Analysing the performance of the European Union

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I am intrigued about what kind of project methodology the EUPERFORM planners have in mind. Do they have any more info on, e.g. what kind of magic indicators could serve for comparative assessment of EU’s performance (comparing how we do on the death penalty and the corruption convention, in the IAEA and in ECOSOC, with the PBC and the HRC)? It is very good to define performance in terms of impact (and not speaking with one voice) but impact is extremely difficult to assess, since political objectives in UN fora are rarely spelt out clearly and demonstrating causal links can be impossible. Will it look at IFIs and WTO, as well as UN and UN agencies?

(European Commission official commenting on the EUPERFORM project, 2008)

What is the European Union doing in multilateral institutions? Though a simple question, it nonetheless connotes several different meanings. First, for many it will come as a major surprise to learn that the EU actually engages in multilateral institutions. They tend to consider the EU itself to be an international organisation, a one of a kind organisation perhaps, but, nonetheless, an international organisation, and international organisations are not supposed to engage in or develop policies towards other organisations. Instead they might cultivate inter-organisational relations (for this approach, see Chapter 5). However, the diplomatic activities reviewed in the present chapter are conceived of in a different fashion, specifically reviewing how the EU aims at shaping international institutions, including what the EU is doing in international institutions.

Second, some would highlight the term ‘doing’ emphasising that questions about doing are fundamentally different from questions about being. The latter set of questions leads to studies of the EU as an international actor, its international identity, its policies, ways of being a role model, e.g. a normative power or a city upon a hill (to borrow a popular American self-image). Ways of being also include formal representation, i.e. one of the key issues addressed in legal studies.

Third, some ask the question with a certain degree of inbuilt normative preference. They might ask what the EU is doing, e.g. in the UNHRC, emphasising that this institution seems at times to be on a collision course with the liberal international order that the EU counts among its strategic foreign policy objectives to support (see Chapter 17). Similar questions could be asked about activities within UNESCO, an international organisation that historically has triggered US and UK (temporary) exit strategies. Likewise, FAO has experienced severe governance problems, i.e. almost the opposite of effective multilateralism (FAO, 2007).
Fourth, some would point to arguments about the false promises of international institutions and ask why the EU wastes time engaging with these supposedly irrelevant organisations, epiphenomenal to international distribution of power dynamics (on power and multilateralism, see Chapter 33).

Fifth, some would ask the following: OK, the EU might be a player with a considerable portfolio of international policies, then what? In the first place, what are the EU’s objectives in the world of multilateral institutions? What do the Europeans want? To what degree or how does the EU engage in outreach activities, i.e. meet third parties in multilateral ‘capitals’ such as New York, Geneva, the Hague, Vienna or any other major hub for global governance? To what degree, or how, does the EU have an impact on the dynamics of global governance? How does the EU engage in negotiations, for instance providing leadership? Does the Union build coalitions with like-minded players? To what degree does the EU contribute to outcomes?

This chapter addresses the last category of issues and reviews literature analysing the EU’s performance in international institutions. In a certain sense, this is a simple and straightforward analytical task that only depends on two crucially important factors: i) get the explanandum right and, ii) identify suitable explanans. That’s it! The rest is a question of colouring the blanks.

**Getting the explanandum right**

The explanandum is clearly a composite unit, containing three elements: ‘the EU’, ‘international institutions’ and ‘performance’. In the following, the two first elements are explicated, leaving the third element for the subsequent section.

