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*Evolution through learning?  
Epistemic communities and the emergence of security sector reform in  
the EU security and defence policy*

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## Introduction

The goal of this article is to account for the emergence of the European Union (EU) approach to security sector reform (SSR), and to address the challenges arising from its implementation. I argue that the EU has *learned* to become a more efficient security provider through SSR means, in order to enhance its crisis management capabilities and to better address changing security threats. The establishment of a policy framework on SSR has been driven by epistemic communities, or expertise-based networks of professionals. By bringing their expertise into the EU decision-making, these networks have mainstreamed a new security thinking based on the paradigm of “human security” and on the integration between security, development and good governance, thus leading to the promotion of a new approach to EU crisis management. Accordingly, this article stresses the role of ideational factors in shaping security decisions, and in particular processes of policy and institutional change.

Security challenges are, by definition, subject to change, and so are security institutions and policies created to address them. Policy-makers are always confronted with the difficult task of making sense of this evolution by assessing and tackling increasingly complex and diverse risks. The complexity of security challenges requires states to rely on international institutions and multilateral forms of security governance to confront common threats. The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)<sup>i</sup> represents an institutionalized attempt on the part of EU member states to address new challenges to European security, drawing from the experience of the Balkan crises in the 1990s. Therefore, approaches focusing on the dynamics of institutions-building, institutional change and on role of institutional structures in shaping policies and behaviours (falling under the umbrella of “institutionalism”) are

potentially well-suited to contribute to explain the nature and functioning of CSDP (Menon 2011). However, international security institutions in general, and the EU ones in particular (Giegerich 2006, 24), have generated limited literature compared to other areas, such as economic or environmental policies. Moreover, despite a rising attention paid by researchers and policy-makers on the security policies of the EU in the last ten years, theoretical studies of CSDP lag behind its empirical developments. In other words, while there is no lack of detailed empirical investigations, theoretical approaches to CSDP are much less common and overall difficult to mainstream (Birckerton, Ironelle and Menon 2011, 2).

It is true that CSDP has evolved rapidly and somehow unexpectedly, from its creation at the Cologne European Council in 1999 onwards. Unprecedented institutional developments cropped up across three dimensions: first, the building-up of institutions and the consequent process of institutional reform, leading to the implementation of existing structures and the creation of new pivotal ones (Howorth 2007); the emergence of a European strategic debate, leading to the adoption of the European Security Strategy (2003) and to the report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy as of December 2008; and finally the operational experience gained by ESDP missions from 2003 onward (Grevi 2009). In March 2003, in fact, the EU launched its first military operation (EUFOR Concordia, in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) using NATO assets under the “Berlin Plus agreement”, and the first autonomous ESDP military deployment came about only a few months later, in May 2003, with the launch of Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (RDC). Since then, the EU engaged in more than 25 operations, thus becoming a significant actor in crisis management and conflict prevention in many regions of the world (Western Balkans, Africa, Middle East,

Caucasus, Asia). Besides military operations, the EU's civilian commitment to crisis management embraced a broad span including police, rule of law, assistance, planning, monitoring and border missions.<sup>ii</sup>

Over the past ten years, the EU has therefore created and consolidated the instruments to project stability and peace over its borders.<sup>iii</sup> As noted by Agnieszka Nowak, the EU involvement in crisis management and peace operations has become one of the most challenging tasks of EU external action (Nowak 2006, 9 - 10). The conceptualization of SSR is, in this regard, a key policy innovation that contributed substantially to the EU commitment as a security provider, by stressing the need for a holistic approach to security aimed at ensuring effective crisis management, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction.

Against this backdrop, the question arises as to what theoretical framework can best capture the factors driving such process of institutional and policy innovation, given the process of almost continual adaptation of EU security and defence policies contrasting with institutional claims that institutions tend to be "relatively stable" over time (Menon 2011, 87; Duffield 2007). Why and how did member states choose to deepen their security cooperation within the EU institutional setting, and how do we explain the rise of a new security thinking emphasizing SSR as a key component of the EU crisis management toolbox?

### *Knowledge matters*

To solve this puzzle, this article explores the role of ideational factors and the interaction between the changing structure of the international system (after the Cold War) and policy-makers' responses to these changes. Accordingly, a new policy

consensus based on the definition of “human security” emerged in the mid-1990s and redefined states’ interests and their attitudes towards security cooperation and crisis management. New ideas, or shared causal beliefs about security, arising from processes of policy innovation, emulation and experience, permeated through the EU policy-making becoming dominant and consensual, and hence resulting into observable policy and institutional evolution.

To understand how these ideas became dominant and consensual among political actors, this article applies an epistemic communities approach (Haas E. 1990) to the study of the emergence of EU SSR. How do institutions learn? In a wide range of policy areas, knowledge, broadly defined as new ideas, information, expertise and understanding about a subject is required by policy-makers in order to take decisions. As such, knowledge may also serve as a driving factor leading to institutional or policy change. The same logic also applies to international security cooperation, where the increasingly technical and complex nature of threats demands for a significant involvement of experts in the decision-making process leading to security decisions. As a result, international security institutions – CSDP is no exception – provide member states with the necessary expertise to address complex issues they are willing to cooperate on.

