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EUROPEAN UNION FOREIGN POLICY AFTER
LISBON: FIVE LESSONS LEARNED FROM A
SERIES OF ROUNDTABLES

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European Union Foreign Policy after Lisbon: Five Lessons Learned from a Series of Roundtables

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During the 2011-12 academic year, the European Foreign Policy Unit (based in the International Relations Department, London School of Economics and Political Science) hosted a series of ten roundtables on EU Foreign Policy after Lisbon. The series explored a number of different issues with respect to EU foreign policy, including the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on particular policy areas, the role of parliaments and NGOs in policy-making, and the views of outsiders of the post-Lisbon EU. The series was funded by the EU's Jean Monnet Programme (Lifelong Learning).¹

This working paper summarises general lessons that I have learned about EU foreign policy from the roundtables. The schedule of the ten roundtables, with a list of all of the speakers, can be found at the end of this working paper. The European Foreign Policy Unit [website](#) also contains blog postings on the roundtables, podcasts of several of the roundtables, and copies of some of the speakers' presentations. We were very fortunate to have speakers from all five continents, as well as from many of the EU's 'strategic partners'; most speakers were academics based in universities, but some were parliamentarians, or worked for NGOs and think tanks. Many, many thanks to all of the speakers and moderators for their participation in the series – they have all contributed to increasing our knowledge of EU foreign policy after Lisbon. Several speakers had to travel very long distances, pay for exorbitantly-priced visas, and endure long queues to pass through UK border control. I am very grateful that they were nonetheless willing to make the journey, and share with us their views on EU foreign policy. Many thanks also to my project assistant, Moritz Reinsch, who provided invaluable help in organising the roundtables. Finally, thanks to the LSE PhD students who wrote blog posts on the

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roundtables: Madalina Dobrescu, Monika Hellmeyer, Moritz Reinsch, and Benedetta Voltolini.

The roundtable series focused on outsiders' perceptions of EU foreign policy, the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on foreign, security and defence policy, and the influence of NGOs, think tanks, and parliaments on EU foreign policy-making. Speakers addressed a number of specific questions, including:

- Is the EU viewed as a coherent and effective actor by other states?
- Have outsiders' perceptions changed since the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty?
- Is the EU viewed as a normative power, a 'bully', or a self-interested power by other states?
- What influence do national parliaments, the European Parliament, think tanks and NGOs have on EU foreign policy-making, and have the prospects for influencing policy-making changed as a result of the Lisbon Treaty?
- Has the Lisbon Treaty had an impact on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)?
- Has the External Action Service (EAS) made a difference to the EU foreign policy-making process?

Rather interestingly, the first question attracted the most attention by those speakers who focused on outsiders' perceptions of the EU, and here the impact of the euro crisis was crucial (see lesson 1). It was too soon to tell whether the Lisbon Treaty would change matters, because other, more pressing issues were determining perceptions (again, see lesson 1). The third question was often answered yes, to all three images (normative power, bully, self-interested power), but again, such perceptions were viewed as less important than the more fundamental question of whether the EU was united and influential in the first place. Those speakers who addressed more institutional questions – the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on CSDP, or the role of the EAS, or the influence of parliaments and NGOs – also noted the overwhelming (and damaging) impact of the euro

crisis on policy-making. Thus the roundtable series might have been more appropriately subtitled, EU Foreign Policy-Making in the Midst of the Euro Crisis.

Lesson 1: The long-running euro crisis – particularly the inability of the EU to reach an agreement that resolves it – is having a profound impact on EU foreign policy. Speaker after speaker noted that the crisis has negatively affected EU foreign policy in two ways. Firstly, it has drained attention from foreign policy in general, meaning that high-level officials and politicians have less time to devote to foreign policy issues (particularly those that aren't crises themselves – such as Libya in 2011), and are much more aware of budgetary constraints on resources. The euro crisis has thus exacerbated a ‘delivery deficit’ in EU foreign policy, making it even harder for the EU to deliver incentives to third countries (from aid and trade concessions to visa liberalisation and EU membership). Secondly, the euro crisis has severely dented the EU’s image around the world. This is not only because the integration model seems ineffective now, but because the EU’s traditional message about economic and political reform attracts few believers. In addition, the EU has become a ‘problem’ for the rest of the world: for the US, the EU is actively impeding global recovery; for other countries, the euro crisis is seen as actually damaging their economies, and dominates the agendas of international fora such as the IMF and G20. This in turn has led to an ‘equalising’ of the EU’s relations with many third countries, but a downgrading of the EU in the eyes of the US (see below).

