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What is This?
Decision-making in security and defense policy: Towards supranational inter-governmentalism?

Jolyon Howorth

Abstract
For scholars and practitioners of European politics alike, the distinction between supranationalism and inter-governmentalism has always been fundamental. This distinction has underpinned the various schools of European integration theory, just as it has remained crucial for European governments keen to demonstrate that the Member States remain in charge of key policy areas. Nowhere is this considered to be more central than in the area of foreign and security policy, which has consciously been set within the rigid intergovernmental framework of Pillar Two of the Maastricht Treaty and, under the Lisbon Treaty, remains subject to the unanimity rule. However, scholarship on the major decision-making agencies of the foreign and security policy of the EU suggests that the distinction is not only blurred but increasingly meaningless. This article demonstrates that, in virtually every case, decisions are shaped and even taken by small groups of relatively well-socialized officials in the key committees acting in a mode which is as close to supranational as it is to intergovernmental.

Keywords
European decision-making, institutionalism, inter-governmentalism, security and defence policy, socialization, supranationalism

The broad field of what we are now learning to call the European Union’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has been a burgeoning academic growth area in recent years. Within that general literature on CSDP, there have also been a growing number of studies focusing on decision-shaping and decision-making in foreign and security policy. This literature has been framed by a wide variety of epistemological and theoretical approaches, including (but not restricted to) institutional dynamics (Grevi, 2007, 2009; Smith, 2003); inter-governmentalism (Gégout, 2010; Ginsberg, 2001;
Hoffmann, 1966; Moravcsik, 1998); socialization theory (Checkel, 2007; Jørgensen, 1997; Lewis, 2007; Smith, 2003; Stinchcombe, 1965; Tonra, 2003); committee governance (Christiansen and Kirchner, 2000; Hooghe, 1999; Majone, 1989); trans-national networks (Mérand et al., 2010; Slaughter, 2004; Thurner and Binder, 2009); epistemic communities (Cross, 2011; Haas, 1992; Howorth, 2004; Radaelli, 1999); European diplomatic analysis (Allen, 1998; Cross, 2007); European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) policy creation (Dumoulin et al., 2003; Howorth, 2000; Mérand, 2008; Salmon and Shepherd, 2003); security culture (Giegerich, 2006; Meyer, 2006; Sjursen, 2006); and a major focus on negotiation theory (JEPP, 2010; Risse, 2000). In particular, we have now seen the emergence of a substantial body of literature analyzing the main agencies of decision-shaping in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and CSDP: the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) (Bostock, 2002; Cross, 2007, 2011; Hayes-Renshaw, 1990; Lewis, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2007; Noël, 1967); the Political and Security Committee (PSC) (Cross, 2007, 2011; Duke, 2005; Howorth, 2010; Juncos and Reynolds, 2007; Meyer, 2006); the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) (Cross, 2010, 2011); the Committee for Civilian Crisis Management (CIVCOM) (Cross, 2010, 2011); the Council Secretariat Working Groups (CWGs) (Beyers, 2007; Beyers and Dierickx, 1998; Juncos and Pomorska, 2006; Warntjen, 2010); and the European Defence Agency (EDA) (Bátora, 2009; Trybus, 2006).

Ten years ago, it was suggested, with respect to ESDP in general, that there were indications that we might be in the presence of a phenomenon that the present author called ‘supra-national inter-governmentalism’ (Howorth, 2000). The expression meant that there was obvious overlap between these two modes of decision-making and that they were, in a sense, both interactive and symbiotic. The aim was simply to stress that rigid distinctions between inter-governmentalism and supra-nationalism – which many scholars take to be axiomatic – were becoming somewhat meaningless and that the entire decision-making process in CSDP needed re-thinking. While many scholars quoted this neologism, none attempted to develop it theoretically. Subsequently, much of the scholarship referred to in this article was being carried out under a variety of methodological, theoretical and empirical frames. In conducting fresh research at the end of the 2000s, specifically into decision-shaping, and in evaluating the contributions in this area of the many scholars referenced in this article, the present study has resurrected the concept of supra-national inter-governmentalism and attempted to demonstrate that it is not an inappropriate expression to describe the procedures being investigated. There is an obvious paradox in the fact that CFSP and CSDP are very deliberately situated under Pillar Two of the Maastricht and Lisbon arrangements, where inter-governmentalism is considered to be sacrosanct and all decisions are officially taken either at Foreign Ministers or at Heads of State or Government level, whereas, as we shall see, scholars are increasingly agreed that the reality is far more complex. Much of the literature referred to above touches to a greater or lesser degree on the tensions between the inter-governmental and the supra-national dimensions of CFSP and CSDP. With few exceptions, scholars have puzzled over the reality of a growing sense of de facto supra-nationalism. Scholars wonder whether we are not in fact witnessing the disappearance of any meaningful dichotomy between inter-governmentalism and supra-nationalism.
But first, an important caveat. This article is not suggesting that an *EU foreign and security policy* (CFSP and/or CSDP) is either challenging or supplanting whatever *national* foreign and security policies the Member States might continue to favor. That said, one has to ask how many of the 27 Member States can be said to possess distinctive national foreign and security policies whose reach extends much beyond their own immediate borders. France and the UK have global interests and outreach; Portugal and Spain exercise a measure of impact in Latin America and parts of Africa; Germany has special relations with Eastern Europe and especially with Russia. For most of the smaller Member States, however, it is no secret that their diplomatic clout can be maximized through association with the EU (Rickli, 2008; Thorhallsson and Wivel, 2006). Moreover, the fact is that 30 years ago there was no *EU foreign or (still less) security policy worthy of the name*. Today the EU is (albeit slowly and painfully) generating a series of commonalities in its approach to the outside world which are distinct from (though not necessarily opposed to) the policies of the individual Member States. Naturally, the President of France will continue to believe (despite evidence to the contrary) that he (or she) alone has real influence in Lebanon and even Syria; the UK Prime Minister will see British influence in the Indian sub-continent as far more significant than any hypothetical collective EU influence; and Germany is beginning to learn that its market potential in the emerging powers is far greater than its current commercial interests in Europe (Guérot, 2010). However, EU commonalities do not evaporate before these assertions of national interest. In particular, a distinctive EU approach to international crisis management has picked up both steam and cohesion over the past 10 years. This also includes an increasingly common approach to armaments procurement and even to defense spending (Maulny and Liberti, 2008). It is these *commonalities* to which I refer when focusing on CSDP and when assessing supra-nationalism and inter-governmentalism.

