Functionality in EU Foreign Policy: Towards a New Research Agenda?

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ABSTRACT The study of European Union (EU) foreign policy has hitherto been dominated by the question of effectiveness, i.e. does it work? This takes the external impact of the EU’s foreign policy as its analytical starting point. In addition to asking whether EU foreign policy works, we should also inquire into its functions. The article identifies three functions served by EU foreign policy: (1) the legitimization of inactivity at the national level; (2) as a site for the struggle over political power between different actors in the EU; (3) as a means for exploring ontological issues relating to the EU’s underlying purpose and its finalité politique. A common feature of each of these functions is their internal orientation. From this perspective, the study of EU foreign policy need not be limited to assessing the impact of the EU on the rest of the world. It can also tell us a great deal about the political dynamics and the ongoing search for meaning within the EU.

KEY WORDS: European Union foreign policy, functionality, legitimization, political competition, ontology, power

Introduction

In his famous study of prisons in the modern age, Michel Foucault noted that these institutions had traditionally been studied in terms of their success or failure as centres of correction and rehabilitation. In his view, this evaded the more radical question of what function prisons served in the wider society of the early modern period (Foucault 1975). This was a question Foucault also posed with regards to other institutions, such as the asylum. Foucault argued that the role of these institutions was not simply to rehabilitate prisoners or
to treat patients; they were central to the establishment and maintenance of power relations within modern society. It was through the study of the enlightened, liberal institutions such as prisons and asylums that Foucault hoped to uncover the ‘dark side of modernity’ (McNay 1994, 2).

A similar shift of attention from effectiveness to functionality in the field of International Relations (IR) was suggested by Claude in his seminal work on the United Nations (Claude 1966). Claude noted the widespread pessimism that pervaded studies on the UN: it was derided as a ‘talking shop’, immobilized by the onset of the global Cold War. For Claude, this rather missed the point. Instead of asking whether or not it works, we should inquire into its political function. Claude argued that the ‘talking shop’ nature of the UN was crucial to its role as site for the collective legitimization of its members.

These authors provide a useful entry point for reappraising existing approaches to EU foreign policy. The study of EU foreign policy has been marked by an interest in institutional development. This is what Zaki Laïdi has identified as the problem of ‘institutional formalism’: an analysis of the legal framework of EU foreign policy that pays scant regard to the wider political dynamics of the integration process (Stetter 2004, 720; Laïdi 2008, 3). This interest in institutional development has been accompanied by a prescriptive concern with the EU’s ability to act in the world. This concern has given rise to contributions such as Allen and Smith’s (1990) paradox of ‘presence’ without ‘actorness’ and Hill’s (1993) notion of a ‘capabilities–expectations gap’. In both cases, the analytical goal was to explain why the EU fails to realize its potential in international affairs (Hill 1993, 306). This same concern lies behind the well-worn saying that the EU is an economic giant but a political dwarf in foreign affairs. This prescriptive concern underlies the enduring focus on the effectiveness of the EU as an international actor, shared by scholars and policy makers alike.

Recently, there has been a salutary move towards a more theoretically sophisticated account of foreign policy making in the EU. An important direction for new research has been the focus on ‘cross-pillarization’: the recognition that foreign policy resists the institutional straight-jacket of the Maastricht Treaty and has spread as a policy field across the different pillars of the EU. This development has not, however, done away with the prescriptive concern identified above. The policy implication of an interest in cross-pillarization has been to view effectiveness through the prism of coherence across different foreign policy fields (Duke 1999; Missiroli 2001; Pilegaard 2003). Moreover, the work on cross-pillarization does not always manage to escape the framing of EU foreign policy as intergovernmentalism versus supranationalism. Scholars working in this area often see the blurring of boundaries between the pillars as a development that ‘gives shape to an emergent EU sovereignty’ (Stetter 2004, 720).

