
Explaining the Pattern of CSDP-Operations: Towards a Theoretical Synthesis

Tim Haesebrouck¹

Abstract: *The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has mainly been used to deploy small-scale operations, which generally did not provide the member states with clear security benefits. This article combines insights from different theories of international relations to explain this disappointing track record. It argues that liberal theories adequately identify the domestic pressures the member states' governments need to accommodate in the area of crisis management. Constructivism, on its part, properly emphasises the diverging strategic cultures of the member states. Both theories however fail to explain why domestic pressures and diverging strategic cultures lead to small-scale operations. Rational-choice institutionalism does provide a convincing explanation for the latter by drawing attention to the CSDP's ineffective institutional design. Realism, in turn, is best positioned to explain why the CSDP was not designed more effectively, by emphasising the reluctance of states to transfer sovereignty to international organisations. The article concludes by discussing two measures that could alleviate the impact of the identified impediments on the CSDP's track record: devising a CSDP-strategy and adapting the consensus rule. However, since the latter is very unlikely in the near future, the CSDP is not expected to develop into a more effective framework for crisis management.*

Keywords: *Common Security and Defence Policy, liberal theories, constructivism, rational-choice institutionalism, institutional design, realism, sovereignty*

Introduction

Over fifteen years after France and the United Kingdom agreed in Saint-Malo that “the [European] Union must have a capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so”, Europeans seem to be “sorely disappointed” with the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).² One of the main reasons for this disappointment is the pattern of operations deployed under the aegis of the policy. Although an impressive number of CSDP-operations has been launched, these were generally of a relatively small scale and rather unambitious. Moreover,

¹ **Tim Haesebrouck**, MA in EU-studies (Ghent University 2010), is a PhD researcher at Ghent University, Belgium. His research interests include the Responsibility to Protect, military intervention and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. He has previously published articles in *International Politics*, *European Foreign Affairs Review* and *Internationale Spectator*. E-mail: Tim.Haesebrouck@UGent.be.

² Daniel Fiott, ‘The CSDP Is Dead, Long Live the CSDP?’, *European Geostrategy*, 2014 at 1, Maartje Rutten, ‘From Saint-Malo to Nice’, *European defence: Core documents, Chaillot Paper*, 4 (2001) at 22.

critical evaluations consistently conclude that these operations barely made “a dent in serious defence issues” and question whether any of them had a long-term impact on the ground.³ On top of that, the CSDP remained strikingly inert when confronted with crises in which the EU had a significant stake, like Gadhafi’s atrocious repression of the Libyan uprising or the 2012 Tuareg rebellion in Mali.⁴ How can this pattern of operations be explained? Why have an impressive number of small-scale operations that did not provide the member states with clear security benefits been launched under the aegis of the CSDP, while the policy remained oddly inert when confronted with crises in which the member states did have a significant stake? The answer to this question essentially determines the response to what is perhaps the most fundamental question: can the CSDP evolve into a more effective framework for crisis management or are the impediments that hampered its development so fundamental that there can be little hope of overcoming them?

A large number of policy-oriented works have been written on the practical obstacles that hampered the CSDP’s development, drawing attention to the absence of operational headquarters, the lack of adequate military capabilities, and the failure to identify clear strategic objectives for the policy.⁵ In line with the general trend in scholarship on the CSDP, there are however no theory-informed studies on the subject.⁶ This is unfortunate, since theoretical approaches drawn from the wider study of international relations can provide valuable insights on the limits and possibilities of the CSDP. In this article, I aim to fill this gap in the scholarly literature by drawing on theories of international relations to explain the pattern of CSDP-operations and determine the obstacles that hampered the CSDP’s development. Because no single theory can be expected to explain the complex dynamics behind CSDP operations, I draw on insights from liberal, constructivist, institutionalist and realist theories of international relations.⁷ Subsequently, I suggest two measures that could alleviate the identified impediments and allow the CSDP to evolve into a more effective framework for crisis management: devising a strategy for the CSDP and amending its institutional design.

The article proceeds as follows. In the first section, I describe the pattern of CSDP operations. In the second section, I draw on theories of international relations to explain this pattern. In the third section, two feasible initiatives to increase the CSDP’s effectiveness are discussed, after which I recapitulate the article’s major findings in the conclusions.

³ See inter alia: Fiott, ‘The CSDP Is Dead, Long Live the CSDP?’, Muriel Asseburg and Ronja Kempin, *ESDP in Practice: Crisis Management without Strategic Planning*, *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 15/1-2 (2011), 178-99, Bastian Giegerich, ‘European Military Crisis Management’, *Studia Diplomatica*, 62/3 (2009), 37-42, Daniel Keohane, ‘Lessons from EU Peace Operations’, *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 15/1-2 (2011), 200-17.

⁴ Rik Coolsaet, Sven Biscop, and Jo Coelmont, ‘Mali: Another European Intervention without the EU?’, *Egmont Security Policy Brief*, 42 (2013), Nicole Koenig, ‘The EU and the Libyan Crisis – In Quest of Coherence?’, *The International Spectator*, 46/4 (2011), 11-30.