How are decisions taken in CSDP? In the remarks that follow, the focus will be predominantly on security and defense policy. Formally, decisions are taken by 27 national Foreign Ministers sitting as the newly minted *Foreign Affairs Council* (FAC) or, in the case of certain high-profile issues, by the Heads of State and Government themselves, sitting as the *European Council*. In reality, those quintessentially political meetings are often largely formal occasions which dispatch a huge agenda in short order. In reality, policy options have largely been agreed in advance. Ministers and Heads of Government do not take kindly to complex issues being tabled for debate at summit meetings where everybody has their eye on the clock. The decisions are actually shaped and formulated by a host of working groups and committees in the Council Secretariat, the Commission and the national capitals. They are complemented by the expert technical advice formulated in the EUMC and CIVCOM. The recommendations of those bodies then go to the PSC and COREPER, which transform them into policy options to be, in the vast majority of cases, rubber-stamped by politicians. Only comparatively rarely do elected politicians actually arbitrate on important policy issues.

This article addresses, in a first part, the extent to which the general literature on CSDP agencies reaches clear conclusions on the issue of inter-governmentalism ‘versus’ supra-nationalism. In a second part, it focuses more narrowly on the available literature on the PSC, the key agency in CSDP. It then concludes by focusing on the issue of how most accurately and most appropriately to formulate the relationship between the two
main institutional dynamics at the heart of this article. The basic argument is that decisions in security and defense policy are very often shaped and even made by small groups of relatively well-socialized officials in the key committees acting in a mode which is as close to supranational as it is to inter-governmental. The paper is based on over 70 semi-structured interviews with all members of the Political and Security Committee and on a further 40 interviews with security and defense officials from the EU institutions and the Member States. The interviews, conducted throughout 2007, were accompanied by a detailed questionnaire filled out by the interviewees. The results of the questionnaire were subsequently correlated by the author.

What does the literature tell us about decision-shaping and decision-taking in CSDP?

One of the key criteria for judging the inner workings of EU agencies is the extent of socialization which takes place. Jeffrey Checkel (2007) has set down some basic prerequisites for socialization processes to work and has theorized the distinctions between three different types of process: ‘strategic calculation’ (intergovernmental logic), ‘role playing’ (mid-point) and ‘normative suasion’ (supranational logic). He suggests that, when actors move from conscious strategic calculation to conscious role-playing within an institutional setting, ‘Type I socialization’ has taken place. When they go beyond role-playing and accept the collective norms of the group as ‘the right thing to do,’ they have exhibited features of ‘Type II’ internalization. He also identifies two key ‘scope conditions’ under which individuals tend to accept socialization more readily and more speedily. First, when delegates are in settings where contact is long, sustained and intense; second, when they have significant prior experience in international bodies or settings. Other factors can include a common culture and esprit de corps; a common expertise; and the nature of the relationship between the agent and the national capital (Cross, 2010).

Let us begin with the meetings of the working groups in the Council Secretariat (CWGs). At any one time, several hundred such groups exist, for the most part bringing together representatives from all Member States – technically in inter-governmental mode. Several scholars have offered estimates of the number of decisions which are actually finalized at this level, Wessels (1991) putting the figure as high as 80%, and Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace (1995) at 70%. Research into the practices of these groups has been spear-headed by Jan Beyers and Guido Dierickx. In an initial study, these scholars asked whether group behavior in CWGs came ‘closest to a supra-national cooperation style or an inter-governmental negotiation style’ (Beyers and Dierickx, 1998: 293). They conclude by suggesting that ‘supranationality has developed further than most outsiders would have expected [and] could develop even further were the regime of qualified majority voting to be introduced in all the working groups.’ This has in fact happened under Lisbon, although not so much in the area of CSDP. Another early study by Anna Juncos and Karolina Pomorska (2006) focused on the extent to which members of the CWGs adopted codes of conduct such as reflex coordination or consensus-building practice. They saw compliance with such codes as betokening strategic calculation ‘based on legitimacy concerns and the long-term perspective of the
negotiation’ (Juncos and Pomorska, 2006: 1). Their findings were that no internalization of norms could, at that stage, be detected. However, they recognized that CWG members were capable of playing a role in persuading national capitals to be flexible, particularly through the manner in which instructions were formulated.

In a later study which focused on ‘multiple embeddedness’ (the extent to which officials remain conflicted as between their national identity and their European function), Beyers discovered that representatives of Member States face various ‘dilemmas regarding the interests they are supposed to represent’ and adopt role conceptions which correspond to Checkel’s category of Type I socialization (Beyers, 2007: 131). However, Beyers also concluded that ‘state representatives adopt supranational role conceptions as norms of appropriate behaviour,’ thereby confirming that ‘joint problem solving is an important feature of the processes in the CWGs’ (Beyers, 2007: 1). In short, it is clear that state representatives engage in decision-shaping behavior which goes far beyond the calculated ‘defense’ of member state interests. However, there appeared to be no correlation between the scope conditions normally associated with the emergence of Type II internalization (intensity, duration, and density of contact) and behavior which might be construed as supranational. This was also the finding of another, very recent study of decision-making in the Council (Warntjen, 2010) where elements of both consensus-seeking and bargaining were detected.