Lesson 2: Although it is too early to tell whether the Lisbon Treaty will lead to more effective, efficient, and legitimate foreign policy-making, so far the omens are not all good. In many ways, the EU has become an even more confusing institution for NGOs to try to influence, as there has been a proliferation of new actors and a rather long period of institutional ‘bedding down’. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty has not filled the democratic deficit with respect to foreign policy-making, as neither national parliaments nor the European Parliament can really hold policy-makers to account. And although the External Action Service could in the long run change foreign policy-making for the better – notably by enabling more systematic information gathering and analysis – it has taken some time for the institution to be set up, in an often acrimonious process. The new High

Representative, with much heavier responsibilities (vice-president of the European Commission, permanent chair of the Foreign Affairs Council, principal interlocutor with the rest of the world, and so on), has been heavily criticised for spending too much time and energy setting up the EAS and not enough on other aspects of her job. In the United Nations, the EU's dogged pursuit of a 'special status' to fit with Lisbon Treaty rules has sparked acrimony as well, and has not increased the EU's effectiveness or even presence in that global institution. Speaker after speaker noted, however, that responsibility for the disarray – and the EU's loss of international influence in general – should first and foremost be laid at the doors of the EU member states, who are ultimately in charge.

Lesson 3: Power is more diffuse in international relations, and the 'west' is no longer as dominant as it used to be. This is damaging to the EU, which in many ways derived much of its global influence from being part of the 'west' (sometimes allied with, sometimes in opposition to the US in particular). There are new players on the scene now, and the EU seems to be adjusting to the diffusion of power much less slowly than the US has (with its 'pivot' towards Asia, for example). The new world order means that other countries can provide what the EU cannot (for example, aid and investment in Africa). With alternative sources of financial assistance, developing countries no longer need to heed EU conditions and hectoring. The relationship between the EU and non-western countries is less asymmetrical, not only because the EU is in crisis and suffers a 'delivery deficit' (see lesson 1) but because traditional 'demandeurs' demand less of the EU as they can go elsewhere for resources. South-South links are growing, bypassing the EU as a focus for demands (indeed, the EU has even gone cap in hand to other countries to ask for help in dealing with the euro crisis). Furthermore, the EU's internal divisions mean that US expectations that the EU could be an effective partner (in the pursuit of American foreign policy goals) have often been dashed; while it may be a good thing for the EU not to be seen to be too close to the US, the fact is that this does not result from any clear strategy but from its internal disarray.

Lesson 4: The EU lacks a strategic vision. Instead, a rather technocratic approach tends to dominate foreign policy-making at the EU level. Again, speaker after speaker noted

this. What does the EU want to do in the world? What are its priorities, in the short, medium and long term? There is a noticeable loss of interest in foreign policy in the highest echelons of the national capitals and EU institutions. This is due partly to the euro crisis, but also partly to the fact that in the EU we ‘feel safe’ – there are few security threats that menace us now. There is, as a result, little appetite to agree to EU civilian or military missions abroad. This in turn means that the EU is not seen as a meaningful security actor in places where security concerns are paramount, such as south or east Asia. But the lack of strategic vision goes beyond the ‘defence dimension’ and affects EU foreign policy in general.

