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Macklin Miezejeski, *Staying warm for the second Cold War: How the EU is defining its own foreign policy* (June 2022)

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# Staying Warm for the Second Cold War:

# How the EU is Defining its Own Foreign Policy

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**Developing the EU's External Policy**

As the European Union (EU) has developed since the 1950s, member states have increasingly aligned their interests both within the organization as well as externally (Bergmann & Niemann, 2018). As the linkages among EU states have deepened, there was a need to develop a system for coordinating external policy. From the Maastricht Treaty came the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which formed the second pillar in the restructuring of the union. With the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 removing the pillar system, the creation of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP) further centralized the role of foreign policy within the EU. (Bergmann & Niemann, 2018) Nonetheless, external action has remained a strictly intergovernmental area within the EU framework (Biedenkopf et al., 2021). This does not suggest that there are no collective interests within the EU, however. Instead, under the umbrella of protection provided by the United States' since the EU's conception, foreign and security policy has often been able to be an afterthought (Thomas, 2013). This also does not suggest a European identity in international politics did not exist, instead, it has been able to focus more on soft power as the United States – often forcibly – promoted Western ideals abroad. This legacy has shaped how the union looks to project itself within the international community and spread its interests through soft power. This was especially true following the end of the Cold War and the US experiencing a moment of unipolarity in international politics (Hyde-Price, 2006).

During the rehabilitation of Eastern Europe from 50 years of authoritarianism, the EU looked at "milieu shaping" in the region, providing soft influence while the US led a hard security approach. The continent then became multipolar as Germany, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States contended for influence internally looking to direct the course of European affairs (Hyde-Price, 2006). This realist perspective, however, has become dated due to the United States' period of unipolarity coming to an end. As new pressures from China and Russia rise, challenging the hegemony of the West, the US has noticeably reduced its role on the global stage (Nye, 2019). This is a moment where the EU must respond and develop a more independent stance away from America's foreign relations. The question is then asked: How can the EU define itself as a distinct actor in international politics?

The prescriptive nature of the research requires first detailing the major issues currently blocking the EU from developing an effective CFSP whereby theoretical perspectives will be offered to consider the salience of each issue. A description of the decision-making procedures and bodies will then be given to show the complexity of navigating external affairs. This will show differing ideas of the sources of conflict as well as possible remedies. A section of a proposed solution is then given

with theoretical and logical backing that will be analyzed concurrently to understand the influence of such a shift in the structure of the bodies handling CFSP. Finally, a conclusion is given that will look ahead to the future of the EU as an independent actor and what it means for the global power dynamic moving forward.

**A Shifting World Order**

Under the Trump Administration, there was a turn towards isolationism due to their anti-globalist politics. Under Biden's presidency, the transatlantic partnership has remained in poor condition making little progress in reversing the isolationist doctrine (Blockmans, 2021). Since the end of the Cold War, the EU has worked to redefine its position in response to a shifting world order; however, this has not always been done efficiently. When the European External Action Service (EEAS) was established in 2010, it was rooted in the liberal world order led by the US. The values of the liberal world order have led to the service being posed to address any threats to the institutions of the West (Jørgensen et al., 2022). However, the power dynamic at a global level has shifted, and as the United States took a smaller role in spreading liberal democratic values and more general forms of soft power under the Trump administration, the EU has reevaluated its place in foreign policy (Nye, 2019; Jørgensen et al., 2022). In the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) of 2016, there was a call for "principled pragmatism" as America's leadership shrinks for the EU to effectively navigate the world order. Ultimately, the EU continues to push a liberal conception of international relations (European Union External Action [EUEA], 2019). Nonetheless, realist conceptions of power have become increasingly relevant as hostility has returned to the global stage. There is a multiplicity of perspectives to take on the EU's development as an international actor. Constructivists are looking at how the Commission is setting up transnational trade and political networks (Shyrokykh & Rimkutė, 2019). Realism has become increasingly relevant through the natural progression of becoming an "ever closer union". With the development of a Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), states are looking to develop how to become more independent actors in global relations. Liberalist and institutionalist perspectives, however, have been a hallmark of studies on the EU given their softer approach to international relations in contrast to America's more "martial" stance (Hyde-Price, 2006; Kaldor, 2012).

