

Understanding the European Union as a global political actor: Theory, practice, and impact

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The EU today is one of the most unusual and widest-ranging political actors in the international system. Since the 1950s, this capacity has gradually expanded to encompass foreign policy initiatives towards nearly every corner of the globe, using a full range of foreign policy tools: diplomatic, economic, and now limited military operations related to peacekeeping and peace enforcement. This capacity, however, was neither included in the original Treaty of Rome, nor was it predicted by many knowledgeable observers of European integration. Ernst Haas explicitly excluded foreign and security policy from his neo-functional logic of regional integration, which stresses spillover processes in socio-economic affairs. Stanley Hoffman once characterized the European Community as an “international regime” when he gave the keynote address at the first conference of the Council on European Studies in 1979; he also argued that the EU would not be able to strengthen its political cooperation efforts due to the issue of sovereignty. David Allen once argued that the EC/EU can not have a foreign policy because it is not a nation-state, while Henry Kissinger predicted that Europe’s global ambitions would amount to very little, particularly in the Middle East. Even after the Cold War, when the EU continued to expand its foreign policy cooperation, many observers (particularly those influenced by realism, such as John Mearsheimer, Robert Art, Philip Gordon, and Kenneth Waltz) made outlandish predictions that Germany would attempt to acquire nuclear weapons, that NATO and the EU would atrophy, and that the EU would never be able to organize its own military cooperation. Others with little or no experience with European integration studies, such as Robert Kagan, argued that the EU has secured its own corner of the world through economic integration and it can now simply enjoy the fruits of its efforts while the U.S. continues to play the tough role of world policeman.

Whether ignoring (Mearsheimer) or belittling (Kagan) the EU as a global actor, many of these predictions turned out to be incorrect. While the EU certainly has had its share of difficulties, setbacks, and failures in the area of foreign policy cooperation, it has engaged in a continual process of institutional growth in this domain, these institutional mechanisms do produce regular foreign policy “outputs,” and these decisions do have a positive impact on certain global problems. The EU’s very terminology in this area has changed as well; it was not long ago, and as recently as the 1980s, that many scholars and practitioners referred to EU foreign policy as EU “external relations” to help preserve the artificial distinction between “high” and “low” politics in the course of European integration. The shift in terminology from external relations to foreign policy since the 1990s speaks volumes to the change in the EU members’ own understanding of and preference for the EU’s role in the world. Usage of the term “European foreign policy”

(EFP), which is now becoming commonplace, denotes all of the global behaviors of the EU: the foreign economic policy and diplomacy of pillar one, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) of pillar two, and the police cooperation and anti-crime/anti-terror work of JHA in pillar three.

This chapter analyzes these activities to better understand why the EU defied the predictions of many skeptics and grew into a true *global political actor* rather than remained a *regional economic power*. Specifically, it examines three related strands of research into this topic: 1) the gradual emergence of the EU's institutional capacities (both procedural and substantive) in this realm despite their conspicuous absence in the Treaty of Rome; 2) the extent to which the EU actually influences non-member states and other actors and thus overcomes the so-called "capability-expectations gap" posited by Christopher Hill; and 3) the current and future role of the EU in world politics in light of a range of unresolved issues. We are particularly interested in institutionalists' notions of path dependency, feedback loops, and agent-structure analysis to explain (a) the growth of EFP as a result of the pooling of sovereignty and the gradual delegation of authority to central institutions and (b) the need for member states to reduce transaction costs and exploit economies and politics of scale in the conduct of foreign and security policy, especially under conditions of regional interdependence, global economic liberalization, and transatlantic competition.

By examining these dominant themes in the literature on EFP, we expect to better understand and define the boundaries of this topic as a key sub-field in European integration studies and international relations/security. In this sense we hope to determine whether the EU's experience in this area provides any meaningful and generalizable "value-added" to the theoretical investigation of modern international relations. We argue that the EU's status as a global actor cannot be fully understood by orthodox theories of international relations as this status does not take the form of a supranational state, an international regime, a military alliance, or an intergovernmental forum. However, nor is the EU wholly *sui generis* in possessing this capacity: its institutions and policies may yield useful lessons for other troubled areas of the globe. In fact, the EU's deliberate efforts to "export" its techniques of political cooperation and regional integration comprise one of its most important foreign policies. This activity may yet challenge past methods of establishing regional or global order, particularly those championed by realists in general and the U.S. in particular.

