

# **The Europeanization of National Foreign Policy: Bilateral Relations Revisited?**

Skander Nasra

[Skander.Nasra@UGent.be](mailto:Skander.Nasra@UGent.be)

**DRAFT. WORK IN PROGRESS.**  
Please do not quote without author's permission

EUSA Eleventh Biennial International Conference,  
Panel Session 4G 'Europeanization of National Foreign Policies',  
Los Angeles, California,  
April 23-25, 2009.

## ABSTRACT

The Europeanization of foreign policy is widely considered to be beneficial to smaller EU member states. Yet, the conditions under which they may pursue their foreign policy objectives as well as the consequences of EU membership to their bilateral policies with third countries remains scarcely researched. This paper first examines the possibilities for smaller member states to influence the development of EU foreign policy. The paper then goes on to analyze the way a smaller member state's role in EU foreign policy may impact on their national foreign policies to third countries. This paper thus links the analysis of the EU's foreign policy system to studies of Europeanization. Concretely, this paper analyzes the role of Belgium – as one of the EU's smaller member states – in the development of EU foreign policy towards the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The paper concludes that four factors determine the extent of a smaller member state's influence in EU foreign policy: the extent to which the policy process is characterized by the 'logic of arguing', the role of information, the extent of involvement of a member state and the presence of EU actors. This role influences whether EU membership ends in a strengthening of a smaller member state's bilateral relations – resulting in a pattern of parallel diplomacies – or its convergence into a wider European whole.

### Introduction<sup>12</sup>

In the past decades, the European Union's (EU's) activities in the field of foreign and security policy have undergone substantial changes. From a modest attempt to coordinate member states' foreign policies, the European Union evolved into an international actor which is widely acknowledged to have the potential to be a major force in shaping global events. Within the context of its expanding external activities, the EU is seen as one of the world's economic superpowers, as an emerging player in international diplomacy and, although tentatively, in security affairs.

Despite this evolution, EU member states reserve the right to act unilaterally in the sphere of foreign and security policy, and they often do so. This raises questions regarding the relation between member states' foreign policies and the extending and deepening

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the information presented in this paper was obtained via personal interviews with both national representatives and EU officials in Brussels in April 2007 and from February to April 2009. Because of requests for anonymity, these will only be indicated by a general reference.

<sup>2</sup> This paper presents the preliminary results of a broader research project of which the aim is twofold. In this project the role of smaller EU member states in the formation of EU foreign policy will be examined. Second, the project aims at analyzing the impact of EU membership on smaller EU member state's bilateral relations with third countries. To this end, the role of three smaller member states (Belgium, The Netherlands and Sweden) will be analyzed in bilateral as well as multilateral contexts. The underlying assumption is that the role that a smaller member state plays in the formation of EU foreign policy determines the consequences of EU membership on their bilateral relations. The aim of this paper is thus rather modest, presenting and discussing partial results of the first case study.

international role of the EU. The literature on Europeanization examines the extent of influence, opportunities and constraints on member states' foreign policy choices due to EU membership (Smith 2000, Tonra 2001). Europeanization entails 'a process of policy change manifested as policy convergence as well as national policies amplified as EU policy' (Wong 2005: 150). It is widely argued that the EU's external activities are primarily an instrument for member states to pursue national objectives (Regelsberger et. al. 1997: 4, Zielonka 1998: 62). The dominant EU member states – meaning those countries that dispose of an extensive diplomatic network – are said to perceive the EU primarily as a means to strengthen national foreign policy-making (Hill 1993, Risse-Kappen 1996). Member states with a less extensive diplomatic network will 'rather wish to enmesh themselves in a European rather than a national system of foreign policy-making' (Manners and Whitman 2000: 262-263). The influence of EU membership on member states' foreign policies is thus assumed to vary depending on the size of member states.

This line of argumentation underestimates – if not neglects – the potential of smaller states to direct the development of the EU's external policies. This paper wishes to examine this potential, looking at the opportunities for smaller member states to reinforce their national system of foreign policy-making rather than to 'enmesh' into a European system of foreign policy-making. Subsequently, this paper will analyze the way and extent to which the process of Europeanization affects a smaller member state bilateral diplomacy. Linking the analysis of the EU's foreign policy system to studies of Europeanization, this paper thus addresses the following research questions: first, to what extent can a smaller member state influence EU foreign policy? Second, how does the process of Europeanization affect a smaller member state's bilateral relations with third countries? In this paper, a small member state will be defined as a non-dominant member state in EU foreign policy, lacking an extensive diplomatic network comparable to those of dominant states such as France and the United Kingdom (Manners and Whitman 2000). In addition, these states have a limited resource base which is characterized by factors such as population size, geographical size, economic weight, diplomatic resources and military capabilities (Kelstrup 1993: 140).

I hypothesize that the influence of EU membership on national foreign policy is, rather than by the quantifiable size (i.e. material resources) of member states, primarily determined by the qualitative role of a smaller member state in the development of EU foreign policy. As Neill Nugent argues, 'a small state in resource terms may not necessarily be so in influence and power terms. Careful and astute use of diplomatic, mediating and brokerage skills may [...] enhance the international position a state may be expected to occupy [...] by virtue of its

resources alone' (Nugent 2003: 4). Whether the process of Europeanization is either amplifying or enmeshing smaller EU member states' national foreign policies into a European whole will thus be determined by the extent to which a smaller member state influences EU foreign policy. Consequently, as opposed to a convergence of national foreign policies, which is expected in the literature on Europeanization (Wong 2005), I argue that EU membership will rather lead to a mixed pattern of converged and parallel bilateral relations.

