The Routledge Handbook of European Public Policy

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The Common Foreign and Security Policy

Publication details
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Published online on: 21 Nov 2017

Accessed on: 30 Nov 2023
PART IV

External policies
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THE COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY
The EU as a global actor

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Introduction
The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is a unique European Union (EU) policy area, because through policy making and implementation in this area EU policy makers discuss and determine what the EU will (try) be to its counterparts around the world: What role it will play, which objective it will promote and through which means it will promote them. Many questions surround CFSP, some focus on the appropriateness of the term CFSP: To what extent do the outputs in this area represent a foreign policy worthy of the name and to what extent are those outputs common? Others are related to the substance and nature of the policy: Is there a truly European interest system or is the CFSP an arena for promoting national interests? This is related to the question of agency: Does it make any sense to discuss the EU’s activity on the global stage? Is the EU an entity capable of such activity? These questions touch upon the two fundamental features of international actors: the ability to define goals and possession of the means to pursue them. On paper the EU has a list of foreign policy goals – democratization, stabilization, conflict prevention, cooperation toward tackling supranational criminal activity, promoting good governance – and a catalogue of foreign policy instruments, e.g., trade and aid, strategic partnerships, diplomatic statements, and imposing arms embargoes and military missions. However the priority between the goals was never defined and the authority to activate the instruments is split and fuzzy (Smith, 2014). Even if the EU is an actor it is certainly a multifaceted and highly complex actor, and there are several different levels in which EU foreign action is enacted (Hill and Smith, 2011). This chapter discusses the EU’s foreign policy and it will briefly touch upon all of these issues. It does not offer unequivocal answers but it does review the answers proposed in the literature and their implication. The next section discusses the historical evolution of CFSP. Sections three and four review the theoretical discussions of CFSP. Section five reviews some of the future challenges for EU global action, and concludes.

The evolution of CFSP
The first attempt at forging a common European foreign policy was the European Defence Community treaty which was rejected in the French national assembly in 1954. The Rome treaty did not mention common foreign policy as such (Smith, 2014). As a result the EU’s
global presence has followed a dual pattern; one encompassed trade, enlargement, and development assistance and was rooted in the Rome treaty. The other included security and foreign issues and originated in European Political Cooperation (EPC) (Bindi, 2012). The EPC was an informal practice of coordination of positions on issues of world politics, through meetings between foreign affairs ministers. It was constructed and elaborated through the Luxembourg (1970), and London (1981) reports. EPC yielded little policy making – around 70 policy decisions from its inception until the Maastricht treaty – but it established consultation habits and ‘shared understandings’ among foreign ministries (Hill and Wallace, 1996). This effect was enhanced by the ‘Gymnich meetings’ – periodic meetings of foreign ministers which were first initiated by West Germany in 1974.

There were three triggers to the gradual corrosion of the separation between the economic community and foreign policy: the refusal of the leaders of the Arab league to accept it (Gablentz, 1979); the demands of the European parliament to receive regular updates on ‘political’ aspects of external relations; and the establishment of a procedure for using economic community instruments to give effect to EPC decisions, initially targeting South Africa (Nuttall, 1992). The SEA institutionalized EPC and strengthened political cooperation by requiring consistency between external and internal policies marking the decay of the economics/politics dichotomy.

The end of the cold war transformed the regional and global context of political cooperation putting the EC in a perceived unsafe neighbourhood, and drawing the carpet from under NATO’s claim to exclusivity in strategic cooperation in Europe. Against this background France and Germany devised a plan for foreign policy cooperation which formed the basis for the institutionalization of a common foreign and security policy, in a separate intergovernmental pillar, in the treaty of Maastricht. However it soon became clear that the new pillar was rather ineffective as exemplified in the EU’s weak response to the Balkan crisis and Rwanda genocide. The Amsterdam Treaty created a new position of a ‘High Representative for the CFSP’ (not to be confused with the position of special representatives, which the council appoints to promote the EU’s policies and interests in troubled regions and countries), and established the policy instrument of ‘common strategies’ adopted unanimously in the council on key issues of common interests. The Amsterdam Treaty also created a Policy Planning unit and Early Warning unit. The Nice Treaty elaborated the requirement for consistency between external and internal policies (Gebhard, 2011). In 2003, heavily influenced by the post-9/11 global context, the council adopted the European Security Strategy which aimed to build security beyond the EU (Simmons, 2011).