The first element is the EU. Given that the EU is the performing organisation, it does matter who represents the EU in interactions with international institutions (Wouters, Hoffmeister and Ruys, 2007). However, the issue of representation is not exclusively legal, i.e. formal representation is only one among several aspects, yet has attracted an impressive range of studies (Eeckhout, 2004; Govaere et al., 2004; Hoffmeister, 2007; Gstöhl, 2009; Jørgensen and Wessel, 2011). The legal dimension also plays a certain role in principal agent-informed studies, taking its point of departure in formal mandates, contracts and rules of engagement. Others have focused on the recognition issue, including the recognition of diplomats in EU delegations (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998; Bretherton and Vogler, 2006; Bruter, 1999; Carta, 2011; Rijks and Whitman, 2007). Still others have analysed who actually performs on behalf of the Union and concluded that the following might be involved in the EU’s multilateral institutions: the (rotating) Council presidency, the Council President, the President of the Commission, the HR/EEAS, special envoys, EU or national officials and, ministers of foreign affairs being assigned specific tasks (cf. Duke, 2002). Finally, several policy fields are characterised by a combination of those listed, for instance climate policy (see Oberthür and Kelly, 2008; Emerson et al., 2011, see also Chapter 23). Given the rich diversity of forms of representation, Sieglinde Gstöhl (2009) has chosen an apt title, ‘Patchwork Power Europe’, for her analysis. The EU’s system of representation seems to be very complex and as far from a streamlined system as it can possibly be. Analysts frequently deplore such diversity arguing that it will reduce EU performance and influence. But is such diversity that different from how states are represented in international institutions, for instance by presidents, prime ministers, ministers, state secretaries, directors of national banks, ambassadors and several other categories of officials?

The second element is international institutions that seemingly have many features in common. They constitute a category, share a generic term and can be perceived as ‘like units’, and, moreover, their members are typically states. In this context, ‘typically’ means that there are exceptions to the rule. Thus, the EU is a member of several international institutions,
e.g. WTO and FAO; the ILO has, besides states, also trade unions and associations of employers as members; the almost non-recognised state of Taiwan is a member of the WTO; the EU is a member of NAFO, whereas EU member states are not; the United Nations is predominantly a club of states but also has permanent observers and other graded forms of representation. Yet, it does not take more than a casual browse of the websites of international institutions to realise that they differ profoundly in terms of mandates, functions, scope, governance and legitimacy. Hence, the ‘patchwork power Europe’-image is not only caused by the composite nature of the EU, including the variety of legal competences but is also caused by the incredibly different governance structures of the international institutions, i.e. by the institutional form of multilateralism (Ruggie, 1993).

Performance

The notion of performance sounds nice. It is tempting to use and connotes several meanings. There is a casual use of the concept everywhere just as much research is characterised by severe limits. In order to point out some of these limits, I’ll briefly engage in three (self-)critical reflections.

First, both criticism of implicit criteria for evaluation and the shadow of the observer problem might be relevant, but it does not amount to a conceptual framework for analysing performance. My first direct encounter with the EU’s performance in world politics was triggered by the frustration policy conferences often cause (Jørgensen, 1998). While seemingly being more down to earth and frequently usefully informed by the insights of practitioners, there is at such conferences no end to verdicts about EU ‘success’ or ‘failure’ in this or that field – verdicts often based on a single straw of evidence, gut feelings or conventional wisdom. Consequently, I made a plea to make explicit criteria for determining success or failure, emphasising that there is no Archimedean point from which success and failure can be objectively measured. Frequently, some stakeholders see success, whereas others see failure. However, merely criticising the absence of explicit criteria and emphasising the multiple meanings of performance that different actors cultivate hardly amounts to a methodological cookbook containing recipes to follow in systematic and focused research.

Second, performance might have something to do with influence but there are important differences. The second example was quite deliberately called a feasibility study (Jørgensen, 2004). To some degree it was informed by performance studies in the business world, not least the employment of spider performance charts. The point of departure was the European Trade Commissioner at the time, Pascal Lamy (2004; see also OECD, 1998), who suggested some fairly intuitive propositions. He pointed to causal links between European unity and the degree of influence in world politics, specifically that the EU plays a considerable role within trade and environmental policy; catching up concerning development policy; yet, insignificant concerning global financial governance and traditional foreign policy, including security and defence (see also Smaghi, 2009). To be sure, these observations were merely indicative, yet it seemed worthwhile to explore the issue in some greater detail. In order to reach a general understanding of the EU’s role and influence in world politics, the first step was to construct a ‘web of influence’. The findings concerning ten policy fields are summarised in Figure 6.1. In the present context, there is no need to describe in detail how I arrived at the specific shape of this web of influence.

