

# The European Union and Multilateral Institutions

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## 1. Introduction

What does the European Union do in international institutions? At first glance this might look like an innocent question. In our view, it is anything but an innocent question. In reality, the question engages and to some degree challenges a considerable range of different important literatures. First, it obviously engages the literature on global governance and international organization, i.e. a research community which for various reasons tends not to pay attention to the EU (Kratochwil and Mansfield 1994; Karns and Minst 2000; Rittberger and Zangl 2006). Furthermore, the question potentially challenges some key findings in the literature on the US and multilateral institutions (Karns and Mingst 1990; Ruggie ed., 1993; Foot et al., 2003; Patrick and Forman, 2001). At the same time, this literature may function as a rich source of theoretical understandings of relations between international players and international institutions. The third set of literature that potentially can be complemented is research on European (Union) Foreign Policy (Carlsnaes 2007; Schimmelfennig 2003; K. Smith 2003; M.E. Smith 2003). While the EU's bilateral relations have received considerable interest among scholars in this research community, there has been little investigation into relations between the EU and international institutions (for exceptions, see Rhinard 2006; Billiet 2006, Or-

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tega ed. 2005). The question also challenges some of the basic assumptions in literature on new regionalism (Warleigh 2007; UNU-CRIS publications). Finally, the question raises some profound doubt about major theoretical perspectives within IR theory. The question runs counter to the common sense that can be derived from specific theoretical perspectives, i.e. that the EU *is* an international institution and should be conceptualized as such. In short, a research agenda on this question promises to challenge well-established perspectives and findings. We ask the question because counter-intuitive questions often provide intriguing answers.

We propose an exploration of relationships between the EU and international institutions because, surprisingly, analysts have left these relations largely unexplored. Hence, the paper will add to the (limited) literature on relations between the EU and international institutions and potentially stimulate further research on the topic. The second reason for our exploration is that these relations are increasingly important. We are aware that preliminary studies tend to confirm this claim and stated policies point in the same direction. Finally, it is widely accepted that global governance is characterized by serious problems. Most international institutions are in the process of being reformed and, in addition, the value of (certain) multilateral institutions has been put in serious doubt by one or more powerful states.

In the first section of the paper we outline an analytical framework by explicating our key terms such as international institutions and the European Union, as well as four master variables: identity, power, interests and institutional settings. In the second section, we briefly review the literature on international institutions, including the relatively small part focusing on EU-II relations. In the third section, we outline future directions of research on the EU and IIs, in particular a portfolio of research questions. In addition we explain why the proposed research agenda is challenging vis-à-vis major theoretical orientations within IR theory. Finally, we briefly summarize our findings.

## **2. Analytical Framework**

In this section of the paper, we outline our understanding of the key features of our analytical framework. Specifically, we explicate the meaning of key concepts such as international institutions and the European Union, and we outline an approach based on levels of analysis, combined with the agency-structure debate, before going on to identify a set of key master variables (identity, power, interests, and institutional setting). These can provide a framework for future research (see also section 4).

## **2.1. *International Institutions***

A research agenda addressing the relationship between the EU and international institutions may usefully focus on “negotiated” institutions that are deliberately established by governments and other actors in order to shape policy outcomes and behaviour. International institutions can in general be defined as “persistent and connected sets of rules and practices that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations” (Keohane 1989: 3). They find their expressions in “stable, recurring patterns of behaviour” (Lowndes 2002). In addition to “negotiated” arrangements, they in particular include “spontaneous” institutions that emerge much like customary law as a matter of practice from the interaction of actors (Young 1983). From a governance perspective, negotiated institutions are of particular interest because they can be employed instrumentally to bring about change and influence outcomes. They therefore constitute a useful focus of research on the EU and international institutions, because they provide actors such as the EU with the opportunity to participate in and influence the shape of these governance instruments.

Negotiated international institutions have two components. First, they encompass substantive rules and obligations that indicate socially desirable behaviour. These norms are the principal instruments of governance that may affect the behaviour of addressees and have an impact on the issue at hand. Second, and contrasting spontaneous institutions, negotiated institutions comprise their own collective decision-making processes/apparatuses from which their norms and behavioural guidelines emerge (Levy et al. 1995). These procedures enable actors to adapt and develop international institutions dynamically and to use them as flexible instruments of international governance (Gehring 1994). They thus provide clear channels and opportunities to the EU, as an international actor, to influence international rules and obligations agreed on in these institutions.

