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The European Union as a Small Power, or Conceptualizing Europe's Strategic Actorness

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ARTICLE

The European Union as a Small Power, or Conceptualizing Europe's Strategic Actorness

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ABSTRACT The article disputes the notion that the European Union is unfit to develop a strategic actorness for cultural or structural reasons or that it must change in order to facilitate the development of such a presence. Instead, it posits a counter-intuitive hypothesis: an EU strategic actorness has already emerged and its tenets are not those of a great power — but rather those of a small power. In this article the EU strategic actorness is traced in the Union's history, in its geopolitical setting, in its power resources and in the attitudes of its leaders. The article shows how the twin concepts of 'strategic actorness' and 'small state studies' have much to offer in terms of gaining insight into the foreign policies of the European Union.

KEY WORDS: EU, strategic actorness, small states, small powers, EU foreign policy

Introduction

How to think of the European Union as a strategic actor? The EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has been the subject of intense exploration by scholars, eager to determine what sort of strategic actor the EU is or — more frequently — what sort of actor it should be. The EU is a tricky object to pin down since it, despite a stated ambition to become a global power, persistently fails to display the traits usually associated with emerging powers in the international system.[1] The varying agendas, traditions and capabilities of the Union's member states offer few common denominators for a shared approach to the management of hard power. Given this, the most obvious choice for the EU would, perhaps, be to opt for a Swiss-style

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foreign policy. This was the *de facto* European approach until the end of the Cold War and it remains the favoured position of a number of EU member states to date. A larger group consists of states that believe Europeans share sufficient interests, values and threats to justify an aggregate CFSP and a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) that will make the EU "share in the responsibility for global security" (Solana 2003).[2]

This article disputes the widely held notion that the EU is inherently unfit to become a strategic actor or that the EU must change in order to gain such a presence. Instead, it posits a counter-intuitive hypothesis: EU strategic actorness has already emerged and its tenets are not those of a great power — but rather those of a small power. The article falls into three sections. The first section elucidates the concepts of the small power and strategic actorness, laying out the basic assumptions underpinning the analysis. Based on this, the following section explains how strategic actorness might be applied in an EU context in reference to the Union's history, its power resources, its geopolitical setting and the attitudes of its leaders. The concluding section will revisit some of the characteristics of the EU as a strategic actor and how they overlap with the small power equivalents.

Small States and Small Powers

Most of the small-state studies that make up the backbone of the small-power research tradition were carried out in the heyday of non-alignment by scholars such as David Vital (1967), Robert Rothstein (1968), Maurice East (1973) and Robert Keohane (1969). The decline of the non-alignment movement during the 1970s coincided with a gradual decline in small-state studies, culminating in Peter Baehr's critical appraisal of the research tradition, where he questioned smallness as a useful framework for analysis (Baehr 1975, Amstrup 1976).[3] The value of 'small states' as an ideal type in a Weberian sense is debatable. Small states are a heterogeneous group. Nevertheless, a new generation of scholars has, in recent years, found the concept useful as an alternative vantage point from which to view the international system (Bauwens *et al*. 1996, Neumann and Gstöhl 2004, Wivel 2005).

Most small-state studies and virtually all enquiries into actorness have defined small states by what they are not. This is unsurprising since the political science canon relies heavily on the past 200 years of history, in which small states have figured less prominently than great powers.[4] From the second half of the twentieth century, the bipolar balance of power decreased the strategic room for manoeuvre for smaller actors. The late 1960s and early 1970s briefly saw strategic studies orientating towards smaller actors. The problem with lumping all small actors together is that the members of the group have so little in common that little can be learnt from seeing them together. A more refined classification is therefore required.

Robert Keohane (1969, pp. 295–296) distinguished between large and small powers by examining whether their leaders have a decisive impact on the international system. He saw three types of powers: 'system-determining' — those that can influence the international system though unilateral or

multilateral action; 'system-affecting' — those that cannot influence the international system on their own but can do so together with other states; and 'system-ineffectual' — those that adjust to the international system and cannot change it. The three types of actors shall be referred to here as 'great powers', 'small powers' and 'small states'.

David Vital's (1967, p. 4) criterion for measuring the strength or weakness of an actor is "the capacity … to withstand stress, on the one hand and its ability to pursue a policy of its own devising, on the other". Robert Rothstein is sceptical of a definition based solely on objective or tangible criteria since it carries the danger, through an "A is stronger than B but is weaker than C" logic, of ending up by projecting a hierarchy on the international system that does not actually exist. Instead, he adopted a definition where small states are seen to "develop behavioural patterns which decisively separate them from non-group members" (Rothstein 1968, pp. 23–24). In other words: a small state is as a small power does. The problem with the 'small state' category is that it is too broad. Most small states are utterly dependent and conduct very little foreign policy of their own. In fact small-state studies have generally concerned themselves with a narrow strata of small states that – actually do act strategically. Such actors can be called small powers.