Constructivism at points will be considered more in-depth, particularly relating to the EEAS and its troubles projecting a united European vision. Ideas of identity are relevant to the research if the EU looks to project a more distinct yet still wholly Western approach to international politics (Jørgensen et al., 2022). Additionally, the member states themselves may be pressured to be

perceived as being pro-European. This can entail the surrendering of further sovereignty in aspects of foreign policy in order to remain seen as a productive member of the EU (Thomas, 2013).

Despite the relevance of theories, particularly realism as some members of the EU look to strengthen the defense policy, liberalist thinking has been at the heart of the EU's philosophy from the beginning. Institutionalism will provide the framework as it allows an analysis of the individual EU agencies as well as how the organization interacts with other international actors (Biedenkopf et al., 2021). Studying CFSP as an institution allows for an understanding of how agreements are met through the institution and its dynamics within the EU framework. By nature, CFSP and CSDP will be continuously contested. Each government has its interests, traditions, and relations to consider (Chaban & Elgström, 2021). As states such as France and Germany continue to push for further EU integration, it will only make the public more aware of policy decisions and the path designed for external relations. This could potentially disrupt a successful development of not just a *common* foreign policy but a *united* foreign policy. The role of the HRVP as head of the CFSP personifies the complexity of defining an external policy for the EU (Bergmann & Müller, 2021). As will be explained more in-depth below, since the Lisbon Treaty, the HRVP is the aggregate of three past positions, the Commissioner of External Relations, the rotating Presidency, and the High Representative. With the intent of unifying the CFSP under one chair, there are now issues of consistency and politicization of its duties (Okemuo, 2013). The EEAS is a notable victim of the complexity of CFSP. The intergovernmental and public nature of foreign policy debates quickly blocks any united voice for the EU. When communicating with external states, this leads to a level of ennui and inaction from the service, hindering the EU from being able to project an image of a formidable international actor.

**How the EU has realigned its Foreign Policy Intentions**

Given the intergovernmental nature of CFSP, the EU's functioning as an actor in world politics has had wide policy interests that allow for member states to still be able to exercise their own sovereignty. However, in the ENP, the European Commission (hereafter, the Commission) the supranational technical and bureaucratic arm of the EU, has worked to provide a level of transnational governance to peripheral states that will more closely align the nearby governments with EU liberal values (Burlyuk, 2015). By virtue of the role of the HRVP straddling the line between a supranational and intergovernmental position, it has allowed for some CFSP ideas to be able to be spread outside the consent of the European Council in a way that has allowed for the EU to function as a unitary actor. However, the Commission only has authority in sectors concerning trade; a factor of soft power by integrating the economies closer to the EU framework (Shyrokykh & Rimkutė,

2019). Ultimately the core of CFSP is negotiated through the European Council – an EU body composed of the EU member's heads of state or government, the president of the European Council, the President of the Commission, and the HRVP. Due to the majority of treaties requiring unanimity, CFSP is slow (Biedenkopf et al., 2021). Instead, documents such as the EUGS provide broad policy goals while calling on the need of the European Council to take action both in areas of hard power (EUEA, 2019). The Franco-German partnership has led the way in fostering a more complete common security and defense policy (CSDP). Ultimately, it is their view alongside the supranational actors of the EU, notably the Commission and the HRVP that a more united stance on issues of high politics will place Europe in the most optimal position (Bergmann & Müller, 2021). However, smaller states in the EU such as Ireland, Denmark, and Portugal have shown resistance to a more united defense policy, particularly by some states initially refusing to join the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) which enhances military and security cooperation among members (EUEA, 2019).