Such a spider chart is a means to connect findings of otherwise separate individual case studies or specialised literatures and also a starting point for contemplating possible factors to explain variation of EU influence over time and across policy fields. But spider charts are not magic as they merely provide a neat overview leaving both input data and interpretation to the accompanying analysis. Furthermore, measuring ‘influence’ is not, as we shall soon see, the same as measuring ‘performance’ and even less explaining performance.
Finally, ‘performance’ is (like ‘role”) frequently used in the passing (Bickerton, 2007, Tuzunkan, 2009). According to Richard Higgott, ‘the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009 showed Europe’s underperforming or indeed less than central role in global public decision-making’ (Higgott, 2010: 16). Perhaps Copenhagen did, but what does the employment of underperforming tell us, and who performed really well in Copenhagen?

In summary, major parts of the literature on performance analyse performance in a general fashion that unfortunately does not tell us very much. Findings are typically too vague, issue specific or case dependent. We might easily end up using vague or blunt conceptual instruments. Hence, the combined output is a bit like in Donald Puchala’s (1971) famous fable of the elephant and the blind men, and it is easy, way too easy, to question findings simply by pointing to other cases. This leads us to further explicating the key terms and, subsequently, to strategies for measuring performance.

In order to upgrade research on the EU’s performance, several analytical issues need to be addressed: criteria should be made explicit and focus should be on EU performance as such, not on influence or impact. The complex and contested nature of performance implies that we are bound to specify exactly what we have in mind when referring to performance, i.e. its major dimensions and its key characteristics. We also need to specify how we might possibly measure performance once unpacked, because one thing is to understand the nature of performance and a very different thing to engage in measurement.
Four studies represent feasible avenues of inquiry. Franziska Brandtner and Richard Gowan (2008) have analysed EU performance within the domain of UN human rights politics and how successful the EU has been to get draft resolutions adopted. The short version of their findings is that the EU during the last decade or more has been less and less successful in influencing UN human rights resolutions (see also Smith, 2006). The second study is the annual scoreboard, produced by the European Council on Foreign Relations (e.g. 2010). The authors divide EU activities into a range of policy fields, and performance is measured by means of a summarised analysis and translated into a grade. While the grades provide an overview, the explication of the analysis behind the grades contributes reasoning and nuance. The third study examines more generally performance politics of international institutions (Gutner and Thompson, 2010; see also Chapter 4). The fourth study is a special issue of *Journal of European Integration* (Jørgensen, Oberthür and Shahin, 2011; see also Jørgensen, 2009). The special issue offers an analytical framework and eight case studies. The common point of departure and the relatively focused studies allow both some comparative reflections and the identification of potential explanatory factors. In the following, the analytical framework will be outlined, including illustrative examples, and some of the problematic issues will be addressed.

The analytical framework draws on a study by Charles Lusthaus *et al.* (2005) which, basically, is an approach bringing together a range of different analytical approaches to performance. The authors acknowledge that performance is an essentially contested concept, and their contribution can be said to represent a pragmatic consensus position. Performance is unpacked and differentiated into four elements. Each element is in turn further differentiated into a range of dimensions and associated questions. To each question there might be one or more indicators resulting in a typical tree-structure, cf. Table 6.1.

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Adapted from Lusthaus *et al.*, 2005.
Effectiveness

In their analysis of the EU at the UN, Katie Laatikainen and Karen Smith (2006; see also Young, 1982, 1999; Mitchell, 2008) make a distinction between four different kinds of multilateral effectiveness:

- Do member states act collectively, as a union, in the UN?
- Does the EU achieve its objectives?
- Does the EU contribute to the effectiveness of the UN?
- Is the UN effective in terms of problem-solving?

In the present context where we measure EU performance, only the second kind of effectiveness is relevant. This reduction in scope obviously makes the measurement of effectiveness easier, although one should not underestimate the remaining analytical challenges. For instance, EU objectives are not always made explicit or specified to a degree that allows for an analysis of whether the goals have been achieved. Moreover, it is highly relevant to ask whether such goals should be fulfilled in the short, medium or long term. Furthermore, which dimensions of effectiveness does it make sense to include, and which questions are relevant to ask? Finally, which relevant indicators can we identify?

In many cases, too specific or precise policy objectives would make no sense. The quality of the five strategic objectives in the European Security Strategy (Biscop, 2005) is exactly that they are simplified strategic objectives for which reason we should not expect the specification characterising tactical (or operational) objectives. However, in order to gain significance, strategic objectives need to be translated into tactical and similar objectives. Otherwise strategic objectives might just be words on paper. Similarly, the general objectives listed in the Lisbon Treaty should not be mistaken as operational objectives that can be checked against empirical reality. Rather, they belong to the realm of EU public philosophy and might or might not be connected to operational policy objectives.

