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Exploring the Politics of EU Foreign Policy:
The Utility of a Governance Approach

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Abstract

The paper argues that a governance approach may be more suitable to the study of the European Union's (EU's) foreign policy process than more established approaches. This argument rests on three assumptions: (1) the political processes of EU foreign policy are an essential explanatory factor for policy outcomes, (2) the day-to-day functioning of these processes differs analytically from 'history-making' and 'policy-setting' decisions and (3) the political processes vary across different issue areas. Starting by reviewing traditional approaches' key differences and lack of capacity to fully grasp the 'politics' of EU foreign policy, an analytical framework is suggested that aims at offering a way forward to analyzing the modes and process patterns of EU foreign policy-making and the interaction between member states and EU institutions. Then the paper moves on to present two sets of propositions on: (1) the conditions under which a governance perspective may be more suited than traditional approaches and (2) the informal structures and interaction patterns that dominate the EU's foreign policy process.

I. Introduction

The rapid evolution of foreign policy cooperation in the EU has fostered a lively academic debate about the suitability of approaches to analyze and explain EU foreign policy[1]. Even though it is generally accepted that EU foreign policy has analytical boundaries vis-à-vis other subfields of EU studies (Carlsnaes 2007: 546), scholars have mainly drawn from existing approaches used elsewhere in the study of the EU. Early studies have mostly been of a descriptive or policy-oriented kind, comparing the content of generated policies and critically reflecting upon them. This is mirrored in the continued use of individual concepts and partial explanations, and the absence of a coherent theoretical and analytical approach to the issue. The past decade has certainly witnessed considerable more theorizing on especially the Common

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[1] Brian White's (2004: 12-16) conception is followed. He argues that EU foreign policy embraces first, second and third pillar policies. Although sometimes used interchangeably, European foreign policy also denotes member states' foreign policy.

Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) than the preceding decades. Yet, 'theorizing remains subordinate to case studies and organizational description, with the result that the problems in grasping fully the phenomenon (…) remain unsolved' (Øhrgaard 2004: 42; Carlsnaes 2007: 547). Øhrgaard concludes that 'the study of European foreign policy cooperation remains at a pre-theoretical stage' (2004: 42; Rosamond 2000: 177).

Three elements have diluted the coherence of the approaches adopted to study EU foreign policy. The first fundamental issue revolves around the kind of international actor the EU itself is, and how it should be analyzed and explained. This is about the question whether the EU is *sui generis* or whether it can be classified and explained with conventional analytical tools. It goes without saying that as long as the nature of the EU remains conceptually contested, the nature of its foreign policy interactions will remain an issue of contestation too (Øhrgaard 2004: 42; Carlsnaes 2007: 546).

Second, the gradual emergence of a complex 'system of external relations' has further exacerbated the lack of analytical coherence. This system can be decomposed into three 'types' of foreign policy interactions cutting across member states and the EU: national foreign policies emanating from each of the current 27 member states, the Community's external relations and member states' coordination efforts of their political relations and security policies, commonly referred to as second pillar policies (Hill 1993: 322). The central issue here is the way to approach the Union's international capacity: does this comprise first pillar policies, second pillar policies or both? And how are these related to national foreign policies (Tonra 2000: 164)?

Third, scholars studying EU foreign policy often aim at analyzing and explaining essentially different things. This has lead to a situation in which studies often speak past one another, and hence develop conceptual tools that serve different purposes (Carlsnaes 2007: 550-554). Diez and Wiener identify three different areas or 'objects' of approaches: (1) theories dealing with the polity or the political community and its institutions, (2) theories dealing with actual policies and (3) theories covering the politics or policy-making processes (2009: 18-19).

In the study of EU foreign policy, scholars' focus traditionally lies on the policies and the polity, i.e. the general (institutional) evolution of EU foreign policy, its relation to member states' foreign policies and the EU's international role. Yet, there remains a remarkable gap in the literature regarding the analytical approaches to the politics of EU foreign policy (Tonra and Christensen 2004: 3; Jørgensen 2007: 508-510). This connotes the daily struggles and

bargaining between member states' representatives, the influence and role played by EU institutions and the dominance of styles of how decisions are reached and implemented (Diez and Wiener 2009: 19). Although various valuable (case) studies have been conducted on the EU's foreign policy process (Gégout 2002; Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet 2002; Piana 2002; Smith M.E. 2004b; Smith 2006; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 98-123; Thomas 2009), to date a systematic and integrated analytical approach remains unavailable.

This paper will first review the different approaches taken by scholars in their analysis of EU foreign policy. The paper will then discuss the possibilities for an analytical approach rooted in a governance perspective. This approach rests on three assumptions: (1) the political processes of EU foreign policy are an essential explanatory factor for policy outcomes, (2) the day-to-day functioning of these processes differs analytically from 'history-making' and 'policy-setting' decisions and (3) the political processes vary across different issue areas. Third, a framework will be proposed for analyzing the politics of EU foreign policy. This framework aims at offering a way forward to analyzing the modes and process patterns of EU foreign policy-making and the interaction between member states and EU institutions. Lastly, the paper will generate propositions on the conditions under which a governance perspective is best applied as well as on the informal structures and interaction patterns that dominate the EU's foreign policy process.

