational relations the absence of a clear theory remains a fundamental challenge. Despite some remarkable advances in formulating concepts and frameworks for more systematic comparative analysis, the emerging EU–IO research field still heavily relies on a wide range of pre- or a-theoretical case studies and largely unconnected attempts of tentative theorising. Neither the existing body of theories of International Relations (IR) nor the theoretically informed debates on European integration or EU foreign policy-making have proved suitable for approaching the phenomenon of the ‘European Union as an inter-organisational actor’ in a more conceptually informed and systematic fashion. As a result, the development of coherent theoretical approaches for assessing the origins, nature and overall impacts of the EU’s interactions with other organisations remains still in its infancy. It is therefore still too early to talk about the emergence of one coherent theory of inter-organisationalism. Instead, authors have tried to advance a variety of inter-organisational approaches during recent years, slowly moving the field from policy-oriented case studies to more theory-driven research.

This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the differing approaches that can be helpfully employed for shedding some light on the main processes, dynamics and outcomes of the links and interactions between the European Union and other major international organisations. Whilst the examples provided are mostly drawn from the policy field of security, peacekeeping and crisis management – where the growth of the EU–IO partnerships has been most dramatic since the end of the Cold War – the theoretical insights and concepts can also easily be transferred to the EU’s inter-organisational relations in other policy areas.

The chapter will be structured as follows. The next section will provide a brief set of definitions of what is meant by ‘inter-organisational relations’ in the first place. Thereafter, a brief
overview of the evolution of the EU’s relations with international organisations will be provided in order to place the current research on inter-organisational relations in its proper historical context. The main part of the chapter will review major problem- and policy-oriented approaches as well as the main theory-driven studies on EU–IO relations. The final section will provide several suggestions for future research. Overall, this chapter also serves as a reminder of both the negative and positive aspects of taking part in the exploration of a newly emerging research agenda. Whilst the absence of lead authors and major established theoretical approaches in the field of EU–IO relations can often be the cause of frustration, new scholars and students entering the field should be encouraged to join the intellectual and inter-disciplinary excitement of actively shaping the development and formulation of a more theory-driven inter-organisational approach to the study of the European Union in global affairs.

Understanding inter-organisational relations

On the most basic level, the term ‘inter-organisational relations’ refers to the links, relationships and modes of interaction between two or more international organisations. Even though these relations can be unintended (i.e. one organisation affecting another simply by virtue of its presence and overlapping membership of states belonging to both organisations) most research on inter-organisational relations is interested in the dynamics of purposefully structured links between organisations. Those links between organisations can be formal (based, for example, on the institutionalisation of relations through steering committees, joint declarations or memoranda of understanding) or informal (resulting from staff to staff contacts and ad hoc interactions in the field). In this light, Rafael Biermann (2008a: 165) distinguishes between three categories of inter-organisational cooperation: firstly, information-sharing between organisations, observer status at the partner organisation and light liaison mechanisms. Second, the coordination of policies, formalised through joint declarations and third, the funding of one organisation’s programmes and policies by another as well as joint projects and joint decision-making structures. Similarly, David Law (Law, 2007: 53–57) outlines three forms of cooperation, ranging from the exchange of information and staff (first order cooperation) via the formal dependence of one organisation on the authority of another (second order cooperation, e.g. a regional organisation relying on the legitimating authorisation of its activities through a UN mandate) to joint planning and training activities, co-developments of programmes and joint funding (third order cooperation).

In addition, scholars point out that whilst inter-organisational relations mostly evolve gradually and flexibly, they can differ in terms of depth, longevity or ‘maturity’. Accordingly, cooperation between organisations can either take the form of short-term one-off ad hoc interaction, or structured and institutionalised long-term partnerships. Biermann (2008a: 161) argues that ‘mature IO–IO dyads’ have at least four characteristics: ‘(1) regular, intense contacts; (2) formal and informal rules of behavior; (3) regular channels of cooperation of varying formalisation; and (4) long-term orientations as opposed to ad hoc cooperation’.