⁵ Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont, *Europe, Strategy and Armed Forces: The Making of a Distinctive Power* (Routledge, 2013). Nik Hynek, ‘EU Crisis Management after the Lisbon Treaty: Civil–Military Coordination and the Future of the EU OHQ’, *European Security*, 20/1 (2011), 81-102, Luis Simón, *Command and Control? Planning for EU Military Operations* (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2010). Bastian Giegerich and Alexander Nicoll, ‘The Struggle for Value in European Defence’, *Survival*, 54/1, 53-82.

⁶ Chris J. Bickerton, Bastien Irondelle, and Anand Menon, ‘Security Co-Operation Beyond the Nation-State: The EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy’, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49/1 (2011), 1-21 at 2.

⁷ Roy H. Ginsberg and Susan E. Penksa, *The European Union in Global Security: The Politics of Impact* (Basingstokes: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) at 3.

The disappointing pattern of CSDP operations

Ever since its very beginnings in 1998, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy has been focusing on crisis management.⁸ In their joint declaration in St-Malo, the Heads of State and Government of France and the United Kingdom explicitly agreed that the EU needed a military capacity to "respond to international crises."⁹ The conclusions of the 1999 Cologne European Council further specified that the EU wanted to develop an autonomous capacity for performing the "Petersberg tasks", which include "humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking."¹⁰ The type of operations the EU aimed to conduct was further expanded during the 2000 Feira Council, where the member states agreed to develop capabilities for conducting civilian operations in the areas of the rule of law, civilian administration, civil protection and policing.¹¹ In 2003, the European Security Strategy added disarmament operations, missions to combat terrorism and security sector reform to the CSDP's task list.

Arguably, the most impressive aspect of the CSDP's short history is the sheer number of times it actually served as a framework for crisis management operations. At the time of writing in January 2015, no fewer than 32 missions have been launched under the CSDP-framework. However, when looking at the scale and ambition of these operations, the level of activity is far less impressive. The bulk of the CSDP's operational activity consists of small-scale and/or civilian operations.¹² In consequence, the around 6,000 troops that were averagely deployed under the CSDP-framework between 2003 and 2012 only constitute a small share of the 53,000 European troops active in crisis management operations during the same period.¹³ Furthermore, CSDP operations were generally rather risk averse and not very ambitious. Most missions did not involve the deployment of coercive force or were deployed for a very limited period of time.¹⁴ Moreover, although operations generally achieved the goals of their limited mandates, analysts consistently question their long-term impact on the area of operations as well as whether they provided the member states with strong security benefits.¹⁵ On top of that, no operations were deployed through the CSDP in response to crises that did pose a clear threat to European interests, like when the stability of Europe's immediate neighbourhood was threatened by the Tuareg rebellion in Mali or Gaddafi's atrocious repression of Libya's popular uprising.

⁸ Luis Simón, 'CSDP, Strategy and Crisis Management: Out of Area or out of Business?', *The International Spectator*, 47/3 (2012), 100-15 at 101-03.

⁹ Rutten, 'From Saint-Malo to Nice', at 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, at 163.

¹¹ Maria Raquel Freire, 'The European Security and Defence Policy: History, Structures and Capabilities', in Michael Ostrauskaite Merlingen, Rasa (ed.), *European Security and Defence Policy an Implementation Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2008), 9-25 at 12-15.

¹² Alyson J. K. Bailes, 'The EU and a 'Better World': What Role for the European Security and Defence Policy?', *International Affairs*, 84/1 (2008), 115-30 at 123, Giegerich, 'European Military Crisis Management', at 38.

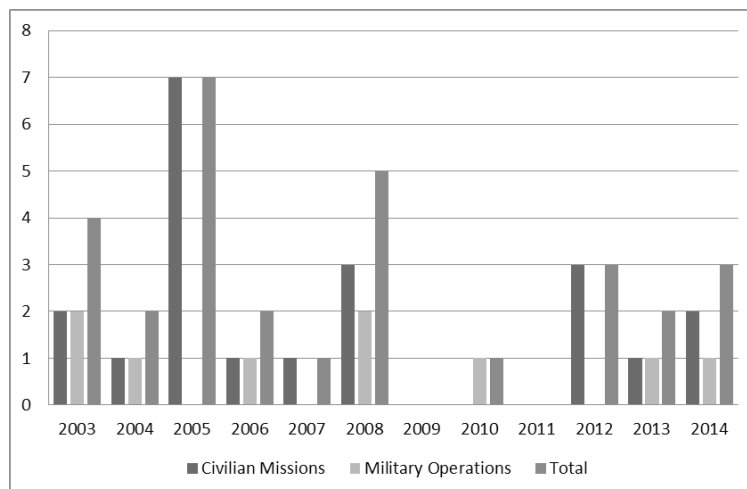
¹³ Giegerich and Nicoll, 'The Struggle for Value in European Defence', at 59.

¹⁴ Giegerich, 'European Military Crisis Management', at 37.

¹⁵ See inter alia: Asseburg and Kempin, 'ESDP in Practice: Crisis Management without Strategic Planning', Catherine Gegout, 'The West, Realism and Intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo (1996-2006)', *International Peacekeeping*, 16/2 (2009), 231-44, Giegerich, 'European Military Crisis Management', Keohane, 'Lessons from EU Peace Operations', Gorm Rye Olsen, 'The EU and Military Conflict Management in Africa: For the Good of Africa or Europe?', *International Peacekeeping*, 16/2 (2009), 245-60.