I will proceed as follows. A first part conceptualizes EU foreign policy in terms of issue areas. The second part examines the development of EU foreign policy towards the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). With a detailed analysis of the policy process, I aim at distinguishing the determining dynamics within each issue area of EU policies and the role Belgium, as one of the smaller EU member state, plays in those areas. A last section considers the determinants of a smaller member state's influence in EU foreign policy. This section also looks into the ways the role of a member state in EU foreign policy affects the dominant dimension and consequences of the process of Europeanization on bilateral policies.

### **Conceptualizing EU foreign policy**

The EU's 'external relation system' entails a combination of 'three strands': (1) the European Communities' external relations, (2) the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), and (3) national foreign policies (Hill 1993: 322). EU foreign policy, which is composed of the first two strands, meets the classic features of a regime: it is characterized by a set of distinct principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures (Krasner 1982: 2, Smith M. E. 2004: 117-144), and is supported by institutional arrangements that extended over time (Young 1986: 111-115, Allen 1998: 54-55). Furthermore, EU foreign policy entails various issue-areas (Hill 1993: 322). Defined as a regime, EU foreign policy has two significations: first, it represents a sub-system of international relations that entails a set of international institutions coordinating the interests and preferences of its members (internal dimension). Second, it generates international relations, representing a power that has an impact on the international arena (external dimension) (Hill and Smith 2005: 4-9).

The idea of 'issue-areas' is of particular relevance when analyzing the internal and external impact of EU foreign policy. An issue area is a set of issues which policy-makers consider closely interdependent and which are dealt with collectively. The exact boundaries of

issue-areas are difficult to define. Not only are these boundaries defined subjectively, they can also change over time (Keohane and Nye 1977: 65). Even though issue-areas can be approached from different perspectives, the most common approach is content-based (Brecher et. al. 1969: 87-88). Within the EU's foreign policy regime, Christopher Hill suggests that there are three such areas: political, military and economic (Hill 1993: 322). This classification largely corresponds to the Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP), the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) and 'Community'-issues respectively.

Within each issue-area, the actors, motives' intensity and direction as well as the interaction sequences vary. Moreover, the pattern of institutional organization, and thus the explanatory variables of policy outcomes, depend on the issue at stake (Rosenau 1967: 12). This is echoed by EU-scholars who argue that it is ultimately the policy issue which reveals the features of the policy processes in the EU: 'much EU policy-making and decision-making ... tends to be rather compartmentalized and it is within, rather than across policy-compartments that the trading, bargaining, linkaging and compromising that are so characteristic of EU processes are mainly to be found' (Nugent 2003: 357). Helen Wallace concludes similarly: 'policy processes are potentially very variable from one issue-area to another' (Wallace H. 1996, 27). In order to analyze the institutional organization within an issue-area, the authority structures out of which policies emanate need to be defined. Instead of attempting to rank these structures in a hierarchical order of importance (government), it is of importance to look at the role played by all those who have the authority to initiate and sustain actions within a given issue-area (governance) (Rosenau 1990: 40-41).

The specific patterns of organization of authority within a given issue-area is covered by the idea of a system, entailing the structured political action connected with a particular policy issue. There exists no single system, but rather a separate system for each issue. The underlying assumption is twofold: first, there is no over-arching issue encompassing all issues within the EU's foreign policy regime. Second, there is neither a single group of actors nor a single resource of power that are strong enough to dominate in all issue areas. Different actors, resources and motives will be relevant depending on the issue at stake (Willetts 1990: 269). Sarah Collinson labels this an issue-system: 'a set of actors, political structures (including institutions) and the political action or interaction (processes) within a particular issue-area'. The boundaries of these issue-systems coincide with the boundaries of the issue-area (Collinson 1999: 213).

Nevertheless, issue areas are not completely separated from one another. Horizontal or 'inter-systematic' linkages connect the different issue systems within the regime. They can for instance be found between civilian operations and development aid, or between trade policies and human rights (Collinson 1999: 214-215). Horizontal linkages are likely to emerge when issues appear on the agenda of different systems or subsystems. Given that different issues will generate the involvement of different (combination of) actors and interests, such linkages will not merge various issue-systems but rather result in highly complex sets of relations. In order to understand the relation between the EU's foreign policy regime and member states' national foreign policies, analyses should thus not only be concerned with the examination of the different issue-systems but also with the analysis of the linkages between the relevant issue-systems.

### **The development of EU foreign policy to the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

EU foreign policy towards the DRC is characterized by a remarkable evolution. Initial relations date back from the late 1950s and were incorporated in the ACP framework<sup>3</sup>. It is only in the 1990s, however, that the relations between the EU and the DRC matured. Political considerations (European Commission 1995, 1996, 1997) were more explicitly pronounced in the EU's policies (Møller 2001: 31) and member states appointed an EU Special Representative (EUSR) to the Great Lakes region, increasing the EU's political visibility. The Congolese peace process (2002-2006) allowed the EU to strengthen its political role in the DRC with the deployment of two civilian and two military operations. The civilian missions (EUPOL and EUSEC) aim at strengthening the institutional structures of the DRC in the security sector. The military missions (ARTEMIS and EUFOR RDC), which were both short in time and geographically limited, assisted the UN's MONUC in securing the Congolese peace process (Hoebeke, et. al. 2007: 8-11). Today, the EU is one of the key political and strategic partners to the incumbent Congolese regime. This makes the DRC probably one of the best examples of the interface between first and second pillar policies, drawing various EU actors in the development and conduct of its policies. The EU's strong actorness in the DRC creates a window of opportunity that has offered new chances and constraints to member states as well as EU actors.

---

<sup>3</sup> The ACP framework comprises a group of countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The framework covers three policy areas: political relations, development and humanitarian aid, and trade cooperation.

Within the EU's policies towards the DRC, four issue-areas which policy-makers consider closely interdependent can be identified: (1) political relations, (2) trade, development and humanitarian aid, (3) civilian missions, and (4) military operations. The dynamics characterizing each of these areas and more in particular Belgium's role in the development of EU policies will be examined below.