'Small' is a quantitative term, but it is also a qualitative and relational one. In international relations, the concept is often used to denote something unpowerful. But this is not necessarily the case. Small powers can be relatively strong and great powers can be relatively weak. As Robert Keohane pointed out (1969, p. 291), small states frequently make the mechanisms of the international system work to preserve their interests. Strategy is the endeavour to reconcile the ends and means for powers with extensive interests and obligations (Kennedy 1991, p. 5). Not all small states are strategic actors — but some are. Small powers can be remarkably adept at manoeuvring in the international system to further their strategic ambitions.

For a small power to develop a strategy reconciling ends and means, it must operate within the regular power spectrum with the capacity to persuade, reward, deter and coerce — and be able to resist attempts at such. A primary curbing factor for small powers as strategic actors is that the amount of resources available for allocation is relatively small. The quantity of capabilities — be it pieces of cannon or currency reserves — is certainly important in this respect, but far from necessary or sufficient. Certain capabilities are more relevant than others. They are more coveted as rewards or more disagreeable as retribution. The relevance and credibility of a capability will always be subject to the ability to mobilize it for strategic purposes. Small powers are frequently disproportionately strong in certain sectors. Maurice East (1973, p. 558) saw such "variable geometry", where relative strength is coupled with relative weakness, as a defining trait of small powers as strategic actors.

Of equal importance to capabilities is the ability to contrive and implement policy. Strategy thrives on autonomy; the more self-reliant, the easier it is for an actor to project power. 'Autonomy' is a relative term — from states that have contracted out their security via various forms of alliance to complete

self-reliance — which would allow for the development of a strategic actorness in its purest form. That said, all states — great and small — operate in a strategic environment inhabited by the power of states that they do not control. As Peter Baehr (1975, p. 464) pointed out, one of the main findings of small-state studies has been "to bring the relativity of the notion of independence into focus". So, apart from size and recognition of relative weakness, what characterizes small powers as strategic actors? In the surveyed literature, some general traits can be discerned.

- The strategic behaviour of small powers is characterized by dependence. A small power recognizes that it cannot obtain security by reliance on its own capabilities alone (Rothstein 1968, p. 29). David Vital (1971, p. 19) defined it as "that state which, in the long term, can constitute no more than the dispensable and non-decisive increment to a primary state's total array of political and military resources". Depending on previous experiences in big wars, small powers tend towards either a policy of neutrality, or a policy of alliance (Reiter 1996, p. 71). Small powers tend to follow the alliance leader closely, lend it what support they can, and avoid antagonizing it (Posen 2004, p. 7) Small powers and weak states in close proximity to great powers are the most likely candidates for band-wagoning (Walt 1985, p. 18).
- Although themselves sometimes opportunistic, small powers are usually deeply opposed to the *realpolitik* associated with great-power politics (Wivel 2005, p. 396). They differ from great powers in their attitudes towards risk and are forced, by their limited resources, their location and the system, to prioritize more strictly, establishing a hierarchy of risks while attempting to minimize the risk they consider most serious (Hoffman 1965, p. 138). Small powers avoid bilateral strategic interaction with greater powers on matters of substance but will rather seek to enlist other powers or international organizations to offset relative power inequality.
- Small powers generally place high importance on being seen as *status quo* actors in the sense that they wish to be seen as upholding the established order, also when they are violating the rules. They work within the established order, rather than attempting to revise the order itself. Small powers see more dangers than opportunities in unregulated international politics which leads to frequent moral and normative policy positions. The perceived immorality of international anarchy is frequently countered by the pursuit of idealist causes on a systemic level (Russett and Oneal 2001, p. 278).
- Small powers engaging in conflictual behaviour face high costs (Vital 1967, p. 8). Anette Fox (1959, p. 3, fn 8) saw such actorness as defined in terms of 'local' powers whose demands are restricted to their own and immediately adjacent areas, while great powers exert their influence over wide areas. Subsequently, small-power strategic behaviour is characterized by a general reluctance to coerce, and a tendency to promote multilateral non-military solutions to security challenges (Hoffman 1965, Wivel 2005, p. 395).

- Small actors are primary beneficiaries of international institutions (Wallace 1999). A small power will often seek to minimize the costs of conducting foreign policy and increase the weight behind its policies by engaging in concerted efforts with other actors. This leads to a generally high degree of participation in and support for international organizations. Formal rules are actively encouraged to curb great power independence and increase their own power and influence (Mosser 2001, p. 164).