II. Reviewing the Current Debate

Three 'Traditional' Perspectives on EU Foreign Policy

The way to interpret the 'nature of the beast' is one of the most contentious issues dividing theorists of EU foreign policy. Scholars studying the EU's international capacity, whether studying its policy processes, its institutional evolution or its actual policies, are confronted with the same fundamental question: 'are we looking at something that is comparable with other social institutions such as a state or an international organization, or are we looking at something wholly unique' (Tonra and Christiansen 2004: 4)? This fundamental issue has led to the emergence of three primary strand or currents of theory that shed light on EU foreign policy: a 'state-centric', a comparative and a 'sui generis' strand. In what follows, the most important differences between these strands and their main weaknesses will be emphasized rather than repeating their core assumptions (for reviews, see Tonra 2000; Tonra and Christensen 2004; Andreatta 2005; Carlsnaes 2007; Rosamond 2007).

The three strands or currents identified in the literature differ on three key issues. The first crucial difference revolves around the assumptions about what the EU is, and how we should approach its role internationally. The state-centric strand associates the EU with processes of regional integration and international cooperation. EU foreign policy is seen as yet another form of international cooperation in which member states remain central entities. Approaches within this strand, either implicitly or explicitly, adhere to the Weberian notion of the state, 'as a hierarchical structure of authoritative decision-making enjoying external and internal sovereignty' (Risse-Kappen 1996: 57). Even though other actors, such as institutions, may be given a varying extent of relevance, their impact and role are eventually examined in relation to their constraining or enhancing effect on member states' cooperation.

The second, comparative strand conceives the EU as a polity or political system akin to other domestic political systems (Eliassen 1998; Winn and Lord 2001; Smith H. 2002). The centrality of the state in analyses of EU foreign policy are put aside. Instead, the EU is seen as a complex entity in which political decisions stem from interlinkages, complex bargaining and discursive processes (Pollack 2005: 26). Yet, scholars differ greatly in the degree of complexity of their conception of EU foreign policy. While some go as far as to argue that the EU does have a foreign policy and that it is 'much the same as that of the nation-state' (Smith H. 2002: 7), others depart from a more complex definition and treat the 'EU foreign affairs system as a complex web of nodal interconnections' (Winn and Lord 2001: 177). All, however, assume that the EU mimics in some way or another features of nation-states within the international system (Rosamond 2000: 175).

The sui generis strand considers the EU to be neither of the above and claims that attempts to theorize EU foreign policy should defy conventional classifications (Ginsberg 2001; Krahmann 2003; Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Elgström and Smith 2006; Orbie 2008). The EU is treated as a unique or *sui generis* international actor, in terms of its character, identity, instruments and institutional set-up (Elgström and Smith 2006: 1-4). By applying the multi-level metaphor, this strand attempts to break away from traditional notions of the state and sovereignty in the international system, assuming that 'governments are unable to unilaterally control their foreign or even domestic affairs' (Krahmann 2003: 1). EU foreign policy is thus seen as part of an evolving multi-actor global system, resulting from complex interactions produced at different levels of action, i.e. national, transnational and international (Rosamond 2000: 175-176; Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 13; Hill and Smith 2005: 9).

It follows that the three strands apply different analytical tools to analyze and explain EU foreign policy. The state-centric strand mainly draws from theories of International Relations (IR) and European integration. Initially, the debate was dominated by the opposition between neo-functionalist and intergovernmentalist theories both emphasizing the continued dominance of national governments. Later, this antagonism was supplanted by a second debate pitting rational-choice theorists against constructivist analyses (Øhrgaard 2004; Pollack 2005; Carlsnaes 2007).

The comparative strand turns to analytical tools stemming from comparative politics and conventional foreign policy analysis (Tonra 2000: 164; Carlsnaes 2007: 554). While some authors judge EU foreign policy against measurements of ideal state-type foreign policies (Tonra 2000: 164-167), most argue in favor of adapting conventional tools to fit the distinctiveness of the EU. Brian White (2004: 24-25) argues that the foreign policy analysis (FPA) framework which is traditionally situated in narrow state-centric approaches is not necessarily wedded to them, and should be adjusted in order to provide more complex international constructions such as the EU's foreign policy system. Also Winn and Lord (2001: 176) take a similar position and state that models from comparative politics and public administration allow 'the theorist to look at insights into preference formation, agenda-setting, national foreign policy inputs, policy learning and strategic action'.

In line with their conception of the EU as a unique entity in global politics, scholars within the last current argue in favor of the need 'to develop an approach that differs considerably from contemporary studies' (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 1-3). Responding to the demand to develop novel conceptual tools, authors have put forward various role concepts for the EU (Elgström and Smith 2006: 1-4, Orbie 2008: 2-4). In addition, analytical tools and models have been developed to analyze the EU's functioning, both internally and externally (Ginsberg 2001; Bretherton and Vogler 2006). But despite attempts to streamline these various conceptual tools, their continuous growth has hampered the development of an integrated approach.

