New Horizons in European Studies

Aston University, 24-25 April 2014

www.uaces.org

For a Global European Studies? Comparative Politics, International Relations and the Myth of 'European Exceptionalism'

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Introduction

Over the past decades European Studies has increasingly sought to borrow from the conceptual and theoretical apparatuses of Comparative Politics, replacing the previous hegemony based around approaches drawn from International Relations. The conventional narrative has it that this move was necessitated by the remarkable degree of institutional development which the European Union undertook and the extent to which this condition has mitigated the effects of international anarchy. This 'European exceptionalism', it is held, has altered the relations between the member-states to the extent that the application of International Relations theories no longer offers adequate explanatory leverage. In this paper I argue that the exceptional nature of relations between the member-states has been overstated. The introduction of Comparative Politics concepts into European Studies owed more to the sociology of the discipline than to the nature of European international relations itself. The reason it has proved so successful is, I argue, more a reflection of the underlying linkages between domestic and international politics which it has uncovered, rather than a particular 'fit' with a new type of politics. Rather than argue for the re-colonisation of European Studies by International Relations, therefore, I suggest that International Relations itself can learn from the increasingly rigorous scholarship undertaken within European Studies. Such an engagement holds out the potential for greatly improving the conceptual, theoretical and methodological elements of the 'second-image' in International Relations theory.

The essay proceeds in three broad stages. The first section discusses the historical evolution of Comparative Politics, International Relations, and European Studies, and charts the shifting relations between the three disciplines over time. The second section discusses the exceptionalist thesis in detail, detailing important advocates and challengers, before outlining the particular critique offered here. The third section demonstrates empirically the value-add of an engagement between International Relations and European Studies with reference to the puzzle of variation in US alliance politics. This is an area where International Relations has had difficulty in generating sufficient theoretical leverage and where the concepts and theories from European Studies – particularly their understanding of parties, partisanship and institutions – hold out the promise of significantly increased explanatory power.

Studying EU Politics: Disciplines and Boundaries

It is helpful to begin by distinguishing between three largely discrete literatures within contemporary political science; International Relations (IR), Comparative Politics (CP), and European Studies (ES). Although any discussion of broad groupings of scholarly work will offer more simplification than is desirable, my aim here is to tease out general patterns that apply to these disciplines, rather than to engage in academic reductionism or 'pigeon-holing'. Let us first ask what it is which separates these disciplines from one another.

IR is commonly associated with attempts to understand the behaviour of states within the anarchic international arena. The state is the primary actor in most IR theory, although there are very few who would claim that domestic or transnational actors are unimportant. The best-known variants of each mainstream theory explicitly present an abstracted form of the state that is stripped largely of its component parts (e.g. Waltz 1979, Keohane 1984, Wendt 1999). Moreover the assumption of

anarchy is also a near constant; even sociological accounts concerned with the normative and social content of the international understand that such relational ties emerge from within a condition best described as 'anarchy' (e.g. Bull 1977). As a discipline, then, IR is generally preoccupied with studying the interactions between units (states) under anarchy and accounting for the behavioural differences evidenced.

CP, on the other hand, is concerned with politics within – as opposed to between – states. CP scholars ask two broad types of questions, both of which cohere around the concept of political institutions. First, they ask where these institutions emerge from, and what explains the differences between institutional forms highlighted by the different forms of regimes present in different regions and countries. Second, they ask as to the *effects* of these varying institutional architectures on the conduct of politics within these countries. Although CP scholars routinely study regions – and some are beginning to focus more on international organizations – by and large the discipline treats the state itself as the prime boundary within which analysis takes place, and through which comparison is facilitated. Unlike IR where the state is the primary *actor*, in CP it is perhaps better understood as the primary *case identifier*.

ES differs from both of these disciplines in that it has no formal ontological commitment as far as the state is concerned. ES is defined solely by the empirical phenomena under study; the politics of the European Union (EU) and the states from which it is constituted. As such, ES relies on the theoretical and methodological apparatuses of other disciplines to explain its primary focus of study, whether this is law, sociology, economics, or either of the two politics disciplines described above. Here I am concerned solely with the political element of ES, which comprises a split between the twin influences of IR and CP on the study of the EU.