In the field of European security cooperation, expertise-based networks of professionals, or epistemic communities, both inside and outside institutions, have emerged and exerted influence in shaping policy formulation and institutional development. As demonstrated by Emmanuel Adler and Peter Haas in other policy areas, these communities of experts play a pivotal role in the transfer and diffusion of knowledge by promoting a) policy innovation; b) policy diffusion; c) policy selection and d) policy evolution as learning (Adler and Haas P. 1992).

However, epistemic communities' role in shaping security policies has been largely neglected, leading to the persistence of two gaps in the literature as yet. First, within the wide literature on endogenous processes of institutional change, no extensive study has thus far investigated the role of transnational networks of experts in shaping European security decisions<sup>iv</sup> and in particular their explanatory power vis-à-vis competing explanations of institutional and policy change (Jones 2006; Smith M.E. 2004; Mérand 2008; Meyer 2006; Gross 2009; Menon 2009; Giegerich 2006; Howorth 2007). Second, theories of IR have failed – if they attempted at all – to explain why and how particular types of knowledge, ideas or norms are selected and other are discarded<sup>v</sup>.

As a matter of fact, the end of the Cold War and the enormous amount of foreign policy change witnessed at the time actually pushed scholars to investigate how experts had influenced national foreign and security policy-making, with a number of publications produced throughout the 1980s and 1990s<sup>vi</sup>. Another stream of publications uses epistemic communities to explain international cooperation and institutional change in technical areas such as environment, food aid regime or central banks (Haas P. 1990; McNamara 1999; Hopkins 1992; Drake and Nicolaidis 1992). However, the concept of epistemic community has not been employed to investigate change in critical cases such as international security institutions (i.e. NATO, the EU or OSCE) as it dramatically and incrementally set off after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

This article applies the epistemic communities framework to study the emergence of a new security thinking about SSR that have influenced how the EU security architecture looks like, in terms of conceptual, institutional and policy development. The introduction, by expert communities, of such conceptual innovation changing the traditional definition of security and crisis management has been one of the main

drivers that pushed forward the EU's comprehensive approach to security. The empirical analysis supporting my theoretical argument is based on experts and elites interviews carried out between March and June 2011 in Brussels, Geneva and London, with officers from the Council Secretariat, the European Commission and member states as well as experts from leading European think tanks and NGOs.

**I. Epistemic communities and institutional learning:  
the framework of analysis**

What is “expertise” and why should it matter in international relations? John G. Ruggie introduced the concept of “epistemic communities” in a special issue of *International Organization* (1975) co-edited with Ernst B. Haas (Ruggie 1975). According to Ruggie, processes of institutionalization<sup>vii</sup> involve not only the grid through which behaviour is acted out, “but also the *epistemes* through which political relationships are visualized” (Ruggie 1975, 569). Ruggie borrowed the term *epistemes* from Michel Foucault (Foucault 1970), and came to define “epistemic communities” as “a dominant way of looking at social reality, a set of shared symbols and references, mutual expectations and a mutual predictability of intention” (Ruggie 1975, 570). Ernst B. Haas later articulated the idea of epistemic communities as “professionals who share a commitment to a common causal model and a common set of political values (Haas E. 1990, 41). A more precise conceptualization was finally given by Peter Haas, who defines the concept as follows:

*An epistemic community is a network of professionals from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. They have (1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs,*

*which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members; (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which they serve as the basis for elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes; (3) shared notions of validity – that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise; and (4) a common policy enterprise – that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence (Haas P. 1992).*

The emergence of epistemic communities is therefore related to the increasingly complex and technical natures of the issues decision-makers need to address. Accordingly, complexity and uncertainty push decision-makers to seek the advice of experts, which hence contribute to the way interests are formulated and decisions are taken.

Epistemic communities have provided an important stimulus to research aimed at explaining how policies are crafted according to knowledge flows wielded by transnational networks. In fact, they allow researchers to identify the missing link between political objectives, technical knowledge and the formation of interests. This has profound consequences for the study of international relations. In the current international society characterized by globalization and interdependence, knowledge and ideas must spread across state boundaries in order to be recognized by the wider international community. As a consequence, networks of experts cannot be conceived as belonging to single national communities separated one from each other. Epistemic

communities are transnational precisely because their expertise and their “vision” is carried over from the national levels into the international (global or regional) arena.

Rejecting simple notions of causality, in *When Knowledge is Power* (1990) Ernst B. Haas maintains that international organizations are created to solve problems that require collaborative action (among states) for solution; therefore, “the knowledge available about “the problem” at issue influences the way decision-makers define the interests at stake in the solution to the problem; (...) when knowledge become consensual, we ought to expect politicians to use it in helping them to define their interests” (Haas E. 1990, 9 – 12).

But how do these networks exert influence on policy-making and how do they produce policy evolution? Although the relationship between an epistemic community and a policy-maker is complex and operates at multiple levels, Emmanuel Adler and Peter M. Haas have identified four steps (Adler and Haas P. 1992). First, epistemic communities act as policy innovators by identifying the nature of the issue-area and framing the context in which new data and ideas are interpreted. By framing the context, experts guide policymakers in the choice of the appropriate norms, tools or institutions within which to manage problems. State interests are therefore a consequence of how issues are framed by experts setting the standards of *policy innovation*.