A final difference concerns the diverging explanandum or object of studies. In the first strand, scholars are mostly concerned with the dynamics that characterize EU foreign policy, changes in its wider environment as well as its institutional development. Although studies falling in the comparative current have a similar focus, they also focus on the policy outcomes from the EU's foreign policy system (Tonra 2000: 166-167; Carlsnaes 2007: 548; Rosamond 2007: 127). Sui generis approaches mostly focus on the EU's capacity to shape its external environment (Hill and Smith 2005: 7).

Despite these substantial differences, the three currents share two important weaknesses which are particularly problematic when we wish to analyze the politics of EU foreign policy. First, all three strands embrace such a great diversity of approaches that it complicates analyses. Some have argued that attempts to propose *a* theory to the entirety of EU foreign policy is 'inappropriate and foolhardy' (Holland 1991: 5) and that the 'failure to create a general theory … is in fact perhaps to be welcomed' (Bulmer 1991: 89-90). Yet, the large numbers of theories and frameworks existing in the study of EU foreign policy have too often been applied in a 'single shot' fashion. Applying a deductive method, studies often focus on case studies of selected policies or institutional aspects. It may thus prove fruitful to attempt to integrate various aspects of theories and combining them in a new framework (Jørgensen 2004: 14).

Second, the approaches within the identified strands are either ill-suited or neglect the politics of EU foreign policy. In their discussion of decision-making in the EU, Peterson and Bomberg (1999: 1-7) suggest that different levels of action require different sorts of theory. While theories of IR and European integration are useful to analyze changes in the wider environment of the EU and institutional change, they are less suited to account for the EU's actual functioning. In other words, approaches within the state-centric strand are ill-suited to analyze the day-to-day functioning of the EU's foreign policy system. Approaches within the comparative and sui generis strand hardly develop tools to analyze and explain the politics of EU foreign policy. They simply examine different phenomena.

'New' Thinking about the Politics of EU Foreign Policy: A Governance Perspective

Ideally, an approach should offer a perspective on the EU's foreign policy process that draws from insights of all three primary strands of theories that shape our thinking about EU foreign policy. Rather than adding novel approaches to the already extensive body of conceptual and theoretical tools, we can move on to achieving that goal by selecting aspects of the existing strands and then systemizing and establishing analytical links between them. Such an inductive exploratory fashion (Jørgensen 2004: 14) is further supported by the assertion of Winn and Lord (2001: 175-177) that the various approaches within all strands are not sufficient in themselves but offer each partial tools to improve our understanding of foreign policy-making in the EU. I argue that a promising way of achieving that goal may be offered by a governance approach which has aimed at achieving a similar goal in general EU studies.

Over the past three decades the theoretical debate in EU studies gradually moved away from questions regarding the nature of European integration. The attention of scholars shifted instead to the actual functioning of the polity: the processes of policy-making and the daily struggles and strategies of political actors (Jachtenfuchs 2007: 159-160). While a distinctive approach emerged for the study of EU policy processes, this analytical shift did not occur to a similar extent in the study of EU foreign policy. Even if the latter is increasingly conceptualized as a political system (Hill 1993: 322; Ginsberg 2001; Winn and Lord 2001; Hill and Smith 2005), the analytical perspectives that have emerged in EU studies hardly trickled down to the study of EU foreign policy. What's more, even though authors recognize the need to examine the governance structures and processes that lie behind the EU's external policies, they continue to apply mostly traditional theories to analyze and explain the EU's complex foreign policy-making process (Collinson 1999: 207; Filtenborg et.al. 2002; Schimmelfennig and Wagner 2004: 657).

In short, governance is about 'coordinating multiple players in a complex setting of mutual dependence' and refers to the 'patterns that emerge from governing activities' among these actors (Kohler Koch 1996). The approach's key assumptions indicate its potential to analyze the politics of EU foreign policy. First, a governance perspective does not embrace a single theory but rather a cluster of related approaches that emphasize common themes and share a set of assumptions. Contrary to Hix's critique, a governance approach cannot be considered sui generis but draws from parallel governance traditions in both IR and comparative politics (Pollack 2005: 36-38). It is important to emphasize that a governance approach does not primarily aim at causally *explaining* the way EU foreign policy functions. Rather, it offers a framework through which EU foreign policy can be *analyzed*. The added-value of a governance perspective lies on its potential to grasp the structural relationships and dynamics between actors in policy-making, placing emphasis on agenda-setting power, the implementation process, the role of actors and the role of informal and formal structures in the decision-making process (Börzel 1998: 258-259).

Second, a governance approach does not primarily seek to analyze the establishment and development of EU foreign policy or the EU's international role, but takes the existing foreign policy system as a starting assumption for analyzing the modes and processes of EU foreign policy-making (Schimmelfennig and Wagner 2004: 657). A governance approach should thus not be considered as a rivalry to 'traditional' approaches but rather as a complementary perspective: while it focuses on the politics *within* the 'Euro-polity', traditional approaches

primarily cover the causes and evolutions *of* the polity as well as its policy outcomes (Jachtenfuchs 2001: 256).

Third, a governance perspective not only takes governmental institutions and the EU's legal set-up into account but also informal, non-governmental mechanisms whereby persons, institutions and organizations move ahead to satisfy their needs and fulfill their wants (Rosenau 1992: 4). This is particularly valuable in the study of EU foreign policy. Not only is it composed of policy processes that are highly diverse and take place across different pillars and levels, political actors may also opt to pursue their foreign policy objectives through other international forums. Political actors thus have to manage the connections between various locations, pillars and levels and the choice as to which is their preferred way for addressing policy issues (Wallace 2005a: 78-79; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 28-33).

