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Three Doctrines on European Foreign Policy

According to numerous newspaper articles, the first victim of the war over Iraq was the vision of the European Union as a global actor. The articles claimed that the EU's foreign policy had become a pile of „good intentions rubble“ (Burkard Schmitt, *International Herald Tribune*, 13 February 2003). Similarly, the Commissioner for external affairs, Chris Patten, thought the Iraq issue had „blown apart Europe's ambitions to be a global player“, and that „the handling of the Iraq issue has been seriously damaging for the CFSP“ (*The Independent*, 10 March 2003). According to a poll, officials in European institutions thought that the CFSP had been „destroyed beyond repair“ (*European Voice*, 27 March – 2 April 2003).

These and many similar interpretations suggest it was common wisdom that the EU's foreign policy had been destroyed. This may seem a logical conclusion to draw, since, as most readers will remember, the spring 2003 was characterized by fundamental disagreement, lack of trust, and mutual accusations.¹ On the other hand, this climate of distrust is something that routinely develops during a major international crisis. And as a rule, foreign policy is resurrected phoenix-like shortly after.

How is it possible for a policy to live such a harsh life? Has the policy not really been destroyed? Or has the policy never really (re-)appeared? This article aims to explore these issues. The approach will be a critical examination of three examples of doctrinal thinking, so called because each doctrine is built on the basis of implicit assumptions, intuitive comparison, propositions that are taken for granted or unquestioned points of departure. These dimensions of doctrinal thinking have very important ramifications for our understanding of the qualities of the EU's foreign policy. The three doctrines are

¹ It is not very comforting that the same words can be used to characterize relations in NATO and in the UN Security Council. Furthermore, it is equally disconcerting to note that American diplomacy has also been wrecked, in the sense that in March 2003 the US were incapable of orchestrating a so-called moral majority in the UN Security Council.

- the ED doctrine (Existence Denied),
- the DEBF doctrine (Does Exist But Failure) and
- the LHBWA doctrine (Look How Big We Are).

The ED doctrine (Existence Denied)

Most readers of this article also read newspapers and therefore know that editors, commentators, and journalists are prone to believe that the EU has *no* foreign policy. According to them, it is quite simple: there is no such thing. Some years ago, an article in a Toronto newspaper asked, „Where has Europe’s power gone?“ (*The Globe & Mail*, 9 March 1996), implicitly suggesting that Europe has no power. A more recent example is William Pfaff writing: „the EU has no *foreign policy* itself, other than a generalized commitment to international law and multilateral solutions“ (*International Herald Tribune*, 16 October 2002). A somewhat similar opinion can be found in Judy Dempsey’s portrait of Javier Solana (*Financial Times*, 12-13 July 2003). These are just examples. However, searching the media systematically leads one to conclude that there are numerous examples of *denying* the existence of an EU foreign policy. In fact, there is an entire community of nay-sayers. But journalists do what they probably have to do. They focus on spectacular, breaking news, then they note the absence of an EU policy and draw conclusions accordingly. When they write background news analyses, they consult the archive and note the many times they have concluded that the EU has no policy. Logically, a pattern emerges. How can they possibly reach a different conclusion?

But it is not only the media where one can find the doctrine. It is also very much present in academic writings. On the bookshelves of university libraries there are plenty of studies of *national* foreign policy, written as if the EU did not exist. The possible existence of an EU foreign policy is not even contemplated, and the possible impact of the EU on national foreign policies is left unexamined. A similar result is reached if, on the basis of theoretical assumptions, only *great powers* are regarded worthy of attention. In such a context, the EU is most often *not* even considered – and if considered, dismissed as *irrelevant*. On the basis of one such theoretical stance, it is well-known that Kenneth Waltz once concluded: „Denmark doesn’t matter.“ Concerning other minor EU member states, he would have reached similar conclusions and, notably, in his theoretical universe, the EU counts as something similar to an international institution, i.e., an arena where real actors (read great powers) play real games (see also Mearsheimer 2003).