### *Political relations*

Member states have the biggest stake in the development of the EU's political stance towards the DRC. Member states dispose of several channels through which they can exert influence: the COREU network<sup>4</sup>, the Africa Working Party (COAFR), the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC). The first venue to influence debates is COAFR in which the political relations of the EU with Africa are discussed, and in which conclusions and common positions are drafted. In addition to the weekly meetings of COAFR, the Africa directors of all EU Foreign Ministries meet once a month in Brussels. Even if member states deal with Africa as a whole within COAFR, the DRC is one of the most recurrent themes on the agenda and often takes most of the time due to its complexity. Even if all member states have the opportunity to engage in discussions, participants in COAFR, but also in the PSC, confirm that in the actual discussions on the DRC only a handful of member states<sup>5</sup> are actively involved. Within this active 'core', the position of member states is more determined by the extent of their knowledge, expertise and involvement in the region than by the material resources they dispose of. Representatives from both small and big member states do not perceive the 'quantitative' size of member states within this group of active states as the determining factor defining one's position. Smaller member states within this group find themselves in a similar position as the big member states (interviews, Brussels).

Furthermore, the EU Special Representative plays a central role in the development of the EU's political relations with the DRC, internally between the different EU actors and member states as well as externally between the EU and the Congolese (and regional) authorities. Internally, the EUSR plays a prominent role in both COAFR and the PSC. In these bodies, the EUSR, a post currently held by the Dutchman Roeland Van de Geer, briefs member states on his latest contacts and shares his analyses. His role is highly valued by

---

<sup>4</sup> The COREU network is an EU communication network between the Member States, the Commission and the Council Secretariat. It allows for a swift exchange of information and analyses on topics in the field of foreign policy.

<sup>5</sup> The most recurrent member states cited are Belgium, France, The Netherlands, Sweden and United Kingdom.

member states as the majority lacks expertise and diplomatic resources in the region. Moreover, the EUSR is seen as a neutral actor, providing 'EU-made' information that is gathered on a high political level in the region. This puts the EUSR in a position where he can shape and frame the debates on the DRC, setting the agenda and guiding member states in the elaboration of their common positions. Besides his active role in debates, initiatives such as a Great Lakes strategy (in preparation) allow the EUSR to play an important role in preparing and steering the EU's political relations with the DRC. Especially, for smaller member states, the relation with the EUSR is of crucial importance. He allows smaller member states to transcend their national roles, in Brussels as well as in the region. As one participant of a smaller member state notes, it is of utmost importance for a smaller member state to be on the same line as the EUSR, either to move him to their position or to align themselves with him. Otherwise their role in the discussions is severely curtailed (interviews, Brussels).

The European Commission is also a strong political player in EU-DRC relations. Through an active participation in debates and the drafting of policy documents (e.g. Africa Strategy), the Commission became closely involved in the development of the EU's political profile in Africa (Krause 2003: 236-237). In discussions on the DRC, the Commission has several assets that has strengthened its role considerably over the years. The Commission's long-standing engagement in the region (over 50 years) is supplemented with an extensive network of Delegations on the ground and significant financial resources. Moreover, the personal commitment of the responsible Commissioner for Development, Mr. Louis Michel, further enhances the political profile of the Commission in DRC discussions. Especially on the higher political levels in the PSC and the GAERC, the Commission is a leader in the political discussions on the DRC. While the EUSR has to balance member states positions carefully, the Commission has a much more independent role. This makes it difficult for member states, and in particular the smaller ones, to weigh on the Commission's positions (interviews, Brussels).

In this context, the main objective of Belgian policy-makers is to create a context which fosters consensus among member states and thus facilitates the issuing of EU positions. This is a very incremental and collective process, and thus difficult to measure. Nevertheless, the impact of this process is clear in the case of the DRC. At the time of the EUSR's appointment in 1996, the UK and France had diametrically opposed ideas on how to deal with the incumbent regimes in the region. Under the impulse of intense information-sharing and coordination, member states gradually moved towards a common position, resulting in an increasingly shared understanding of the problems in the region. Belgian diplomats actively



contribute to this process, sharing their first-hand information, analyses and expertise with other member states. Several participants in these committees indicate the active and informative stance of Belgian officials when issues concerning the DRC pop up in discussions (interviews, Brussels). These internal efforts are further complemented with external activities. In the DRC, Belgium is for instance involved in the Contact Group Great Lakes<sup>6</sup> in which its members analyze the situation and share information, coordinating the position of the international actors in the region. Such small informal groups do not take any formal decisions, but they prepare the elaboration of proposals and decisions for other forums such as the UN. For Belgium, the participation in such an informal group offers an opportunity to reinforce its position in the EU, either directly by strengthening its credibility or indirectly via EU actors and other key European (or international) partners (interviews, Brussels).

#### *Trade policies, development cooperation and humanitarian aid*

Regarding trade policies, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, the Commission is the central actor in the policy process. It initiates policies and plays a dominant role in the implementation phase. Within the Commission, DG Development is the chief directorate, with DG Trade responsible for negotiating the trade component of the ACP framework. In contrast to other foreign policy areas, DG RELEX is largely excluded. In their relations towards the DRC, DG Development puts most emphasis on poverty reduction, while DG Trade is more focused on integrating the ACP countries in the world economy (Dickson 2004: 50). There is nonetheless a strong effort from both DG's to integrate their efforts. In the negotiation of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA's) for example, a package that mainly covers the trade aspects of the Cotonou framework, the negotiation phase is covered by both DG's (Maerten and Tison 2009). Also the Commission Delegation in Kinshasa reinforces the Commission's role. Being the 'ears and mouth' of the Commission on the ground, the Delegation is essential for the Commission's leverage and position in the policy process (interviews, Brussels).