Second, epistemic communities diffuse their policy recommendations transnationally, through communication and socialization processes. New knowledge is shared and exchanged across research groups, national governments and international organizations through different channels (conferences, meetings, transnational research networks). This process of *policy diffusion* fulfils two purposes. On the one hand, it allows innovation to become consensual among members of the

community and translate into an effective policy advice. On the other hand, it pushes government and institutions (who participate in the process) to redefine their expectations, reach common understanding and coordinate their behaviour accordingly.

Third, *policy selection* mechanisms intervene to select certain advice and discard others. Domestic political factors prove important in policymakers' solicitation and use of knowledge provided by epistemic communities. Several other factors, however, can hinder or facilitate policy selection, such as timing, regime structure, culture or the consensus among community members themselves as well as the content on the innovation and the way it relates to the mainstream.

Finally, *policy persistence* refers to the continuation of consensual knowledge about an issue within the members of an epistemic community, to determine how long it will remain influential. The degree of consensus among community members is certainly one of the key factors affecting policy persistence.

This four-step process involving innovation, diffusion, selection and persistence is therefore understood as the core dynamics leading to policy evolution. In a world characterized by increasing interdependence and complexity, conceptual innovations are diffused nationally, transnationally and internationally by epistemic communities and pave the way for new international practices or institutions. Socialization plays a key role in fostering the diffusion and a shared understanding of the issue among members of the community and policy-makers.

Epistemic communities are, therefore, a fundamental source of institutional learning, to the extent that they produce permanent changes in the epistemological assumptions and interpretations that help framing and structuring collective understanding and action (Adler and Crawford 1991).

According to Ernst Haas, “an international organization *learns* is a shorthand way to say that the clusters of bureaucratic units within governments and organizations agree on a new way of conceptualizing a problem” (Haas E. 1990). The notion of “learning” is, to use Jack Levy’s famous expression, a “conceptual minefield (...), difficult to define, isolate, measure, and apply empirically” (Levy 1994). Following the early works of Deutsch and Hecló (Deutsch 1963; Hecló 1974), the literature has evolved and provided a myriad of definitions and approaches that cannot be congregated in the same formula or channelled through core tenets<sup>viii</sup>.

This article adopts an epistemic community approach to learning, drawing from both constructivism and sociological institutionalism. This approach suggests that shared knowledge and expertise, conveyed by epistemic communities into the EU decision making, drive CSDP, since they determine policy and institutional change<sup>ix</sup>.

Epistemic learning can be defined as a two-stage process by which epistemic communities develop and diffuse new principled or causal beliefs into the decision-making, resulting in goals, means or instruments-related institutional change. *Goals* refer to the ultimate purpose of the institution, its ends, values or strategic prescriptions underlying the institution’s means of action. *Means* refer to the organizational structures, programmes and policies that are set out to achieve the institution’s goals. Finally, *instruments* are material and non-material resources (capabilities) available to achieve the institution’s *goals* through its *means*.

Epistemic learning has four main characteristics: it is *informal*, *collective*, *consensual/networked* and *constrained*. *Informal* means that epistemic communities stimulate institutional change by means of an informal method of institutional reform, and hence it does not originate in formal negotiations or bargaining processes (Smith M.E. 2004). *Collective* signifies that learning is not individual (Levy 1994), but it is

assumed that bureaucratic entities and organizations can learn through socialization processes (Haas E. 1990; Adler and Haas P. 1992; Cross 2007). Moreover, learning is also *consensual/networked*, in the sense that the creation of transnational networks of experts, professionals and policy-makers sharing the same principled and causal beliefs, and the interaction within these networks is vital to carry through the learning process (Risse-Kappen 1994; Schout and Jordan 2005). Networking takes place at two levels. First, within the epistemic community itself, allowing experts to exchange their ideas during transnational conferences or workshops. As a result of this process, knowledge becomes shared. Second, networking occurs between the epistemic community and the decision-making arena, through channels (or policy networks) that enable new ideas to be diffused. As a result, knowledge becomes consensual. Finally, epistemic learning is *constrained*: its effectiveness highly depends on a set of intervening variables (Risse-Kappen 1994) facilitating or hampering the diffusion and institutionalizations of knowledge. These are: the presence of national constituencies supporting the diffusion of a specific set of ideas; the presence of different/divergent organizational cultures (i.e. civilian vs military) putting an obstacle to the persistence of a new episteme; and inter-institutional or inter-organizational rivalries leading to a lack of communication between different organisms (i.e. the Council Secretariat and the Commission).

## **II. Human security and EU crisis management: conceptual origins**

The process conceptualization and consolidation of the EU approach to crisis management have been influenced by three factors. First, a structural change in the nature and scale of conflicts characterising the post Cold-War period. Second, the

emergence of human security as a new security thinking linking security to development and good governance. Third, the consequences of the traumatic experience of the conflicts in the Western Balkans, which eventually reinforced the need for a more coherent and integrated approach to security including civilian and military aspects.