Actorness and the European Union

What causes similar actors to act differently in similar situations? Kenneth Waltz (1959) outlined three answers to this question in his three levels, or images, "man", "state" and "war". In European Studies the 'state' line of enquiry is centred on the concept 'actorness'. The question of actorness is relevant because it captures the EU's aspiration to become what in international relations jargon is called a 'power'. Possessing a 'self' is a precondition for self-interested behaviour and for willed behaviour. David Allen and Michael Smith (1990, pp. 19–37) associated actorness with the ability to exert influence, to shape the perceptions and expectations of others. Christopher Hill (1993, p. 308) asserted that 'true actorness' requires "a clear identity and a self-contained decision making system" as well as the "practical capabilities to affect policy". In other words, the development of actorness can be seen as the overlap of three interconnected dimensions: 'presence', 'procedure' and 'capability'. While presence alludes to the relationship between the actors in Europe's foreign policy and third-party expectations of the EU's role in global affairs, procedure refers to factors in the policy process environment which enable or impede deliberate action. Finally, capability refers to the capacity to formulate and carry out foreign and security policies, once they have been agreed.

The EU does not meet this strict definition of actorness. The member states have established a collective presence without achieving a corresponding collective ability to act. In one widely cited attempt at alternative definition, Gunnar Sjöstedt (quoted in Hill 1993, p. 309) defined an international actor as one that is delimited from others and its environment; autonomous, in the sense of making its own laws and decisions; possesses certain structural prerequisites for action on the international level, such as a legal personality and a set of diplomatic agents, and the capability to conduct negotiations with third parties; and has the capacity for goal-orientated behaviour towards other international actors. More recently, Henrik Larsen (2002, p. 287) outlined a constructivist approach to international actorness in how a "group of states construct themselves as an international actor" and the "surrounding world constructs this group as an actor". Other scholars have pointed out that the EU's international performance is defined increasingly by multi-level governance, making the question of 'actorness' dependent on the level of governance (Peterson and Sjursen 1998, p. 12). Magnus Ekengren and Kjell Engelbrekt (2006,

pp. 19–20) noted that EU actorness can also be derived from two sets of circumstances, namely that a mandate has either been delegated to an 'agent' (such as the EU Commission) or that it arises from a substantive understanding among the 'principals' (for example, by declaring: 'A common foreign and security policy is hereby established').[5]

The obvious problem with Sjöstedt's definition of actorness is that it is self-serving in the sense that it is tailored to the strengths of the EC/EU, while omitting the ability to affect policy. Larsen's definition is problematic because it deals solely with words, which is unhelpful when dealing with an actor that frequently promises more than it can deliver and delivers other things than it promised. Similarly, Ekengren and Engelbrekt's definition fails to distinguish sufficiently between formal structures and policy output. A main strength of the actorness concept is that it allows one to hold the EU to some of the same yardsticks as the other principal actors in the international system. After all, the EU operates in an international system constructed and inhabited by states. The power or influence exerted by the EU is conditional upon a strategic environment provided by the political, military and economic power of states, with which the EU interacts. The fundamental premise for the CFSP–ESDP nexus is the agreement that if the EU is to become an effective force in international affairs it will need to control credible diplomatic, economic and military instruments. For that reason the most prudent approach is to apply Hill's definition of 'true' actorness to the EU. None of the listed criteria are absolutes — if they were, only the greatest powers could be considered actors. Rather than a static concept, actorness is a yardstick by which the process of change in EU foreign policy can be monitored.

Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler (2006, p. 36) noted that: "Judgments concerning EU actorness abound, although systematic analyses of the bases of actorness are relatively uncommon. In many cases … the EU is simply assumed to be an important actor". While much research has been carried out on the procedure and capability elements of EU actorness, less attention has been given to the EU's presence. Yet it is this element that can help answer questions regarding the fluidity of the EU actorness — that power that often lies dormant but by virtue of its potential must be taken seriously. As Chris Hill and William Wallace (1996, p. 8) assert, effective foreign policy rests upon a sense of shared identify "These underlying assumptions are embedded in national history and myth, changing slowly over time … . Debates on foreign policy take place within the constraints this conventional wisdom about national interest sets upon acceptable choice; the symbols and reference points they provide enabling ministers to relate current decisions to familiar ideas". In the following discussion, the EU's strategic actorness will be placed on these underpinnings. Actorness cannot and should not be viewed separately from actual capabilities, even though that is the common approach (Sjursen 1998, p. 95). Capabilities need not be used or even mentioned — but they must be credible. Potential power and demonstrated power are, after all, not the same things (Knudsen 1979, p. 212). Also, in the presence of capabilities, other factors shape strategic behaviour. Jack Nagel (1975, p. 29) noted that 'actorness' "refers to an individual, group, organization or other collectivity. In

social power relations the state of a social entity — the behaviour, beliefs, attitudes, or policies of an actor are of utmost importance".

