

European Union foreign policy

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Abstract

The Common Foreign and Security Policy cover EU relations and its members with other international subjects. As a novelty, this policy actually replaced European political co-operation and foresaw the current framework of a common foreign and security policy, which would in time lead to a common security. The objectives of the common foreign and security policy should be achieved through specific legal instruments (joint actions, common positions), which should be approved by the Council by unanimity.

In fact, the common European foreign policy is under construction. It has mainly started from the political and security domain. From an economic point of view, member states count to compensate for the lack of fuller coordination within them, paving the economic problems as a priority. This implies a more pro-active doping in the sphere of the economy, promoting "geo-economic" strategies in relations with developing countries.

In this paper, we will discuss the experiences of the present practice in practice, but also the objective vision of how, when, what, and what in the future.

Keywords: European Union, foreign policy, Council, vision.

1. Introduction

Compared to other important EU projects the overall development of the EU's foreign policy remains underwhelming. The EU began to work on its foreign policy in the early 1970s. The Common Foreign and Security Policy were created in the early 1990s, but it remains half-finished and fragile to this date. Other important initiatives of European integration, such as the internal market, monetary union, and Schengen area, have moved forward with greater speed and have advanced much further.

The fact is that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, shortly after the introduction of the euro and just before the EU's big enlargement to Central Europe, the union had reached the peak of its self-confidence. This sense of achievement and optimism also framed its view of its place in the world. The EU considered itself the vanguard of an emerging liberal international order, in which multilateral diplomacy would create elaborate rule-based regimes regulating all dimensions of globalized exchanges and cooperation. The EU saw itself as a model for the future organization of international relations and was convinced that other parts of the world would soon follow suit.¹

¹European External Action Service Strategic Planning, "European Security Strategy – A Secure Europe in a Better World," European Union Global Strategy, December 12, 2003, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/european-security-strategy-secure-europe-better-world>; "European Neighborhood Policy Strategy Paper," European Commission, May 12, 2004, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf.

Against this background, the Constitutional Treaty was expected to bring about far-reaching structural reforms of the EU's foreign policy. The treaty was rejected by referendums in France and the Netherlands, but its foreign policy provisions reappeared—largely unchanged—in the Lisbon Treaty, which was signed in December 2007. The Lisbon reforms did not amount to a revolution. The most serious constraints on EU foreign policy, the unanimity principle and the parallelism between the member states' national foreign policy and that of the EU, were left untouched.

Chairing the foreign ministers' council and acting as the vice president of the European Commission, the position would ensure closer coordination between the member states and help bridge the gap between foreign and security policy - where the council is in the lead - and the commission's work on trade, development, enlargement, and the neighborhood. The new European External Action Service (EEAS) would include diplomats from the member states and officials from the institutions and serve as a coordination platform and a source of expertise and strategic advice.²

Over previous decades, foreign ministers have lost ground in Europe just like in other parts of the world. The real players in this area are today the prime ministers and presidents. Effective EU foreign policy requires their direct involvement. The high representative is simply not quite high enough to engage with U.S. President Donald Trump, Chinese President Xi Jinping, or Russian President Vladimir Putin. The EU's halting steps toward an enhanced collective foreign and security policy capability were outpaced by the rapid deterioration of the security environment. In the East, an assertive Russia drew the EU into a geopolitical competition for the first time. A low-level conflict continues in Ukraine, and the EU members bordering Russia feel exposed to pressure from Moscow. Under an increasingly authoritarian President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey, a crucial strategic partner, is drifting away from its European orientation. Turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa has thrown up a number of critical challenges, such as mass migration and terrorism, and there appear to be few prospects of the region returning to stability. The trends in international relations have not conformed to the EU's optimistic expectations. A multipolar world has emerged where authoritarian regimes rule in many countries and power politics have made a comeback.

These changes have profound effects on the EU's self-perception as an international actor. Rather than shaping its environment in its own image, the EU is worrying that the disorder in neighboring regions will spill over and disrupt the achievements of six decades of European integration.