Moreover, emphasising instrumentality too much might be detrimental to achieving the ends. When major players in international institutions emphasise instrumental action too much, demand exceeds investment and institutional supply will suffer. The COP15 2009 Summit in Copenhagen might serve as an illustrative example of this unbalance. The question is then how we can strike a balance between instrumental possession goals and institutional milieu goals. When the latter is emphasised too much, we are happy that multilateral institutions exist even when they are not effective in delivering what their task portfolio suggests they should.

Keen attention to effectiveness might overlook cases where the EU’s key aim is being not doing. Sometimes being present equals at least a symbolic form of existence or recognition. A famous example is provided by Jacques Delors and the European Commission that did not have many environmental stakes at the Rio 1992 environmental conference, but being present could possibly be cashed in as symbolic recognition (Jupille and Caporaso, 1998) – and subsequently, recognition could be used as a platform for substantive engagements, cf. subsequent developments in EU environmental and climate policies (see Sjöstedt, 1998; see also Chapters 20 and 25). This delicate issues has also much to do with the form vs. substance issue (see Chapter 1). No wonder that third parties at times have a hard time knowing what the EU really wants.

In some issue areas, the EU might have clearly stated objectives, yet not be capable of achieving its goals for which reason it might be tempting to conclude that the EU does not perform well. It might be the case, but it seems relevant to check for the ‘external constraints dimension’. In other words, we should ask if the EU is operating in a majoritarian environment.
(Kissack, 2010) and whether the majority is etched in stone or the EU aims at outreach, i.e. engages in processes of persuasion or coalition building. The governance of many international institutions are characterised by majoritarian principles, and it might not really make a difference whether the EU talks with one or 27 voices (Rhinard and Kaeding, 2007; van Schaik, 2010; Laatikainen, 2010).

Evaluations of performance might be abused and do more harm than good (van Willigen and Kleistra, 2010; see also Chapter 7). Diplomatic negotiation processes cannot and should not be analysed or exposed to rigid performance studies, focusing only on short term, nitty-gritty details, time invested, results achieved; rigorous (i.e. rigid) performance charts, fifty forms to fill in for management for every round of negotiation. It is easy to predict everything with a negative impact on negotiation processes that only make management bookkeepers happy (Delreux, 2011; Elgström, 2007).

Finally, multilateral institutions are often characterised by diffuse reciprocity, implying that simple minded analysis of effectiveness might overlook that multilateral processes frequently take time and result in package deals that are somewhat difficult to unpack to determine achievements (Rittberger, 1987). Give and take processes are obviously detrimental to achieving stated goals, just as long term gains are excluded from rigid short term performance studies.

In summary, when engaging in analysis of effectiveness there are eminently good reasons to avoid simple schemata. The point of departure is effectiveness but it has often several dimensions and to each dimension it is possible to ask a range of questions. In short, jumping from effectiveness directly to indicators, or vice versa, seems like an eminently good recipe for arriving at analytically dubious findings.

**Efficiency**

Efficiency is defined as the achievement-cost ratio, relative to other performing organisations. It seems that the ratio is essentially contested especially because so many implicit comparators are doing their discrete work and, being implicit, they have difficulty in facilitating informed debates. The topic of this handbook concerns EU policies towards and within international institutions yet very few studies provide knowledge about what could be called Europe’s foreign policy system. National ministries of foreign affairs have been analysed (Hocking and Spence, 2002), just as the European Community’s diplomatic representations and DG Relex (Bruter, 1999; Carta, 2011). Even if launched relatively recently, the EEAS has attracted a bundle of studies (Vanhoonacker and Reslow, 2010, Lehne, 2011; Drieskens and van Schaik, 2010). However, a comprehensive authoritative study of the EU’s foreign policy system toward international institutions is still lacking, leaving the floor for very different understandings of what counts as efficiency. Moreover, many observers have opinions concerning this ratio and make bold claims, yet rarely find it necessary to provide thorough analysis. Being an exception to this trend, José Torreblanca (2010) points out that EU member states operate 2,172 embassies and 933 consulates (in contrast to 170 American embassies and 63 consulates). Not even novel-length explanations, pointing to political or historical reasons, can explain (away) the fact that the American foreign service is by far more cost efficient than the European foreign service(s).

