

EU MONITOR

Identifying the EU's weaknesses in foreign and defence policy: the struggle to become a more effective global actor

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The European Union is a strong political entity with a considerable influence in several fields: commercial, normative, the promotion of human rights and democratic values and energy transition among others. Nevertheless it has less presence and relevance in other global affairs shaping the international agenda. These, in realistic terms, usually refer to issues considered on the playing field of the great powers (for example, diplomacy related to security and defence matters). This paper will examine the features considered to be hampering the EU's ability to effectively act in the global stage. First, it will assess two main voting procedures (unanimity and qualified majority). Afterwards, it will dig into the prevalence of a wide array of national interests, sometimes incompatible with each other, and the lack of a common strategic culture within the Union. Later, it will reflect on the fact that the EU cannot behave like a traditional actor since its members can pursue their own goals through other means. Unlike in other fields, such as trade policy, Member States retain sovereignty in foreign and defence policy. For instance, this means that it is not within Spain's remit to negotiate a commercial agreement on export tariffs and regulatory standards with China; however, in theory, it can reach a defensive cooperation agreement with Morocco, recognize an interim government in Congo and support a certain group in the Yemen war, all of which can go against its fellow Europeans' priorities. Finally the paper will conclude with policy recommendations and concluding remarks.

Unanimity versus Qualified Majority Voting: the limits of the voting system

When analysing the influence of the European Union in world politics, some voices argue that the EU often fails to position itself as a relevant and credible player on the international system. This lack of effectiveness in foreign policy stems from two main factors: conflicting national interests and strategic assessments, and the unanimity rule required in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) decisions. The first one is a mantra that reaches its maximum expression with the assumption that Southern countries are concerned about Africa and the Middle East while Eastern countries' main focus is Russia. Unanimity is a principle that governs decision-making processes in CFSP. At this point, it is worth noting that there are two main legislative procedures: the community and the intergovernmental method. Many areas of external action follow the community method, by which the legislation is proposed by the Commission and approved by the Council of the EU and the Parliament. In these cases, encompassing fields such as humanitarian aid, the European Neighbourhood Policy or internal policies that have an external dimension (e.g. trade, energy and migration and refugee policies), approval is made by Qualified Majority Voting (QMV). This means that 55% of the Member States representing at least 65% of the EU population must vote in favour in order to adopt a proposal.¹ The intergovernmental method, instead, applies to the CFSP decision-making process (common guidelines, positions and statements, sanctions and CSDP operations). All resolutions, with few exceptions, have to be taken unanimously by

Member States. That is to say, should a country disagree with the proposal, it can use its veto power to avoid adopting any compromise.

February 4th 2019 constitutes a case in point of how intricate this process can be. A joint statement between the EU and the Arab League was blocked by Hungary over migration issues.² An individual Member State also prevented the EU to launch another joint statement. This time, Italy, with the coalition government deeply divided, blocked the Union in the recognition of Juan Guaidó as interim president of Venezuela.³ This led to a separate group of states that supported the opposition leader. On top of that, there were no response on the then imminent collapse of the INF treaty,⁴ which is of critical importance for European defence. These are but a few examples. The EU's inability to respond quickly and decisively to international developments is a regular occurrence.

The unanimity rule has generated criticism, however. In a club of 27 members, reaching consensus can be a hard task. Given internal divisions, decisions are often made late or not taken, which undermines EU's capacity to become a reliable foreign policy actor. Against this backdrop, some parties have proposed moving from unanimity to QMV, through which 80% of Community legislation is adopted, in CFSP. In late 2018, the Commission called upon the Member States to broaden the scope of QMV in relation to positions on human rights, apply effective sanctions and decisions on civilian CFSP missions.⁵ Following this proposal, France and Germany have shown themselves in favour of exploring this path.⁶ Adopting this procedure would speed up the decision-making, thus increasing the Union's adaptive abilities to rapidly changing scenarios. Besides, eliminating

¹ Qualified majority. Consilium

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/qualified-majority/>

² Hungary causes diplomatic spat over EU's migration stance. Euractiv <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/hungary-causes-diplomatic-spat-over-eus-migration-stance/>

³ Divided Italy blocks EU statement on recognizing Venezuela's Guaidó. Reuters <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-italy/divided-italy-blocks-eu-statement-on-recognizing-venezuelas-quaido-idUSKCN1PT15G>

⁴ The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, signed between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in 1987, eliminated nuclear and conventional ground launched ballistic and cruise missiles of intermediate and short range.

