2. European foreign and security policy in the making: a historical overview

Anna Michalski

THE LONG ROAD TO EUROPEAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY COOPERATION

European foreign and security policy has been on a long journey. From its modest beginning as an informal consultation among the foreign ministers of the European Communities (EC) in the early 1970s, to the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1992, and the development of a coordinated foreign and security policy of the European Union (EU) in the 2000s, the road has been accompanied by both setbacks and achievements (Dinan, 2010; Pijpers et al., 1988; Keukeleire and Delreux, 2014). Conflicting views reign among the member states concerning the degree of decision-making autonomy, whether the EU should be given operational capability in foreign and security policy, and the extent to which a common strategic outlook is desirable. To date, the CFSP has resisted supranational decision-making by retaining its intergovernmental character. That is, because European foreign and security policy is based on the coordination of national foreign policy, formal transfer of competence to the EU has been limited. In practice, however, national foreign policies have undergone ‘Brusselization’ as the policy-making surrounding the CFSP has become increasingly intense and structured in parallel with the widening policy scope and the emergence of common working practices (Dijkstra and Vanhoonacker, 2017).

In the over 50 years of seeking consensus on matters of foreign and security policy, member states and EU institutions have overseen the gradual introduction of processes that coordinate and implement common policy, a trend that has given rise to formal and informal practices and behavioural codes (Mérand, 2008). This development has taken place within an institutional environment that has undergone substantial reform directed at enhancing decision-making capacity to improve joint action and visibility, including the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the foundation for a new European diplomatic corps (Blockmans and Laatsit, 2012). As the scope of

the European foreign and security policy has enlarged, its financing and workforce have increased. Today, the policy-making surrounding the CFSP and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) is much more sophisticated than when the EU member states first started to coordinate national foreign and security policies (Juncos and Pomorska, 2006). Moreover, this increase in sophistication has created a sense of a common purpose and problem-solving ethos (Juncos and Reynolds, 2007), which coalesces around the working practices embedded in the institutional memory of bureaucratic processes, codes of conduct, and tried and tested policy approaches. Nevertheless, national strategic cultures, foreign policy orientations and existing relations among EU member states create boundaries that limit the scope of European foreign and security policy (Meyer, 2006).

The working practices that have emerged among the institutions in Brussels, national bureaucracies, embassies in third countries and national enforcement agencies in the field are ultimately conditioned by the provisions of the EU treaties. Therefore, the historical background to the CFSP is an essential piece of the puzzle to understanding the emergence of a burgeoning European foreign and security policy, and the unique features that underpin the functioning of the CFSP. To address these historical conditions, in this chapter I trace the institutional development of the CFSP through the successive reforms of the EU treaties to provide background for the other chapters in this book. I also account for the political and strategic choices that inform the decisions taken at various times to strengthen the institutional framework and extend the scope of policy. Finally, I juxtapose the emergence of the European foreign and security policy with geopolitical developments and shifts in the global strategic environment.

MODEST BEGINNINGS: EUROPEAN UNITY AS A PEACE PROJECT, 1950–1980

In 1952, political and security concerns prompted the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), an organization with far-ranging supranational governance and control over the production and sales of coal and steel. The ECSC's original members were Belgium, France, Italy, Luxemburg, The Netherlands and West Germany. At the time, coal and steel were necessary for the production of arms and military equipment, and therefore were regarded as strategic resources that should be monitored and controlled so that potential bellicose regimes would not have access to these resources. In part, the creation of the ECSC was a response to the events that led to Germany's preparations for the Second World War. In addition, the ECSC's supranational authority was established as a response to lessons learned from the First World War, including the unintended and dire consequences of demanding excessive

war retributions from Germany. In Robert Schuman's words, the intention of the ECSC was to make 'any war between France and Germany ... not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible' (Schuman, 1950).