2. EU foreign policy – challenges

Diplomatic initiatives to resolve various regional crises remained rare and internal divisions have deepened rather than diminished. When the high representative advocated a more active approach, she often ran into opposition from member states. Chastened by this experience, both then high representative Catherine Ashton and her successor, Federica Mogherini, tended to avoid controversial policy debates in the monthly foreign ministers' meetings, which therefore lost relevance.³

²Stefan Lehne, "More Action, Better Service: How to Strengthen the European External Action Service," Carnegie Europe, December 16, 2011, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2011/12/16/more-action-better-service-how-to-strengthen-european-external-action-service-pub-46218>.

³Georgia and Ukraine have concluded a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU. Tunisia is the only of the "post-Arab Spring" countries where the EU's transformational approach has some traction.

The record of the EU's concrete diplomatic and security initiatives in neighboring regions is uneven. The dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia, EU involvement in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program, the fight against piracy around the Horn of Africa, and the efforts to shore up governance in Mali and neighboring states have contributed to enhancing stability in the neighborhood. The EU-Turkey deal on refugees - while much criticized at the time by humanitarian NGOs - also showed the ability to manage a complex and urgent challenge.⁴ Concerning Russia, the EU managed to maintain unity in its sanctions policy—a considerable achievement given the diverse attitude of member states toward Moscow. But the price of this unity was diplomatic paralysis. Just two EU member states, Germany and France, participated in the Normandy format negotiations on the Ukrainian conflict, but they were unable to overcome the stalemate.

Regarding Libya, while EU actors, particularly France and the UK, were pushing for the intervention that would bring down Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, the EU proved ineffective in tackling the post-revolutionary chaos. Instead, stopping the migrants who crossed from Libya to Italy soon became the primary objective. Italy is taking the lead on the ground and working closely with various Libyan security actors. But French President Emmanuel Macron's sudden initiative to broker an agreement between the internationally recognized government and the strongman in the east, General Khalifa Haftar, was heavily criticized by Rome and revealed the lack of coordination among the main EU players.⁵

The picture is not much more encouraging on the global level. The EU's weight in international economic and financial negotiations will remain considerable, but its clout is being reduced by the fact that its presence in the groups of the seven largest and twenty largest economies (the G7 and G20) and in international financial institutions remains divided between EU institutions and the bigger member states. As the discussions about trade agreements with the United States (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and with Canada (the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement) have shown, trade policy, long one of the union's greatest strengths, has become controversial as the losers from globalization have begun to mobilize against it.

The UK's decision to leave the bloc dealt a further severe blow to the EU's global image. After decades of increasing international weight through successive enlargements, the EU will now lose 16 percent of its economy and one of its strongest foreign policy players.⁶ The EU has long been accustomed to operating as a junior partner to the United States in efforts to preserve the international order, but Donald Trump's election has put an end to this tandem.⁷ Too weak to assume the leadership role abandoned by Washington and in many respects still dependent on partnership with the United States, EU actors are just struggling to limit the damage and hoping for the self-correcting capacities of the U.S. political system. However, Russian hostility and rearmament, instability in the South, and the loss of confidence in U.S. protection eventually reignited interest in EU defense policy.

Recent initiatives regarding coordinated defense planning and enhanced defense cooperation, joint financing of EU military operations, and allowing groups of the more capable member

⁴Helena Smith, "Refugees in Greece Suffering After EU Deal with Turkey, Says NGOs," *Guardian*, March 16, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/17/refugees-in-greece-suffering-after-eu-deal-with-turkey-say-ngos>.

⁵Jalel Harchaoui, "How France Is Making Libya Worse," *Foreign Affairs*, September 21, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/france/2017-09-21/how-france-making-libya-worse>.

⁶"Share of Member States in EU GDP," Eurostat, April 10, 2017, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20170410-1>.

