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THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL ISOMORPHISM IN CONSTRUCTING THE CSDP

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Abstract While the EU is a rather different collective security actor from NATO, it is frequently asserted that there exists a striking resemblance between their respective institutional structures. But why does the Common Security and Defence Policy look so much like the transatlantic alliance? And how profound is this similarity in fact? Following the literature on regime complexity and institutional overlap, this paper argues that the CSDP initially imitated NATO structures as a result of isomorphic pressures that are based in the structuration of the European security field while at the same time being driven by strategic uncertainty between the respective institutions and the professionalisation/socialisation of the actors involved. The CSDP's relationship with NATO provides the former with a template for the organisation of its political-military nexus (PSC-EUMC-EUMS) and the evolution of operational instruments (see the Battlegroups concept). We find evidence for an initial homogenisation of these structures, while the continued absence of strategic headquarters in CSDP indicates that isomorphism is constrained. Also, further research is needed to internalise state preferences and institutional power into our model.

Keywords European Union, CSDP, NATO, institutional isomorphism, imitation, uncertainty

Introduction

As the field of European security remains in flux, its two primary organisations – NATO and the EU (via the CSDP) – seek to define a strategic role for themselves that will allow them to deal with the security challenges of the twenty-first century. Both NATO's latest Strategic Concept and the EU's updated Security Strategy would suggest that this process is still fully underway. Within this gradual process of strategic adaptation and reorientation, the two institutions are also changing in terms of their internal organisation. Especially the CSDP has come a long way since its inception in 1998/9. In order to be able to conduct frequent parallel missions in distant theatres, EU member states have created a new institutional structure almost from scratch. Rather than putting the supranational EU bureaucracy in charge – i.e. the Commission – member states chose to create a support structure around the rather intergovernmental Council Secretariat and the member states' Permanent

Representations (Vanhoonacker et. al., 2010). This includes a multiplicity of bureaucratic bodies, such as the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EU Military Committee (EUMC), the EU Military Staff (EUMS), the European Defence Agency (EDA), and various more. At the same time, in order to implement military missions the Battlegroups concept was created. These bureaucratic structures as well as the operational instruments form a crucial component in delivering EU crisis management policy.

While this rather recent policy area has become the object of extensive inquiry, I contend that a basic question remains yet unanswered: what dynamics account for the specific institutional form the CSDP has taken? The starting point of this paper is a frequent yet underdeveloped observation in the literature, which deals with the institutional organisation of CSDP. Some authors have thus remarked upon the resemblance of CSDP structures with regard to their counterparts in NATO (Hofmann, 2009; Reynolds, 2010). Why this is so has not been explored beyond the anecdotal. I propose to employ the concept of *institutional isomorphism* as the guiding theme of an analytical strategy aimed at explicating the organisational similarity of CSDP to NATO. Originally drawn from natural phenomena such as mimicry or camouflage, the concept has found its way into political science via organisational sociology (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It outlines processes of institutional homogenisation across political systems that form part of the same organisational space.

The goal of this paper is to explore the role of institutional isomorphism in the construction of the CSDP. As to now we lack a clear understanding of its extent, nature and effect in CSDP. This study entails a primary concern with empirical research that seeks to extend our knowledge regarding institutional creation and change in the CSDP, as well as a secondary concern with theoretical refinement in terms of specifying under what conditions the CSDP draws lessons from related organisations and what the nature of that causal mechanism is. The CSDP fits uneasily into the traditional supranational-intergovernmental dichotomy with which the EU is usually portrayed, and it is in this respect that I argue we have to broaden our perspective on institutional creation and change to the wider sphere of European security. CSDP occupies the same functional and geographic space as NATO – i.e. European (and, increasingly so, global) crisis management. This regime complex in which the two organisations are linked is characterised by considerable interdependence, which enables such isomorphism.

An analysis along the lines of institutional isomorphism requires three steps. In the first step, we have to demonstrate that a sufficient degree of homogeneity of institutional structures across organisational settings indeed exists, to warrant an investigation along the

lines of institutional isomorphism in the first place. I will assess whether the political-military decision-making nexus and the Battlegroups concept resemble organisational structures found in NATO. Second, we forward a model of isomorphic change that addresses how we can explain institutional imitation. On the one hand, this requires demonstrating the applicability of the underlying condition that gives rise to isomorphic change, i.e. the structuration of the organisational field as illustrated by the interdependence between the organisations. On the other hand, we need to outline the nature of said change by contrasting coercive, mimetic, and normative variants of isomorphism. Third, I will assess the significance of factors such as dependence, uncertainty, and professionalisation in bringing about institutional imitation, as they pertain to these distinct – though not opposed – logics of isomorphic change.

The preliminary results of this research suggest mixed evidence for institutional isomorphism. A major qualification has to be drawn with regard to *degree* of change. While similarity can be established for core features of the CSDP's institutional structures – the politico-military decision-making nexus and the Battlegroups concept – this is also limited due to the absence of strategic headquarters. Regarding the issue of the *nature* of change, I contend the most convincing explanation to be a combination of the mimetic and normative strands of isomorphism. In an effort to reduce strategic and environmental uncertainty, crucial national actors located in Brussels make recourse to NATO templates in the institutional creation of CSDP. The evidence for the coercive strand is partially conflicted and rather inconclusive.