Beyond such categories of formal and informal cooperation, inter-organisational relations have also been described in terms of ‘systems of organisations’ (Jönsson, 1993: 466), ‘networks’ between organisations (Ebers, 1997; Biermann, 2008a, 2009, 2011), resource dependencies (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003 [1978]) and ‘organisational interplay’ (Caruso, 2007; Brosig, 2011a, 2011b) – the latter focusing in particular on issues of overlap and interaction (see also Galbreath and Gebhard, 2010).

Much work on the relationship between international organisations centres on the interaction at the organisational and bureaucratic levels. However, it is important to keep in mind that inter-organisational relations are also determined by a variety of factors and processes at the
individual, member-state and international system levels (Koops, 2011, see also final section below). What all of these approaches have in common, however, is a research agenda that examines the origins, processes and outcomes of partnerships between organisations. Most authors interested in the EU’s inter-organisational relations focus on the positive or negative impact and influence the EU and its partner organisations can have on each other, either in shaping each other’s institutions and policy approaches (Reynolds, 2007; Franke, 2009; Bailes and Messervy-Whiting, 2011; Koops, 2012), their organisational identity and legitimacy (Ojanen, 2004, 2011; Trybus, 2005) or their joint operational impact and effectiveness in a given policy field (Laatikainen and Smith, 2006; Derbloem et al., 2008; Gowan, 2009). The latter aspect encompasses the wider research question of cooperation, implicit competition and outright rivalry between the EU and other international organisations (Varwick, 2005; Varwick and Koops, 2009; Biermann, 2008b; van Ham, 2009; Galbreath, 2010; Galbreath and Gebhard, 2010).

Thus, inter-organisational approaches to studying the EU and multilateral institutions provide a suitable framework for understanding the origins, nature, cooperative and rivalrous patterns as well as the overall impact of the EU’s interactions with major international organisations. Before providing a more in-depth overview of the existing literature on problem-driven and theory-driven studies, the following section offers a brief historical context of the EU as an ‘inter-organisational actor’.

The European Union’s relations with international organisations: a brief history

Research on the European Union’s relations with other international organisations has flourished during the last decade, mirroring the EU’s increasing engagement with partners since 2003. Yet, inter-organisational relations in themselves are not a new phenomenon. Already during the 1920s and 1930s, the League of Nations had to structure its relations with regional alliances such as the ‘Little Entente’ or ‘Balkan Entente’ in a complementary fashion (Goodrich and Hambro, 1949: 309). It was, however, in particular the difficult negotiations at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference of 1944 over the relationship between the newly planned United Nations Organization on the one hand and regional organisations on the other that sparked wide-ranging interest in the issue of organised universalism vs. fragmented regionalism (Claude, 1956: 105–9).

In the mid-1960s, the proliferation of international organisations in Europe with overlapping memberships prompted the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to warn member states in a confidential communiqué entitled Duplication and Co-operation Between Organisations about ‘the imperious necessity to make some progress in the long and arduous task of giving a more coherent structure to the growth and development of international organisations’ (Council of Europe 1966, cited in Smithers, 1979: 30).

From an EU perspective, the peculiarity of Cold War dynamics also structured and limited to a large degree the relations between the European Community (EC) and potential partner organisations, especially in the ‘high politics’ field of peace and security. Contacts between officials from the EC and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation had indeed been prohibited until the early 1990s (Ojanen, 2004: 12). Yet, in other ‘low politics’ fields the EC and its institutional predecessors did establish closer links with other organisations, in particular agencies and programmes of the UN system, from the early 1950s onwards. One of the EU’s earliest formal inter-organisational arrangements dates back to the European Coal and Steel Community’s Cooperation Agreement with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1953 (Delarue, 2006: 98, for a thorough analysis of the EU’s role within the ILO, see Kissack, 2008, 2010). Further agreements were signed by the EC with, inter alia, the Food and Agricultural

With the onset of the European Political Cooperation (EPC) mechanisms in the 1970s, the EC also gained an elevated position in international politics through its observer status in the UN General Assembly since 1974 (Maes, 1979; Luif, 2003) and its role as a player in its own right during the negotiations of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) between and 1973 and 1975 (Möckli, 2007). An interesting, and often overlooked inter-organisational aspect during this period consisted of the negotiations between the EC and the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) with the aim of reaching a more institutionalised inter-block relationship (Zieger, 1978; Cutler, 1987), foreshadowing much of the ‘interregionalism’ developments and literature of the 1990s and 2000s (Edwards and Regelsberger, 1990; Söderbaum and Van Langenhove, 2005; Hänggi et al., 2006).