The relations between these three bodies of work are important because they determine the extent to which distinct ontological claims are deemed a legitimate basis for one's analysis. Literatures are, as Guzzini (2001, 109) has argued, 'clusters of assumptions'. Where these assumptions are at odds with one another, combination is impossible; when they do not, they provide the building-blocks for academic innovation. Disciplinary boundaries do not necessarily map onto incompatible clusters of assumptions, yet, over time, they may become short-hand ways for scholars to identify potentially conflicting assumptions. Hence, although at an ontological level assumptions may be fully compatible, the relations between disciplines matters insofar as particular combinations of assumptions are viewed as legitimate or illegitimate. As relations between disciplines change over time, so do the combinations of ontological assumptions deemed appropriate for any particular scholarly endeavour.

The relationship between IR and CP has always been somewhat difficult to conceptualise. On the one hand, both disciplines are clearly both components of 'political science' more broadly. On the other hand, however, attempts to cross the disciplinary boundary have failed to challenge the dominance of mainstream (and non-interdisciplinary) approaches which dominate the respective fields. Abstract state-centrism remains the hall-mark of IR and CP scholars have seldom toyed with the utility of a relational inter-state ontology for understanding domestic institutions. Within IR there have developed interesting avenues of research on interest-group politics (Mearsheimer & Walt 2006; Milner & Tingley 2011; Moravcsik 2000), 'divided government' (Lohmann & O'Halloran 1994; Milner 1989; Sherman 2002), bureaucratic politics (Allison 1971; Allison & Halperin 1972;

Halperin 1974; Stern *et al*. 1998) and regime-types (Farnham 2004; Kaarbo 2001; Katzenstein 1976), yet surprisingly little on such topics as issue-linkage, parliamentary systems, coalition politics, political ideology, authoritarian politics, partisan or electoral cycles, and the organization, type and motivation of political parties. From within CP there has been even less inter-disciplinary engagement with issues of foreign policy; most studies with an explicitly international dimension have evidenced something of an 'institutionalist' bias by focusing on intergovernmental organisations such as the UN and ILO (e.g. Boockmann 2006; Wittkopf 1973). Neither the dearth of international work by CP scholars nor the overwhelming focus on institutions is surprising, given that the discipline itself is defined by the comparison of institutions and their effects within ostensibly discrete units (i.e. 'states').

What about the relationship between ES and IR, and between ES and CP? Here the relationship has been more difficult to pin down. Initially ES work borrowed predominantly from the discipline of IR, and explicit attempts to theories both the nature, and emergence, of the then EEC was spawned from discussions within IR itself (Pollack 2001, 221). That this was initially the case is unsurprising. Any international organization, no matter how significant it becomes, will have as its most proximate explanation the decisions of major states. Furthermore, given that debates within Western Europe at the time of the EEC's institutional emergence were over issues of international security and 'high politics', it was inevitable that the scholarly division-of-labour would favour the contribution of those engaged in explaining inter-state politics. The occasional periods of deep institutional development within the EU, particularly those accompanying the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, paved the way for a re-think of the relationship between ES and IR. If the EU, as it had become, was so institutionally dense, and if politics between the member states appeared to be more a game of bargaining than of explicit threats and clandestine diplomacy, then could IR theory continue to gain leverage over policy outcomes?

Increasingly scholars turned to the tools from CP in order to fill this gap in explanation left by a reliance on IR theories. They argued that the EU was better understood as a 'political system' with an internal political arena – within which traditional 'left-right' politics occurred – rather than as a mere intergovernmental organization (Hix 1994, 22-23). Over time this orientation towards CP rather than IR has become the dominant interdisciplinary linkage, with the IR literature on the EU gradually being supplanted by CP-influenced work. Together this growing dependence on the theories and concepts of CP has led to the development of a sophisticated literature linking domestic political institutions to outcomes at the European level, and composed of multiple substantive foci, including party positions (Hooghe *et al*. 2002; Jensen *et al*. 2007; Marks & Wilson 2000), the role of national parliaments (Schneider *at al*. 2010; Slapin 2006), multi-level governance (Marks *et al* 1996; Hooghe & Marks 2003), democratic audits (Follesdal & Hix 2006; Lord & Beetham 2001), the institutional balance-of-power (Hix 2002; Tsebelis & Garrett 2001), and the conduct of politics within the institutions themselves (Hix *et al*. 2005; Lindstädt & Slapin 2011).

This approach to ES, which sought to challenge the extent to which politics within the EU conformed to the traditional notions of statecraft espoused by IR scholars, I refer to as 'European exceptionalism'. It is the claim that *the EU's institutional architecture is so dense and strong that it has mitigated the condition of anarchy between the European states and thereby requires theorising of a different kind in order to understand the politics within.* Thus, the EU is 'exceptional' from the point of view of international relations; it is not, exceptional from a CP perspective, however, the

claim being that we may begin to observe 'normal politics' within the EU (Hix *et al*. 2006). It is therefore necessary to use the term 'exceptionalism' carefully so as to avoid extending the connotation too far.

