Review Article

The State of European Integration Seen from an External Relations Perspective

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It is generally assumed that the European Union has been undergoing a period of crisis since the beginning of the new millennium. The failure of the European constitutional project—following the negative results of the referendums in France and the Netherlands—the uncertainties surrounding the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and the exceptionally low turnouts at the European elections in June 2009 all account for such crisis. The path to European integration has always been an uneven one. Phases of crises—national rollbacks, failure of new policy initiatives, arduous intergovernmental conferences aimed at negotiating new treaties, and so on—have been part of EU history since its beginning. However, the transition phase experienced during the last 10 years might make the current situation somewhat different: whilst struggling with the consequences of the 1990s post-Cold War order and completing its internal economic integration, the European Union simultaneously integrated 12 new states between 2004 and 2007, and it has aimed to strengthen its political dimension by developing its foreign policy. Such an ambitious roadmap is hardly achievable without

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internal opposition and difficulties. This leads to a key question in academic and decision-making circles: is the current crisis “just another crisis?” In other words, is it a temporary and cyclical one as others already experienced by the European Union? Or is it of a more structural nature as some analysts seem to think? More specifically: is the European Union experiencing an identity crisis exemplified by growing opposition and Euroscepticism? And if this is the case, how can it be explained and what are the possible ways out of it?

Paul Taylor, in his book The End of European Integration, tries to deal with these questions and to stimulate the debate through straightforward and sometimes provocative conclusions. Considering how recent such events are and the author’s intention to offer an overall view of the integration process, his book is very ambitious in nature. Taylor starts with giving a picture of what he calls the “dilution of integration” (p. 5) in Europe. Based notably on opinion polls in Member States, he notes a general loss of enthusiasm and a lack of vision for the future of Europe: while the United Kingdom has always been relatively prone to anti-Europeanism, the declining support in France and Germany is more telling of the depth of the current crisis, since traditionally both have been the drivers of European integration. Moreover, the recent enlargements have brought into the Union several Member States that are more sympathetic to Anglo-Saxon socio-economic models (thus less favourable to strong European integration) and less sensitive to the idea of the European Union as a post-world war peace project. In sum, traditional anti-Europeanists’ critiques that view the Union as resulting in loss of national sovereignty, threats to national economic and social models, as well as European administrative and financial waste, have gained influence. In Taylor’s opinion such critiques have become all the more powerful in relation to a general context of public discontent with and suspicion of politics. He relies on Stanley Hoffmann’s claim that a “logic of diversity” is currently prevailing in the European Union (or amongst its Member States) over the idea of an ever-closer union. New forms of European governance such as the Lisbon Strategy for Jobs and Growth or the Open Method of Coordination, which have promoted the concepts of flexibility and subsidiarity, are provided as examples of this tendency to reassess state primacy by favouring national and thus diverse approaches to the Union.

The author deals competently with numerous examples from the various policy areas concerned with integration, but regrettably most of his considerations are drawn from the UK approach to it whilst the book claims to give a large overview of integration in Europe. The chapter on EU participation in the economic and social structures of the United Nations clearly points out how, despite a European wish to coordinate Member States’ positions and promote a common foreign policy, internal divisions make it a weak international power. One of Taylor’s original points is that the way the European Union is conceptualised in academic circles and particularly by European studies also plays a role in the dilution of integration. Scepticism concerning the ideal of an ever-closer union has led scholars to give up macro theories offering general definitions of integration (such as neofunctionalism), and rather to resort to partial theoretical explanations in order to study different aspects and dimensions of the EU project. In Taylor’s words, such a tendency to “multi-theorise” (p. 90) strengthens the lack of coordination between different EU policy sectors and tends to “harden the boundaries” (p. 94) between them. New theories are unable to explain the general dynamics
of integration or disintegration and their ongoing processes, which makes the current crisis event more difficult to analyse.

In an attempt to move beyond such difficulties, Taylor concludes with some propositions on what should be done to launch what he himself somewhat grandly calls a “New European Project”. In order to initiate a new phase of integration, the European Union should focus on policies that are likely to mobilise key elements of a potential European identity, and thus to create a sense of common European destiny which is precisely what it is lacking today. The two main challenges facing the European Union are the threats to the European social democratic model and the lack of a strategic capacity. This would allow it to defend its interests and values worldwide and in particular against a more aggressive and hegemonic American model. A new European project should therefore focus on European defence policy and on a new European social policy—two projects which should go hand in hand with a renewed reflection on a more efficient European budget. Only in this way would the European Union be able to become a significant international actor, balance American power and overcome its internal oppositions.

