

Europe as a Global Power

Prof. Dr. Hanns W. Maull, University of Trier

Exposé

1) *The European Union as a Global Player: Trends*

The European Union (EU) recently has assumed growing importance in international affairs. Three major trends have been observable in this context:

- The EU has long been a global power in the world economy and in international economic policy-making. The EU is the largest trader in the world economy; in 2005, its external merchandise trade equalled about \$ 2,790 bill., with a rather well balanced position: the external deficit of the EU came to about \$ 134 bill.¹ In the same year, the US total merchandise trade came to about \$ 2,637 bill., but with a massive external imbalance: the US trade deficit in 2005 was about \$ 840 bill.. International trade negotiations traditionally have been dominated by the United States and the European Union, both of which continue to have effective veto power, though they are no longer able to settle the issues between themselves. Since its introduction, the Euro has become the second international reserve currency and the advantage of the Dollar on that score has been declining. Politically, however, the European Union is less well organised to project its influence on international monetary and financial matters: first, the Euro has been adopted only by some, but not by all member countries (the most notable non-member being the UK), and second, the Euro is represented internationally only by the head of the European Central Bank but not by an EU Monetary and Finance Commissioner, as in the case of trade negotiations. The closest the Euro comes to a political voice is that of Jean-Claude Juncker, the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, who heads the Euro-committee of economics and finance ministers. Nor does the EU speak with one voice in the Bretton Woods Institutions; its influence, while substantial, therefore remains below the EU members' combined voting rights. Still, overall the EU clearly is a Great Power in international economic relations, including their policy dimensions.
- The EU more recently also has become a significant political and diplomatic player, although the record there is much spottier than in international economic relations. Genuine common foreign and security policies compare unfavourably with the official claim that the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) represents the “second (and hence, presumably, equally weighty) pillar” in the EU's three-pillared institutional architecture, which joins the supranationally organised integrated common policies in “pillar one” (mostly in the economic realm) with (primarily inter-

¹ All data are for the EU-25. They are taken from the WTO International Trade Statistics, available at http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/statis_e.htm

governmental) foreign and security policy (“pillar two”) and home and justice affairs (“pillar three”) under the roof of the Union. Significant political and diplomatic contributions by the EU include

- EU enlargement from 12 to 27 member countries since 1990. This arguably has been the most successful exercise in preventive diplomacy and the projection of democratic peace, stability and prosperity since the Roman empire,
- stabilisation of the Balkans after the wars of implosion of former Yugoslavia. This job, begun with the Dayton Agreement in 1995, is not yet finished, but there certainly has been significant progress. While the final status of Kosovo remains to be determined and state-building in Bosnia-Herzegovina and state transformation in Serbia and Montenegro are certainly far from completed, violence has been effectively contained.
- (nuclear) non-proliferation policy, notably vis-a-vis Iran. In response to lessons learned from the dramatic split of NATO and the EU over Iraq in 2002/3, the EU has engaged both Washington and Teheran in efforts to peacefully settle the Iranian nuclear issue through the so called EU3/EU negotiation mechanism, which brings together the governments of Britain, Germany and France with the CFSP High Representative Javier Solana. Solana has also been acting as the representative of the EU3+3 format, which includes the US, Russia and China.

On the other hand, significant gaps and divergences still exist in European policies with regard to

- EU relations with the United States: significantly, there never has been an effort to formulate a “common strategy” (one of the CFSP’s principal policy instruments) vis-à-vis the United States.
 - EU relations with Russia (while for relations with Russia, the CFSP has formulated such a common strategy but recently, there have been considerable political tensions between Russia and several Eastern European member states of the EU, mostly over issues of energy and history.
 - (international) energy policies. The EU does not have a common approach towards security of supply, energy prices and energy transition issues, and its recent agreement on a common approach towards reducing carbon dioxide emissions to combat global warming represents a declaration of intent, rather than a serious policy effort.
 - the Israeli-Arab conflict. On this conflict, there has since 1980 (Declaration of Venice) been a common European position, but actual policies have tended to follow the US lead, rather than develop genuine European initiatives.
- Finally, the EU has also emerged since 1999 as a significant military actor through its Common European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in the context of peace-keeping and peace-building (though not as yet in peace-enforcement), notably in the Balkans and in Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo). What is important to note here, however, is that the EU’s military power projection has been rather non-traditional. That is, it has – for rather obvious reasons - not been related to the pursuit of vital or even existential national interests but mostly to humanitarian contingencies and perceived threats related to failing or failed statehood. In that context, the ESDP has also developed important civilian components and capabilities. The EU also takes pride in being the only major international player to have developed a truly integrated civil-military approach towards crisis-management.

2) The European Union as a Global Power: Prospects

Any analysis of the position and role of the EU in international relations today and in the future needs to recognise its – from the traditional IR perspective² - peculiar characteristics and behaviour. While the EU's overall capabilities as a global player are likely to grow in the future (most immediately as a result of the agreement and likely implementation on important foreign policy aspects of the Draft Constitutional Treaty during the EU summit meeting chaired by German Chancellor Angela Merkel in June 2007), those characteristics and behaviour will not change fundamentally: the EU will continue to be a composite actor, made up of sovereign nation states³ which voluntarily are pooling, coordinating and integrating their foreign policy resources and strategies. This will continue to impose serious constraints, notably in the field of military power projection, and it therefore seems obvious that the EU will not become a military Great Power either in terms of its real (i.e. politically available) military resources or its political will to play such a role.