Challenging the Exceptionalist Thesis

Understandably there have been challenges to the exceptionalist thesis. It is perhaps not surprising that these have come predominantly from IR scholars whose aim has been to demonstrate the continuing relevance of IR's theories and concepts for the study of the EU. Challenging the exceptional or *sui generis* nature of the EU is one way in which these scholars have attempted to demonstrate the appropriateness of more traditional IR-based explanations of state behaviour and international delegation. An early example of such a challenge is provided by Hurrell and Menon, who argued that the EU system gave the most prominent roles to the member-states, thereby reinforcing their position and highlighting the utility of theories based around inter-state bargaining (1996, 390). Moreover, following Scharpf, they claimed that the EU – whilst featuring state-like attributes – lacked crucial components of national political systems, such as system-wide political parties, economic and social homogeneity, and a shared 'civic culture' (1996, 391). Similarly, Hyde-Price has sought to challenge the assumption of realism as an 'atypical actor' from the (IR) realist perspective by demonstrating the utility of this body of theory for understanding the intergovernmental nature of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Europe's preoccupation with 'second-order' security concerns where there was an underlying consensus between states (2006, 231). Finally, it is also the case that the combined work of Moravcsik does much both to undermine both the notion that the EU is a fundamentally exceptional actor and that it cannot be studied by adapting conventional IR theories, in this case, liberalism and intergovernmentalism (1993; 1999, 82).

What unites these critics of the exceptionalist thesis is their shared reliance on the continuing relevance of IR theory in explaining European politics. They take the view that undermining the purported exceptionalism requires demonstrating the value of IR theory in terms of the analytical leverage it can offer. There are, however, two problems with such an approach. First, it has not been overwhelmingly successful; reducing outcomes at the European level to interstate politics (however conceived) is relatively difficult to do, as the multiple criticisms of liberal intergovernmentalism attest to (e.g. Forster 1998; Hix 2002; Wincott 1995). In other words, it has not been established that IR theories offer greater explanatory leverage than those drawn from CP, save for perhaps a debatably valuable increase in parsimony. Second, this approach implicitly (and inappropriately) paints mainstream IR theory as the most appropriate tool for gaining leverage over international relations more generally, reinforcing the division-of-labour between IR and CP whereby the former holds the comparative advantage in explaining inter-state behaviour. In arguing for the continuing relevance of IR theory in explaining European politics, advocates of these approaches are claiming an ability to best-explain relations between states *and* to understand important aspects of politics within the EU.

My claim in this paper is different from the challenges to exceptionalism made above. Whilst I still wish to contest the idea of 'European exceptionalism', I do not wish to do so by recourse to the strengths of IR theory. Rather, my argument works in reverse. In teasing out the relations between

domestic politics and state behaviour, I argue, the present linkage between CP and ES has developed conceptual and theoretical tools which can help us to better explain international relations more generally. That these tools offer us leverage over European politics is not solely a result of the peculiarities of the EU's institutional architecture; it is rather that they are able to tap into regularities of domestic-international linkages that are inherent in inter-state relations. I contend that the breakdown of the 'exceptionalism' thesis should result not in the re-colonisation of ES by IR approaches, but rather the colonisation of IR's subject-matter by CP-ES concepts, theories and methodologies.

I am not the first to have suggested the value of drawing lessons for IR from ES. In particular, Warleigh (2006, 32) has argued that the move "of IR away from its traditional focus on relations between governments under conditions of anarchy towards the study of 'World Politics'…calls for a reappraisal of [European Union Studies]' utility". The difference between the two claims lies in the extent to which we understand the emergence of a 'post-national' IR as the determining factor underpinning the relevance of ES approaches for studying international relations. Contra Warleigh, I argue that we need not buy into the shift towards a 'global polity' in order to establish the relevance of concepts from the CP-ES literature. Although there may be important differences in the relations between EU member-states and the broader community of states (which I shall discuss in greater detail later), these are not substantial enough to undermine the transposition of ES theories and concepts. Moreover, because one of the primary reasons that CP-IR linkages have never become fully absorbed into mainstream IR is *omissions* on the part of IR scholars, it is not clear that the relevant standard by which to judge the applicability of CP-ES approaches is whether international relations approximate the relations between EU member-states. Rather, it is simply a question of rectifying inadequately specified theories by engaging with other disciplines which have provided the relevant level of specificity and conceptualisation.