It was not, however, until the end of the bipolar global order and the outbreak of the Bosnian War (1992–95) that both the opportunities and imperatives for closer inter-organisational cooperation between the EU and a variety of international organisations dramatically intensified (Biermann, 2008a: 154). Whilst all four major European security institutions – the NATO, the OSCE, the Western European Union (WEU) and the EU – sought to play their own distinctive roles in the field of ‘crisis management’ during the first post-cold war decade, the escalating violence in the Balkans forced upon them their first major instances of inter-organisational coordination, interaction and policy interplay – albeit in a very ad hoc fashion (Steinberg, 1992: 35–36; Weller, 1992; Caruso, 2007). In this context, Roy Ginsberg reminds us in his extensive study on EU foreign policy that the EU’s influence on and in other international organisations forms an important part of the EU’s overall external impact in the area of peace and security (Ginsberg, 2001: 71–72). This intensified further with the onset of the EU’s European/Common Security and Defence Policy (ESDP/CSDP) and the foreign policy concept of ‘effective multilateralism’.

**CSDP, ‘effective multilateralism’ and EU foreign policy: towards an inter-organisational turn**

Essentially, the decision made by EU member states in 1999 to launch the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP, since 2009 renamed to Common Security and Defence Policy, CSDP) meant that a more systematic approach to structuring the EU’s relations with other international security organisations – above all NATO and the United Nations – was urgently required both for political and operational reasons (Varwick and Koops, 2009; Brantner and Gowan, 2009). After a series of informal contacts between EU, UN and NATO officials and major CSDP institutional advances between 1999 and 2003, the European Security Strategy (ESS) sought to provide conceptual clarifications and policy foundations for the EU’s role as an international security actor (Council of the European Union, 2003; Biscop, 2005). As a central feature of the ESS, effective multilateralism emerged as the core EU foreign policy concept and guiding principle, placing fundamental emphasis on the EU’s cooperation with and strengthening of other major international organisations (Council of the European Union: 9; Biscop and Andersson, 2008; Jørgensen, 2009; Kissack, 2010; Koops, 2011).

It is fair to state that research on the EU in global affairs has taken somewhat of an ‘inter-organisational’ turn since the publication of the ESS and the EU’s promotion of effective multilateralism in both theory and practice. As Robert Kissack has pointed out with reference to research on the EU’s relations with the United Nations, ‘the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) that proclaimed effective multilateralism to be a goal of the EU, […] has been by far the most
important stimulus to the growing body of literature on EU external action in the UN system’ (Kissack, 2010: 17). Edited volumes, such as Katie V. Laatikainen and Karen Smith’s (2006) *The European Union at the United Nations: Intersecting Multilateralism* and Jan Wouters et al.’s *The United Nations and the European Union: An Ever Stronger Partnership* (Wouters et al., 2006) provide important examples of early research on the wide-ranging forms of EU–UN relations. Furthermore, in the security realm, the increase of research devoted to the EU’s inter-organisational relations is also a direct result of advances made in the context of the Common Security and Defence Policy. The vast majority of the EU’s 24 CSDP operations launched since 2003 have been carried out in direct cooperation, coordination or indeed in competition with either the United Nations or regional organisations, such as NATO, the OSCE or the African Union (Grevi et al., 2009: 117–57; Howorth, 2007; Merlingen and Ostrauskaite, 2007; Koops, 2011).

As a result, authors that seek to evaluate the policies, processes and effectiveness of the EU in global affairs also increasingly turn to assessments of the EU’s engagement with other core organisations in order to assess the overall impact of EU foreign policy itself.

