Review - The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?

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The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?
Edited by Mario Telò and Frederik Ponjaert.
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This edited book by Mario Telò and Frederik Ponjaert is the first publication of GR:EEN-GEM, a book series on multilateral global governance. Its aim is to contribute to a re-conceptualization of EU's foreign policy, whilst taking into account recent institutional reforms and changing global landscape.

The first part of the book consists of three chapters that attempt to conceptualize the EU as an international actor in a transforming global context. How can the EU respond to these large structural changes given its own internal challenges – the Eurozone crises, lack of leadership and military powers in decline? *Andrew Gamble* draws up four possible scenarios that present the EU with more or less opportunities to assert itself as an international actor. If the international system develops in a unipolar or bipolar direction – with either the United States acting solo or with China as its opposing pole, Gamble claims that the EU is less likely to thrive because it would entail the continued drift of the US away from Europe. If, on the other hand, the international system were to develop in a multipolar direction or with regional blocs becoming more important, there is a greater chance for the EU to gain influence. *Mario Teló* discusses how the EU in the Lisbon Treaty tried to create an institutional and legal structure that would establish a more coherent basis for its external policy. But instead of reducing the complexity of the EU system, the Treaty reforms increased the intricacies of the decision-making process and the institutional framework. Although the EU still often fails to live up to expectations, Telò argues that there is unfulfilled potential in the EU's "linkage power" – the option of negotiating package deals across wide policy areas. He then goes on to discuss how the EU's role as an international actor might be strengthened by a combination of skilful diplomatic action and a redefinition of the multilateral global system. Finally, *Jolyon Howorth* addresses the problems of the EU in the realm of security and defence. He argues that the Libya-crisis and the efforts to conjure up a European response gave impetus to a new debate about security and defence in the EU: "[e]ither the Europeans agree to develop the necessary instruments to underpin their global strategic ambitions; or they become a continental-sized Switzerland" (p. 71). According to Howorth, if the EU is to make progress in this realm it has to be through closer cooperation with NATO. He argues that while the EU is in a better position to lead the European procurement process, there should be a gradual political and institutional amalgamation of NATO and the Common Defence and Security Policy.

In the second part of the book, three chapters delve into the institutional maze of the EU's foreign policy system. *Christian Lequesne* describes the policy functions of the European External Action Service (EEAS) – building coherence, providing information to EU-institutions and member states, as well as producing ideas. He argues that the EU's diplomatic service has a hard time moving beyond the confines of a bureaucratic service because of the resistance it faces from the national governments, both with regard to fostering coordination – vertically and horizontally. Moreover, the EEAS lacks a strategic frame that to tie together and guide its more specific ideas. *Caterina Carta*'s chapter also deals with the EEAS, using the policy-making cycle as a heuristic to illustrate the involvement and activities of executive actors in foreign policy process. At all stages of decision-making, from initiative and policy formulation, to decision-making and implementation, Carta explicates the high demands on

coordination between the HR and the EEAS, the Commission and its different DGs, as well as the Council and the bodies sorting under it. *Hartmut Mayer* then suggests ways of conceptualising coherence. He argues that while the EU is lacking in horizontal and vertical coherence, a source of strength to the EU is in developing its strategic, normative and external engagement coherence. From the perspective of third parties, effectiveness outshines cohesion; it means less whether the EU is able to speak with one voice on all occasions. What matters is developing a more moderate rhetoric and strategic goals that can be achieved, as well as acting in coherent manner vis-à-vis third parties. In practice, this means prioritising politics over legal and institutional reforms.

