The Capability-Expectation Gap in EU Foreign Policy after the Lisbon Treaty

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The notion of the capability-expectations gap was firstly coined by Hill (1993). This idea aimed to represent the situation in which the European Union was after the Cold War. It was a time when the EU was expected to act in the global arena as a strong unitary actor, but it was instead, unable to meet such expectations as it did not have the power to do so (Marques, 2016: 1-2). With the Treaty of Lisbon, new provisions were introduced in relation to foreign policy (FP). The question that this essay aims to answer is whether the capabilities-expectations gap (CEG), described by Hill (1993), has been closed after the Treaty of Lisbon provisions for foreign policy were introduced.

In order to answer the question, this essay will first provide a definition of both, the CEG and the concept of foreign policy in the European Union. Then, it will tackle the criticisms received by the EU in regard to the CEG thematically, relating each of them to the foreign policy provisions of the Lisbon Treaty. The main criticisms being the notion of actorness in FP, the EU's ability to act as a unitary actor in foreign policy, coherence in this policy area, its capabilities in FP prior and after Lisbon, and its ability to promote democracy. In doing so, this essay will be arguing that the provisions of Lisbon Treaty, in foreign policy, have not been able to fully close the capability-expectations gap.

To understand the effects of the Lisbon Treaty provisions in foreign policy in relation to the capability-expectations gap, both notions should be conceptualised. The notion of foreign policy in the EU will be tackled first. Foreign Policy in the European Union is not referred broadly to any external relations with non-EU countries but rather concentrated in diverse policies. These are: The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), concerned with crisis management missions (Howorth, 2017:342), the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) with an emphasis on wide spreading the EU principles, where human rights promotion is central (Sjursen, 2017:447), migration policy, and lastly democracy promotion, another core value of the EU. From that starting point, one can focus on the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty in this policy. Lisbon abolished the three-pillar structured established by the Maastricht Treaty, where the CFSP was the second pillar (Edwards, 2017:45).

In addition to providing the EU with legal personality, unified representation, and the transformation of the ESDP into the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Marques, 2017:19), one of the most notorious changes from previous treaties was the creation of the High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Vice President of the European Commission (HRVP) all under one role (Howorth, 2017:342) and the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The position of HRVP is currently held by the Italian ex-foreign affairs minister Federica Mogherini. These provisions introduced by Lisbon aimed to provide the EU with a unitary voice in the international arena (Andreatta and Zambernardi, 2017:88) as it will be discussed later. Nonetheless, these capabilities were challenged with the increased expectations from the EU, noticeably after the Euro crisis in 2008 and the perceptions of Europe as a "fortress" (Wolff, 2017:379).

The second concept that concerns this essay is the notion of a capability-expectation gap (CAE) coined as a result of Hill's article on *The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role* (1993). His intention was to evaluate the European Community's, now the European Union, actual role in the international system at the end of the Cold War in contrast with the expectations the international actors had from the EU. He was critical

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of the EU notion of actorness, as for him it was the "sum of what Member states severally decide" (Hill, 1993: 309). In that regard, Sjüstedt (1977:16) understood actorness as the "capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relations to other actors", with four criteria to comply with: recognition, authority, autonomy and cohesion. This could be applicable to any state, yet the EU is not a state *per se*, due to its *sui generis* status, which makes this classification difficult. A possible solution to this issue would be to discuss particular policy areas of the EU (Carbone, 2017d), this way the EU could be argued to satisfy or not the criteria mentioned above.

In the case of foreign policy, the EU aimed to become an authority in foreign policy after the provisions from Lisbon, where the High Representative of Foreign Affairs role was combined with the Vice President of the Commission (Duke and Vanhoonacker, 2017:33). This change was crucial, at least in theoretical terms, as it would allow the EU to speak with one voice since the HRVP would have access to the supranational policies of Trade and the intergovernmental policies, the CFSP, with Development policy being in-between both levels (Carbone, 2017d). However, one of the main criticisms often attributed to the EU's CEG in foreign policy has been, precisely, its ability to act as a single unitary actor internationally. Niermann and Bretherton, (2013:262) provided a simple explanation for the challenge the EU faces when attempting to speak with one voice, in foreign policy. On the one hand, there are 28 Member States (MS) forming the European Union, all of which possess diverse (foreign) policy approaches, preferences and positions. It is the EU's role as a "multilevel and semi-supranational polity" to dialogue and generate common approaches to the international arena as a global actor (Niermann and Bretherton, 2013:262).

