

## JORDAN ROBINSON

### DOES EUROPE NEED A COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY TO BECOME RELEVANT IN WORLD AFFAIRS?

The European Union is increasingly asserting itself as an international actor with the ability to significantly influence developments throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> However, it has received much historically warranted criticism for being a largely ineffective actor, suffering from “chronic problems of disunity, incoherence and weak leadership”<sup>2</sup>. Individual states’ national sovereignty and interests have played a major role in encumbering the development of a common defence and security policy<sup>3</sup> and fuelled criticisms of the EU as a “weak security community”<sup>4</sup>, primarily restricted to economic dealings<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the EU’s continuing enlargement is seen as yet another hindrance to developing a cohesive ‘European foreign policy’<sup>6</sup> and impeding Europe’s expected role as an “international heavyweight in the making”<sup>7</sup>.

Nonetheless, the EU and its member states have moved “with almost breathtaking rapidity towards the creation of a European [Common] Security and Defence Policy [ECSDP]”<sup>8</sup> in comparison to their history of bloodshed. Such a policy and degree of cohesion is needed by an international actor such as Europe to become relevant in world affairs. In order to understand why this is the case, it is important to explore the following: the historical evolution of the ECSDP; the necessity of a common security and defence policy in the current global environment; the issues surrounding the legitimacy of Europe’s external relations; the role of the US and NATO in the ECSDP; and some recommendations for further improvement and strengthening of a European Common Security and Defence Policy.

Before proceeding it is necessary to provide a brief overview of some of the key moments in the historical evolution of the ECSDP. Doing so establishes a context for where it stands today, and demonstrates why a concerted ECSDP is necessary to become relevant in world affairs. The concept of foreign policy cooperation and decision making can be traced as far back into Europe’s history as the founding of the Western European Union (WEU) in 1948, and the consequent plan for a European Defence Community (EDC) in 1952<sup>9</sup>. However, efforts were largely focused upon economic integration, and it was not until 1969 that the issue again came to the fore with the Hague Summit’s creation of the European Political Cooperation (EPC)<sup>10</sup>. Essentially, the EPC allowed “EC foreign ministers and heads of government to debate broader political and security issues”<sup>11</sup>. Further development for the current ECSDP occurred in 1987 with the Single European Act (SEA), which emphasised the “necessity to coordinate the EPC”<sup>12</sup> and to continue political cooperation where possible.

Pivotal recognition for the need for a ECSDP occurred with the 1991-3 Maastricht Treaty (originally known as the Treaty on European Union), which

brought to light the treatment of elements of ‘high politics’ in development of a common foreign and security policy<sup>13</sup>. To further exacerbate the situation, Europe was enduring the Yugoslav crisis and the subsequent civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. In what proved to be a damaging test of too great a magnitude for the EU to handle, the Yugoslav crisis served as an awakening to the Western European Union (WEU) of the time. Not only did Europe not possess “the necessary integrated military command structure and logistical means [to deal with the crisis]”<sup>14</sup>, it was too heavily reliant on NATO and the US (in the Balkans)<sup>15</sup>. The lesson of Yugoslavia showed that it is not enough to have a concerted, but forced, approach; it must be unanimously agreed upon to be effective, and not simply “based on the deliberate suppression by a large number of member states of their own strongly held views, precisely in order that the EC/EU should have a common policy”<sup>16</sup>. Conversely, the EU also suffered (and still does to a large degree) from poor response times, inability to pass concrete decisions and, in particular, “difficulties in agreeing on military action”<sup>17</sup>. An example of this was the 1991 Gulf War: “despite the urgency of the situation, it took the WEU countries 19 days before they met to discuss the situation. By that time, the United States had initiated its own diplomatic and military efforts to remove Iraq from Kuwait and asserted American leadership within the UN and NATO”<sup>18</sup>. The significance of the EU’s later response to the 1999 Kosovo crisis was also pronounced, and “acted as a catalyst for the debate on the nature of the EU’s role in defence”<sup>19</sup>. After these blunt awakenings, the “EU made firmer Treaty commitments to security cooperation, first in Amsterdam but especially at Nice”<sup>20</sup>. Of particular significance to the current ECSDP was the assigning of a new political and security committee of senior national officials who made plans to enable “deployment of an EU Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF) of up to 60,000 troops”<sup>21</sup>.

It is evident that the EU has been characterised by an insufficiently collaborative security and defence policy throughout much of its history. Crowe argues that in the current volatile global environment it is an “illusion to think that individual European countries can influence the big issues representing only themselves”<sup>22</sup>. These states, especially smaller ones, seek to use the EU as “a multiplier of their power and influence”<sup>23</sup>. Conversely Nugent correctly points out that some member states, in particular the larger ones, have “long histories of being influential on the world stage in their own right, [and] are reluctant to lose control of a policy area that is so associated with national influence, sovereignty, and identity”<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, the consistent loss of economic sovereignty by member

1 E. Bomberg, J. Peterson and A. Stub, *The European Union: How Does It Work?* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 202.