So what is the value for IR of transposing theories and concepts from ES? I have noted earlier that despite some attempts at cross-fertilization, there remains much work to be done at the nexus of IR and CP. Although there has been much written on interest-group politics and the importance of different regime-types in explaining foreign policy (Milner 1998), significant work remains to be done in transposing CP concepts and approaches more broadly, and in greater detail. This is reflected in the repeated calls for greater integration between IR and CP over the years (Cantir & Kaarbo 2012, 4; Putnam 1988, 432). Despite these frequent calls for more interdisciplinary work, however, the problem has remained.

There are three ways in which an engagement between CP and IR would help to enrich the explanatory power of IR as a discipline. The first is *conceptual*. The CP literature is an excellent source of concepts and variables pertaining to domestic political processes. Moreover, these concepts are more specific than the notion of 'regime-type' with which IR has become enamoured over the decades. The second is *theoretical*. CP offers a rich source of hypothesised cause-effect relationships which the different institutional configurations of domestic politics open up, and many of these would require little further specification to be brought to bear on IR problems. The third is *methodological*. Borrowing from CP holds out the potential for increasing the rigour of second-image research in IR. In particular, the statistical tools and spatial modelling techniques from CP may be put to greater use in IR than is currently the case, and CP scholars have developed datasets that would

allow for many new and interesting hypotheses to be tested, were they combined with existing data in IR.

If there is a demand for greater interdisciplinarity in IR, then why did an engagement with CP emerge only through ES and not independently (as an IR-CP research programme)? This is an important question, for it speaks directly to the ostensibly exceptional nature of European politics itself. There were three broad reasons why CP approaches were easier to develop within ES than IR. Importantly, however, none of these three reasons suggests any fundamental ontological divide between IR and CP; they are all, in effect, causes which may be located within the politics and sociology of the discipline itself. First, the standard realist narrative of security-seeking states under anarchy became delegitimised within ES long before it began to descend in popularity in relation to other international phenomena (with the early 1990s marking the relative shift in popularity from realism to liberalism and constructivism). Because the density of the EU's institutional architecture defied explanation by reference to traditional realist categories of IR, the literature emerged in a relatively shielded discursive environment. By contrast, work within IR that attempted to bring in CP was at constant risk of attack from those (realists) sceptical of such an endeavour, leading to an impoverished debate around *whether* domestic politics mattered, and not *how* it mattered. Second, the geographical location of the EU helped the case for CP approaches by encompassing only democratic and (prior to 2004) wealthy Western countries. Quite irrespective of any arguments that relations between such states may be more pacific, the scope of the EU ensured that the applicability of CP would not be stretched by the need to incorporate authoritarian politics. Moreover, the openness of these states, coupled with their high degree of institutional capacity, ensured that the relevant data for measuring and testing CP concepts would be readily available. Third, the increasing scope of the EU's competences over the decades lead to an encroachment of the EU's remit into areas traditionally conceived of as residing within the sphere of domestic politics. As the EU expanded into social and economic issues, scholars from within these fields increasingly found themselves needing to incorporate the EU into their analyses, and also needing to account for the conduct of EU politics itself. Unsurprisingly, given the previously 'domestic' nature of these issue-areas, most of the scholars whose work the EU now implicated were reared in CP theories and methods and not those of IR.

Each of these factors helps us to explain why CP-ES linkages emerged in a far stronger fashion than CP-IR ones and each had its role to play in facilitating cross-disciplinary transposition. Most importantly, none of these factors is able to suggest that CP approaches are not relevant outside of the European context. Rather, this appears to be something of a 'myth' that has grown around the literature. The consensus around the exceptional nature of the EU has strengthened the links between CP and ES whilst at the same time denoting their inapplicability in other fields. While the emergence of this literature succeeded in laying the theoretical, conceptual and methodological groundwork for a reinvigoration of the second-image in IR theory, the incorporation of the newly reinvigorated ES never occurred, largely due to assumed differences in the nature of European versus international politics. In other words, what could have been the beginning of an emerging CP-IR research programme has been curtailed.

The key to challenging the myth of European exceptionalism, and of incorporating rigorous CP insights into IR, is to demonstrate the usefulness of insights generated within the CP-ES literature for understanding international relations more generally. In the remainder of this paper I focus on one

particular puzzle in IR – explaining variation in US alliance politics – and highlight the value-add that an engagement with the CP-ES literature offers.