This should not necessarily induce a negative assessment of the viability or usefulness of the CSDP as a framework for operations. The CSDP is still a relatively young policy, which could be expected to be developing into a more important framework for crisis management. However, exactly the opposite evolution seems to be taking place. The number of personnel deployed under CSDP peaked at 9,000 in 2008, after which it dropped dramatically, resulting in a total of only 4,500 in 2012.¹⁶ This downward pattern can mostly be accounted for by a loss of appetite for new operations. While on average one new mission was launched every three months during the first five years after the CSDP became fully operational, only one new operation was established in the three years between 2008 and 2011 (see figure 1). Between 2012 and 2014, eight new operations were deployed under the CSDP-framework. However, even EUFOR RCA, the most ambitious of these recent operations, is of a far more narrow scale than the largest missions conducted under the CSDP before the downward pattern started.¹⁷

Figure 1 – Yearly Breakdown of New CSDP operations¹⁸



In summary, the CSDP has not been used for launching large-scale, ambitious operations in response to crises where European interests were clearly at stake. Moreover, the downward pattern in CSDP-operations suggests it will not likely be used for such operations in the near future. Unsurprisingly, this state of affairs gave rise to a widespread disappointment on the CSDP's track record. In a report of the renowned European Council of Foreign Relations, former European Defence Agency Chief Executive Nick Witney and his co-authors for example assert that "the CSDP is doing more harm than good to the EU's reputation, and

¹⁶ Tim Haesebrouck and Melanie Van Meirvenne, 'Eufor RCA and CSDP Crisis Management Operations: Back on Track?', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 20/2 (2015), at 29. Tim Haesebrouck and Melanie Van Meirvenne, 'EU-Geleide Crisis Management-Operaties: Minder, Kleinschaliger en Pragmatischer', *Internationale Spectator*, 67/2 (2013), 28-32.

¹⁷ Tim Haesebrouck, 'Interventie in De Centraal Afrikaanse Republiek: Het Eerste Succesverhaal Voor R2P?', *Internationale Spectator*, 68/5 (2014), 28-32.

¹⁸ Data retrieved from ISIS, 'CSDP Mission Chart October 2014,' (retrieved from www.csdpmap.eu on 30 December 2014).

to the contribution to global security that member states might otherwise be making under the more effective auspices of the UN, or simply as coalitions of the willing”, Daniel Fiott, editor of “European Geostrategy”, contends that “Europeans have been sorely disappointed with, or even deluded by, the European Union’s (EU) Common Security and Defence Policy” and Jolyon Howorth, one of the most prominent scholars of European defence cooperation, argues that “even after twenty years of preparation, the EU’s capacity to mount a significant military mission in its own backyard is grossly inadequate.”¹⁹ The next section builds on theories of international relations to shed light on the CSDP’s disappointing pattern of operational activity.

International relations theories and the pattern of CSDP operations

In spite of their small scale and lack of ambition, the crisis management operations conducted under the CSDP have spurred a huge body of literature. However, this mainly consists of normative inquiries on the impact of military operations on the EU’s global role and detailed empirical investigations of the operational record of the CSDP.²⁰ In consequence, there are few theory-informed studies on the pattern of CSDP operations. An important exception is the work of Benjamin Pohl, who builds on liberal international relations theory to develop a general argument about the drivers behind CSDP operations.²¹ Furthermore, several authors have drawn on insights from realist, constructivist and institutionalist theories of international relations to formulate expectations on the scope and ambition of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy. This section builds on these insights to explain why the CSDP has not been used for conducting large-scale, ambitious operations in response to crises where European interests were clearly at stake, in spite of the large number of operations launched under its aegis.

Liberalism: Domestic Politics Matter

In one of the rare theory-informed studies on the pattern of CSDP-operations, Pohl draws attention to the explanatory power of a key argument of liberal theories of international relations: domestic politics matter for international relations.²² According to liberal theories, governments primarily focus on what their domestic societies want when they formulate

¹⁹ Fiott, ‘The CSDP Is Dead, Long Live the CSDP?’, Nick Witney et al., ‘Rebooting EU Foreign Policy’, *ECFR Policy Brief*, 114 (2014) at 6. Jolyon Howorth, ‘CSDP and Nato Post-Libya: Towards the Rubicon?’ *Egmont Security Policy Brief* No. 35, July 2012, (2012) at 3.

²⁰ e.g. Lisbeth Aggestam, ‘Introduction: Ethical Power Europe?’, *International Affairs*, 84/1 (2008), 1-11, Asseburg and Kempin, ‘ESDP in Practice: Crisis Management without Strategic Planning’, Giovanni; Helly Grevi, Damien; Keohane, Daniel, *European Security and Defence Policy: The First 10 Years (1999-2009)* (Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, 2009) 450, Ian Manners, ‘Normative Power Europe Reconsidered: Beyond the Crossroads’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13/2 (2006), 182-99, Michael; Ostrauskaite Merlingen, Rasa (ed.), *European Security and Defence Policy an Implementation Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

²¹ Benjamin Pohl, ‘The Logic Underpinning EU Crisis Management Operations’, *European Security*, 22/3 (2013), 307-25, Benjamin Pohl, ‘To What Ends? Governmental Interests and European Union (Non-) Intervention in Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 49/2 (2014), 191-211.