### State of the literature: from problem-driven to theory-driven research

The existing literature on the EU’s relations with international organisations can be divided into roughly two phases and categories. Early research on effective multilateralism and the EU’s inter-organisational relations was mostly driven by policy-oriented think tank reports. The core focus of these studies was to identify the main challenges to effective cooperation between the EU and its partner organisations and to provide insights into how the overall impact of joint initiatives could be enhanced. Thus, research in this type of category has been essentially problem-driven.

More recently, scholars have begun to develop concepts and analytical frameworks for theorising more systematically the EU’s interaction with other organisations. Research in this second category seeks to identify the conditions for ‘inter-organisational effectiveness’, mutual impact and seeks to uncover which factors (internal and external) contribute to fundamental change in the EU’s relationship with other organisations. Current research promises more theoretical depth by examining the causes for the formation of inter-organisational networks, such as ‘overlap’.

### Problem-driven research: improving inter-organisational impact

So far the majority of studies that focus on the EU’s inter-organisational relations has been problem-driven, policy-oriented and remain in many ways a- or pre-theoretical. With the EU’s growing ambitions and advances towards becoming a comprehensive security actor, the core question of how this task expansion would affect other regional organisations (such as the OSCE, the Western European Union and, above all, the NATO) emerged during the mid-1990s. Policy-makers’ hopes for ‘interlocking’ (NATO, 1991) or ‘mutually reinforcing institutions’ (OSCE, 1996: para 6) were quickly dampened by the stark reality of inter-organisational chaos during the Balkan wars (Higgins, 1993; Yost, 2007). From 1996 onwards, debates centered on how to institutionalise and enhance the relationship between the EU’s emerging hard security dimension and the NATO’s continued role as the lead organisation for transatlantic security (Williams, 1997; Albright, 1998, Larabee, 2000). Indeed, of all dyads, the EU–NATO relationship has so far received the most sustained attention from policy-oriented scholars and also continues to inform many more conceptually oriented studies (see below). The literature on this specific inter-organisational relationship falls mainly into three categories.

First, studies which seek to advance policy-oriented recommendations for formal institutional mechanisms of inter-organisational EU–NATO cooperation – either by improving the so-called
'Berlin Plus agreements' (Burwell et al., 2006: 13–15; Yost, 2007: 74–96) or by advancing institutional complementarity between the tools of the respective organisations (Riggio, 2003). Second, a wide range of studies seeks to analyse how EU–NATO relations can be improved in practical, operational terms by focusing on informal cooperation channels or interaction of core staff members (commanders, executive heads and senior officials) during missions on the ground (Michel, 2006; Kupferschmidt, 2006). Finally, authors have focused on political and member issues, examining the roles played by states that impede or deliberately block advances in inter-organisational relations, such as France or Turkey (Valasek, 2007; Missiroli, 2002).

Similar problem-driven studies identified the core challenges and ways for enhancing the EU’s relations with the OSCE (Lynch, 2009; Galbreath, 2010), the Council of Europe (Kolb, 2010), the African Union (Vines and Middleton, 2008; Franke, 2009) and the United Nations (Graham, 2006; Major, 2008; Gowen, 2009; Tardy, 2009; Novosseloff, 2012). In a special issue of Studia Diplomatica – ‘Military Crisis Management: The Challenge of Inter-organisationalism’ (Koops, 2009a) – fourteen scholars and practitioners are brought together to examine the evolution, state of play and core challenges of a wide range of IO–IO partnerships in the field of peacekeeping, crisis management and capacity-building, including EU–UN and EU–African Union relations.

In addition, several studies on the EU’s impact on the Western European Union (WEU) highlight the ‘crowding out’ effect of the European Union’s rise as a security actor. The EU’s incorporation of the WEU’s main institutions and from 1999 onwards raised major questions about the existential impact the EU’s growth can have on organisations that occupy the same policy domain (Varwick, 1998; Wessel, 2001; Bailes and Messervy-Whiting, 2011). Indeed, in a rather evocative fashion, the absorption of the WEU by the EU prompted Ramses Wessel to conceptualise the European Union as a ‘Black Widow’ that was ‘devouring the WEU to give birth to a European Security and Defence Policy’ (Wessel, 2001: 405). Wessel’s article generates an important question about the EU’s inter-organisational impact more generally. By expanding its tasks and foreign policy tools, the European Union might also undermine existing organisations by diverting the resources and political attention of member states belonging to overlapping organisations. The demise of the Standby High Readiness Brigade for United Nations Operations (SHIRBRIG) serves as a more recent case in point. Whilst 16 out of 23 members of the unique UN peacekeeping brigade were also members of the European Union, the rise of the EU battlegroups (which were similar in terms of design and purpose to SHIRBRIG) prompted member states to divert their resources from the UN peacekeeping brigade to the EU’s own crisis management tool. Here, the EU’s task and tool expansion had significant ‘crowding out’ effects on the United Nations peacekeeping system and contributed to the ‘death’ of another organisation (Koops, 2007, 2009b). In this light, policy-oriented studies adopting an inter-organisational approach can also provide insights into existential competition between organisations with overlapping policy goals and member states.