The Contribution of ES: Parties, Partisan Preferences, and Institutions

The relationship between the United States (US) and its allies has been of utmost importance in explaining the emergence of, and potential responses to, global problems. Since the end of the Cold War in particular, many of the world's states hold the US as their most important relational tie, and the quality of relations at any given time is likely to have a significant impact on the ability of the US – and its partners – to achieve their international goals. Within IR there is a consensus that the relations between the US and many of its allies are stronger than other relational ties in the international system. Despite this shared assessment of the strength of these relationships, two debates have emerged in the field.

The first concerns the nature of US power and of its relationships with its erstwhile 'partners', and what the totality of these relations represents. For some the ties are nothing more than military alliances (Walt 1985) or examples of security co-binding (Deudney 2007). For others there ties have more positive connotations; they are understood as 'political partnerships' (Ikenberry 2001), as components of an American 'tributary system' (Khong 2013), or as variously 'special' in any number of ways (Dumbrell & Schäfer 2009). Finally, a third school view these relations more cynically, as the representation of US hegemony, and refer to them as 'patron-client' ties (Sylvan & Majeski 2009) or as part of an American-led global empire (Ferguson 2005; Lundestad 1986).

The second debate centres on the competing explanations offered for the relatively high level of cooperation evidenced between the US and its allies. Here the debate is structured largely along theoretical lines. Realists argue that alliances with the US emerged during the Cold War as a means of balancing Soviet power, and that after the 1990s the US' position as sole 'hyper-power' offered little choice to its allies other than to continue to bandwagon on US power (Wohlforth 1999, 18). From this perspective the relations are themselves nothing more than the product of a modus-vivendi between states with temporarily convergent security interests (Gaddis 1986, 107; Mearsheimer 1990, 26; Waltz 1979, 122). Liberals have focused more on the importance of shared institutional ties and increasing interdependence as determinants of the high level of cooperation witnessed between the US and its allies, pointing to the Pareto-superior outcomes available through mutual economic exchange and the ability of institutional ties to regularise the involved stakes (Axelrod and Keohane 1985, 231; Ikenberry 1992, 289; Ruggie 1982, 393-394). Constructivists, on the other hand, have stressed the importance of a shared liberal-democratic identity, and the development of mutual practices, as the prime determinants of the quality of relations (Adler 2008, 205; Risse-Kappen 1995, 502; Williams 2001, 543).

Where the discipline has faltered, however, is in understanding the crucial question of *variation*. IR theory would appear well-suited to explaining such macro-processes as broad alliance patterns, but it struggles when we wish to gain leverage over the important day-to-day variation in the quality of the US' alliance relationships. The problem, as summarised by Milner, is as follows: "If the international system is relatively constant in each case and the international position of the countries is the same, how do we explain failure to achieve cooperation in one case and success in

the other?" (1997, 27). It is for this reason that IR has generally left explaining variation up to historians (e.g. Banchoff 1999; Bartlett 1992; Costigliola 1992; Dumbrell 2006; Hanrieder & Auton 1980; Martin 1982). The historical accounts highlight the importance of personality and politics – among other unit-level factors – but they do not seek to incorporate these into a systematic explanatory framework. Yet it is likely that there is more than *ad hoc* variation occurring here.

For this reason I shall utilise the case of US alliance politics as an example of the contribution which an engagement with CP-ES scholarship can bring about. There are three reasons why I have selected this example. First, the most plausible explanation for the variation fits well with CP's ontology; that is, short-term, systematic variation in domestic political conditions (given that the ability to use structural variables to gain leverage over the problem has already been ruled out). Second, the problem itself will be a familiar one to students of EU politics; we need to understand day-to-day variation in relations between countries that have, on the whole, a largely benign relationship to one another. Third, the sub-set of relationships covered by the US' allies includes some dyads where one state is an EU member and others where no states are, making it a helpful test of the CP-ES literature outside of the EU itself.

The next section discusses prominent works on European politics from a CP perspective and discusses the relevance for our question and for IR theory more generally. The first concerns the nature of political parties as actors and the dimensions upon which partisan positions vary in regard to international issues. The second addresses the shifting balance-of-power between different political institutions and how this channels political preferences.