Notwithstanding these achievements, it was unclear how to deal with the strategic vacuum created in Central Europe by decommissioning the German army. Moreover, West Germany's desire to rearm remained imminently sensitive so close to the end of the Second World War (Mérand, 2008). After rejecting an American plan to integrate the West German armed forces under allied North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) command, the French government in 1950 put forward the Pleven Plan, placing the West German army under a joint European command. In 1952, the final negotiations of the Pleven Plan were formalized in the European Defence Community (EDC) and an agreement was signed by the Benelux countries (Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg), Italy, West Germany and France. Although Germany and the Benelux countries approved the agreement in the following year, the ratification was met with opposition in the French parliament. In the end, the French parliament rejected the treaty in 1954, mainly because the final EDC agreement was modelled on the ECSC and therefore more supranational in character than the original Pleven Plan (Bindi, 2012). In 1955, West Germany became a member of NATO and its armed forces were integrated under the command of the Western alliance, assigning it the role as guarantor for the security of Western Europe. The emergence of NATO as the undisputed security provider reduced the strategic importance of the European efforts for unity, which subsequently moved from the politico-military sphere to the economic sphere.

At the end of the 1960s, the European Economic Community (EEC) completed the establishment of the Customs Union, and tariff-free and quota-free trade in the common market. With the creation of the Customs Union, the EEC also established a regime for external tariffs and the common commercial policy on the basis of which trade with non-EEC countries, including former colonies, primarily in Africa, was organized. In parallel, the EEC member states agreed on the conditions that the United Kingdom (UK) should satisfy in order to become a member of the EEC, after several attempts to seek membership since 1961 (Michalski, 2014). In 1969, the heads of state of the six original members met in The Hague and agreed on measures to complete and deepen various aspects of the EEC, including matters of foreign policy, and set out a framework to include the UK. The foreign ministers of the six original countries, under the leadership of Belgian Foreign Minister Etienne Davignon, were tasked to examine how to increase political cooperation within the EC. The Davignon Report, which was presented in 1970, recommended bi-annual meetings of the foreign ministers of the EC and regular consultation among the political directors of the ministries of foreign affairs (EC, 1970). On the basis of this rather modest measure, the European Political Cooperation (EPC)

was set up. The EPC was strengthened through a network of European correspondents, the Coreu, and a European telex system. In addition, many working groups were tasked with preparing the regular meetings of the foreign ministers, which were increased to four per year in the 1973 Copenhagen Summit.

TOWARDS ENHANCED CONSULTATION IN EUROPEAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE FORMALIZATION OF THE EPC, 1981–1987

Despite the ambitious aim to strengthen the EC's role in the world, as outlined in the report on European identity presented to the European Copenhagen Summit in December 1973, the efforts to enhance the EPC in the 1970s produced few results (EC, 1973). Certainly, the EPC proved useful as a venue for consultation among the foreign ministers of the EC member states, and some modest steps were taken in specific areas. For example, during the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the member states decided to coordinate their response, and mandated the European Commission to represent the EC in the 'economic' basket set up by the 1975 Helsinki Accord (Stewart, 2008). In 1979, the member states also forged a common approach to the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union, and imposed sanctions on Argentina for its invasion of the Falkland Islands. In addition, the German *Ostpolitik* (Eastern Policy), under Chancellor Willy Brandt, was formulated within the larger framework of the European security structure (Romano, 2012).

However, by the beginning of the 1980s, pressure was building to take the EC out of the doldrums of the 1970s. With the inclusion of Greece in 1981, and Spain and Portugal in 1985, the political strength of the EC was significantly increased, especially its ability to stabilize these newly democratized countries. In addition, the external economic impact of the EEC increased after two successful negotiations regarding the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (the Kennedy round, 1964–1967; and the Tokyo round, 1973–1979) and increased interest within the EC to enhance the competitiveness of European economies amid growing competition from Asian countries. In the 1981 London Report, the EC took several steps to enhance the coordination among the foreign ministers of the ten member states (EC, 1981). These measures included streamlining the formal meetings of the foreign ministers, enhancing the central position of the Political Committee, increasing the role of the presidency in representing the EC, and improving the coordination among the embassies of the member states in third countries. In addition, the report stressed the importance of maintaining the informality and confidentiality of the Gymnich meetings, where foreign ministers meet with very few officials present. The importance of this informality and confidentiality is reflected in

the following quotation from an experienced EPC observer: '[T]here was an EPC culture and sense of solidarity which only worked as long as decisions were restricted to the charmed circle, with interference neither from the EC institutions, nor from other ministries at home' (Nutall, 2000, p. 2).

