# Simulating Europe: Lesson-drawing from EU Decision-making Games

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In-class simulation games are one of the latest trends in the teaching of European Studies and International Relations. From the civil war in Syria to the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, from failing environmental conferences to new trade deals, many teaching professionals in higher education appreciate the potential to offer a glimpse into the real world of decision-making by international and supranational organisations that cannot be gained so easily, if at all, from more traditional methods of instruction, such as academic readings, expert seminars from those involved, or structured class discussions. Those who actively participate in simulations stand to develop a richer set of skills, knowledge and experiences that complement what they learn from standard curricula that they could not gain in any other way short of being involved in real life negotiations.

In the specific case of the European Union (EU) and its rather complex foreign policy process, however, little thought to date has gone into the question of what, more precisely, we can learn beyond the often disturbing detail of a current crisis constellation. Herein lies the central issue; there is a wider range of lessons to be learnt from in-class simulations beyond drawing attention to current events, or deepening our understanding of them. To give some inspiration and to move beyond a sterile debate about the technical organization of such games, here are six more fundamental lessons participants gain from simulations. They are largely drawn from regularly observing students addressing some of the EU's classic foreign policy dilemmas.

The first concerns the fundamental challenge in EU external relations. Orchestrating 28 member states to speak with one voice, and thus achieve an effective policy response on the ground, puts into question many of the Eurosceptic claims about red-tape and alleged administrative mismanagement in Brussels. A factor frequently neglected, for example by the Farage camp in the United Kingdom, is the highly influential role the British security community has played over the years in shaping the substance of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) when, according the to the standard Euro-sceptic view, this should have worked to the advantage of other European powers. Not surprisingly, the harshest UK based critics hardly refer to the foreign policy dimension when launching their assault on EU institutions since this experience stands in stark contrast to the views they wish to perpetuate.

Whether a localised conflict or a global crisis, replicating EU decision-making invariably requires a closer look into what goes on in national capitals. This is an important second lesson, and the most obvious one as far as the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union is concerned. Small and big member states have domestic constituencies their Foreign Ministers cannot ignore. While national attitudes are hard to change, 'Europeanization' has been observed in most, if not all, member states and regardless of their changing governments with different political persuasions. In the formal simulation setting, students will often cherish the common practice among individual member states to conduct informal bilateral meetings before negotiating in a full session of the Council. Thus, 'Europeanization' as an academic term becomes easier to digest once it is translated as 'socialization'. There can be little doubt that regular participation in several rounds of a simulation facilitates mutual understanding among the participants and allows for new perspectives on a common problem constellation.

As key foreign policy makers are bound to meet their national counterparts in Brussels (or in a seminar room), they realise being an expert in a substantive area of international relations is not enough. They need to internalise a third

lesson; to know the rules of the game. This is vital in a fast changing institutional environment as that of the EU. Even the 'big beasts of the jungle', the likes of Gerhard Schröder or Gordon Brown, at times have been overwhelmed by the procedural complexity of Council meetings and the need to synchronise political agendas across diverse policy arenas. On many occasions the EU Council's very own web-based voting calculator has been an indispensable tool to come to terms with qualified or double majorities across the member states even if unanimous decision-making remains an overarching goal as far as EU foreign policy is concerned. With the latest voting reforms since Lisbon in place, the teaching profession is waiting for a technical update, more than ever. The good news is that former Commission President José Manuel Barroso might be wrong. Although smaller member states frequently see themselves in a structural disadvantage, individual oratory skills by their representatives, the ability to form alliances and to block majorities can compensate for their smaller number of votes.

Students can be raw political talents or enthusiastic methodical actors when slipping into the role of a Foreign Minister, or that of a powerful EU institutional actor; and so the fourth lesson is to be able to actively develop political skills around emotional and social intelligence. Political leadership cannot evolve without negotiation and networking even when the necessary compromise solutions need to be achieved under strict time constraints. Attitudes the European External Action Service (EEAS) would like to see instilled in its workforce are those of cultural openness, team-playing, result-orientation and ethical awareness. By contrast, a behaviour that resolves fundamental disagreement with the use of force and violence would, in this mindset, belong to the past. Nevertheless, former Foreign Ministers remind us that due to the loss of the ability to have hidden agendas at the national level, EU negotiations can also use excessive delaying tactics and transform into purely defensive polemics.

A typical EU foreign policy maker, perhaps only as part of an essential de-briefing session after the conclusion of a final negotiation round, will inherit a fifth key lesson; do not confuse problem-solving with devoting more and more budget resources to foreign policy implementation. Making spending pledges is easy at the negotiation table and fits the EU's soft power image well, but they typically hurt at home. A better option here might be to go for external policy transfer and policy emulation rather than financial incentives, or to consider close cooperation with other intergovernmental organisations such as the UN, the IMF, OECD or OSCE. One of the reasons why the CFSP can hold the head high within the European policy universe is the relative small amount of own resources it has required to fulfil its purpose over time.

Their position formulated and a clear contribution to the management of an international crisis in place, would-be decision makers should have learned a final lesson; improved EU coordination capacity in its external relations equals hard work. There are differences in the administrative capacities each member state can devote to EU activities in the same way as there are differences in student engagement with a university course. Twenty contact hours of preparatory meetings might be considered enough for the staging of a simulation game. Yet it must be clear that most teaching environments will not allow for an entirely convincing replication of the dense support structure of the Council of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), or the EEAS as far as the position of the EU's High Representative is concerned. Indeed, it might well be that some of the malcontents with the complex decision-making process opt for their own version of reality. Famously, Charles de Gaulle and John Major on rare occasions have resorted to the 'empty chair' as their preferred negotiation strategy. However, most practitioners would agree, this is pushing the realism of a simulation game one step too far.

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