

The European Union: A Strategic Actor under Permanent Construction?

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Abstract:

In recent years the European Union has been quietly building a nascent capacity for strategic reasoning and action in the field of security and defense policy. Today observers tend to acknowledge that some of the EU's policies and actions, especially with respect to neighbouring countries and regions to its east and south, have been characterized by 'strategic qualities' in that they imply a long-term perspective and already managed to alleviate threats and conflicts in the periphery of the Union. A holistic conception of strategy describes this evolving capacity better than a classic, Machiavellian notion that focuses on military capabilities and a strong executive at the center of European politics. But we may also need to take into account that the pluralistic, slow, and often cumbersome process of multilevel deliberation is an element inherent to the success of Union strategy-making. Since there is virtually no support for an EU without a role in global affairs, one that effectively reverts back to merely being an international organization and a marketplace, we outline what we take to be two realistic options for the future development of the EU as a strategic actor.

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Forthcoming as the concluding chapter in Engelbrekt and Hallenberg (eds.), *The European Union and Strategy: An Emerging Actor* (London: Routledge).

This book began by situating our empirical and theoretical claims in the context of the already existing literature on the EU as a growing presence in world affairs, and by stating what we believe are some of the most pertinent questions facing the European Union in this regard. Two assumptions were sketched out with the purpose of focussing our discussion on the Union's nascent capacity to engage in strategic reasoning and action. The first assumption recognizes that some of the current policies and actions of the Union have important 'strategic qualities,' especially with respect to neighbouring countries and regions to its east and south. These strategic qualities include policies and institutions with a long-term perspective as well policies that have alleviated threats and vulnerabilities resulting in the solution of conflicts on the periphery of the Union. The second assumption moves us beyond the view that legal and political constraints render it impossible for the EU to assume a significant role in the area of security and defence matters. We note that external and internal developments already are blurring the lines between this area—where the veto rights of member states previously were intact—and other realms of Union policymaking. Mindful of the remaining limitations to the EU's institutional design, we then set out to consider its actual and potential capacities as a 'strategic actor' in regional and world affairs.

In this final chapter we reflect upon some of the empirical analyses contained in this book. What do they teach us about the current character of the European Union as a strategic actor, and can they say anything about the future role of the Union in this area? In doing so, we distinguish between two related issues. The first is whether or not the European Union is at the present time, or is likely to become in the near future, a strategic actor. The second, related but distinct, question is whether or not the actorness of the Union in the field of security and defence is being developed. It is possible to view the Union as lacking the capacity that should rightfully be demanded of a strategic actor, while at the same time regarding it as gradually acquiring increased actorness in this field?

We proceed by considering the importance of the holistic conception of strategy, introduced in Chapter 1, for the purposes of comprehending the Union as a strategic actor. We then assess the strategic capacity of the EU in the field of security and defence policy. Is this peculiar creature, as a collective new to the world of military strategy and action, able to undertake practical actions that will have major regional, even global consequences? Finally, we attempt to pull the threads together by returning to the paradox, introduced early in this book, of an actor that clearly has strategic impact, even though it seems very far from possessing the characteristics of an assertive and coherent actor in the traditional mould of state actors.

Holistic Strategy as a Comparative Advantage

In Chapter 1 Engelbrekt introduced a traditional concept of strategy, associated with Machiavelli, and the modern, holistic concept used by the British theorist Colin S. Gray. While a traditional concept helps clarify some of the deficiencies of EU actorness, in particular with regard to capacities ‘to reason and act strategically,’ Gray’s holistic notion brings out some of its actual and potential strengths. For instance, Gray’s concept of strategy recognizes the EU’s enlargement policy as strategic in that the Union purposefully altered the basic incentive structure of governments and populations in the former communist states, and thereby suppressed and even eliminated many sources of conflict. Acknowledging this particular achievement, Adrian Hyde-Price in Chapter 9 speaks about the ‘*milieu* shaping’ influence of the EU in post-war Europe.