As we have seen, the ED-doctrine can be found in the media and in academic writings. What about *officials* working in foreign ministries or EU institutions? Having told diplomats about my research interest in EU foreign policy, I have heard different kinds of responses. A young Dutch diplomat commented: „I didn’t know we had one“ – before he went on to criticise my naïve belief in rhetoric. A

European Commission official said: „But the European Commission is not in the cockpit of that policy-area, so there cannot be a *truly* European foreign policy.“ She continued by describing the necessity of institutional reform. This kind of reasoning is very representative of a common Commission self-image, as the true carrier of the European torch. In other words, it is implicitly assumed that only the Commission is capable of launching genuine European policies, including foreign policy. Finally, an old fox in the London Foreign Office was brief and caustic in his response: „You are working on that Euro-crap?“ Then he slipped into a reflective mode: „It was probably in this building the bombardment of Copenhagen was planned.“

There is a tendency in the media and among academics and officials to believe that there is no such thing as an EU foreign policy, thus it comes as no surprise that the policy seems to be living through a kind of perpetual existential crisis. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to conclude that we are witnessing a massive collective misperception. Analysts adhering to the ED-doctrine are not completely out of touch with current European events. Therefore, I am *not* going to argue that there is nothing phantom-like about the EU’s foreign policy or that it has always existed in all thinkable foreign policy issue areas. Did the EU have a policy on Iraq? *No*, certainly not.² Does the EU have a policy on strategic military developments in the Far East? No way. In many respects, the Far East is beyond the EU’s horizon. European aircraft carriers do not plough the waters of the South China Sea. Does the EU have a policy on current problems concerning relations between Israel and Palestine? I think it does, but I also think it *does not matter*, at least not alone. As a member of the so-called Quartet, the EU plays a minor role. So, what *do* I argue? Simply, that even though the policy is at times phantom-like, it does exist nonetheless. And sometimes, it even *matters*, in *some* issue areas. Enlargement, trade, and international environmental policies come to mind. Furthermore, in balanced, unbiased studies there is a significant difference between conviction and conclusion, i.e., between dogma and reality. Probably, the main problem is that most followers of the ED-doctrine do not really attempt to question their own premises, analyses, or findings.

The DEBF-Doctrine (Does Exist But Failure)

Even if the ED doctrine is widespread, not everything operates within its framework. Some firmly believe that an EU foreign policy does exist. However, they also claim that – time and again – it has been a policy of *failure*. Hence, they believe in the DEBF-doctrine. In the following, I will give three examples.

² European Dis-union cannot achieve much. But France, Germany, and the UK did play a certain role in the diplomatic game leading to war.

The first example concerns an EU role in security and defence. According to two American defence analysts, the defence dimension of the EU has to be a failure, because the EU does not possess aircraft carrier battle groups. When reading their analysis, we learn that among Europe's many weaknesses, „the most serious (...) stems from a lack of fleet carriers and a satisfactory airlift wing“ (Birch and Scott 1993, 273-274). A critical response would point out that the two defence specialists seem not to take into consideration the rather modest objectives of the EU defence project. It is not to *wage* and *win* wars but to engage in peace support operations. It is well known that most peace support operations do not need aircraft carrier battle groups.³ In other words, Birch and Scott do not compare ends and means but compare the EU to the US, and because the EU is lacking the US 'big hammer', EU military action has to end in failure.

The second example concerns the mode of decision-making. According to this example, the EU foreign policy must be a failure because it is intergovernmental, not supranational. This is a typical verdict of European Commission officials and European federalists respectively. A critical response would point out that NATO has never been deemed a failure, even though it has been intergovernmental from the very beginning. Intergovernmentalism does not require a rotating Presidency or the absence of a general secretary, yet for a long time EU member states concluded they could afford the luxury of keeping the former while avoiding the latter institutional asset. Furthermore, it should be noted that only the CFSP and ESDP parts of EU foreign policy are intergovernmental, whereas important policies such as trade, development, and enlargement are conducted in a supranational mode.

The third example is provided by Robert Kagan, who has characterized the CFSP with the following words: „The truth is that EU foreign policy is probably the most anemic of all the products of European integration.“ For Kagan, Europe is from Venus, living in a postmodern paradise, fully unaware of cruel conditions in the Hobbesian world. The EU is therefore, by definition, incapable of conducting a real, non-anemic foreign policy (Kagan, 2002, 20; see also 2003).