Lesson 5: It isn’t all doom and gloom. The EU, for all its faults, is still seen as a model for regional organisations around the world, and its support for regional integration and regional security mechanisms is appreciated. The European Neighbourhood Policy is, in principle, a good approach. Despite the crisis, the EU still has vast resources that it can use to pursue policy goals. These strengths should still serve the EU well in the short and medium term. And it is still possible that the EU will react to this situation by realising that they need to cooperate more with each other. The EU member states share values and cultures and ways of doing things that they do not share with other countries – including rising powers. The member states could even save money by collaborating more closely – on defence, for example. The EU could eventually emerge stronger and more unified from the euro crisis – though granted, at this stage in time, this could be just wishful thinking.

In conclusion, the picture of EU foreign policy presented in the roundtables was jarring – with a large € dominating it. It remains to be seen of course, whether an end to the euro crisis will indeed allow officials and politicians to focus more specifically on EU foreign policy, on providing the EU with a strategic vision, and on bolstering the EU’s influence in international affairs.

European Union Foreign Policy after Lisbon: Speaker List

1. The Common Security and Defence Policy, 17 November 2011

Speakers:

Professor Jolyon Howorth, Yale University

Professor Anand Menon Birmingham University

Nick Witney, European Council on Foreign Relations

Moderator: Dr Spyros Economides, LSE

2. The Role of Parliaments in EU Foreign Policy-making, 6 December 2011

Speakers:

Lord Teverson, Chairman of the House of Lords EU Sub-Committee C (Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy)

Mike Gapes MP, former Chairman of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee

Brendan Donnelly, Federal Trust

Dr Wolfgang Wagner (VU University of Amsterdam)

Moderator: Professor Karen E Smith, LSE

3. EU Foreign Policy: The View from the Mediterranean, 19 January 2012

Speakers:

Professor Atila Eralp (Middle East Technical University, Ankara)

Professor Richard Gillespie (University of Liverpool)

Dr Claire Spencer (Chatham House)

Moderator: Professor Karen E Smith, LSE

4. The EU's Influence in its Eastern Neighbourhood, 2 February 2012

Speakers:

Dr Hiski Haukkala, University of Tampere, Finland

Dr Nicu Popescu, European Council on Foreign Relations
Professor Stefan Wolff, University of Birmingham

Moderator: Dr Ulrich Sedelmeier, LSE

5. Influencing the EU foreign policy process, 21 February 2012

Speakers:

Chiara Biscaldi, International Crisis Group
Heather Grabbe, Open Society Institute Brussels
Catherine Woppard, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office

Moderator: Professor Karen E Smith, LSE

6. The European External Action Service, 15 March 2012

Speakers:

Professor Michael Smith, Loughborough University
Professor Sophie Vanhoonacker, University of Maastricht
Professor Richard Whitman, University of Kent

Moderator: David Spence, Dinam Fellow, LSE

7. EU Foreign Policy: The View from the EU's Strategic Partners, 30 April 2012

Speakers:

Professor Purusottam Bhattacharya, School of International Relations and Strategic Studies, Jadavpur University, India
Dr Andrea Ribeiro-Hoffmann, University of Erfurt
Professor Derek Averre, University of Birmingham

Moderator: Professor Chris Hughes, LSE

8. EU Foreign Policy: The View from Asia, 1 May 2012

Speakers:

Professor Martin Holland, University of Canterbury, New Zealand
Dr Yeo Lay Hwee, Director, EU Centre, Singapore

Dr Michito Tsuruoka, National Institute for Defense Studies, Tokyo

Moderator: Dr Spyros Economides, LSE

9. EU Foreign Policy: The View from Africa, 10 May 2012

Speakers:

Professor Gerrit Olivier, University of Pretoria

Dr Marie Gibert, Nottingham Trent University

Dr Daniela Sicrelli, University of Trento

Moderator: Dr Tine van Crikinge, LSE

10. The EU-US relationship after Lisbon, 18 June 2012

Speakers:

Professor Katie Verlin Laatikainen, Adelphi University

Professor John Peterson, University of Edinburgh

Professor Erik Jones, Johns Hopkins SAIS Bologna Center

Moderator: Professor Karen E Smith, LSE