The somewhat inconclusive findings of these in-depth studies notwithstanding, there is no denying that officials in the Council Secretariat working groups do undergo a significant degree of socialization, leading to consensus-seeking behavior. An interview with a senior Council official confirms this, in particular with respect to CWGs in the area of CSDP: ‘the working groups in Brussels function extremely well. COWEB meets five times a week if necessary. They tackle something and they give an enormous finished product to PSC and Coreper.’ Moreover, the CWGs have learned increasingly successfully to work in tandem not just with their own fellow committee members, but also with their counterparts from the Commission: ‘The staff to staff contacts are so frequent that we don’t need special meetings. We are meeting every day anyway. Meetings are focused on a dossier rather than being general. This reflects – over the last few years – a big improvement in staff to staff contacts. This is due to demand but also because people have learned to work together’. This view was echoed by a member of COWEB: ‘The main WG in DGVI is COWEB. We have two formal meetings per week, Mondays and Thursdays. We also have pre-meetings. The respective desks will meet the Presidency in advance of the PSC meeting in order to discuss what exactly will be discussed, what the tactics should be, what is really the outcome that we seek from that particular meeting… In most cases we draft the outcome of proceedings even prior to the meeting in order to discuss it with the Presidency. We know what kind of conclusions we need to reach in order to make them operational for the PSC to take action.’

Taking one step up the hierarchical ladder, we can examine the work which has been done on the EUMC and CIVCOM, largely by Mai’a K. Davis Cross (Cross, 2010, 2011). This work has been based very largely on interviews and we must bear in mind the specific
peculiarities of this methodology (Campion et al., 1994). Cross’s analysis is influenced by sociological institutionalism and cautiously suggests that ‘the group dynamics, shared norms and evolving world-views within these committees at least in part contribute to whether consensus is possible and play a part in determining what that consensus will be’ (Cross, 2010: 9). Her conclusions with respect to the EUMC are unequivocal. This is a committee where the role of expertise, the impact of a pre-existing common recruitment pattern and common culture, the intensity and sustained periodicity of meetings (especially informal meetings), shared professional norms, and the ability to persuade capitals of the wisdom of EU consensus are exceptional. Citing evidence from the decision-shaping in the run-up to two important military missions (EUFOR Chad and NAVFOR Atlanta), she demonstrates how the esprit de corps of the military representatives in EUMC enables them ‘to find military solutions that contribute to overcoming political obstacles stemming from the capitals.’ Cross concludes that ‘since their primary goal is to execute successful ESDP operations, and provide for the common security of EU citizens, they realise that working together will be necessary for the EU to have efficient and effective planning and procurement, particularly in the light of declining populations and defence budgets’ (Cross, 2010: 23). In the longer study (Cross, 2011), she notes that:

Despite the fact that EU military power is still a relatively new aspect of EU security integration, the impact of the military epistemic community on the trajectory of security integration has been quite strong, and is likely to grow. The professional norms, culture, and worldview of the military epistemic community indicate that it is a highly cohesive transnational network of experts. In particular, their tactical expertise is for all intents and purposes the same, and this enables them to come to agreement very quickly.

(Cross, 2011: 257–258)

There is no doubt whatever that this key military committee’s inter-governmental structure in no way impedes its capacity to deliberate in effectively supra-national ways.

CIVCOM, the civilian equivalent of EUMC, offers a somewhat different picture. First, the members of this committee are drawn from a wide range of civilian and diplomatic backgrounds and lack the cohesive recruitment patterns and culture which characterize the military. Second, they meet more frequently in formal settings and less frequently in informal settings (where socialization theory argues that bonding works best; Lewis, 2010; Pueter, 2003). Third, by its very nature, the work of CIVCOM is relatively new and experimental, and little can be taken for granted about the outcome of committee discussions. However, Cross has demonstrated that CIVCOM representatives nevertheless succeed, just like their EUMC counterparts, in focusing on the achievement of consensus rather than on the defense of national red-lines. Cross even reports delegates ‘text messaging each other across the table to informally resolve conflicts before they are formally aired in the negotiation room’ (Cross, 2010: 30). They have all developed appropriate strategies for handling their respective national capitals, which, in any case, given the relative newness of this policy field, tend to have fewer red-lines than in other more sensitive or complex areas of negotiation. Cross details various ways in which the committee as a group navigated around the complexities of the EULEX mission in Kosovo, which was
rendered especially sensitive given the deep divisions within national capitals over the issue of recognition of Kosovo. Her conclusions are that there is ‘a common expectation that some type of consensus should be found by the end of the proceedings’ and that they ‘are driven to leave the meeting room with a completed paper in hand’ (Cross, 2010: 32). The bottom line is that ‘their advice is rarely rejected by the PSC, and in that sense they are able to carve out compromise solutions against the backdrop of competing interests’ (Cross, 2010: 35). Here again, the distinction between inter-governmental negotiating and supra-national consensus-building becomes very blurred. Cross’s work embraces a constructivist approach, while nevertheless being deeply influenced by other theoretical schools. Although it may not persuade hard-line realists, convinced that these highly socialized committees remain the faithful instruments of their statist masters, it must be respected as the rigorous result of empirical investigation. To date, Cross is the only scholar to have examined the workings of the EUMC and CIVCOM, and her findings do square with those of many other scholars working in the same broad area. Unless contradictory findings are later presented by scholars coming from a different theoretical perspective, her conclusions will stand.