The concept of strategy developed by Lucien Poirier, explained and then applied in Chapter 3 by Lars Wedin, stems from French strategic thought but encompasses many of the same holistic properties as that of Colin Gray. Strategy is by Poirier described as “politics in action” (*la politique-en-acte*) and is directly reflective of the French general’s view that military ‘ways and means’ need always to be subordinated to clear political objectives. The formal definition introduced by Poirier is that “strategy is the science and art of manoeuvring forces in order to reach political objectives,” and Wedin uses this notion to try and match the conceptual and organizational dimensions of the EU’s crisis management capacity. Wedin’s analysis shows that, although the EU has never purposefully developed a ‘grand strategy’ or military strategy proper, a

number of military concepts have been elaborated and together form a rather coherent 'hierarchy of papers.'

Developing an interpretation of the military Headline Goals 2010 and the civilian Headline Goals 2008, both adopted in 2004, Malena Britz and Arita Eriksson build on Wedin's findings in Chapter 4 to detail the conceptual and legal innovations of recent years in terms of a strategic *acquis*. Just like Wedin, Britz and Eriksson understand the existing civilian crisis management capacity as a fully operational tool at the disposal of the Union. They argue that the ESDP as it stands represents "shared strategic actor capacity, both in the form of political and administrative structures and in the form of physical capabilities for external deployment, such as civil and military packages of different kinds."

Wedin further highlights the importance of a 'strategy of resources' that can be employed in future operations. He refers to Poirier's distinction between a 'logistical strategy' aimed at making available and placing resources at the disposal of military forces that need them, when they need them, and on the other hand a 'genetic strategy.' The latter, more ambitious strategy pertains to the creation of new resources through research and industrial development, and in this context the newly established European Defence Agency (EDA) is perceived as a particularly interesting component. Haaland Matlary agrees with Wedin on the importance of this institutional innovation. While most observers expect that the EDA will speed up the trend toward pooling European expertise in defence research and procurement, Haaland Matlary predicts that this cooperation may also grow to encompass training and maintenance.

In the realm of defence capabilities proper, however, the European capacities do not seem to amount to much compared to those of the U.S. In the post-Cold War era, as succinctly observed by Andrew L. Ross in Chapter 10, "the international market for hard power has been cornered by the United States." What the EU so far can muster is a set of soft power instruments for shaping the opportunity structures and living conditions of its neighbours, plus some coordination of defence procurement and a small-scale military force component. If the EU now is building a strategy that aims

to ‘manoeuvre’ these modest resources, it is perhaps understandable that other actors including the U.S. are not paying full attention.

Wider considerations should, however, be added when discussing a nascent EU strategy in the context of its U.S. ‘equivalent.’ First of all, the EU is not aspiring for the job as a Machiavellian strategic actor, equipped with fully-fledged ‘fox and lion’ properties. Indeed, few of its protagonists are in favour of such a transformation. As Ross explains, much of the transatlantic tension “is due less to the pursuit of divergent interests than to the embrace of divergent ways and means.” While the ambition is that the Union’s ‘hard power’ component will be significantly upgraded, to the point of constituting an asset of European strategy, few would support a security and defence policy based on the outlook of any of the big European countries. Even if they did, agreement is unlikely on whether the policy to be writ large should be that of the UK, France or Germany.

Second, for the time being it is debatable whether it is the strategic thinking of the U.S. or that of the EU which represents the most effective and promising approach to projecting, sustaining and generating power and prosperity. If a major objective is to win the battle over minds and hearts, Washington has certainly not had many successes as of late. According to Ross the effects of U.S. policies are so unsuccessful that the ongoing “erosion of U.S. soft power and legitimacy has rebounded to the advantage of the EU and its members. No less striking than the pronounced imbalance of hard power in favor of the United States is the shifting EU-U.S. balance of soft power in favor of the EU.”

Third, one may ask whether the differences between the two strategic actors, one well established and the other emergent, are as vast as they are mostly made out to be in terms of how policy is generated. The EU is a complex polity that encompasses a variety of units, whose autonomy in many areas is far-reaching. Its decision-making procedures have several different levels, and the pluralistic institutional structures compel politicians, bureaucrats and representatives of organized interests to await (policy) windows of opportunity and utilize multiple advocacy tactics. The same description applies to the United States.

