

Review - The European Union in the Security of Europe

Written by Nicola Chelotti

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NICOLA CHELOTTI, OCT 15 2012

The European Union Security in the Security of Europe: From Cold War to Terror War

By: Steve Marsh and Wyn Rees

Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011

Since the end of the Cold War the European Union (EU) has emerged as an increasingly important security actor in international politics, and in particular, in the European context. The EU has taken many political initiatives in the region – from Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean, from the Western Balkans to Russia –, and backed them with a wide range of tools (economic, diplomatic, civilian, commercial, aid, and more recently, also military). Investigating what the EU has achieved and to what extent it was able to bring security to Europe is the declared objective of this book. *The European Union in the Security of Europe. From Cold War to Terror War* offers the reader a comprehensive overview of the EU's role as a security provider in Europe, and is surely a valuable addition to the growing literature on EU external relations. If the main findings of the book – the EU is an increasing important actor in the region, especially when it can use conditionality, as in the case of the Central and Eastern European countries, but it still lacks the institutional arrangements, additional capabilities and political will which impede the full realization of its potential – will not surprise the careful student of EU foreign policy, since they confirm and reflect the general consensus on the strengths and limits of the EU's action in international affairs. What will surely appeal to scholars

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and observers alike is the vast of information the two authors collected to provide very insightful analysis of EU security policies in Europe. The book is extremely rich and well-documented, with an extensive use of primary documents (along with secondary literature) – which is also reflected in an equally rich bibliography, conveniently divided in several sections (official reports and documents; speeches; books; book chapters; articles; paper and reports; and newspaper articles).

The book is coherently and convincingly structured. The introduction sets up the themes for analysis and argues for a broader security agenda – which would include poverty and disease, environmental problems, immigration, energy and resource insecurity, along with more traditional military threats. This in turn requires that the EU develops and uses instruments (and engages in their coordination) across different policy regimes, with different legal and political requirements and involvement of different institutions and budgetary lines (chapter 1). Consequently, the next two chapters investigate both the EU's internal and external security tools. Chapter 2 traces the progressive institutionalization of immigration and asylum, drug trafficking, counter-terrorist policies into the EU agenda, while chapter 3 introduces EU development and commercial policy, and then concentrates on more traditional foreign policy, the acquisition of a EU military arm and of a Security Strategy, as well as the complex and contradictory relationship with NATO in the European security architecture. However, in order to understand the space of manoeuvre the EU has in the European security area, and the context of its policy initiatives, the two major regional powers and their security frameworks are discussed. Chapter 4 focuses on the United States and concludes that, despite its political priorities have shifted to Asia and the Pacific, America still remains the “indispensable nation” in helping the EU to cope with security threats in Europe. Chapter 5 analyses EU-Russia relations in the post-Cold War period, and reveals that while Russia has reasserted itself as a major power in Europe, the EU struggles to find a coherent and effective strategy towards Russia, given also its status as a major energy importer and the diverging interests of its member states.

The rest of the book connects EU internal and external policy instruments and the wider regional context to explore how the EU provides security in three different geographical areas. Chapter 6 shows that the 2004-07 enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe has been arguably the biggest (though not unqualified) success in EU foreign policy, and conditionality is a powerful tool at the EU's disposal. Less positive is the assessment in the other two cases. While the Western Balkans, amid difficulties, false steps and misunderstandings is a top priority area for the EU, the achievements in the Eastern arc and Southern Caucasus are more limited – due also to the continued military, political and economic presence of Russia (chapter 7). Finally, the Mediterranean region has increasingly become a crucial security theatre for Europe, where immigration, energy, environment, terrorism and organised crime are added to military and also nuclear threats. However, the policy frameworks envisaged by the EU – from the Barcelona Process to the Union for the Mediterranean – have achieved little results, and the EU impact in the region has been limited (chapter 8).

Overall, the book truly provides a sound and detailed account of the EU's performance as security provider in Europe, and is very insightful in delineating the rationale, as well as the main problems, behind EU's policy decisions. Less appealing the book will appear instead to those students who search for more theoretical explanations of the EU's external action (“The book does not seek to theorise the EU as a security actor or to offer prescriptions for its developments”, p. 14), or simply would ask more “why” questions. In this vein, it is not always clear why and under what conditions the EU was able to play a prominent role vis-à-vis Russia or United States or in the three above-mentioned geographical areas, or vice versa, why it failed to do so – while instead often recurring as implicit explanatory factors to “the usual litany of institutional and programme delivery problems often associated with the EU's external relations” (p. 151). Also, if the introduction makes a convincing case for a broad security agenda with a wider number of actors involved, the book only partially delivers what has promised and mostly focuses on the diplomatic, institutional and political relationship between the EU and the governmental leaders of outside countries. More emphasis could be placed on the internal security agenda and on the threats coming from, and EU actions directed to, not necessarily state actors.

These points notwithstanding, *The European Union in the Security of Europe. From Cold War to Terror War* is a welcome contribution to the literature on the EU's external relations. Empirically rich, plenty of insightful and compelling observations, it is a recommended reading for any student of EU foreign policy.

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