Journalists tend to be impressed by the EEAS, yet with a negative twist, claiming that this new institution, the EEAS, will be big and bound to be both bureaucratic and costly. Under the heading, An Outsized Diplomatic Machine, Boris Biancheri claims that ‘Without a doubt, its structure will be anything but modest, with 6,000 to 7,000 diplomats coming from community institutions and from the 27 member states. Most will be based in Brussels, while the rest will be spread out in 136 foreign locations, for a total budget of nearly 3 billion euros’ (La Stampa, 23 July 2010).
In stark contrast to journalistic ‘without-a-doubt’ analysis, diplomacy analyst, Stefan Lehne (2011), points out that ‘roughly one year after its establishment, the EEAS still suffers from a number of design flaws. It has an insufficient resource base and there is a lack of buy-in on the parts of both the member states and the European Commission’ (Lehne, 2011: 1). Moreover, he highlights that ‘currently (December 2011), the EEAS comprises roughly 3,200 staff. This compares to about 12,000 people working in the French and 3,700 in the Dutch foreign service’ (Lehne, 2011: 14). Without a doubt, this analysis is slightly different from Boris Biancheri’s. In the present context, the comparison to the French and Dutch foreign services is particularly intriguing because it provides some information about the resource side of the costs-achievement ratio. In general, such information is not easy to find. One important feature of good governance is accountability. In democratic states, decision-makers are supposed to be held accountable for their decisions. Yet how can citizens do that if they do not know the objectives or the degree to which objectives have been achieved or the costs of trying to achieve the objectives. Decision-makers are usually eager to provide reasons for their actions. They try to legitimise what they have decided or explain why things did not work as intended. Such reasoning provides part of the information on which media and citizens make up their minds about the performance of this or that organisation.

So, how efficient is the EU? We are in no short supply of responses, yet efficiency has a relative quality to it. Hence, we need to bring in comparators and engage in comparative analysis. In turn, we need to turn implicit comparators into explicit comparators. When it comes to the EU, implicit comparators never include Lesotho or China. Sometimes Canada and Germany (as decentralised federal polities) are brought in. But for some reason, the implicit comparator is almost always the United States of America. However, systematic comparisons of EU and US diplomatic services remain on the to-do list.

**Relevance**

Relevance is defined as the degree to which key stake-holders consider the EU a relevant performing organisation, no matter how the EU is represented. When analysing relevance, thus defined, one of the first follow-on questions is to ask which stakeholder we should consider to be of key importance. Not surprisingly, member states frequently pop up as natural born candidates. Who are the key member states, governments, major businesses (or their representatives in associations of chemical industry, pharmaceutical industry, media, etc.)? To which degree do such stakeholders find the EU relevant as a performing organisation? Are there any constants? Oxfam will presumably be critical of EU performance until the EU does what Oxfam wants the EU to do; some British conservatives will be critical of EU performance no matter how the EU performs and the same applies to other segments of nationalists.

Some add the subtle, but not insignificant distinction that, actually, we are focusing on member states’ governments, i.e. an important but not exclusive segment of political preferences in member states. This issue can be boiled down to the analytical trade-off between considering states as unitary actors and opening a Pandora’s Box of diverging preferences within states, i.e. domestic politics. Several theoretical orientations keep the notorious Box closed, i.e. ask questions about how principals delegate specified tasks or monitor the performance of their agents (Pollack, 2003; Kerremans, 2011). Rational choice-informed studies do something similar, yet ask somewhat different questions: Given the assumption of self-interested actors, why do states cooperate? How do rational actors, states, engage in strategic bargaining or design institutional outcome? When do states prefer informal agreements, and when do they consider formal agreements to be the better outcome? (Lipson, 1991). How can we describe the dynamics that cause
rational actors, states, to build a supranational political community and, is such an outcome likely? (Haas, 1958).