In the sphere of security and defence, there are of course still crucial differences between the two, for instance that the U.S. executive, when perceiving a threat to the nation, can promptly decide to use military force to counter it. On the other hand, the long term trend is toward greater structural similarities between the EU and the U.S. Via enforcement of the Schengen agreement, conventional border crossings between member states have been dismantled, and external borders made increasingly salient as entry points for trade as well as for visitors and migrants. Correspondingly, cooperation between justice and home affairs ministries is growing to meet the challenges associated with realizing the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital in the Union's internal market. In that market, one may add, competition between defence industry companies has been greatly facilitated by recent deregulation, prompting a series of mergers, acquisitions and corporate alliance building. Again, all of the above is reshaping the conditions for security and defence policy, and is paving the way for an overarching strategic perspective on matching means to meet European ends.

The power of the executive

Those means are slowly evolving, too. Wedin, who served with the EU Military Staff after its first creation, is of the opinion that the EU of today—looked at through the prism of Poirier—can be described as a military strategic actor with regard to crisis management operations. That being said, he acknowledges that many problems remain to be addressed, emphasizing that each mission is only approved after having passed several hurdles. There must first of all be a general agreement that the mission is legal, that the funding is secure, and that there is support from decision makers as well as from the public. And then it has to be established that there are sufficient forces available, that the risks are manageable, and that there is a specified agreement on what the mission should accomplish.

Britz and Eriksson single out one particular dilemma, namely “who and what institution will be at the top of the chain of command when both civilian and military capabilities are used in an ESDP mission,” as the major remaining challenge. The concerns of Sten Rynning, in Chapter 6, are similar though deeper and wider in scope, in that he notes that the EU “is poor at strategic interaction; at translating values into

interests and promoting these in a tense dialogue with adversaries.” Having explored the case of nuclear diplomacy with Iran, Rynning concludes that “the EU comes up short with its attempt to solve the conflict by appealing to reason.” As previously stated, he identifies the main problem as being that ~~he persuasively argues, is that~~ the EU’s emergent strategic culture “is limited [and] fundamentally liberal.”

The Iran case is an example where the EU Big 3—the UK, France and Germany—have played a leading role, and therefore presumably one easier to manage than an issue on which 27 countries would be invited to have a say. In particular, she asserts, there can be no ‘sharp EU operation’ without France or the UK and their leadership in military matters. For these and other reasons, Haaland Matlary believes it is “unlikely that the EU will be able to develop the ability for coercive diplomacy.”

A traditional strategic actor would clearly need to be unitary. But do the same high standards necessarily apply to a ‘holistic’ one? Wagnsson perceives one advantage in that the EU, lacking the ‘flesh and blood’ of a coherent actor, will be more flexible and be able to adapt as circumstances alter. By extension, one could hypothesize that the positive experience of ‘constructive abstention,’ and by allowing one country to assume the role of ‘Framework nation’ in a specific ESDP mission, could form the foundation for a different form of actorness than that traditionally expected from a nation-state. While it no doubts limits the scope for coercive diplomacy and military intervention, it would at least theoretically provide additional opportunities for temporary coalitions that could be expedient and ‘comfortable’ to decision-makers.

When considering the role of modern media on domestic politics, Haaland Matlary herself develops an argument precisely in this direction. The expediency of ‘collusive delegation’ and ‘self-binding’ leads Haaland Matlary to conclude that many European governments, not least the Big 3, may actually find the EU a useful ‘shield’ that deflects attention from measures that an individual government would not risk adopting. The deployment of armed forces may clearly render a government prestige, if successful. But it can also easily cause the downfall of a cabinet, when things go wrong. In other words, the protection against direct accountability provided by the EU could come in handy for a government that is reluctant to accept the entire risk of a hazardous operation on its own.

