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Review - Debating European Security and Defense Policy

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STEFAN GÄNZLE, FEB 5 2015

Debating European Security and Defense Policy: Understanding the Complexity

By: Maxime Larivé

Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2014.

Since the inception of the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) in 1998, a considerable body of scholarship has developed assessing the depth and breadth of 'EU actorness'[1] on the global stage. Conceptually, CSDP is a critical part of the European Union's foreign policy (EUF). In short, EUFP embraces both sets of external policies – ranging from development and trade policy to civilian-military action – at a *horizontal* level, as well as embracing the different constituent parts of the EU's multi-level governance system – including, for example, member states and EU institutions – at a *vertical* level. Although supranational modes of decision-making have never played a significant role in most EUFP (with the notable exception of trade and commercial policy), EUFP actors and policies have always been subject to different logics and jurisdictions of decision-making. This, in a nutshell, is the foundation of the complex architecture of EUFP in general and of CSDP in particular. Throughout the entire history of EUFP (which, interestingly, has its origins in the 1954 policy failure of the EDC[2]), an impermeable boundary has endured between the member states and the European Union in matters pertaining to foreign, security and defense policy.

The member states – in particular the 'Big Three', France, Germany and the United Kingdom – have stood (increasingly) firm in order to defend of the special rights bestowed by their individual capacities in foreign policy. It is only with the Treaty of Lisbon, with the newly modeled post of the High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) and the creation of a European diplomatic service in its own rights – made up of officials from EU institutions and temporarily assigned national diplomats – that the EU has started to embark on a fascinating and perhaps experimental path towards gradual bureaucratic transformation fostered by institutional boundary-spanning (e.g. between the Council and the Commission as well as the member states). Whether this policy innovation may ultimately turn the European Union into a more coherent, efficient and effective global actor remains to be seen. Looking at more recent literature and research, however, it is safe to conclude that a good dose of skepticism has been injected into many scholars and experts of EUFP. This is in stark contrast to the literature that was dedicated to the study of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and later CSDP – following the St. Malo meeting between Jacques Chirac and Tony Blair in 1998 –, subsequently enriched by analyses of 'Europeanization' of member states' national foreign policies, an analytical lens that started to be applied in order to understand the impact of European integration on public policy (and later foreign policy) in EU member states. This overall positive (if not optimistic) spin on the subject in the late-1990s and early 2000s faded in the run-up to the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, as Jolyon Howorth, one of the doyens of EUFP, correctly observes in his foreword to the book. Today, studies on EUFP tend to exhibit a strong bent towards the public administration and internal dynamics of the EU's new diplomatic bureaucracy, the European External Action Service.

Maxime Larivé's book addresses, almost in class-room style, some of the main achievements and shortcomings hands-on, rather than discussing the history of the European Security and Defense Policy's development. After all, it is the ESDP that exposes all key challenges to coherence of action – at the level of both actors and policies – and

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where we can study in an almost exemplary way one of those areas that is most critical to member states' sovereignty: defense.

The book is structured in three sections, focusing on (1) theoretical approaches to ESDP (neo-realism, neo-liberalism and social constructivism), (2) the political context that has embraced ESDP historically and (3) a theoretically informed understanding of key actors in ESDP, such as EU institutions and the member states. Larivé walks the reader through a set of ten core questions, organized in chapters. These questions, such as for instance the ones on the explanatory power of neo-realism vs. neo-liberalism in accounting for non-integration in defense policy, or on whether or not the EU has a global strategy, are explored via a "yes or no" debate rather than answered straightforwardly. This is done in a very clear, succinct and balanced way; the author also provides a short summary of his main arguments at the end of each chapter – although it might have been advantageous to explore some of the debates in some more analytical depth. In particular, it might have been worthwhile to explore what it means for theorizing EU foreign policy in general if the grand theories of International Relations fail at capturing the 'nature of the beast' in full? Is this a particular case calling for bold moves beyond established paradigms and pursue research questions based on 'analytical eclecticism'[3]? Given its institutional complexity it might also be interesting to explore ESDP through the lens of adjacent disciplines rooted for instance in Comparative Politics, such as for instance public administration or multi-level governance approaches.

Each chapter concludes with a set of questions which may be used in a classroom – presumably at the upper-BA or first-year MA level in political science or European Studies. At times, I felt the need to move from debate towards analysis and self-reflection: what does it ultimately mean that core paradigms of International Relations routinely fail to explain core driving forces of integration? Are our concepts of states and international systems adequately defined to capture the ramifications of political integration in the field of 'high politics'? Some of these exercises are done in the concluding section, where Larivé reflects on eight issues that are likely to determine the further development of ESDP, such as the political commitment of the EU member states, in particular the Big Three regarding further integration, or the increasing power and influence of the now not so 'new' member states. In any case, such an approach might perhaps have produced a different kind of book altogether, and might have been beyond the ambitions of the author.

When it comes to its core intention of drawing International Relations and European Studies closer together in very practical and pedagogical terms, this book is certainly likely to find its way onto the shelves of IR instructors focusing on that area of European integration that has managed to escape deep integration for quite some time, despite mass support across EU member states.

Notes

[1] See for example: Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, *The European Union as Global Actor*, (New York: Routledge, 2nd edition, 2006); Stephan Keukeleire and Tom Delreux, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd ed, 2014); Michael E. Smith, *Europe's Foreign and Security Policy: The Institutionalization of Cooperation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[2] The EDC (European Defence Community) would have entailed the creation of a pan-European defence force, pooling resources from all initial members of the European Coal and Steel Community of 1951/52 (France, Italy, BeNeLux countries, and West Germany).

[3] See Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms. Analytical Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

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