This article shares with these recent approaches the view that foreign policy spans the different institutional frameworks of the EU. For this reason, the article does not restrict its account of foreign policy simply to the actions of member states; the institutional flux surrounding EU foreign policy is itself
something to be explained. The focus of this article, however, is not on the foreign policy field itself and its own internal development (cf. Stetter 2004, 721). Instead, it focuses on foreign policy as a site for political competition within the EU. The article is interested in what Majone (2005) calls the epiphenomenal nature of EU policy making, i.e. the way policy outputs are instrumentalized and form part of a struggle for political power within the EU. At the same time, the pursuit of closer foreign policy cooperation is difficult to explain in terms of a self-interested pursuit of national power. As we will see, EU foreign policy serves as a tool with which member states are able to justify their relative inactivity in shaping the direction of international politics. The goal is not power but — to use Zaki Laidi’s (2008, 12) term — ‘power avoidance’. This lends to EU foreign policy a sense of contradiction: it is a site for internal political struggle over ‘who speaks for Europe’ and yet member states also use their involvement in pan-European foreign policy initiatives as a way of eschewing more demanding international responsibilities. This ambiguity helps explain why the EU’s power remains so enigmatic.

Phrasing this approach in terms of functionality means that it needs to be distinguished from a prominent approach to European integration theory, (neo)functionalism (Haas 2004). Most simply, the term ‘function’ refers to matters of purpose and intention. The ongoing and fierce debate around functionalism is about the level at which an explanation occurs: at the level of individuals or of collective entities such as states? Is the functionality of an action intended by those who carry it out or is it an unintended outcome, in the manner of Adam Smith’s famous ‘hidden hand’ (Ryan 1970, 172–96)?

The teleology of traditional functionalism stemmed from the conviction of early functionalists that the dynamics of international and regional cooperation contained within them the possibility of overcoming what David Mitrany described as ‘the baffling division between the peoples of the world’ (cited in Heartfield 2007, 131). This article makes no such assumptions. The rationale behind the three functions identified in this article follows from posing the analytical question of what purpose does EU foreign policy serve and for whom. The answers provided in this article are not exhaustive but are intended as an exploration of this approach.

The following section will draw out from existing work on EU foreign policy an embryonic interest in this question of functionality, though one that has not been properly systematized. The next section then identifies three underlying functions of EU foreign policy cooperation that together can account for different features of this policy area. The article will conclude by suggesting further avenues of research and highlighting the contribution of this study of functionality to our understanding of the EU more generally.

Functionality in EU Foreign Policy: A Nascent Research Agenda

For all the attention given to executive capacities, some work on EU foreign policy stresses the dimension of functionality. This began with the study of European Political Cooperation (EPC), the forerunner to the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). After two decades of EPC, re-occuring
crises of inactivity on the side of the EC suggested that EPC would not subsume national foreign policies into a single pan-European foreign policy. Some analysts argued that EPC might be driven instead by the internal needs of member states. Its overriding function was as a mechanism for internal (i.e. intra-European) crisis management (Bickerton 2007). This was the insight provided by Joseph Weiler and Wolfgang Wessels in their early attempt at theorizing pan-European foreign policy cooperation (Weiler and Wessels 1988, 251). In their view, inaction, not action, was the goal of EPC. This status quo orientation of EU member states is pursued in more detail in the next section, where EU foreign policy is considered as a means of adapting to international changes without losing legitimacy at home.

Another example of taking functionality seriously is in the work of Ben Tonra. Tonra provides an even more specific answer to the question of EU foreign policy cooperation for whom and for what purpose? Tonra’s cognitive approach focuses on elite socialization and its impact on pan-European-level bargaining processes. The limits of rationalist approaches to EU foreign policy, according to Tonra (2003, 742), is that they ‘cannot understand what makes so many policymakers labour so long and hard for what can only be seen [in output terms] as so little’. Tonra’s own view is that the function of CFSP lies in its contribution to a process of identification whereby national representatives increasingly understand their roles in terms of collective (i.e. EU-wide) responsibility. What drives foreign policy cooperation is the desire of national representatives to conform with a role and an image they have of themselves (Tonra 2003, 742–3). In Tonra’s analysis, the function of EU foreign policy cooperation is ultimately that of identity building, where national representatives play out a role they have written for themselves.

The interest in functionality, however, is rarely subjected to any systematic analysis. There is little reflection on the implications of these functions for the wider discussion of the EU as an international actor or on how functions have changed as foreign policy cooperation has evolved. A strength of the functionality approach is precisely the manner in which it situates foreign policy cooperation within the wider political dynamics of the Union. Rather than treating foreign policy as belonging to the ‘high politics’ of war and diplomacy and, therefore, quite distinct from other more humdrum policy areas, this approach connects foreign policy with other aspects of European integration. This can help bridge the gap between European integration studies and the work on foreign policy, and achieve a rapprochement between comparative politics and international relations. Moreover, if — as Giandomenico Majone (2005) has argued — functionality is a feature of EU policy making in general, it may be that the dynamics of foreign policy cooperation can contribute to our broader understanding of European integration.