Furthermore, a governance approach also grasps the growing specialization or 'subsidiarity' that characterizes EU foreign policy. Those member states most concerned with a particular policy issue function as an engine of cooperation, shaping policies and following-up its implementation. Such intensified cooperation may, moreover, also involve non-EU member states as well as regional and international organizations (Filtenborg et.al. 2002: 402-403; Keukeleire 2006). In order to grasp these dynamics in the EU's foreign policy process, a governance approach stresses to identify those political actors that have the greatest influence over policy decisions taken (Pollack 2005: 36-45; Collinson 1999: 207; Peters and Pierre 2009: 92).

Fourth, the traditional conception of state sovereignty becomes hard to reconcile with a governance perspective. The latter assumes that the authority to make, implement, and enforce rules is increasingly dispersed among a variety of actors at a variety of levels. It thus challenges the Westphalian notion of sovereignty as an ordering principle of internal hierarchy combined with external anarchy (Jachtenfuchs 2001: 249; Aalberts 2004: 25-29). Sovereignty is rather conceived in terms of political control, namely as the political capacity of a state 'to decide for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems' (Waltz 1979: 96).

At the same time, however, states are not disposed of and remain key actors in EU politics. Governance is conducted in the 'shadow of hierarchy': states continue to have residual powers to (re)claim decision-making and hence to conduct their national foreign policy outside the context of the EU. Even though they have delegated certain aspects of their foreign policy to the EU, member states continue to have the right to act unilaterally and they often do so (Hill

2004; Smith M. E. 2005: 155; Peters and Pierre 2009: 93). In other words, the idea about EU foreign policy is 'not one of governance *above* the state (…), but rather of governance *beyond* the state. That is, 'beyond' in its 'inclusive' sense, as 'more than/besides the state'' (Aalberts 2004: 25-33).

Such an alternative conception of state authority is of particular relevance in the analysis of the EU's foreign policy-making process in which political control is increasingly dispersed. EU foreign policy can neither be seen as a form of intergovernmental cooperation nor as a clear-cut foreign policy comparable to the one of nation states. Scholars agree that 'European cooperation in foreign policy has gone far beyond the framework of sovereign state diplomacy' (Wallace W. 2005: 455) and that within 'EU foreign policy-making, the relationship between member states and the EU is primarily non-hierarchical' (Winn and Lord 2001: 177; Jørgensen 2004: 12). Furthermore, EU foreign policy-making is interlinked with other regional and international organizations, and is characterized by a problem-solving style of decision-making in which consensus-seeking tendencies prevail. This contrasts to traditional perspectives where the principle bargaining style of decision-making is supposed to remain predominant (Smith M. E. 2004a: 741; Hill and Smith 2005: 6-9).

II. EU Foreign Policy as a System of Governance: Towards a Framework for Analysis

Although the EU is increasingly termed a collective political system that produces positions, decisions and actions in the world, its foreign policy activities do not stem from a system that can be termed a polity or political system akin to other domestic systems. EU institutions have not taken on the powers of national governments in the sphere of foreign policy and, in contrast to classic political systems, the rules governing relations within and between institutions and member states regarding foreign policy issues are very dynamic and diverse (Hix 2005: 2-5). Therefore, the looser term of policy system or partial polity remains preferable (Hill and Smith 2005: 6).

The question can then of course be raised how such a policy system or partial polity may look like, and which elements determine its shape. To this question, Lindberg and Scheingold (1970: 64-75) offer a straight-forward framework. They make use of two measurement devices to gain an understanding of the EU's political system which can also be applied to the EU's foreign policy system. First, they suggest to identify the issue areas which are relevant to the policy area under investigation. An issue area is defined as a set of issues which policy-makers

consider closely interdependent and which are dealt with collectively. They are characterized by a particular pattern of institutional organization, entailing varying sets of actors, preferences and modes of interaction (Rosenau 1990: 40-41). Second, they propose to determine the locus of decision-making in the policy process governing a given issue area. This is measured by defining the system's intensity of policy processes, 'that is the relative importance of Community decision-making processes as compared with national processes in any given area' (1970: 68). The authors put forward a continuum designating the locus of decision-making, with at the one end a situation in which no EU-level decision authority has appeared and at the other end a situation where all policy decisions are governed by Community processes (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A scale of the locus of decision-making

Low integration
1. All policy decisions by national processes   **2. Only the beginnings of Community decision processes**   **3. Policy decisions in both but national activity predominates**   **4. Policy decisions in both but Community activity predominates**   **5. All policy decisions by joint Community processes**
High integration

Source: Lindberg and Scheingold (1970: 69)

One of the defining characteristics of governance is the dispersion of the authority to make, implement and enforce rules among a variety of actors at a variety of levels. The scale introduced in figure 1 connotes differing degrees of decision-making authority, reflecting a varying extent of intensity of governance. If the average would approximate a value of 1, EU foreign policy would not alter the hierarchical authority structures of states and would represent little more than yet another form of international cooperation. In this case, EU foreign policy would amount to a regime or, at best, an international organization. If, conversely, the average would approximate the value of 5, EU foreign policy would be much like a national foreign policy emanating from a political system that resembles a federal state. It is clear that EU foreign policy corresponds to neither of the two and that, instead, its international activities oscillate between the two extremes depending on the issue at stake.