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is probably necessary to emphasise that I do not argue that there have been no failures, or, that EU foreign policy making has been one long row of successes. To argue along such lines would be both *foolish* and *apologetic*. I have no intention of representing either position, so let me briefly add an obvious candidate to the nomination of the EU's worst policy failures.

The case of the Western Balkans. Concerning the EU's policy-making vis-à-vis the break-up of Yugoslavia, it has been common to argue, „the policy doesn't work, so it doesn't exist“, i.e. claiming that the EU had no policy, thus seemingly

³ However, deployment of the rather small European aircraft carriers has happened, for instance during conflicts in former Yugoslavia (see Jørgensen 1997).

confirming the ED doctrine. I disagree with that view, arguing that the case belongs to the category of policy failures. Clearly, the EU had a policy, built on five pillars: i) diplomatic mediation; ii) deployment of lightly armed UNPROFOR forces; iii) economic sanctions/carrots; iv) non-employment of military power; and cynical old European-style *Realpolitik*. In terms of *ending* the conflict, it was an *unsuccessful* policy – a failure. Characterised by the *absence* of a military-backed *process* of coercive diplomacy, it was a *dead-end policy*. A case of *mission impossible*. In fact, it was very close to becoming the worst foreign policy failure the EU has ever experienced. Consider the exit option back in July 1995. It has been estimated that rescuing 10,000 largely European UNPROFOR forces would have required 25,000 American troops. What a humiliating mess such an operation would have been. Instead, UNPROFOR was reinforced, NATO airpower was used and preconditions for the Richard Holbrooke-brokered Dayton peace agreement were in place. To sum up, the EU clearly had a policy but it is equally clear that the EU experienced a policy failure.

Indeed, many more *cases of failure* could be mentioned. This should be fully uncontested. Instead I will point out six significant „non-failures“, thus emphasizing the counterclaim that, actually, we have more EU foreign policy than many are ready to acknowledge. We have even seen some cases of success and some examples of EU global leadership.

Firstly, the influence of the EU in UN General Assembly politics has increased during the 1990s and the EU now plays a significant role in it. To a degree, the rise of the EU reflects the decline of US interest in the UN. However, rescuing the UN from institutional decay is a frightening challenge. The EU has yet to demonstrate that it has leadership capabilities to carry such an enormous burden.

Secondly, the EU has been responsible for peacekeeping operations in Macedonia and Congo. The operation in Macedonia was even launched when the crisis over Iraq was at its peak, that is, when it was claimed that the CFSP had been seriously damaged – if not disappeared. The EU also runs a police operation in Bosnia and it is in the cards that eventually the EU will take over military operations in Bosnia as well. Obviously, commanding such operations does not amount to a major military role – which the EU has never aspired in the first place. Yet the examples do suggest that the EU has accepted responsibility for certain aspects of European security – and Europe is not an insignificant part of the world.

Despite fierce opposition from the US, the EU continued sponsorship of both the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the Kyoto Protocol. Agreements have been signed and the ICC was inaugurated (July 2003). US attempts at undermining common EU policies have been rebuffed.

In September 2003, the Palestinian politician Qurai asked for US and EU guarantees when he contemplated accepting the offer of becoming Palestinian

Prime Minister. Why should he ask for EU „protection“ if he did not expect to gain something from an EU guarantee?⁴

Concerning enlargement, one prominent observer introduced his analysis by noting that the „most effective instrument of the European Union’s common foreign policy over the past 25 years has been the promise of enlargement“ (Wallace 2003). When it comes to membership, it is well known that the EU is a very demanding institution. In order to make accession countries fully Euro-compatible, they have to change a substantial number of domestic institutions, policies, and legislation. Admittedly, the enlargement instrument is an unusual foreign policy instrument, but it seems to work. The contours of a neighbourhood policy suggest that the EU is aware that in the long run it will run out of targets. Nonetheless, when reaching the end of the enlargement process, the EU has, by means of enlargement policies, been involved in upgrading an entire continent. Not many (fully) recognised foreign policy actors can claim to have achieved such results.

Within the framework of the WTO, the EU and the US have provided global leadership in trade negotiations.⁵ If we take our point of departure in the ED and DEBF doctrines, this EU global leadership role is quite an accomplishment. Nonetheless, journalists, diplomats, and academics all report that the leadership role is there, only to conclude in their next article that the EU plays no role in foreign policy.