⁵ State of the Union 2018: Making the EU a stronger global actor. European Commission https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_56_83

⁶ Meseberg Declaration. Ministère de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/germany/events/article/europe-franco-german-declaration-19-06-18>

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veto powers would avoid scenarios where a reticent country hampers a common policy and, in addition, narrow down third countries leverage to thwart the Union's foreign policy by putting pressure on EU countries.⁷ It would encourage Member States to intensify negotiations and forge a common position rather than being outvoted. Nonetheless, it is unclear to what extent this initiative would sort out the weaknesses previously mentioned. Leonard Schuette claims that, insofar divergences in national interests and assessments on international developments will remain, QMV will "incentivise unity where the differences are small".⁸ Thus, as long as these two sources of internal division persist, qualified majority voting will have a limited impact on the Union's foreign policy. Besides, despite the fact that in most cases qualified majority would be sufficient, roughly 80% of decisions in the Council are taken unanimously; although this should not be understood as a non-use of qualified majority during negotiations rather than its employ as a driving force in the legislative process.⁹ Sanctions are one of the most relevant foreign policy tools. Schuette argues that implementing qualified majority would result in an increase in its effectiveness and lead to a stronger sanctions regime. Moreover, given the rise of Eurosceptic parties and the likelihood of China's and Russia's pursuit of divide-and-rule tactics will intensify, the need for QMV in this matter will be high as well.¹⁰

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is another of the most important frameworks in the European Union's external action. It endows the Union with the means to undertake civilian and military missions outside its boundaries and, hence, with the possibility of becoming a

better security provider and a more credible actor. It is, however, unlikely that CSDP will move outside the scope of unanimity; some recently interviewed ambassadors to the Political and Security Committee admitted "a real reluctance to go down the route of QMV in CSDP and external relations" and a general concern about the disengagement from agreed positions of States that have not voted for a proposal.¹¹ It is hard to believe that countries that do not agree with deployed missions will send their nationals and put their lives at risk. Furthermore, diverging interests and points of view have led to narrowed mandates in terms of tasks, duration and area of operations. That being said, the issue here is not to choose between unanimity and qualified majority voting. Notwithstanding a unanimous decision is mandatory to launch a CSDP mission, Member States can opt to not engage with the operation. Only those willing, who participate actively, contribute by sending personnel and, through the Athena mechanism,¹² by bearing the largest share of the mission costs. The key problem is that although initiatives are often proposed and promoted by an individual or a group of countries (the High Representative shares also this competence), underfunding and shortage of assets are a chronic occurrence.

The EU is struggling to fulfil its international defence and security commitments

A case in point is the current mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUFOR Althea.¹³ The operation, established in

⁷ The veto power makes the EU vulnerable to rival countries, which can exploit their influence on an EU country to sabotage the Union. "Russia has sought to sow division within the EU and undermine collective action by cultivating Trojan horse governments within the Union. It has sought to identify states, typically at the periphery of Europe and disgruntled for some reason with the European project or beholden to Russian interests, to represent the views of Russia within the EU". For a deeper in-sight: Trojan horses in EU foreign policy. Mitchell Orenstein and Daniel Kelemen. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 55. 2016

⁸ Should the EU make foreign policy decision by majority voting? Leonard Schuette. Centre for European Reform <https://www.cer.eu/publications/archive/policy-brief/2019/should-eu-make-foreign-policy-decisions-majority-voting#section-6>

⁹ The Silence of Ministers: Consensus and Blame Avoidance in the Council of the European Union. Stéphanie Novak. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 51. 2013