Member states ultimately decide on the development and trade relations with the DRC. Within the range of DG Development's activities, a difference has to be made between development aid and humanitarian assistance. Due to its purpose, the latter – which accounts for more than 30% of the budget of DG Development for the DRC – is often rushed through the decision-making process. This gives the Commission more freedom to direct funds. But as

---

<sup>6</sup> The Contact Group Great Lakes comprises Belgium, the EU, France, The Netherlands, United Nations, United Kingdom and United States.

far as development cooperation is concerned, member states keep a stronger hold on the Commission. Formally speaking, member states take decisions in the European Development Fund (EDF<sup>7</sup>) committee. In practice, however, it is very difficult for member states to alter the general objectives and orientations submitted by the Commission as these reflect a delicate balance of various interests (member states, European Parliament and international actors such as the OECD, UN and World Bank). Instead, member states try to weigh on the Commission's preparations as well as at the stage of implementation. According to Commission officials, big and small member states are both very active in this regard. Sweden and The Netherlands, for example, plead strongly to address the cause of sexual violence in the EU development policies towards the DRC while Belgium lobbied for instance for (indirect) Commission assistance to the EU's civilian missions. In the latter case, the Commission attributed €3.2 million in support of the newly integrated brigades (EUSEC) under the Instrument for Stability (interview, Brussels). Member states with a strong national profile in the DRC remain in close contact with DG Development as well as the Delegation in Kinshasa. Especially during the phase of elaboration and implementation, EU member states can have a stake in the prioritization of EU development policies. At this stage, the Commission Delegation in Kinshasa drafts the first proposals (strategy and allocation of funds). In the implementation stage, member states primarily target the Commission Delegation in Kinshasa who holds a key position. Clearly, this requires a substantive presence of experts on the ground who remain in close contact with local Commission officials (e.g. sectorial coordination meetings). More than trying to direct the spending priorities of the Commission, member states aim at coordinating and streamlining their national and the European projects in order to raise the effectiveness of their own policies (interviews, Brussels).

### *Civilian missions*

The elaboration, implementation and follow-up of the civilian missions is dominated by the Council Secretariat who can be considered as a true policy entrepreneur. From 2003 onwards, the Africa desk of the High Representative's Policy Unit and the EUSR explored the possibilities to integrate the EU's civilian instruments in its policies towards the DRC. After recurrent reporting of the EUSR on this possibility, the High Representative sent a mission headed by officials from his Policy Unit to undertake an in-depth assessment to be presented

---

<sup>7</sup> The European Development Fund (EDF) is the main financial instrument providing Community aid for development cooperation with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP countries). It is financed outside the Community budget.

to the PSC. Even if a civilian dimension to EU policies towards the DRC were at that point at least debatable, the High Representative managed, with the support of only a handful of member states, to gather a critical mass to approve the launch of two very limited missions (interviews, Brussels). Another example are the activities of the Council Secretariat to extend the scope of EUPOL and EUSEC. Especially EUPOL is characterized by what can be called ‘mission creep’, moving beyond its original goals. EUPOL was initially launched to assist the Congolese authorities on a technical level during the transition period in Kinshasa. Even though the transition period ended in 2006, the mission still exists and has been extended to the whole country. Moreover, member states currently discuss the Council Secretariat’s idea to include a ‘project cell’ in EUPOL, further broadening the scope of the mission to include various activities such as transport and education. These debates were and are primarily steered by the Council Secretariat (interviews, Brussels).

The European Commission was pushed in to engage in the civilian operations through the so-called ‘flanking measures’. These measures entail humanitarian assistance, strengthening the appeal for some of the more critical member states to support the civilian missions. A second element that engages the Commission is the financing of civilian missions. Depending on the aspect, civilian missions fall either under the appropriate Community budget line or under the CFSP budget line of the Community budget. Consequently, the Heads of Mission of EUPOL and EUSEC have to report to and are supervised by the Commission (Council 2007). The ‘power of the purse’ gives the Commission the leverage to influence the content of the civilian missions (interviews, Brussels).

Even though member states ultimately decide on the adoption of civilian missions, they play a less visible role in its elaboration. This, however, does not imply that member states are completely absent in the preparatory stages. On the contrary, member states have two concrete ways through which they exert influence. First, via the Council Secretariat (and partially the Commission), member states can keep closely in contact with those people directly involved in the preparation and follow-up of the different missions. Especially the traditional strategy of seconding national officials – to bodies such as the Africa Desk and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) – gives member states privileged points of access in the preparatory process. Second, active involvement on the ground in the DRC allows member states to strengthen their position in Brussels. It gives them the opportunity to get first-hand information and gain a deeper insight of the situation. Moreover, the weekly EU coordination meetings in Kinshasa offer member states a chance to share their information,

expertise and points of view with one another and with those EU actors who are influential in the debates in Brussels (e.g. the Heads of Mission and the EUSR). Those member states that are active in the policy process in Brussels are also those with a strong national presence in the DRC. The flow of information between member states and the EU actors on the ground is of particular importance, forming the basis of smaller member states' influence (interviews, Brussels).

Belgian policy-makers actively contributed to the preparation and elaboration of the initial plans for civilian missions. Based on national civilian and military programs that were running since 2003 in the DRC, Belgium shared its experiences with the officials responsible in the Council Secretariat. Also the secondment of key figures in the Africa desk of Mr. Solana facilitates the access for Belgian policymakers to the Secretariat. In early 2007, the Council Secretariat was working on an initiative in which it wanted to propose to merge the EUSEC and EUPOL missions. Most member states did not oppose the idea, hoping to alleviate the financial and logistical burden to the EU. Belgium, however, strongly opposed the idea. Belgian policymakers argued that, at a time when the institutional structures concerning these missions were not yet fully fledged, integrating both missions would risk jeopardizing the efficiency achieved on the ground. In the end, the Council Secretariat did not issue any formal proposal, but maintained the current character of the missions (interview, Brussels). Regarding the activities of EUSEC, Belgium continues to strengthen its bilateral profile. Ahead of an EU mission in early 2009, Belgium sent a national mission to evaluate its own efforts in the area of military integration in the DRC. With this proactive stance, Belgium aims at strengthening its position in the forthcoming discussions in the EU (interview, Brussels).