Debating institutional change in CSDP

There is a multiplicity of terms that seek to provide a description of the CSDP institution-building process, ranging from the more familiar concepts of, say, Europeanisation and Brusselisation to what may strike one as exercises in semantic acrobatics such as 'constrained intergovernmentalism' (see Gegout, 2010). This very multiplicity of notions rather confirms our confusion about what is going on instead of resolving it. If we take the conceptualisation employed by Howorth in his term 'supranational-intergovernmentalism' (2000: 36), this may provide us with a sense of empirical reality, yet analytically this hybrid concept is a dead-end. In fact, the traditional distinction between supranationalism and

intergovernmentalism seems to have become less useful in terms of rendering the evolution of the EU's institutional setup intelligible.

It may thus be more promising to draw an initial distinction between the various approaches to explaining CSDP institution-building in the literature in terms of the logic of change they employ (consequentiality vs. appropriateness) and where they locate the causes of said institutional change. On the one hand, there is the 'rational design' literature (Koremenos et al., 2001), which views institution-building as a conscious, purpose-driven attempt at institutional engineering. Member states respond to various functional imperatives and design institutions in a way to accommodate these exogenous factors efficiently. On the other hand, we have what I broadly term the 'social construction' literature (see Checkel, 2001), which emphasizes an incremental, endogenous process of change. Institutional change is internal to the institutional environment and strongly conditioned by the past. Notions of actor socialisation and path dependency dominate this perspective. In line with the sociological institutionalist approach adopted in this analysis, I shall describe each of the neo-institutionalist approaches in more depth.

Rational-choice institutionalism

Scholars that analyse the evolution of CSDP in terms of rational, purposeful actors with fixed, exogenously determined preferences that are conditioned by the international system and the way it produces specific functional requirements for the organisation of collective crisis management policy are many (see Matlary, 2009; Treacher, 2004; Jones, 2007; Howorth, 2007). Their approach to institution-building is mostly reflected in the unifying theoretical approach of rational-choice institutionalism, which posits that institutions are rationally 'designed' to solve specific collective-action problems (Hasenclever et al., 1997: 23ff). The institutional design of CSDP thus reflects rational solutions to diverse functional needs. These are: an integrated, efficient decision-making structure to overcome incoherence and time constraints; operational instruments aimed at risk- and burden-sharing due to new asymmetric threats and fiscal constraints; and autonomous institutions in the light of a withdrawing US. As such, functional requirements imply that efficiency considerations dominate over concerns of legitimacy.

An illustrative application of rational-choice institutionalism to EU crisis management policy comes from Wolfgang Wagner, which he describes as a 'fast coordination game'. The severe time constraints imposed by crisis management policy and the self-enforcing nature of such coordination games do not require strong, supranational

institutions and thus he argues that the CSDP will remain intergovernmental in nature (2003: 583-4). However, while the sovereignty constraints in European security and defence are undeniably high, we should also note that the accumulation of planning capacities at the EU level – the EUMS being a case in point – goes beyond the implicitly ad hoc depiction by Wagner. In any case, it is too early to pass judgment on whether the institutionalisation of CSDP increases functional coherence across the spectrum of EU foreign policy activities (see Stetter, 2004). The External Action Service is still in the process of becoming operational. For now its mandate over CSDP activities is limited to those structures that were transferred from the Council Secretariat, such as the EUMS.

The CSDP addresses a collective-action problem of new complex threat scenarios, which no EU member state can address individually by facilitating risk- and burden-sharing among its participants (Matlary, 2009: 74). In times of contracting defence budgets, few member states possess the military and civilian tools to deal with the breadth of crisis management scenarios – as laid out, for instance, in the Petersberg tasks – individually. Role specialisation and the rotational principle in the Battlegroups concept are reflective of this. In actual operation, however, these mechanisms remain highly problematic as they also lead to fragmentation and free-riding.

With the end of the Cold War the European security architecture has entered into a state of flux, which it has still not overcome. The re-emergence of violent conflict in the immediate periphery, an increasingly assertive Russia, and, most importantly, the gradual withdrawal of the US have propelled EU member states towards cooperating in CSDP (Howorth, 2007: 52-3). Particularly, the latter development led to the St. Malo declaration that called for a ‘capacity for autonomous action’ for the EU. However, member states – most notably France and the UK – had opposing views whether this ‘autonomy’ meant a decoupling from NATO or a stronger role within it. This core notion of CSDP is still mired in ambiguity as the relationship of NATO and CSDP remains highly contested.

Sociological institutionalism

Whereas rationalist accounts usually treat institutions as dependent variables, sociological accounts use them as independent variables in the form of norms, ideas and values (Aspinwall & Schneider, 2001: 3). Therefore, constructivists are less interested in why institutions are created than in how they condition the interests and behaviour of their members. They do so in the context of socialisation and learning mechanisms. Complex social learning occurs in circumstances where: (a) individuals share common professional

backgrounds; (b) the group feels in crisis or faced by policy failure; (c) there is a high density of interactions; and (d) the group is insulated from direct political pressure (Checkel, 2001: 26).