Since the end of the Cold War, the concept of security has substantially widened and deepened. Systemic factors have led to the proliferation of failing states and intrastate war, entailing the progressive blurring of the boundaries between external and internal security. Declining military expenditures and downsizing state armies (SIPRI 2006) also played an important role in opening a window of opportunity for a change to the old notion of “security”. As a result, a “new thinking” regarding security emerged during the 1990s (Barbé 1995). This new thinking suggested a new paradigm in the development discourse, stressing that security and stability, including the transformation of ineffective, inefficient and corrupt security forces, would become a necessary pre-requisite for development and aid delivery (Abrahamsen and Williams 2006). Accordingly, non-military security issues (i.e. political, economic, judicial and societal aspects) would be integrated in the new global security agenda, with important implications on international organizations’ approach to crisis management (Hanggi and Tanner 2005).

The international community soon adopted the concept of a comprehensive approach merging civilian and military means in the conduct of crisis management and peacekeeping operations. The endorsement of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) notion of “human security”, encompassing the broader and non-military nature of security concerns,<sup>x</sup> spurred the affirmation of the “security-development nexus” (Williams 2002; Chandler 2007) as the absolute protagonist of

the peace-building discourse. The increasing role of the development community in security matters would hence result in the rise of comprehensive security programmes aimed at tackling a wide range of activities within the broader security sector. As development and security actors began to collaborate in the same theatres, a hybrid sphere of intervention called “post-conflict peace-building” emerged, the point being no longer to manage conflict but to address its root causes.

European donor states headed by the United Kingdom and under the institutional umbrella of the EU, were the first to embrace the concept, with significant implications on their development and security policies (Sabiote 2010). Moreover, in Europe, the enlargement of Euro-Atlantic institutions as well as the “baptism by fire” (Ginsberg 2001) for the EU in the Western Balkans dramatically accelerated the development and diffusion of this new thinking.

The EU and NATO’s support to the transition from authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe and demonstrated that good governance in the rule of law and defence sectors were crucial for consolidating democracy and sustainable economic and social development. The central link between development and security came to be a particular truism in the Balkans as well (Spence and Fluri 2007). The EU’s southern-eastern neighbourhood, pretty much like the eastern, was composed of states having serious deficits in security, development and democracy, with regime types ranging from new but weak democracies to regimes with authoritarian features and limited political participation (Hanggi and Tanner 2005). The challenge for the EU was then twofold. First, to prevent conflicts in the Balkans from undermining its own security; second, to ensure that stabilization mechanisms (i.e. the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe) work and the EU’s transformational power (stabilization through integration) be effective.

Against this backdrop, in the early 2000s, two strands influence the European security discourse, although at very different degrees. On the one hand, the presence in some national capitals (in particular, Finland, Sweden, Ireland, Austria, but also Italy, France and Spain) of civilian networks pushing for the development of a non-military approach to crisis management within the EU<sup>xi</sup>. On the other hand, the proliferation of national and cross-national communities supporting a new approach to development assistance based on the security-good governance-development nexus. Accordingly, the conceptual roots of SSR arise from both a developmentalization of donor countries' security discourse (or increasing influence of the development community in security affairs), so as to emphasize transparency, comprehensiveness and a system-wide approach to the establishment of good governance, starting from the security sector; and also from a securitization of development assistance to make aid and state building more effective on the long term, by integrating the conflict-peace-development agenda and reduce the threats associated with state failures.

### **III. Knowledge matters: the emergence of Security Sector Reform policies and practices as a process of “epistemic learning”**

Since the early 2000s, the EU has constantly increased its focus on SSR as part of its foreign-security policy interface. This process is to be understood as part of the evolving goals and means for EU security resulting from its growing fields of competences and the changes occurring in its security environment. The EU has progressively internalized the SSR discourse and practice as part of the security-good

governance-development paradigm. These concepts have become the key elements justifying EU interventions and ESDP operations (Sabiote 2010).

The SSR approach is by definition holistic, in that it assumes that security has to take into account all the institutions and actors that play a role in a country's security. SSR instruments impact on a wide range of sectors: police reform, judicial assistance, border training, and can entail post-conflict situations measures such as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) or Combating Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

For this reason, while it is acknowledged that some generic and general features are common to any type of involvement in SSR, many different sub-approaches have arisen and were developed by the several external actors engaged in SSR. These include state and non-state actors, NGOs and civil society organizations, but in the last ten years intergovernmental organizations have tended to play a leading role in conceptualizing and implementing the SSR agenda (DCAF, 2009).

Therefore, the concept of SSR has been shaped by a variety of policy experiences. Organizations tend to approach SSR from either a development (i.e. World Bank), security (i.e. OSCE, NATO, EU), or democratic perspective (i.e. Council of Europe); have a global (i.e. UN, EU, OSCE), regional (i.e. African Union, Council of Europe) or sub-regional focus (i.e. ECOWAS); maybe active in field activities, such as capacity building and technical assistance (i.e. Council of Europe), norm development (i.e. OECD) or both (i.e. EU, OSCE); can operate in different country contexts, such as post-conflict (i.e. EU, NATO, OSCE), transition countries (i.e. Council of Europe), developing countries (i.e. OECD, ECOWAS, World Bank). Although the overarching principle and framework of SSR remains the same, each organization has experienced

SSR programmes in different ways, depending on their specific concerns (problem-solving), capabilities or geographical scope.