### *Military operations*

The EU military operations in the DRC are a matter of the dominant member states of the EU. The decision to intervene militarily in the DRC was twice made by the 'big three': France, the United Kingdom and Germany. The role of the smaller member states and the Council Secretariat was reduced to a mere supporting role, while the Commission was completely excluded (interviews, Brussels). This was most strongly illustrated with the ARTEMIS operation in 2003. Well before the EU got involved in the preparations, French preparations were already well under way. As a result, the operation is rather seen as a French operation under EU flag than an EU operation led by the French (Hoebeke et. al. 2007: 8).

Although Belgium often plays a significant role in the development of EU policies towards the DRC, it occupied a secondary role in the policy processes preceding both interventions. However, from the moment the dominant states, notably France and the UK, favored a mission, Belgian policymakers contributed actively, both politically and diplomatically, to gather support among EU member states. One participant acknowledges that a country like Belgium cannot do much as long as there is no window of opportunity created by the big member states (interview, Brussels). This was confirmed in late 2008 when violence broke out in the East of Congo. While Belgium, among other smaller states, pleaded strongly and openly for an EU mission, and managed to put the issue twice on the agenda of the GAERC and once on the agenda of the European Council, notably the UK and Germany blocked any suggestion that would lead to an EU intervention in the DRC (Kubosova 2008). Eventually, member states did not agree to reinforce MONUC, let alone to launch an EU mission.

### **Small State Power and the Process of Europeanization**

#### *Small State Power in EU Foreign Policy*

A smaller member states' capacity to influence the development of EU foreign policy is primarily dependent on the issue-area under consideration. Even though the same actors are involved in most areas, they do so in varying degree and with differing interests. This has consequences for all actors involved, but especially for smaller member states. Concretely, the case study demonstrates that a smaller EU member state can play a significant role in the development of the EU's political relations with third countries as well as in the EU's civilian missions and, to a lesser extent, development policies. Concerning military operations, however, a smaller member state is dependent on the role of the dominant member states. If the latter create a window of opportunity, a small member state can still play a secondary role in the elaboration and implementation of an intervention. Overall, four factors are identified which determine the extent to which a smaller member state can influence EU foreign policy.

(1) *The logic of arguing.* When the policy process in a given issue area is characterized by the logic of arguing, the possibilities for a smaller member state to influence EU foreign policy increases significantly. The logic of arguing refers to a situation in which participants are open to being persuaded by the 'better argument' and in which relations of power, force and coercion recede in the background. Instead of changing one's preferences, the main

objective is to find the ground for a reasoned consensus about a policy issue. A policy process is only likely to be characterized by a logic of arguing under a restricted set of three conditions: (a) a high degree of institutionalization, (b) uncertainty of interests and/or lack of knowledge about the situation among actors, and (c) nonhierarchical relations enabling dense interactions in network-like settings. In other words, the degree to which the logic of arguing will prevail varies considerably according to issue-areas (Risse 2000: 7-21).

The policy context in which the EU develops its political relations, civilian missions and, to a lesser extent, development policies, to the DRC is characterized by such a logic of arguing. In these policy areas, processes of argumentation, deliberation and persuasion constitute the distinct mode of social interaction determining policy outcomes. All three areas are characterized by a high degree of institutionalization, with both the Commission and the Council Secretariat playing a central role. This brings big and small member states on a more equal footing (Grieco 1996: 289). Furthermore, debates on the DRC are characterized by a low degree of interest by most member states, with only a handful of member states being actively involved. The policy process leading to the military missions, on the other hand, lack these characteristics. The prevailing relations are strictly hierarchical, with the big three member states taking the lead on all fronts. The reason why such a logic is impeded to develop is mostly related to the interests of big and small member states which are structurally different. According to Michael Smith, the three 'core' EU members (i.e. France, Germany and United Kingdom) need to be separated from the others. The former do not only make a calculation of national versus European interests but also of European against wider considerations (especially strategic considerations, the development of EU military capabilities and the integration process at large) (Smith 2003: 567-568). Catherine Gegout echoes this point of view, arguing that EU decisions to intervene militarily in Africa stem from an agreement among the big three whose reasons originate from their strategic calculations rather than from a reaction to a crisis situation (Gegout 2005: 439-443). As a result, smaller member states are deprived of the means to substantially influence the EU's military operations.

(2) *The role of information.* The extent to which a smaller member state disposes of first-hand information, analyses and expertise determines its influence in the EU's foreign policy-making machinery. Information can alter the perceptions and understanding of policy issues, generating trust and producing common views on specific foreign policy issues (Smith M. E. 2004, 92). The resulting process of learning can alter the role conceptions of member states which serve as mental maps for political action, changing the way how member states

deal with a particular issue or problem (Aggestam 2004: 81-91). Those disposing of information in a context where others do not to a similar extent are thus in a strong position to influence policy outcomes. Consequently, a smaller member states with limited material resources in the field of foreign and security policy will be compensated.