²² Pohl, ‘The Logic Underpinning EU Crisis Management Operations’, at 316.; see also Andrew Moravcsik, ‘Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics’, *International Organization*, 51/4 (1997), 513-53.

foreign policy. Although Pohl does not clarify which variant of liberal theory he applies, his argument corresponds to “Ideational Liberalism”, which contends that “core domestic social identities” constitute an important source of state preferences.²³ Pohl argues that these domestic identities incite two countervailing pressures in the area of crisis management. On the one hand, governments want to demonstrate “that they are capable of influencing international events in line with domestic values and priorities”; on the other hand they do not want to be accused of “paying too high a price in treasure or casualties for foreign policy projects which turn out ill-conceived.”²⁴ In other words, “governments need to pre-empt the twin dangers of standing accused of pointless activism and excessive risk-taking or complacency and weakness.” According to Pohl, these countervailing pressures explain why CSDP operations have been risk-averse, limited in time and generally unambitious.

By drawing adequate attention to the domestic pressure on the Member States’ governments to demonstrate they are capable actors in international relations, Pohl’s liberal theory of the drivers behind CSDP-operations accounts for the impressive number of missions that were launched under the policy. However, the argument does not fully account for the pattern of operations, since the small-scale operations that were conducted under the CSDP could not reasonably be expected to help governments demonstrate that they are “capable of influencing international events.” As mentioned above, critical assessments of CSDP-operations do not suggest that these have impressed the foreign policy elite in the media, non-governmental organizations or academia, whose opinion, according to Pohl, is supposed to confer domestic legitimacy on the government’s foreign policy. By only conducting small-scale operations, governments only seem to pre-empt the danger of “standing accused of pointless activism and excessive risk-taking”, but not of standing accused of “complacency and weakness.”²⁵

Pohl’s liberal explanation fails to provide a convincing explanation for the pattern of the CSDP-operations for two reasons. First of all, he largely ignores a fundamental assumption of liberal theory: it is the “configuration of interdependent state preferences” that “determines state behaviour.”²⁶ While liberalism emphasises the importance of domestic preferences, it also accepts that the interaction between states is important for explaining collective state behaviour. According to Andrew Moravcsik, one of the leading scholars on liberal international relations theory, collective state behaviour should be analysed as “a two-stage process of constrained social choice. States first define preferences [...] Then they debate, bargain, or fight to particular agreements – a second stage explained by realist and institutionalist (as well as liberal) theories of strategic interaction.”²⁷ A narrow focus on domestic preferences can thus not fully explain the pattern of the CSDP-operations and needs to be complemented with insights from realist and institutionalist theories. Second, Pohl overemphasises the shared interest of EU governments in “demonstrating that they are capable of influencing international events in line with domestic values and priorities” and hereby, underestimates

²³ The two other major variants of liberalism are “Commercial Liberalism” and “Republican Liberalism”, see Andrew Moravcsik, ‘The New Liberalism’, in Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 234-54.

²⁴ Pohl, ‘The Logic Underpinning EU Crisis Management Operations’, at 317.

²⁵ Benjamin Pohl, ‘The Logic Underpinning EU Crisis Management Operations’, *European Security*, (2012), 1-19 at 318.

²⁶ Moravcsik, ‘Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics’, at 520.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, at 544.

the significant differences between the domestic values and priorities of the EU Member states.²⁸ In order to account for these differences, insights from constructivist theories on the strategic culture of the member states must be taken into account.

Constructivism: Norms Matter

Constructivist international relations theories draw attention to the importance of “norms, identities and cultures” for understanding political outcomes.²⁹ Constructivists are divided on the relative importance of domestic versus international environments.³⁰ While systematic constructivists focus on how the international environment shapes state identities, other constructivists stress the importance of domestic environments. Insights from the latter strand provide most insights on the pattern of CSDP-operations, since they draw proper attention to “the differences between EU Member states in terms of their foreign policy traditions, and strategic and bureaucratic cultures.”³¹ Scholars building on this variant of constructivism generally examine the CSDP from a strategic culture perspective. “Norms within the context of strategic culture can be conceptualised as beliefs about what is appropriate, legitimate, or just regarding the goals and modalities concerning the use of force.”³² Elites embedded in different strategic cultures are expected to make different choices when confronted with a similar situation.³³ The latter can hamper effective collective action in crisis management operations. “It could lead to an inability for initiating or sustaining operations due to lack of public support for the goals of a mission [...] or incoherent strategies and rules of engagement, or insufficient resources and delays of action.”³⁴ To explain the small scale and lack of ambition of the CSDP operations, constructivist theories would thus point to the diverging norms of the EU member states on the use of force. In other words, they would draw attention to the absence of a common European strategic culture.

Several scholars have examined the extent to which the strategic cultures of the member states diverge.³⁵ Generally, they conclude that there are persistent differences and incompatibilities between the strategic cultures of the EU-members. For example, Jolyon Howorth argued in 2002 that six dichotomies needed to be transcended if the EU was ever to move towards a common approach:

²⁸ Pohl, ‘The Logic Underpinning EU Crisis Management Operations’, at 317.

²⁹ Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, *Debates on European Integration: A Reader*, eds Neill Nugent and William Paterson (The European Union Series; Basingstokes: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006) at 393.