¹⁰ Should the EU make foreign policy decision by majority voting? Leonard Schuette. Centre for European Reform

¹¹ The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost: a Grounded Theory approach to the comparative study of decision-making in the NAC and PSC. Simon J. Smith, Nikola Tomic and Carmen Gebhard. *European Security*, vol. 26. 2017

¹² Athena mechanism. Consilium <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/athena/>

¹³ EUFOR Althea. EEAS <http://www.euforbih.org/eufor/index.php>

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2004, is responsible for the military implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement¹⁴ and relies heavily on UK assets, to such an extent that an eventual departure of the British personnel (as a consequence of a no-deal Brexit) may leave the mission obsolete. In spite of being a relatively small force, with currently 600 personnel deployed while in its peak counted with 7.000 troops and being in the EU's backyard, it remains unclear to what extent the Member States will be able and eager to fill the gaps left if the UK finally withdraws its assets.¹⁵ EUFOR RCA, the military operation in Central African Republic deployed in 2014,¹⁶ is another illustrative example of the EU's problems in pooling support and resources when it comes the time to act. When the security environment significantly worsened in the country after an escalation of conflicts, the Council approved a mission aimed at establishing and contributing "to a secure environment".¹⁷ Even though EUFOR RCA was established on 10th February and that its launch was set to take place on 17th March, the force generation process was a succession of fruitless meetings and calls urging to meet the commitments, which ultimately delayed the schedule. The first conference took place on 13th February, where the first contribution offers were made, and was followed by three other meetings, during which the European leaders were incapable to provide the assets required to start the mission.¹⁸ One day after the last gathering, on 14th March, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement encouraging its fellow Europeans to meet their commitments and responsibilities, but it had no effect. It

took two more negotiation rounds under French leadership to make substantial breakthroughs and launch the operation. The European leaders were appealed on several occasions by the High Representative, the French President and, even, the UN Secretary-General, who repeatedly reminded them their pledge and that the EU's credibility was at stake. Notwithstanding EUFOR RCA was launched on the 1st of April, due to the lack of resources, it did not reach initial operating capability (IOC) until 30th April and full operating capability (FOC) until 15th June.¹⁹ Member States' reluctance caused several deployment delays and, as a consequence, gave time for the conflict to escalate and the security environment to worsen, which was EUFOR's main duty to address. Finally, the lack of political will could be overcome due to France's leading role and its several attempts to get greater contributions from the Member States.²⁰ The information report addressed to the French National Assembly in July 2014 by the National Defence and Armed Forces Commission shows a revealing impression of the situation. It outlined that the run-up to EUFOR RCA highlighted the reluctance of the EU countries to take part in the force generating process and that the mission's architecture presented gaps while it was underway. It concluded that this experience did not allowed them to assert that "the European Union has lived up to its international responsibilities".²¹

Another telling situation happened in 2007 and 2008 with EUFOR Tchad/RCA.²² When the Council authorised it in October 2007, five months after the French proposal, the

¹⁴ Dayton Peace Agreement. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe <https://www.osce.org/bih/126173>

¹⁵ How militarily willing and able is the EU? Operation Althea struggles in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alice Billon-Galland and Nicholas Williams. European Leadership Network <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ELN-How-military-willing-and-able-is-the-EU-Operation-Althea-Billon-Galland-Williams.pdf>

¹⁶ EUFOR RCA. EEAS https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/csdp/missions-and-operations/eufor-rca/index_en.htm

¹⁷ Ibidem

¹⁸ Improving the Effectiveness of Capabilities (IEC) in EU conflict prevention. 3.5 Study Report of DR Congo, South Sudan, Libya and Central African Republic. IECEU https://www.ieceu-project.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/D3.5_Study_Report_of_DR_Congo_South_Sudan_CAR_and_Libya_v5.0.pdf

¹⁹ For a more detailed description of this cumbersome process, consult: Improving the Effectiveness of Capabilities (IEC) in EU conflict prevention...