The remainder of the article will explore functionality in EU foreign policy. It will consider the question of for whom are the functions of EU foreign policy important and how does the identity of actors relate to the function. The next section will begin with EU member states, identifying the legitimization of inactivity at the national level as a key function of EU foreign policy cooperation. The article then turns to the two supranational institutions, the
European Commission and the European Parliament, explaining their pursuit of a greater role in foreign policy as driven by a desire to expand their role and influence within the wider EU-level policy-making process. Finally, the last section considers the function of foreign policy cooperation in the wider pan-European debate on the goals and finalité politique of the European integration process as a whole.

Legitimizing Inactivity at the National Level

The national interest of EU member states is often assumed to be a primary obstacle to the formation of a wider pan-European interest. Such is the logic of Simon Nuttall’s description of EU foreign policy as ‘sedimentary’: it is the ‘sediment’ that remains when the waters of national interest have run dry (Nuttall 2000). Underpinning this view is a set of assumptions regarding the actions and goals of EU member states. In particular, it is assumed that member states remain attached to their national interest and pursue foreign policy cooperation either as a way of maximizing their power or as a process of bargaining which generates ‘lowest common denominator’ outcomes.

Though member states still have different preferences, full-blown clashes of national interest are, in fact, rare in the foreign policy cooperation process. In 2003, the schism between ‘old’ and ‘new’ Europe identified by Donald Rumsfeld was only superficial: in the midst of this crisis, member states agreed to launch their first autonomous security and defence mission (Operation Artemis) and, six months later, they agreed on a European Security Strategy (Menon 2004). What is more striking about EU foreign policy cooperation is the light it can shed on the changing nature of the national interest in Europe today. The attraction of pan-European cooperation comes in part from the discrediting of more traditional realpolitik-driven foreign policy. Justifying military action in terms of a country’s wider European obligation is, for instance, far more acceptable today than is the logic of national interest. This was evident in France’s engagements in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Chad, missions with an important French military presence but firmly placed under the EU flag (Gegout 2005; Menon, 2009, 240). It is also no coincidence that French diplomatic activism reached a peak during the country’s 2008 presidency: acting ‘in the name of Europe’ gave to French leadership a legitimacy it would otherwise have lacked.

What makes EU foreign policy cooperation attractive, however, is more than just a strategic adaptation of national governments to what they perceive as a growing normative sensibility on the part of European publics. The changing nature of the national interest in Europe today means that national designs no longer lurk behind pan-European engagements: the latter serve as a substitute for the retreat of the former. European nation-states are no longer the egotistic self-contained units of nineteenth century Great Power diplomacy. In the words of Frédéric Mérand (2008, 147–54), Europe has experienced a shift from ‘warfare’ states to ‘welfare’ states, with considerable implications for how member states act and conceive of their interests in international affairs.
This explains a feature of contemporary international relations that Zaki Laïdi (2008, 12) calls Europe’s ‘avoidance of power’. By this, he means the unwillingness on the part of European states to play a leading role in world politics. When the US president Barack Obama visited Europe in April 2009, his intention was to win support for an expanded military campaign in Afghanistan. As Irwin Stelzer (2009) observed, Obama returned ‘with non, nein and no ringing in his ears’. Earlier in the same year, Obama’s decision to close Guantanamo Bay posed a problem for European states as it meant that they would be asked to take in some of its former inmates. European states refused, signalling an unwillingness to support the new president’s diplomatic initiatives. In the words of the Economist, ‘Europe’s mood of euphoria over Barack Obama masks anxiety about what the new president will demand’ (Economist 2009, 41).

Realist explanations of this phenomenon point to Europe’s preference for free-riding on American security provision (Posen 2004). In his famous essay, Robert Kagan (2003) presented the problem as one of a European Venus versus an American Mars. Europe’s ‘power avoidance’ in fact goes beyond mere strategic calculation. It denotes a profound social transformation in European societies (Halperin 2004). Mérand’s account of the rise of ‘welfare states’ is useful but at issue also is a shift towards more individuated societies, where sacrifice for the common good has become an alien sentiment (Cooper 2004, 51). What matters here is not just the legacy of the Second World War, as Kagan and others have stressed, but also the demise of collective political endeavours, what Samuel Beer called politics ‘in the collectivist age’ (Beer 1969). As European societies no longer think of themselves as collective subjects acting in the world, the very idea of a national interest is transformed into an anachronism (Habermas 1989, 368–85). The consequence has been a growing preference for foreign policy inactivity, which corresponds closely with the development of EU foreign policy.