Identity and Strategy: the European Example

The European Union clearly meets the preconditions to gain strategic identity in terms of having extensive interests and obligations and the ability to coerce, induce or resist attempts at such. However, the EU lacks the clear identity, self-contained decision-making system and practical capabilities to affect policy that is usually associated with strategic actors. Actors do not start with a *tabula rasa* when they are faced with a challenge or an opportunity to act, but rather draw on pre-existing patterns, derived from situational factors that help determine what is seen to be appropriate behaviour. Some of the most helpful contributions to date have contrived European strategic identity as the area of overlap between national strategic actorness, with a supranational/institutional element (Giegerich 2006, Meyer 2006).

This study takes a rather different approach, seeking the roots of EU strategic identity at the crossroads of history, capabilities and geopolitics as well as in values of Europe as a whole. In the choice of variables some readers will note the deference to Stein Rokkan's "law, economy, culture, force-model" (Flora *et al.* 1999, pp. 135–139). The following analysis should not be taken as an attempt at a complete outline of all the factors shaping the EU approach to strategy, but rather as an indicator of how EU strategic identity — and thereby actorness — might be conceptualized. Keeping in mind that the application and validation of strategic actorness will always be an art rather than a science, let us have a look at four factors that are likely to have impacted upon European strategic actorness.

1. History: the Difficult Legacy of Hard Power

Ernest Renan famously pointed out that getting history wrong is an essential part of being a nation.[6] Although certain traits can run through the history of regions, most historical memories reflect the individual experiences of European nations and are too tightly woven into the fabric of the nation-state to serve as the basis for a common European strategic identity. So, if one were to view Europe as a whole, what would be the defining historical experiences? Among shared pan-European historical memories, Christianity, the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution all would surely be important. The role of war in the unmaking and making of modern Europe should also not be underestimated (Tilly 1985, pp. 169–186). In Europe, the system-determining powers of the nineteenth century ended up as dependencies in the twentieth century through consecutive feats of vivisection. It is therefore to be expected that a desire to prevent a repetition of the past has influenced the view of power politics and the legitimacy of the use of force. The destructiveness of the world wars has helped drive and legitimize European integration. The integration project is

also the manifestation of an intra-European bargain de-legitimizing coercive foreign policy behaviour in the region.

The experience of the Second World War made most states in Europe opt for alliance over self-reliance as security policy (see Reiter 1996). While the Cold War brought foreign dominance to EU members on both sides of the iron curtain, the US primacy in Western Europe was by invitation (Lundestad 2003). For five decades the USA has guarded the *status quo* in Europe, effectively underwriting the European order. During the Cold War the drawbacks of dependence were outweighed by the US commitment to the defence of its allies. The need for an EU strategic actorness arose in the tension of three interconnected changes. First, changes in the strategic environment raised questions as to how long the USA could be relied upon as a guarantor of the European security order. The bargain, in which the USA shouldered an unequal share of the defence burden in return for an unequal share of leadership, came under increasing pressure. Secondly, experiences such as the 1999 Kosovo war and the 2003 Iraq crisis deflated the intellectually fashionable belief that 'soft power' was somehow replacing hard power in post-Cold War world affairs. A third reason was that, once it was decided that the economic communities were to become a political union, security policy was an obvious field with great potential for integration. The EU was always the most likely venue for a self-sustained European security order.

The historical experience of Europe has significantly impacted its strategic actorness notably in the deep-seated scepticism towards reintroducing *realpolitik* into intra-European politics. The EU shares strategic space with twenty-seven nation-states — and the regional hegemon, the USA. There are obvious reasons why the EU chooses seduction over coercion. US guarantees help make the altruistic foreign policy approach of the EU possible. Europeans are not unwilling to intervene militarily as long as the humanitarian rewards are high, the costs in blood and treasure are low — and twenty-seven states are able to agree that this is the case. The experiences of the world wars have left a lasting dread of uncontrolled escalation which leads on the one hand to a deep reluctance to consider the use of force to achieve non-altruistic policy objectives and, on the other, to an emphasis on exit strategies. It is in this context that one must understand why the EU seemingly makes its own use of force dependent on a United Nations (UN) mandate. The EU preference for treating ESDP forces as a trans-border police force rather than as the servants of *raison d'État* must also be understood as a product of Europe's history.