Rather different conclusions, however, have been reached by scholars working on the European Defence Agency. In a pioneering early study, Martin Trybus (2006) contrasted the supra-national aspirations of the European Defence Community’s 1950s approach to weapons procurement with the determinedly inter-governmental approaches adopted ever since – including in the case of the EDA. Noting that defense procurement is recognized by Member States as a policy area where European cooperation is essential if the EU is to avoid sub-contractor status to the US industry, he concludes that the resolutely inter-governmental terms of reference of the EDA are likely to clash fairly constantly with the requirements of procurement rationalization. ‘For many of the policy fields the new agency is intended to cover, Community law offers an alternative model with clear advantages over the current inter-governmental approach’ (Trybus, 2006: 697). Trybus argues that the Agency ‘represents a paradox’ (Trybus, 2006: 701) in that its explicit objective is to make Community progress, but its method bespeaks stagnation. Trybus’s bottom line is that, if the Member States see the EDA as a way of ring-fencing inter-governmentalism, then they are really wasting their time in creating the agency in the first place.

In a more recent assessment of the ‘clash of institutional logics’ (Bátora, 2009: 1075) involved in the EDA’s existence and work, Jozef Bátora seeks clues to how the Agency will impact on the eventual political direction taken by CSDP. Echoing Trybus’s frustrations with the logical contradictions between the determinedly inter-governmental structures of the EDA and its cooperative and even integrationist ambitions, Bátora detects three additional clashes of institutional or functional logic within the EDA. First, he detects clear evidence that the EDA has been making significant efforts to transcend the logic of defense sovereignty by introducing a raft of procedures and rules into the Code of Conduct on Defence Procurement which will, in effect, facilitate cooperation and even integration in the procurement process. Second, concerning the appropriateness of partners, the Agency has found itself unable to resolve the tensions between the Europeanist and the Euro-Atlanticist proclivities of its Member States, the more so in that these are in
a state of constant flux within the Member States depending on the electoral fortunes of political parties with contrasting approaches to this dichotomy. Third, concerning liberalization versus European preference, the EDA has denounced the maintenance of national tendering for national contracts has been roundly as ‘no longer economically sustainable […] and operationally unacceptable’ (EDA, 2007: 1). However, the logic of liberalization runs up immediately against the logic of European preference, and here the EDA has hitherto been unable to resolve the contradiction.

Bátora’s conclusions remain tentative, but they also suggest that the resolution of these conflicting logics will lead either to the disbandment of the EDA or to the triumph of integrationist dynamics. In other words, the inter-governmental approach is something of a non-starter. He concludes that:

the rules and norms set up by the EDA in its effort to bring about greater coordination and cohesion in the field of defence provide a framework for trans-governmental regulation and socialisation among participating member states and thereby possibly a transcendence of the inter-governmental nature of second pillar agencification.

(Bátora, 2009: 1092–1094, emphasis mine)

These developments suggest at the very least a recognition that the sovereignty of the nation state, even in this last bastion of sovereignty (defense procurement) is reaching its sell-by-date. These tentative conclusions are confirmed in discussions and correspondence between this author and Nick Witney, the first CEO of the Agency. Witney notes that the ‘agency itself is/was definitely supranational in spirit, i.e. its staff were genuinely committed to the common cause and ready to resist attempts by national capitals to use them as inside agents.’ However, he bitterly went on to note that a key issue was:

whether whatever was under discussion risked resulting in action or incurring cost, or was just hot air. In the latter case – e.g. agreeing strategies – then pretty much all member states […] cooperated dutifully to find the middle ground, the European answer. But were there a risk of anybody being required to do anything, or pay for anything, then national interest was unashamedly to the fore.

These comments concur with the findings of the academics cited above. Witney has himself proposed a number of essential steps to be taken by defense ministers in order to capitalise on the entire investment in the EDA (Witney, 2008: 32–35). A new book (De Neve, 2010) examines what it considers to be the remarkable successes of the EDA in pushing forward defense industrial integration in the context of such inter-governmental ring-fencing. A similar conclusion is reached by Kaija Schilde in a 2010 PhD dissertation. She notes that the EDA has been reasonably successful at breaking out of the inter-governmental strait-jacket imposed upon it by Member States, especially as a result of the direct input of industry and the common mindset linking industrial lobbyists to the EDA officials (Schilde, 2010: 324).

Formally, at the apex of the CFSP/CSDP decision-making agencies lies COREPER, although its influence in the security and defense field has waned since the introduction of the new institutions of the 2000s (see below). This body has been subjected to intensive analysis. In 1958, when the Committee was created, the permanent representative of each Member State was described as ‘the servant, the eye and the ear of his government’
(cited in Noël, 1967: 223). However, less than 10 years later, the Committee was already being attacked as a ‘third executive,’ which had risen to challenge the decision-making powers of both the Council and the Commission. While such a charge was roundly dismissed by an analyst as sophisticated as Emile Noël, he did nevertheless recognize that the Permanent Representatives and their Committee ‘have always been in the front rank of the defenders, not only of the Community’s existence, but of its principles, its rules and its Institutions’ (Noël, 1967: 249–251). Fiona Hayes-Renshaw (1990: 179–180), in the first substantial evaluation of the committee, noted that its members shared a ‘sense of belonging to a club whose rites seem to verge on the masochistic spending entire days and often evenings together in noisy, smoke-filled rooms doing battle over words.’