Overall, the problem-driven literature on the EU’s inter-organisational relations focuses mainly on identifying core challenges to effective cooperation and partnerships and suggests practical steps for improving partnerships between organisations on the political, institutional and operational level. In this sense, it also contributes an inter-organisational policy-oriented perspective for evaluating the practical implementation of EU effective multilateralism on the ground (Ojanen, 2003; Wouters, Hoffmeister and Ruys, 2006; Morsut, 2009; Koops, 2010).

**Conceptual and theory-driven research**

Building and expanding on problem-driven literature, there has been a decisive push during the last six years to advance more theory-guided generalisations and conceptual insights about the
European Union’s inter-organisational relations. Four edited volumes that address core inter-organisational issues stand out in this respect.

**Theorising inter-organisational effectiveness, influence and change**

The volume *The European Union at the United Nations: Intersecting Multilateralisms* edited by Katie Laatikainen and Karen Smith (Laatikainen and Smith, 2006) provided an important conceptual impulse for analysing how and with which effect the EU acts *within* and *with* the United Nations system. The volume’s emphasis on whether the EU can ‘strengthen the UN’s capacity to act and have influence’ (Laatikainen and Smith, 2006: 10) represents an important starting point for comparative inter-organisational analyses of the EU’s impact on and with major international organisations. ‘Inter-organisational effectiveness’, accordingly, cannot be reduced merely to the EU’s ability to be effective *within* another organisation (i.e. to be able to ‘speak with one voice’), but more importantly it depends on the overall impact the EU is able to generate in a given policy field as a result of its partnership with another organisation. Scholars interested in inter-organisational impact and effectiveness therefore need to assess both the EU’s ability to strengthen and empower other organisations as well as its capability to achieve a higher impact through partnership than if each organisation had acted separately.

Knud Erik Jørgensen’s (Jørgensen, 2009) edited volume *The European Union and International Organizations* provided a second major impetus to advance a more conceptual and comparative approach to studying the EU’s cooperation and competition with a wide range of international organisations. Particular emphasis is placed on the way the EU might use other organisations as instruments for realising EU foreign policy objectives. Based on this assumption, the volume provides a theoretical framework for analysis that seeks to uncover how and why the EU’s instrumental approach to international organisations has changed over time and how the constraints international organisations have in turn imposed on the EU have affected EU policies (Jørgensen, 2009: 4). The strength of the volume lies in the comparative analysis of EU–UN, EU–IMF, EU–WTO, EU–NATO, EU–OSCE, EU–ILO and EU–ICC relations and a framework that differentiates between EU-internal, EU-external and constitutive factors as variables for change (Jørgensen, 2009: 10–15). With this Jørgensen also foreshadows a more nuanced approach to understanding the EU’s behaviour towards other organisations that draws on various actors and processes at the member state, organisational and international system levels.

Almost as a follow-up with a ‘reverse’ perspective, Oriol Costa and Knud Erik Jørgensen (Costa and Jørgensen, 2012) examine in a recent volume the processes and impact of a variety of other international organisations on the European Union. Drawing on institutionalist and ‘second image reversed’ theories, the volume opens up promising avenues for assessing inter-organisational norm diffusion, learning and imitation. Case studies also provide a more theoretically nuanced insight into absorptive and competitive effects of the EU’s domain expansion, when as in EU–Council of Europe relations, the EU ‘enlarges its spheres of competence, it intrudes on the remits of other international institutions’ (Schumacher, 2012: 197).