On the other hand, the creation of the HRVP position, introduced by Lisbon, was supposed to bring both supranational and intergovernmental policies together to prevent coherence issues (Carbone, 2017d) but did not always succeed. One of the main examples were the divisions between member states in the war in Libya (2011), showing how the EU was not "one" when dealing with conflict, in addition to having relied on the US, like Edwards (2017:57) highlighted. The effectiveness of the EU as a global actor in foreign policy affairs has been questioned due to the lack of regional effectiveness, as a unitary actor (Edwards, 2017:51), despite this new role introduced with the Lisbon Treaty (HRVP), thus impeding the closure of the CEG.

In addition to the previous criticisms of the EU's inability to act as a unitary actor, Bikerton, Irondelle and Menon (2010:13), suggested that the CSDP was "lagging behind of its institutional and material capabilities" which did not favour a unitary EU-position in FP. As for the institutional part, the provisions in foreign policy from Lisbon created the EEAS, as a diplomatic service to assist in foreign affairs by representing the EU in different matters outside the EU. It is true that with the creation of the EEAS, the expectations from the EU to produce coherent policies, in both vertical and horizontal levels increased, as Marques (2016:42) highlights. However, due to the clashes between the European Commission, Council and European External Action Service (EEAS) which are all involved in foreign policy-shaping and are responsible for taking action, the EU's ability to speak with one voice has been difficulted.

Furthermore, Duke and Vanhoonacker (2017:35) pointed out that there have been cohesion and representation challenges, especially in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) where the main actors are the UK and France which often put forward their national interests rather than "EU diplomacy". Besides, constant resistance from the MS's has impeded the EU's effectiveness in this area. Howorth (2017:361) suggested that the EU has the appropriate instruments to "address soft challenges" and it is the lack of "strategic thinking about the long-term objectives in a multipolar world" what has prevented the EU from meeting these objectives, these expectations. The conclusion one can get from his argument is that Lisbon has provided the EU with more capabilities in certain foreign policy areas, as mentioned previously, while at the same time, increased the expectations for the EU because of the new provisions in Lisbon, thus preventing the closure of the CEG.

Yet another challenge to the EU's single voice can be found particularly in foreign security affairs, namely in NATO, where the European Union does not have a "seat" *per se*. Instead, individual member states have their representatives and not all EU member states are part of NATO[1] which hampers the possibility of the EU speaking with a single voice in foreign security matters. One argument from Nasra (2011) about the expectations of the European Union was that the EU is not considered an equal partner, as the rest of actors, by the United Nations. Although the Lisbon Treaty has introduced institutional changes in foreign policy (mentioned previously) to provide it with one voice, aka HRVP, the EU "requires the continued support of member states' national action to effectively

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implement EU foreign policy" (Nasra, 2011) which obstructs the closure of the capabilities-expectations gap as the EU does not have the capabilities to be an equal partner due to its *sui generis* statute.

Following from the criticism about the EU's unitary position, the expectations from the other international actors have not been met in issues such a terrorism and migration. However, one could argue that with the provisions in foreign policy from Lisbon, the EU capabilities in both fronts have been increased. On the first issue, fight against terrorism was addressed in Lisbon with the introduction of the solidarity clause (Smith, 2017:182) where member states (MS) should provide assistance to other EU-states that were faced with terrorist attacks or natural disasters. Conversely, the Lisbon Treaty provided provisions for migration trying to foster development in the countries of origin with better job opportunities and conditions (Wolff, 2017:379). In doing so, the Lisbon Treaty attempted to close the CEG in migration policy by providing further capabilities for interstate cooperation. Yet, EU member states remain sovereign in this area of foreign policy too despite the "co-decision of the Council and the European Parliament" in this policy (Hampshire, 2016:575), which contradicts the idea of "unitary position".

An additional challenge the EU faced regarding its capabilities and its actorness, after Lisbon, in terms of migration has been the current migration crisis from Syria and other countries which border the Mediterranean (EuroParl News, 2017). The reason being its lack of an effective/coherent response and coordination efforts as well as the MS divisions about migration, which have not met the international expectations of a unitary response, thus preventing the closure of the CEG. As mentioned earlier, coherence in foreign policy is one of the criticisms to the EU which prevents it from closing the CEG in this realm as without coherent policies, going in the same direction (Carbone, 2017d), the European Union cannot respond as a global actor and influence others internationally.

Furthermore, the issue of coherence can be linked back to the CSDP, where the EU, as a defence actor, has been unable to remain autonomous as it has consistently sought the assistance of either NATO or the US (Howorth, 2017:351) except for Operation Artemis (2003) in the Democratic Republic of Congo where the EU intervened alone (Carbone, 2017a). In addition, Bikerton, Irondelle and Menon (2010:7) attribute the EU's inability to become a major security provided to the institutional deficiencies and political will which constraint the EU actions, thus preventing the closure of the CEG in foreign policy.