David Bostock, from the European Court of Auditors and himself a former deputy Permanent Representative, published a 2002 article in which he assessed COREPER’s role in the growing realm of co-decision (essentially with the European Parliament). He also attempted to tease out the circumstances under which the committee makes a significant contribution to decision-taking. On co-decision, he outlines a growing tendency for COREPER to establish a ‘reasonably harmonious and cooperative relationship with the European Parliament’ (Bostock, 2002: 220) and cites Michael Shackleton’s comments on the growth of a ‘shared culture’ between the two sides, particularly in the Conciliation Committee. He recognizes that the extent to which COREPER is increasingly responsible for taking decisions across a range of policy areas, and in particular for negotiating compromises with MEPs, ‘is a far cry from the classic image of the relationship between the Council of Ministers and the Permanent Representatives, in which it was the former who were explicitly to decide on policy. Co-decision, he concludes, is not only a ‘good example of successful inter-institutional cooperation’ but also a ‘good illustration of evolutionary institutional development’ (Bostock, 2002: 220–221). However, Bostock warns against a tendency to exaggerate the decision-shaping importance of COREPER. Concluding that the committee has significant influence over ‘issues which are both politically sensitive and technically complex,’ he notes at the same time that, since Maastricht, ‘the four most frequently meeting formations of the Council [now] have their own senior committees’ (EMU, CFSP/CSDP, JHA, and agriculture).

The most sustained in-depth analysis of the workings of COREPER has been produced by Jeffrey Lewis in a succession of publications over a 10-year period. In a 2007 study, he encapsulated the essence of this work by examining how permanent representatives succeed in combining their functions as inter-governmental bargainers and as a socialized consensus-forming entity (Lewis, 2007: 138). What is notable about the work of Lewis is that he goes to extraordinary lengths not to overstate the extent to which cohesiveness and group dynamics among Permanent Representatives constitute a clash between the two institutional functions they perform. He offers a variety of alternative explanations for socialization which might be seen as compatible with the normal workings of diplomacy. The article studies two key aspects of COREPER’s institutional functioning: first, the scope conditions for socialization of permanent representatives, including ‘high issue density/intensity and insulation from domestic politics,’ as well as the shift from strategic calculation, through role-playing, to normative persuasion (following Checkel’s criteria); second, a case study of COREPER in action, examining the passage of the 1994 Local Elections Directive which allowed EU citizens to vote in local elections in a third EU Member State where they are resident.
His conclusions fully support the contention that it is increasingly meaningless to draw rigid distinctions between ‘national’ and ‘supra-national’ agency. COREPER permanent representatives ‘nicely illustrate how the logics of consequences and appropriateness can interface, which in turn suggests that national and supra-national identifications can become complexly intertwined’ (Lewis, 2007: 165). Indeed his evidence suggests that ‘what one sees in COREPER is a cognitive blurring of the sharp definitional boundaries between the national and the European,’ not in the sense that the former is being overridden by the latter but in the sense that, increasingly, at least among permanent representatives, the two become merged. Although Lewis found ‘hard evidence’ of Type II internalization, particularly in the way in which certain representatives ‘went out on a limb’ to convince their capitals of the merits of a certain group consensus, he nevertheless rejects any notion that socialization within COREPER is in some way hard-wired into the committee itself or inevitable. Nevertheless, the situation revealed by this in-depth research, involving interviews with some 118 members of the permanent representations, is one in which it is impossible to deny that COREPER functions as a powerful epistemic community which increasingly forges common European positions across a wide range of issues.

Lewis’s analysis is shared by Mai’a K. Davis Cross, the most recent academic scholar of COREPER who has also conducted extensive interviews among permanent representatives and their deputies (Cross, 2007, 2011). Cross has specifically focused on the role of Permanent Representatives in driving forward internal security policy (their purview over external security policy having been assumed by the PSC after 2001). She argues that COREPER constitutes ‘a relatively strong transnational network that is expertise-driven and held together by strong professional norms. Together, these diplomats are a major force in shaping internal security integration’ (Cross, 2011: 77). There are, according to Cross, four key factors which bind this group of ambassadors into a tight epistemic community. First, in terms of professional selection and training, they derive from very similar backgrounds in a context where European diplomats are almost always career professionals rather than political appointees, and they are experts in the art of negotiation and consensus-building. Second, in terms of the intensity of their informal meetings and shared norms, they develop and epitomize a collective mindset. They do everything possible to avoid having to send a problem up to the Council of Ministers by, *inter alia*, becoming involved in the policy-making process some way downstream in order ‘to ensure that their preferences are incorporated into any new document before it is even circulated’ (Cross, 2011: 94). They also demonstrate a commitment to one another which seeks to avoid any one of their group losing out and they will go to extraordinary lengths to generate a unanimously acceptable consensus. Third, they show abundant evidence of forging a shared culture which emphasizes individual equality irrespective of the size of the different Member States. Finally, the capacity of COREPER members to exercise decisive influence over their national capitals is considerable. Cross concludes that ‘ambassadors find themselves negotiating with their capitals just as much as they deliberate among themselves’ (Cross, 2011: 106). They enjoy a high degree of flexibility where interpretation of their instructions is concerned and really have difficulty in persuading their political directors of the wisdom of a collective view only in situations of coalition government, of weak parliamentary majority
government or of a switch of electoral fortunes. She concludes that ‘COREPER has transcended its formal duty of preparing the work of the Council, to in many ways taking over the Council’s role as a key knowledge-based network’ (Cross, 2011: 121, emphasis mine).

This is a remarkable claim, the more so in that the policy area under investigation (JHA, where resistance to European alignment is exceptionally strong; Monar, 2010) is a ‘hard test’ (Cross, 2011: 109) for COREPER. However, Cross substantiates her claim with a revealing case study in which she compares the various drafts of a major text before and after the revisions introduced by COREPER. The case examined was the 2005 Strategy on Radicalisation and Recruitment defining the terrorist threats to the EU. The final draft of the strategy, it transpires, was virtually identical to the version incorporating the committee’s revisions – in other words, the ‘revisions were accepted in toto’ (Cross, 2011: 110). COREPER was responsible for three substantive changes in the very philosophy behind the measure: (1) that the EU needed a comprehensive rather than a piecemeal approach, including a clear strategy for integrating Muslims into European societies; (2) that it needed to elevate the perception of the threat and bring the public’s attention to the many different sources of radicalization; and (3) that it needed to legitimize the action taken by the EU as a whole rather than leave counter-terrorism to national agencies. All three of these approaches enhanced the Europeanization of the Strategy itself. Cross comes closest of all the analysts of COREPER to arguing that it has shed its formally inter-governmental skin to approximate the role of a supra-national organism.