Both international organizations and international regimes qualify as relevant international institutions (Simmons and Martin 2002). International regimes comprise issue-area specific sets of rules and obligations and decision-making fora and are usually based on one or more international treaties. For the last two decades or so, much of the research on international institutions has focused on international regimes, exploring their formation, development and effectiveness (e.g. Keohane 1984; Gehring 1994; Miles et al. 2002). Formal international organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), also elaborate norms and behavioural guidelines and provide their members with fora and procedures for taking collectively binding decisions (Keohane 1989: 5;

Abbott and Snidal 1998: 15-16). They constituted the major focus of scientific attention regarding international institutions until the early 1970s (Martin and Simmons 1998). Both international regimes and international organisations thus fit the definition of negotiated international institutions. They also present a broad field of inquiry and probably the most important fora for global governance. According to the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, 973 intergovernmental international organisations and 2340 multilateral treaties and international agreements were in existence in 2005.<sup>2</sup>

For the most part, international regimes and international organizations can even be treated as like entities. First of all, it is difficult to distinguish between them. Some organizations are themselves the core of a regime (e.g. the WTO), while some others provide services to or host international regimes (e.g. the International Maritime Organization, IMO, and the UN Environment Programme, UNEP). Some scholars have determined the frequently relatively extensive bureaucracies and the particular status of formal organisations in international law (i.e. they are subjects of international law) as their distinctive features (e.g. Young 1994: 163-183; Keohane 1989: 3-4). However, regimes regularly also possess secretariats of varying sizes, and there is little empirical evidence that the size of a secretariat systematically affects an institution's rule-making and governance capacity. Also, neither the significance or effectiveness of an international institution, nor its role as a decision-making forum and norm creator hinges on whether it is a formal subject of international law (i.e. it has the formal status of an international organisation). There is also hardly any evidence available that organisations would possess more formal rules than regime. Both these forms of international institutions usually comprise a specific mixture of formal and informal rules that varies from case to case (but not systematically between organizations and regimes). Overall, international regimes and organisations do not significantly differ in their governance capacity (Oberthür and Gehring 2004: 362-364). They both together provide a suitable focus of research on the EU and international institutions.

## **2.2. The EU as an Actor in International Institutions**

The EU has been increasingly recognized as an actor in international affairs by states as well as by scholars (e.g. Bretherton and Vogler 2006). Many governments and scholars initially found it diffi-

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.diversitas.org/db/x.php?go=pdf&dbcode=v5&year=2005&chap=0\\_1](http://www.diversitas.org/db/x.php?go=pdf&dbcode=v5&year=2005&chap=0_1), accessed 20.12.2006

cult to accept that an international institution such as the EU, even if supranational in character, could participate in international law and politics at a level playing field with states. With the growing number of multilateral treaties to which the “European Community” is a member in the 100s, and in the environmental sector alone standing at 44<sup>3</sup> (see Victor 2007) and the institutionalization of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), doubts about the capacity of the EU to be a global actor have diminished (e.g. Giddens 2006; McCormick 2007).

One of the reasons for continuing to call into question the actorness of the EU in international affairs is the fact that the EU, unlike most states, takes many different forms. The European Commission appears as an actor representing the “European Community” in various fora. On other occasions, the biannually rotating EU Presidency (possibly coordinating within the so-called EU Troika consisting of the current, preceding and succeeding Presidency or the current and succeeding Presidency plus the Commission) speaks for the EU. On still other occasions, the EU High Representative for the CFSP (Javier Solana) acts as the organ of the Union. Finally, individual member states and groups of member states have retained their individual voices and may in some fora speak on behalf of participating EU member states. It may not come as a surprise that this multitude of voices has at times been characterized as a “cacophony” (Meunier 2005: 2).

As regards international institutions, three different forms of representation and actorness of the EU can principally be distinguished (with various mixtures and variations in reality). The actual form of EU participation has generally depended on (1) the distribution of internal and external competences between the Community and its member states (as determined by EC/EU treaty law and implementing EC legislation) and (2) the rules of participation of the international institution in question (e.g. Eeckhout 2004: Chapter 7):

- In cases where the EC itself is a member of the international institution and the issue addressed is within exclusive Community competence, the Community as such acts through the European Commission, which is assisted by a committee of representatives of the member states (“Community Method”).
- In cases of mixed/shared EC competence and in cases of exclusive Community competence without formal EC memberships in the international institution in question,<sup>4</sup> the EU Presidency has represented the EU on the basis of a position coordinated within a committee composed of the member states and the Commission.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/international\\_issues/pdf/agreements\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/international_issues/pdf/agreements_en.pdf), accessed 17.01.2006

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that, mainly due to the constraints of international law, the EC has only been able to become a full member of three formal international organisations so far (FAO, the WTO, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, EBRD) (Eeckhout 2004: 200; Bretherton and Vogler 2006).