2 Peterson, 2008: 202.

3 N. Nugent, *The Government and Politics of the European Union*. 6<sup>th</sup> Ed. Eds. Neil Nugent, William E. Paterson. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 496.

4 D. M. Wood and B. A. Yesilada, *The Emerging European Union*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. USA: Pearson Longman, 2004, p. 211.

5 S. Hix, *The Political System of the European Union*. China: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, p. 400.

6 B. Crowe, ‘A common European foreign policy after Iraq?’ in *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 79(3): 533-546, 2003, p. 538.

7 R. Rummel, ‘West European Cooperation in Foreign and Security Policy’ in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 531: 112-123, 1994, p. 121.

8 P. Cornish and G. Edwards, ‘Beyond the EU/NATO dichotomy: the beginnings of a European strategic culture’ in *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 77(3): 587-603, 2001, p. 587.

9 Hix, 2005: 387.

10 Wood and Yesilada, 2004: 213.

11 Hix, 2005: 187.

12 Wood and Yesilada, 2004: 213.

13 T. Taylor, ‘West European security and defence cooperation: Maastricht and beyond’ in *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 70(1): 1-16, 1994, p. 1.

14 Wood and Yesilada, 2004: 225.

15 Nugent, 2006: 495.

16 Crowe, 2003: 536.

17 I. Bache and S. George, *Politics in the European Union*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 519.

18 Wood and Yesilada, 2004: 222.

19 G. Bono, ‘European Security and Defence Policy: the rise of the military in the EU’ in *Peace Studies Papers* (4): 1-29, 2002, p. 16.

20 Peterson, 2008: 215. 21 *ibid.*

22 Crowe, 2003: 537.

23 Bomberg et al, 2008: 204.

24 Nugent, 2006: 492.



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Jordan Robinson is a 21 year old student with a degree in Journalism from the University of Queensland in Brisbane, and is the final year of an International Relations degree. Next year Jordan is hoping to pursue further studies; either by undertaking honours or pursuing a masters degree. Jordan has received multiple Dean’s Awards throughout his studies.

states has “strengthened [their] resolve... to maintain their sovereignty over foreign and security policies”<sup>25</sup>. This fragmented, national-interest oriented approach to security and defence<sup>26</sup>, as especially as seen in past responses to challenges<sup>27</sup>, has proven to be inadequate to respond to the current global context. This mix of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism, while enabling common policies to be adopted, is “not sufficient to produce decisive actions”<sup>28</sup>.

An example of the inadequacies of the modern manifestation of the ECSDP is the events surrounding the EU’s involvement, or lack thereof, in the US’s war on terror. This is a key example of why a common security and defence policy is necessary today in order for Europe to retain international relevance. As war broke, the EU’s initial reaction was to form a European Council meeting which devised 79 different measures largely concerned with “non-military issues, such as definitions of terrorism [and] the need for a common EU arrest warrant”<sup>29</sup>. The EU’s concerted diplomatic efforts were immediately undermined by the actions of the ‘big three’ (Britain, France and Germany) in the form of their October 2001 informal talks, which excluded the other member states, much to the outrage of the Belgians, Dutch, Italians and Spanish<sup>30</sup>. This demonstrated “the other member states’ suspicion of the intentions of the big three”<sup>31</sup> – a suspicion which is not sustainable if a common European security and defence policy is to be effective. To further worsen this disunity, the leaders of “five member states (Britain, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) and three candidate countries [at the time] (the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) signed an open letter at the end of January 2003 expressing strong support for the United States”<sup>32</sup> – much to France and Germany’s displeasure.

Fortunately, the rift caused by the the War on Terror did not last. Despite the setback to ECSDP caused by Iraq and the war on terror in general, there were signs that both Britain and France had a desire to continue progress. This came in the form of several EU-led peace keeping missions in 2003, such as in Macedonia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Nonetheless, the lack of policy cohesion with regard to the EU’s position on the war on terror raised significant questions about the EU’s legitimacy as a unified international actor.

Europe requires a common security and defence policy, not only to hold relevance in world affairs, but also to do so with a sufficient degree and perception of legitimacy. A common foreign and security defence policy is a requisite extension of its mandate. As Bache and George noted, there has been a “dramatic increase in the EU’s external relations ‘output’, but this has not always matched expectations that the EU will act decisively, consistently and influentially”<sup>33</sup>. This “capability expectations gap”<sup>34</sup> is unsustainable should Europe wish to hold relevance in world affairs.

The EU’s inability to “[act] in a clear and decisive manner”<sup>35</sup> in relation to issues of ‘hard’ politics, as seen in Yugoslavia, demonstrates that the EU does not have the perceived “institutional resources or the political legitimacy to take on these roles”<sup>36</sup> expected of it. For now, the EU is caught in an ‘illegitimacy cycle’ where it is seen as consistently failing to meet “expectations while never ceasing to develop new and bolder ambitions”<sup>37</sup>.