⁷Stefan Lehne and Heather Grabbe, "Donald Trump: Europe's Ultimate Wake-Up Call," *Euronews*, January 18, 2017, <http://www.euronews.com/2017/01/18/donald-trump-europe-s-ultimate-wake-up-call>.

states to cooperate on more ambitious defense projects seem to indicate an understanding that the EU needs to upgrade its security and defense capacity. After a long phase of decline, defense budgets are now rising again in most member states. Together with the new readiness of the commission to provide funding for common efforts on capacity development, this could create a promising environment for significant progress. But, political divisions over migration and eurozone management diminish the mutual confidence necessary for effective defense cooperation. Even under favorable circumstances, the current initiatives for building up military capacities will take several years, in some cases decades, to bear fruit.⁸ And during that time, the neighborhood will not wait until the EU is ready. Military technology is spreading rapidly to state and nonstate actors, and a number of powers in neighboring regions are building up their military strength.

3. EU foreign policy is lagging behind

This relative lack of dynamism in foreign policy cannot be explained by the absence of public support. Polls indicate that the public has broadly positive feelings about a stronger and more coherent foreign and security policy. According to Eurobarometer polling, almost three-quarters of Europeans support a common security and defense policy, and roughly two-thirds favor a common foreign policy. Levels of support are similar in the East and West, the North and South, and in the bigger and smaller member states.⁹ Acting in isolation, EU countries risk being marginalized in the international arena over the coming decades.

There is also little controversy about the fundamental rationale for moving toward a stronger common policy. Given the inevitable long-term redistribution of economic and political weight away from Europe, individual member states, including the larger ones, will find it increasingly difficult to protect their interests on their own. The trouble is that the contribution of bigger member states is often inconsistent and weak, because they assign primacy to their national foreign policy. Playing a prominent role on the international stage is part of the national identities of countries like France, Germany, and the UK, and partly also Italy and Spain.

This failure can at least in part be explained by the EU's collective action problem. Mancur Olson first developed the concept of the collective action problem in the mid-1960s.¹⁰ The theory deals with the question of why members of a group do not provide as much of an agreed common good as would be in the collective interest and therefore end up achieving suboptimal results. Even though Olson wrote long before the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy was initiated, it presents a perfect textbook example for the difficulties he described.

One important constraint is that group members might share a common goal, but also have divergent interests that get in the way, such as special relationships with outside powers, particular regional interests, competition for economic gains, or internal political constraints. One good example is the Western Balkans. All member states support these countries' eventual accession to the EU, but some of the immediate regional neighbors—including Greece,

⁸Dick Zandee, "2017: A Turning Point for European Defence?," Clingendael, July 2017, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-07/2017_A_turning_point_for_European_defence_DZ.

⁹Directorate-General for Communication, "Standard Eurobarometer 85," European Commission, July 27, 2016, <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2130>.

¹⁰Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965),

https://moodle.drew.edu/2/pluginfile.php/225050/mod_resource/content/2/Olson%20%281967%29%20Logic%20of%20Collective%20Action%20%28book%29.pdf.

Romania, and Croatia, which stand to benefit most from this policy's success—insist that their bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans need to be resolved before these countries can join the EU. The narrow national interest trumps the collective objective. Another case in point is the Middle East peace process. The EU is by far the largest donor to the Palestinians, and all member states support a viable two-state solution.¹¹ However, the EU has difficulty converting this investment on the ground into political influence because of divergent attitudes among member states toward Israel and the fragmentation of external competencies between the European Commission and the EEAS.

There is also a tendency of member states to outsource negative messaging on human rights violations or rule of law deficiencies to the EU, thus shielding their own bilateral relations from difficult issues. This hurts not only the EU's collective relationship with the respective third country, it also undercuts the values agenda. Third countries quickly learn not to take the messages coming from Brussels seriously when they don't hear the same messages from the member states.