²⁰ From the outset Paris offered the largest amount of military and other strategic assets. Nonetheless, it had to increase its contribution in order to meet operational requirements. It ended up providing 42% (326) of total military personnel (770). Rapport d'information déposé en application de l'article 145 du Règlement par la Commission de la Défense Nationale et des Forces Armées en conclusion des travaux d'une mission d'information sur l'évolution du dispositif militaire français en Afrique et sur le suivi des opérations en cours. Assemblée Nationale <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-info/i2114.asp>

²¹ Ibidem

²² EUFOR Tchad/RCA. EEAS https://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/csdp/missions-and-operations/eufor-tchad-rca/index_en.htm

force generating process was quite lengthy due to much hesitation and reluctances from the Member States.²³ Chief problem was that European countries did not earmark the required troops and equipment to meet the needs of the mission. This negotiation process lasted more than three months and caused several launch delays. Finally, after the Élysée increased its involvement, EUFOR Tchad/RCA started on 28th January 2008. The force amounted to 3.700 soldiers, of which 55% were French, and rallied 23 Member States and 3 third countries. The operation, however, experienced several shortfalls and did not reach IOC until March and FOC until September. In fact, persisting deficiencies “translated into reduced effectiveness on the ground and increased operational risk”.²⁴

In search of a common strategic culture

Given the modest size and scope of current CSDP missions today, it is hard to believe that the European countries would be willing to launch a campaign of the calibre of EUFOR Tchad/RCA. All the reviewed issues reflect the EU’s failure to act more decisively on the international stage. It is true that European armies have limited operational capability and are overstretched insofar they have to satisfy claims from several organizations (e.g. NATO, UN and OSCE) to collaborate in dozens of missions. Actually, the situation of four of the largest EU armies is telling to give a holistic picture. France have deployed more than 30.000 soldiers in operations all over the globe,²⁵ whilst Italy has stationed more than 7.000 troops²⁶ and Germany and Spain have contributed around 4.000²⁷ and 3.000²⁸ military

personnel respectively to a wide range of international missions. But this is not a satisfactory explanation of the troubles encountered in force generating for CSDP missions. It should be noted that EUFOR Tchad/RCA struggled to put together few more than 10 helicopters even when it was emphasized from the outset that the operation had serious airlift deficiencies.²⁹ Therefore, there are further reasons that explain these struggles.

The current mechanism for financing operations has been identified as a considerable disincentive for Member States to engage in these initiatives. As outlined before, participating countries are those who bear the bulk of operational costs. According to the report addressed to the French National Assembly previously mentioned, the estimated cost of the French participation in EUFOR RCA was “50 million euros in a full year”.³⁰ This, the financial burden of an individual Member State, is more than a third of the total common costs of a much larger operation such as EUFOR Tchad/RCA (3.700 soldiers, when fully deployed, to 770), which amounted to 140 million euros (from an estimated overall cost of between 800 million and 1 billion).³¹ In order to address this issue, the High Representative proposed the European Peace Facility (EPF).³² This fund (with an allegedly budget of 5 billion euros according to the European Council agreement of 21st July 2020) will replace the Athena mechanism and broaden the scope of the financing of the common costs of CSDP missions, among other things. This instrument can definitely encourage Europeans leaders to engage in proposed missions, but it could also hinder the decision-making process. So far, the lack of financial commitments has made

²³ For a more detailed explanation on the mission’s background, see chapter: “The quest for European military capabilities” by Bjoern Seibert, in “European defence capabilities: no adaptability without co-operation”. RUSI https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201003_op_european_defence_capabilities.pdf

²⁴ Ibidem

²⁵ Carte des opérations et missions militaires. Ministère des Armées https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/rubriques_complementaires/carte-des-operations-et-missions-militaires

²⁶ Operazioni Militari. Ministero della Difesa <https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/Pagine/OperazioniMilitari.aspx>

²⁷ Aktuelle einsätze der Bundeswehr. Bundeswehr <https://www.bundeswehr.de/de/einsaetze-bundeswehr>

²⁸ Misiones en el exterior. Ministerio de Defensa https://www.defensa.gob.es/misiones/en_exterior/#

²⁹ The quest for European military capabilities. Bjoern Seibert

³⁰ Rapport d’information déposé...