Anand Menon has noted critically that a danger of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is that it absolves EU member states of their individual responsibilities as members of the international community. In his words, ‘a focus on the ESDP can serve to divert attention from the true nature of the European role in international security’ (Menon 2009, 243). He goes on to note that ‘a narrow preoccupation with building an EU intervention capacity can allow member states the luxury not only of focusing on structures and processes but also of using the difficulties inherent in securing consensus within the Union as an excuse for relative strategic inaction’ (Menon 2009, 243). Menon suggests that a strategic role for Europe exists ‘out there’, which member states are ignoring at present. Alternatively, put in terms of functionality, we can say that a function of EU foreign policy cooperation is precisely to legitimize Europe’s retreat from its historical role as architect and driver of international affairs. This last point suggests that European foreign policy is not simply the ‘rescue’ of national foreign policy (Allen 1996, 290, 303–4), but that it is built upon Europe’s very real ‘refusal of power’ (Laïdi 2008, 7).
Functionality in EU Foreign Policy

Alongside the changing national foreign policy strategies of member states, EU foreign policy cooperation is also driven by the relationship between the three main players within the EU — the Council of Ministers, the European Commission and the European Parliament. Each institution has sought over time to consolidate its role in the pan-European decision-making process. In fact, as Giandomenico Majone has suggested, much of EU policy making is ‘epiphenomenal’: it serves as a mask for an underlying struggle for power between different actors (Majone 2005, 46–51). Foreign policy making is, in this respect, not as different from other policy areas as one might think. Two struggles stand out: between member states in the Council and the European Commission; between the European Parliament and the other institutions of the EU. The function of EU foreign policy cooperation is institutional aggrandizement in this instance. The identification of turf wars in EU policy making is, of course, not new (Missiroli 2001, 181; Allen 2004, 4). The emphasis here, however, is on the relation between these turf wars and the identity of the EU as a non-sovereign order. These turf wars are a result of a fundamental ambiguity over where final authority resides within the Union and are not the usual tensions between executive and legislative powers that characterize political life within states (cf. Hix 1999).

Turf Wars in a ‘Leaderless Europe’

The relation between the Council of Ministers and the European Commission goes to the heart of European integration. In foreign policy, the sharp division between intergovernmental cooperation on security-related matters and supranationalism in economic affairs has been rigidly maintained (Øhrgaard 1997). Over time, however, it has become more difficult to consign foreign policy to the intergovernmental sphere. This reflects the changing nature of foreign policy but also the impact of an ongoing struggle between the Council and the Commission.

For instance, it has become a cliché to observe that security threats today are no longer of the classical inter-state military kind. Instead, they are transnational: economic tensions, migration, environmental concerns, organized crime and global terrorism. This is accepted by most actors, including EU member states. However, this view is more than simply an objective account of a changing security environment. It also reflects the institutional politics of the EU. It is no coincidence that these non-conventional threats happen to lie within the competence of the European Commission. The Commission has, in recent years, capitalized on the demilitarization of security, using it as a way of promoting itself as a major player in the foreign policy-making process of the EU. Prominent publications by the Commission include threat assessments coinciding very neatly with its own legal competences (European Commission 2006). This should be understood as both an attempt to define the changing nature of the contemporary security environment and as a move by the Commission to assert its authority in these areas of new threats. After
all, the Commission’s claim to expertise in dealing with problems of interdependence is rather weak, as Majone has shown in his review of fishing, agriculture, risk regulation and environmental policy (Majone 2005, 107–37).

This has generated tensions with member states. For example, the area of crisis management — understood in terms of conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance — was traditionally the preserve of the Commission. However, in recent years, as security and defence cooperation between member states deepened, these states sought to bring this activity within the ESDP framework. The development of ESDP has — in the eyes of the Commission — militarized the EU’s civilian crisis management identity. For member states, however, crisis management provides the ESDP with a civilian identity and purpose. The EU’s crisis management capacities, and the very meaning of crisis management itself, have become the site of a turf war between the Commission and the Council, with the Commission in 2005 taking the Council to court over the case of a small arms programme in West Africa (Hill 2001; Cameron 2007; Howorth 2007). Even in those areas where greater coordination between different institutional actors within the EU has been possible, e.g. in the Western Balkans, tensions have remained. In Macedonia, the concept of crisis management was interpreted quite differently by the Commission and the Council General Secretariat, leading to confusion on the ground (Ioannides 2006, 81–2).