In the development of EU policies to the DRC, it is demonstrated that Belgium, as a smaller member state, bases its influence on the extent to which it shares information and analyses, framed by a solid reputation vis-à-vis other member states built on thorough expertise, long-standing engagement in the region, openness and transparency in its agenda and in its objectives pursued (interviews, Brussels). The concrete impact of information plays at all stages of the policy process: in the agenda-setting, the elaboration of policies, the (informal) decision-making process as well as in the implementation phase. Most prominently, these assets make a difference in the political, development and civilian issue-areas. As illustrated, a constant flow of information on the DRC within and outside the EU fosters a context in which common analyses are more likely to be made. This is, in turn, a prerequisite to come to common action (Cooper 2007). Concrete examples are the elaboration and follow-up of the civilian mission, the recurrent reporting on the political situation on the ground as well as the diverting of EU development funds in support of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) activities. In contrast, in the development of military operations the role of information is limited, downplaying the ability of a smaller member state to play a role in EU foreign policy.

(3) *Involvement in the region.* The extent of involvement of a smaller member state in a third country is closely related to its ability to influence EU foreign policy towards that country. When a member state is highly involved in a third country, it will strengthen its credibility and reputation in the EU. This is of course also related to the role of information: when a smaller member state is able to optimize the flow of information among its partners, it will increase its credibility, and hence be allowed to punch above its weight.

In the case of the DRC, those member states that are particularly active in the region are also those member states that have most weight in discussions in Brussels. The three issue-areas of EU foreign policy in which Belgium is most influential are also those areas in which it has a strong involvement in the region. Belgian political relations with the DRC are very elaborate. It disposes of the biggest foreign mission in the DRC (embassy and consulates), its ministers frequently visit the country, Belgian diplomats play a prominent role in the regional contact groups and the Belgian foreign minister has his own personal envoy for the region,

complementing traditional diplomatic staff. Regarding the civilian missions, Belgium has extensive bilateral civilian and military programs with the DRC since 2003. These programs are set up to complement the EU's EUPOL and EUSEC missions. Yet, in practice, Belgian policymakers aim at setting the pace of the EU missions by advancing these national programs. Also Belgian bilateral development policies dispose of substantial resources. Its funds amount to € 150 million a year, a sum surpassing the Commission's financial instruments (€ 130 million in 2009) and those of other EU countries such as The Netherlands (€63 million in 2009) and the United Kingdom (£75 million in 2009). In contrast, Belgium's ability to get involved in military interventions with active combat troops is very limited. After the killing of 10 Belgian soldiers in Rwanda in 1994, the Belgian parliament voted a resolution that prohibits Belgium of sending active combat troops to former colonies. As a result, Belgian policymakers are constrained in their ability to take the lead in this area, reducing their ability to influence the EU's military interventions. Even though Belgian policymakers can still try to put an issue on the agenda (e.g. November – December 2008), they lack the actual capabilities to contribute to EU policies. This decreases the credibility of Belgian effort in this field, curtailing the potential to influence the EU's military operations.

(4) *The role of EU actors.* The extent of influence of a smaller member state depends on the extent of the involvement of EU actors in the policy process. EU actors are crucial partners to a smaller member state, inside as well as outside of Brussels. The relevant EU actors are primarily the Council Secretariat and the Commission. In Brussels, these actors are seen as neutral in the sense that their role goes beyond mere national interests and objectives. If a member state manages to align its position with that of EU actors, they can transcend a strict national role. Outside of Brussels, the informal and small scale forums in which member states and EU actors meet allow to develop a mutual understanding and trust. In such smaller, informal settings outside of Brussels, (smaller) member states have more opportunities to influence the position of EU actors. This gives smaller member states an opportunity to indirectly influence the policy process in Brussels.

In the EU's political relations to the DRC, the role of the EUSR is of crucial importance to a smaller member state. The EUSR sets the agenda, has the ability to steer and frame debates and plays an important role in the implementation of policies. A case in point is the preparation by the EUSR of a Great Lake strategy as well as his numerous presentations to the PSC. Regarding the civilian missions, the Africa desk and the CPCC in the Council Secretariat are important points of access to a smaller member state. These bodies are directly responsible for the elaboration of and follow-up to civilian missions. When a smaller member



state maintains open and frequent contacts with these organs, it can effectively influence the EU's civilian missions. In the case of development policies, the situation is dissimilar. Here, the relation with the Commission, and more in particular DG Development and the Commission Delegation in Kinshasa, stands central. Its resources allow the Commission to be less dependent on member states' positions, making the potential for member states to direct spending in particular countries more difficult. Nevertheless, through the Commission's Delegations, who have a substantial stake in the direction and prioritization of EU funds (interview, Brussels), the member states have an additional, indirect way of influencing the spending priorities of the Commission (interview, Brussels). Lastly, regarding military operations, the absence of EU actors deprive smaller member states of potential means to strengthen their position.

### *Europeanizing bilateral diplomacy?*

The central proposition of Europeanization is that EU membership has an important impact on member states' foreign policies and that this impact is increasing in salience. According to Wong, this may result in a convergence of policies or an amplification of national foreign policies (Wong 2005: 150). Several studies conclude that the elaboration and implementation of a smaller member state's foreign policy changes substantially as a direct result of the process of Europeanization (Manners and Whitman 2000, Tonra 2001, Torreblanca 2001). Although the process of Europeanization is widely considered as beneficial for the conduct of smaller EU states' foreign policies, this impact is not straightforward. Policymakers of smaller member states see the process of Europeanization as constraining, while at the same hand strengthening their national foreign policies. But overall, the process of Europeanization of smaller member states' foreign policies is considered as one that enhances rather than reduces their ability to impact upon the international environment (Tonra 2001: 280). The way in which member states can impact on the international environment may, however, differ significantly. Manners and Whitman conclude in their study that the impact of EU membership on smaller member states' foreign policies primarily depends on their orientation, whether the EU is the central forum through which foreign policy objectives are pursued or just one among many (Manners and Whitman 2000: 263-264). Despite these conclusions, the conditions which determine the impact of the process of Europeanization on smaller member states' bilateral relations with third countries remains rather broadly defined.