- In cases of exclusive member state competence, each member state is in principle allowed to speak for itself (subject to the general duty to cooperate with the other member states). Even under these conditions, however, member states may decide to coordinate their positions.

In reality, representation by the Commission and/or by the EU Presidency is the most relevant forms of EU actorness in international institutions. Since some degree of EC legislation and competence (increasingly) exists in most policy fields, exclusive member state competence represents the exception rather than the rule. What is more, a general practice of coordinating positions among EU member states has developed over the years even in areas where Community competence is largely absent. At the same time, exclusive Community competence is mainly limited to the areas of common commercial policy (international trade) and fisheries. As a result, permutations of the (more precarious) shared/mixed competence arrangements may be the most common in international institutions. Having said that, a variety of different concrete arrangements exist in various international fora that reflect varying balances in the distribution of competence as well as historically contingent and evolving practices.

Finally, it is worth noting that the form of the representation of the EU in international institutions has changed over time and continues to evolve. Analyses and comparisons across time will have to take into account that changes in EC treaty law, the evolution of the *acquis communautaire* in various policy fields, and the evolving jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) have all affected and changed EU representation in international institutions. In this context, the ECJ has become an important tool for the settlement of disputes between the Council and the member states on the one hand and the Commission on the other hand regarding the Community role in international institutions (compare Eeckhout 2004).

### **2.3. Levels of Analysis and Agency-Structure**

Most introductions to the level of analysis problem operate with three or four levels: system; state, bureaucracy and individual.

- System. Studies conducted at this level focus on how the world's social-economic-political structure and pattern of interaction - the international system - strongly influence the behaviour and policies of states and other international actors. Thus, understanding the structure and pattern of the international system will lead to an understanding of how international politics operates.
- Studies at the state level ask how the characteristics of an individual country have an impact on the country's behaviour. Thus, understanding these individual characteristics will lead to an understanding of how international politics operates.

- Studies at the level of bureaucracy focus on how the characteristics of bureaucracies have an impact on the country's behaviour. Therefore, understanding states as complex organizations – bureaucracies – which decide policy will lead to understanding how international politics operates.
- The individual level focuses on people, arguing that at the end of the day people make policy. Therefore, understanding how people (individually, in groups, or as a species) decide policy will lead to understanding how international politics operates.

When doing research on the European Union, this standard format is often insufficient. In the first place, a European level should be added, in particular because international politics has been bifurcated, i.e., it can be found both within and beyond Europe. Furthermore, the European level has an impact on the state level as theorized and documented by the literature on Europeanization. Finally, the EU as such can in principle be influenced by factors at the systemic level just as the characteristics of the EU can have an impact on the EU's behaviour and its international policies.

These options become clearer when we merge the level of analysis problem with the agent-structure problem. Such a merger is a most suitable point of departure for mapping the different literatures of existing research, a precondition for our subsequent task, i.e., outlining a research agenda. Obviously, the international system cannot be seen as an agent, so let us begin by looking at the system/society as a structure that influences the EU. Neorealism (Waltz 1979), neoliberal institutionalism (Keohane 1989) and social constructivism (Wendt 1999) are all systemic theories that are designed to explain state behaviour and, with some caveats in place, a similar analytical logic can be used to explain the international behaviour of the EU. The three theorists have fairly different conceptions of the international structure, implying that their theoretical orientations are foremost complementary and hardly competitive. It is possible to stay at the level above states and the EU but avoid the systemic structural level. This is what the international society tradition does all the time, i.e. the theory of international society (Bull 1977). It should be added that neither the international system nor international society has been a widely used point of departure for research. In any case these macro perspectives are hardly applicable in concrete research and should be seen as reservoirs by means of which concrete applicable theories can be built or applied.