I. Theoretical debates/puzzles about the EU as a global actor

* Main focus on this section: What is the appropriate frame of reference for evaluating the EU's global political role?

* Five or six major debates/puzzles: from literature reviews in our recent books: 1) why does the EU need a foreign/security policy at all, and why has this capacity grown over the past three decades? 2) what impact on the outside world, if any, does the EU have? 3) what is the relationship between EU foreign policy and EU economic integration, two domains that used to be separate? 4) what are the unique institutional mechanisms of EU foreign/policy and how do they function; 5) what is the relationship

between EU foreign policy and domestic politics? 6) what does the overall EU foreign policy system look like in terms of inputs, outputs, and feedback mechanisms?

* In examining these questions over the years, both intergovernmental realists and liberal neo-functionalists have made mistakes of interpretation. There is in fact far more cooperation here than realists might expect; therefore intergovernmental integration (or transgovernmentalism) can work under certain circumstances and without always leading to deadlock situations. And on the surface, there seems to be no instrumentally rational need for a CFSP to emerge due to typical functional/political spillover processes, yet the EU still pursues it. Overall, however, the wide variety of research questions surrounding EFP suggests the need for a synthetic approach to the topic to include processes such as (for example) delegation/agency, path dependency, task expansion, Europeanization, sources of international systemic change, and of course the perennial pursuit of national interests within and outside the EU context.

* The EU also is much less secure than both sides care to admit (contra Kagan): both during Cold War and after the European states have worried about their place in world politics. NATO provided a double-edged sword: it deterred the Soviets but also raised the possibility of a tactical nuclear war in Western Europe. The EU's desire not to be the chief battleground for World War III, and to mediate between East and West, provided a major impetus for EPC/CFSP and resulted in one of its major successes: the CSCE/OSCE process. The EU also is directly exposed to a wider range of problematic issues and countries than the U.S. What is most interesting is that the EU rather than other institutions (OSCE, Council of Europe, NATO) has become the primary means for resolving that anxiety, first through enlargement and the single market, more recently through the CFSP/ESDP and related policies (such as Justice and Home Affairs). The EU Security Strategy document of 2003 and related initiatives (such as the European Neighborhood Policy) has started to crystallize European foreign policy in a more strategic sense of what are the threats to European security and what are the EU responses to those threats. And while elites have built the EU's institutional architecture in this area, EU citizens themselves demonstrate strong support for a greater European political role. Support here is even stronger and more consistent across EU states than other core areas of European integration, such as the single currency.

II. The Institutional Dimension of EFP

* These factors mean we must pay much closer attention to processes of institutional growth derived from a range of sources: functionalism, sociology, economics, liberal interdependence theory, etc. Such growth directly affects policy cooperation, even in sensitive domains such as foreign policy. This cooperation in turn increases the EU's overall political impact/influence in world policy in conjunction with other factors often outside the EU's control. Finally, feedback mechanisms lead back to debates over institutional reforms in the EU, most recently in the form of the Convention on the Future of Europe. Although the Constitutional Treaty has not been ratified, we argue that the EU can operationalize some of its foreign policy provisions in order to maintain some momentum of reform. The Constitution would have instituted key improvements in EFP making and implementation, but some of these improvements merely codified existing

practices while others can be instituted in the absence of a new Treaty. We also note that despite the French and Dutch rejections of the Treaty, European public opinion overall exhibits strong support for both the CFSP and the ESDP, both of which would have been strengthened by the Treaty.