Interestingly, the HRVP also holds a chair position in the Council of the European Union (hereafter, the Council) alongside the foreign ministers of member states. The High Representative chairs the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) which includes several committees that cover CSDP: the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EU Military Committee (EUMC), and the Civilian Crisis Management Committee (Civcom). There are however questions about the processes of how the various committees come to decisions as many meetings occur behind closed doors leaving the public in question and reducing the level of accountability for FAC. This does not align perfectly with the core liberal democratic values preached by the EU as some argue that secrecy in policy-making inherently contradicts the structure of the organization (Cross, 2018). Additionally, splitting the HRVP's duties among the Commission, the Council and the EEAS has brought into question the efficiency and effectiveness of the CFSP (Marangoni & Vanhoonacker, 2015). However, within the FAC, working behind closed doors has allowed for a noticeably smoother development of the EU's external policies in areas of defense and diplomacy. Notably, EU negotiations are often informal regardless of the context. This allows for states and representatives to come to agreements without the pressures of parliamentary procedures, decorum, and other ceremonial processes delaying policy decisions (Cross, 2018). Escaping the public eye allows for states to negotiate with a reduced number and significance of external parties providing for the opportunity for a clearer set of interests to be debated.

The EUGS is notable for a clearer statement on the need for hard power. In 2012, the EU was involved in deciding to provide peacekeeping operations to Mali. France instead unilaterally launched their own mission with no further explanation provided by the FAC (Okemuo, 2013). This divides the unity of an EU position as it leads to France pursuing their national interests in the region and leads

to a likening of neo-colonialism, where the EU was working with ECOWAS in West Africa to coordinate a response to the security and terrorist threats in Mali. Following missteps such as this, the EUGS outlines the importance of methods to remain united . These include the Council defining the shared external interests of the state as well as becoming more responsive to immediate threats (EUEA, 2019). The latter recalls past erroneous approaches to foreign policy such as the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and a unified stance on the recognition of Kosovo in 2008 (Thomas, 2013).

Since the 2016 Global Strategy Report, there has been increased politicization of CFSP given the nature of delegating national power to a supranational level. A cleavage of globalization has occurred which blocks the EU from being able to fully project its interests. Additionally, Brexit has further fueled dissent about increasing integration as well as questions of just how united the union can be. Research into the contestation of CFSP is only now developing, however, so further understandings are not yet clear (Biedenkopf, 2021).

**Creating a United European Front**

The further integration continues within the EU, the more difficulties arise. This is both due to the inherent resistance to surrendering authority and national sovereignty as well as the contextual factors that have developed. With nationalism and backlash against globalization on the rise, several factors have pushed states away from a further united Europe (Jørgensen et al., 2022). Additionally, the Eurozone crisis of 2009, Brexit, and other miscalculations have threatened more cosmopolitan states such as France and Germany from being able to push a stronger CFSP and CSDP.

Since Trump's distancing from the EU, it has been unclear how they should move forward. Although it has not yet formally occurred, a reestablishing of US-EU relations under Biden functions as a sort of critical juncture for both sides as the partnership will be able to be restructured in a way more prepared for current and future threats of climate change, democratic backsliding, and the rise of China (Blockmans, 2021). China's rise is of particular importance for the EU as they have supplanted the EU as the predominant aid donor and loaning country to Africa. This has altered the EU's strategy for aid. Being one of their major sources of soft power maintaining close relations with many of their former colonies, aid has lost leverage in the 21st century as African states continue to strengthen their economies. China is looking to appeal to the continent through "southern solidarity" and the EU is unable to determine what the best path forward is (Grimm & Hackenesch, 2017).

Given these challenges to the EU developing its identifiable international personality, a restructuring of the CFSP will be necessary to allow for a more complete capacity as an international

actor. Ideally, states would become more cosmopolitan and committed to further synthesizing a common foreign policy. Ultimately, however, centralizing the tasks of the HRVP further and adopting an opt-out approach to international treaties may provide the best path for the EU as an independent actor at the international level.