This is mirrored in the EU's lack of a single pattern of foreign policy-making: the different demands of distinct issue areas as well as the varying intensity of governance have resulted in a high degree of policy-making diversity (Wallace W. 2005: 483-503). Smith (2006: 301-305) identifies three modes of policy-making that characterize the EU's foreign policy system: (1)

traditional Community policy-making which governs the first pillar, (2) Union policy-making that falls close to the intergovernmental mode of EU policy-making, and (3) 'negotiated order'. The latter indicates the cases in which the EU's international activities take place in a multi-level negotiation context (e.g. G8, ILO, UN, WTO). Yet, EU foreign policy decisions are not easily divided between these modes of governance. In many cases, foreign policy action is based on different 'policy-making regimes', drawing competences and instruments from different pillars as well as different levels (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 66-67). The EU's foreign policy system thus embraces transgovernmental and supranational actor formations which supplement more self-contained practices of national foreign policy-making (Winn and Lord 2001: 53).

Governance through Networks

Various schools of policy networks exist, each approaching and applying the concept in different forms. Here, the conception of the 'governance school' is used. This strand regards policy networks as an analytical concept: they are key structures of policy-making in situations where resources are widely dispersed. Policy networks connote clusters of 'actors, each of which has an interest, or "stake" in a given … policy sector and the capacity to help determine policy success or failure' (Peterson and Bomberg 1999: 8). These actors are assumed to be mutually dependent and cannot achieve their objectives without resources possessed by others. Policy networks may refer to formal or/and informal organizations, to national or/and transnational players, and to interacting state or/and non-state actors. As such, they provide an alternative mode of policy coordination to intergovernmental approaches which emphasize clear hierarchies and privileged channels of access (Börzel 1998: 255; Jönsson et.al. 1998: 321-26; Jachtenfuchs 2001: 254).

Policy networks are, however, seldom characterized by a total absence of hierarchy. In this context, analysts have pointed to so-called *linking-pin organizations:* actors who 'occupy central positions in terms of being reachable from, and able to reach, most other organizations *(or actors)* in the network' (Jönsson et.al. 1998: 328-329). They serve as brokers and facilitate the communication between the different actors in the network. While the European Commission is likely to take up such a role regarding first pillar policies, the Council Secretariat is expected to be central in policy networks concerning second pillar policies (Jönsson et.al. 1998: 329; Krause 2003; Jönsson and Strömvik 2005: 23-25; Nasra 2008: 246-

247). Yet, this role can as well be taken up by one or more member states that, in these instances, act as honest-brokers (Jakobsen 2009: 91-94).

Several scholars have applied the concept of policy networks to the analysis of EU foreign policy. Yet, these studies have been either analytically fragmented or solely focused on individual case studies (Filtenborg et.al. 2002; Piana 2002; Krahmann 2003; Jönsson and Strömvik 2005). A notable exception is the elaborate study of Winn and Lord (2001: 169-76) who conclude that the concept of policy networks may constitute a significant variable in explaining the dynamics of policy formulation, agenda-setting, decision-making and implementation. But they add that the concept is not the only possible model for studying policy-making of EU foreign policy. It should be stressed, however, that Winn and Lord give a rather restricted and static interpretation of the concept of policy networks. They only include the very tightly organized policy communities and 'epistemic communities' and overlook the various variables that may shape a policy network and consequent impact these variables may have on policy outcomes. At the other end, scholars have applied, either implicitly or explicitly, a broader conception to the idea of policy networks: transinstitutionalism (Piana 2002), intensive transgovernmentalism (Wallace H. 2005a) and core groups (Keukeleire 2006). These differ in their respective emphasis and labels.

In sum, several empirical studies confirm the assumption that networks exist in EU foreign policy and that, as a result, the network metaphor constitutes a useful analytical tool to the analysis of the EU's foreign policy process. It is less clear, however, what exactly is meant by a policy network, what elements give sustenance to their emergence, which interaction patterns dominate and how their structure may affect foreign policy outcomes. These unknowns are mostly related to the general acceptance that mapping the participants and the structure of policy networks within the realm of foreign policy is more difficult than in most other policy areas. This underscores the necessity to put forward theory-grounded propositions that allow to identify and analyze these 'patterns of interest mediation'.

III. The Politics of EU Foreign Policy: Insights from a Governance Perspective

Rather than claiming that a governance perspective is better suited than traditional approaches, there might indeed be specific conditions under which the former may be more appropriate to analyze the EU's foreign policy process. To move our theoretical understanding further, we thus need a set of hypotheses on the conditions under which governance rather than

government characterizes the politics of EU foreign policy. Additionally, some central propositions will be put forward on the informal structures and dynamics of interaction within the foreign policy process of the EU. In the following, I draw on insights from existing theories and studies of EU foreign policy.

