

Security beyond democracy?

What is the state of democracy within foreign and security policy? The EU's foreign and security policy is formally conducted through intergovernmental agreements. But are national governments really free to decide on all matters pertaining to foreign, security and defence policy?

Foreign and security policy is in many ways at the water's edge of democratic governance. It is within this issue area that executive dominance is the most pronounced, at both the EU and the national level. Foreign and security policy is the hard case for those expecting that the EU has moved beyond intergovernmental cooperation. The very nature of foreign and security policy is considered alien to supranationalism. Consequently, should the EU develop a robust foreign and security policy, this would be an important indicator of the EU developing into a polity in its own right.

But this does not resolve the democratic issue. It is difficult to find any principled arguments as to why this policy field should be exempt from democratic control. Although there may be good reasons in some cases to allow for secrecy, the definition of the kind of issues or situations this should apply to should be agreed upon through democratic procedures.

In order to answer these questions, RECON has analysed the institutions, policies and decision-making procedures within the field of foreign and security policy. Findings suggest that something that is beyond intergovernmentalism has developed at the EU level and requires legitimation. This cannot be ensured only through national procedures for accountability and authorisation.

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Selected findings

- **Executive dominance in the EU's foreign, security and defence policy is on the rise**
- **Barriers between national and European levels of foreign policy making are eroded due to the institutionalisation of information exchange between the member states**
- **The establishment of the High Representative and the European External Action Service contributes to a fragmentation of national executive power in foreign and security policy**
- **Neither the European Parliament nor national parliaments are able to effectively control foreign, security and defence policy**
- **While public support for a common *foreign* policy is high, the desirability of a common *defence* policy is contested**
- **While a majority of Turkish elites agree on the desirability of EU membership, they do not share the same perception of the EU's global role**



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Not so intergovernmental

A Brussels-based machinery of foreign policy making has emerged. While representing national governments, actors and institutions such as the Political and Security Committee have considerable autonomy. This contributes to a fragmentation of national executives and makes it difficult to determine ‘who decides’.

This creates problems for democratic control. Who should be held responsible, and to whom? Lines of authority and power may be further blurred due to the double hatting of the High Representative and the establishment of the European External Action Service.

While still formally in place, it is not uncommon to see the national veto sidestepped. Member states often opt to change their initial positions rather than become a lone obstacle to agreement on a particular issue.

EU foreign and security policy does not merely promote member states’ perspectives. It is shaped with reference to the interests and values of the Union itself. A re-constitutionalisation of foreign and security policy may be needed in order to clarify lines of authority and power.

Foreign policy communication

The integration of the EU’s foreign and security policy is reinforced by the information exchange system COREU.

The COREU network allows member states and EU institutions to exchange confidential information about foreign policy. Hence this system could be called a ‘community of practice’ which refers to a group of people who routinely get together on a common or similar enterprise with the aim of developing and sharing practical knowledge. In the EU, governments use the COREU network to find compromises and to reach common positions. Moreover and more importantly, RECON researchers have found that this network is not only used to share and exchange information, but also to make decisions. Inside this network the red lines of intergovernmentalism are crossed on a regular basis.

Contesting a common defence

Public opinion data show that general support for a common foreign policy is high. The desirability of a common defence policy is however much more contested.

Member states are divided into two groups: supporters of a common defence policy (mainly the founding members, excluding Germany), and sceptics (especially Finland, Sweden, Denmark and the UK). The two groups disagree especially on whether there should be common EU decision-making in the defence realm, and whether the EU should establish common armed forces. There are however areas where a common EU security and defence policy would be acceptable even in generally sceptical countries: common EU efforts which are strictly focused on defending international law and human rights. Further, a comprehensive RECON study of media coverage of international conflict management in EU member states testifies to an increased awareness of the EU’s role in external security affairs.

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‘Playing into the hands of the Commission?’, Marianne Riddervold/Helene Sjørnsen, in *The influence of international institutions on the EU*, Costa/Jørgensen (eds), Palgrave, 2012

‘Not so intergovernmental after all?’, Helene Sjørnsen, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2011

‘Democratic challenges to the EU’s foreign and security policy’, Helene Sjørnsen, in *Rethinking democracy and the European Union*, Eriksen/Fossum (eds), Routledge, 2011

‘A humanitarian common policy through deliberation? On the characteristics of EU foreign policy’, Marianne Riddervold, PhD thesis, ARENA Report, 2011

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‘The perception of the EU as an emerging security actor in media debates on humanitarian and military interventions’, Cathleen Kantner/Amelie Kutter/Swantje Renfordt, *European Journal of International Relations*, 2012

The limitations to parliamentary involvement

RECON's research suggests that neither national parliaments nor the European Parliament alone is able to ensure effective democratic control of foreign, security and defence policies. Instead, inter-parliamentary cooperation may enhance parliamentary control.

As the formal responsibility for security policy in the European Union has remained with the member states, national parliaments bear the main burden in ensuring parliamentary control. However, the effective exercise of this responsibility is hampered in two ways.

First, national parliaments differ considerably in their authority, ability and attitude towards scrutinising security and defence policy. Second, although national governments have retained a formal veto power, the integration of the armed forces and the Europeanisation of decision making have led to a democratic deficit in this area. This democratic deficit has not been compensated by the European Parliament, which has few formal competences, especially on military missions.

Read more

'Parliamentary control of military missions', Dirk Peters/Wolfgang Wagner/Cosima Glahn, *RECON Online Working Paper 2011/24*

'Parliaments and European security policy', Dirk Peters/Wolfgang Wagner/Nicole Deitelhoff, *European Integration online Papers, 14, 2010*

'Decision-making void of democratic qualities?', Anne Elizabeth Stie, *European Integration online Papers, 14, 2010*

Die demokratische Kontrolle internationalisierter Sicherheitspolitik, Wolfgang Wagner, *Nomos, 2011*

'Can you keep a secret?', Guri Rosén, *RECON Online Working Paper 2011/22*



Turkish parliamentarians' perceptions

While a majority of Turkish elites agree on the desirability of membership in the EU, they do not share the same perception of the EU's global role.

RECON researchers have analysed Turkish perceptions of the EU's foreign policy. An analysis of debates in the Turkish Parliament over the last decade identified four camps: the right-wing nationalists, Islamists, liberals and left-wing nationalists. The *Islamists* are mostly globalists and approach the EU and its foreign policy from a utilitarian angle. Their deliberations reflect a perception of the EU not yet acquiring a significant role in global politics because of its relative lack of power. Even though the goal of accession is there, the emphasis after 2007 is increasingly on the Turkish contribution to the EU as a global power. The *left-wing nationalists* reflect a different view of the EU as they perceive the EU as a normative power which diffuses norms and values to its periphery, and this is seen as its greatest strength in global politics. The *right-wing nationalists* see the EU and its foreign policy as a threat to Turkish interests and approach the EU with great scepticism.

However, after 2007 it is possible to perceive a greater degree of alienation from the EU in all the political camps. This is partly due to the accession negotiations losing its momentum, but also related to the ongoing crisis in the EU, which decreased the attractiveness of EU membership for the Turkish political elite as well as for the Turkish public.

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'The European Union's foreign policy: The perceptions of the Turkish parliamentarians', Meltem Müftüler-Baç/Rahime Süleymanoğlu-Kürüm, *RECON Online Working Paper 2011/23*