2. Capabilities: Consensus–Expectations Gap

Although capabilities do not determine behaviour, they do limit it — especially when they are absent. The EU goal in terms of capabilities is a "capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military force".[7] The field of operation is 'Petersberg' peace-keeping and crisis-management tasks.[8] In his seminal article about the "capability–expectations gap", Christopher Hill (1993, p. 315) has pointed out the gap between what the EU had been talked

up to do and what it was able to deliver in terms of "its ability to agree, its resources, and the instruments at its disposal". Since then, the EU has gained an increasingly central place in European security, not least since medium and small member states, unable or unwilling to maintain a broad spectrum defence, make pooling of capabilities and aspirations a virtue of necessity. Also, European unwillingness to spend on defence has made Europe miss out on new defence technologies. This threatens interoperability with the USA. The EU has constructed its force concept around battle groups made up of sub-sets of EU states and a Rapid Reaction Force for collective action (Biscop 2004). The EU finds itself in the unenviable situation of mustering a new force amidst a general decline in military spending.[9] The military capabilities that the EU can call up on short notice are feeble in terms of numbers, weaponry and logistics. Overall, they are unsuited for deterring or compelling other actors.

Although the EU has made some headway towards assembling institutional frameworks to govern the ESDP, the Union still lacks an integrated command structure. In real terms this means that military operations are likely to be carried out through framework nations, of which Britain and France are the most credible candidates. A more detrimental shortcoming is the flawed decision-making procedure governing the initiative. The EU is a weak federation with a fragmented centre. This significantly impacts its ability to make strategic decisions under pressure. The unanimity requirement in Council foreign policy making is an inherently conservative factor for EU strategic behaviour. The lack of an effective policy-making procedure curbs the EU's ability to mobilize economic or armed force for political purposes. When time constraints prevent carefully crafted ambiguities and consensus building, European unity tends to crumble under the conflicting short-term interests of the member states. As the list of operations of the *CFSP Forum* (2007, pp. 17–22) illustrate, the EU is more apt in dealing with trivial issues low on the international agenda. The cumbersome formal procedures destine the EU to rely largely on *ad hoc* foreign policy making by the informal trilateral directorate of Germany, France and Britain and the agenda-setting of the rotating EU Presidency, which help explain the apparent lack of focus in EU security policy.

Despite declaring the capabilities 'operational' on several occasions, the EU, in 2007, still does not have a capacity for autonomous action in any real sense of the term due to persistent shortfalls in core areas (see Cornish and Edwards 2005, pp. 801–804). This limits the geographical and mission scope of EU operations primarily to mitigating instability in the European periphery, supplemented by small-scale operations further afield. If the EU formations were to become fully operational, their 'light and mobile' focus could make them a highly effective force. Such a force could shift the transatlantic power-burden sharing equation and allow for a more proactive EU foreign policy approach. The ability to issue credible threats can open the possibility to deter or coerce where the EU now is wired to rely primarily on positive incentives and persuasion. That, of course, will depend on the EU states being able to agree measures. By 2008 the much-discussed capability–expectations

gap has been replaced by a narrower consensus–expectations gap. The capabilities and frameworks are in place but remain largely unused due to a decision-making mechanism that relies on twenty-seven-state consensus. Due to a decision-making mode that trades efficiency for legitimacy, the EU capacity to respond effectively in times of crisis is limited and will remain so in the foreseeable future (Toje 2008).

3. Geopolitics: the Failure to Interact

Chris Hill (2002, p. 99) has pointed out that "students of the European Union have for too long neglected geopolitics, either because they could not see its relevance to a 'civilian power' or because they were uneasy with that kind of discourse for normative reasons". Without embracing structural determinism, it remains clear that a number of constant variables curb the EU strategic legroom. One such factor is geopolitics. The most important geopolitical function of the EU is its very existence, which has helped take the sting out of the great power rivalry among Germany, France and Britain. Although the EU is not the vehicle for the territorial defence of its members, this does not mean that the Union is entirely free from territoriality. The natural barriers of the EU are made up by the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, while no similar barriers exist in the east.

In strategic terms, the EU has an exposed eastern flank. In the absence of hostile neighbours in the east the EU has enjoyed a degree of success in furthering stability along its borders through positive measures, notably the prospect of EU membership. Yet the current unwillingness or inability in the EU to agree when enlargement is no longer an option, has strategic implications. To indicate rewards such as membership and then fail to deliver, is risky strategic behaviour. Especially when the EU pretends that this is a bureaucratic question and not a strategic one. A similar situation is also arising in the east where the failure to extend NATO frontline defences to the new members in the east has encouraged fringe states to actively seek further enlargement in order to escape their buffer status.[10] The overlap between Russian and EU spheres of influence along the length of the EU's outer borders carries an inherent potential for conflict. The EU-non policy towards Turkey and Russia is indicative of a more important point: the EU persistently fails to interact strategically with large powers. It also illustrates the dangers of over promising and under-delivering in terms of strategy. The EU runs the risks alienating not only Turkey but also Russia.