Throughout the 1980s, the momentum for treaty reform was gradually building in the EC due to the realization that Western Europe was falling behind major global powers, both economically and politically, at a time when the geopolitical situation in the world was becoming critical. To encourage greater political unification and reform of the EC institutions, the German and Italian foreign ministers presented the Draft European Act (The Genscher-Colombo Plan) in November 1981 (Governments of the FRG and Italy, 1981). The report laid the ground for the adoption of the Solemn Declaration on European Union in June 1983 by the heads of state and governments of the EC (EC, 1983). In the declaration, the member states pledged 'to strengthen and develop European Political Cooperation through the elaboration and adoption of joint positions and joint action', including in the areas of 'political and economic aspects of security' (point 1.4.2). In addition, the declaration sought to improve the coordination and decision-making between the EPC and the existing structures of the EC, by enhancing the unity among European countries through the coordination of their foreign policy and international responses to these policies (point 2.2.3).

Despite British, Danish and Greek opposition, the heads of state and government of the remaining members called for reform of the existing EC treaties during the first Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) at the 1985 summit in Milan (Nutall, 2000). The IGC, which was held over a couple of months, was not originally intended to deal with foreign affairs. Nonetheless, the Single European Act (SEA) introduced a new title III to the Treaty of Rome, which brought the EPC into the framework of the EC by setting out its purpose and functioning, but without changing its intergovernmental nature (EC, 1987). In essence, the new provisions codified the existing scope and methods of working, affirming that the member states must inform and consult each other 'on any foreign policy matters of general interest so as to ensure that their combined influence is exercised as effectively as possible through co-ordination, the convergence of their positions and the implementation of joint action' (SEA, art. 2(a)). The reforms also formalized the existence of the European Council, which amounted to yet another codification of a current practice of the heads of state and government, who had hitherto met either in ad hoc summits or in regular although informal 'fireside chats' since 1974. Generally, the codification of the European Council and the EPC was seen as strengthening the intergovernmental character of the EC, an arrangement many opposed (Imbrogno, 2016). In essence, the inclusion of a new chapter on foreign policy in the treaty represented a hybrid solution for the EC, as it strengthened the

EC's supranational nature by imposing a majority vote for the approval of any internal market decisions, while formalizing the EPC in a separate chapter operating under intergovernmental rules and endowing it with a small secretariat kept separate from other European institutions. However, the European Commission was fully associated with the EPC and gained a seat at the EPC meetings. This uneasy dichotomy between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism continued to create unexpected outcomes in the next phase of the EC, which followed soon after the entry into force of the SEA in 1987.

THE CREATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF DEEPER INTEGRATION AND GEOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATION, 1989–2001

The end of the 1980s saw a radical transformation of the geopolitical situation in Europe, with the end of the Cold War and the Berlin Wall in November 1989, and the ultimate demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The EC became deeply involved in the negotiations related to German reunification as a decision was taken to integrate the five German eastern *Länder* into the EC without a formal accession led by the European Commission (Dinan, 2010). As the former communist states in Central and Eastern Europe turned to the West for support as they transitioned to a market economy and democracy, the onus fell on the EC and its member states to provide stability and to map economic, social and political reforms. For the EC, these sweeping changes coincided with a growing internal momentum to deepen economic integration as a consequence of the spillover effects from the completion of the Internal Market, and plans were already well advanced to hold an IGC on treaty reforms to create an Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). With the geopolitical shift in Europe as a result of German reunification and the prospects of much closer ties between the EC and the Central and Eastern European countries, the Dublin European Council in June 1990 decided (with the UK and Portugal voting against) to hold two IGCs: one on the EMU and one on the political union, including the issue of strengthening the cooperation in foreign and security policy (Pryce, 1994).

The IGCs took place during 1991, and in February 1992 the heads of state and government signed the Treaty of European Union (the Maastricht Treaty), which created a new political entity – the European Union (EU) – with far-reaching political and symbolic significance. Although European integration took a leap forward with the creation of the EU, the fundamental disagreement among member states on the extent and depth of integration could not be solved during these negotiations. The EU was built on three pillars: the EC's internal policies, now largely governed by common institutions and decision-making and new provisions on economic and monetary union; the