There are various accounts that identify socialisation processes at work within the CSDP. Christoph Meyer (2006) points to the convergence of national strategic cultures due to cross-socialisation among policy-makers in the PSC and the EU Military Committee (EUMC), which is reinforced by post-crisis learning. This is confirmed in a number of other studies investigating the inner workings of CSDP bureaucratic bodies, such as the PSC, EUMC or CFSP working groups (Duke, 2005; Juncos & Reynolds, 2007; Davis Cross, 2010). However, there is also evidence that socialisation may be strategic rather than internalised (Juncos & Pomorska, 2006). The continuing debate on whether a 'European strategic culture' is in the making reflects the fact that the pervasiveness of socialisation in the field of European security and defence remains a very contested issue. While the studies just discussed rely heavily on the *constructivist* underpinnings of sociological institutionalism, I will forward an approach that draws more readily from organisational theory and thus reinforces its *institutionalist* lens.

Historical institutionalism

Historical institutionalism fits somewhat in between rational-choice and sociological institutionalism if we consider a sequential logic of change. In the first, strategic, intentional behaviour reigns. In the second, this behaviour becomes routinised over time. The former is the calculus approach from rationalists, the latter the cultural approach from sociologists. Actors are thus both strategic, utility-maximisers as well as norm-abiding rule followers (Steinmo, 2008: 126). As Thelen and Steinmo point out, we may conceive of institutions as both explanandum and explanans:

“The institutions that are at the centre of historical institutionalist analysis [...] can shape and constrain political strategies in important ways, but they are themselves also the outcome (conscious or unintended) of deliberate political strategies of political conflict and of choice” (1992: 10).

What distinguishes this strand from the other two is its “concern with contingency and the unintended consequences of strategic action and with a focus on the path dependency of institutional change” (Hay & Wincott, 1998: 952), or as Aspinwall and Schneider put it, “history creates context, which shapes choice” (2000: 16). The concept of path-dependency denotes the limited room for institutional change. Initial choices are made by self-interested

actors on the basis of their preferences. These initial choices are thus locked in so as to constrain future deviations from that path.

Along these lines, Smith forwards a dynamic and circular process of institutionalisation that accounts for the incremental development of European foreign policy. Institutional development and changes in state behaviour are caught in a two-way relationship, which strongly impacts on European foreign policy cooperation (2004: 11). Thus, with the formalisation of the policy-area comes an increase in states' cooperative attitudes. The assumption here is that institution-building functions as a ratchet towards ever increasing integration (see Wessels & Bopp, 2008). What is problematic in terms of path dependence is the institutional fragmentation in EU foreign policy activities that has accompanied increasing functional differentiation (Stetter, 2004). It is questionable whether we can discern a clear trajectory 'EPC–CFSP–CSDP'. Most bodies involved in the decision-shaping of CSDP were either created from scratch (the PSC being a partial exception) or were located in institutional settings subsequently transferred *into* the EU, i.e. the WEU.

However, historical institutionalism also serves us by providing a different look upon the role of power. Anand Menon, for example, stresses that by reducing the returns to power the CSDP effectively creates voice opportunities for smaller states (2011: 90). At the same time, it asserts the big states with 'laundering' opportunities by lending legitimacy to military interventions (94). From this follows that the institutional context conditions actors' strategies within which power is embedded (Matlary, 2009: 90). Thus, in the context of CSDP actor power is not exogenous to the institution. It matters how much a state contributes to policy creation and implementation. *Institutional* power internalises "the bargaining process that translates power resources into power over outcomes" (Keohane & Nye, 1977: 19). It is thus inherently occupied with the distribution of gains accruing from collective action.¹ The very idea of applying the two-level game analogy to CSDP (see Matlary, 2009; Koenig-Archibugi, 2004, for CFSP) recalls our attention to the fact that the EU is not simply a unidirectional filtering process for government preferences. Instead, we may conceive of it as a sphere of political contestation that gives rise to its own sources of power.

¹ We should note that there may exist considerable interaction between functional imperatives that relate to the distribution of gains and institutional power. Analytically speaking, we have to evaluate whether power stems from exogenous (systemic) or endogenous (institutional) factors.

NATO and CSDP: how similar are they?

Before we can assess how isomorphic change informs the institution-building process within the CSDP, we have to establish that this specific case warrants such an analysis. Do we actually observe a sufficient degree of similarity – or homogeneity – across the respective institutional structures? While both organisations form part of the same organisational space, they follow from very different historical trajectories (Howorth, 2009: 101).