More than any other area Africa has been singled out as the 'natural theatre' for EU hard power.[11] The strategic importance of Africa is far from self-evident. A more likely reasoning is geopolitical: Africa is one of the few regions where the EU can practice using hard power without trespassing on the interest spheres of more powerful actors. Although the rise of China as an African power is rapidly closing this window of opportunity. A third region of strategic significance to the EU is North America. American primacy in Europe is the main constraining factor for the EU as a strategic actor. Although strategic self-reliance, as has been seen, is a relative term, the

EU is more dependent than most. The territorial integrity of most EU states is underwritten by US security guarantees through NATO, an organization based on individual not collective membership, and where the EU does not act as a bloc.

The past decade has witnessed a historically novel situation where the EU is assembling a security framework apparently duplicating the US-sponsored security architecture in Europe, while continuing to rely on the USA for defence guarantees and strategic leadership. A series of hard-fought compromises aiming to console the EU and US security architectures has agreed that NATO is to remain the primary security organization in Europe and that the USA is to retain primacy in NATO (Betts 2005, p. 13).[12] Again the EU persistently fails to interact strategically with the USA, but rather waits for Washington to decide. Since NATO and the EU draw essentially on the same resources, participation in ventures such as the International Stabilisation Force in Afghanistan will significantly limit the EU capacity for its own operations. The threats facing Europe are latent and whether or not to address them is voluntary as opposed to the imperatives of the Cold War. US security guarantees, coupled with an absence of clear territorial threats, translates into an overall sense of security that is bound to have an impact on the EU strategic actorness, giving greater room for the importance of values.

4. Values: Doctrinal Idealism

Values are the unspoken assumptions on which behaviour is ultimately based. The EU is not a federation but a grouping of states. In the absence of any defined *raison d'état*, the stability, coherence and endurance of the EU is, to an uncommon degree, rooted in shared cultural and ideological experiences as well as values. For the EU as an actor, values occupy much the same space usually occupied by the national interest in state actors. While the link between public opinion and strategy is tenuous, the prevalent beliefs held by strategic elites are unquestionably of key importance. Many of Europe's political leaders attended universities in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a turbulent decade in European history. Frustration over the Vietnam War and the Prague Spring was mixed with the impact of economic stagnation and decreased attentiveness to European concerns by the increasingly bilateral US–Soviet partnership (Sloan 2003, pp. 79–80). A widespread sense of powerlessness and disillusionment gave impetus to a host of counter-cultures spanning a broad array of reformist causes, from ecology movements to new-age religion, multiculturalism, internationalism and peace movements. These movements were united in the belief that the world could be, or already had been, fundamentally changed by new ideas and new assumptions. This spawned a rejection of national interests, and national identity among intellectual elites. Although practices such as peace-marching may seem naïve today, many at the time believed that they were in fact changing the world (Andrew 2000, pp. 80–87).[13] These years were formative for the deeply politicized generation that made up much of the European political elite during the formative years for the CFSP/ESDP nexus. The result has

been that the EU as a whole has been more profoundly influenced by liberal internationalism.

Values are essential to understanding the EU approach to strategy where the *raison d'être* of the ESDP is often framed in idealist terms. Abstracts such as Europeanization — whose definition is disputed, whose effects are uncertain and how it is encouraged or indeed reversed is unclear — are too wobbly to put to strategic use. The EU is instead furthering liberal democracy, that is the blend of rule of law, human rights, protection of minorities and the merits of market economy.[14] The strength of belief in the rightness of these values is reflected in the enthusiasm with which the EU imposes them on others, notably prospective members and Third World countries (Solana 2003, pp. 4–7). The values driving European integration are, on the whole, unsuited for calculating power politics. Acquiring hard power capabilities has not dampened EU self-image as a civilian, rather than military, power. As EU insider Steven Everts (2001, p. 48) noted, the EU is above all willing to defend its values by offering diplomatic discourse and huge sums of money.

The elite perception is often cast in terms of the EU being the supranational successor to the nation-state — a linear perspective where not only the nation-state but also the security concerns of the nation-state are *passé*.[15] 'Multilateralism' and 'Europeanization' have a central place in the EU founding myth. Multilateralism is presupposed to bring about outcomes that are 'fair' and 'just', which is assumed to be the opposite of power politics and unilateralism (Solana 2003, p. 11). Europeanization is seen as making states so interdependent that armed coercion is no longer an option. According to this narrative the EU, not the USA, is given the credit for securing peace in the region. The underlying point is that the historical mission of the Union is to deliver Europe from *realpolitik* not be the vehicle for it. The federalist undercurrent also helps explain the high esteem reserved for the UN in EU lore (Solana 2003, p. 11). In the core assumption that the international system is experiencing essentially the same transformation that most human societies have undergone, from violent anarchy to a law-governed society, the EU strategic approach can be dubbed "doctrinal idealism".