³⁰ Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), at 170-171.

³¹ Christoph O. Meyer and Eva Strickmann, ‘Solidifying Constructivism: How Material and Ideational Factors Interact in European Defence’, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49/1 (2011), 61-81, at 64

³² Christoph O. Meyer, ‘The Purpose and Pitfalls of Constructivist Forecasting: Insights from Strategic Culture Research for the European Union’s Evolution as a Military Power’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 55/3 (2011), 669-90 at 677.

³³ Alastair Iain Johnston, ‘Thinking About Strategic Culture’, *International Security*, 19/4 (1995), 32-64 at 35.

³⁴ Christoph O. Meyer, ‘European Defence: Why Institutional Socialization Is Not Enough?’, *Oxford Journal of Good Governance*, 2/1 (2005), 51-54 at 54.,

³⁵ Alessia Biava, Margriet Drent, and Graeme P. Herd, ‘Characterizing the European Union’s Strategic Culture: An Analytical Framework’, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49/6 (2011), 1227-48, Geoffrey Edwards, ‘Is There a Security Culture in the Enlarged European Union?’, *The International Spectator*, 41/3 (2006/07/01 2006), 7-23, J. M. Howorth, ‘The CESDP and the Forging of a European Security Culture’, *Politique européenne*, 4/8 (2002), at 21.

“differences between allies and neutrals, between “Atlanticists” and “Europeanists”, between those favouring power projection and those prioritising territorial defence, between emphases on military as opposed to civilian instruments, between large states and small states, between weapons systems providers and weapons systems consumers, between nuclear and non-nuclear states.”³⁶

Five years later, he concluded that “some of those dichotomies have begun to be resolved, but most have not.”³⁷ According to Christoph Meyer, “the Achilles heel” of the CSDP is the lack of consensus on whether force can be used in very hostile environments.³⁸ This can be expected to severely hamper the ability of the CSDP to act as a framework for high-intensity operations:

“In order to achieve a higher ambition regarding the use of force [...] one would need to see the gradual transformation or upgrading of particularly the more pacificist or defensive-minded strategic cultures toward accepting the legitimacy of military interventions not only for humanitarian but also for realpolitik reasons, a higher tolerance for risks, lower thresholds for the authorization of force, and a higher acceptance of working with highly activist countries such as the United States, or indeed the European Union, with increasingly ambitious definitions of goals for security and defence policy.”³⁹

Next to the persistent differences between the member states, there are also indications of an increasing convergence between their strategic cultures.⁴⁰ Meyer, for instance, found substantial agreement amongst the member states on the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention and a general preference for civilian over military instruments. Other authors even claim that a distinct EU strategic culture has evolved, in which there is a broad consensus on a comprehensive approach to security and a preference for non-military instruments.⁴¹ The risk-averse nature of the CSDP operations and the prevalence of civilian over military missions is thus in line with constructivist expectations on the constraining impact of norms: collective action under the CSDP-framework was largely limited to areas in which norms converged.

However, constructivists have been predominately occupied with questions about whether and how norms converge into a common European strategic culture, not with the political outcomes of the interaction between states with diverging strategic cultures. In consequence, constructivist theories do not explain why CSDP operations were consistently

³⁶ Howorth, ‘The CESDP and the Forging of a European Security Culture’, at 4.

³⁷ J. M. Howorth, ‘Towards a European Strategic Culture’, in Jolyon Howorth (ed.), *Security and Defence in the European Union* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 178-207 at 179.

³⁸ Christoph O. Meyer, *The Quest for a European Strategic Culture Changing Norms on Security and Defence in the European Union* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 209 at 185.

³⁹ Meyer, ‘The Purpose and Pitfalls of Constructivist Forecasting: Insights from Strategic Culture Research for the European Union’s Evolution as a Military Power’, at 680.

⁴⁰ Paul Cornish and Geoffrey Edwards, ‘The Strategic Culture of the European Union: A Progress Report’, *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 81/4 (2005), 801-20, Edwards, ‘Is There a Security Culture in the Enlarged European Union?’, Meyer, *The Quest for a European Strategic Culture Changing Norms on Security and Defence in the European Union*.

⁴¹ Biava, Drent, and Herd, ‘Characterizing the European Union’s Strategic Culture: An Analytical Framework’, Per M. Norheim-Martinsen, ‘EU Strategic Culture: When the Means Becomes the End’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 32/3 (2011), 517-34.

in line with the preferences of countries with more “pacifist” strategic cultures instead of with the preferences of countries with a more “active” strategic culture.⁴² In summary, constructivist approaches draw adequate attention to differences between the EU member states, but in order to account for their collective behaviour, they need to be complemented with insights from theories capable of explaining the results of their interaction: institutionalism and realism.