In a rather predictive tone, Paul Taylor remains, however, very pessimistic about the fulfilment of such a scenario and on the future evolution of the European Union. According to him, it is almost impossible for EU Member States to agree on such an ambitious agenda, and the European Union is destined to resemble more and more a traditional international organisation (as opposed to a political entity of a different nature) which fails to develop an international power capacity. The prescriptive and forewarning dimensions of this analysis are probably the most unsettling elements of the book. As mentioned, Taylor deals with a very recent topic, which is very ambitious but forces him to formulate uncertain conclusions. The methodology and scientific character of the analysis are not to be criticised: even though the number of academic published sources that can be mobilised is necessarily limited, it largely offset by impressive research on primary sources (in particular official EU documents and press resources). However, some of his conclusions could be more nuanced. For example, one could question whether his view of the opposition between the American and the European international models is still as relevant in the new American context. In sum, Taylor’s ambition is to stimulate the intellectual debate on European integration. In certain ways, his contribution is similar to an opinion paper, and his tendency to make predictions and issue clear-cut judgements sometimes make the book unorthodox from a purely academic point of view.

Other scholars share Taylor’s view that adopting a functional approach to integration, i.e. launching new policy projects in areas that are not very integrated—in particular the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)—is a good way of overcoming the European crisis.  

The CFSP and related European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) emerged as a new EU policy during the 1990s and quickly proved to be a stimulating field of integration or disintegration and their ongoing processes, which makes the current crisis event more difficult to analyse.


2. Since the approval of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) has been renamed Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). I have chosen to retain the use of the acronym ESDP in this present article, as this is the term used in the reviewed books.
of study for scholars of political science and European studies. Although developed recently, it provides a number of interesting contributions, some of which are considered as “must-read” for students of the discipline. However, academic publications on the European Union and its foreign policy remain fragmented and lack consistency. Firstly, considering the recent development of the CFSP/ESDP in the last decade, not only is research in this area scant but also not consolidated yet. Secondly, policy-oriented research centres and think tanks are particularly active in reflecting about the foreign policy of the European Union, thus offering a significant alternative to more classical and academic contributions. The most emblematic example of this tendency is the EU Institute for Security Studies, whose publications often serve as a useful source for both officials and academics. Thirdly and more importantly, the emergence of the CFSP/ESDP challenges scholars of international relations and European studies, because it does not fit the traditional categories and intellectual maps of either discipline. Empirically, the launching of a common security and defence policy is an ambitious novelty, since it directly or indirectly affects what is usually considered as the core of national sovereignty. Whereas previous attempts had failed, CFSP succeeded with its integration in the EU treaties in the 1990s. From a theoretical point of view, the phenomenon has been largely unanticipated and ignored. To date, it remains an “anomaly” for theories of international relations or theories of European integration. This reminds us of Paul Taylor’s comments on the difficulties of theorising European integration, particularly so in the case of the CFSP/ESDP. As a consequence, most research on this topic remains very empirical and sometimes descriptive. Even though useful in understanding this policy area, they are limited in trying to understand whether the CFSP/ESDP is likely to provide incentives for further European integration.

Barbara Delcourt, Marta Martinelli and Emmanuel Klimis’s edited volume provides a good example of what an analysis based largely on empirical accounts can bring to the understanding of the European Union’s external relations. Its stated aim is to draw lessons from the European Union’s civil and military crisis management initiatives—something previously missing in the francophone academic literature. Based on insights from peace and conflict studies, it presents the different phases of a conflict in order to clarify the different types of intervention that are to be mobilised by external actors. This sheds some light on the crucial issues of coordination and coherence in crisis management operations, given the multiplicity of initiatives and actors that can be potentially mobilised.

Different contributions in this collection undoubtedly give credit to such an approach. Indeed, matters of coordination and coherence are at the core of the book, and are tackled via two dimensions: an institutional one and an empirical one. The first part of the book focuses on the role of the different EU institutions in crisis management operations, thus demonstrating how the European Union tries to promote an inclusive and preventive approach to conflict resolution


through the large variety of instruments it has at its disposal. Valérie Peclow’s chapter deals with the central role of the Council of the European Union, Federico Santopinto with the wider and more preventive action of the European Commission, and Gerrard Quille with the increasing—although still secondary—responsibilities of the European Parliament. Three conclusions can be drawn from this first part: firstly, the EU institutional setting for conflict resolution illustrates how the management of security has become inseparably linked with wider issues of development. It is thus in line with broader international thinking on how to handle conflicts. Secondly, it also illustrates the debates surrounding the nature of crisis management: short-term versus long-term action, military versus civilian operations, and so on. Thirdly, it points out the existing inter- and intra-institutional tensions in the EU foreign policy system, thus illustrating the centrality of the issues of coordination and coherence.