Political Parties

The first area where ES studies have much to offer IR is in the shift from states to parties as the fundamental actors in interstate political negotiations. IR has tended to view the state – rather than the party controlling the reins of government – as the most important actor, and has assumed a degree of continuity between governments of different partisan persuasions that is difficult to justify. Shifting IR towards a party-based ontology, however, would seem to make sense for a number of reasons. First, parties offer the primary link between citizens' preferences and foreign policies. Parties aggregate individual preferences into largely coherent ideological programmes than afford agency to potentially diffuse political preferences. In this manner parties act as 'vehicles of ideology' (Vassallo & Wilcox 2006, 413). Second, parties dominate most (if not all) areas of government, meaning that they cut-across institutional boundaries and serve a coordinating function between different branches of government (King 1976, 12; Müller 2000, 310). Understanding policy without parties, then, makes little sense. Even in authoritarian regimes – where IR scholars could plausibly claim that party politics is simply not evident – it often makes more sense to understand the state's foreign policy as serving the interests of the ruling party, as with the Communist Party in China.

The CP-ES literature, unsurprisingly, begins with the implicit assumption that political parties are the predominant actors in explaining outcomes at the European level. The reason this is implicit is that, from a CP perspective, it is not deemed necessary to provide justification for a party-centred ontology (as would be the case in IR). Accordingly, much work within ES focuses on the role played

by political parties in both the European Parliament (EP) and the national governments (Hix 1999; Hix 2005; Hooghe *et al*. 2002; Marks *et al*. 2002; Ladrech 2002; Marks & Wilson 2000; Pechová 2012). Of most importance for IR is the literature on political parties at the *national level*. This may seem somewhat counter-intuitive, given that the operation of political parties *across* national boundaries (through the EP) would seem to be closer to IR's remit than domestic party politics. The reason is that the ES understanding of national party preferences more directly challenges IR's conception of the state as the predominant actor in foreign affairs. That there is a politics within the EP would not undermine the assumptions of many scholars that wish to account for continuity in state behaviour by recourse to the notion of the 'national interest'. Opening up the state itself, however, and understanding foreign policy issues as dependent upon partisan control of the government, provides more of a challenge to this line of thinking.

There are two principal claims which the CP-ES literature makes which can provide the basis for a revised understanding of international relations generally and of the particular puzzle of US alliance politics in particular. First, parties constitute the primary actors in foreign policy and as such they should structure our analysis. As such, it will be helpful to jettison the language of the 'national interest', since this connotes a degree of consensus between the parties that is unlikely to exist in anything other than a vague sense. Second, the most important changes in foreign policy are likely to correspond with changes of the party in power. We would therefore be best placed to consider the individual periods of governmental tenure of the different parties as the 'units' of our analysis. Rather than speak of Anglo-American relations, for example, this position pushes us to think of Labour-Democrat relations, or Conservative-Republican relations, and various combinations thereof.

Partisan Preferences

A second area where the CP-ES literature has obvious lessons for IR is in its specification of the motivations of parties and of the content of partisan preferences. Within IR the few works which have directly engaged with the party politics of foreign policy have tended to view parties through a largely rationalist framework (e.g. Bueno de Mesquita 2002; Milner 1998; Schultz 1998). Yet the adoption of a rationalist lens obscures the extent to which the ideological worldview of parties may push them towards taking different positions to their opponents. Although some work has directly engaged with the content of partisan beliefs held by parties, most notably Rathbun (2004, 2012) and Haas (2003, 2005), the partisan account of international relations remains underspecified. In particular it is necessary to link party ideology to the different dimensions on which foreign policy may vary with a greater degree of conceptual and theoretical precision, and to offer further empirical verification of these hypotheses. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with the existing works in the literature, of course; the real issue is that these accounts open up many more questions concerning the relationship between party ideology and foreign policy.

Here again the CP-ES literature is poised to help. First, much of this work is dedicated to teasing out the conceptual linkages between party ideology and issues concerning international relations. Although aimed squarely at explaining party positions on integration issues, in opening up this dimension these works inevitably tap into deeper factors that buttress a party's position on international engagement. Perhaps most relevant here is the 'horseshoe' account of partisan support for integration whereby the far-left and far-right are most sceptical, and the political centre

most supportive (Hooghe *et al.* 2002, 968). The implications of this conceptualisation of international engagement more broadly should be of note for IR scholars. First, it challenges the notion that one side of the political spectrum is more cooperative than the other, or more likely to engage in multilateral cooperation. Second, it points us towards the largely unspecified 'political centre' as being particularly important; if centrist parties are those most likely to support international engagement, then why do our standard frames of reference for political ideology and foreign policy only operate in terms of 'left' and 'right'? Third, it raises the question of whether or not the left and the right are sceptical of European integration for the same reasons, given the vast ideological disparity between these positions in terms of ideology. Is there an underlying similarity between left and right which is not measured, or is it simply that the left fear the free-market elements of economic integration while the right are sceptical of political integration (e.g. Marks & Wilson 2000, 437)? Related to these questions are the different conceptual models of partisan positioning (Hooghe *et al.* 2002, 971-972), each of which posits a different relationship between the 'left-right' and 'European integration' dimensions of ideology. These models – and the conceptual issues that underlie them – raise important questions for our understanding of left-right positions on foreign policy.