Rather than its general foreign policy orientation, this case-study finds that the impact on a smaller member state's foreign policy is closely related to the role this state plays in the development of EU foreign policy. This role varies greatly depending on the issue-area. In policy areas where a smaller member state plays a determining role, and thus maximizes the projection of its national preferences on the EU-level, EU membership amplifies national foreign policymaking. In defining the political relations of the EU with the DRC, the aligning of EU positions with Belgian political objectives strengthens the Belgian bilateral position in the DRC. A former Belgian ambassador to the DRC acknowledges that it makes a significant difference when one is able to refer to the position of the EU in its bilateral contacts with his Congolese counterparts. This substantially increases the political leverage of a smaller member state. Especially for certain politically sensitive issues, the fact that a smaller country is also an EU member state greatly strengthens its bilateral position (interviews, Brussels). Also regarding civilian operations, the bilateral agreement that Belgium has with the DRC would lose in political significance if it would not operate in close coordination with the EU. While these bilateral programs also serve as instruments to incite and influence EU action in this area, the fact that these missions do not operate in a vacuum (i.e. a situation in which the EU would be absent) allows Belgium to give more political weight to its bilateral civilian activities. Concerning development policies, the national profile remains largely intact. Yet, the frequent meetings among EU member states in the DRC on aspects of development cooperation allow member states to avoid duplication and increase coordination, increasing the effectiveness of their national policies. Those member states that have strong national development policies (strong presence, large funds) are also those who have most leverage in the coordination meetings and in the elaboration of EU policies (interviews, Brussels). Even though the bilateral relations operate within an EU context, smaller member states that are influential players within the EU use EU membership to amplify their bilateral diplomacies with third countries. EU membership thus allows smaller member states' bilateral diplomacies to become less rather than more vulnerable.

Conversely, when a smaller member state plays no (or a less) significant role in the development of EU foreign policy, pressures to converge into a European whole are high. Even if national objectives can still be pursued (more passively), the national profile of a member state decreases, enmeshing its foreign policy into a wider European whole. In this case, the downloading of EU-generated incentives will be the dominant dimension of the process of Europeanization. This pressure to converge national foreign policies will likely result in a gradual removal of national foreign policymaking from national capitals to

Brussels. This process of Brusselization does not mean that member states communitarize their foreign policies but rather that they rely primarily on 'Brussels' to act on foreign policy issues (Allen 1998: 54-55). Military operations are an obvious example. In the development of EU military operations, the smaller EU member states lack a strong national profile (e.g. capabilities, expertise, involvement) which deprives them of the possibilities to play an influential role in the policy process. Smaller member states are forced to follow the dominant member states. As a result, they come under pressure to enmesh their national foreign policymaking in a wider European effort. In these instances, the Europeanization of foreign policy towards third countries should be understood as a subsumption of bilateral relations. This constraint does not necessarily imply a weakening of a smaller member state's foreign policy. As smaller member states often lack bilateral capacities to develop national initiatives anyways, the possibility to move those aspects to the EU-level may still result in a strengthening of their national foreign policy action.

Either way, EU membership strengthens a smaller member state's foreign policy with third countries. When a smaller member state plays an influential role in EU foreign policy, the resources of the dominant member states are devoted towards an issue of importance to a smaller member state, strengthening its national capacities. In this case, the Europeanization of foreign policy results in a pattern of parallel national and European policies. When a smaller member state is not influential in the formation of EU foreign policy, and is pressured to converge its national policies to EU policies, it may still strengthen its position internationally. Being able to participate, even passively, in a European effort still constitutes a reinforcement of its national policy. Consequently, a varying pattern of converged and parallel diplomacies of national and European policies will emerge.

## **Conclusion**

This paper's aim was to examine the impact of EU membership on a smaller member state's national foreign policy. On the basis of the concept of issue areas, the paper analyzed the development of EU foreign policy towards the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The paper focused in particular on the role of Belgium as one of the EU's smaller member states. Subsequently, the paper examined the conditions under which a smaller member state can be influential in the development of EU foreign policy. Then the paper looked at how the role of a small member state in EU foreign policy affects the impact of the process of Europeanization on its bilateral relation with countries outside the EU.

This paper identified four factors that determine the extent to which a smaller EU member state can play an influential role in the development of EU foreign policy. First, when a policy process in a given issue area of EU foreign policy is characterized by the 'logic of arguing', a smaller state's influence may increase substantially. In such a context, participants are open to being persuaded by the better argument, with relations of power, force and coercion receding in the background. Also the extent to which a smaller member state disposes of first-hand information, analyses and expertise as well as the extent to which it is involved in the region determines its role in EU foreign policy. The extent to which EU actors are involved in the policy process is a last factor influencing a smaller member state's role in EU foreign policy. EU actors are key allies to smaller member states aiming at influencing EU foreign policy. The degree to which these four elements are present in the policy process determine the influence of smaller EU member state.

It is difficult to draw straightforward conclusions about the impact of EU membership on smaller member state's foreign policies. Depending on the role a smaller member state plays in the development of EU foreign policy, the consequences of the process of Europeanization varies from an amplification of national policies to a convergence of national foreign policies. When the actorness of a smaller member state is high, it increases chances to play an influential role in the EU. In this instance, EU membership will amplify national foreign policymaking. Conversely, in those policy areas where a smaller member state lacks a strong national policy, EU membership will result increased pressure on smaller member states to converge to EU policies, constraining national room to develop national policies outside the EU. Either way, when the EU has a strong actorness towards a third country, this strengthens the impact of a smaller member state's impact on the international environment.