The real added value of this volume lies in its second part, based on empirical accounts, which lead to similar conclusions, thus completing and supporting the arguments in the first part. Case studies of EU interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo or in Macedonia are developed (by Marta Martinelli and Isabelle Ioannides, respectively), and relations with other actors explored: one chapter by Damien Helly focuses on the relations with NGOs and on the security and/or development debate, while others, by Thierry Tardy and Emmanuel Klimis, respectively, focus on the cooperation and competition with the United Nations and on EU development cooperation policy in partnership with the OECD. Whereas coordination is treated originally in its vertical dimension—relations between the different EU bodies and with Member States—the final chapters tend to stress its horizontal dimension—relations between the European Union and other international actors.

Even though it offers a more complete picture of EU crisis management characteristics, this latter point might be regretted in so far as the last part of the book takes us further away from its central claims (see, for example, Delphine Resteigne’s chapter which deals with crisis management in Afghanistan from a NATO perspective, thus stressing the involvement of European states but not the European Union per se). One significant exception, however, is Sami Makki’s stimulating reflection on the militarisation of humanitarian interventions which, although focusing mainly on the United States and NATO, tackles the European debate on the civil–military nature of its crisis management operations, and offers an interesting contrast to the too often uncritical academic views of the European model. The diversity of the contributions itself confirms the difficulty of approaching EU external relations in a single way, and ironically illustrates the centrality of the issue of coherence. The book concludes by casting some doubts on the European Union’s capacity to be an efficient international actor. While providing more complete empirical testing than Paul Taylor’s book, it thus confirms its conclusions, although it remains less pessimistic. Delcourt et al., however, do not address the theoretical debate concerning the ability of a strong and successful CFSP/ESDP to be a driver of further European integration.

This theoretical dimension is more present in Frédéric Mérand’s book and Tuomas Forsberg, Timo Kivimäki and Liisa Laakso’s edited volume. Both attempt to provide fresh insights into the study of EU external relations and ways out of the academic dead-ends which can be found in the discipline. Their
starting assumption is that traditional theoretical and conceptual frameworks prove rather unsatisfactory when applied to the study of the CFSP/ESDP, which results in the empirical and descriptive nature of most of the related research, and a general lack of ambition.

Forsberg, Kivimäki and Laakso’s collection gathers contributions from Finnish scholars who share the intellectual heritage of Raimo Väyrynen’s research on transnational and global governance issues in the fields of international relations, foreign policy, peace and conflict studies and international political economy. Although opting for a wider approach than that of Delcourt et al., some of his considerations are reminders of the theoretical assumptions explored in M. Martinelli’s chapter. His arguments on the increasingly multifaceted character of security and the intertwining of domestic and international factors shaping decision making are used as the theoretical cornerstone of the book.

The book starts with a chapter by Jussi Seppälä explaining Finland’s position vis-à-vis the CFSP, which proves very informative for scholars who are not familiar with Finnish foreign policy. It does not really match the overall theoretical thread of the volume, but is interesting because it empirically demonstrates and confirms a central claim of all the contributions reviewed here: the fundamental influence of national foreign policy priorities in the determination of EU foreign policy. Let us mention here Marta Martinelli or Sophie Da Camara Santa Clara Gomes and Emmanuel Klimis on Belgium and DR Congo, or Taylor’s more general arguments on the role of France, Germany and the United Kingdom in the CFSP.

The next two chapters are more theoretical in nature: Tuomas Forsberg develops his reflection on the challenges facing the study of the ESDP in particular. He criticises the lack of a thorough research agenda and reflectivity in the discipline (why did the ESDP come so far? What are its main motives?), and aims to offer three middle-range testable propositions as likely explanations for the development of a European defence policy: the ESDP as a completion of the European integration process; the ESDP as a way to balance US power; and the ESDP as a practical need to address new international threats. Forsberg concludes that the third proposition is the most satisfying one, providing an interesting contrast to Taylor’s view which stresses the balance-of-power analysis. In a similar vein the second contribution, by Liisa Laakso, states that security issues in a regional integration context revolve around four ideal-types (security community, military alliance, civilian power, and security partner), and that the European Union, through its mixed security policies, combines elements of all four. Laakso thus argues that a multilevel governance (MLG) framework is best suited to the study of European foreign policy since it allows simultaneous consideration of the multiplicity of governmental, supranational and non-governmental actors involved in its making.