On the one hand, we have the well-established NATO, which is a peacetime military alliance that provides its members with a mutual defence clause. Since the end of the Cold War it has moved from a strategic outlook of collective defence towards a more expeditionary, out-of-area approach to collective security. It deals in matters of high-intensity war-fighting, with peacemaking being the rule and peacekeeping being the exception. Its missions are few in number yet vast in personnel and material employed. Institutionally speaking, its membership of 28 nations is drawn from across the transatlantic seaboard, yet the organisation is strongly dominated by the US not least due to its sizeable contribution in terms of hardware and strategy.

On the other hand, the nascent CSDP is itself part of another greater polity, namely the EU. Its membership consists of 26 states (Denmark has opted out). While supranational EU institutions have gradually acquired a small stake in the policy area, CSDP remains strongly intergovernmental with member state governments as the key actors. The unanimity rule largely ensures that states stand on an equal footing yet in practice the three big states – France, UK, and to a lesser extent Germany – tend to bear greater weight. While CSDP membership is arguably less diverse than that of NATO, its strategic and operational outlook as well as the range of instruments employed are more stratified. The early stages of institution-building were mainly concerned with the military dimension, yet this has quickly extended to a strong civilian dimension as well as the military-industrial dimension. On the military side, EU missions are few so far, small in size, and with very modest operational goals. One of the three big member states assumes control and contributes most of the forces. Civilian missions make up the bulk of CSDP operations, covering a broad spectrum of activities, such as policing, border control, rule-of-law, or security sector reform. Geographically these missions span from Europe and its periphery (Balkans and Middle East) to Central Africa and the Horn of Africa as well as to Central and East Asia.

Overall, although there exists a fair amount of differentiation between NATO and the CSDP in terms of their (geographic) composition, strategic rationale and operational

profile, the relationship is simultaneously characterised by significant overlap regarding the closely related – yet not equivalent – issues of membership, mandate and resources (Hofmann, 2009; 2010). In fact, certain aspects of the CSDP’s institutional structures bear considerable resemblance to those of NATO. In order to demonstrate this similarity I will focus mainly on the bodies that comprise the political-military decision-making nexus of CSDP (i.e. PSC, EUMC, and EUMS) and the CSDP’s core instrument of intervention, namely the Battlegroups concept, and how these resemble their counterparts in NATO.

We can find sporadic, anecdotal evidence for the occurrence of institutional isomorphism in the literature that hints at the CSDP imitating NATO (see Hofmann, 2009; Reynolds, 2010). More specifically, Howorth states that the PSC, EUMC and EUMS are “all roughly modelled on their NATO equivalents” (2010a: 5). The move from an ad hoc to a permanent committee was largely induced by the experience of the North Atlantic Council (NAC). While the NAC may be considered to possess more authority over decisions, the tasks and functions with which the PSC is endowed follow closely the NAC template. The PSC did not initially have a permanent chair – as it was left at the discretion of the High Representative to assume this function or not – but the reforms of the Lisbon Treaty now provide for such a permanent chairman (Vogel, 2010). With regard to the EU Military Committee, the composition of its responsibilities and functions closely reflects that of NATO’s Military Committee (Howorth, 2007: 74). Further, its members are double-hatted and thus represent their country in both NATO and CSDP, with the exception of France and Belgium (Davis Cross, 2010: 12). An issue of contention between France and the UK was the level of seniority of diplomats within the PSC, and it was left to each country to decide what level diplomats to have them represent in the body (Juncos & Reynolds, 2007: 134). Yet overall, the CSDP’s bureaucratic organisation largely resembles that of NATO.

Looking beyond the decision-shaping and -making bodies that administer the CSDP, the picture becomes more mixed. In order to equip the CSDP with the necessary punch to respond to crisis situations, member states agreed under the Helsinki Headline Goal (HHG) in December 1999 to create the European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF), allowing for the deployment of up to 60,000 troops within sixty days and for a period of up to one year. In many respects this idea resembles NATO’s Implementation Force (IFOR), both in terms of operational mandate – the Balkan crises serving as the inspiration – and force size/composition. However, as progress on establishing such a large force was not forthcoming, the ERRF made way for the Battlegroups concept, which has since become the CSDP’s core instrument of intervention. It dates back to the Franco-British summit at Le

Touquet in February 2003, was further formalised in November 2003 with the participation of Germany, and formally adopted by the member states in June 2004 as part of the 2010 Headline Goal (Granholm, 2006: 63).

The Battlegroups were established with a close eye towards NATO's Response Force (NRF), which was already endorsed in November 2002. The Battlegroups make use of NATO certification requirements to ensure interoperability and military effectiveness, and mirror the NRF in terms of the overarching objective of the transformation of armed forces as well as pertaining to a similar spectrum of tasks in crisis management (Major & Mölling, 2011: 11, 13). However, the NRF was originally designed for considerably more extensive operations than the Battlegroups. In terms of the specific operational profile – size, capabilities, timeframe and requirements – the Battlegroups reflect the mission parameters of the CSDP operation Artemis in the DRC in 2003 (Quille, 2004: 1-2). Yet, while Artemis did provide policy-makers with a distinct template, this in turn is largely modelled on the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the former Yugoslavia in 1992 regarding the elements of its rapid response mechanism (Lindstrom, 2007: 10). Here we are faced with a number of organisational templates from NATO, the UN, and the CSDP itself. Consequently, although the original setup of the ERRF was modelled closely on NATO, the Battlegroups made recourse to a number of operational experiences.