The European Security Strategy (2003) underlines the importance of SSR in improving the EU's capabilities for peace support activities and in achieving its strategic objectives in third countries. However, it was not until the "*EU Concept for ESDP Support to Security Sector Reform*" had been released (Council of the EU 2005) that the operationalization and effective integration of the concept came into being. The document underlines the importance of SSR in "...putting fragile states back on their feet...enhancing good governance, fostering democracy and promoting local and regional stability". The Council's concept was followed by the Commission's *Concept for European Community Support for Security Sector Reform* of the European Community (May 2006), stating that "SSR is an important part of conflict prevention, peace-building and democratisation...SSR concerns reform of both the bodies which provide security to citizens and the state institutions responsible for management and oversight of those bodies". A month later, in a Council of Ministers decision of 12 June 2006, the EU adopted a "Policy framework for Security Sector Reform"<sup>xii</sup> aiming to pull together the Commission's related activities and doctrines with the military route available to execute and support SSR through the common security and defence policy (Ekengren and Simons 2011). Therefore, both the Commission and the Council have rapidly become major players in SSR,<sup>xiii</sup> in a period that coincides with the rapid expansion of the EU's crisis management structures and activities (Grevi 2009). The Council concept, in particular, stresses the need to adopt a co-ordinated, holistic and tailored approach to SSR due to the different European institutions involved in the domain. It also emphasizes, in accordance with the OECD-DAC report, the importance of local

ownership the creation of the conditions for political control as the main aim for SSR missions.

How was EU SSR conceptualized and diffused? The notion of security sector reform is linked to security sector governance. The two concepts stem directly from the security-development-good governance nexus and are defined as follows:

*Security Sector Governance (SSG) refers to the structures, processes, values and attitudes that shape decisions about security and their implementation.*

*Security Sector Reform (SSR) aims to enhance SSG through the effective and efficient delivery of security under conditions of democratic oversight and control. SSR offers a framework for conceptualising which actors and factors are relevant to security in a given environment as well as a methodology for optimising the use of available security resources. By emphasising the need to take a comprehensive approach to the security sector, SSR can also help integrate a broad variety of actors and processes<sup>xiv</sup>.*

The rise of Security Sector Reform in the EU was experts-driven. It largely relied on the *OECD DAC Guidelines for Security Sector Reform* (2004),<sup>xv</sup> which served as a vehicle for the “multilateralization” of the EU variant of SSR (Albrecht, Setepputat and Andersen 2010). Nonetheless, its conceptual foundations are rooted in a policy consensus that emerged gradually among national think tankers, political actors, pressure groups, research centers and NGOs. I stress the emphasis on these expertise-based networks because in the mid-2000s, when the concept started to enter the security discourse, many European governments did not have an explicit SSR

policy position (including big member states, such as France, or major donors, such as Denmark), but a common European approach on SSR emerged nonetheless.

Following Adler and Haas' model, the boost for *policy innovation* largely came from national inputs, and from major aid donors in particular, drawing from experiential learning or policy failure. The United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany were in the frontline of this development. They advanced the SSR agenda first at the OECD DAC level and, subsequently, within the EU, at a crucial stage where civilian crisis management principles were gaining ground thanks to the OECD agenda.

The vision for SSR as a new instrument for the foreign/security policy of donor countries was laid out by Clare Short, UK Secretary of State for International Development, through a policy statement in March 1999. Clare Short's understanding of future SSR activities reflected a government-wide consensus on a new rationale for increasing foreign-security-development policies coordination as a result of recent experiences in difficult developing countries such as Cambodia or Sierra Leone. According to this reading, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) played a key role in spreading a new thinking bridging development assistance and security policies.<sup>xvi</sup> The United Kingdom's role as a promoter/pioneer of SSR relied on a tight network of expert communities, among which the UK-based Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform (GFN-SSR), initially hosted by Cranfield University and now managed by the University of Birmingham, occupies a prominent position. The "epistemic" mission of the GFN is stated in the network's principal aims: to "promote a better understanding of security and justice sector reform through the provision of information, advice and expertise to practitioners, academics and policymakers through the world". The Foreign and Commonwealth

Office (FCO) also defined the objective of the network as “to provide knowledge management and network facilitation services to an international network of SSR practitioners”. The network was funded by the UK Government’s Department for International Development (DFID) and led by the University of Birmingham’s International Development Department (IDD) and the Centre for the Studies of Security and Diplomacy (CSSD).

As part of the broader question of the “constraining” conditions facilitating or hampering the emergence of epistemic communities, the case of the DFID and of the GFN provide evidence of the role of national constituencies in promoting the formation of consensual knowledge to be spread transnationally. As suggested by Jennifer Sugden, there is an overwhelming agreement that the UK is a leader in the field of SSR, and in this regard the DFID is described as the “Godfather of SSR”, exerting a significant influence on OECD DAC and UNDP in the promotion of SSR (Sugden 2006). According to Hendrickson, for instance, DFID commissioned in the first semester 2000 the Centre for Defence Studies at King’s College London to produce a set of security-sector assistance guidelines identifying the ways in which development assistance can help countries strengthen their security sector governance and pointing out the ways in which DFID itself, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence could work effectively together in this regard (Hendrickson 2000).