Rational-Choice Institutionalism: Institutions Matter

The basic assumption of institutionalism is that “institutions matter in world politics.”⁴³ According to the rational-choice variant, states create institutions to solve cooperation problems. Two specific problems need solving before an operation can be launched. First, the member states need to agree on whether an operation is appropriate, its specific goals and the best way to achieve these. Second, they need to agree on the division of the burden of this operation.⁴⁴ Given the persistent differences between the member states’ strategic cultures, bargaining over when and how an operation should be launched constitutes a challenging process. Agreeing on the division of its burden, on the other hand, will be difficult because states want to avoid domestic criticism for “paying too high a price in blood or treasure.”⁴⁵ Especially in military operations, which entail a risk of military casualties and significant financial costs, member states will be reluctant to make contributions that are fully commensurate to their capabilities. Instead, they can be expected to try to ride cheap on the efforts of others, hoping that the latter “will do the job that the actor would like to see done.”⁴⁶ In fact, successful free or easy riding is one of the most effective ways for national governments to accommodate the countervailing pressures mentioned by Pohl. By only making symbolic contributions, governments can pretend to be “capable of influencing international events”, without facing the risk of being accused of “pointless activism.”⁴⁷ However, if all member states attempt to ride cheap and only make minor contributions, only relatively small operations will be deployed.

The disappointing pattern of CSDP-operations suggests that the CSDP’s institutional design is not apt to solve these cooperation problems. An important institutional characteristic of the CSDP is that it is based on consensus decision-making: every member state has to agree before an operation can be launched.⁴⁸ Since many member states have a pacifist or defensive-minded strategic culture (cf. supra), the need to arrive at a consensus disposes the

⁴² Meyer, ‘The Purpose and Pitfalls of Constructivist Forecasting: Insights from Strategic Culture Research for the European Union’s Evolution as a Military Power’, at 680.

⁴³ Andreas Hasenclever, Peter Mayer, and Volker Rittberger, ‘Interests, Power, Knowledge: The Study of International Regimes’, *Mershon International Studies Review*, 40/2 (1996), 177-228 at 178.

⁴⁴ Anand Menon, ‘Empowering Paradise? The ESDP at Ten’, *International Affairs*, 85/2 (2009), 227-46 at 237.

⁴⁵ Pohl, ‘The Logic Underpinning EU Crisis Management Operations’, at 317.

⁴⁶ Joseph Leggold, ‘Nato’s Post-Cold War Collective Action Problem’, *International Security*, 23/1 (1998), 78-106 at 87.

⁴⁷ Pohl, ‘The Logic Underpinning EU Crisis Management Operations’, at 317.

⁴⁸ Anand Menon, ‘European Defence Policy from Lisbon to Libya’, *Survival*, 53/3 (2011/07/01 2011), 75-90 at 82. Sten Rynning, ‘The European Union: Towards a Strategic Culture?’, *Security Dialogue*, 34/4 (2003), 479-96 at 487, Asle Toje, *The European Union as a Small Power after the Post-Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 250 at 132.

EU towards lower level commitments, for which consensus is easiest achieved. A second important feature of the CSDP's institutional design is the lack of obligations to contribute significantly to operations. While all member states need to agree before an operation can be launched, every state is free to decide whether it seconded personnel to the area of operations. In civilian operations, the financial costs are covered by the community budget. However, in military operations, only the so-called common costs are shared between all member states, which usually only cover around 10% of the total operations costs.⁴⁹ In the absence of a "centralised enforcement mechanism" that obliges states to make significant contributions to operations, member states will be tempted to try to ride cheap on the efforts of others, resulting in a pattern of small-scale and unambitious operations.⁵⁰

To make matters worse, the combination of consensus decision-making and the lack of an obligation to contribute makes the CSDP an unappealing framework for the governments that see most benefits in deploying an operation. On its face, conducting operations through the CSDP should be an attractive option, since it allows to share the burden between the member states. However, using the CSDP-framework requires compromising on the operation's goals to arrive at a consensus between the member states. Governments in favour of launching an operation thus face a trade-off between the material benefits of sharing the burden with the other member states and the policy loss that results from compromising on its goals. If the benefits of burden-sharing do not outweigh the disadvantages of the policy-loss, they can be expected to conduct the operation unilaterally, through an ad hoc coalition or under the aegis of other international organisations.

The institutional design of the CSDP causes the member states that are most strongly in favour of an operation to gain little support in return for compromising relatively much. While consensus decision-making forces them to take the preferences of all other member states into account when deciding on an operation's goals, they have no guarantee that these will carry a part of its burden. Moreover, the member states that see most benefits in launching an operation are in a weak bargaining position. Since no consensus means no operation, the states most strongly in favour of an operation have the highest incentive to avoid non-agreement. In consequence, they will be most inclined to moderate their demands. Similarly, persistent free-riding creates the risk that an operation is insufficiently resourced to achieve its goals. Since the member states with the most at stake in crisis have the highest incentive to avoid an under-resourced operation, they can be expected to contribute more than proportionately. Member states that see most benefits in launching an operation thus need to make a lot of concessions on its goals, in return for relatively little support of the other member states. Since member states are less likely to compromise a lot if vital interests are at stake, they will be inclined to deploy military operations through other frameworks when strong security interests are at stake.

In summary, the institutional design of the CSDP explains why the interaction between member states results in a pattern of small-scale operations, deployed in crises where the

⁴⁹ Giovanni Grevi and Daniel Keohane, 'ESDP Resources', in Giovanni Grevi, Damien Helly, and Daniel Keohane (eds.), *European Security and Defence Policy: The First Ten Years (1999-2009)* (Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2009), 69-114 at 78.