The Lisbon treaty carried out an institutional overhaul of CFSP in order to achieve higher degrees of consistency and coherence in the EU’s presence on the international stage. Toward this end the treaty abolished the pillar structure, introduced common objectives for the different external policies (spelled out in Article 21 TEU), established a European External Action Service (EEAS), and created the new position of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President (HR/VP). The HR/VP was entrusted with the task of ensuring policy coherence. Article 37 TEU gives the Union treaty-making competence in the field of CFSP with the power of initiative and negotiation resting with the HR/VP. The HR/VP also has the power to propose the adoption of restrictive measures to the council. The position embodies a further erosion of the already weak distinction between core community policies and foreign policy because the office is involved in both. However CFSP remains subject to distinct rules and procedures under title V TEU. Unanimity remains the voting rule (although exceptions do apply and the bridging clause enables expansion of QMV through unanimous decision in the council). No legislative acts can be adopted in this area, and the Court of Justice has no jurisdiction except regarding restrictive measures. Therefore while in political terms...
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the Lisbon treaty put in place certain institutions which enable a higher degree of coherence, in legal terms the treaty maintained the distinctiveness of this policy area. Furthermore there is still potential for incoherence between the actions of EU and the policies of the member states, between the actions of DGs, and between the HR/VP and the commission in CFSP. Coherence has been particularly problematic in the area of development cooperation, and the Lisbon treaty has institutionalized rather than mitigated the discontinuity between this area and other areas of EU external action (Smith, 2013).

Post-Lisbon analyses try to move beyond the intergovernmental-supranational debate by interpreting the differences between the CFSP policy mode and the community method as demonstrating an exclusivity of the executive over foreign affairs which is commonly found in democracies. In many contemporary democracies the legislative and judicial branches are excluded from foreign policy making, due to the sensitivity of the policy area and the need for confidentiality. Thus a comparative-democratic is useful in analyzing the uniqueness of this policy area (Elsuwege, 2010).

Recent work describes the evolution of CFSP governance as a process of socialization into perceptions of common goals and rules; Brussels-ization, involving a shift in the locus of CFSP policy making to Brussels-based intergovernmental institutions; and bureaucratization involving an increasingly complex information-sharing arena. The combination of these transformations challenges a pure intergovernmental interpretation of CFSP (Juncos and Pomorska, 2014). Other analysts insist that there are still substantial national and other divides among CFSP actors (Lequesne, 2015; Wessel and Van Vooren, 2013). The next section takes a closer look at these and related conceptual questions.

Power and identity conceptualizing the EU as a global actor

The academic discussion of the EU’s place in the international system has been described as a ‘confusing cacophony’ (Hill and Smith, 2011: 465). One of the reasons for this is lack of agreement even on the most fundamental ontological questions of what is the EU in the context of global politics. These disputes often arise in reaction to institutional changes. For example work on the ‘coordination reflex’ can be traced back to the Copenhagen report of 1973 (Ohrgaard, 1997). Some of the most serious leaps in the conceptualization of CFSP followed on from the institutionalization of EPC within the SEA (Ifestos, 1987; Weiler and Wessels, 1988). Discussions of the EU’s foreign policy identity (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009) coincided with efforts to reform the second pillar, initially within the constitutional conference and subsequently through the Lisbon treaty. More recently the implementation of the Lisbon treaty has given rise to many new ideas regarding CFSP: Such are the treatments of the post-Lisbon CFSP policy community as a community of practice (Bicchi, 2011), the discussion of the elite-public split, lack of democratic legitimacy and weakness of CFSP policy narrative (Tonra, 2011), and the comprehensive conceptual framework developed to analyze and evaluate consistency and coherence in EU foreign policy (Carbone, 2013; Gebhard, 2011; Portela and Orbie, 2014).