Since 2001, most of the policy-shaping and policy-making in CFSP, and particularly in CSDP, has gravitated away from COREPER and towards the Political and Security Committee. The work of this committee will now be considered in the second section of this article.

**The role of the PSC in CSDP policy-shaping**

Current work on the Political and Security Committee produces consistent conclusions about the extent to which it is possible to see this key committee as an example of a strong consensus-seeking epistemic community. Most scholars agree that it fits into the pattern already observed in the first section of this article (Duke, 2005; Howorth, 2010; Juncos and Reynolds, 2007; Meyer, 2006). Paradoxically, Cross, whose work on various other groups of CFSP and CSDP decision-shapers detects, as we have seen, strong patterns of socialization and group dynamics, demurs somewhat in the particular case of the PSC (Cross, 2011).

The first substantial analysis was carried out by Simon Duke in 2005, in the very early stages of the PSC’s existence. He situated the committee in its historical context (as the logical successor to the Political Committee) and provided an initial analysis of its modus operandi. Noting that PSC was already considered to be the ‘linchpin’ of the entire institutional and political mechanisms behind CFSP and CSDP, he stressed its growing significance in the field of crisis management missions and hypothesized that its very existence would generate tensions both with COREPER and with the national capitals. However, he concluded, insightfully, that ‘the need for consensus will tend to reflect whatever constraints exist’ (Duke, 2005: 30).
Christoph Meyer produced the first scholarly analysis of the workings of the Committee (Meyer, 2006: ch. 5). His research set out to establish to what extent the working of the PSC had ‘set in motion dynamics of social influence that c[ould] mould a group of national officials into a socially cohesive policy community with shared objectives and increasingly shared attitudes concerning the use of force’ (Meyer, 2006: 112). His conclusions were based on considerations of group characteristics, discursive dynamics, and the capacity to persuade. Meyer considered that the PSC constitutes ‘an unusually cohesive committee with a club atmosphere, high levels of personal trust and a shared “esprit de corps” driven by a common commitment to pioneer cooperation in a new, labour-intensive and particularly sensitive policy-field’ (Meyer, 2006: 124). He detected a consensus-seeking discursive approach which results in even envoys from major countries shifting their initial stance in the greater cause of forging an EU policy. Thus, the language and codes through which the meetings are conducted were rapidly established in a form which actively promotes group cohesion. Meyer’s overall conclusion was tentative but unequivocal. The PSC, Meyer claims:

has developed into a multiplier of social influence, both through informational influence as well as peer pressure. It has managed to manufacture consent and broker compromises even in areas where national strategic norms would initially indicate incompatibility. [It] remains one of the most important ideational transmission belts of a gradual Europeanisation of national foreign, security and defence policies.

(Meyer, 2006: 136–137)

The first systematic attempt to evaluate the influence of the PSC was conducted by Ana Juncos and Christopher Reynolds (2007). They sought to assess the committee with reference to the methodological and theoretical debates between rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Schmidt, 2010). After a thorough presentation of the origins and logic behind the existence of the committee, they present their conclusions based on some 20 interviews with a variety of actors in Brussels (including some PSC ambassadors and their deputies) and in the national capitals. Recognizing that rational approaches fail to grasp the significance of the permanence of the PSC in Brussels, they state that their interviews suggest that national representatives are expressly not in Brussels simply to represent and bargain over rigid, predefined national positions. Rather, they adopt a problem-solving approach […] and are there to sound out other national positions, gain information and find out what is and is not possible.

(Juncos and Reynolds, 2007: 129)

Taking issue with a rationalist or even a liberal inter-governmentalist perspective on EU decision-making processes, Juncos and Reynolds note that PSC ambassadors have considerable margin of maneuver in decision-shaping and conclude that ‘interaction [in PSC] can and frequently does impact upon the definition of preferences.’ Furthermore:
we cannot understand the definition of national interest in the field of foreign and security policy among EU Member States without reference to institutional environments in Brussels and the interaction that takes place within them. From such a perspective, the national interest is not defined in an isolated manner in a national capital and brought to Brussels to be bargained over, as inter-governmentalist approaches suggest. Instead, it is constructed in an institutional context/space in which the national cannot be easily separated from the international, nor the self from the other.

(Juncos and Reynolds, 2007: 139)

The Juncos and Reynolds analysis removes any residual doubt that might have existed in the literature. The committee, they conclude 'remains a forum where informal norms and rules play an important role and in which routine interaction can make a difference, both to the representatives themselves and to the actual substance of national foreign and security policies' (Juncos and Reynolds, 2007: 146, emphasis mine). Once again, we see the cognitive and political distinction between inter-governmentalism and supranationalism fading into meaninglessness.

My own work on the PSC (Howorth, 2010) is entirely consistent with that of Juncos and Reynolds. It is based on substantive interviews with all 28 full ambassadors to the committee, plus several of their deputies, as well as with some 40 additional decision-shapers in CSDP from the General Secretariat of the Council, the European Commission, and national officials in MFAs and MODs from five large countries. The interviews were conducted from January to September 2007. They were reinforced by a structured questionnaire which all interviewees were invited to fill out. The data contained in these questionnaires offers hard evidence of the profile of PSC ambassadors as well as of their approach to their function and to CSDP policy issues and indeed, to some extent, of their own political preferences.

