

➤ Identity Matters: Exploring the Ambivalence of EU Foreign Policy

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'Economic giant, political dwarf!' 'The EU does not get its act together' 'The capability-expectation gap is widening'. These are only a few of the many indictments of the European Union's (EU) foreign and security policy to be found in editorials, but also occasionally in the scholarly literature.¹ And yet it moves! There have been more than 1000 common strategies, common positions, and joint actions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) since 1993, and more than 2000 foreign policy statements made by the EU Council and Presidency between 1995 and 2008. Since 2003, there have been 25 civilian and military ESDP missions, 14 of which are still ongoing. In addition, the EU has adopted its own declaratory foreign policy strategy in 2003 (European Council 2003, updated in 2008). Finally, the Lisbon Treaty has more or less completed the foreign and security portfolio of the EU, including a (sort of) foreign minister and the External Action Service (EAS). The EU now commands the whole range of institutional capabilities of a cohesive and strong foreign and security policy.

To discern the visibility of the EU in foreign policy, a corpus-linguistic analysis of more than 100,000 newspaper articles in seven EU member states and the US from 1990-2005 was carried out, focusing on military interventions. The data show that the EU is mentioned in 10-20 percent of the articles on average, which is surprising given the limited degree of EU competence in military affairs up to the late 1990s. We can observe some convergence in newspaper coverage from the late 1990s on, with a first peak during and after the Kosovo War. The EU's visibility then increases during the 2001-2003 period before decreasing again to the level of the mid-1990s. All in all, the data refutes the notion that the EU is simply absent in coverage of military and security affairs.

In other words, cooperation on foreign policy matters is the rule rather than the exception in the EU. The EU has emerged as a foreign policy actor and is able to pursue rather coherent foreign policies – if it wants to and if the conditions are right. This is the good news.

But there is also bad news: Catherine Ashton's appointment as EU 'foreign minister' confirms that the member states had no intention of enhancing the status of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) at the expense of their own individual foreign policies. The disagreements among the EU 27 on major foreign policy issues are legendary: the 2003 Iraq invasion showed an intra-European split as much as a transatlantic one, while Germany abstained in the UN Security Council over Libya.

¹ For a recent criticism of the EU's inability to develop a coherent foreign policy see Jolyon Howorth, 'The EU as a Global Actor: Grand Strategy for a Global Grand Bargain?' *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48(3), (2010), 455-474.

Depending on one's viewpoint, therefore, the glass is either half empty or half full with regard to a common European foreign and security policy. But how do we explain the variation between EU coherence in foreign policy in many cases, on the one hand, and Europe's inability to speak with one voice in different instances, on the other hand? And to what extent will issues of European coherence determine its role in a world increasingly animated by the dynamics of Asian economies?

WHY THERE IS NO SUPRANATIONAL EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY²

17 of the 27 EU member states have given up core features of their national economic sovereignty and have accepted the euro as a single currency. In all likelihood, the current euro crisis will result in more rather than less European integration with regard to financial and economic policies, at least among the EU 17. In sharp contrast to the Economic and Monetary Union, which has been fully supranational from the beginning, foreign and security policy remains the one significant issue-area in European affairs in which decisions are still made consensually and in an intergovernmental fashion.³

The refusal to extend Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) to decisions over war and peace is consistent with a version of realism emphasising autonomy. But if states seek to increase their collective power and influence in international politics, then the unwillingness of some EU member states to give up external sovereignty in foreign and security affairs is outright self-defeating. The less Europe speaks with one voice in world politics, the less EU member states can exert influence. The European divisions over the Iraq war in 2003 or over Palestine in 2011 only serve to underscore the point. Moreover, if middle and small powers seek a balance, they need to pool resources and build alliances. In an emerging multipolar world, one would then expect the EU to get its act together in foreign and security affairs in order to build a counter to US power or the rise of China.

Indeed, roughly two-thirds of the current EU member states would be more than willing to supranationalise external security and national defence, a figure which includes many of the big member states such as France, Germany, Spain, or Italy. In 2007, 72 percent of EU citizens were in favour of a common European foreign and security policy, including 84 percent of Germans and 52 percent of Britons.⁴

The only available empirical study that seeks to explain the variation among EU member states concerning their preparedness to supranationalise defence affairs concludes that federal states are more likely to prefer supranational decisions in external security and defence policies than unitary states.⁵ It is possible that federal states where elites and citizens are used to the notion that sovereignty can be divided and/or shared between various levels of governance, might also be more prepared to include supranational levels of governance in these understandings.