What explains the policy-making process in this field is, therefore, not an overarching vision of security or an EU grand strategy. Rather we are dealing with what Jack Hayward and Anand Menon have called a ‘leaderless Europe’, where the dominant force shaping policy processes and outcomes is that of political competition between different EU actors (Menon 2008). Though the Lisbon Treaty will introduce changes, the likelihood is that such competition will endure (Economist 2008; Missiroli 2001).

Foreign Policy as Identity Building in the European Parliament

In recent years, the EP has built for itself a distinctive foreign policy identity. MEPs view foreign policy as a field where the EP can forge for itself a role that distinguishes it from both the Council and the Commission. Central to the EP’s foreign policy identity is its emphasis on human rights and democracy promotion. The EP regularly coruscates member states for their compromises with countries like China and Cuba. The EP has also played an important role in the introduction of political conditionality into the EU’s international relations, particularly in the case of EU enlargement. This is not to suggest that the EP is necessarily very powerful in the overall decision-making process of EU foreign policy. The point being made here is simply that this is one of the ways in which the EP understands its own role and is one where it feels it has good chances of expanding its powers. Writing on the EP’s ‘autonomous foreign policy identity’, Flavia Zanon (2005, 16) argues that

The promotion of human rights and the rule of law ... is a matter on which the [EP] can easily build an internal consensus and show significant
cohesion, enhancing its changes of playing a more effective role within the EU ... [The] promotion of these values generally meets public opinion’s concerns and allows the body to mobilize media attention, reinforcing the possibility of making its voice heard.

For an institution whose popular mandate is regularly undermined by low rates of participation in EP elections, foreign policy is a chance to raise the EP’s profile on issues that resonate with domestic publics across Europe. MEPs are particularly conscious of the usefulness of the EP to the other institutions of the EU. At a time when the ‘democratic deficit’ is acutely felt by Commissioners and national representatives alike, the EP can bring an element of democratic authenticity to EU foreign policy. MEPs have used this as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the Council and the Commission. One MEP with a leading role in foreign affairs argued that ‘both the Commission and the Council need us ... [A]t the beginning they were very reluctant, but in some cases they invite us to take a position, so that they can say “look, the Parliament wishes, the Parliament supports our action”’.

Participation in EU foreign policy making serves as a form of identity building for the EP. It is also a way in which the EP can try to expand its power in the policy-making process. Foreign policy as an issue area is attractive for these attempts at empowerment because MEPs are relatively united on the EP’s human rights and democratization-driven foreign policy identity. Had MEPs been divided on this issue, it would have been more difficult to present a united front in negotiations with the Council and the Commission.

It is worth noting that all this poses difficult questions regarding the compatibility of the EP’s foreign policy identity with its role as a site for debate and deliberation between different political groupings in Europe. The EP’s legitimacy rests upon its ability to accurately represent political divisions within Europe. A united EP might be more effective in its fight for greater power within the EU’s institutional apparatus, but is not a divided parliament — representing the divisions and diversity of the society out of which it is constituted — more legitimate? The consistently bi-partisan nature of the EP’s foreign affairs committees (AFET and its sub-committee on security and defence, SEDE) illustrates this point. MEPs regularly assert their collective institutional identity above and beyond an attachment to their own political family. This tension between effectiveness in the power struggle and the legitimacy of a politicized parliament has yet to be resolved in the EP (Barbe and Herranz 2007).

**Foreign Policy as Ontology**

A final function of EU foreign policy cooperation is as a site for exploring the meaning of the European project. There are various reasons why in the current period foreign policy has become attractive for this purpose. One is that the alternative path, the internal project of federalist ‘deepening’, seems to have run its course (Nicolaidis and Moravcsik 1998). This was the peculiar paradox of the Constitutional Treaty: it appeared to be an audacious
attempt at constitutionalizing the Union and thus raising the EU to the level of a constitutional polity; and, yet, the text of the Constitution made very clear that its purpose was to place limits on any further moves towards supranationalism (Patten 2005, 129–30).