Regarding competition policy, quite dramatic changes are underway. Within this area the European Commission has its perhaps strongest powers. In order to meet the challenges of globalisation, a massive process of restructuring has been launched, implying that the European Commission delegate some of its powers back to the national level and, thus freed from a substantial administrative burden, become a truly powerful player at the global level. It remains to be seen whether the operation will be successful or not.

Clearly, this list of non-failures could also become much longer. However, there is no need to use more space on this issue. The point I am trying to make should be clear by now, namely that a balanced analysis of the EU’s absences and presences on the global scene raises some serious doubts about quick conclusions regarding the qualities of the EU’s international activities. In other words, a comprehensive balance sheet would present a much more complex picture than the DEBF-doctrine suggests.

⁴ Against this, one can ask whether the EU’s check-book diplomacy and modest role in the Quartet amount to a coherent policy.

⁵ The meagre outcome of the WTO 2003 meeting in Cancun, however, demonstrated that the US and the EU are not the only players in the WTO game.

The LHBWA-Doctrine (Look How Big We Are)

In recent years, it has become increasingly popular to think along the lines of the LHBWA doctrine. It has been pointed out that the EU represents 26 per cent of world GDP and constitutes the largest trading block in the world. Furthermore, the EU and member states combined provide a significant portion of world development aid; a significant portion of troops to peace-support operations, including UN peacekeeping operations; that the EU virtually runs post-conflict countries like Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo. Finally, the EU and member states have more *diplomats* than any other region and more soldiers than the US. Several other examples could have been listed. However, in the current context the facts as such are not significant. Rather, their significance is derived from their function. Usually, aggregated data such as that mentioned function as a prelude to the argument that, given such gravity, the EU *ought to* play a much more prominent role in contemporary world politics (as if global leaders should ask for permission).

In my view, we can look at such normative statements in at least three ways. The first option is to note the presence of *aspiration* to become a global player. No single member state can possibly expect to ever reach a similar level of aspiration, except, obviously, cases when processes of mental self-aggrandisement are running ahead of realities. In the case of the EU, aspiration is at times accompanied by slightly pathetic complaints about the lack of influence, at times connected to wishes to be *recognised* as a global player. One example suffices: „We have put so much money into the Palestinian Authority and we have *hardly any influence*.“

The second option is to acknowledge not only the aspirations and desires for recognition but also the presence of a material basis for playing a global role. In other words, the aggregated data is not made up. It represents a reality which is often not recognised because we are not used to look at things this way. In a Kantian language, the EU has capabilities *an sich* but only to a degree *für sich*. In short, the EU has *great* potential.

However, and this is where the third option comes in, one cannot expect that the accumulated material basis of politics or its aspirations or potential can be automatically translated into influence or power. Instead, it seems that the capability to translate potential into accomplishment is falling far behind aspirations. Why is that the case? Some may think that new hardware solutions are required. I tend to agree. It could be traditional solutions in terms of new institutional design. The present combination of foreign ministries and EU institutions has proved incapable of delivering sufficient value for money. Similarly, European defence has a hopeless cost-benefit balance. Communication networks among policy-makers are obsolete. The IGC 2003-04 has prepared new treaty provisions. For the first time ever, treaty designers have explicitly mentioned an EU foreign minister. The idea is to merge the positions presently occupied by Javier Solana

and Chris Patten. The current problem is that Solana represents the position of the Council. He can travel, give talks, present his opinions and so on. But the back-up for doing what he does is weakly developed institutionally (e.g. a budget of about 48 million EUR). It is Patten who has a diplomatic service at his disposal – some 2,700 people; furthermore, a budget of around 700 million Euros a year. In other words, the proposed fusion is about merging political authority with administrative means and letting the two levels contribute to organisational and political synergies. It is a proposal that makes sense. In short, institutional reform is a precondition for more international clout.

But hardware solutions would be insufficient – and they would be wrong to use to solve problems of a different kind, for instance *software* problems. Which kind of software? Software solutions are necessary in terms of ways of thinking foreign policy, political-strategic visions of what the EU should be in the 21st century, and public philosophies, guiding policy-making in terms of values and principles.