inclusion of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); and the new area of justice and home affairs, based on coordination of national policy with few supranational elements (Duff, 1994). These three pillars were an awkward solution to the member states' resistance to creating a supranational foreign and security policy. Nonetheless, the pillars strengthened the symbolic importance of the EU's external identity, especially through the ambitious language concerning the overall goals and purpose of the CFSP. In addition, more practical improvements were introduced, such as specifying how the EU could conduct foreign policy (joint action and common positions), and associating the European Council further to the CFSP by tasking the heads of state and government with developing the general direction of foreign and security policy. One of the main stumbling blocks concerned the extent to which majority voting should be practised in the CFSP. In the end, majority voting was only permitted for decisions to implement joint action already agreed by common consent. Many member states were still unwilling to confer to the EU the ability to take action with military implications, as they feared that too close an association between the ESDP and NATO would dilute European states' commitment to the latter and upset relations with the United States.

The limitations of the CFSP as presented in the Maastricht Treaty became obvious soon after its entry into force in 1993. For example, the new provisions did little to improve the coherence of the EU foreign and security policy, as member states remained reluctant to go beyond coordination in a handful of areas. In addition, the sheer number of institutional actors involved in the CFSP policy-making hampered internal decisiveness and external visibility (Smith, 2003). As early as 1996, however, the member states had anticipated a revision of the treaty. To this end, the Corfu European Council in 1994 commissioned a high-level reflection group led by Spain's Foreign Minister, Carlos Westendorp, to investigate ways to make EU decision-making more efficient and give the EU greater capacity for external action (EU, 1994). To address these issues, an IGC was convened at the European Council in Amsterdam in June 1997. The Amsterdam Treaty resulted in several substantial reforms to the CFSP (EU, 1997). For example, it created the office of High Representative (HR) of the CFSP, which was charged with coordinating European foreign and security policy with the member states and the EU institutions and representing the EU when negotiating with third countries and international organizations. The HR performed these duties in conjunction with the foreign minister of the country holding the rotating EU presidency and the president of the European Commission. The HR would be supported by the policy planning and an early warning unit, and a new instrument – common strategy – was added to the arsenal of the CFSP. The ESDP strengthened the link between the EU and the West European Union (WEU), as the EU received

access to the WEU's capabilities within the Petersberg Tasks of peacekeeping, humanitarian and rescue efforts, and military aspects of crisis management.

The efforts to reform the EU continued with another IGC leading to the signing of the Nice Treaty in 2001 (EU, 2001). The reforms dealt with issues from the previous two IGCs that remained unsolved, primarily regarding whether to invite Central and Eastern European countries to join the EU. In the CFSP, several measures enhanced the policy-making capacity by upgrading the Political Committee, renamed the Political and Security Committee, and by creating the Military Committee and Military Staff.

On balance, the successive reforms of the EU treaties strengthened the EU's foreign and security policy in scope, capacity and visibility. A new office was created with the appointment of the HR, and new bodies were added to increase the CFSP's autonomy and capabilities. In addition, new EU policies modified some of the security and defence policies. However, the CFSP remained essentially intergovernmental, relying on the coordination of national foreign and security policies and consensus-based policy-making, although a provision was introduced that allowed member states to abstain from a common action without opposing it, the so-called 'constructive abstention'.

BALANCING TRANSNATIONAL AND SUPRANATIONAL FEATURES: THE EU'S EXTERNAL SECURITY POLICY, 2002–2015

The preceding decade of constitutional reform of EU treaties and the gradual, albeit modest, development of European foreign and security policy unfolded against the background of several geopolitical events that influenced the thinking of European leaders and shaped their views on the future of the CFSP. Possibly the most defining experiences for the leaders of the EU were their inability to act to prevent the war in the former Yugoslavia (1991–2001), and their inability to take firm action to stem the violence that ensued as the break-out republics engaged in military conflict. For the recently created EU, a decisive handling of the crisis would have been a crowning moment, but it did not have the resources or the experience to deal with this tragedy. In the end, NATO intervened, although NATO was unable to stop the hostilities. However, the action taken by NATO reconfirmed its standing as the security guarantor in Europe. Yet, in relation to the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, the EU played a significant role creating social, economic and political reforms. As part of the wider Western security alliance, the prospect of EU membership provided these countries with stability, which boosted the EU's role as a security provider on the continent (Schimmelfennig, 2003).