There are other instances that hint at limits to homogeneity. The most significant case where a transfer/imitation of a core institution of NATO's structure has not occurred is with regard to strategic headquarters. This remains a major dispute among member states, aggravated by considerable interference from outside, i.e. the US. While the EU has established the EU Operations Centre within the EUMS (and also has recourse to five national Operational HQs), it does not have a permanent strategic HQ that is equivalent to NATO's SHAPE.

Table 1: Juxtaposition of selected NATO and CSDP structures

| NATO | CSDP |
|---|---|
| <i>The political-military decision-making nexus</i> | |
| North Atlantic Council | Political and Security Committee |
| Military Committee | EU Military Committee |
| Military Staff | EU Military Staff |
| <i>Instruments of intervention</i> | |
| NATO IFOR | European Rapid Reaction Force |
| NATO Response Force | EU Battlegroups |
| <i>Strategic and operational HQs</i> | |
| SHAPE (and Joint Force Commands) | EU Operations Centre and national OHQs, but no strategic HQ |

Overall, we can observe a considerable level of conformity between NATO and CSDP structures, while keeping in mind the qualifications. As already indicated, the aim of this study is to go beyond a mere comparison that draws our attention to the ‘similarity’ of structures and towards an understanding of this phenomenon as an ordered process of imitation. In order to assess the role of institutional isomorphism in CSDP we need to explore the nature of the causal mechanism that drives such change.

Institutional isomorphism

We start from the sociological premise that institutional isomorphism tends to be the rule rather than the exception (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional isomorphism describes the homogenisation of institutional structures across organisations that inhabit the same policy field. To put it simply, organisations that face the same environmental conditions imitate each other. These new structures allow imitating institutions to conform better to the normative demands posed by that environment.

The essential condition for isomorphism to occur is that the respective organisations sustain relations and depend on each other (Kourtikakis, 2010: 31-2). The associated process of 'structuration' of the organisational field consists of:

“an increase in the extent of interaction among organizations in the field; the emergence of sharply defined interorganizational structures of domination and patterns of coalition; an increase in the information load with which organizations in a field must contend; and the development of a mutual awareness among participants in a set of organizations that they are involved in a common enterprise” (DiMaggio & Powell; 1983: 148).

In this vein, NATO and CSDP can be portrayed to be in such an interdependent relationship, meant to involve “reciprocal costly effects of transaction” (Keohane & Nye, 1977: 9). Both organisations occupy the same organisational space of European (and increasingly, global) security. We may describe it as an instance of international regime complexity, which refers to “the presence of nested, partially overlapping, and parallel international regimes that are not hierarchically ordered” (Alter & Meunier, 2009: 13).

CSDP and NATO depend on each other in terms of their functionality (the problem to be solved) as well as their means to act. This also explains the substantial degree of institutional overlap, as expressed in terms of membership, mandate, and resources (Hofmann, 2009; 2010: 103). The relationship does not imply symmetrical dependence (in fact, it is rather asymmetrical), nor does it presuppose complementarity or conflict between the respective organisations. Specific instances of (inter-)dependence will be elaborated upon below.

The nature of the homogenisation process is laid out in DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) typology of three isomorphic pressures – coercive, mimetic, and normative. Coercive isomorphism occurs as political actors in one political system compel another system to adopt its institutional structure (Kourtikakis, 2010: 32). Coercive pressure is thus grounded in political influence and the problem of legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 150). Hence the two keywords of coercive isomorphism are power and dependence. Mimetic isomorphism, on the other hand, is a response to uncertainty and results in imitative modelling. As DiMaggio and Powell state, “when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organizations may model themselves on other organizations” (1983: 151). If rationally derived templates for optimal institutional design are unavailable, policy-makers turn to related institutions that are seen as more successful or legitimate (Beckert, 2010: 158). Here it is the political actors that operate within the

'receiving' system that identify desirable structures from other systems and push for their imitation. Lastly, normative isomorphism stems from elite group behaviour brought about by professionalisation and socialisation (Radaelli, 2000: 28). Actors that operate within the same network are engaged in a "collective struggle [...] to define the conditions and methods of their work" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 152) – i.e. professionalisation. Another mechanism that facilitates professionalisation and socialisation is personnel turnover.

The three isomorphic processes laid out above provide us with three testable propositions:

- 1) *Coercive isomorphism*: NATO pressures CSDP to copy its organisational structures in an effort to secure political influence and legitimacy. Impact derives from resource dependence and NATO's legacy as the primary security institution in Europe.
- 2) *Mimetic isomorphism*: Member states imitate the institutional features of functionally related organisations legitimated by their success (i.e. NATO) as rationally derived templates for optimal institutional design are unavailable. This is a response to uncertainty about CSDP's goals and about the future organisation of European security.
- 3) *Normative isomorphism*: Policy actors that operate within transgovernmental networks/epistemic communities across the related organisations facilitate institutional imitation. This is due to a sharing of professional norms and identities and personnel turnover.