But if the EU will almost certainly not become a Great Power in the traditional sense, what kind of power will it be then? There is as yet no clear answer to this, but elements for such an answer do exist. Analytically, the answers relate to the question: what role concept does the EU claim for itself in international relations, or, more precisely, in the context of the future world order? Role concepts express and “operationalise” national (or, in our case, the EU's) European “identity” for the purposes of conceptualising and implementing foreign policy. Role concepts embody expectations by the “self” – that is, in the case of the EU, expectations of member governments and citizens - (this constitutes the “ego part” of a role concept), but also those of others – other governments, international organisations, and others (“alter part”). The “self” in the case of the EU is of course a rather complex animal, and the “actorness” of the EU in international relations (that is, a clear political will ultimately represented by one voice or at least a very well attuned choir of voices) often will be ambivalent or even non-existent. (In such cases, it will also be difficult to talk about “one” role concept; there will then in fact be several role concepts competing with each other for dominance in the field of the EU's external relations, or perhaps even agreement among member governments not to develop a role concept segment towards a given policy area or issue at all).

The EU's role concept presently is the object of considerable debate in Europe, both academically and politically. In the academic debate, different concepts (such as “civilian power” or “normative power”) vie with each other. Politically, there are several key issues on which there is presently no agreement among EU member states; a good example would be the relationship between the EU and the United States. Still, the EU CFSP also has been able to agree on important policy documents and foreign policy actions, including military action in the context of the ESDP. The EU's role concept is reflected perhaps most clearly in the European Security Strategy, adopted formally by the heads of states and governments in December 2003.⁴ It reflects the common denominator of member states expectations but clearly also is

² The traditional IR perspective here encompasses not only Realism and Neo-realism, but also Neo-liberal institutionalism and all other approaches which are state-based in the sense of emphasising the (historically contingent) modern nation states with its key attributes of territoriality and sovereignty. This perspective looks at international relations as a “modern nation-state” or “Westphalian” system. One key assumption underlying my argument is that this distinct historical phase in international relations history has already come to an end; in that sense, we are already living in a “post-modern world”.

³ It should be noted, though, that “sovereignty” within the context of European integration and for (the older) EU member states has a rather different meaning and different connotations from those which are traditionally associated with “modern”, i.e. “Westphalian” nation-states and international relations!

⁴ A Secure Europe in a Better World, European Security Strategy, Brussels, Dec.12, 2003 [http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf, accessed 24/9/07]

more than just the “lowest” common denominator: rather, it reflects a distinctively “European” approach to international relations and world order. Analytically, this EU role concept reflects both the impact of (diverging) national role concepts on the EU (“uploading”) and, conversely, of processes of integration of different policy approaches and their socialisation on national policies at the EU level (“downloading”). Since the EU role concept clearly needs to have a minimum of compatibility with *all* individual national role concepts of member states, this European role concept seems likely to develop most strongly in areas of compatibility and overlap between national expectations, rather than in areas where national differences are pronounced. In that sense, the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the foreign policy guidelines (i.e., the role concept) behind it are generally not very contested – where there are serious differences, there simply will not be a common European approach.

This suggests that the EU role concept will develop mostly along the lines originally suggested by Francois Duchene in the early 1970s, namely that of a “civilian power”. The need for effective collective approaches where individual national European approaches will no longer make any difference – and that realm can only increase in the future, given the relative decline of Europe’s weight in international relations – will be the strongest impulse pushing for effective common foreign policy approaches, while national sensitivities about specific policy objectives or strategies, but also more generically about national prerogatives (e.g., on the use of force) will be the principal obstacles to an effective and efficient CFSP. The constraints on CFSP will thus continue to reflect different national preferences and reservations about “sharing sovereignty”.

3) *The European Union as a Global Civilian Power: Its Relevance for Future World Order*

If the EU can be expected to develop its role concept along the lines of a global civilian power, and if we assume (perhaps rather optimistically) that it also will enhance its capacity for common policies and strategies along those lines, what does this mean? And: how relevant will this role concept be to the evolution of international order?

On the first question, the following key elements characterise the ideal type role concept of a civilian power:

- First, the role concept is transformational – its ambition is to transform the quality of international relations along the lines which characterise the conduct of politics to formulate policies for a given polity within developed Western democracies or, for that matter, within the European Union. In other words, civilian powers want to civilise international relations, just as the modern nation state, through a centuries-long process, civilised intra-state relations.
- Second, the transformation is to be achieved through the simultaneous promotion of six interrelated objectives (the so-called civilisational hexagon, see Chart 1) across the full spectrum of politics, that is, within and between all states. Those objectives are the monopolisation of force, the rule of law and institutions, political participation, interdependence and emotional self-restraint, the development of a culture of non-violent conflict resolution and social justice. Civilian powers will pursue those objectives with a general scepticism (though not a complete rejection) of what the use of force can achieve in this context; if use of force is considered unavoidable, civilian powers will insist on using it only legitimately and multilaterally. They will promote the rule of law and institutions by self-binding and example, and thus be willing to transfer elements of sovereignty to international and supranational institutions.

- Third, this transformation will obviously be a long process, which will presumably experience set-backs and could also fail catastrophically. There will therefore be the need to make progress sustainable, to consolidate civilisational gains and to guard against possible set-backs.

As for the relevance of this particular role to future international relations: my answer is that, broadly speaking, the role concept of a global civilian power presently seems to be the one most compatible with the logic of rapidly globalising international relations. For globalisation entails a diffusion and dissipation of power, while at the same time the opportunities and challenges which globalisation produces will need the mobilisation of vast power resources to achieve desired results. The obvious consequence is that the governance of globalisation will often require very broad-based coalitions of actors – involving not only states, but also international organisations, Transnational Corporations, INGOs (international non-governmental organisations) and BINGOs (business international non-governmental organisations). From this perspective, the future of world order would indeed depend not only on the EU forcefully developing and enacting this particular role concept, but on others adapting their own, mostly “modern” role concepts along post-modern (i.e., “European”) lines.

Chart I: The Civilising Hexagon