The Suitability of a Governance Approach

It has been argued that the locus of decision-making determines the degree of governance. Based on Lindberg and Scheingold's framework, a continuum was identified that ranges from the ideal-type of government at the one end to the ideal-type of governance at the other. In the literature on governance, scholars often assume that the degree to which the locus of decision-making has shifted away from the national level is reflected in the extent of institutionalization of a given policy domain (Risse-Kappen 1996; Jachtenfuchs 2001).

A similar position can be found in studies of EU foreign policy. Based on the degree of institutionalization, scholars indicate 'stages of governance' within EU foreign policy. Allen (1998: 54) refers in this context to Brusselization as a process that embraces 'a gradual transfer … of foreign policy-making authority away from the national capitals to Brussels'. This process connotes the expanding Brussels-based machinery within the Council structures. More elaborately, Smith (2004b: 38-49) conceives governance as an advanced form of institutionalization, identifying five stages in the institutional development of EU foreign policy. Departing from an intergovernmental forum in the early 1970s, he argues that EU foreign policy has evolved into a system with features of governance. He highlights four characteristics in particular in this respect: the coherence of the policy process, legally binding features, authoritative decision-making rules and a certain degree of autonomy for EU actors (Smith M.E. 2004a: 742-45).

But regardless of the 'stage of governance' or institutionalization, member states continue to have the right to act outside of the EU framework in the pursuit of their foreign policy. There exists a dialectic relationship between fragmentation and cooperation in EU foreign policy: 'most *(EU)* states have no intention of relinquishing their own diplomacy, but equally it would not occur to them to opt out of the CFSP' (Hill 2004: 160). It does thus not suffice that an advanced process of institutionalization has occurred to talk about governance in analytical terms: the willingness of member states to share the political control on a specific policy issue is equally important. As long as the EU level is not considered relevant in policy terms, the

extent of institutionalization is irrelevant to the notion of 'authority sharing'. The relevance of the EU is defined by its devoted capabilities and its ability to exert influence beyond its borders on a specific issue, i.e. when the EU disposes of *actorness* (Bretherton and Vogler 2006).

This leads to the following proposition:

The more a policy issue has been institutionalized and the higher the EU's actorness, the more suitable a governance approach becomes to the analysis of the politics of EU foreign policy.

Nevertheless, the suitability of a governance approach will be severely curtailed when issues arise that directly preoccupy high-level decision-makers, particularly foreign ministers and heads of state and government. In these instances, the systemic level gains considerable importance opening the scope for governments to (re)affirm their positions (Peterson and Bomberg 1999: 248).

Despite the continuing institutionalization, EU foreign policy still has a firm intergovernmental backbone that pushes member states to (re)claim decision-making authority at times of heightened political controversy. Notable examples are those situations that revolve around Atlantic solidarity as has been lively demonstrated at the height of the Iraq-crisis in 2002-03. The increasing international profile of the EU and the formalization of the foreign policy process after 1993 has resulted in a situation where high-level policy-makers primarily focus on those issues which carry the greatest political sensitivity. Regarding those foreign policy issues that are far less politicized, the EU falls back on a labyrinth of working groups and committees staffed by diplomats, bureaucrats and military experts. It is on this level that an increasing amount of decisions are taken and that a governance approach will be better suited (Peterson 2009).

This goes hand in hand with the degree of public scope policy issues get. Spurred by the so-called CNN-effect, politicians are put under immense pressure to get directly involved in the policy process on those issues that top the international political agenda. As a result, debates between foreign ministers mostly concentrate on the most pressing and controversial issues (Peterson and Bomberg 1999: 249; Gomez and Peterson 2001: 65-67; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008: 69-73). In these instances, member states have a tendency to fall back on their fixed national positions (Pollack 2005: 45) and become less inclined to share their decision-making authority with other member states, let alone with EU institutions.

The politicization of issues resulting in the surfacing of 'government' rather than 'governance' has in certain instances been pushed even further. Telling examples are the Contactgroups (e.g. for Bosnia and Iran) and the unacknowledged Quint. These informal groupings, also referred to as *directoires*, comprise only the big EU member states often complemented with major non-EU states. They meet to take initiatives and discuss highly sensitive foreign affairs issues, affecting the interests of other member states without their participation. This shows the unwillingness of the big member states to share their foreign policy authority with the smaller member states and EU institutions. Especially the Quint highlights this evolution as this group is highly secretive and institutionally disconnected from the EU's foreign policy process (Gégout 2002).

This leads to a second proposition:

When it comes to politically sensitive questions and/or policy issues that gain considerable public scope, high-level decision-makers are provoked to get directly involved in the policy process. As a result, national governments have an incentive to (re)claim decision-making authority, reducing the suitability of a governance approach to analyze the politics of EU foreign policy.