Leadership is a crucial factor in countering the inertia and free riding that impede collective action. Under the Lisbon foreign policy system, the formal leadership role belongs not only to the institutions, the high representative, and the EEAS but also to the presidents of the European Council and the European Commission. The high representative and the EEAS run the day-to-day operations of EU foreign policy but will rarely launch a major initiative without the backing of the bigger capitals. When they have this support, they can play a prominent and creative role. This happened in the cases of Iran's nuclear program and the EGS. But frequently, this backup from the key capitals is not forthcoming.¹² Together, those member states possess the greater part of the EU's overall diplomatic, military, and intelligence resources; maintain extensive networks around the world; and are present in the exclusive global clubs.¹³

Such a fragmented leadership constellation is unlikely to result in a determined and consistent foreign policy. The various institutional and national leaders often operate at cross-purposes. Sometimes, no one steps up to the task. Decision-making is slow and negotiations tend to get bogged down. When member states fail to achieve unanimity, the EU simply vanishes as a relevant actor. Even when initiatives are launched, they often lack sufficient follow-up. Declarations frequently take the place of action. And all of this exacerbates the EU's collective action problem. In fact, no other factor explains more of the chronic underperformance of EU foreign policy than inadequate leadership.

4. Conclusion

Action along these lines will not produce miracles. Under the best of circumstances, EU foreign and security policy will remain a work in progress for some time. However, after a long period of stagnation, there is now a real opportunity to strengthen EU foreign policy. In light of

¹¹Mousa Jiryis, "Beyond Labelling: How Europe Can Save the Two-State Situation," Euractiv, February 15, 2016, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/opinion/for-mon-beyond-labeling-how-europe-can-save-the-two-state-solution/>.

¹²Johannes Hahn, "Agreement in Skopje to Overcome Political Crisis," statement, European Commission, July 15, 2015, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/hahn/announcements/agreement-skopje-overcome-political-crisis_en.

¹³Stefan Lehne, "The Big Three in EU Foreign Policy," Carnegie Europe, July 5, 2012, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2012/07/05/big-three-in-eu-foreign-policy-pub-48759>.

the serious challenges in the neighborhood and on the global level, this opportunity must not be missed.

As long as EU foreign policy runs parallel to national foreign policy, it will not enjoy the necessary buy-in from member states. National leaders will only behave as real stakeholders if there is a real and visible role for them at the EU level. The EU Council should therefore task individual member states or groups of them with specific crisis management jobs or with taking the lead on particular regional policies or even thematic issues.

The Lisbon reforms have resulted in a better functioning foreign policy machine that, under fair weather conditions, services relations with third countries with reasonable efficiency. However, when the going gets tough and important policy choices need to be made, the dysfunctionality of the current decision-making arrangements combined with the intrinsic constraints of collective action hamper the EU's effectiveness as an international actor.

In September 2017, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proposed qualified majority voting for foreign policy decisions.¹⁴ This would certainly remove a big obstacle to the EU's effectiveness and could be done even under the existing treaty. However, it is very unlikely to happen. By accepting majority voting, member states would effectively subordinate their own national foreign policy to that of the EU, and only very few of them seem ready to do that.

Over the past five years, the EU has responded to a deteriorating security environment by shifting toward *realpolitik*. The over-optimistic transformative commitments of the past have been corrected. The new emphasis in policy documents is on stability and resilience, and the efforts to strengthen military capabilities have gained momentum. However, as the overall outlook for European integration has improved in 2017, a window for significantly strengthening EU foreign policy might be opening. Foreign policy has never been a driving force of integration but a complementary activity that depended to a large extent on developments in the core areas.

The prospects for the EU's future have recently begun to brighten. A sustained economic recovery appears to be under way. This by itself will help to rebuild the EU's international influence and soft power. The long list of countries eager to conclude trade agreements with the EU shows this clearly.

Berlin and Paris will begin work on a common road map for EU reforms. Both sides also agree on the need to move forward more rapidly on security and defense. And progress on the "hardware" of defense needs to go hand in hand with upgrading the "software" of diplomacy. In fact, Angela Merkel recently called forging a coherent foreign policy the biggest challenge facing the EU.

Stepping up the level of activity through increased diplomatic initiatives and operational engagement is therefore the best way to become more effective. Whether this concerns converting the EU's capacity for reconstructing Syria into a political role, launching a major diplomatic initiative to stabilize Libya, or replacing the deadlocked Minsk talks with a new diplomatic process on Ukraine, there are plenty of opportunities for additional EU engagement.

¹⁴24 Jean-Claude Juncker, "State of the Union Address 2017," September 13, 2017, European Commission, transcript, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-3165_en.htm.

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