Germany serves as a case in point. Federalism has been constitutive for the German state for centuries and German elites have thoroughly Europeanised German collective identity after World War II. No wonder, then, that Germany supported a supranational CFSP/ESDP from the beginning. In contrast, it took centralised France until the Anglo-French St. Malo agreement of 1998 to recognise that a common European foreign and security policy could not be promoted as an alternative to NATO. St. Malo also marked the beginning of

² For a more detailed discussion of this section see Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans. Transnational Identities and Public Spheres*, (2010), 191-196.

³ Note that this pertains mostly to military and defence issues. EU foreign affairs in the areas of environmental policies, human rights, development aid, not even to mention external trade, are mostly subject to supranational decision-making including Qualified Majority Voting (QMV).

⁴ European Commission, *Eurobarometer 67: Public Opinion in the European Union*, (2007).

⁵ Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, 'Explaining Government Preferences for Institutional Change in EU Foreign and Security Policy', *International Organization* 54(1), (2004), 137-174.

a British turnaround toward ESDP, as the Blair government gradually came to accept the notion that NATO and the Anglo-American 'special relationship' were not endangered by closer European defence cooperation. Nevertheless, the British government has constantly objected to any moves toward supranationalism in CFSP/ESDP affairs. It is hard to interpret this position without taking sovereignty considerations into account.

In sum, it is very hard to explain the variation in member states' preferences with regard to supranationalising CSDP without references to the differential Europeanisation of elite identities. This argument is underscored by the request of five EU members, including France and Germany, that Catherine Ashton 'examine all institutional and legal options available to member states, including permanent structured co-operation, to develop critical CSDP [Common Security and Defence Policy] capabilities, notably a permanent planning and conduct capability.'⁶ We might well see a core group of EU member states moving ahead toward a truly common security and defence policy.

WHY THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN EU FOREIGN POLICY WORDS AND DEEDS

The same EU member states that have long supported QMV in foreign and security policy are also those advocating a European identity as a 'civilian power' and emphasising cooperative security, multilateralism, and the rule of (international) law. In promoting its own normative conception of international order, the EU has started behaving like any other great power. Some have argued that creating a distinct foreign policy identity is the whole point about the EU's efforts in external affairs, representing the outward looking version of the EU's modern and enlightenment identity.⁷ The 2003 European Security Strategy was full of references linking what is constitutive for modern and democratic Europe to its vision for international affairs. But the EU's attempt to consciously develop its own foreign policy identity is not confined to a declaratory strategy alone. By about 2000, the EU's foreign and security policy had at its disposal the entire set of instruments necessary for the promotion of democracy and human rights as well as for post-conflict peace- and state-building.

Yet whilst the EU actively constructs a particular foreign policy identity, that is not to say that the emerging EU foreign policy can be causally explained by the EU's collective identity. EU foreign policies often prioritises geostrategic and security interests over human rights and democracy concerns. Moreover, multilateralism might be the foreign policy identity of the weak who do not command the necessary economic and military resources to develop a more forceful foreign policy.

The question boils down to a) whether the EU's foreign policy identity as a 'civilian power' is a matter of choice or of necessity and b) how we can account for the gap between the EU's words and deeds. On the one hand, the lack of qualified majority voting in foreign and defence affairs might lead to decisions on the lowest common denominator leaving the EU with no other choice than to behave as a 'civilian power.' On the other hand, while the EU's military might is no match for the US, its combined defence expenditures of €200 billion is second only to the US: Great Britain, France, and Germany are numbers 2, 4, and 6 in defence spending worldwide.⁸ The EU contains two nuclear powers, and the EU's combined GDP constitutes the number one economic power in the world, which would certainly command the resources to become a formidable military power. Such data suggests that the EU's self-proclaimed 'civilian power' identity is indeed a matter of choice rather than necessity.

⁶ See <http://euobserver.com/13/113569> (Sept. 11, 2011).

⁷ Stefanie Anderson, *Crafting EU Security Policy. In Pursuit of a European Identity*, (2008).

⁸ SIPRI Year Book 2008, *Armaments, Disarmament, and International Security*, (2008).

As to the second question, how can we explain the gap between EU words as a ‘force for good’ and its deeds which are often inconsistent with its proclaimed values of promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law? I would argue that this gap can be explained if we take the EU’s self-proclaimed foreign policy goals as a ‘civilian or normative power’ not as a prescription for a grand strategy, but as a more reflexive attempt at conscious identity creation in foreign policy, an effort that is mainly meant for internal consumption. Given that Europe and the EU lack a strong supranational identity, the EU’s foreign policy identity can be seen as an attempt to externalise its core values, as part and parcel of the more general effort at identity creation rather than as a genuine prescription for foreign and security.