Informal Structures and Dynamics of Governance

As demonstrated, several scholars have illustrated the existence of policy networks in the context of EU foreign policy. But what are the reasons for the emergence of policy networks? The first element is the fluidity and complexity of the formal policy framework. In the wake of complex institutional structures, informal and less visible structures typically emerge (Jönsson and Strömvik 2005: 17). The formal design of EU foreign policy mirrors such a highly complex and diverse institutional setting. Not only are competences and instruments dispersed across the three institutional pillars, a considerable part of EU foreign policy depends on the coordination and cooperation between member states and EU institutions. Furthermore, EU foreign policy is increasingly made and implemented in close collaboration with other regional and international organizations, either to coordinate EU activities with parallel national actions of member states in those forums or because the EU needs external partners to implement its own foreign policy. The formulation and implementation of EU foreign policy thus often touches on a variety of actors, competences and instruments that are spread across different pillars, levels and locations (Hill and Smith 2005; Wallace H. 2005a; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008). Given the lack

of hierarchical governance, political actors are incited to rely on informal structures or networks to facilitate the development of common policies as well as policy coordination (Börzel 1998: 261; Jönsson et.al. 1998; Peterson 2009).

It follows that the complexity of formal structures lead to a high degree of resource dependency of the various actors involved. Börzel refers in this context to functional interdependence: 'governments have become increasingly dependent upon cooperation and joint resource mobilization of policy actors outside their hierarchical control' (Börzel 1998: 260). Various studies indicate that EU foreign policy is increasingly characterized by a division of labor or subsidiarity: those member states that are most concerned formulate and implement EU foreign policy, sometimes complemented with external actors if these add value to the capacities of the EU to pursue its policy objectives. Such a group of member states develops a more dynamic, coherent and proactive foreign policy towards a specific policy matter: through agenda-setting and supporting the elaboration, implementation and follow-up of EU policies and, in parallel, through the pooling and stronger coordination of national efforts and assets. Examples can be found in the EU's relations with its northern and eastern neighbors, Afghanistan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In these cases, informal networks have been steering the elaboration and implementation of EU policies (Arter 2000; Filtenborg et.al. 2002; Keukeleire 2006; Nasra 2008).

This leads to the following proposition:

The more a given policy issue is governed by a complex formal framework and the more the relevant political actors to that policy issue are dependent on each other, the more likely it is that policy networks will emerge in the EU's foreign policy process.

A rationalist reading conceives policy networks as informal institutions that allow actors to realize common gains by reducing the cost of information and transaction and create mutual trust. This perspective assumes that policy networks facilitate the cooperation between utility-maximizing actors. However, several scholars have argued that networks also represent an ideal context for dynamics of persuasion and deliberation to take root, emphasizing the role of consensual knowledge, ideas, beliefs and values (Risse-Kappen 1996; Börzel 1998). This reflects an increasing interest that has surfaced the past decade for theories of communicative action (Risse 2000; Johnstone 2003; Neyer 2003; Pollack 2005).

Embedded in constructivist thinking, the theories of communicative action add a communicative understanding of rationality to the instrumental and bounded perspective which

is dominant in rationalist theories. Assuming that language can affect the outcomes and dynamics of policy processes, their core assumption holds that political actors do not only bargain on the basis of fixed preferences but also argue, question their own beliefs and preferences, and are open to persuasion and the power of the better argument. Scharpf and Benz argue that problem-solving activities within policy networks are made possible by enabling such non-strategic action based on communication and mutual trust, 'endogenizing' actors' preferences and interests, i.e. no longer taken as given or fixed (Börzel 1998: 264-265). When 'argumentative rationality' dominates policy networks, this will lead 'to a change of actors' preferences so that in the end they all agree on a common course of action because they are convinced that this is the best and right collective decision even if they would have liked another outcome initially' (Jachtenfuchs 2007: 166).

This is not to say that instrumental rationality and strategic bargaining should be discarded all together: situations where governments dominate the policy process will not generate a context where processes of deliberation or persuasion will set in. A policy process is likely to be characterized by argumentative rationality under certain conditions: actors need to (1) demonstrate the ability to empathize, to see the world through each other's eyes, (2) share a common lifeworld and a collective interpretation of the world, (3) be uncertain about interests and/or lack knowledge about a given policy issue, and (4) consider each other as equals, operating in a non-hierarchical, network-like setting (Risse 2000: 10-11; Neyer 2003: 690-696; Checkel 2005: 812-13; Pollack 2005: 42-45).

Bargaining and arguing as modes of social action are nonetheless ideal types and rarely occur in pure form. They 'represent opposite ends of a continuum whereby most of the actual communicative processes take place somewhere in between' (Ulbert and Risse 2005: 352). In many cases, arguments are used in a strategic way in order to justify one's identities and preferences. Consequently, strategic argumentation often evolves towards a search for reasoned consensus: a situation in which actors try to 'get the facts right' and to acquire 'common knowledge', trying to reach a consensus on the 'facts in the world'. While they may alter as a result of this process, preferences do not necessarily require to change in order to reach a consensus (Risse 2000: 8-14; Johnstone 2003: 453).

Scholars consider communication and argumentation essential features of the EU's foreign policy system (Jørgensen 2004: 12). In the literature on the role of small states in EU foreign policy, analysts have pointed to at least suggestive evidence of patterns of deliberation and persuasion (Arter 2000; Romsloe 2004; Nasra 2008; Jakobsen 2009). These studies emphasize

that 'the power of the better argument' depends not only on the extent to which actors appeal to the EU's fundamental norms and values and their ability to convince others, arguments should also aim at moving the discussion or integration process forward and should facilitate consensus- and coalition-building (Jakobsen 2009: 87). Ideational and argumentative elements are thus not only compatible with an instrumental rational logic of action, but will in most cases go hand in hand.