This aspect of ‘organisational Darwinism’ is also picked up on by Spyros Blavoukos and Dimitris Bourantonis’ edited volume *The European Union’s Presence in International Organizations* (Blavoukos and Bourantonis, 2011: 177). Combining case studies on EU–NATO, EU–UN, EU–WTO and EU–Commonwealth dyads, the volume aims to promote a research agenda on inter-organisational relations by focusing on three major aspects. First, the volume seeks to establish the EU-internal and EU-external factors that condition the EU’s interaction with other organisations. Aspects include member states’ preferences, but also the legal status of the EU’s presence in international organisations (on this aspect, see also Jørgensen and Wessel,
2010). Second, the volume calls for a historical perspective on EU–IO interaction and for an assessment of the effects successive EU enlargements had on EU coherence as well as on the dynamics of EU–IO relationships. Finally, the ‘top-down’ effects of EU–IO interaction – i.e. the effects IOs have on EU institutions and member states – is taken into consideration.

These volumes offer nuanced insights and conceptual bases for studying the EU’s relations with major international organisations. Inter-organisational effectiveness and change, instrumentalism as well as EU–IO and IO–EU reverse influence provide important building-blocks for more theory-guided analyses. These efforts have been deepened by a handful of recent journal articles (Biermann 2008a; Brosig 2011a, 2011b) aimed at advancing a theoretical inter-organisational perspective that draws on research that had been carried out in neighbouring disciplines and had largely remained neglected by the IR and EU studies mainstream.

Theorising the formation and outcome of inter-organisational relations

Current research on inter-organisational relations draws on organisational theory from both sociology and management studies in order to apply some theoretical insights to core questions of inter-organisational cooperation and overall outcomes. In a seminal article, Rafael Biermann (Biermann, 2008a) proposes an ‘inter-organisational network’ perspective for explaining the onset of collaborative networking between major Euro-Atlantic security institutions (European Union, NATO, Council of Europe, OSCE and Western European Union) as well as the United Nations after the cold war. The *sine qua non for cooperation* between previously autonomous organisations lie, according to Biermann, in ‘domain similarity’: ‘Domain similarity implies a shared issue-area with significant, though not total overlap of competences for meaningful cooperation’ (Biermann, 2008a: 155). According to this assumption, the post-cold war move of NATO, WEU, EU and OSCE into the field of ‘crisis management’ resulted in domain similarity and ‘functional overlap’ (Biermann, 2008a: 156) or ‘functional crossover’ (Stewart, 2008: 272), which formed the main basis for inter-organisational relations. In a similar vein, Stephanie Hofmann views ‘overlap’ in terms membership, mandates and resources as an important precondition for cooperation (Hofmann, 2010: 103). Taking the discussion one step further, authors have tried to understand why overlap itself occurs in the first place. Here, as mentioned in the brief historical overview section above, the simple fact of the rising numbers of IOs pursuing similar policy objectives, or what Malte Brosig refers to as ‘actor density’ (Brosig, 2011a: 147) has produced the preconditions for cooperation or rivalry. Or as Christer Jönsson put it: ‘The proliferation of organisations raises the generic problem of interorganisational relations’ (Jönsson, 1993: 464). In addition, task and ‘competence expansion’ of existing organisations can also be a cause of overlap and may produce the pre-conditions for cooperation or rivalry between existing actors and new challengers in a given policy field (Law, 2007: 43).