The Netherlands also became involved in the development of SSR as a means to enhance civil-military cooperation, in particular through the establishment in 2004 of a SSR Team located in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and composed of one expert from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one from the Ministry of Defence. The team was tasked of identifying specific SSR activities the country could be involved in,

such as training, policy support and the provision of material/infrastructures (Ball and Hendrickson 2005). In January 2005, a development advisor was seconded to the Ministry of Defence after a pool of some 30 military SSR specialists was created within the Ministry of Defence. The pool also included highly qualified staff in the field of policy, judicial issues, finance, logistics etc. Germany also started promoting an holistic approach to SSR, although more focused on internal security structures (Albrecht, Stepputat and Andersen 2010). Another interesting case is Slovakia, which during its presidency of the United Nations Security Council, in 2007, organized a wide thematic debate on security sector reform, co-hosted by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and the DCAF. The Netherlands and Denmark also provided a cradle for SSR initial conceptualization.

The process of SSR *policy diffusion* and *persistence* within the EU institutional framework (CSDP/Commission) sees international organizations-related networks come into play in addition to existing national constituencies. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) were in the frontline of this development, being literally outsourced by the EU the task of fashioning a SSR concept through knowledge sharing, networking, training and activities fostering a transnational understanding of the issue.<sup>xvii</sup> Outsourcing here means the existence of a convergence between the EU's need to develop a policy framework from scratch and other actors (DCAF) with the goal, mandate and capacity to fill such gap providing the right input at the right time.<sup>xviii</sup> Evidence from the first round of interviews with experts and EU officers in Brussels and Geneva confirms that policymakers drafting the Concept for ESDP support to Security Sector Reform, adopted by the Council of the EU in November 2005, drew largely on the policy recommendations advanced by the *Chaillot Paper n.80* published by the EU Institute

for Security Studies and DCAF in July 2005 and co-edited by Heiner Hanggi and Fred Tanner<sup>xix</sup>. Further conceptual development of SSR was also fostered by experts communities through networking and training activities between 2006 and 2009, promoted by “pool” of member states favourable to the new approach and exploiting the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU to shape the security agenda (Austria and Finland, holding the Council presidency in the first and second semester 2006, provide a good example of this since. Both states are largely committed to non-military crisis management and took advantage of the 6 months presidency to shape the SSR concept).<sup>xx</sup>

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and in particular its Conflict Prevention and Development Co-operation Network (CPDC)<sup>xxi</sup> also constituted a leading cross-national epistemic community. Chaired by the DFID’s Senior SSR adviser, the CPDC’s contribution has been particularly crucial to forge a common, transnational understanding of the security-development nexus by means of its handbooks.<sup>xxii</sup> OECD-DAC has therefore been able to create an “emulation effect” and change the perceptions of the actors who were reluctant to accept the new norms.

As far as the EU is concerned, the OECD DAC’s influence is reflected in the European Commission’s 2004 annual report on development aid and external assistance, which promotes an explicitly “holistic approach to governance, peace, security and development”<sup>xxiii</sup> according to the OECD guidelines. This greatly promoted the creation and diffusion of human security-related norms within the EU. The European approach to SSR would then become focused on its comprehensiveness, as it emphasizes the necessity of approaching overlapping fields

of security, law enforcement and justice simultaneously in a coherent manner, and thus engaging non-state actors but also changing the way EU member states think about security.

In this regard, the Europeanization of France's position on SSR is also an interesting case, since it demonstrates the power of knowledge to shape the security agenda of a big member state. The French government were initially very sceptical about an approach that would imply bridging the "unbridgeable" gap between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (et notamment l'*Aide au développement et gouvernance démocratique*) and the Ministry of Defense. The French involvement in SSR came directly as a result the influence of OECD DAC experts on French policy-makers.<sup>xxiv</sup> France released its first official document on the French approach to SSR, following the OECD DAC guidelines, as late as August 2008, to "board the train before it leaves" as reported by French official.<sup>xxv</sup>

*Policy persistence* of the EU approach to SSR is understood as a combination between persistent networking, knowledge sharing and cross-fertilization activity by the emerging "SSR epistemic community" (including all the actors and individuals previously involved in the policy innovation and policy diffusion process) and the "presidency factor" allowing some EU member states favourable to the development of non-military tools for crisis management to push forwards the SSR agenda. In this regard, the period between 2002 and 2006 was particularly favourable to the development of a prioritization of the EU SSR approach, the rotating presidency being held by major donors such as Denmark (second semester 2002), Netherlands (second semester 2004), UK (second semester 2005) or by countries supporting the development of non-military crisis management tools such as Ireland (first semester 2004), Austria (first semester 2006) and Finland (second semester 2006). A