A Distinct European Internationalism

So how does the EU strategic actorness measure up to the characteristics of small power strategic behaviour? Looking at the outline above, all of the points resonate with the strategic approach of the EU. Having been forged in the tension of intra-European sovereignty, interdependence and transatlantic reliance, the strategic behaviour of the EU is, above all, characterized by dependence. The EU's multilateralist credo and pro-UN sentiments fit well with Robert Keohane's definition of a small state as an actor whose leaders consider that it can never make a significant impact on the system when acting alone or in a small group. In much the same way that small powers depend on greater powers, the EU depends on the USA for political leadership and military support. David Vital's definition of a small state as

an actor that constitutes no more than the dispensable and non-decisive increment to a primary state's total array of political and military resources echoes the EU experience of the 2003 Iraq War, where the USA built a coalition of those states that accepted its primacy and ignored those that did not. The European experience *vis-à-vis* the USA after the Cold War has been to avoid direct strategic interaction. As noted initially, the Union has failed to display the traits usually associated with emerging powers in the international system.

The EU shares the same predicament as a small power in that the amount of resources available for allocation is relatively small. If the test of a great power is the test of strength for war, then the EU surely is no great power. On the contrary, the EU displays the variable geometry characteristic of a small state being, as the saying goes, 'an economic giant and a military dwarf'. The limited ability to project hard power, both in terms of hardware and policy-making procedures, predisposes the EU to a strategic actorness that places less value on power and military strength and more value on such soft-power tools as constructive engagement, critical dialogue and commercial ties. The EU frequently invokes moral and normative policy positions to justify policies and reduces foreign policy costs through multilateralism. The result is a union of twenty-seven democracies that effectively defers authority for when to act militarily to the UN (Solana 2003, p. 11). EU strategic actorness is inclined towards cooperative damage-limitation strategies illustrated by the eagerness to limit strategic possibilities by self-imposed rules of restraint. This is, of course, a reflection of a belief (or hope) that other actors are equally committed to the Western-formulated rules of restraint.

The operational nature of the institutional structures is illustrated by the EU's engaging in a number of small pre-and post-conflict missions spanning from Indonesia to the Congo, Bosnia and, conceivably, Kosovo in 2008.[16] The EU military operations to date have all been limited operations in areas of little significance to other great powers and where the chances of uncontrolled escalation are remote. Rather than simply slapping a 'lowest common denominator' label on the EU approach to strategy, it would be more accurate to say that by seeking the middle ground, the member states have successfully agreed a community interest and upgraded it into a strategy. The increasing rate of operations indicates that EU strategic actorness is getting firmer, if one accepts David Vital's claim that the capacity to pursue a policy of its own devising is one indicator of strategic strength, although the Union still has a long way to go, especially when it comes to displaying actorness when faced with US pressure.

If one was to accept that the EU has developed a strategic actorness which resembles that of a small power, the next question would be 'what are the implications for EU policies?'. While the factors listed certainly restrict EU strategic actorness, this does not mean that the EU is powerless. The enlargements of the EU have shown that the Union has few qualms about imposing its values on others, and that it can mobilize its economic power to measurable strategic effect. Provided that the others are not what Stephen Walt (1985, p. 18) called "states that matter". In its apparent lack of will or

power, the Union is continuously furthering its common values, both internally and externally, without the threat or use of force. The EU strategic approach is to mitigate instability on the European periphery by integrating potential adversaries and making them a part of a greater whole. Europe absorbs problems and conflicts instead of directly confronting them. The EU actorness is most apparent when dealing bilaterally with inconsequential powers.

The problem is that the CFSP/ESDP has proclaimed itself to be much more than that. The 2010 Headline Goal is: "The European Union is a global actor, ready to share in the responsibility for global security".[17] This is clearly misleading. The EU may dabble in issues on the international agenda, but cannot, in its present shape, purport to be an upholder of the international order. This cannot be done without embracing the superpower potential inherent in the twenty-seven-state bloc. One must not forget that Europe is declining in terms of global share of population and world economy. Europe is set to figure less prominently in the global politics of the twenty-first century than it did in the twentieth. Behind the talk of how the world has changed, Europe is slipping. In the medium term Europe's great powers are likely to be relegated to the third power division by the rise of new great powers, such as China and India. The EU is the only realistic alternative for a European resurgence. Seen collectively, Europe has the tools — the capabilities, the technology, the finances and population — of a great power, but lacks the will.