However, it was in the build-up to the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 that the deep differences were laid bare among the EU member states, present

and future, about a common European approach to international crises. In effect, the EU was split into two camps: one camp believed that the American invasion of Iraq was unlawful, and that the decommissioning of nuclear stockpiles should continue to be the responsibility of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission; the other camp believed that the American-led invasion was necessary, as regime change in Iraq was the only way to deal with the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. The two groups coincided with the countries that supported the EU developing its own security and defence identity, whether within or outside NATO, chiefly represented by Germany, France and the Benelux countries; and those that feared that such a move would endanger the role of NATO and the American commitment to the defence alliance, chiefly represented by the UK, Denmark, Spain, and a number of Eastern European candidate countries, chiefly Poland, the Czech Republic and the Baltic states. The EU let itself be further divided by the Republican administration under George W. Bush, as Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld derisively labelled these countries 'old Europe' (Hooper and Black, 2003; Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez, 2005; Kagan, 2003).

The EU recognized the damage that was caused to the prospects of deepening the CFSP and the ESDP by the rift among member states and the obvious lack of coordination, shared global outlook and common strategic culture. The incumbent HR, Javier Solana, set out to elaborate the first strategic doctrine of the EU in an effort to strengthen the member states' resolve around a common approach to international affairs (Morillas, 2011). The novelty of the process of adopting a strategic review enabled Solana to deal more with the content and general orientation of EU's view of the world than to deal with the intricacies of institutional structures and distribution of competences between the EU and its member states. Solana worked closely with representatives of the member states in an ad hoc task force that drafted a report in a matter of a few months, which was eventually endorsed by the European Council in December 2003 (EU, 2003). The support that the European Security Strategy (ESS) received from the European Council further emphasized how pivotal its role had become for European foreign and security policy (Smith, 2015).

In parallel to these momentous events in international politics, the EU was again taking steps to prepare its institutions and policies for the admission of the Central and Eastern European countries. A convention on the future of the EU was established by the Laeken European Council in December 2001 (European Council, 2001). The convention prepared the issues to be considered by the ensuing IGC concerning the functioning of the EU, including its decision-making procedures, division of competences, the composition of the institutions, its democratic qualities, and the EU's global role. In 2003, the convention submitted a draft treaty to the IGC establishing a Constitution for

Europe. In 2004, the Constitutional Treaty was signed by the leaders of the EU member states (EU, 2004).

The Constitutional Treaty represented a significant leap forward in many aspects regarding the integration of both substantial and symbolic structures and policies. Clearly, the symbolic parts of the treaty represented a step too far for many EU member states, as the ratification of the treaty was turned down in referenda in France and The Netherlands in 2005. However, the EU member states considered that the need for reforming the Treaty on European Union (TEU) was urgent, and another IGC was called to reconsider the Constitutional Treaty again. The revision of the treaty was accepted at the European Council Summit in Lisbon in December 2007, and became operational in 2009 after being ratified by the EU member states (EU, 2007). Although much of the symbolism associated with the Constitutional Treaty had been removed, the Lisbon Treaty kept much of its substance and therefore represented a considerable upgrade of the TEU in terms of clarifying the division of competences, streamlining the decision-making processes, and enlarging the scope of EU action. In addition, the Lisbon Treaty made considerable changes to foreign and security policy. In general, making the EU a legal entity was important in many respects. For example, it has the authority to enter into international agreements and commitments vis-à-vis third countries and international organizations. In addition, the abolishment of the pillar structure solidified the EU and removed the confusion surrounding its structure. In terms of leadership and visibility, the treaty assigned a much stronger role to the European Council, which was charged with 'identify[ing] the Union's strategic interests' and 'defin[ing] the strategic lines of the Union policy' (TEU, art. 26). The newly established office of the President of the European Council increased the visibility of the European Council as the key political institution in the EU. Above all, the EU's external visibility was improved through the merger of the office of the HR and the Vice-President of External Affairs of the European Commission. This measure was meant to increase the coherence of the EU's external action by coordinating foreign and security policy with other external policies of the EU, primarily trade and development, along with the external dimensions of internal policies. The capacity of the HR/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) to lead and conduct European foreign and security policy was bolstered by the creation of the EEAS, which was created as a modest step towards a European foreign ministry drawing on diplomats from the member states, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat. Finally, the treaty introduced a solidarity clause that commits the member states to assisting each other in the event of natural or man-made disasters (art. 222), and a clause of mutual defence (art. 42(7)) in the event of armed aggression against a member state, a clause that in many ways is reminiscent of NATO's mutual defence clause (art. 5).