What would it take to upgrade European foreign policy? If the goal is to carry the EU towards a global leadership role, it is fairly easy to specify the steps that need be taken. But there are some pitfalls along the road, so I will present two contradictory arguments. The first argument begins with a presumably well known plea: „Send more money, diplomats, soldiers, and institutions.“ According to this line of thinking, it is not without costs to be a key player at the global level. In this context, note that during the last decade the budget for the EU’s international activities has been steadily increasing. A global leader will have to meet all sorts of demands for money; for example, it would have to keep collapses states alive, offer financial incentives to achieve its goals, etc. Furthermore, the process of turning global visions into reality needs skilled people to do it: diplomats to handle communication, negotiate, and bargain on behalf of the Union. Sometimes diplomacy works better if backed by a credible military force. Soldiers are therefore necessary to constitute such a force. If we look at all the crises around the world calling for Petersberg tasks missions, the conclusion is the same: send more skilled soldiers. Finally, given that the present institutional set-up does not produce optimal political outcomes, a need for more institutions seems relevant. To sum up, the intuitive argument leads one to expect the following: „it’s gonna be expensive.“

According to the second argument, the counterargument, the EU does not need more money, diplomats, soldiers, or institutions. On the contrary; less is potentially more. A few examples illustrate this point. Consider development assistance. Combined, the EU and its member states spend some 85 billion Euros annually, making the EU the (single) biggest aid provider in the world. Is this amount of money translated into political power in global development institutions like the World Bank, the IMF, or the UN? Is it likely that an even bigger budget would make this happen? Quite a few people would have their severe doubts. In

other words, the EU and its member states should demonstrate that they are capable of translating economic assets into political power, that is, they should demonstrate the capacity to act as a structural leader.

Concerning diplomats, it is a fact that Europe has some 45 thousands diplomats working around the world. In Washington, you will find around a thousands European diplomats. The European Commission runs the fourth largest diplomatic service in the world. Does this gigantic workforce deliver the assets it takes to be or become a global key player? Could the governance of diplomatic services be greatly improved or made more efficient? Perhaps this could even be accomplished with fewer diplomats. Perhaps, private sector strategies for „lean production“ could be employed. Put differently, the EU and member states have opted for the possibly most expensive solution, an arrangement where many tasks are not only duplicated but performed as if member states were not constituent parts of a union. Therefore each member state runs its own diplomatic service (to the degree they each can afford and have aspiration for it). On top of this we have the EU institutions, in the various modes of integration that have developed (inter-governmental and supranational).

Concerning Europe's armed forces, two words summarise developments after the end of the Cold War: restructuring, and hot peace. Nonetheless, Europe's armed forces remain over-staffed and less capable than demands require. In short: less could potentially be better.

Conclusion and Perspectives

The inevitable conclusion is that EU foreign policy has evolved during the last 30–40 years. When precisely it was launched depends on which aspect we are talking about. This kind of specifications should be greatly welcome to studies of EU foreign policy and substitute general, sweeping statements about the essence of the EU and its foreign policy. The notion „EU foreign policy“ is probably best described as a cluster concept comprising the following issue areas: Enlargement policies, External economic policies, Developmental policies, CFSP-policies (sometimes drawing on first and third pillar instruments), ESDP-policies, Monetary policies, Grotian policies (promotion of human rights and democracy).

Furthermore, each doctrine illuminates important aspects of contemporary European foreign policy, yet claims wrongly to represent the entire picture. Therefore, when assessing the qualities of this policy, it is useful always to think twice, asking ourselves: Who is writing? Are there any implicit assumptions, comparisons, or agendas detectable? Does the shadow of the observer have an impact on the observed? Such a procedure is similar to the procedure we should use for any other foreign policy.

Finally, EU foreign policy is more than a phantom, sometimes *less* than real, yet quite often *more* real than the ED doctrine assumes and more successful than

the DEBF doctrine suggests. It has proven significantly more difficult to conduct the policy than the LHBWA doctrine claims. This said, it is likely that the study of EU foreign policy remains a highly contested field. The EU's role in the world constitutes a real challenge to understand and is therefore really exciting to study.

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