Other theoretical or analytical orientations find it useful to open the black box and ask questions about domestic preference formations, i.e. how key domestic stakeholders find the EU a relevant performing organisation. Andrew Moravcsik’s (1998) liberal intergovernmentalism is one example even if closely linked to the theoretical perspectives outlined above. The analytical frameworks informing the literature on policy networks is a second prominent example (Peterson, 1998), especially because the strong state-centric focus is relaxed and replaced by a very flexible understanding of who can be considered members of a policy community. A third example, the literature on foreign policy traditions, emphasises that within many countries fairly stable foreign policy traditions, also called political schools of thought, engage in fierce competition about interpreting the options and future directions of foreign policy (Mead, 2002; Nau, 2002; Jørgensen, 2012). Representatives of foreign policy traditions also find the EU more (liberal internationalists) or less (nationalists) relevant.

Whereas the above two sections review literature focusing on internal aspects of relevance, this section focuses on external relevance, i.e. to which degree can third parties be considered stakeholders, and to which degree do they consider the EU a relevant performing organisation? Also concerning this issue, can we find both narrow and broad conceptions of stakeholders? The former mainly focuses on states and the latter is defined by a more flexible approach. It might include companies (e.g. Microsoft or the merging Boeing and McDonnell-Douglas), NGOs and transnational actors generally (e.g. those pleading in favour of the International Criminal Court or the convention banning personal landmines) and international organisations (e.g. the World Bank considering the EU a partner in international development activities) the latter being more flexible.

Though overlaps in kinds of interest should not be excluded, external stakeholders tend to look at relevance in different terms and ask different questions. They would, e.g. ask whether a Union in multilateral institutions is of some significance or if it is just a bundle of mainly small and largely insignificant states that enjoys an existence in Europe and frequently is heading in different political directions. When US President Barack Obama cancelled a meeting in February 2010, he might have reasoned that there was no Union of significance to do business with. Moreover, key external stakeholders might ask if the Union has something to say and who, anyway, represents the Union this week? It seems relevant to ask these questions because in numerous cases the Union is present, which is symbolically important for the Union, but either it has nothing to say or presents a message that is the outcome of a long process of coordination. Hence, the message might be rich in words but rather empty in substance and direction. Finally, external stakeholders might ask if the EU is capable of engaging in negotiation processes, including the winding road map of tactical manoeuvres that sometimes characterise international negotiations. In this context, it is also a matter of relevance whether the EU is in a position to sign an agreement, i.e. enjoy legal personality.

**Financial viability**

The literature on the balance between budgets and assigned tasks is remarkably limited, at least when it comes to relations between the EU and international institutions. Political scientists and other social scientists seem to find the topic considerably less than attractive. The EU and member states might have a role to play in this game because data are not particularly easy to find. The annual report, *General Report on the Activities of the European Union* (European Commission, annually), simply provides an overview of activities but not that much else. There is
nothing like the Performance and Accountability Report (State Department, annually, e.g. 2006). Stefan Lehne (2011) points out that the EEAS does not have its own budget as the new institution is the outcome of an inter-institutional agreement, an institutional feature that seems to be detrimental to its effectiveness.

Carefully examining potential explanans

Once the explanandum has been specified and characterised, and its nature understood, we know how the EU performs in given international institutions and issue areas. We also know how performance varies across policy issue areas, and how it has changed over time. In short, we have acquired a basic yet substantive understanding that would suffice for preparing a policy brief on a given issue. If we want to dig deeper and go for theory-informed analysis, we find ourselves at a crossroads, especially because strategic analytical choices have to be made. We are quite simply facing a new task, namely explaining or understanding why or how the EU performs as it does; why we find variation across policy fields and change over time.