When tracing the opposite flow of influence, we put the EU in the cockpit and subsequently we analyze how the EU or its policies have an impact on the international system's structure or international society. In stark contrast to the structural perspective we outlined above, this EU agency point of departure has been fairly popular, cf. the following arguments:

- EU is a multilateral institution, explaining its preference for international multilateral institutions
- Europe is militarily weak, explaining why Europe opts for the tactics of the weak (Kagan 2003)

- When this or that institutional design is in place, for instance the Constitutional Treaty, the EU can do so much better internationally
- EU is a decision-maker “supertanker”, i.e. slow to adjust to new directions or challenges
- The EU’s domestic *raison d’être* is foremost politico-economic, hence the EU plays a major international role within these issue-areas, whereas the role is more modest elsewhere.

## **2.4. Master Variables**

In this section we focus on the kind of variables that in our understanding should be seen as master variables. In specific terms, we focus on identity, power, interests and interest constellations, and finally, institutional settings.

### **Identity**

In theoretical frameworks, the function of the identity variable varies from being an “add on” variable to being a master variable. In the present context, we will focus on the latter function. Identity is a complex variable that includes dynamics of self-other relations, i.e. notions of self-images in relation to images of (significant) others. The variable also includes a dimension of recognition, i.e., the fact that actors want to be recognized for what they are or for what they perceive themselves to be. There is an intricate relationship between this ontological dimension and behavioural dimensions, i.e. concerning what actors do.

Let us first explicate the dimension of recognition, which probably is the least explored aspect of European identity. For half a century, the European Community/European Union has wanted to be recognised as an international actor. Processes of formal diplomatic recognition of European Commission delegations have been incremental. In the context of international institutions, the European Commission has also attempted to be formally recognized but in the state-centric world of multilateral institutions success has been limited. Jupille and Caporaso (1998) suggest that the participation of the European Commission in the UN Rio 1992 Summit had more to do with recognition politics than playing a role in global environmental politics. The limited external success may be linked to the very slow incremental process of being recognized “EU-domestically.” What we have in mind here is the gradual rapprochement between the European Commission (and Community policies) and the EPC/CFSP institutions and policies. The recognition aspect suggests that the EU supports multilateral institutions, in part because it is an ontological vocation to do so. In this perspective, instrumental reasoning only comes second. In summary there are both external and internal dimen-

sions of recognition. Both dimensions have hardly been explored in a systematic fashion. Relations between the EU and international institutions seem to be a promising point of departure.

Second, let us take a closer look at the identity variable as such and some of potential ways in which it can be used for our purposes. According to Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt and Peter Katzenstein (1996), we can use the identity variable to explain patterns of both interest-formation and policy-making. In the first place they point out that, “[v]ariation in state identity, or changes in state identity, affect the national security interests or policies of states (1996: 60). If applied to the EU context, Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein’s argument implies that we can use the EU’s international identity in order to explain the formation of European interests and, in turn, European policy-making. Thomas U. Berger begins his analysis of security policies in Germany and Japan in the following fashion, “For nearly half a century Germany and Japan have pursued remarkably consistent national security policies that deemphasize military instruments as a means of achieving national objectives” (Berger, 1996: 317). It is remarkably easy to insert the European Union and replace national objectives with European objectives. To the degree that the EU’s identity is changing, we should expect European interests and policies to change as well. State identities vary across time. There are reasons to expect that the identity of the European Union also varies across time. However, we should be cautious concerning the causal linkage between identity, interests and policies, in particular because the EU’s identity might be less well-established than many states. Our reflections above on recognition politics suggest that this might well be the case.

Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein claim that, “[c]onfigurations of state identity affect interstate structures, such as regimes or security communities” (1996: 62). Clearly, this proposition could be the point of departure for studies of the EU’s international impact. The development of the transatlantic security community and the transformation of the European security community to a secure community are examples of such potential impact. However, we lack studies that have been designed with such research questions in mind. Furthermore, the proposition could lead to studies of the effectiveness of the EU’s policy vis-à-vis international institutions.

It is a fact that most EU member states are relatively small states. Joseph Grieco’s (1997) forwards a realist theory of multilateralism that claims to explain why small (weak) states have an interest in multilateral institutions. Grieco suggests that ‘weak states’ prefer multilateral institutions because then they do not have to form alliances (balancing) against powerful states but can rely on legal commitments that redistribute power from the powerful to the weak. Could it be that this rationale

explains the widespread support among the EU-27 of multilateral institutions even if their influence is rather limited? Furthermore, could it be that the EU-27 on the one hand are very pleased to be seen as internationally engaged while, on the other hand, trying to square the circle by means of upgrading their influence by means of a “consortium,” the EU, while preserving their formally powerful presence in international institutions? While we cannot, in the present context, address these issues, we can keep them in mind when we outline, in the third section of the paper, our research agenda.