## Bibliography

- Aggestam, L. (2004) 'Role identity and the Europeanisation of foreign policy' in B. Tonra and T. Christiansen, *Rethinking European Union foreign policy* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Allen, D. (1996) 'Conclusions: the European rescue of national foreign policy?' in C. Hill (ed.) *The Actors in Europe's Foreign Policy* London: Routledge.
- Allen, D. (1998) 'Who speaks for Europe' in J. Peterson and H. Sjursen, *A common foreign policy for Europe?* London: Routledge.
- Belgian Foreign Office (2001), 'Peace Building in the Region of the Great Lakes: A Belgian Action Plan', Brussels: *Press Release*, consulted on <http://www.diplomatie.be/nl/press/homedetails.asp?TEXTID=34>
- Brecher, M., Steinberg, B. and J. Stein (1969) 'A framework for research on foreign policy behavior' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 13.
- Collinson, S. (1999) 'Issue-systems', 'multi-level games' and the analysis of the EU's external commercial and associated policies: a research agenda' *Journal of European Public Policy* 6(2): 206-224.
- Cooper, R. (2007) *How foreign policy happens: Could Europe become a great power?* Bruges: Lecture at the College of Europe.
- Council of the European Union (2007) Joint Action on the European Union mission to provide advice and assistance for security sector reform in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brussels: *Official Journal of the European Union*.
- Dickson, A. K. (2004) 'The unimportance of trade preferences' in K. Arts and A. K. Dickson, *EU development cooperation: From model to symbol* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- European Commission (1995) *Preventive Diplomacy, Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping in Africa*.
- (1996) *The EU and the Issue of Conflicts in Africa: Peace Building, Conflict Prevention and Beyond*.
- (1997) *Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa*.
- Gegout, S. (2005) 'Causes and consequences of the EU's military intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Realist Explanation' in *European Foreign Affairs Review* 10(4): 427-443.
- Grieco, J. (1996), 'State Interests and Institutional Rule Trajectories: a Neorealist Interpretation of the Maastricht Treaty and European Economic and Monetary Union', in Benjamin Frankel (ed.), *Realism. Restatements and Renewal*, London: Frank Cass.

- Hill, C. (1993) 'The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role' *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31(3): 305-328.
- Hill, C. and M. Smith (2005) *International Relations and the European Union* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hoebeker, H., Carette, S. and K. Vlassenroot (2007) *EU support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo* Paris: Centre d'analyse stratégique.
- Kelstrup, M. (1993) 'Small States and European Political Integration: Reflections of Theory and Strategy' in T. Tiilikainen and D. Peterson (eds) *The Nordic Countries and the EC* Copenhagen: Copenhagen Political Studies Press
- Keohane, R. and J. Nye (1977) *Power and Interdependence*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Krasner, S. (1983) *International Regimes*, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Krause, A. (2003) 'The European Union's Africa Policy: The Commission as Policy Entrepreneur in the CFSP' *European Foreign Affairs Review* 8: 221-237.
- Kubosova, L. (2008) 'EU resist calls to send troops to the east Congo' in *EUobserver*, consulted on <http://euobserver.com/?aid=27017>
- Maerten, C. and E. Tison (2009), 'EPA Negotiations with Central Africa: The state of play' in *Trade Negotiations Insights* Brussels 8(2).
- Major, C. (2008) 'EU-UN cooperation in military crisis management: the experience of EUFOR RD Congo in 2006' *European Union Institute for Security Studies* 72.
- Manners, I. and R. Whitman (eds) (2000) *The Foreign Policies of European Union Member States*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Møller, B. (2001) *Europe and the Crisis in the Great Lakes Region* Copenhagen: Copenhagen Peace Research Institute.
- Nugent, N. (2003) 'Cyprus and the European Union: The Significance of Being Small' Reykjavik: *Occasional Working Paper Centre for Small State Studies* (1): 1-22.
- Nugent, N. (2003) *The Government and Politics of the European Union* (5<sup>th</sup> edn.) Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Olsen, G. R. (2004) 'Changing European concerns' in K. Arts and A. K. Dickson, *EU development cooperation: From model to symbol* Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Petiteville, F. (2003) 'Exporting values? EC External Cooperation in 'Soft Diplomacy'' in: M. Knodt and S. Princen (eds) *Understanding the European Union's External Relations* London: Routledge.

- Regelsberger, E., de Schoutheete de Tervarent, P. and W. Wessels (eds) (1997) *Foreign Policy of the European Union: From EPC to CFSP and Beyond* Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Risse, T. (2000) “‘Let’s Argue!’: Communicative Action in World Politics’ in *International Organization* 54 (1): 1-39.
- Risse-Kappen, T. (1996) ‘Exploring the Nature of the Beast: International Relations Theory and Comparative Policy Analysis Meet the European Union’ *Journal of Common Market Studies* 34(1): 53-80.
- Rosenau, J. (1967) *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* New York: The Free Press.
- (1990) *Turbulence in World Politics* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Smith, M. (2003) The framing of European foreign and security policy: towards a post-modern policy framework?’ in *Journal of European Public Policy* 10 (4): 556-575.
- Smith, M. E. (2004) *Europe’s Foreign and Security Policy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tonra, B. (2001) *The Europeanisation of National Foreign Policy: Dutch, Danish and Irish Foreign Policy in the European Union* Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Torreblanca, J. (2001) ‘Ideas, Preferences and Institutions: Explaining the Europeanization of Spanish Foreign Policy, Oslo: ARENA Working Paper, 1-33.
- Wallace, H. and W. Wallace (eds) (1996) *Policy-Making in the European Union* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Willetts, P. (1990) ‘Transactions, networks and systems’ in A. J. R. Groom and P. Taylor, (eds) *Frameworks for international Cooperation* London: Pinter Publishers.
- Wong, R. (2005) ‘The Europeanization of Foreign Policy’ in: C. Hill and M. Smith *International Relations and the European Union* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Young, O. (1986) ‘International Regimes: Toward a New Theory of Institutions’ in *World Politics* 39(1): 104-122.
- Zielonka, J. (1998) *Explaining Euro-Paralysis. Why Europe is Unable to Act in International Politics* Basingstoke: Macmillan.