The four subsequent chapters serve as empirical illustrations of the theoretical claims of Forsberg and Laakso. Juha Auvinen’s contribution on the European Union as a “Venus-like” civilian power does not bring much added value to an already widespread debate on the nature of European power, but it provides a useful illustration of Forsberg’s hypothesis that the concrete need for crisis management capacity is the main driving force of the ESDP. Timo Kivimäki’s discussion of the European Union’s role in conflict resolution in the Indonesian region of Aceh is probably the most valuable case study: not only does it
provide the reader with an interesting focus on a European intervention which remains understudied, but it offers a very convincing illustration of Laakso’s claim on the salience of an MLG framework, showing how different actors (European Commission, individual official or unofficial civil society actors, and so on) and intertwining procedures played a decisive role during the peace negotiations. Finally, Hanna Ojanen’s chapter on the EU–NATO interaction and the way it contributes to shaping their respective roles and perceptions, and Teivo Teivanen’s chapter on the ambiguous neo-colonial aspects of the European policy of democracy promotion both offer interesting insights on other dimensions of European foreign policy.

On the one hand, these last two contributions are indeed necessary in order to give a complete overview of European common foreign policy. In particular, Teivanen’s argument that the European Union replicates its global domination over the South through its practices of democracy promotion fills an important gap, since most collective works on EU foreign policy tend to neglect this aspect. On the other hand, these last two chapters are less consistent with the general research framework of the book. This reflects the editors’ argument that an accurate study of European foreign policy is hardly conceivable within a single conceptual framework. Whereas Forsberg et al. offer a higher degree of theoretical ambition and explanation, they are thus facing similar difficulties to Delcourt et al.’s volume. Interestingly, they all claim the need for increased crisis management capacity and better clarification of the role played by major EU actors involved in conflict resolution as necessary conditions for a real international EU “actorness”.

While the previous authors remain largely inspired by theories of international relations and European integration, Frédéric Mérand argues in his book that the limits of traditional conceptual approaches to the study of the ESDP encourage scholars to look at other branches of political science for theories and concepts. His claim is that European integration in the field of security and defence is part of a larger redefinition of the European state, whereby its driving forces (mainly statesmen, diplomats and military officers) progressively change their social representations, expectations and practices. This evolution, i.e. the progressive institutionalisation of a European security and defence field which makes national actors increasingly interact with each other, results from two simultaneous historical moves: the internationalisation of European defence forces since the end of the Second World War, and the Europeanisation of foreign policy making since the beginning of European integration. Theoretically, the argument relies on political sociology and Pierre Bourdieu’s or Michael Mann’s writings on the formation of the state: the state is seen as a social field of power—or a structured space of relations—within which actors compete to maintain their position, impose their rules of the game and legitimate their domination through widely acknowledged social representations. The development of the ESDP is seen by Mérand as a replication of this phenomenon at the European level. In order to prove his claim empirically he offers a very clear and complete account of both the historical development of European integration in the field of security and defence and its present institutional functioning, mechanisms, actors, and so on.

Although he is not the first to offer such a complete account, the theoretical standpoint he proposes is definitely a novelty, which offers convincing new insights to the study of the CFSP/ESDP. One might, however, feel frustrated
that the argument is not tested further in the empirical part of the book. The author seems to be stuck in a dilemma: on the one hand, to develop his Bourdieusian argument, which would require complex complementary theoretical considerations as well as more precise empirical accounts; on the other, to offer an easily accessible and useful publication on the past and present state of the ESDP. The reader who is interested in learning more about the issue should therefore also refer to Mérand’s other writings, which offer more detailed accounts and go beyond the generalizing character of the present book. Still, this contribution tackles a number of challenging issues that are likely to form the bulk of future research on the ESDP: Europeanisation of national security and defence policies; progressive socialisation among actors of the ESDP; divisions and tensions that are not merely of a national nature; a shift of attitude in public opinions towards the use of force and the legitimacy of armed forces, etc. It therefore offers an original point of entry to study such issues, even though further empirical testing is required.

Interestingly, and despite apparently diverging contents and methods, Mérand’s book shares a number of common assertions with Forsberg et al.’s volume. In particular, the depiction of defence as a “transgovernmental field”, stressing the intensity of relations between different sets of actors at different levels, is congruent with the MLG approach (as Mérand himself acknowledges). While there is a general agreement on the need to integrate the plurality of actors active in the field of EU foreign policy and to move beyond the traditional theoretical divides, the sociological argument’s added value lies in the ability to take into consideration the “conflict” dimension which occurs in the formulation of this European foreign policy. Here, too, it raises the level of theoretical ambition, and provides solid ground for analysing whether the European Union is likely to turn into an international actor. Mérand’s contribution largely departs from Taylor’s method, approach and conclusions. However, it offers interesting answers to the latter’s interrogations since it confirms the potential of the ESDP as a driver for European integration. Finally, it refuses to adopt a teleological and normative approach to integration in the field of defence—i.e. the progressive development of a European identity—so as to avoid falling into the trap of an over-optimistic view. It thus remains consistent with Taylor’s more cautious arguments that integration in the field of security and defence might be difficult to achieve.