This leads to the following proposition:

The more actors are uncertain about their interests, share a common understanding of a given policy issue and consider each other as equal, the more likely the dominant interaction pattern in EU foreign policy will be characterized by persuasion and the search to achieve reasoned consensus rather than strategic bargaining.

Without wanting to go as far as Habermas who claims that power relations are largely absent in 'ideal speech' situations, it follows from this hypothesis that the notion of power ought to be reconsidered in a context of informal structures and non-hierarchical relations. Risse (2000: 7-19) argues that the prevalence of argumentative rationality implies that relationships of power and social hierarchies recede in the background: 'assuming that materially more powerful actors do not necessarily have the better arguments, an arguing situation should disproportionally empower the weaker actors who have less material resources at their disposal.' Furthermore, it has been argued that governance through networks is characterized by a dispersion of political authority and does not necessarily engage the most powerful actors but rather those who dispose of the resources, both material and immaterial, that are required for the formulation, decision and/or implementation of a given policy (Börzel 1998: 259).

The difficulty, however, is that there is no agreed definition of the forms of influence and power available in the EU. Instead, scholars have pointed at various sources of influence which essentially boil down to either attributable and objective or relational and subjective factors. From the first perspective, power is defined by the extent to which a member state can exert 'hard' influence, referring to the use of threats and coercion. The relevant elements in this context are population size, economic weight, size of the diplomatic corps and military capacities. From the second perspective, the 'know-how' and 'know-who' of actors will be more determining to influence and power in the policy process: the extent to which actors can add value through their expertise, contacts and knowledge. In addition, the ability to formulate innovative ideas that are conducive to coalition- and consensus-building as well as the

trustworthiness and credibility of political actors are considered as important constitutive elements of power and influence (Wallace H. 2005b: 36-42). Therefore, it is stated that in a context of arguing and persuasion, relational and subjective elements will carry a greater weight than attributable and objective factors (Jönsson and Strömvik 2005; Jakobsen 2009).

This leads to the following proposition:

The more the EU's foreign policy process is dominated by an interaction pattern that is characterized by arguing and persuasion, the more the notion of power should be seen in subjective and relational rather than objective and material terms.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has argued that a governance approach may offer a more suitable framework to analyze the politics of EU foreign policy than the more established 'government' approaches. Two conditions have been identified under which the politics of EU foreign policy can be better examined as a policy system made of various policy networks rather than as intergovernmental bargaining. The paper has also suggested three propositions on the structures and dynamics of interaction in the EU's foreign policy process, advocating that the 'deliberative turn' which has reached EU studies should be taken more serious in analyses of EU foreign policy.

Although a governance approach considerably broadens the analytical horizon as compared to traditional approaches, it has a number of shortcomings too. A first element of two that are most commonly cited in the literature is the bias towards effective and efficient problem-solving and its underestimation or even ignorance of questions of power (Jachtenfuchs 2001: 258). This paper has countered this criticism in two ways. First, it has been posited that a governance approach does not neglect the notions of power and influence but that it approaches them from a subjective and relational perspective. Rather than ignoring the material power resources of political actors, this perspective offers a broader understanding of both concepts. Second, it has been argued that governance approaches are less suitable to analyze the politics of EU foreign policy when 'government' overhauls 'governance'. This occurs when policy issues are politically sensitive and when they gain considerable public scope, implying that power relations come to dominate the policy process. At these times, traditional theories offer a more accurate picture of the EU's foreign policy process.

A second point of critique is that the 'shedding of light' of a governance approach has not entailed the creation of a coherent theory. While a governance approach is considered to be a useful analytical device, it does not constitute a theory in the same league as institutionalism, intergovernmentalism and constructivism (Jachtenfuchs 2001: 259; Peterson 2009: 114-115). It has been argued that a governance approach does not wish to replace existing theories, but rather to complement them. While a governance approach aims at analyzing the structural relationships and dynamics between actors in policy-making, the existing theories aim at causally explaining these relations. It thus points the analyst to where the answers may be found. A second element that supports its compatibility to more established theories revolves around the level of analysis. The explicit task of a governance approach is to analyze the politics of EU foreign policy at a sub-systematic or sectoral level while traditional approaches are primarily devised to explain decision-making at higher political levels.

Having said this, a governance approach explicitly takes elements of persuasion, arguing and deliberation into account in the analysis of the EU's foreign policy process. This paper has argued that a governance approach is best deployed with theories of communication and deliberation. At the same hand, instrumental rationality is expected to prevail at times where a logic of bargaining dominates the policy process. Rather than approaching both theoretical approaches in an 'either-or' fashion, it has been tried to identify the transition points between them.

This paper has attempted to integrate analytical elements rooted in a governance perspective in the thinking about the politics of EU foreign policy. Nonetheless, it remains clear that the suggested framework and propositions would greatly benefit from further clarifications generated on the basis of case studies. Yet, by providing a framework for analysis, future case-studies can be conducted in a more systematic and comparable fashion, facilitating generalizations and theoretical reflections.

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