⁵⁰ Menon, 'European Defence Policy from Lisbon to Libya', at 82.

member states have few interests at stake. Consensus decision-making disposes the CSDP towards lower-level commitments, the lack of an obligation to contribute incites free-riding. The combination of these two features makes the CSDP an unattractive framework for states that see benefits in launching operations. However, rational-choice theories assume that “states use international institutions to further their own goals, and they design institutions accordingly.”⁵¹ In consequence, rational-choice institutionalism cannot explain why the CSDP was not designed more effectively. For explaining the latter, realist arguments must be taken into account.

Realism: Sovereignty Matters

Realists operate with the core assumption that world politics consists of an international anarchy of states, which jealously guard their sovereignty. In consequence, realists do not believe that states would cede strong enforcement capacities to supranational institutions.⁵² Realist scholars were sceptical about the feasibility of a strong European security and defence policy long before it was launched. In 1966, Stanley Hoffman argued from a classical realist perspective that integration is not likely in a high politics area like security and defence policy. According to Hoffman, the diversity of domestic determinants and geo-historical situations results in diverging foreign policy priorities, on which states are not willing to compromise for the uncertain result of more integration.⁵³ After the launch of the CSDP, several authors reverberated Hoffman’s “observations concerning the uneasy relationship between the “high politics” of security and the functional messiness of international integration.”⁵⁴ Sten Rynning builds on Hoffman’s assertions to warn for too high hopes for the CSDP.⁵⁵ Because of Europe’s complex and pluralist history, efforts to push the CSDP too hard will not advance the policy but cause it to fail. Adrian Hyde-Price argues from a neorealist perspective that “Europe’s great powers will continue to jealously guard their sovereign rights to pursue their own foreign and security policy priorities. Consequently the CFSP/ESDP is destined to remain firmly intergovernmental.”⁵⁶

Scholars have explicitly turned to realist arguments for explaining the two aspects of the CSDP’s institutional design that render it ineffective. According to Asle Toje the reason for consensus decision-making can be captured in one word: sovereignty.⁵⁷ “While most

⁵¹ Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal, ‘The Rational Design of International Institutions’, *International Organization*, 55/4 (2001), 761-99 at 762.

⁵² Kenneth W. Abbott and Duncan Snidal, ‘Why States Act through Formal International Organizations’, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 42/1 (1998), 3-32 at 8. For realist assessments of international organizations see Kenneth N. Waltz, ‘Structural Realism after the Cold War’, *International Security*, 25/1 (2000), 5-41 at 18-17. John J. Mearsheimer, ‘The False Promise of International Institutions’, *ibid.* (1994), 5-49.

⁵³ Stanley Hoffmann, ‘Obstinate or Obsolete? The Fate of the Nation-State and the Case of Western Europe’, *Daedalus*, 95/3 (1966), 862-915 at 862-64.

⁵⁴ J. M. Howorth and A. Menon, ‘Still Not Pushing Back: Why the European Union Is Not Balancing the United States’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53/5 (2009), 727-44 at 738.

⁵⁵ Sten Rynning, ‘Realism and the Common Security and Defence Policy’, *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49/1 (2011), 23-42.

⁵⁶ Adrian Hyde-Price, ‘“Normative” Power Europe: A Realist Critique’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 13/2 (2006), 217-34.

⁵⁷ Toje, *The European Union as a Small Power after the Post-Cold War*, at 138.

member states would like to carry the weight of 27 states when pursuing their own foreign policy objectives, the thought of having foreign policy objectives defined by 26 other states is generally less appealing." Howorth and Menon point to the "reluctance of states to entrust matters of high politics to powerful central institutions" for explaining the absence of an enforcement mechanism for contributing to operations.⁵⁸ The institutional design of the CSDP thus clearly corresponds to realist expectations on the reluctance of states to cede strong enforcement capacities to supranational institutions.

International relations theories and the pattern of CSDP operations

Why has the CSDP not been used for conducting large-scale, ambitious operations in response to crises where European interests were clearly at stake, in spite of the large number of operations launched under its aegis? In line with the story of the blind men and the elephant that Donald Puchala used to grapple with European integration, different schools of thought must thus be combined to fully understand what caused the disappointing pattern of CSDP operations.⁵⁹ Liberal theories properly identify the domestic pressures that the member states' governments need to accommodate in the area of crisis management. However, while these account for the large number of operations conducted under the CSDP, domestic pressures does not explain why these were not sufficiently ambitious to make governments look effective in the eyes of domestic constituencies. Constructivism draws proper attention to the diverging strategic cultures of the member states, which makes collective operations difficult. However, it cannot explain why the interaction between states with different strategic cultures consistently results in small-scale operations. Rational-choice institutionalism suggests this can be explained by the CSDP's ineffective institutional design. Realism, in turn, was best positioned to explain why the CSDP was not designed more effectively, by emphasising the reluctance of states to transfer sovereignty to international organizations.

Limits and possibilities of the CSDP

In recent years, various attempts have been made to develop the CSDP into a more effective framework for crisis management. The most noticeable of these was the December 2013 European Council meeting, where the heads of state and government of the member states agreed that "increasing the effectiveness, visibility and impact of CSDP" constitutes a top priority. The insights derived from international relations theories provide valuable lessons on whether such a more effective CSDP is possible, as well as on the specific initiatives that could get the policy on track. Unfortunately, some of the impediments on the CSDP are unlikely to ever fully disappear. In line with realist theories, member states cannot reasonably be expected to transfer sovereignty on defence issues. Differences in the strategic cultures of the member states are also likely to persist, just like governments will continue to have an incentive to shift the burden of operations on the other member states. Two specific measures could however alleviate the impact of these obstacles: devising a CSDP-strategy and amending the consensus rule.