The profile of PSC ambassadors reveals an extraordinarily homogeneous background, all having a first degree in (overwhelmingly) Political Science, History or Law, the majority also having completed a Master’s degree in these subjects and two having a doctorate. All are totally fluent in English and French and the average number of languages spoken is 3.7. In terms of identity, 53% declared that they feel ‘very attached’ to the EU and the remaining 47% ‘fairly attached.’ They believe that CSDP is important in the construction of a European identity, which 80% believed to be necessary, 86.6% to be desirable, and a surprising 86.6% also to be likely. Although all 27 Member State ambassadors saw their function on the PSC as that of representing their home country, there was unanimity in feeling that there is no incompatibility between national interests and European interests. When asked about their role as members of PSC, a large majority saw it as being to devise ‘feasible solutions,’ while only 12% felt they were supporting ‘specific interests.’ As far as the working style of PSC was concerned, 63% defined it as ‘cooperative and consensus-seeking’ while 37% felt they were engaged in ‘rational bargaining.’

My interviews with the members of the PSC reveal a unanimous sense that, above all, the Committee seeks to achieve consensus. Ambassadors were asked to think of an example of an initiative taken by PSC which had been illustrative of the search for this consensus, if possible showing how an initial tour de table had revealed a wide diversity of national viewpoints, whereas further discussion, and several iterations between
Brussels and the national capitals, had succeeded in narrowing the gaps or even in achieving unanimity. The answers varied widely, but that very variety illustrated the point. Between them, they cited missions as diverse as the Aceh monitoring mission, the EUFOR-Congo military mission, the Ukraine–Moldova border mission, the rule of law mission in Iraq, the Afghanistan police mission, and one or two others. Cases where consensus proved impossible (the hypothetical third intervention in Congo in 2008) or very difficult (the mission in Chad/Central African Republic in 2007) are much rarer. The reality is that, in most cases, the starting positions of EU Member States are at variance but the process involved in decision-making through the PSC most often ends up with a broad consensus or even unanimity.

The degree of socialization which obtains within the committee is a major factor in generating compromise. The members know one another extremely well. Their average tenure is around three years. The key element is a deeply rooted sense of *mutual trust*, which is a key value in international relations theory (Kydd, 2005):

> I think we all have a trust in each other that whatever compromise is possible we will find it. [...] And so, even if you have instructions where you have to cross your own red lines, you can then get back to capitals. It is really true that there is a trust among colleagues that they try to find wherever a common basis is possible. It would be a different thing altogether if you always met 26 different colleagues. You simply would not have that crucial element of personal trust that everybody is doing their utmost, whatever is possible to find the best compromise. That is the main element which helps.

Several ambassadors noted that it is often sufficient for one of the group to be replaced by his or her deputy for the trust-based group dynamics to break down and for consensus to be more difficult to achieve.

In many instances, the majority of Member States are unlikely to have a very strongly held national position on a given proposal (say, to mount an ESDP mission in Indonesia or in Congo). In that case, they see it as their function to assist those who do have strongly held positions to reconcile their differences. Here we encounter very strong evidence of the switch from strategic calculation to role-playing which Checkel sees as fundamental to Type I socialization. For those states that do have strongly held positions, the object of the PSC exercise is to try, through an astute mix of personal persuasion, subtle ‘pitch’ and reasonable argument, to find a way of persuading those holding a different line to shift their position. When the proceedings reach an impasse because an ambassador has received strict instructions from his or her MFA Political Director to defend a given red-line, then a telephone conversation to the national capital can often be sufficient to get the discussion moving forward again. However, the quality of the arguments deployed is also crucial:

> There is something which struck me when I first came and it was rather unexpected. You have to defend your case *very well*. The argument counts. The rational discourse is very important, because there is a clear dynamic. If you just have a certain position and you say “Ah, but my minister wants this, and that is that [...]”, that, obviously, is not convincing. So you have to *prepare your case* and you have to *present it well* and then sometimes a certain dynamic comes
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into play. Because countries come in which don’t necessarily have any interest in the case, and say: ‘Yes, this seems a very good argument, a sensible line to follow’ and then you see that a general mood arises. And then it is very difficult if you are against it. If a wave of consensus starts and you are the only obstacle, then you have to have exceptionally good arguments to turn the tide. Sometimes, colleagues have to say: ‘Yes I understand everybody else, and I would love to agree but I simply have to call home.’ Then everybody will agree to let him/her call home. Very, very often, I would say, it is also the case that the colleague will come back and say: ‘Yes, OK we agree!’ Because if there is a very strong sense of consensus, if common sense suggests that such and such is a good compromise, so let’s go for that, unless it is some absolutely essential policy point for a minister, then colleagues can and do convince their capitals. So argument counts and you can create a certain wave where opinions go.

Here we see the crucial importance of the normative suasion which Checkel identifies as the first sign of a shift towards Type II internalization.

That national capitals are prepared to compromise in this way is so for several reasons. These reasons give us insight into the scope conditions which allow socialization in this particular committee to take place. First, although Member States retain their longstanding autonomy in national foreign policy-making, they all know that they have a strong vested interest in making CFSP and CSDP work. In these policy areas above all, there is recognition that, most often, the whole will prove to be greater than the sum of the parts. Second, there is a strong collective desire to achieve results. For this reason, it is rare for a proposal to come up to the PSC which is clearly going to run up against some strongly entrenched national interest on the part of one or more Member States. What the PSC is in effect doing is acting as a kind of script-writer for the CSDP narrative. Debates thus tend to turn around proposals that have a realistic chance of success.