An engagement with the CP-ES literature on partisan preferences, then, offers potentially interesting conceptual insights linking left and right positions to issues of international engagement, multilateral approaches to international issues, and the delegation and pooling of sovereignty (elements of each of which are part of the 'European integration' dimension). There are also two additional (and related) properties of the literature which could prompt a re-think of the manner in which the discipline conceptualises partisanship. The first is a focus on 'party families', groupings of ideologically similar parties across countries that offer more specific ideological commonalities than the left-right distinction would allow us to gain leverage over, but which still encompass enough empirical examples to make reliable generalisations. Examples include Agrarian, Communist, Social Democrat, Liberal, Christian Democrat and Conservative parties, among others (Marks *et al.* 2002, 587). Such groupings are seldom considered important for foreign policy, though research by Therien and Noel (2000, 153) seems to suggest that these groupings may themselves hold distinct foreign policy positions in their own right. The second property of the literature is its propensity to account for ideological change. This is largely the result of the quantitative epistemological bias of CP studies and the corresponding need to account for fluctuations in party positions over time. The use of statistical data to measure party positions requires that one account for shifting patterns of ideology over time. Rather than presenting a problem for explanations based around ideology, the evidence of shifting ideological positions opens up further research interesting avenues for research on party positions, and helps in assessing the independent contribution of individual positions irrespective of party-type or party-family. Works in IR have yet to fully embrace the implications of change in party position over time. Rather than using such change as evidence in support of the 'null hypothesis' that political parties do not matter, IR would benefit from embracing the questions opened up by the empirical evidence of shifting party positions.

The section above has suggested some general insights to be gleamed from the CP-ES literature on partisan preferences. There are three areas in particular where there is much value-add for the puzzle of US alliance politics. First, the distinction between several broad 'party families' provides a convenient way of relating the parties in different states to one another, and of distinguishing the

particularities of each party-family's approach to international issues. Second, the conceptual mapping of ideology and foreign policy dimensions holds out the potential to explain why both left- and right-wing parties have at times evidenced poor relations with the US. In understanding better the linkages between different elements of ideology and foreign policy, we start to understand why this may be the case. Leftist governments, for example, have often disagreed with the US on issues of social and economic policy, while rightist governments have taken issue more with US multilateralism and the perceived loss of national independence which results. Third, utilising data on party positions that often informs the empirical element of CP-ES research (e.g. Budge *et al.* 2001) can provide a detailed empirical mapping of party positions that allows for a degree of sophistication not available from the standard qualitative method of comparing different configurations of party-types.

Domestic Constraints

Although there exists a substantial literature within IR on 'two-level games' (played by leaders vis-à-vis their domestic and international audiences) (e.g. Putnam 1988; Lieberfeld 2008; Milner & Rosendorff 1996; Mo 1994; Trumbore 1998), far less has been written on the relation between partisanship and domestic constraint. Partly this is the result of the theoretical divide between liberalism and constructivism, which has resulted in a division-of-labour where rationalist scholars focus on institutional structures and constraints while constructivists delve into the belief-systems underpinning preferences. The problem is that the two seldom meet; IR work which takes parties and their ideological positions seriously seldom accounts for their power position within the domestic institutional context. Here again, the CP-ES literature offers valuable insights on the means by which we can understand the relationship between partisanship and institutions.

Of particular use here is the 'veto players' approach developed within CP by Tsebelis (1995, 2002) and applied frequently to the EU itself (Garrett 1995; Tsebelis & Garrett 2000; Tsebelis & Garrett 2001; König & Finke 2007). The veto players approach offers a conceptualisation of the impact of different institutional structures which is able to subsume the crude distinctions between parliamentary and presidential systems, making sense of the different ways in which these different constitutional structures operate whilst accounting at the same time for variation *within* the types themselves. In order to understand the number of veto players – actors whose consent is required in order for any change to the status quo – we need to take into account the number, congruence and spatial location of actors within the political system (Tsebelis 1995, 305-308). This requires that we consider both the nature of the constitutional framework and the number and ideological preferences of the major political parties. *Ceteris paribus*, political systems with a greater number of veto players (like the US and the EU) will evidence greater policy stability than those with a smaller number, such as the United Kingdom. This perspective on domestic constraints is useful in that it incorporates partisan factors (such as the nature of the party system, and the location of the actors) into an assessment of the relative level of constraint operating on governments. Thus, it allows us to ascertain the extent to which political parties, once in government, are free to implement their favoured policies, given the location of the other parties and the constitutional rules within which they must operate. When combined with the already well developed literature on two-level games, which adds a necessary relational element to the power of governments in their international