From an institutionalist perspective, the current structuring of the CFSP and CSDP is inefficient and unclear to allow for effective foreign policy. Due to the HRVP essentially straddling three main functions as a vice president within the Commission, a member of the Council, and head of the EEAS and European Defense Agency (EDA) – as part of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) – there are difficulties in efficiently crafting foreign policy (Okemuo, 2013). Many states are hesitant to create a post more closely resembling a foreign minister, thus, centralizing the role under the Council could appease Eurosceptics due to the intergovernmental nature of the body (Biedenkopf et al., 2021). The EEAS being integrated into the Council would provide further oversight by the member states. Combining with the FAC would facilitate dialogue for the two. The FAC has already demonstrated a level of efficiency through informal and closed-door negotiations that the EEAS could follow. This would allow the EU to develop its foreign policy while the EEAS can function as the liaison in external relations.

The HRVP's *ex-officio* role in the Commission should stand as it allows the position to still have the power to draft legislation. Additionally, this will provide the opportunity for PESCO to move over to the Commission in the future. This prospect should not be overlooked, throughout the development of the EU, tasks, and duties have initially started at the intergovernmental level and then shifted to the supranational. Although this could appear as a step backward from what the Lisbon treaty formalized, there have been apparent difficulties in the consistency of the position and being able to transfer responsibilities and tasks between the three main bodies that the HRVP oversees. However, in contrast to the pre-Lisbon structure, CFSP (and by extension, CSDP) would remain in place under the HRVP, it would, however, allow for a clearer dialogue to occur and to place less significance upon the individual managing relations among the EU agencies and more upon the responsibilities relevant to functioning as the High Representative for the EU. Placing all of the duties within the Commission would be ideal in the ability to mimic the structure of a foreign ministry, ultimately the realities of the European landscape block any such outcome for the time being.

Nonetheless, the solution presented would lead to fewer questions about the consistency of the CFSP. There would be fewer opportunities for politicization and contestation of policies and states would be able to provide input early in the process. This early input is fundamental to facilitating a common policy front (Marangoni & Vanhoonacker, 2015). The FAC's tendency to be

secretive in the name of good governance has been effective thus far and would allow any disagreements to be remedied early in the process. The policies devised under the FAC along with the valuable insight from the two main PESCO bodies would flow more smoothly into the Commission where legislation could be drafted.

A major obstacle in such an endeavor, however, is that some have identified “four Europes'': A thin-Europe whereby the EU functions more as a mediator and liaison rather than the supranational functions it holds now, this idea, however, has little support; a thick-Europe that would seek to cultivate a European identity, an idea that recalls racial superiority claims of the past; a parochial-Europe that is the antithesis of the EU and seeks to return all sovereignty to the nation-state; and a global-Europe that seeks for the EU to look beyond the continent as an actor in the world and to be more cosmopolitan in nature (Jørgensen et al., 2022). No state nor EU official is singularly in favor of any of these models of Europe. However, each influences how the EEAS portrays the EU and the level of politicization found within the CFSP. Somewhere along a thick-thin continuum lies this solution. As it can more closely unify Europe in foreign policy, there are aspects of the thick model. However, placing more of an intergovernmental emphasis on the diplomatic aspects of the CFSP would be in line with supporters of the thin model. This also aligns with a potentially more cosmopolitan perception of the EU. Supranational authority is more similar to EU cosmopolitanism, however, it would allow for states to be able to voice their interests in a way that will allow for the great European interests to take shape.