The Lisbon Treaty made some real and potential advances towards more coherent and effective policy-making in foreign and security policy. However, the jury is still out on whether the EU can fulfil its ambitious goals and principles announced in the preamble of the TEU, and in regard to the CFSP, and whether the member states are ready to give up national autonomy in order to commit fully to a European foreign and security policy. The treaty points in both ways: the member states commit to support the EU's foreign and security policy 'actively and unreservedly in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity', and to 'refrain from any action which is contrary to the interests of the Union or likely to impair its effectiveness as a cohesive force in international relations' (TEU, art. 24(3)). At the same time, both the CFSP and ESDP remain intergovernmental in character, mainly because decision-making continues to be consensual, based on the coordination of member states' foreign and security policies. In essence, the pillar structure was officially removed, but unofficially it remained. To ensure the unambiguous supremacy of national competence in the area of foreign and security policy, the member states added two protocols to the Lisbon Treaty. The most conspicuous declaration states that CFSP does not affect 'the responsibilities of the Member States ... for the formulation and conduct of their foreign policy nor of their national representation in third countries and international organizations' (TEU, declaration no. 13). Other issues remained, such as the practical measures necessary for setting up the EEAS, and the precise division of competences and tasks between it and the European Commission, including the budgetary authority.

MOVING TOWARDS A EUROPEAN FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY IN A CHANGING WORLD ORDER

In the decade following the Lisbon Treaty, the new provisions in the CFSP were gradually implemented. In 2009, the UK politician Catherine Ashton became the first person to simultaneously be HR of CFSP and Vice-President of the Commission for External Relations. Ashton's main responsibility was to stake out the role and the fields of activity of the newly strengthened CFSP, of which the main challenge was to set up the EEAS. Over two years, the EEAS was established, running with staff, a budget, and other practical aspects, despite a turf war breaking out between the EEAS and the European Commission (Cameron, 2012) as the European Parliament attempted to stem the intergovernmental tendencies of the member states (Duke, 2009). Although Ashton was credited with setting up the EEAS, she was also criticized for not finding a role for the EU to play in some of the most crucial issues in international politics, despite actively engaging in the negotiations with Iran. In 2014, the Italian Foreign Minister, Federica Mogherini, replaced Ashton as HR/VP. Mogherini decided to use her dual responsibilities as HR

and Vice-President to greater effect, so she moved her office to the Berlaymont building, the headquarters of the Commission College. Mogherini reviewed the EU's security strategy from 2003 by consulting not only member state officials but also various civil society groups (EEAS, 2016). The EU's Global Strategy of 2016 has been seen as an attempt to reconcile the EU's normative foreign policy agenda and transformative powers (as defined by the EU) with the challenges posed by a systemic shift in the international system and the demise of the liberal world order (Barbé and Morillas, 2019).

The European foreign and security policy has been put to the test, as the international system has undergone radical changes with the rise of China and other emerging powers, and geopolitical tensions have risen in Europe due to the aggressive action taken by Russia in Ukraine and towards the Baltic and Nordic states. These challenges have put the international system under strain, which has been further compounded by the former US president Trump's (2017–2021) blatant disregard for international rules and overt undermining of international organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), further weakening the liberal world order.

Given its role as a normative power upholding international principles, primarily multilateralism and a rules-based international system, these are taxing times for the European foreign and security policy. Arguably more challenging, however, are the disagreements among the member states in areas such as migration and asylum, human rights, and EU's relationships with China and Russia. These deep divisions, which have far-reaching implications for the EU's ability to show a unified stance in international politics, have not, however, resulted in a breakdown of the coordination of foreign and security policy in the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and working groups as strong procedural norms continue to inform working practices and a problem-solving ethos (Michalski and Danielson, 2020). Although the EEAS has become increasingly visible, and internal competition with both the European Commission and EU member states is on the rise, the EU has gradually evolved into a full-fledged diplomatic actor. In addition, the EU delegations, and the embassies of EU member states in third countries, have generally established functioning processes that coordinate the implementation of EU foreign and security policy abroad.