interactions, the veto players approach offers a promising means of connecting partisanship and constraint.

The potential for illuminating our understanding of US alliance politics is also of interest. Many accounts of the relations between different political parties have concluded that partisanship does not map directly onto the quality of alliance ties (e.g. Dobson 1990; Doran 2006, 393). Yet these accounts do not take into consideration the differential levels of political power held by governments during different periods. In the British case, for example, when we take into consideration the extent to which the Labour Party was constrained, it becomes evident that this is responsible for a distinct drop in the level of antagonism towards the US. Consider also the extent to which De Gaulle was able to instantiate his anti-US rhetoric into policy before and after the Gaullists obtained an outright majority within the governing coalition in France in 1962. Another important contribution is the ability to distinguish between the politics of different countries in a systematic manner. Here there are significant differences in the number of veto players, with potentially important effects on foreign policy. Consider, for example, the remarkable degree of continuity in US foreign policy, particularly during the Cold War, the likely result of the presidential system in the US structuring political conflict around executive-legislative relations rather than partisan divisions. Each ally may have its own distinct political system, but the veto players approach allows us to conceptualise these differences, and understand their impact, in a systematic and non-reductionist manner.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that there is much that the European studies literature can teach us about the conduct of international relations. In particular, work lying on the CP-ES disciplinary boundary is placed to offer rigorous conceptual, theoretical and methodological insights into the relationship between domestic politics and the conduct of foreign policy. This is the case irrespective of whether we buy into the 'global polity' perspective on the nature of the international realm. In this sense I have argued that there is nothing particularly 'exceptional' about the international relations between the EU member-states.

I have focused here on the contribution which this literature can make to the party politics of US alliance relationships, although I believe the contribution of ES to be broader than this. The alliance politics example highlights the value-add of viewing IR puzzles from a CP-ES perspective. Whereas mainstream IR approaches struggle to gain leverage over variation in the quality of alliance dyads, the ES literatures on political parties, partisanship and domestic constraints offer many convincing avenues of explanation for systematic variation in these relationships over time. While there is not space here to pursue each of these avenues in greater detail, the examples offered in the text – along with the persuasive logic of the approaches themselves – is hopefully sufficient to establish the value to be gained from interdisciplinary engagement. Though we may not have a definite answer to the question 'what explains variation in alliance politics?' we do possess a significantly improved conceptual, theoretical, and methodological toolkit.

There are two caveats to the argument offered here that I wish to conclude by discussing. The first concerns the manner in which this intervention should be understood from within IR and ES. The

paper represents an attempt to spur greater bridge-building between the two disciplines, and to suggest ways in which both groups of scholars may be mutually advantaged. I am not claiming that there is no interplay between ES and IR, that ES scholars cannot explain outcomes outside of Europe, or that IR scholars are unable to account for sub-state determinants of foreign policy. What I am suggesting, however, is that the ES literature's understandable fixation on European politics may belie a more general applicability, and that IR scholars can learn from the rigour that this field has developed over the years in linking together domestic and international politics.

The second caveat concerns the nature of the international and the ontological basis of European 'exceptionalism'. I have argued that relations between the EU member-states are not sufficiently different from international relations more generally to render the theories utilised inapplicable to the extra-European world. This should not be understood as my claiming that there is *no* difference between politics within and without the EU. There are clearly some important differences worth taking into account in any theoretical transposition, not limited to the increased relevance of international 'anarchy' outside of Europe, the lower degree of normative thickness and cultural commonality, and the presence of different political systems and vestiges of authoritarian politics. My suggestion is not that these factors do not matter, but that they do not negate the contribution which CP-ES scholarship can offer our understanding of the role of parties, political ideology and domestic institutional structures in understanding international relations within such conditions. What is needed is a careful and considered conversation between the two disciplines with the aim of specifying the points of theoretical and conceptual compatibility and, where this is found wanting, the specification of relevant theoretical modifications.

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