Returning to the ontological debate, scholars affiliated with the international studies discipline have been grappling with the question of EU actorness since the inception of the EC. The concept of a security community coined by Deutsch (1957) and elaborated by Adler and Barnett (1998) interpreted European integration as a structure which fundamentally alters member countries’ preferences, but does not and cannot forge preferences and abilities of its own. By contrast in his 1972 essay on civilian power Europe, Francois Duchêne argues that in the international arena the EC: ‘Could play a very important and potentially constructive role . . . a lot will depend on the precise degree of cohesion it can
master’ (Duchêne, 1972: 45). These two early formulations have marked the perimeters for the theorization of CFSP, and subsequent concepts are arguably elaborations of these two fundamental positions: the EU as structure and the EU as agent.

The conceptualization of the EU as a factor which affects actors’ behaviour rather than an actor itself proceeded from the inward-looking security community concept to the notion of the EU’s ‘International presence’. This concept detaches the analysis of the EU’s international activities from the statist perspective and captures the ways in which the EU ‘operates to influence the actions and expectations’ not only of its member states but also of its counterparts around the globe (Allen and Smith, 1990: 21). As the CFSP evolved and developed researchers identified a process of convergence of national foreign policies in which EU membership affected the way member countries interacted with third countries (Smith, 2004). Likewise the concept of EU external governance interprets the EU as a process enmeshed in other multilateral processes, focusing on the ways in which the practices and interactions which unfold within it realize certain values and principles (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009). Linklater describes the EU as a civilizing process which has transformed intra-EU politics and which could transform global politics. The EU’s civilizing process domesticates international relations by creating a sense of common responsibility and mutual commitment. In the External arena the process consists of enlarging the EU’s zone of peace, promoting human rights among interlocutors, assisting in the prevention of terrorism, reducing environmental harm, and donating aid (Linklater, 2011).

The conceptualization of the EU as an agent in global politics, able to define its collective European goals, and choose the proper means for perusing them proceeded from the argument that the EU could exercise a unique – Civilian – form of power to the argument that the EU is already an embodiment of a new – Normative – kind of power, which it strives to extend toward the global scene (Laïdi, 2008; Sjursen, 2006; Whitman, 2011). The concept of normative power Europe is intrinsically linked to the work on soft power (Keohane and Nye, 1977) within the international relations discipline, but it expands it substantially toward a fundamental existential claim. Normative power Europe conceives of the EU ‘as a promoter of norms which displace the state as the centre of concern . . . (with) the ability to define what passes as “normal” in world politics’ (Manners, 2002: 236). The normative power Europe concept inspired many paraphrases and elaborations over the years, such as ethical power Europe (Mayer, 2008), divided power Europe (Wagnsson, 2010), pragmatic power Europe (Wood, 2011). Concepts such as market power Europe (Damro, 2012) and regulatory power Europe (Young, 2014) focus on the degree and methods by which the EU exerts influences through the constraints it and its internal rules impose on global actors. For example multinational corporations often change their practices in order to adapt to the EU’s rules, diffusing these rules beyond the realm of the EU to their activities elsewhere.

Conceiving of the EU as a potential agent, or an agent in the making, does not automatically entail optimistic expectations regarding its ability to act effectively at any given time. In the most recent assessments of the EU’s global influence, researchers have offered various explanations to the fact that the EU is not always able to translate its economic power, and its normative attraction, to influence over multilateral regulatory processes (Falkner and Muller, 2013; Vogel, 2012; Wessel and Van Vooren, 2013; Zielonka, 2015). This point is elaborated in the next section.

**A powerless identity – the critique of the EU’s international role**

As exemplified by the skeptic institutional interpretations of EU global ‘actorness’ cited above, it is wrong to equate skepticism regarding the feasibility, desirability, or credibility of a common
European foreign policy with realism. In fact there are various kinds, and various theoretical orientations of CFSP-skepticism.

Richard Whitman, hardly a realist, points out that although the EU members vote together at the UN Security Council and plenary, the EU has failed to translate this strength into external influence over specific countries. Furthermore while the EU has become a key actor in the UN as a result of cohesive voting it has not become a leader (Whitman, 2010). Many constructivists argue that member states use CFSP to avoid more demanding international measures, to preserve the status quo, and to free ride on American strategic foreign policy (Laidi, 2008). Important criticism comes from institutional theorists who argue that the significance of CFSP differs across institutions. While it is often used by MS to avoid action in the council, it is a site for turf battles between DGs for the commission, and an instrument for institutional identity building for the parliament. These varying approaches undermine coherent policy making (Bickerton, 2010).