Another reason is that the traditional narratives of European integration are less convincing today than they were in the past. As a former editor of Le Monde argued, ‘The founding project is no longer. There is no majority for a Europe that would require further abandonment of sovereignty; and there is no more of a majority for a “single” model …; no majority for fiscal harmonization or for a European budgetary or industrial policy; no consensus on a European public service. The list is not exhaustive …’ (Colombiani 2007).

In this context, where narratives of peace and economic prosperity no longer seem convincing, foreign policy has emerged as the new vehicle for pro-Europeans. Chris Patten echoes this sentiment when he identifies the EU’s enlargement to Turkey as a source of internal spiritual and moral renewal (Patten 2005, 148–9).

A similar conclusion is drawn by scholars. In Ben Rosamond’s (2005, 478) words, ‘one of the key lessons about the practice of EU external relations and the policy discourse that surround outward projections of the EU and others’ interpretations of it is the significance of ontological claims about the nature of the EU’. This interest in the ontological implications of EU foreign policy has in fact served as the sub-text to a field otherwise taken up with a concern for the effectiveness of different institutional constellations. In particular, what the EU can aspire to become in international politics has often overlapped with visions these same scholars hold of the integration project in Europe (Manners 2002; Nicolaïdis and Howse 2002; Balibar 2004).

It is perhaps not surprising that this ontological dimension can be found within the scholarly writing on the EU, given the vocation of the academy as a site for abstract thinking. However, it is worth noting that an ontological dimension to EU foreign policy can also be found in those actively engaged in making EU foreign policy (e.g. Miskimmon 2007: 66–7). A good example of this is in the EU’s security and defence policy. In his recent account of ESDP, Anand Menon notes that a feature of this policy area is a tendency to assess its success in terms of its contribution to the European integration project as much as its actual impact on the ground. What matters, it seems, is that the EU asserts itself as an actor and that it confirms — to itself — its own self-image. Menon notes that ‘ideas for institutional engineering [in ESDP] are sometimes dominated as much by attitudes towards integration as by military capabilities’ (Menon 2009, 241). It therefore tends to be those member states that are most enthusiastic about closer European integration in general that favour ESDP, rather than those member states actually able to conduct military operations. Menon goes as far as suggesting that ‘a desire to prove the effectiveness of the EU has sometimes helped to determine the missions it has undertaken’ (Menon 2009, 242).

Here, the purpose of ESDP seems to be the affirmation of the EU as an actor, with the policy action itself — e.g. a police or military mission — the means to that end. One striking example of this was the EU’s mission in
Bosnia, Althea. Taking over from NATO SFOR in December 2004, Althea was the EU’s third, and most ambitious, mission to date. Althea has been fêted as an example of the EU’s ‘holistic’ approach to security but the development of the mission was mostly *ad hoc*. Writing about his experience as commander of the Althea mission, Leaky noted that his only advice from the High Representative for CFSP, Javier Solana, was that the mission should ‘make a difference’ and be ‘new and distinct’. The decision to focus on organized crime was made once the EUFOR soldiers were in the field, and reflected above all Leaky’s concern to give his soldiers something to do (Leaky 2006, 64). Only in retrospect has this mission been taken as evidence of the EU’s flexible use of military force and its ability to assign to soldiers non-conventional tasks, such as tackling Bosnia’s networks of organized crime.

The lesson from Althea is that what mattered in the launching of the mission was simply, as Solana put it, that it should do something ‘new and distinct’. Each ESDP mission in this way serves the ontological purpose of building the EU’s international identity. Other assessments of ESDP missions echo this theme (Helly 2006, 84, 100, 101; Ioannides 2006; Howorth 2007, 213–4). Writing about the EU’s 2008 rule of law mission in Kosovo, Ulrike Guérot (2008) argued that the EU ‘should let Kosovo be the catalyst for more creativity about what we want to achieve with the EU’. Given this ontological dimension, the concern with effectiveness so prevalent in the literature is problematic. At the very least, scholars should inquire more systematically into the meaning of the term effectiveness. In the eyes of some, it refers to the EU’s impact around the world but, for others, it refers to the contribution of EU foreign policy to the internal development of the European project.7

This lack of attention to the consequences of its action on the part of the EU is instructive. To paraphrase Max Weber (1994, 368), the essence of political action is not simply the passionate commitment to a set of values or principles but also the ability to balance that passion with responsibility for the actions taken. The EU’s attachment to own self-image, without a serious appraisal of its impact around the world, questions its vocation as a political actor. However, it also suggests the problem lies with the member states as much as with the EU itself: because the EU is far from being an accomplished state, its standards of success can be lowered such that doing something is as important as the content of the action itself. This lack of regard for consequences is attractive for member states who have swapped their role as active shapers of contemporary global politics for the more parochial project of closer foreign policy cooperation.