Yet, mere ‘passive overlap’ does not necessarily result in direct inter-organisational transactions. Scholars point out that cooperation or rivalry is a matter of active choice. Here, insights from ‘resource dependence theory’ (Emerson, 1962; Pfieffer and Salancik, 2003 [1978]) have been fruitfully applied (Biermann, 2008a: 159–61; Brosig, 2011a: 152). The upshot of this theory is that organisations choose to cooperate in order to gain access to vital resources of their partners. For example, the EU chose to cooperate with NATO in order to gain access to crucial resources for military crisis management and CSDP. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the original formulation of resource dependence theory included both material resources as well as ideational ones (i.e. legitimacy, reputation, prestige) which have also often played a crucial role in the cooperation between organisations (e.g. regional organisations seeking legitimacy and authority through United Nations Security Council authorisation). Moreover,
scholars have pointed to structural changes at the international level (such as the end of the Cold War) and shocks in the external environment (such as the failure of most organisations during the Balkan Wars) that might induce organisations to cooperate (Biermann, 2008a: 160; Jørgensen, 2009; Varwick and Koops, 2009: 110–12). This is also linked to the wider assumption in sociological approaches that ‘environmental uncertainty can motivate organisations to develop inter-organisational relations’ (Galaskiewicz, 1985: 287).

Finally, current theoretically informed research tries to explain the overall outcome of inter-organisational interaction.

The most commonly applied dichotomy is that of ‘cooperation vs. rivalry’ – where scholars are interested in uncovering the conditions under which IO–IO interactions either result in conflict or mutual reinforcement (Biermann, 2008a, 2008b; Kolb, 2010; Brosig, 2011a). Here, theory-driven research is not much further developed than policy-oriented research and much more empirical testing is required. So far identified factors that hinder cooperation include the inherent quest of each organisation for autonomy and hence the avoidance of too much inter-organisational dependence (Biermann, 2008a: 154). Further factors include the relationship between the individual leaders of partner organisations (Jönsson, 1993: 466), the ability to bridge differences in organisational cultures or the promotion of cooperation/rivalry through strong member states (Smithers, 1979). Furthermore, cooperation and rivalry can occur in the same dyad, simply at different points in time of the IO–IO ‘life cycle’: cooperation may prevail at the beginning of a relationship, but can later turn into open rivalry. The case of EU–NATO relations serves as an important illustration: whilst the EU’s CSDP required NATO resources during the years 1999–2003 and thereby facilitated cooperation, urges towards autonomisation and differentiation from 2003 onwards contributed to frictions and open rivalry (Koops, 2012). According to Biermann, inter-organisational networks can have two outcomes: positioning or emulation. On the one hand, organisations constantly seek to enhance their own positions within a network, resulting in rivalry for inter-organisational power and centrality within a network (Biermann, 2008a: 169–71). Interestingly, insights from neo-realist IR theory could prove fruitful here for also explaining power struggles between organisations. Alternatively, relations between organisations may also lead to ‘emulation’, where one organisation adopts the successful features and institutions of the perceived model (Biermann, 2008a: 171–72; see also Brosig, 2011a). This aspect links the literature to institutionalist studies on ‘isomorphism’ (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Reynolds, 2007) and Oriol Costa and Knud Erik Jørgensen’s volume on IO influence on the EU (Costa and Jørgensen, 2012). Applying insights from regime complex theory, Malte Brosig argues that competition between organisations can also lead to either a division of labour or the development of ‘niche capabilities’ that one organisation can adopt in order to avoid outright rivalry (Brosig, 2011a, 2011b). Alternatively, as we saw above, inter-organisational relations might also lead to the marginalisation of one organisation by the other, leading to ‘encroachment’ (Stewart, 2008: 280) or ‘black widow devouring’ of one organisation by the other (Wessel, 2001; Koops, 2009b).

Finally, according to David Law, inter-organisational relations may result in three possible outcomes: defensive, enhancive, transformative. IOs may first try to protect their own position and prerogatives, thereby adopting a defensive strategy where a cooperative discourse is used in order to keep the partner at bay and actual cooperation on the ground is avoided. Such outcome might also result in partners ignoring each other in practice. Second, organisations may end up enhancing each other by compensating each other’s limitations. Third, an organisation may choose to have a deliberate impact on another organisation, either in order to influence its functioning or to absorb it entirely (Law, 2007: 58).

Overall, these studies highlight the promise that theory-guided work holds for a more nuanced understanding of inter-organisational relations. Yet, it also becomes clear that
theorising is still in its infancy and much more work is needed, particularly for uncovering the actual causes and conditions for cooperation, rivalry and inter-organisational effectiveness.