Some critical discussions of the identity–foreign policy link attribute the weakness of this policy area to the absence of a European public sphere. A European public sphere would enable open and substantive debate and formulation of genuinely European positions on world affairs. Currently there is only a foreign policy community whose discourse is interesting and understandable to a limited professional audience. It is an epistemic community which debates issues amongst itself and other professional elites and fails to engage in a dialogue with the European public (Giegerich, 2015). Furthermore there is a democratic deficit in CFSP as a result of the influence of non-representative NGOs and private corporations on the policy making process (Joachim and Dembinski, 2011), in addition to the increasing impact of the permanent Brussels-based institutions: the EEAS, the working groups, and the PSC. Coupled with the occasional willingness of member states to forgo their veto right in order to develop a common position, this development undermines accountability and autonomy which are the key requirements for democratic intergovernmental policy making (Sjursen, 2011).

Although not all CFSP critics are realists, it is true that the most insistent CFSP sceptics are realists. Liberal-Realist warnings against setting high expectations for EU action in the international arena have been sounded as early as 1982 when Hedley Bull stated that Europe is not an international actor and is unlikely to become one (Bull, 1982). This line of thought continues up to recent realist assessments of the EU’s role in the Ukrainian crisis (Mearsheimer, 2014). Following the Maastricht treaty Christopher Hill warned that: ‘The community does not have the resources or the political structure to be able to respond to the demands which the commission and certain member states have virtually invited . . . the consequential gap which has opened up between capabilities and expectations is dangerous’ (Hill, 1993: 315). He argued that the expectations that the EU would balance American hegemony, mediate in conflicts, intervene in crises, pacify its neighbourhood, bridge between rich and poor, and tame economic globalization are dangerously out of touch with the EU’s reality. Although a number of institutional overhauls have been carried out since Hill’s piece has been published, some of the weaknesses he identified are still applicable including the lack of powers to declare war and peace; to mobilize military forces; or to cease or acquire territory (except through enlargement). The gap between expectations and capabilities is dangerous because it can lead to excessive risk taking and unrealistic policy making. Hill therefore suggests looking at the EU as a system, rather than as a single actor, which generates international relations, rather than a foreign policy.

Other realists criticize the normative power concept insisting that there is nothing particularly moral or ethical in the EU’s foreign policies and that there is nothing new in the way it exercises its power (Hyde-Price, 2008). While the EU and the CFSP may substantively alter the preference systems of participants it is nevertheless driven by utilitarian calculations rather
than by ethical or normative considerations. Furthermore economic integration, which has included tightening fiscal requirements can actually hamper the development of normative and costly European diplomatic and security policies, rather than promote them through spillover (Hoffmann, 2000).

Structural realists put forward a more fundamental critique of the idea of the EU as a global actor. Their critique consists of four core arguments: First, CFSP negotiations are intergovernmental, and therefore give priority to national interests. Second, these negotiations seldom produce policy outcomes. Third, in the rare occasion where a common position or action is adopted it is often defected from. Fourth, even if states do not defect they are cooperating because cooperation incidentally coincides with their national interests, or because the policy is trivial and general so as to render it meaningless (Glarbo, 1999; Mearsheimer, 2014).

For constructivist and realist skeptics alike, it comes as little surprise that: ‘The European Union and its Member States have responded with uncertainty and hesitance to the early twenty-first-century transitions in international relations’ (Whitman, 2010: 24). The next section turns to this issue.

The EU in a changing and challenging global system

As the global power structure changes, so does the EU’s position in it. But these changes have not yet been met with an appropriate CFSP strategy. The EU’s approach to the ongoing changes in the global system has been, and is likely to remain, quite tactical, though plans and recommendations for a more comprehensive policy are abundant (Renard and Biscop, 2013). The EU’s approach to contemporary issues and important powers in the global system are reviewed below.