The advantages of risk-sharing, on the other hand, are primarily to be found among the members of the 'composite actor.' For those who find themselves on the other side of a negotiation table, or in a specific context of political bargaining, such uncertainties are unwelcome. Given that 'wobbliness' will probably remain a constant in Union policymaking, the prospects for working out a long-term strategy look relatively dim. Based on its track record in the Middle East and Asia, both Rynning and Géré express scepticism as to the possibility of the EU acting as an 'honest broker' concerning high politics issues. Continuity, predictability and a solid institutional memory are necessary prerequisites for a European diplomacy with strategic depth.

If such scepticism is well-founded, then the 'strategic qualities' of Union policies in recent years could in part be largely illusory, reflecting a series of intergovernmental bargains made for short term benefits rather than on intelligent foresight (Moravcsik 1998). Hyde-Price goes even further, saying "the EU remains ham-strung by many of its member states' lingering illusions about the virtues of 'soft power,' and by a failure to develop a common strategic culture that goes beyond the platitudes of the *European Security Strategy*." In reality, he argues, the Union cannot live up to Machiavellian demands on strategic actorness and Europeans therefore need to adjust to having "a neurotic Centaur in their midst, with delusions of grandeur but limited power capabilities." In terms of the two questions about the Union as a strategic actor, and about its actorness in the field of security and defence asked at the beginning of this chapter, it is obvious that Hyde-Price answers the first question negatively, while he is at least sceptical whether or not the Union is currently acquiring more actorness in this field.

The Context of European Capacity-Building

Gale Mattox in Chapter 5 offers a useful historical perspective and shows how the United States has been reluctant to accept the notion of an EU as a strategic actor, a development that would have repercussions for its own interests and commitment in the European hemisphere. That negative, if not always coherent, U.S. attitude may be changing, though only slowly. The 1999 Kosovo campaign brought home the point of

American military technological predominance on both sides of the Atlantic, and swayed NATO bodies to address European deficits in this field more seriously than before. In Washington, Mattox writes, the imbalance in military forces was perceived as both “striking and disturbing.” With the U.S. currently tied up in Iraq and footing the bill for the bulk of post-9/11 anti-terrorism measures, European contributions are increasingly welcomed as the current U.S. administration seems “gradually to appreciate the role of the EU in assuming greater defense responsibility on the [European] continent [...] but also more globally,” she observes.

The U.S. is both a facilitating and a complicating factor for the EU as a nascent strategic actor. Understandably, bilateral ties to Washington are of considerable importance to each member state, and U.S. officials have at times used this leverage to undermine European cohesion. But, as Janne Haaland Matlary explains in Chapter 2, even this equation is not of a zero-sum type since “[t]he stronger the UK is in the ESDP, the more interesting it is to the US and the more power it can bring to the table in its interactions with the US.” Concerning the present climate of intra-EU sentiments, Haaland Matlary suggests that the electoral defeat of the Union’s Constitutional Treaty draft in the French and Dutch referenda in mid-2005 means that the pragmatic UK vision has eclipsed—at least for the time being—the more assertive EU security and defence role sought by Paris. Haaland Matlary thus seems not to want to classify the Union as a classical strategic actor at the present time. She does, however, highlight the fact that the Union possesses greater strategic actorness in 2007 than it did ten years ago, even though this actorness in military interventions depends on the willingness of the two greatest military powers in the organization, France and Great Britain, to take decisive action.

Haaland Matlary reminds us that commentators frequently either overemphasize or underestimate the role of the EU in security and defence matters. This applies to its internal impact as well as its external one. Meanwhile in Asia, where the U.S. and China constitute the two major competing powers, François Géré’s Chapter 8 shows that some subjects of strategic reasoning and action have acquired a distinctive EU dimension. In the disputes over the possible lifting of the arms embargo against China, as well as over the Galileo satellite guidance and navigation system, the EU has emerged as a player of appreciable significance. Géré believes that the Union is at

present not assertive enough to be a strategic actor in the classic sense, partly due to competing visions among member states. At the same time, he identifies at least some aspects of a triangular power play where the EU interacts with the U.S. and China. Such an analysis presupposes that a certain amount of strategic actorness is observed.

In Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, meanwhile, Bertil Nygren is able to demonstrate in Chapter 7 the substantive leverage of the EU over the electoral process in 'managed democracies' or countries governed by clan-based elites in recent years. Many factors regarding the specific communist legacy, regime type, relationship to Russia and to pro-reformist Western sponsors are significant, yet a widespread 'membership wish' has typically allowed the Union to exert its considerable 'soft power' by weighing in with pro-European and pro-democracy candidates. At the same time Nygren's analysis reflects the absence of alternative, coercive instruments that traditional great powers have tended to employ to sway political élites in one direction or another. Nygren does not explicitly address the question of whether or not the Union is a strategic actor. His empirical analysis indicates, however, that the Union clearly influences electoral processes in countries on its Eastern periphery, and that this influence is greater the closer the state in question is linked to the EU.

The analysis by Sten Rynning in Chapter 6 of the Union as an actor on the issue of Iran's programme of developing nuclear reactors, by many believed to herald the acquisition of nuclear weapons, contains a critical assessment of the ability of the EU to work as an 'honest broker' in conflict between two parties. According to Rynning the honest broker approach works when the EU wields overwhelming power in the situation at hand, as in today's Balkans, but is likely ineffective when, as on the Iranian matter, the Union is weak relative to both main adversaries: the United States as a global power and Iran as a major regional player. Rynning regards the EU's liberal strategic culture as a problem when assessing it as a strategic actor. In his careful analysis he shows that such an actor can only have real strategic influence on very specific issues. It thus seems possible to conclude that he is at least sceptical about whether or not to regard the Union as a strategic actor.

In a more general assessment of the EU's present status as a strategic actor, Chapter 11, by Charlotte Wagnsson, provides a review of three ideal type role descriptions at a global level. Drawing on recent examples of policymaking and bargaining derived from empirical research, Wagnsson juxtaposes the conception of the Union as a strategic actor against that of a passive pole and, finally, that of a re-actor. She accepts that the Union has developed into something more consequential than a passive pole in world affairs, but doubts whether strategic actorness is in the cards for the foreseeable future. In fact, Wagnsson predicts that the "pursuit of increased cohesion in the sphere of security—which is a precondition for a common strategy—risks generating negative effects for the general sense of community within the EU." She therefore favours the terms 'pole' and 're-actor' as these notions better reflect its limited genuine capacity to reason and act strategically, whereas she believes it both unlikely and even unwise for European to expand its ambitions towards strategic actorness in the classical, Machiavellian, sense. The Union may thus not be a strategic actor in the classical sense, in Wagnsson's view, but it possesses some strategic actor capacity.

The Paradox Revisited

The sobering assessment of Wagnsson and others returns us to the curious fact that several EU policies—some of which were described in this volume—possess 'strategic qualities,' despite the near-absence of conceptual and institutional capacities for strategic reasoning and action. Even such a sceptical observer as Rynning refers to the EU's non-proliferation policy as "a strategy, in fact." If stability and coherence of vision are impossible to achieve without a radical strengthening of central, essentially 'federal' institutions, how come the EU has developed its 'holistic approach' to security and defence affairs? Is this approach sustainable and can it be institutionalized, regardless of the weakness of the 'executive properties' of the Union?

It is indeed a contradiction of sorts, as pointed out by Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi in the autumn of 2006, that the EU has a unified power network but no central authority to run or supervise it (BBC News 2006). Some form of central institution in the area of power and energy would be in a position to coordinate political and legal

initiatives, draft joint statements, and serve as the Union's institutional memory. This is how policymaking takes place in most fields where the EU has a mandate or a clear stake. It does not necessarily mean that power and executive capacities are centralized in a supranational body at the Union level, more often that there is an EU-wide contact and coordination point that facilitates multilateral and multilevel governance.

In fact, the pluralism of present decision-making arrangements might be one explanation for why the EU, more than many other polities, has been successful in fashioning policies with strategic qualities. Decisions are taken on the basis of consensus or qualified majorities, with a multitude of opportunities for modification (or blockage) at each level, not infrequently rendering the outcome of regular bread-and-butter issues suboptimal. Holistic strategy is, however, supposedly a subject that lends itself to bargains made at a higher level of abstraction, the qualities of which could be enhanced by taking a multitude of views and interests into account. Helpful in this context is the medium- to long-range time perspective of many of the Union's legal and political initiatives.