As a result, a mismatch – or perhaps better, a decoupling – of words and deeds would have to be expected. Moreover, a foreign policy identity prioritising liberal and cosmopolitan values over everything else is necessarily likely to fail in the real world. Any major foreign policy actor such as the EU has to balance security, economic, and other ‘material’ needs with the promotion of core values. A foreign policy identity that does not take into account that states, as well as supranational entities such as the EU, need to worry about potential security threats or about economic issues in a globalised world is likely to fail in practice.⁹ Take the Middle East: for all its rhetoric about the promotion of democracy and human rights in the region, the EU foreign policy behaviour prioritised stability over other values, which meant stabilising autocratic rulers and applying double standards. The ‘Arab spring’ took the EU as much by surprise as anybody else and it is now scrambling to regain credibility in the Middle East.

IDENTITY CLASHES: WHY THE EU IS AMBIVALENT OVER TURKISH MEMBERSHIP

One cannot even begin to understand EU enlargement without taking identity politics into account. European identities explain the relatively smooth processes of Eastern enlargement to a large degree, since there was no question that Central Eastern Europe (CEE) belongs to modern Europe as represented by the EU. In sharp contrast, Turkish EU membership has remained contested from the very beginning – and identity concerns explain a large part of this controversy.

After the Cold War, the enlargement discourse depicted Europe and the EU as a community of liberal values and market economies as a result of which the democratising Central Eastern Europeans acquired an almost ‘natural right’ to join. The 1993 European Council explicitly offered an accession perspective to CEE countries – provided that they met certain conditions of the ‘Copenhagen criteria’ which enshrined the values of human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and market economy.

As a result, it took the EU less than fifteen years to accept CEE countries as member states. In contrast, the history of Turkish-EU relations has developed in slow motion. As early as 1963, Turkey signed an Association Agreement that acknowledged the final goal of membership. More than two decades later, in 1987 Turkey applied for EC/EU membership. In 1999, the European Council accepted the Turkish membership candidacy. It took another five years before the 2004 European Council acknowledged that Turkey fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria and that membership negotiations should begin in October 2005. Yet major EU member states, including Germany and France, remain opposed to full Turkish membership.

The cumbersome history of Turkish-EU relations demonstrates the deep ambiguity with which both the EU and Turkey have approached the membership issue over the years. Both Turkey and the EU have constructed Turkey as a bridge between Europe and Asia in their respective discourses. Depending where Turkey is

⁹ In fact, the 2003 ESS does try to strike a balance between diverse values and foreign policy goals. Its main problem is that the EU never made a serious attempt to implement it.

discursively situated in this metaphor, it is either 'in' Europe and, thus, eligible for EU membership, or 'out.' As a result, the contemporary debates about Turkish EU membership is simultaneously about who Europe and the Europeans are, i.e. European identity, as it is about who Turkey and the Turkish are, i.e. Turkish identity.

One analysis shows that opposition to Turkish EU membership can be largely explained by identity concerns, as well as material interests. The most important variable proved to be the fear of Turkish mass migration into the EU (which would explain why Germans and Austrians, with their large Turkish immigrant populations, are so adamantly opposed, by 69 and 81 percent respectively). In addition, fears of losing one's national culture, i.e., identity concerns, also play a significant role in explaining public opposition to Turkish membership. Moreover, religion exerts a significant effect on attitudes toward Turkish membership, with Christians being strongly opposed. In contrast, rational economic self-interests, such as fear of losing one's job and income, have little effect in forming opinions toward Turkey.¹⁰

The politics of Turkish membership in major EU member states shows a profound ambivalence about whether or not Turkey belongs in Europe. The debate about Turkish membership is a discussion about the European borders: where does Europe end, and who, as a result, has a legitimate claim to EU membership? This debate involves different conceptions of European identity. On the one hand, there is the modern, inclusive and liberal vision of Europe that found its most significant expression in the Copenhagen criteria. Accordingly, Turkey is seen as a part of Europe as long as it respects the liberal agenda and complies with its norms. On the other hand, the exclusionary counter-discourse developed in the conservative parts of the French and German media constitutes Turkey as the 'Other' of Europe. Opponents of Turkish EU membership use geographical, cultural, historical, and religious references to place Turkey outside of Europe. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the former French President and President of the European Constitutional Convention, argued in articles published across Europe that only five percent of the Turkish territory and only seven percent of its population live in a 'European enclave', while the remaining parts are located in Asia and Anatolia. This allegedly natural boundary also serves as a cultural and historical boundary, sealing Turkey off from modern Europe of enlightenment and liberalism.¹¹ Others have used Christianity as a demarcation line to exclude Turkey from the EU, with Germany's *Die Welt* arguing that 'Islam, which has been built in Turkey on the ruins of a Roman-Christian civilisation, is completely unsuitable to revive the soul of Europe.'¹²