Evaluating isomorphic change in CSDP

Copying as a result of dependence

In order to trace externally imposed transfer of institutional templates we need to identify the possible 'perpetrator'. The problem here is, however, that we are dealing with intergovernmental organisations that are decisively non-unitary. To complicate it further, they have overlapping memberships. Consequently, the only 'external' actor we can identify without rendering the conceptualisation of coercive isomorphism useless is the United States. It is the crucial, dominant member of NATO, so much so that frequently the organisation's policies are tacitly considered an extension of US security policy. Accordingly, we may ascribe to the US a position that allows it to exercise considerable influence on its European allies. This influence as it pertains to the NATO-CSDP relationship is foremost

epitomised by the CSDP's resource dependence on NATO, and, to a lesser degree, the latter's persistence as the pre-eminent organisation in the hierarchy of European security. Therefore, there is both a material and an ideational dimension to dependence with which we have to contend here.

We can deduce the EU's resource dependence on NATO from its primary coordination mechanism in terms of operational capabilities, namely the BerlinPlus agreement. Here it is laid down that the EU should have access to NATO operational assets to conduct its own military operations. Crucially, NATO reserves the 'right of first refusal', whereby the Alliance must first decline to become involved in a given crisis, thus enabling the EU to take autonomous action. Further, the design of the NATO-EU 'crisis consultation arrangements' also includes EU access to NATO planning and the provision of a NATO command option (EU/NATO, 2003). The implication of this is that the EU remains dependent on NATO for both operational and tactical conduct of missions. This is due to the CSDP's continually slow progress in developing certain 'strategic enablers' – e.g. airlift, C3 (Communications, Command and Control), and intelligence (Biscop, 2004: 513) – as well as the lack of strategic headquarters, which make it necessary to draw on NATO assets.

The final agreement on BerlinPlus was only reached in December 2002 – at this point in time much of the CSDP's institutional structures were already in place – and this may seem to make it difficult for us to claim that the CSDP's resource dependence on NATO could have been a factor in the CSDP's early institutional creation. However, the BerlinPlus provisions stem from the 1999 NATO Washington summit (NATO, 1999a). In fact, the spirit of the provisions was already visible in the 1996 NATO meeting of foreign ministers in Berlin, which laid out the CJTF² mechanism, providing for WEU access to NATO assets (NATO, 1996). As such, the fact that the EU could not enter into significant military interventions without operational recourse to NATO was a reality not lost on member states when conceiving the CSDP.

The creation of CSDP was immediately perceived by the US as a challenge to the primacy of NATO as the dominant European security organisation, as manifested in then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's warning of the 'three Ds'. Shortly after the Franco-British St. Malo declaration, Albright clarified the US position that the ESDP must not lead to *decoupling* of Europeans from Alliance structures, unnecessary *duplication* of assets, and *discrimination* of NATO members that are not part of the EU (1998). This view of the CSDP's subordination to NATO was also expressed in NATO's new Strategic Concept of 1999, which

² I.e. 'Combined Joint Task Force'

stated that “the European Security and Defence Identity will continue to be developed *within* NATO” (NATO, 1999b, emphasis added).

Consequently, within the wider debate on the reorganisation of the European security architecture the US (via NATO) sought to safeguard the pre-eminence of NATO as the foremost organisation of European security by subordinating the CSDP to the Alliance framework. However, whether the US has in fact had a coercive impact on the institutional design of the CSDP is another question. Where we can observe such an impact is in US efforts to bring about a more inclusive membership structure of the CSDP, which would enable NATO members that are not part of the EU to take part in CSDP operations. However, these states do not possess voting rights within the institution and thus cannot partake in its strategic direction.

With respect to strategic headquarters US pressure has effectively prevented homogenisation of structures. Indirect coercion may be said to have occurred via the ‘Atlanticist’ member states of CSDP that were wary not to let the new institution endanger the integrity of the transatlantic alliance (Howorth, 2007: 147). The UK and the CEECs thus tend to view the existence of SHAPE as rendering redundant a genuinely autonomous strategic planning capacity within CSDP (Howorth, 2009: 100). However, this instance of ‘coercion’ led to non-transfer of institutional structures. At this stage, we do not identify coercion that has led to homogenisation. Consequently, the hypothesised link between dependence and institutional isomorphism is tenuous.

Imitation as a result of uncertainty

In a different vein, institutional isomorphism may also be the result of states’ efforts to reduce uncertainty. Uncertainty in CSDP comes in two guises. On the one hand, uncertainty derives from the strategic ambiguity of CSDP. What are its objectives in terms of the nature and location of crises it seeks to address? In other words, what is its functional and geographical purpose? On the other hand, uncertainty is inherent in the contested, unresolved nature of the relationship with NATO and the hierarchy in the European security architecture. Is this relationship one of competition or complementarity (see Cornish, 2006)? Both instances of uncertainty refer to the indeterminacy that springs from a lack of common norms and identity (see Rathbun, 2007: 549-52).