⁵⁸ Howorth and Menon, 'Still Not Pushing Back: Why the European Union Is Not Balancing the United States'

⁵⁹ Donald J. Puchala, 'Of Blind Men, Elephants and International Integration', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 10/3 (1971), 267-84.

First, the CSDP would become more effective if the member states agreed on a well-defined strategy for the CSDP, which sets out the priorities and objectives of the policy, as well as the “types of operations that can potentially be undertaken to meet them.”⁶⁰ It would be much more difficult for the member states to oppose or not contribute to an operation that aims to secure an objective that was previously defined a strategic priority for the CSDP. In consequence, such a mission statement would make it easier to agree on whether or not to respond to a crisis with a CSDP operation, as well as to assemble the required resources for such an operation. In the past, several attempts at devising such a strategy have been made. In 2003, the then-High Representative for Common Foreign Policy Javier Solana drafted the European Security Strategy. However, this only provides an overall mission statement of the EU as an international actor, which, so far, has not been translated into clear objectives and priorities for the CSDP. However, during the December 2013 European Council, the heads of state and government tasked the High Representative with developing a European Strategy on Security and Defence. If this eventually results in agreement on the strategic objectives and priorities of the CSDP, the latter could become a more effective framework for crisis management.

Second, the CSDP’s effectiveness would increase if the member states amended its institutional design. Since the combination of consensus decision making and the lack of an obligation to contribute hampered the CSDP’s development, changing these institutional characteristics should have a positive impact on the pattern of operations. Insights from realism suggest that it is very unlikely that the member states would accept an obligation to contribute if the unanimity rule was abolished, since this could force them to contribute to operations they do not support. A more feasible alternative would be to preserve consensus decision-making, but obliging the member states to carry a more equitable share of the costs of the operation. Hereby, the CSDP would become more attractive for states that favour the launch of an operation, since the material benefits of sharing the burden of the operation would more likely compensate for the policy loss incurred by the requirements of consensus decision making. However, obliging all member states to make an equitable contribution would make a large-scale operation even less likely, since it would provide states that do not fully support the goals of an operation an additional reason to block it.⁶¹ It appears that the best option is to amend the consensus rule, without increasing the obligation to contribute. Adopting less demanding voting rules like Qualified Majority Voting would strengthen the bargaining position of states in favour of launching an operation, making the CSDP a more attractive framework for conducting operations. Moreover, as long as states would be allowed to withhold their resources when they have no interests in an operation, this would not necessarily infringe on the sovereignty of the member states and could, in theory, be a feasible option.

Agreeing on a CSDP-strategy and amending the consensus rule would only partially solve some of the impediments on the CSDP. Qualified Majority Voting still requires significant agreement on when and how an operation should be launched, which will still be difficult to achieve even if the member states agree on the strategic objectives of the CSDP. Moreover,

⁶⁰ Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont, *Europe, Strategy and Armed Forces: The Making of a Distinctive Power*, at 35.

⁶¹ Anand Menon, ‘Empowering Paradise? The ESDP at Ten’, at 239.

governments can still be expected to try to shift the burden of the operation to the other member states. Nevertheless, it would allow the CSDP to evolve into a framework through which the EU member states could conduct more ambitious operations. Unfortunately, changing the voting rules of the CSDP would require a Treaty revision, which is highly unlikely in the near future. In consequence, even a modestly optimistic scenario seems improbable.

Conclusion

So far, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy has mainly been used to deploy small-scale operations, which generally did not provide the member states with clear security benefits. To explain the CSDP's disappointing track record, this article combined insights from different theories of international relations. It argued that liberal theories adequately identify the domestic pressures the member states' governments need to accommodate in the area of crisis management, but fail to explain why CSDP-operations were not sufficiently ambitious to make governments look effective in the eyes of domestic constituencies. Constructivism, in turn, draws attention to the diverging strategic cultures of the member states, which makes collective operations difficult. However, it cannot explain why the interaction between states with different strategic cultures consistently results in small-scale operations. Rational-choice institutionalism does provide a convincing explanation for the latter by drawing attention to the CSDP's ineffective institutional design. Realism, in turn, seems best positioned to explain why the CSDP was not designed more effectively, by emphasising the reluctance of states to transfer sovereignty to international organisations.

While these impediments on the CSDP's effectiveness are unlikely to fully disappear, this article put forward two specific measures that could alleviate their impact on the pattern of operations deployed under its aegis. First, devising a CSDP-strategy would facilitate agreement on when and how an operation could be deployed and make it more difficult for member states not to contribute to operations. Second, amending the consensus rule would make the CSDP a more attractive framework, without infringing on the national sovereignty of the member states. Unfortunately, the latter seems very unlikely in the near future. Consequently, the future pattern of operational activity can be expected to resemble more closely that of the previous years: small-scale, unambitious operations, that do not provide the member states with clear security benefits.

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