³¹ The quest for European military capabilities. Bjoern Seibert

³² European Peace Facility: an EU off-budget fund to build peace and strengthen international security. EEAS https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/46285/european-peace-facility-eu-budget-fund-build-peace-and-strengthen-international-security_en

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unanimity relatively easy to achieve. Nonetheless, a large common fund may lead to more and deeper national interests involved and competing priorities on where and how spend economic resources.

Yet, there is one factor that, qualified majority voting and innovative mechanisms notwithstanding, will hamper the EU's performance on the international stage: the lack of a common strategic culture, understood as "comprising the socially transmitted, identity-derived norms, ideas, and patterns of behaviour that are shared among a broad majority of actors and social groups within a given security community, which help to shape a ranked set of options for a community's pursuit of security and defence goals".³³ However, such a security community is a largely heterogeneous group when it comes to the EU. While foreign and security policy in the European Union remain an "area of intergovernmental bargaining" instead of one under the control of the supranational model, the forging of an EU strategic culture will be difficult to achieve.³⁴ The state of play is more that of 27 differentiated strategic cultures with diverging approaches.³⁵ This ties in with what has been said about unanimity and the decision-making process. The possibility of reaching consensus and agreements depends, to a large extent, on the ability of the Member States to overcome national preferences to the benefit of partner countries.

It cannot be assumed that economic reasons and capability shortfalls are what stand between the countries and a greater involvement in missions abroad, these are only a

small part of the picture. Rather are the more than 4.500 km that separate Bangui, in Central African Republic, from Budapest, with the consequent lack of interest. From many European capitals' point of view, conflicts that erupt at such distances are not regarded as a threat nor do they endanger their national interests. Likewise, Russia does not pose the same menace to the Baltic countries or Poland as to Germany. While a large part these countries' foreign policy efforts are devoted to fight against Russian influence and counter a possible military attack, Germany see it through different lenses (take for instance its continuous defence of Nord Stream 2). Therefore, differing threat perceptions and national interests can be identified as weak points in the EU's foreign and security policy-making. At this point, the Strategic Compass should be noted, a new EU's initiative designed to guide the implementation of the EU Global Strategy. Agreed on 16th June 2020 by the EU Defence Ministers, it will be developed over two years and finished under the French presidency of the Council, linking it with the German presidency.³⁶ Its first phase will consist of a threat analysis led by the High Representative (HR) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in close cooperation with the Member States.³⁷ This six month process will provide a broad scope of all the threats perceived across the Union and will present a valuable background, which can foster discussions and a better "understanding of where shared priorities truly lie and of each other's red lines".³⁸

Shared threat assessments are deemed paramount for consensus-building among partners in a political and

³³ Convergence towards a European strategic culture? A constructivist framework for explaining changing norms. Christoph O. Meyer. *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 11(4). 2005

³⁴ Characterizing the European Union's Strategic Culture: An Analytical Framework. Alessia Biava, Margriet Drent and Graeme P. Herd. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 49(6). 2011

³⁵ In fact, Howorth argues that there are seven types of divergences when it comes to the varied EU national security cultures: allies/neutrals, Atlanticists/Europeanists, power projection/territorial defence, military/civilian instruments, nuclear/non-nuclear, large/small states and weapons systems providers/consumers. The CESDP and the forging of a European security culture. Jolyon Howorth. *Politique Européenne*, vol. 8. 2002

³⁶ Council Conclusions on Security and Defence. Council of the European Union

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44521/st08910-en20.pdf>

³⁷ For further details on how countries perceive, describe and rank threats, take a look at: Uncharted territory? Towards a common threat analysis and a Strategic Compass for EU security and defence. Daniel Fiott. EUISS

https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2016%20Strategic%20Compass_0.pdf

³⁸ For a better insight of its risks and opportunities, see: The EU's strategic compass for security and defence: just another paper? Nicole Koenig. Jacques Delors Centre

https://hertieschool-f4e6.kxcdn.com/fileadmin/2_Research/1_About_our_research/2_Research_centres/6_Jacques_Delors_Centre/Publications/20200710_Strategic_Compas_Koenig.pdf