The European Union as an inter-organisational actor: towards a multilevel and interdisciplinary research agenda

As this overview chapter highlighted, problem-oriented and theory-guided research on inter-organisational relations provide important insights for understanding the EU’s interaction with major international organisations. Future research on the EU as an inter-organisational actor would benefit from a wide range of empirical case studies of EU–IO relations beyond the peace and security field. Furthermore, insights from neighbouring disciplines where organisational theory has long-standing traditions – such as sociology and management studies – should be broadly applied to understanding the causes for the onset, development and outcome of inter-organisational relations.

Furthermore, whilst inter-organisational approaches zoom in on the bureaucratic and organisational levels, it should not be forgotten that policy decisions of member states and relations between individuals affect EU–IO relations as much as international developments and external shocks. Researchers should therefore ‘open the black box’ of EU–IO relations and consider the interplay of dynamics at various levels affecting IOs in various domains. In this way, relations, interactions and pathways of influence among international organisations can be analysed as multiple processes operating across various levels and actors related to international organisations (Koops, 2011, 2012). As outlined in Table 5.1 below, the overall nature and

Table 5.1 Multi-level analysis of inter-organisational relations

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<td>International crises &amp; exogenous shocks as catalysts for cooperation or competition</td>
<td>Values and norms at the international level, convergence with/differentiation from ‘other’ actors</td>
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<td><strong>National</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferences of core EU member states as to promoting/limiting IO–IO cooperation</td>
<td>Preference of core member states facilitating or hindering IO–IO cooperation in the field</td>
<td>Role of core member states in promoting distinct identity of one organisation over the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of leaders/boundary-spanners in promoting IO–IO relations</td>
<td>Role of ‘operational personnel’ on the ground (e.g. force commanders, programme directors)</td>
<td>Role of individual ‘identity entrepreneurs’ in promoting common or differentiating IO–IO identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisational (Bureaucratic)</strong></td>
<td>Role of bureaucratic cultures; activism of certain sub-institutions</td>
<td>Inter-organisational compatibility between different staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inter-organisational</strong></td>
<td>Inter-organisational institutionalisation? Role of steering committees, joint working groups</td>
<td>Inter-organisational learning; IO–IO epistemic community? Joint actions/planning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration, based on Koops, 2011 and 2012.
effectiveness of an inter-organisational relationship arguably depends on various processes that are influenced by factors and actors at the international, national, individual, organisational (bureaucratic) and inter-organisational level. As a result of these multi-level processes, organisations can affect each other in the institutional/political, operational and identity domains.

Viewed in this analytical perspective, inter-organisational research can draw on existing work carried out on, inter alia, the role of individual leaders, acting as ‘boundary-role spanners’ (Jönsson, 1993; Koops, 2008; Kille and Hendrickson, 2010) as well as cooperation facilitators (Stewart, 2008: 275), the impact of core member states in promoting or hindering EU–IO cooperation, the significance of organisational and bureaucratic cultures in determining inter-organisational understandings and effectiveness as well as the importance of changes and shocks at the international system level (such as the end of the Cold War or major crises) in facilitating or obstructing inter-organisational links. Finally, research on the inter-organisational level should pay more attention to what extent institutionalisation efforts (such as the creation of joint steering committees or formalised agreements) actually improve inter-organisational coordination, cooperation and joint impact.

Finally, with regard to the European Union, the role of ‘inter-organisational power’ has so far been tackled mostly in an indirect or marginal manner (but see Cook, 1977). Assessing the different factors and processes at different levels that contribute to the power and influence of the European Union vis-à-vis its partner organisations, should generate important insights about the nature and prospect of the EU’s management of inter-organisational relations. Whilst inter-organisational approaches to studying the behaviour and impact of the European Union might often appear technocratic and limited, the reviewed research in this chapter highlights that an IO–IO perspective provides not only rewarding opportunities for engaging with organisational theory advanced in other disciplines, but it also provides policy-oriented and theory-relevant insights into the influence of the European Union more generally in global affairs. As the inter-organisational research agenda is still at its infancy in the field of IR and EU studies, the demand is high for scholars to contribute a wide range of case studies for the build-up of an empirically rich and conceptually nuanced theory of the EU as an inter-organisational actor in the coming years.

References


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