Conclusion

Taking functionality as a starting point for studying EU foreign policy provides us with a wide range of new insights. It heralds the prospect of uniting the study of foreign policy cooperation with the wider field of European integration, not least by opening up the field to the possibility of greater
theoretical reflection. An advantage of functionality is that as an approach it
does not presume anything about the institutional framework of EU foreign
policy. Indeed, the functions identified above highlight the extent to which
EU foreign policy involves a multitude of actors and operates across the
different institutional frameworks of the EU. Such cross-pillarization,
however, does not indicate the emergence of an embryonic EU sovereignty.
A paradox of contemporary EU foreign policy is precisely that it has gone
beyond the traditional pillar divisions but without fashioning a new quasi-
governmental political system (Winn and Lord 2001, 10). This leaves the EU
in a political no-man’s-land: it is driven forward by member states who
favour a pan-European consensus over purely national exertions and yet it
has no single voice since its foreign policy is made up of an ongoing struggle
for the right to ‘speak for Europe’. Studying the EU’s foreign policy thus
opens up some fundamental questions about the nature of interest, responsi-
bility and political action today of interest to scholars outside of the imme-
diate EU studies field.

Future research on functionality in EU foreign policy cooperation could
proceed down a number of different avenues. Three such avenues are laid out
very briefly below.

(1) The discussion of national foreign policy strategies raises broader ques-
tions about the nature and meaning of national interest in contemporary
Europe. Do all member states conceive of their interests as being Euro-
pean rather than national? What of traditionally Eurosceptic countries
like the UK? Can we say the attractiveness of EU foreign policy stems
from the opportunity it provides to member states to escape their interna-
tional obligations as rich and capable nation-states? Do CFSP and ESDP
represent a strategy for bridging the gap between Europe’s historically
central role in international affairs and its current parochialism? If so,
what implications does this have for our understanding of ‘Europeaniza-
tion’? Various studies of the Europeanization of foreign policy, from
Rummel (1996) and Miskimmon (2007) on Germany, to Irondelle
this point. It would be worth studying more systematically in the form of
historical case studies.

(2) Detailed case studies of specific policy areas are needed to properly under-
stand the political competition between the different institutional actors
within the EU, and its role in shaping foreign policy cooperation. In
particular, more work is needed to understand the paradox of member
states struggling with other EU actors over who has final authority in
foreign policy and yet also using foreign policy cooperation as a way of
escaping their own international responsibilities. How can we reconcile
this struggle for political power within the EU with a refusal of power
projection in the rest of the world? Though its ratification remains in
doubt, and given the ambiguity over the consequences of its provisions,
the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on these internal political struggles
should be studied in detail.
(3) Why has foreign policy become subject to so many ontological questions about the nature and purpose of the Union? Was it always thus? Did the ontological dimension exist in earlier incarnations of EU foreign policy, e.g. EPC in the 1970s? Or has foreign policy become over time the last refuge of the federalist imagination, the result of a steady retreat from early aspirations towards building a more political Europe on the ashes of European nation-states? Does this ontological dimension reveal the uncertainty over the finalité of the EU or does it reflect a wider crisis of meaning at the level of the nation-state in Europe?

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Notes

1. My thanks to Alex Callinicos for suggesting the link between functionality and Foucault's work.
2. For a similar argument, see also Patten (2005, 155), Védrine (2003, 344) and Erlanger (2005, 16).
3. For example, on France, see Treacher (2001).
4. For a very interesting discussion of 'late sovereign diplomacy', see Adler-Nissen (2009).
5. For an early formulation of this argument, see Keohane and Nye (1989).
6. My thanks to one of the anonymous referees for this point. The only real exception to this is the Confederal Group of the European United Left–Nordic Green Left, who on occasion publishes dissenting opinions on matters relating to CFSP and ESDP. See, for instance, the minority opinion of this group in the 2005 report on the Security Strategy, adopted on 23 March 2005. One MEP interviewed referred to one of the leaders of the Confederal Group of the European United Left as 'our own little Lenin'.
7. My thanks to Andrew Bacevich for highlighting these different meanings of effectiveness.

References

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