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security community; they shape preferences when designing policies and strategies. Furthermore, a statement issued by the HR linked it to the development of a common strategic culture: Josep Borrel stressed the need for this latter and referred to it as “a common way of looking at the world, of defining threats and challenges as the basis for addressing them together” and he added “the Strategic Compass should help us get there”.³⁹ But shared perceptions of risks and threats do not necessarily translate into a common strategic culture. National governments may significantly differ in the means and strategies to tackle them. Furthermore, even if the Strategic Compass avoids a ranking or a prioritisation of threats, in a context of limited resources, European countries may also disagree on to which endeavours the available assets should be earmarked. That is to say, from a cynical point of view, the way common identified threats are addressed could reveal how far from a strategic culture the Union is.

The issue of multiple strategic cultures connects with a third key problem. The EU cannot behave as a traditional actor in foreign policy. The Union is not a federal state like Germany or the U.S., it relies on its Member States’ willingness and ability to reach consensus to be able to carry out its foreign policy objectives. It is an innate feature. Moreover, any Member State can decide to pursue its goals by other means, that is to say, unilaterally or through other organizations (e.g. NATO) and groups. Although now reconciled, take for instance the opposing position taken by France and Italy in the Libyan conflict during some years.⁴⁰ In the same vein, a group involving an EU country could go

against the interests defined by the Union. On top of that, it is well-known the Atlanticist point of view of some of the Eastern countries among their fellow NATO partners. At the end of the day, it is the Atlantic Organization that they consider their foremost guarantee against a Russian aggression. Nevertheless, it would be pessimistic to think that policy actions undertaken outside the EU-level would undermine or be non-aligned with the European Union’s foreign policy position. In fact, multilateral cooperation involving a subset of countries is a common characteristic of European foreign and defence policy. These coalitions differ greatly from each other (i.e. degree of institutionalization, permanent and *ad hoc*, or geographical or thematic *raison d’être*) and include groups such as: Benelux, Visegrad, the Salzburg Forum, NORDEFECO, the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) and a wide array of both *ad hoc* contact and lead groups. It is beyond this article’s purpose to explain the ins and outs of multilateral cooperation initiatives⁴¹ but it is worthwhile noting that, according to Giovanni Grevi et al, they can perform five main functions: i) “operate in areas where there is no clear EU foreign policy line or initiative”, ii) “differentiated cooperation may take place alongside EU foreign policy and be complementary to it, or mutually reinforcing”, iii) “initiatives that run in parallel to those taken under CFSP” and that may “weaken the credibility of the EU”, iv) “pave the way to EU positions and actions, playing a sort of bridging role” and v) “cooperation through variable geometry can occur when implementing common positions, as it happens when EU bodies delegate member states with some tasks”.⁴² Thus, this phenomenon could also serve the

³⁹ Europe security and defence: the way forward. EEAS https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/81247/europe-security-and-defence-way-forward_en

⁴⁰ Italy backed from the outset of the formation of the Government National Accord (GNA) as an interim government in Libya in 2015, On the other hand, France supported the Libyan National Army (LNA), the rival faction of the GNA in the Libyan war. For further information: Italy’s chance in Libya. Arturo Varvelli and Tarek Megerisi. ECFR https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_italys_chance_in_libya and France’s double game in Libya. Paul Taylor. POLITICO <https://www.politico.eu/article/frances-double-game-in-libya-nato-un-khalifa-haftar/>

⁴¹ In-depth analysis on this matter can be found in: Differentiated Cooperation in European Foreign Policy: The

Challenge of Coherence. Giovanni Grevi, Pol Morillas, Eduard Soler I Lecha and Marco Zeiss. EU-IDEA

https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/project_papers/eu_idea/differentiated_cooperation_in_european_foreign_policy_the_challenge_of_coherence