Due to the stark differences between member states in their security policy postures and traditions, as well as the so far underdeveloped strategic culture at EU level, a uniform understanding of the specific scenarios that would lead to concerted action is constrained

(see Stahl et al., 2004). We can identify three major cleavages among CSDP members. The first exists between so-called Europeanists and Atlanticists, rooted in member states' respective preference to conduct collective security via different institutional venues, i.e. NATO or CSDP. The second divide centres on the preferred type of intervention, separating those countries that more willingly advocate military solutions and those that prefer civilian means. The third cleavage concerns the underlying conception of the role of the military, that is whether the CSDP should serve the ends of territorial defence or force projection (Giegerich, 2006: 46). There also exist specific divides in terms of member states' attitudes towards the organisation of defence procurement in the EU (see Bátorá, 2009).

Since the establishment of CSDP in 1999 there has been gradual albeit slow progress in addressing this fundamental question of purpose, yet an actual answer is still elusive. The European Security Strategy from 2003 (and its overhaul in 2008) reflects the difficulty in defining strategic priorities for 26 states, particularly those that refer to the military realm. Put differently, a security strategy is not quite a 'strategic concept' (see Mawdsley & Quille, 2003: 16). Such a qualitative leap requires foremost a better matching of (political) expectations and (operational) capabilities. Only recently has a flourishing debate emerged focusing on EU 'grand strategy' (Howorth, 2010b; Smith, 2011; Rogers, 2009; Biscop & Coelmont, 2010). Another indicator of this strategic ambiguity may be the sheer number of missions conducted. The EU has launched 28 missions – out of which six military – since 2003 (CSDP Map, 2011). In comparison, NATO has conducted eight missions since 1995 (NATO, 2011). It is not the point to compare the scale of these missions. More importantly, implicit in the high number of CSDP missions is a 'learning by doing' attitude in Brussels policy circles that reflects the fact that the EU is still in the process of defining itself as a security actor. We can observe a similar inconclusiveness with regard to geographical priorities of intervention or the reform of the European armaments market.

Uncertainty is also inherent in the CSDP's relationship with NATO. Ever since the end of the Cold War – and arguably even before that – there has been an intense debate on the re-organisation of the European security architecture (see Croft, 2000). When creating the CSDP, member state governments somewhat avoided the question of how this new organisation would interface with the other major organisations of European crisis management, namely NATO – well-established but itself in need of strategic adaptation. Was/is the CSDP intended to complement or compete with NATO (Ojanen, 2006)? It is vital to understand how member state governments differently interpreted the meaning of the notion of 'autonomy' as put forth in the St. Malo declaration. While the British took it to

mean that a strong, autonomous European capacity for intervention would serve to reinvigorate the transatlantic alliance, the French rather had a partial decoupling in mind that would make Europeans less dependent on NATO (Howorth, 2007: 36-7). This disagreement was mediated by means of 'constructive ambiguity' (Heisbourg, 2000: 5), which allowed member states to move forward with the project while diverging on its purpose. A 'grand bargain' between the two organisations remains elusive (Cornish, 2006:4).

In light of this considerable strategic ambiguity and environmental uncertainty, the assumption is that policy-makers in the EU made recourse to NATO templates to guide the creation of CSDP structures. However, in order for this to apply we need to rely on the insights of the normative strand to gain an understanding of the relevant actors involved and their collective actions.

Imitation as a result of professionalisation

As for normative isomorphism, the assumption is that models may be diffused indirectly through professionalisation and personnel transfer/turnover (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 151). Frédéric Mérand points our attention to the role of transgovernmental networks in CSDP. He argues that "European defence has created a historically unprecedented political space for bureaucratic elites to experiment and enact new forms of transnational governance" (2008: 3). Davis Cross confirms that shared professional norms between EUMC representatives facilitate integrity between NATO and CSDP (2010: 19-20). We thus find in Brussels a network of national actors and those based in the Council Secretariat, which sits at the heart of the CSDP (Mérand et al., 2011). That these actors have become increasingly socialised in the exercise to define appropriate norms of behaviour and group identity is documented in various studies (Duke, 2005; Juncos & Reynolds, 2007; Davis Cross, 2010; Juncos & Pomorska, 2006).

Professionalisation and socialisation are facilitated by high levels of interaction, which, in turn, are evident in the extensive provisions for consultation and cooperation. January 2001 marked the beginning of institutionalised relations between the organisations, as joint meetings between foreign ministers and at ambassadorial level were established. The NATO-EU capability groups met for the first time in May 2003. In October 2005 it was decided to set up military permanent arrangements in the form of a NATO liaison team at the EUMS and an EU cell at SHAPE (NATO, 2007). Processes of personnel turnover between NATO and CSDP are common, and the fact that EUMS personnel is double-hatted, provides for even greater consistency.