Of course, such a vision is not new: Turkey as the 'Other' of European identity has a history going back to the Ottoman Empire and its struggles with 'Christian' Europe. In contrast to the case of Eastern enlargement, European identities vis-à-vis Turkey remain fundamentally unsettled and deeply contested. It might be precisely the lack of clarity and the contested nature of identities and interests in this case which explains why the EU and Turkey have been struggling over the membership issue for the past decades and why the accession talks have been rather cumbersome so far. If this holds true, the prospects of Turkey joining the Union any time soon are rather remote, even before one considers the other institutional and political obstacles to its membership.

10 Lauren McLaren, 'Explaining Opposition to Turkish Membership in the EU', *European Union Politics* 8(2), (2007), 251-278.

11 Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, 'A Better European Bridge to Turkey', *Financial Times*, 24/11/2004.

12 *Die Welt*, 10/9/2004.

CONCLUSIONS: EUROPE AND THE GLOBAL ORDER

I have argued in this piece that one cannot understand the difficulties of the EU in putting a coherent foreign policy into place without taking its unsettled (foreign policy) identity into consideration. First, the differential Europeanisation of national identities explains to a large degree why the ESDP has not yet enabled Europe to speak with one voice in foreign policy matters. Second, the gap between the EU's identity rhetoric as a 'civilian power' and its rather mundane foreign policy practice results from the fact that its foreign policy discourse is more inward-looking than directed toward the outside world. Last and not least, the enlargement discourse, particularly with regard to Turkey, further exemplifies the unsettled nature of the EU's identity.

The consequences of this analysis for Europe's role in the world are rather straightforward. Three 'Ps' are necessary for a great power to be able to shape world politics: power, purpose and practice. As to power capabilities, the EU certainly has the necessary resources to play a major role in the global order. Its combined GDP and military expenditures – not to mention its 'soft power' resources – certainly qualify for a great power, and the talk about European decline is rather exaggerated. With regard to purpose, the EU certainly has a transformative vision of world politics in line with its foreign policy identity as a 'civilian power'. While this vision does not yet recognise that foreign policy is mostly about reconciling competing security, economic and human rights goals, there is no reason why the EU should not be able to develop a grand strategy, and indeed the 2003 European Security Strategy is a surprisingly coherent attempt to do just that.

Yet when it comes to putting this vision into practice, the EU is hampered by its unsettled identity, resulting in an inability to speak with one voice on major foreign policy matters. A key problem, of course, is Great Britain's refusal to accept a truly supranationalised EU foreign policy, and it is unlikely that the EU will be able to develop coherent foreign policy practice as long as the UK continues to block these attempts. However, the euro crisis is likely to have profound implications for the future of EU foreign and security policy. The crisis has already created an EU core – the 17 Eurogroup members – and a periphery. If the core survives the crisis, it will strengthen rather than weaken European integration, and this will include foreign policy, and as a result, the UK will be forced to make up its mind, rather than continuing to sit on the EU's fence. Since it is very unlikely that the British people and political elites will accept an even more integrated EU, they will probably leave.

However, it remains unclear if more coherent EU foreign policy practice will emerge, even if the UK exits the Union. Take the Middle East, for example: France and Germany pursue very different approaches toward Israel and the Palestinians, and the EU's foreign policy machinery has been stymied by these differences so far. In other words, a more supranationalised EU foreign policy apparatus does not guarantee a coherent foreign policy practice *per se*.

This does not bode well for the global order. There is a serious lack of leadership in contemporary world politics. While the United States certainly commands formidable military and economic capabilities, it has lost much of its soft power and legitimacy in the last fifteen years, and the Obama administration has not been able to make up for it. The US certainly has a vision of world order, but it increasingly lacks the resources and political will necessary to put this vision into practice. As to the so-called 'rising powers', they command the capabilities to become great powers, but they mostly lack the other two 'P's, namely purpose and practice. For all the hype about the 'rise of China', Beijing has not yet developed a coherent foreign policy toward the rest of the world. While it is positioning itself as a regional power in Asia (thereby threatening its neighbours), we have yet to see China's position on the future of the global economy, on the challenges to international security, or on the global environment. ■