Differentiation in CFSP: Potential and Limits. Steven Blockmans. Istituto Affari Internazionali. 2017 http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/eu60_5.pdf

Europeanization and regional cooperation initiatives: Austria’s participation in the Salzburg Forum and in Central Defence Cooperation. Patrick Müller. Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, vol. 45(2). 2016

⁴² Differentiated Cooperation in European Foreign Policy: The Challenge of Coherence. Giovanni Grevi, Pol Morillas, Eduard Soler I Lecha and Marco Zeiss. EU-IDEA

interests of the Union. For example the E3 group, formed by France, Germany and the U.K., proved to be a useful mechanism to further the European Union's interests during the Iran nuclear negotiations. In the same vein, the Balkan Contact Group brought the U.K., France, Germany and Italy to the negotiations table, along with great powers such as Russia and the U.S., and played a crucial role in the peace agreements in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, defence clusters, such as NORDEFECO or the E12, foster dialogue, promote consensus among like-minded countries and enhance military cooperation and interoperability by erasing bureaucratic barriers and carrying out joint military planning and exercises.

Final recommendations and conclusions

The European Union is a unique political entity with a hybrid government model that makes the organization half supranational, half intergovernmental. It is precisely the latter that applies to almost every domain in foreign, security and defence policy. When in order to adopt a decision or approve an initiative unanimity is required, the bargaining process can be a headache, especially in club of 27 members where differences are wide and national priorities often contradict others. Although not within this area's remit, this summer negotiations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework can give an idea of how cumbersome this process might be. Therefore, it should be explored:

- Shift from unanimity to qualified majority voting. It could bring some benefits such as a less slow policy-making process, reduce third countries leverage to undermine the Union's foreign policy and encourage negotiations where differences are small. This could certainly help in sanctions policy, due to its binding nature, but it would have little impact in CSDP.

- Nonetheless, it cannot go unnoticed that this could rise reservations among the smaller Member States, which would lose a crucial negotiation tool (their veto power) and because population size would translate into voting power. To allay their concerns, Leonard Schuette notes that bigger countries should employ compensation mechanisms. Should Germany, for instance, find itself isolated in the Council opposing other Member States, it could give its veto up.⁴³

Tackling the other issues aforementioned is a more complex labour insofar as it would require addressing the pillars on which stands the institutional architecture of the Union in defence and foreign policy domains. It would be naïve to think that this situation would change in the short term, so recommendations must be found within the current framework. The European Union is an amalgam of national interests and strategic cultures. It cannot always act with a single voice. These features, alongside the possibility to accomplish other goals through different organizations, limit considerably the EU ability to operate. Therefore, in order to tackle this issue it should be acknowledged that the EU can be regarded as one platform, among others, through which to act in foreign policy. Bearing in mind that European multilateral groups present a valuable opportunity to further the EU's interests, the Union should:

- Work towards a close and fluid cooperation and consultation relationship with these groups in those issues where the Union proves unable to act. The relationships to be established could be build following that of between the Union and the Salzburg Forum, where representatives from the Commission and relevant institutions are "routinely invited for extensive discussions" and views exchanging. Besides, the country holding the rotary presidency keeps relevant EU authorities up to date on the main development in the group⁴⁴
- In the defence field, the Union could facilitate to these groups, in the image of the Berlin Plus agreements,⁴⁵ the deployment of both military and civilian operations by ensuring access to

⁴³ Should the EU make foreign policy decision by majority voting? Leonard Schuette. Centre for European Reform

⁴⁴ Europeanization and regional cooperation initiatives: Austria's participation in the Salzburg Forum and in Central

Defence Cooperation. Patrick Müller. Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, vol. 45(2). 2016

⁴⁵ Signed between NATO and the European Union, it allowed the EU access to NATO facilities and capabilities in order to conduct crisis management operations

established EU assets and command and control structures; namely the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC)⁴⁶

Where it is not possible to act with a single strong voice, the European Union should then strengthen the voice of the groups through which its Member States act.

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⁴⁶ As stated, the MPCC and the CPCC, are command and control structures for the planning and conduct of military and civilian missions.