Theory-informed analysis is fully dependent on the chosen category of theory. In the present context, only the three major categories of theory will be included: interpretive, normative and explanatory theory, each category including a range of specific theories. When working with normative and interpretive theory, ‘how’ questions are key questions. Hence, Ian Manners (2002) has analysed how the EU has evolved as a normative power. While Manners’ approach provides neat links to the performance element of relevance, it has less to offer concerning effectiveness, not least because being a normative power, the EU does not need to do much. Employing discourse theory, Ben Rosamond (2002) has examined how the EU has responded to processes of globalisation, arguing that discourses on globalisation have some inbuilt response suggestions sometimes labeled logic-of-no-alternative. Thus, Rosamond argues that globalisation as such might be important but discourses on globalisation are equally, if not more, important because the discursively constructed challenges of globalisation carry reasons for action and pleas for specific EU internal policies. Globalisation discourses constitute protectionist policies in France, but free trade policies in the United Kingdom. Within the EU, DG Trade welcomes globalisation and tends to favour free trade, whereas DG Agriculture has some severe concerns. In general, discourse theory allows for a two-way street of projection: i) one following an inside-out logic emphasising how Europe can or should shape processes of globalisation and, ii) and outside-in logic, emphasising how Europe, for better or worse, is being shaped by global processes and institutions. The former logic is the one that is most directly linked to our interest in performance. Erik Eriksen (2004) and the Oslo school draw on Habermasian social theory, analysing how the EU engages in communicative action, both internally and externally, e.g. in the IMO (Riddervold, 2011). Legal analysis demonstrates how many of the EU’s external powers are implied powers, i.e. derived from competences to deal with a range of policy fields internally (Jørgensen and Wessel, 2011). Joseph Weiler (1999) has masterfully examined the crucially important distinction between inside and outside, i.e. the baseline for all EU external relations, including both bilateral relations (with states) and multilateral relations with international institutions. As it is possible to establish a close encounter between communicative action and diplomatic negotiations, it should also be possible to bring performance studies and Habermasian social theory together.

Explanatory theory comes in many colours yet features causal analysis as its trademark. Among classical theories of European integration, both neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism ask why member states aim at creating a supranational political community, the former suggests a range of positive answers and the latter a range of negative answers. The two theoretical frameworks
therefore also disagree concerning the likelihood of such a political community. Apart from the important externalisation thesis, neofunctionalism is predominantly EU introvert, i.e. make use of EU-internal explanans, whereas intergovernmentalism is aware of the international context in which the EC/EU is situated. However, this awareness is not translated into studies of EC/EU agency, exactly because a supranational political community of some significance is considered unlikely.

Among contemporary theories, the following three have been selected for review: liberal intergovernmentalism, principal-agent models and a specific identity-theory. Andrew Moravcsik's theoretical framework, liberal intergovernmentalism, has mainly been used to analyse EU treaty reform processes and their outcome in terms of institutional dynamics. However, these three discrete theories, which in Moravcsik's framework are put under the same roof, might each have potential to inform studies of the EU's performance in international institutions. Processes of domestic preference formation could be coupled to issues of relevance and financial viability; processes of strategic bargaining seem to have important linkages to the configuration of the EU's political objectives, and theories of institutional design might help us to understand the string of institutional designs characterising the governance of EU external relations. However, with a few notable exceptions, external relations and foreign policy have rarely been attractive to liberal intergovernmentalists. Exceptions include studies of the EEAS (Vanhoonacker and Reslow, 2010).

Principal agent (P–A) models have predominantly been used to analyse internal EU dynamics, i.e. anything else than external relations (Pollack, 2003). The prime exception to this rule is trade policy, a policy field that has been thoroughly analysed by means of P–A models. True to its nature, the main area of concentration is relations between member states and EU institutions. Though P–A analysts employ a different analytical language, these relations are of considerable importance for explaining patterns of relevance. In short, why do member states find the agents of their creation sufficiently relevant to be created? Do the agents act according to their mandates? How do they perform (see Hawkins et al., 2006)? P–A analysts, specialised in EU trade policy, typically ask such questions (see Kerremans, 2011; Dür and Zimmerman, 2007). P–A analysts tend to be analytically conservative, so they stick to the classic relationship between member states and EU-institutions. By contrast, the main theme of this handbook, if couched in P–A language, concerns how the EU as a collective principal interacts with other principals (states) in order to cultivate the garden called global governance, populated by multilateral institutions (conceptualised as agents).