conference on SSR in the Western Balkans held in Vienna and organized by the Austrian presidency of the EU (in association with DCAF and the EU Institute for Security Studies) on February 2006 took forward the work done by the previous British presidency to further mainstream SSR conceptual basis, coherence and coordination among different institutional, governmental and non-governmental actors<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Finally, on the implementation side, *policy evolution as learning* is perhaps the aspect of EU SSR that is most problematic. Notwithstanding the efforts to achieve a coherent conceptualization of what SSR is and how it fits into different and sometimes conflicting agendas (security-development), SSR seems to remain in the mind of policymakers and EU officials as a fuzzy concept, difficult to implement and to assess. As a result, processes conceptualization and implementation continue to occur at the same time, with the latter influencing the former by means of a “learning by doing” dynamic. Again, the EU relied on external centres/organizations to achieve this goal. The International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT) and the Association for Security Sector Reform Education and Training (ASSET), both created in 2008 within DCAF, were in the frontline of this development, promoting training, education and networking activities to foster a transnational understanding of the issue and facilitate coordination among different actors and organizations on the ground.<sup>xxvii</sup> As this volume of European Security shows, experts and members of the SSR epistemic community continue playing a fundamental role in ensuring policy evolution of SSR practices as a “learning by doing” process. The debate surrounding the setting up of an EU SSR mission in Libya suggests that the SSR concept and its implementation, despite changing patterns across organizations, persists as a policy innovation in the EU.

To conclude, evidence from my research indicates that EU SSR is a case of epistemic learning whereby structural changes affecting the international system triggered the creation of a consensus among policymakers on a new way to address security concerns rooted in the notion of human security. SSR conceptualization was channelled through national and transnational epistemic communities, fostering its evolution by means of networking, knowledge sharing, training and learning by doing activities. Both individuals and organizations that can be considered as members of the “SSR epistemic community” continue shaping the policy agenda: OECD-DAC, GFN SSR, DCAF served as the main institutional and non-institutional *fora* through which professionals committed to advancing the SSR agenda (experts, academics, policy-makers, political actors) convened to pave the way for establishing a consensual and coordinated approach in view of establishing a common policy framework. National inputs, provided by the UK DFID or by the Netherlands, was a key factor supporting the emergence of policy innovation and its diffusion by providing the necessary resources for the new episteme to develop. Challenges to SSR implementation have arisen from the convergence (sometimes problematic) of different ways to look at SSR, that is whether from a development or from a security perspective, with the integration of different and often competing organizational cultures (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence, Development actors). Accordingly, whereas the presence of national constituencies has facilitated the creation of a consensus within the emerging SSR epistemic community, the persistence of differences in terms of organizational cultures has hampered a successful policy evolution as a learning by doing process. The latter issue, however, goes beyond the scope of this article.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this article was to assess the development of EU SSR by analyzing the role of epistemic communities in introducing conceptual innovations into CSDP as a learning process.

Evidence suggests that national and transnational epistemic communities actively contributed to policy change and institutional evolution of EU SSR. These expertise-based networks, including actors from a variety of backgrounds with a commitment to human security, made it possible to introduce a “new thinking” within the EU, or new way to deal with crisis management by non-military means. Therefore, this article has sought to show the causal force of knowledge and ideas in shaping interests leading to policy evolution. Theoretically, the outcome of such process of epistemic learning is the provision of a new consensual understanding of the cause-and-effect relationship in EU security. Its empirical aspect is the implementation of SSR policies.

Further empirical research applying the epistemic community framework to SSR will need to investigate the reasons why SSR conceptualization is not clear enough to achieve coherent implementation and possibly go through the processes of learning by doing to establish the extent to which SSR evolution has been shaped by practice on the ground.

Special emphasis could be devoted to the difference between the operational and strategic/policy levels; to the structure of epistemic communities (degree of fragmentation and consensus among experts); to the relation between organizational cultures (i.e. civilian vs military) and the conceptual consolidation and persistence of

SSR; and to the role of other factors (alliance politics, public opinion, power struggles within institutions) in affecting institutional learning.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Previously named European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) before the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (1 December 2009). To avoid confusion, I will use the acronym CSDP also when referring to security and defence policy in the EU before the Lisbon Treaty.

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. CSDP Mission Chart, available from: <http://www.csdpmap.eu/mission-chart> [Accessed 23 June 2011].

<sup>iii</sup> For an early account of the EU's involvement in peace support operations, cf. Missiroli (2003).

<sup>iv</sup> A notable exception being Mai'a Cross (Cross, 2008; Cross 2010).

<sup>v</sup> With the exception of Thomas Risse-Kappen's analysis of the role of transnational coalitions in producing foreign policy change leading to the end of the Cold War (Risse-Kappen 1994). Another exception is the "Advocacy Coalition Framework" (ACF) model developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). Although it was developed initially with the American experience in mind, the model applies well to the complex nature of European institutions and to cross-national policy research in Europe (Sabatier 1998). That being said, the ACF framework presents a major shortcoming in that its applicability is limited to situations characterized by well-defined coalitions driven by belief or knowledge-driven conflict, thus leaving unexplained these situations where conflict between different coalitions is less evident.

<sup>vi</sup> I.e. the debate on change in US and Soviet foreign policies, which provided new insights on how bureaucratic élites or leaders learn or change their beliefs even when security matters are at stake (Goldstein and Keohane 1993; Breslauer and Tetlock 1991; Checkel 1993; Mendelson 1993; Stein 1994).