* Basic argument in this section: EPC/CFSP/ESDP institutions have always been best described as “more than intergovernmental but less than supranational.” What does this actually mean, why did this type of policy coordination emerge as opposed to other forms (“pure” intergovernmentalism and “pure” supranationalism, and how stable is it (i.e., how likely to endure in the face of internal and external pressures)?

* Overview of the EDC, EPC, CFSP, ESDP lineage. From failed attempt to integrate defense cooperation in the EU, to a weak intergovernmental forum, to a formal EU policy domain, to efforts at military cooperation. Role of enlargements, weak states, linkages to economic integration, expansion of Commission influence.

* Formal and informal rules. Formal rules: Luxembourg, Copenhagen, London Reports on EPC; Single European Act; Maastricht; Amsterdam/Nice; Constitutional Treaty. Informal mechanisms: intergovernmental meetings, transgovernmental networking, consultation reflex, Gymnich, crisis procedures, etc.

* Who are key actors, what power resources do they have, how has all of that changed. EU member states: initial roles of France and Germany, small EU states, new member states (UK). EU organizations: Commission mainly, plus EP and ECJ to a much lesser extent. Power resources: diplomatic, legal/institutional, economic, military, normative.

III. The Impact Dimension of EFP

* Basic argument: the EU has shown more influence than realists predicted but possibly less than the EU deserves based on its total economic weight and combined military capabilities. Also less than EU architects (Delors, Van den Broek, Solana) and maybe even EU citizens hoped for/expect (capability-expectations gap). But rather than reduce expectations the EU has in fact raised them while also attempting to increase its capabilities (i.e., EU Security Strategy, European Neighborhood Policy, ESDP).

* Impact on EU member states as a confidence-building mechanism is reason enough to consult on foreign policy, also to shield EC affairs from foreign policy disputes. But EU has gone much further than that – toward a true CFSP - over the past several decades.

* Evolution of EU policy tools/power resources: diplomacy, economic aid/sanctions, normative/soft power, military power.

* Major examples of EU activity and impact on international issues, countries or regions, stressing the relationship between agency and institutional growth. So what has the EU accomplished, and what has the EU learned from this experience (which then

becomes institutionalized)? Possible examples include the EU's impact in former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and the U.S. Also insights or lessons learned from EU's initial experiments with crisis management and military deployments, where eight recent ESDP missions have been agreed: two missions in Bosnia (military and policing); two in Macedonia (military and policing); two in the Democratic Republic of Congo (military and policing), and two rule of law missions (one in Georgia, the other in Iraq).

* The EU also conducted three ESDP crisis management exercises between 2002-04 (including one with NATO), and in September 2004 several EU member states issued a Declaration of Intent to establish a European Gendarmerie Force: a police force with military status to assist with conflict management.

IV. The future of EFP

* What is our overall evaluation of the EU's future global political role? Business as usual based on the past? Steady expansion of influence (even conflict with the US)? Or steady erosion of influence: has the EU "maxed out" its impact since decision-making with 25+ states is nearly impossible on tough issues? Or some combination?

* Impact of recent enlargement: will the EU's mechanisms of foreign policy cooperation work effectively with 25 or more member states?

* Impact of Constitutional Treaty/aftermath: can anything be salvaged from the treaty in the realm of foreign policy without having to ratify a new treaty? EU foreign minister, diplomatic service, loose security guarantee?

* Other unresolved/emerging issues: Afghanistan, Turkey in the EU, Balkans, war on terror, war in Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Israel-Palestine, Russia and Ukraine, China WMD, European Neighborhood Policy, concerns about American unilateralism, what role for a European army, what about security guarantees for EU member states?

* Implications for theory: new predictions about the future of this policy domain in light of the above.

V. Conclusion

* To what extent and why did past predictions diverge from reality?

* What can we learn from the EU's foreign policy cooperation? Is it really *sui generis*? Can any elements of its model be exported, particularly its intergovernmental and transgovernmental components? And should the EU have a military force, a security guarantee, or even replace NATO?

* Attention to real limits of EFP expansion post-enlargement. However, the EU has confounded skeptics many times before. It may do so again despite the difficulties in ratifying the Constitutional Treaty.