Proponents in each member state of these different models of Europe can effectively alter any new treaties or other methods of restructuring the CFSP. For a solution such as this to be implemented, states in favor of further integration, such as France or Germany, will need to find ways to appeal to states leaning closer to a vision of a parochial or a thin Europe. These can be through expressing the benefits of a more common security policy in light of the changing world order. With the reduced presence of the US, the rise of China, and the return of Russia, the joint gains achieved through further unifying the EU may be useful. Divisions are currently forming within the EU, states such as Hungary, and Poland are separating themselves culturally from many of the more pro-globalization states of the EU (Bergmann & Müller, 2021). However, placing the EEAS as a more intergovernmental body could appeal to their desire of retaining sovereignty. An approach in which the EEAS can articulate competing interests from member states more efficiently will assist in the EU further developing an international personality.

This does not suggest that the EU would immediately have a more identifiable, idiosyncratic external policy, however, it would reduce the red tape and politicking that has notoriously slowed

the responsiveness of the EU in external matters. Despite the common view of the cleavage of cosmopolitanism splitting member states between a supranational or intergovernmental EU, the idea of "an ever closer union" continues to prove to fit. Recently, Denmark, the last member state outside of the CSDP, passed a referendum in which the people voted to join after initially opting out of the institution. This is understood to be in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine earlier in 2022. Denmark, however, is already a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which indicates the desire for the country to move towards a more European approach to defense rather than relying only on the transatlantic alliance. Although increased parties in PESCO can hinder cooperation, it is ultimately indicative of essentially the entirety of the EU being prepared to align its defense in a way that will be lucid and identifiable in the international context (Bergmann & Müller, 2021). If the EU harnesses its diversity of opinion in an effective manner such as this, then the states' could be potentially more receptive to further integration in the future. Past instances of listening to member states have been of benefit, particularly Ireland being able to hold a second referendum for the Lisbon Treaty to ensure that their neutrality could be upheld and France during the Empty Chair Crisis (Thomas, 2013). Both cases were in favor of intergovernmentalism over supranationalism. However, through the success of intergovernmentalism, the states became more inclined to aspects of further integration later on. Ultimately, a difference of opinion is natural, if the EU can escape the scrutiny of the public through informal meetings in a manner that still protects democratic values, then it is a worthy pursuit.

**The EU Looking Ahead**

There is no clear, singular solution to the EU defining itself as an independent actor in international politics. Any attempts to deviate from the path of dependency set out by the Lisbon Treaty will inevitably face backlash and politicization for the state's interests. It would be naive to think this would only have an effect on simplifying the role of the HRVP and reducing the inefficiencies in the CFSP. This restructuring extends beyond the EU-level context and into how the organization would be able to position itself in a way that is more advantageous on the global stage. Consistency and politicization have been the two main factors hindering the EU from moving unilaterally on foreign policy. Placing the EEAS under the FAC will allow for member states' foreign ministries to work in a more unified manner as they will have a clearer control of EU diplomacy. The HRVP should function more in line with its name: as a representative, not a manager of competing interests.

When considering the hypothetical, how the global power dynamic will be influenced is just as relevant. The transatlantic partnership, despite currently being under a state of duress, is not an institution to disappear quickly. The US will continue to push its doctrine of spreading Western values through the assistance of the EU and NATO. However, if the EU can disambiguate its actions as a foreign actor, it will be more equipped to face the nascent cold war developing between the US and China. The EU has its own interests, particularly with its relations in Africa. These will be more effectively handled if they can further differentiate their global strategy.

How the EU and the rest of the West move forward as paradigms evolve is yet to be defined. Academically, further prescriptive investigations into how to improve the EU's ability to act unilaterally in foreign affairs in consideration of the political landscape surrounding further integration. Socially, further debates and discussions among member states' key actors as well as public discourse are required to further understand how the EU should function externally in a manner that will be mutually beneficial for all member states. The effects of the Russian invasion remain to be seen, however, earlier responses have indicated a tightening of interests among EU members has been apparent. The return of a threat from the east has functioned as a critical juncture with many in the European public supporting a stronger defense policy in their countries.

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