The constitutional treaty defeated in 2005 was also a long-term project, but above all it was conceived to bring about a sense of completion regarding European integration. It was an exercise designed to stabilize the internal market as the pivot of Europe's economic life, the euro as its currency, community law as an enduring legal order, and EU institutions as the expression of a novel polity, historically unique on the continent since the days of the Roman Empire. Last but not least, that is, the new constitutional treaty was supposed to enhance the Union's political legitimacy.

That project failed, but the implications of this failure are often overstated, not least when it comes to the Union as an actor in the external field. The expectation that people would vote in favour of something they essentially already have, and avoid mixing in their own sentiments regarding the national and domestic politics was perhaps misguided. The reasonable idea at the core of the process, however, was that the time has come to consolidate the gains of more than half a century of European integration. The basic form and shape of the EU would have been 'constitutionalized.'

EU leaders are now trying to think of other ways to consolidate the system in its present form and shape. Arguably, a similar attempt could also be made in the field of security and defence policy, given the establishment of the ESDP and the strategic *acquis* that has evolved for certain purposes and then adjusted to the assignments which it has carried out. While the idea of ‘freezing’ the present structure of the ESDP would seem to go against the grain of the European project as hitherto understood, it still seems possible to envision a degree of consolidation in this field along the lines of two broad alternatives.

The first option would be modelled on the monetary union regime, with countries that are financially fit and able to decide on the macroeconomic policy of the Euro-zone. Although the ECOFIN regime has seen its fair share of trouble in terms of burden-shirking by individual countries, the overall principles are chiefly intact. By analogy, the major contributors to a Union-wide security and defence policy could, by virtue of sizeable defence spending or readiness to deploy troops or equipment, be seated at a specialized Ministerial Council that allows for qualified majority voting in this narrower group. The existing treaties would need to be revised for this to be possible, though the principle of ‘variable geometry’ has already been enshrined in the now valid text, so the amendments would be limited. Given the successful experience with ‘constructive abstention’ mentioned above, this alternative may be attractive to members of the Big 3 in particular.

The second option would be most congenial with the approach of recent years, meaning that the Union pursues a long-term objective of additive reinforcement based on the ‘Community method’ of patient consensus-seeking. It is true that the remarkable progress made in setting up the ESDP and the EDA in the past couple of years appear to lend credibility to this alternative. If the combined effects of the ‘botched’ 2005 treaty referenda and the steep increase in the number of member states through enlargement have not made it irrelevant, then there are significant advantages in sticking to this approach, as the Union’s power can grow ‘organically,’ and internal and external actors adjust to its increasing weight over time.

There is virtually no support for an EU that would revert back to merely being an international organization and a marketplace, without any role in global affairs. Nor is

there any serious proposition that the Union should embark on a path toward building capacities to join, or compete with, the United States as a global hegemonic power, equipped with the whole range of hard and soft power instruments. Based on our two assumptions of where the European project finds itself at present, the goal of this volume has been to explore—in some detail—a narrower set of more realistic scenarios.

To return to Prime Minister Prodi and his vision of the role of “Europe” at the end of the Lebanon War in the summer of 2006, the analyses in this volume devoted the European Union as a strategic actor have still not been able to disentangle the role of the European member states from the role of the Union in this area. We have made somewhat clearer that the big 3, the United Kingdom, France, and to some extent Germany, are crucial to the puzzle that this book has addressed. To the extent that one, two or all three of them wish to act, they have a choice between acting unilaterally and acting within the context of the Union. The very fact that this second option did not exist at all a few years ago tells us that the Union has a larger role to play in security defence affairs after 1999 than it had before the decision was taken to cooperate in security and defence policy. It is the contention of the editors that whether or not the Union qualifies as a strategic actor at this point in time is a question that may be legitimately contested, but what is incontrovertible is that the development of the ESPD after 1999 means that the Union’s actorness is clearly more advanced in the field of security and defence than it has ever been before.