Why has the EU developed the strategic actorness of a small power? The obvious answer to this question lies in the way that EU foreign policy decisions are made. It is perhaps to be expected that a Union based on equal membership, which is for the most part made up of small states, would be influenced by their strategic outlook. The ease with which four neutral states have joined the CFSP/ESDP is a testimony to the small-power emphasis of the EU strategic actorness. The second reason is the case of Germany. Europe's largest state is currently the only great power apparently willing to channel its strategic ambitions through the EU. Eager not to repeat past mistakes, Germany embraces the EU's 'play small' approach.[18] Finally, there is what Robert Rothstein (1968, p. 27) called "the temptations of appearing insignificant". Considering the high stakes of great-power politics, a small-state strategic actorness can be seen as insulating the EU against costly foreign policy adventures. There is no direct link between intentions and outcomes that actions produce (Merton 1936). The law of unintended consequences is sometimes harsh on those who favour hard power. Perhaps the EU's reluctance to 'go looking for monsters to destroy' should be lauded, not lamented.[19]

In 1976 Raymond Aron ((p. 519) wrote: "Yesterday, Europe only just avoided perishing from imperial follies and frenzied ideologies, she could perish tomorrow through historical abdication". Thirty years later this warning is more relevant than ever. It is something profoundly disappointing in finding that the pooled power of twenty-seven states equals that of a small power. This does not mean that the EU is stuck with a small-power strategic

actorness. The four dimensions visited in this article are inter-wired and mutually influence each other. Actorness changes when a shift occurs in any of the variables (for instance, US disengagement, a new existential threat arising, the arrival of new defence technologies or an ideological shift towards doctrinal realism) thus instigating change in the other variables. The geopolitical setting with a lack of threats and US guarantees, the historical memories of the perils of power politics, the capability–expectations gap and doctrinal idealism, all help explain why the EU falls short of the world-changing potential of a great power.

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Notes

1. 'Conceptualizing' in this context means providing a framework for how to think accurately about the EU as a security policy actor. It should not be understood as the more ambitious endeavour of providing a theory by which EU strategic behaviour can be predicted.
2. Note the mention of 'global' twice in the opening sentence. Headline Goal 2010 (6309/6/04) approved by General Affairs and External Relations Council on 17 May 2004 and endorsed by the European Council on 17 and 18 June 2004.
3. Baehr's remarks were backed up by the 1976 survey of 55 small states that noted an 'astonishing' lack of common denominators. Amstrup's study is a testimony to the problem of quantitative studies. In fact, what the study discovered is that not all small states are strategic actors — something that was already known.
4. The formalization of the division between small and great powers came about with the signing of the Treaty of Chaumont in 1817.
5. Title V, Article J and J-4 Treaty on the 1992 European Union (TEU). Reprinted in Hill and Smith (2000, pp. 153–155).
6. From his lecture '*Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*' delivered on 11 March 1882 at the Sorbonne, Paris.
7. Joint Declaration on European Defence, British French Summit, Saint Malo, 3–4 December 1998.
8. First formulated in the Petersberg Declaration, West European Union Council of Ministers, Bonn, 19 June 1992. The tasks were later taken into the Amsterdam Treaty and updated in the 2010 EU Headline Goal.
9. Overall European military spending fell from $US200 billion in 1994 to $US195 billion in 2003 (*SIPRI Yearbook 2004*, p. 340). In 2005 Europe was the only region in the world with a decrease in military spending, by 1.7 per cent, especially because of Western European spending cuts (*SIPRI Yearbook 2006*, p. 233).
10. The 'Drang nach Osten' of the exposed states was apparent in the role played by the EU in the 2005 'Orange Revolution' in the Ukraine when, on Poland's bequest, the EU was launched with little apparent forethought headlong into the Russian sphere of interest.
11. Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for the CFSP speaking at Pembroke College, Cambridge, November 2005.
12. Most clearly spelt out in the so-called 'Berlin plus' compromise at the NATO Summit in Berlin, 16 December 2002.
13. As it later turned out, the Soviet Union was manipulating the pacifist instincts of many Europeans as illustrated by Chris Andrew (2000).

14. As expressed in the 1993 Copenhagen Criteria for joining the European Union. European Council in Copenhagen (21–22 June 1993), Presidency Conclusions SN 180/93, pp. 10–15.
15. While such sentiments are expressed regularly by leading figures, the extent to which the world-federalist thoughts have influenced thinking on European integration remains an under-researched topic.
16. A complete list of ESDP missions is made available in the *CFSP Forum* 5(1): 17–22.
17. 2010 Headline Goal endorsed by the European Council of 17/18 June 2004.
18. According to a 1991 Rand Corporation survey a majority of Germans saw Switzerland as an appropriate model for the new Germany's role in international affairs.
19. To paraphrase the title of the 4 July address given by US Secretary of State John Quincy Adams in 1821, "America does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy".

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