The EU’s legitimacy comes into further disrepute when one considers its relationship with other powerful international actors, particularly NATO and the US. As eleven European nations have NATO membership,<sup>38</sup> any formation of a ECSDP will be inevitably interlinked with NATO objectives. The EU was fearful of the ECSDP being too heavily influenced by NATO (and in turn the US) and arguments have been made that NATO has been able to play a “disproportionate role in... shaping [the] ECSDP”<sup>39</sup>. However, there is an inherent paradox in this situation. Firstly, the central role of NATO in Europe’s defence actions throughout history, such as in Kosovo<sup>40</sup>, is unavoidable. Secondly, in terms of the US, extensive cooperation with and even a degree

of reliance on the current global superpower is not only desirable, but ultimately inevitable in creating with an ECSDP<sup>41</sup>. The question of whether to “accept US leadership which has been the mainstay of the post-war world and work with it; or whether rather to develop an independent line even in opposition to the US”<sup>42</sup> is somewhat irrelevant as a blanket statement, in the sense that an ECSDP should not be formulated in terms of whether or not to support or oppose the US. Rather, it should be formulated in terms of what is best for the interests of Europe on a case-specific basis. The medium must be reached whereby the EU needs to “carry enough weight to ensure that the US sees its own interests in... leadership being shared not just imposed”<sup>43</sup>. What, then, are some possible recommendations to counter this capability expectations gap and image of over-reliance on NATO and the US, in order to restore legitimacy to Europe’s vital common security and defence policy?

There is no panacea for the problems facing Europe in developing its common security and defence policy to ensure relevance in world affairs. Some observers have cited simple recommendations such as cooperating more effectively on military equipment between states<sup>44</sup>. But as the modern conflicts described above demonstrate, deeper cooperation is essential should the EU have any relevance. Numerous obstacles stand in the way, such as EU enlargement. While increasing the potential for international power, enlargement decreases the chance for unanimous consensus on external policy issues<sup>45</sup>. A ‘deepening’ of the EU has thus been recommended before further enlargement, as EU foreign policy is “only as good as the quality of the consensus amongst its members, and it is often of poor quality in an enlarged EU of 27 member states”<sup>46</sup>. The creation of something similar to a European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF), as agreed upon in the 1999 Helsinki Headline Goals, or genuinely mobile ‘battle groups’ capable of being “deployed anywhere in the world within two weeks”<sup>47</sup> on UN-approved missions, would provide Europe with some relevant combat power, without dissolving state-orientated security in a significant way.

25 Hix, 2005: 405.

26 Bache and George, 2006: 529.

27 Wood and Yesilada, 2004: 221.

28 Hix, 2005: 405.

29 M. Clarke P. Cornish, ‘The European defence project and the Prague summit’ in *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 78(4): 777-788, 2002, p. 783.

30 D. Dinan, *An Ever Closer Union: An Introduction to European Integration*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, p. 600.

31 Dinan, 2005: 600. 32 *ibid.*: 602.

33 Bache and George, 2006: 515.

34 Hix, 2005: 393. 35 *ibid.*: 394. 36 *ibid.*: 395.

37 Paterson, 2008: 202.

38 Cornish and Edwards, 2001: 591.

39 Bono, 2002: 22.

40 Bache and George, 2006: 532.

41 Clarke and Cornish, 2002: 787.

42 Crowe, 2003: 535. 43 *ibid.*: 537.

44 Taylor, 1994: 12.

45 Peterson, 2008: 218. 46 *ibid.*

47 Nugent, 2006: 498.

However, perhaps focusing specifically on the EU's military capacity is one-dimensional. That is to say, the EU's expanding expertise As Cornish and Edwards argue, sudden and abrupt surrendering of further national sovereignty to a supranational common security and defence policy is unrealistic, however, the "EU's gradual accumulation of confidence and expertise in a new and largely unfamiliar area of polic[ies] will steadily enhance its credibility as a potential military actor"<sup>48</sup> in the eyes of the international community. Whilst a common security and defence policy is needed to ensure relevance in international affairs, there is some merit in arguments that the EU's "powerful economic and trading positions are becoming all the more important [since] much of international relations becomes less focused on 'traditional' political and military issues and more focused on economic [and environmental] issues"<sup>49</sup>.

The world awaits the potential spillover effect that such policy creation generates. Nonetheless, a cohesive common security and defence policy is needed by an international actor such as Europe in order to become and remain relevant in world affairs. This is due to the current volatile global environment, the waning legitimacy of Europe's external relations, and the over-reliance of the EU on the US and NATO in the development of its ESDP. It is important not to forget the potential influence of the EU as a collective force, rather than as individual states. Instead of waiting idly for global 'catalysts' to occur to stimulate progress, such as conflict or terrorism, a constant and gradual move towards deepening rather than enlarging the EU is needed. Only then can the EU live up to its image and expectations, and deliver rapid, unified decisions and policy to serve the EU's best interests.

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<sup>48</sup> Cornish and Edwards, 2001: 595.

<sup>49</sup> Nugent, 2006: 492.

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