Barry Posen has, in his recent analysis of the ESDP from the perspective of a realist (in International Relations theory terms) noted that over the coming decade the EU will gradually come to possess an ever increasing amount of strategic assets, even if one uses traditional military strategic criteria in making this assessment (Posen 2006: 180). This growth in assets should, in principle, make the Union significantly more potent as a strategic actor on those issues when it is able to take a decision and to act decisively. At the same time, however, the growth in strategic assets can, by itself, do nothing to change the basic character of the Union as an actor that lacks some of the essential qualities of a strategic actor in the classical, Machiavellian sense of the term.

In a sense, Chapters 4 and 9 in this volume present the two most diametrically opposed assessments, as well as two of the most distinct ones, of the basic question studied in this volume: is the European Union, as currently constituted, a strategic actor? We have outlined in Chapter 1 that we believe that there are two ways of answering this question. The traditional answer informed by a realist analysis of strategic affairs, in this case well represented by Adrian Hyde-Price in Chapter 9, is that “Given the unwillingness of the ‘EU three’ to subordinate their national foreign policy interests as great powers to the CFSP, there is little chance that the EU will emerge as a strong and coherent strategic actor in global politics.” The alternative view of the current EU, as well as a view that attempts to project future developments, is provided in Chapter 4 by Malena Britz and Arita Eriksson: “in order to comprehend a fully EU shared strategy, we should not only investigate the EU level but also the member state level. It becomes increasingly important not only to study the development at the EU level when the shared strategy is to be studied, but also to study what happens in the member states and the interplay between the development at the EU level and the member state level. The EU’s possibilities of pursuing a shared strategy is built on member state capabilities, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of an EU shared strategy.” The view developed by Britz and Eriksson is closer to what Engelbrekt calls a holistic conception of strategy in Chapter 1.

Thus, our answer to the question of whether or not the EU is a strategic actor differs, depending – at least in large part – on our definition of “strategy” as well as on our general view of the European project. For Hyde-Price, who subscribes to what amounts to a Machiavellian (or Clausewitzian) view on strategy and strategic actor, the EU is not now, and is very unlikely ever to become, a strategic actor in the classic sense. For Britz and Eriksson, a classic conception of strategy and strategic actor is not applicable to the EU of the current or of the future. For them, the holistic conception cited by Engelbrekt in Chapter 1 is much more apt to characterize the current and probably also the future Union. In this second conception, the EU is not distinguished from the member states, as is done in the first conception, but it is rather taken for granted that EU strategy is formulated in an interplay between the EU and the nation state level. While they might agree that the Union is not now a strategic actor in the classic sense, in a way this is beside the point, as it is a creature that

cannot be properly evaluated by criteria developed for the nation state. Understanding the Union from this perspective necessitates a different perspective than that of Hyde-Price.

Another way of stating the difference between Britz and Eriksson, on the one hand, and Hyde-Price, on the other, is that the former obviously believe that the actorness of the Union has developed in this field, whereas Hyde-Price is much more skeptical about this, and holds that it is still the two or three most important member states of the Union that are most important in this field.

One way of characterizing our difficulties in conclusively “nailing down” the precise role of the European Union as a strategic actor in the present and in the future is provided by Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, who state that

The political construction of Europe shows a special characteristic that distinguishes it from all nation-state projects: European integration was from the beginning a *dynamic open process without any given end result*. ...Europe does not exist, just Europeanization. And this process of Europeanization continues in two directions: *inward* through the EU's ever expanding growth of its powers and the structural adjustments in the member states they lead to, and *outwards* through the recurring expansions of membership and through the export of its norms and rules. (Beck and Grande, 2006: 22, translation by the authors, italics supplied.).

Despite the necessary caveats about the specific changing nature of the European Union, some conclusions are possible to draw from the chapters in this volume. The first is that few, if any, of our authors classify the present Union as a strategic actor in the classic sense. If, however, we apply the holistic notion of strategy, several of our authors would be inclined to agree that the Union possess at least some of the traits of a modern strategic actor. The second overall conclusion is that, be it as it may about the definition of a strategic actor, most, if not all, authors would tend to agree that the Union has a clearly greater actorness in security and defence matters in 2007 than it had in 1997.

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