The personification of the described process is Javier Solana. He took office as NATO Secretary General in December 1995 and following the Cologne European Council he subsequently moved on to become the EU's first High Representative for the CFSP in October 1999. An interesting corollary is that immediately after assuming his NATO post he took charge of IFOR, the multinational peacekeeping force in Bosnia. During Solana's term, NATO went through a process of reform regarding both its strategic outlook (see the Alliance's new Strategic Concept in 1999) as well as its politico-military structure. Later, Solana was an influential figure in driving forward the institution-building process in CSDP – although he mainly kept out of its daily business – as exemplified by his crucial role in compiling the European Security Strategy.

The normative conception of isomorphic change complements the mimetic variant in channelling what are considered appropriate structures for crisis management. A potential problem regarding normative isomorphism rests in the idea that it may be unclear whether professionalisation cuts across political/bureaucratic and military personnel. As these groups possess distinct role conceptions we may expect a clash with regard to the willingness to launch several parallel missions. While bureaucratic officials are more likely to display a 'learning-by-doing' attitude, military leaders will be more concerned with potential overstretch.

Conclusion

In the preceding analysis I have sought to get to grips with a commonly asserted yet poorly understood phenomenon in the institution-building process of CSDP, namely the proposed resemblance of its institutional structures to those of NATO and the supposition that this is rooted in interactive dynamics between these organisations as captured by the thesis of institutional isomorphism. This study has found that similarity can indeed be established with regard to core features of the CSDP's institutional structures, especially those that were set up in the initial phase of institution-building in 1999 – the politico-military decision-making nexus as composed of PSC, EUMC and EUMS, and the ERRF. However, homogeneity of structures eroded over the course of the CSDP's institutional maturation, as can be deduced from the Battlegroups concept, which was to a large extent the outcome of an endogenous learning process from operation Artemis. The prevailing absence of strategic headquarters points to the fact that strong political dynamics based in notions of

complementarity and rivalry continue to impact on the relationship between CSDP and NATO, effectively hindering institutional copying.

I have forwarded the concept of institutional isomorphism in three distinct variants, employing drivers such as resource dependence, uncertainty, and professionalisation in bringing about institutional imitation. I contend the most convincing explanation to be a combination of the mimetic and normative strands of isomorphism. In an effort to reduce strategic and environmental uncertainty, crucial national actors located in Brussels make recourse to NATO templates in the institutional creation of CSDP. The imitation of NATO structures is perceived to be a legitimate way to institutionalise CSDP. The concern with legitimacy dominates over considerations of efficiency (see Thies, 2009), and accordingly the logic of change inherent in imitation is one of appropriateness instead of consequentiality. The evidence for the coercive strand is partially conflicted and rather inconclusive. Overall, further empirical research is needed to confirm this model. This also pertains to potential interaction effects between the mimetic and normative variants of isomorphism, as the two may be much more integrated in our case at hand than the original approach from organisational sociology may suggest.

In any case, a number of interesting questions arise out of this study opening up promising avenues for future research. First, we have to acknowledge that isomorphic change is constrained. Further research is needed to assess in how far member states' preferences and their respective institutional power impact on institutional isomorphism. Where institution-building is contested, the question is who gets their way and why? To this end we may widen the scope of our analysis by including further institutional structures of the CSDP, such as the European Defence Agency, thus incorporating the military-industrial dimension.

Second, we should address ourselves to the issue of intentionality. Does the process of transfer presuppose agency in terms of goal-oriented behaviour, or do we rather observe unreflexive transfers of knowledge from one setting to another (see Bicchi, 2006: 292)?

Third, we may ask what the effects of institutional isomorphism are in terms of decision-making and implementation. Implicit in the contention that isomorphic processes internalise concerns of legitimacy rather than efficiency is the realisation that institutional structures may be exposed to gridlock or policy failure. We have to evaluate whether the imitation of NATO structures within the CSDP framework gives rise to unintended consequences that adversely affect the delivery of crisis management policy. For instance,

the fact that the Battlegroups concept has so far not been deployed in a mission may shed doubt on its (perceived) utility.

Fourth, we should pay close attention to how the current process of establishing the European External Action Service leads to a re-organisation of institutional structures within CSDP as well as in its relationship to NATO, as this holds important implications in terms of whether we will observe structural convergence or divergence within the European security architecture.

Fifth, we may consider a re-conceptualisation of the specification of causal direction in our model of isomorphic change. While I have been mainly interested in the way NATO influences the CSDP (NATO \rightarrow CSDP), the model also allows itself to be adapted to reverse processes (CSDP \rightarrow NATO). Accordingly, a promising avenue for research may be to investigate whether/how NATO imitates the CSDP's civilian crisis management procedures (NATO \leftrightarrow CSDP) (see Serfaty, 2004: 86). In fact, this may well be expanded to a multi-directional model that incorporates other organisations of European security, such as the OSCE, the UN, and the WEU. Accordingly, we may analyse whether the CSDP derived its civilian crisis management mechanisms from the UN or OSCE (see Weiss & Dalferth, 2009: 270). Thus, future research may develop the model offered in this paper into a more comprehensive view of institution-building dynamics in the European security architecture, where complex, intersecting pressures of imitation flow in various directions between the various organisations involved in European security.

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