The EU’s relationship with the US is a mixture of political and economic competition and cooperation (Bindi, 2012). In this regard some believe that the European resistance to the foreign policy of the Bush administration demonstrated that the EU is not a subordinate satellite of American powers and interests. It is seen as an ‘alternative articulation of Western Interests’ (Hill and Smith, 2011: 468), which can at times balance the US through non-military means. This changed somewhat when Obama came to power and the EU’s discourse toward the US assumed a more supportive and cooperative tone. The degree to which the two powers share common interests in the ever-changing global power configuration, the future ability of Europeans to oppose the US, where European views diverge from those in the US, as well as the EU’s willingness to join forces with the US when views converge are subject of academic debate (Dassu and Menotti, 2012; Moravcsik, 2012). The Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) which is being negotiated is likely to boost not only EU–US cooperation but also the EU’s and US’s role in global governance, since the resulting massive trade bloc is likely to set the regulatory standards to which other countries will have to accommodate (Woolcock, 2015).

There are strong ties of dependency between the EU and rising powers: Russia, which is still an important energy supplier, has changed its initial cooperation with the EU’s attempt to anchor it to the EU’s value system, with an increasingly resistant and defiant stance, culminating in the Ukrainian crisis. The crisis illustrates Russia’s determination to block the EU’s influence on Ukraine, through every means at its disposal. The Ukrainian crisis is probably the kickoff of a wider battle over spheres of influence in Eastern Europe and in Western and Central Asia (Haukkala, 2015). China is the EU’s largest origin country for commodity imports, and cooperates with the EU on a range of issues and projects. The EU’s approach to China differs from the US’s approach of containment and is built on the principle of engagement. Chinese and EU interests converge not only in the economic sphere but also on the issues of UN reform and moderation of US power. Their views diverge however on a range of important issues including
Human rights, Tibet, Taiwan, and Chinese armament (Balme, 2008; Caira, 2012). Brazil is an important importer of EU agricultural goods. The bilateral cooperation with Brazil has recently replaced the EU’s historical regional approach to Latin America partly due to a recognition of Brazil’s status as a regional power (Joaquin, 2012). India is a central supplier of services and an important export market, but the mutual economic prominence has failed to materialize into normative or strategic convergence (Orbie and Khorana, 2015). The rhetoric and discourse between the EU and these countries is often one of cooperation and partnership, but ambitious statements have not always materialized into actual common strategies with clear objectives (Erickson, 2011; Holslag, 2011; Kavalski, 2015). Furthermore both in the economic sphere and in the political sphere some of these countries are increasingly challenging the EU’s economic and political positions. This is not just because they are becoming more and more powerful, but also because as the EU’s external relations are becoming more coherent, and as the EU speaks with an increasingly clear and unitary voice, the discord between the EU’s approach to global issues (for example regarding the legitimacy of the use of economic power as leverage for political influence, the preference for multilateralism), and those countries’ approaches are becoming increasingly obvious. In addition to their resistance to the EU’s attempts to use its economic leverage to pressure them, Russia and China are competing with the EU over global influence, presenting third countries with alternative models of relationships to that proposed by the EU. In Central and Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, Russia and China increasingly present themselves as competing regional actors, offering a non-interventionist, material interest-based and normatively thin model of development assistance. This model may become increasingly attractive for countries which are unsympathetic to the EU’s Western-Liberal-Democratic agenda (Keukeleire and Bruyninckx, 2011). The EU’s ability to maintain its relevance in those regions in the presence of Russian and Chinese competition is therefore a key future challenge. In this context, in regional as well as global settings, the EU’s role as a change-maker continues to depend on its ability to engage rising powers, while asserting its interests and norms and maintaining its cooperation with the US (Bratner, 2008). The recent deal on the Iranian nuclear program, which is the result of persistent sanctions imposed by the US and the EU, is a positive illustration of what an internally well-coordinated EU policy, together with a coherent transatlantic position, is capable of achieving (Dasu and Menotti, 2012). Equally significant policy challenges are ahead. Between the Eurozone woes, which drain material and symbolic resources and the unrest South and East of Europe which trigger a seemingly endless flow of refugees and awaken questions regarding the EU’s policies toward them and toward their homelands, the EU seems less able than ever to protect its ‘post-modern paradise’ let alone spread it throughout the world (Smith, 2014).

Note

1 A further attempt at strategic cooperation – the Fouchet plan – also failed.

References


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