Conversely, in terms of material capabilities, the demand for military and civilian missions, part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), has been greater than the EU's capabilities (Carbone, 2017c). In addition, the EU has been criticised due to its limited crisis management actorness (Edwards, 2017:41) and its inability to respond unanimously (Sjursen, 2017:453). An example of this was the limited means the EU had to conduct missions beyond the Petersberg Tasks, which were enhanced with Lisbon (Andreatta and Zambernardi, 2017:91). It can be seen that despite Lisbon provisions attempted to close the gap they have not been entirely successful in this area.

Contrary to that, Verola (2010:47) claims that the enhancement of the Petersberg Tasks by combining military and civil capabilities to deal with a crisis and restore peace was another example of how the Lisbon Treaty has attempted to close the CEG in foreign policy issues. Yet, another criticism to the EU's foreign policy, particularly concerned with the CSDP, has been a disproportionate number of civilian missions in relation to military missions launched by the EU since Lisbon (Howorth, 2017:351). One reason for that could be the current lack of military troops the EU has, which limits its ability to send military missions and forces it to send civilian ones. Besides, the role of the EU as a defence actor has also been questioned due to its overreliance on the US and NATO when serious "destabilization threatened the EU" (Howorth, 2017:351).

Nowadays, there are still MS in Europe that appeal to Duchêne's (1972:19) argument to claim that the EU should not have military capabilities as Trade and Development, central to the notion of civilian power, are better instruments to promote EU norms (Meunier and Nicolaïdis, 2017:211). These divisions in foreign policy add to the issue of the CEG as Lisbon has increased the capabilities, in some foreign policy aspects as mentioned, yet the constant divisions of MS difficult the EU's ability to meet the international expectations, hence closing the CEG.

The last aspect of the EU in foreign policy that this essay will discuss is its ability to promote its norms in outside of the EU and the success of such attempt. The European Union in foreign affairs promotes peace and stability, which

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are part of its core principles (see Manners, 2002). In attempting to maximise the norm promotion the EU has advocated for coherence and development going hand by hand (Carbone, 2017d), as stated in the Treaty of Lisbon. Nonetheless, this has been difficult to establish in foreign policy; it can be seen by the challenges the rising powers put to the European Union's actorness in FP. It is emphasised in the Lisbon Treaty that democracy promotion is one of the core principles of the European Union.

The rise of new powers such as the BRICs has increased the expectations from the EU to be able to act as a normative power, like Manners (2002:239) described it, spreading its core values. In the first instance, it attempted to largely leverage influence in the internal political and societal structures of the BRICs, but was not successful (Carbone, 2017c). Then, the EU has used different instruments to address the challenge of the rising powers poses to the hegemony of the EU internationally (Sjursen, 2017:444). It decided to act strategically and emphasise multilateralism with the BRICs countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) as a way of being able to spread its values after Lisbon.

A downside from the relation between the EU and the BRICs countries has been the perceptions of the EU as an international actor, which are also relevant to the CEG. In the case of China, the EU's actorness internationally has been undermined by the "failing attempts to reform its institutions" as well as the response to the invasion of Iraq (Holslag, 2011:310). Furthermore, from the US perspective, the perceptions of the EU are not positive either, as it "lacks domestic political interest" and the aspirations to become a global security player, with a non-coherent policy about Asia (Fröhlich, 2016:420). Kagan (2003:23) described this relationship as the following: "The US makes dinner and the EU washes the dishes". This was a contrast between how the US would address international relations, from a realist (military-oriented) perspective versus a more liberal (towards Kant) approach taken by the EU with its "soft civilian power" (Sjursen, 2017:446). This links back to the argument presented previously where MS are divided in terms of "more Europe or less Europe" in foreign policy which is problematic as it challenges the unitary view the EU tries to portray since Lisbon's provisions on FP.

To conclude, this essay has provided an overview of the issue of the capabilities-expectation gap in foreign policy after Lisbon. It has argued that although Lisbon has attempted to close the gap with the new provisions introduced, it has failed in doing so as the EU has not coherently and consistently acted as a unitary actor in foreign policy. Part of the reason why Lisbon has not been able to close the CEG has been the lack of common will among MS, who have not always put the interests of the EU over their own. In addition, the expectations from the European Union have increased over time, as well as with the provisions introduced in Lisbon. This should also be noted when assessing the ability of the Lisbon Treaty provisions in foreign policy to close the capabilities-expectations gap. Lastly, this essay has provided different criticisms often attributed to the EU and how they have prevented the closure of the CEG in relation to the foreign policy provisions introduced with Lisbon. The conclusion is that although the Lisbon Treaty increased the capabilities of the EU in foreign policy, the expectations from the EU have increased as a result, hence preventing the closure of the gap itself.

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