<sup>vii</sup> Michael E. Smith's defines institutionalization as "the process by which institutions, understood as behaviours, norms or beliefs, are created, develop and change over time" (Smith M.E. 2004).

<sup>viii</sup> The literature on learning distinguishes between individual or collective learning, and simple or complex, hence involving simple instrumental change or complex belief change by single individual or groups (Levy 1994; Stein 1994; Breslauer and Tetlock 1991; Haas E. 1990; Argyris and Schon 1978; March and Olsen 1988; Etheredge 1985; Nye 1987). Since the 1980s, mainstream research on learning in international relations has gone in three directions. A first strand of studies has analyzed processes of policy change (foreign policy in particular) building on both collective and individual approaches to learning (Etheredge, 1985; Stein, 1994; and Levy, 1994). A second strand has focused on the broader

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question of international cooperation and how learning between two or more states could lead to some form of progress in international relations (Adler and Crawford, 1991). Finally, the most recent social constructivist literature on learning has emphasized processes of collective learning leading to the diffusion of norms (Checkel 2001; Finnemore 1996).

<sup>ix</sup> This approach is not new to EU studies. Some scholars have already “adopted” them, in particular in the field of EU governance. According to Zito, the “governance turn” that occurred around 2000, implying a shift from macro theories towards analysing the micro processes in EU decision-making, has led to a change in preferences in favour of networks and learning-driven instruments, making learning a key theme in the EU research agenda (Zito 2009). Epistemic communities explanations have been used to study European integration in many areas (Zito 2001; Marier 2009), such as monetary integration (Verdun 1999), justice and home affairs (Cross 2007). The linkage between EU governance and learning has also attracted scholars’ attention. The concept of networked governance emphasizes processes of networks-driven learning and knowledge transfer as the basis of the EU multi-level policy-making (Schout and Jordan 2005; Schout 2009; Radaelli 1995). A special issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy* has investigated the insights in learning conditions and the peculiarities of learning in the EU: cf. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16:8, 2009.

<sup>x</sup> UNDP Annual Report 1994. Available from: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/> [Accessed 13 June 2011].

<sup>xi</sup> Interview of the author with expert, Brussels, March 2011.

<sup>xii</sup> 2736<sup>th</sup> General Affairs Council meeting conclusions, Luxembourg, 12 June 2006.

<sup>xiii</sup> The Commission, through its Conflict Prevention programmes for developing countries, its mandate for justice and home affairs, and its responsibilities for EU’s enlargement and neighbourhood programmes; the Council through its CSDP instruments.

<sup>xiv</sup> Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2009. *Security Sector Reform and Intergovernmental Organizations*.

<sup>xv</sup> Cf. OECD Development Cooperation Directorate (DCD-DAC), *INCAF work on Security Sector Reform*, available from: [http://www.oecd.org/document/6/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_33693550\\_37417926\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/6/0,3746,en_2649_33693550_37417926_1_1_1_1,00.html) [Accessed 17 June 2011].

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<sup>xvi</sup> Hendrickson, D., 2000. Security Sector Reform: a Work in Progress. *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*. 17, October 2000. Available from: <http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?id=2231> [Accessed 25 August 2011].

<sup>xvii</sup> Interview of the author with an expert, Geneva, April 2011.

<sup>xviii</sup> Interview of the author with an expert, Geneva, April 2011.

<sup>xix</sup> The Paper can be downloaded from the EU ISS website: [http://www.iss.europa.eu/nc/actualites/analysisbooks/select\\_category/19/article/promoting-security-sector-governance-in-the-eus-neighbourhood/?tx\\_ttnews%5BpS%5D=1104534000&tx\\_ttnews%5BpL%5D=31535999&tx\\_ttnews%5Barc%5D=1&cHash=33fb88a7f5](http://www.iss.europa.eu/nc/actualites/analysisbooks/select_category/19/article/promoting-security-sector-governance-in-the-eus-neighbourhood/?tx_ttnews%5BpS%5D=1104534000&tx_ttnews%5BpL%5D=31535999&tx_ttnews%5Barc%5D=1&cHash=33fb88a7f5) [Accessed 23 June 2011]

<sup>xx</sup> Interview of the author with an expert, Geneva, April 2011.

<sup>xxi</sup> Now the *International Network on Conflict and Fragility* (INCAF).

<sup>xxii</sup> OECD DCD-DAC, 2005. *Handbook on Security System Reform: Supporting Security and Justice*. Available from: [http://www.oecd.org/document/32/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_33693550\\_45884768\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/32/0,3746,en_2649_33693550_45884768_1_1_1_1,00.html) [Accessed 18 June 2011]

<sup>xxiii</sup> European Commission, 2004. Annexes to the Communication on the Annual Report 2004 on EC Development Policy and External Assistance. COM(2004) 536 final, Brussels 29/07/2004.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Interview, of the author with an expert, Geneva, April 2011.

<sup>xxv</sup> Interview of the author with an expert, Geneva, April 2011.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Cf. Batt, J., 2006. EU Presidency Conference on Security Sector Reform in the Western Balkans. *EU Institute for Security Studies*, Report 06-03. Available from: <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/rep06-03.pdf> [Accessed 28 June 2011].

<sup>xxvii</sup> Interview, of the author with an expert, Geneva, April 2011.