Thus, while the ambassadors are involved in a constant European learning process through daily interaction with their peers, they also perform a second suasion or didactic function with respect to their national capitals, communicating the sense of collective European opinion in the PSC and suggesting ways in which national positions can be modified in order to achieve collective results. Of course, the issues which the PSC deals with are selected by ministers in the national capitals and to that extent PSC ambassadors are constrained in terms of their agenda. However, timing is also important. The fact that the PSC is, in some ways, ahead of the game, allows the ambassadors to avoid their minister being caught off guard by a tricky question from a journalist:

We can streamline things at an early stage. Because once you have 10 foreign ministers and three have publicly said we would like A and three have gone for B and three are backing C and one has said D, then to bring them back to a common position is very difficult. So early warning is very important – early signaling. They had better not take too early a public position. To be able to inform the capital that the mood seems to be behind B, that helps.

In this way, although the PSC ambassadors remain under the hierarchical control of their respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs, their capacity to influence thinking and opinion both at home and in Brussels is considerable. A number of them explicitly made the point that they see themselves rather as ‘two-way ambassadors,’ facilitating
consensus-seeking in both directions. They are involved in a constant, albeit inchoate, process of generating a specifically European strategic culture which amounts to much more than the lowest common denominator of the EU’s Member States. To the extent to which the definition of a ‘new EU way of doing international relations’ is being forged, to the extent to which there exists an agency of CSDP leadership, it is primarily within the PSC that this gestation can be perceived.

If there is one somewhat dissenting voice about the PSC, it is (rather surprisingly) that of Mai’a Cross. While she agrees in her substantial chapter on the committee (Cross, 2011: ch. 4) that the PSC does constitute an epistemic community, while she recognizes that it ‘goes some distance toward fostering cooperation among member states,’ and while she sees it as ‘potentially enormously powerful,’ (Cross, 2011: 142) her own interviews and empirical work suggest that this potential is, to date, far from being fully realized. She regrets the fact that PSC has become bogged down in the minutiae of crisis-management and is hamstrung by much stronger red-lines emanating from the capitals. Cross’s verdict may have been to some degree influenced by the comparisons (which, to date, only she is capable of making) with the other Brussels-based agencies she has studied in depth; particularly Coreper.

In sum, one can only conclude that, whatever its current limitations as a charioteer of CSDP integration, the PSC nevertheless conforms to the pattern we have established through this survey of the entire range of decision-shaping and decision-making agencies in Brussels. Formally an inter-governmental institution, PSC acts increasingly regularly like a supranational agent.

Conclusions

In a recent article on the significance of institutional environments for decision-making in the EU, Jeffrey Lewis concludes that:

variables that impact whether more competitive or more cooperative styles adhere include: insulation; issue scope; interaction intensity; and informal norms. Higher levels of [these variables] deepen the mutual trust and introspection that engenders more cooperative styles of negotiation to take hold and become routinized.

(Lewis, 2010: 658)

Most of the institutional agencies studied in this article correspond relatively closely to the ‘higher levels’ of scope conditions which he outlines. EU foreign and security policy is a recent policy area which has to coexist with residual ‘heroic’ stances taken on a number of key international issues by a handful of European national capitals (e.g., the Iraq crisis of 2003). However, what we have seen over the past 10 years is a Union attempting to write a new security script essentially geared to international crisis management which is challenged only around the margins, by the larger Member States. That script features both a military and a civilian component but is increasingly self-defining as the interface between and the synergies between the military and civilian components.
The vast majority of the ‘spade work’ in this policy area is carried out by the many working groups, committees, and agencies studied in this paper. All of them, without exception, are formally ‘inter-governmental’ agencies composed of one or more representatives per Member State. A rationalist or liberal inter-governmentalist approach to such policy-shaping and policy-making would insist that these representatives are essentially in the business of bargaining around hard and fast national interests or ‘red-lines’ and that the outcome will be a reflection of that bargaining. Much of the recent sociological institutionalist literature has challenged that approach and argued that various forms of socialization and inter-subjectivity within the insulated institutional settings typical of the agencies involved in CSDP decision-shaping allows for a different form of political process which equates more closely to what Checkel has called Type I socialization or Type II internalization. Much of the literature reviewed in this paper suggests that, with varying degrees of intensity, the latter interpretation is much closer to the truth than the former.

A tentative overall conclusion might be the following. While there is no doubt that, within these different bodies, at different moments in time and on different policy dossiers, there is variation in the extent to which the representatives are able to transcend a purely bargaining mode and move towards role playing or normative suasion, there is little or no doubt that such tendencies exist in all of them. In particular in the field of CSDP – which is a work in progress – there is a marked trend towards consensus-seeking which goes far beyond what one might normally expect of diplomatic practice and which comes close on many occasions to policy-making. Under these circumstances, to continue to draw distinctions between inter-governmental procedures and supra-national practices is, at the very least, unhelpful to our understanding of what is actually happening. Even in a body as robustly ring-fenced by inter-governmental constraints as the EDA, the direction – largely driven by the imperative of security cooperation in a rapidly changing world – is clearly towards ever greater cooperation and even integration. Under these circumstances, one might even be tempted to conclude that the present author was too hasty, 10 years ago, in speaking of ‘supra-national inter-governmentalism.’ The emerging pattern begins to look more like inter-governmental supra-nationalism.

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Notes
1. Committee on the Western Balkans.
2. Author interview with Cesira D’Aniello, 14 August 2007.
3. Author interview with Rasa Ostrauskaite, 14 August 2007.
4. Note that in American English ‘quite’ normally denotes ‘very.’
5. The classic reference on this debate has long been the Hall and Taylor article. However, Vivien Schmidt’s more recent piece massively updates the discussion and introduces a new perspective which has special relevance in the context of the deliberations of the PSC: discursive institutionalism. This approach focuses on the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes of discourse in institutional settings.
6. It is noteworthy that, in terms of attachment to their home country, only 64% said ‘very attached,’ while as many as 36% only recorded ‘fairly attached.’
7. Of course, the example of the Libyan crisis in 2011 does tend to call some of these conclusions into question (Howorth 2012a, 2012b).

References


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