Turning to the politics of the EUs external affairs, the third part of the book analyses how the EU exercises its foreign policy. *Richard Gillespie* assesses the EU's response to the Arab Spring in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. He argues that while the EU discourse about the events was fairly consistent, the EU lacked leadership and a proper strategy to develop an effective foreign policy. The aim of *Frederik Ponjaert*'s chapter is to assess the coherence of the EU's interregional cooperation schemes. He compares the Union's policies towards a range of world regions, and concludes that it scores high on strategic coherence – being consistent in promoting interregionalism – but still lacking in real political ambition. *Giovanni Grevi* concentrates on the EU's strategic partnerships. He argues that these partnership formats should be understood as transcending ordinary bilateral relationships due to broad scope of cooperation, but that they remain fragmented and lacking in strategic purpose. *Chen Zhimin*'s chapter focuses on the relationship between EU and China. The chapter highlights the progress made in the wake of the Lisbon Treaty, and argues that the economic crisis prompted the EU to be more pragmatic in its dealings with China. Nevertheless, a real breakthrough is still pending. *Hidetoshi Nakamura* addresses the EU-Japan relationship. The chapter argues that while there are commonalities between the EU and Japan that bode well for a deeper and broader cooperation, political differences may prove difficult in the future, for instance on the issue of death penalty. In the final chapter of the book, *Ummu Salma Bava* analyses the developing relationship between India and the EU. It is argued that while their economic relations may be thriving, differing perspectives on security and sovereignty prevents deepening the liaison. A remaining challenge is "to bring a post-Westphalian EU and a Westphalian India to find a win-win partnership" (p. 218).

One of the most interesting aspects about the book is its attempts to conceptualise the complexity of the EU, not only by focusing on problems emanating from internal fragmentation, but also on the external challenges that demand a response from the EU, and hence may contribute in shaping its policies and positions. The interaction between the EU's internal dynamics and external context is often forgotten in the existing literature, and the book deserves praise for highlighting how the EU's fate as an international actor is indispensably linked to how the international system evolves. Another positive feature of this debate in the book is that it explicitly aims to use reality as a point of departure, as opposed to some ideal version of the EU – be it in normative terms, or by assuming that only states can be counted as actual actors on the world stage. This has resulted in several exciting and thought-provoking ideas about how the EU may and should advance itself globally.

The red thread of the book is the developments after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, with a particular focus on the institutional reforms – the new role of the High Representative and the establishment of the EEAS – combined with analyses of the EU's evolving relationships with emerging powers and its strategic partnerships.

A strong point of this edited volume is its emphasis on the discrepancy between the goals of the Lisbon Treaty and the outcome, while avoiding the hairy goals of international grandeur versus the EU's inability to commit-dichotomy. At the same time, the book takes a critical view of the developments in the wake Lisbon. Carta's chapter does a good job in describing the densities of the foreign policy process, as well as the importance of formal and informal procedures to be able to coordinate between the plethora of actors involved. This gives a detailed empirical underpinning of the argument made by Telò in the conceptual part, that while the ultimate goal of the Lisbon Treaty was to create greater coherence in EU external relations, the institutional reforms have brought with them increasing complexity. This is particularly interesting because of the parallel debate about an increasing centralisation of the EU executive. At the same time, while the challenges the EU faces as a result of fragmentation and complexity are described empirically, there are few attempts to address them analytically within the main frame of the book, i.e. to spell out what the implications may be for the EU as an international actor. Instead, many of the chapters offer ideas on what the EU should do to strengthen its international role – suggestions that one could argue would presuppose a

greater degree of coherence on the part of the member states.

The chapters focusing on the EU's policies towards its partners in the near and far abroad provide good insight into the evolvement of different forms of partnerships. Grevi's chapter provides a clear link to the previous debate about coherence by exposing the lack of coordination in the development and management of the strategic partnerships. However, it would have been good for the overall output of the book, if the different chapters would relate more to each other as well as to the attempts to (re)conceptualise the EU. As it stands, there is a certain repetitiveness on the facts of institutional reform, but too little about what the findings tell us about the EU as an international actor – i.e. what kind of power it is and the diplomatic action it exerts. For instance, the book does not have a concluding chapter, which is a shame considering the clear divide between the more conceptual first part of the book and the two more empirical parts. A conclusion could have tied them together and brought out more clearly the empirical and theoretical findings.

About the author:

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