Identity theories come in many shapes but often not in the shape of causal theory. An analytical framework developed to explain cultures of national security is constructivist in orientation yet at the same time has a causal nature (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein, 1996). It is designed to explain policy something typically done by reference to configurations of (material) interest. However, Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein have an interest in knowing the processes of interest formation and therefore opt for identity theory. Actors with a given identity are likely to identify and promote interests within a certain scope. As processes of identity formation are caused by international interaction, specific actors should not be analysed in splendid isolation from others, rather they are embedded in a global normative environment. Thus, the theoretical framework can be seen as a cascading causal model, predominantly structural (even if several of the structures are social institutions and therefore better labeled structurationist). In any case, the model presents itself as potentially relevant for explaining EU policy towards multilateral institutions (see also Ruggie, 1993). The relationship between the global normative superstructure and the EU has some striking similarity with the process through which international institutions influence the EU, whether institutionally or concerning policy-making processes.
(see Costa and Jørgensen, 2012). However, the identity-interest-policy sequence of explanation might experience some problems, in part because the EU’s international identity is still under construction, in part because it might be through the process of policy-making that identity is created, and in part because the analytical framework is characterised by a general structural bias, downplaying the role of agency in creating the global normative superstructure (Kowert and Legro, 1996). EU member states might have been involved in this kind of norm entrepreneurship (prior to putting the EU at work) and not necessarily as members of a European Union.

**Conclusion and perspectives**

The aim of this chapter has been to review literature with focus on the analysis of the EU’s performance in international institutions, i.e. a highly topical issue in world politics. Because the EU is an actor often seen as an international organisation itself, we are dealing with research on a rather unusual actor. Analytical approaches on performance contributes to the increasingly popular trend of assigning actor features to both states and international institutions, thus transcending a traditional distinction and potentially making it possible to extend the scope of traditional performance studies to include both states and actors like the EU. Based on the above review, the chapter leads to five conclusions.

First, it is clear that only a fairly limited literature analyses the EU’s performance in international institutions. Given the strengths of EU studies in general, and the relatively high interest among academics in global governance studies, one would intuitively expect a higher degree of interest in the encounter between these two levels of governance – European and global – but so far this has not been the case. At the same time, traditional International Relations studies remain state-centric and are therefore bound to be of limited relevance.

Second, the variety of approaches reviewed in this section of the book suggests that further refinement of research strategies seems promising. Chapters 5 to 8 outline four fairly different strategies. Despite acknowledged and important overlaps, it is equally clear that each of the approaches asks different questions, in turn leading to different research agendas. In future research, the four strategies might be joined by additional strategies. Hence, they might benefit from engaging in reflexive dialogues.

Third, the case studies in this book can be seen as free standing contributions on a key aspect of world politics. Contributors review existing knowledge, build new knowledge, characterise the current state of affairs or suggest directions for future research. However, the contributions can also be seen as feasibility studies and, thus, as points of departure. All suggest that the EU’s performance in these various policy fields and institutional landscapes vary significantly. Hence, the focus privileged in the present chapter might be employed in a wide-ranging number of case studies, hopefully accompanied by studies aiming at more general knowledge.

Fourth, whereas the explanandum, performance, might be sufficiently fine-tuned still more remains to be done on the explanans side of the equation. Some promising explanans have been suggested but offer themselves more as potentially relevant and fruitful factors of explanation. The literature on new institutionalism, including theoretical updates (Thelen, 1999) and newcomers such as discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008), seems to offer promising analytical possibilities.

Fifth, the focus on performance has some unintended analytical consequences, perhaps most prominently an inbuilt agency-oriented bias. It favours studies focusing on what the EU is doing in international institutions and can thus be situated within the so-called second-image literature. Even if actor specifics do not necessarily play a strong role in examinations of how
the EU projects its interests and values in the global institutional landscape, the focus on inside-out projection is notable. Thereby such studies tend to downplay opposite flows of influence, flowing from international institutions towards the EU (Costa and Jørgensen, 2012). Once these two opposite flows of influence have been integrated in synthesised comprehensive analytical frameworks, it might be appropriate to begin talking about a mature field of inquiry.

Notes
1 Some parts of this chapter were presented at a research seminar at IBEI, Barcelona, 15 December, 2011. I would like to thank the participants for very helpful feedback.
2 Hence, I selected ten international policies of the EU (in reality, each ‘policy’ is a policy field or a bundle of issue areas) and, ideally, at least five of the most cited studies of each policy field. Moreover, I included newspaper reports to add some flavour to the analysis and, when possible, I also included official (self-)assessments or self-images. For each policy field, I quantified the typically qualitative assessments by using a simple scale from 1 to 10.
3 Cf. research on American policy towards international institutions (e.g. Karns and Mingst, 1990).
4 Actually, Ernst Haas’ interest in institutional learning might be equally important, perhaps have even more potentials in studies of EU performance (see Haas, 1990).

References