## Power

Power is the ubiquitous variable that nonetheless has had a hard time entering studies of global governance. Given our focus on relations between the EU and international institutions, we should pay attention to both the actual absence of power in the literature and to the potential, indeed likely presence of power in the relationship. This situation leads us to one of the few systematic studies on the topic, in concrete terms to Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall’s *Power in Global Governance* (2004).

Barnett and Duvall point out that despite of the very considerable amount of research on global governance during the last decade or more, research “has not included a sustained consideration of power” (2004: 2). They consider this absence paradoxical, because governance and power are inextricably linked” (ibid.). Furthermore, they point out that the liberal tradition has traditionally asked questions of who governs, how institutions might be designed to check the potential abuse of power and how individual autonomy and liberty can be preserved” (ibid.). Finally, they emphasize that “governance involves the rules, structures, and institutions that guide, regulate, and control social life, features that are fundamental elements of power” (ibid.). Barnett and Duvall conclude that “[t]here seems to be something about how global governance is understood, conceptually and empirically, that de-centers power as an analytical concept” (ibid.).

Barnett and Duvall’s observations seem crucially important to our analytical endeavours, i.e. to better understand relations between the EU and international institutions. The question remains though, how we can make use of the power variable. In this context, it is relevant to consult the literature on relations between the US and international institutions, in particular because this literature provides some of the exceptions to the rule that power is absent from studies of global governance. However, power typically enters the scene in the shape of the international distribution of

power. This distribution is regarded a potential factor in explaining changes in US behaviour towards international institutions. Analysts consistently conclude their studies by pointing to the limited explanatory power of the international distribution of power factor. Actually, analysts conclude that domestic politics is a much more powerful factor.

In order not to limit our agenda to the kind of material power that operates in the international distribution of power, we adopt Barnett and Duvall's distinction between four forms of power:

- Compulsory power (actors directly controlling other actors)
- Institutional power (actors indirectly controlling other actors through institutions)
- Structural power (defined as the "constitution of social capacities and interests of actors in direct relation to one another")
- Productive power (defined as the "socially diffuse production of subjectivity in systems of meaning and signification", Barnett and Duvall, 2004: 3).

Barnett and Duvall emphasize that their conceptualization has obvious analytical advantages if compared to other conceptualizations such as hard and soft power, material and ideational power or agency-centred and structural power. The challenge for our project is operationalizing the concepts within the context defining our project. We will return to this challenge in the third part of the paper.

The identity and power variables are often seen as contradictory or in terms of either/or. But actually, they can also be seen as complementary variables. Thus, Henry Nau's study of American foreign policy *At Home Abroad* (2002) carries a telling subtitle "Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy" and the key argument of the book is that neither identity- nor power-factors should stand alone in studies of foreign policy. Rather, both kinds of factor can carry their part of the explanatory burden and complement each other. When outlining our research agenda, we will make use of this insight and, in addition, we will draw on the classical distinction between system-wide or general power and issue-specific power. The distinction is obviously particularly important when it comes to actually applying the distribution-of-power variable in studies aiming at explaining EU behaviour vis-à-vis international institutions.

### Interests and Interest Constellations

Interests/preferences and interest/preference constellations figure particularly prominently as explanatory variables in rational-actor and rational institutionalist approaches in international politics and European integration (e.g. Moravcsik 1991; Keohane, 1988). We may therefore expect these

factors to have considerable explanatory power also with respect to understanding the relationship between the EU and international institutions. Interest-based approaches are based on the assumption that political actors generally strive to assess the varying costs and benefits of options available for them. This enables them to prioritize these options so as to maximize their net benefit or minimize their net costs. Although interest-based approaches are frequently suspected to pay particular attention to tangible direct costs and benefits (frequently of an economic nature), there is a wide range of direct and indirect costs and benefits that principally can be taken into account including economic, political, social, cultural, psychological, etc. gains and losses. It is implied that the assessment of costs and benefits principally follows a 'rational' pattern. It is possible, however, to relax this assumption by taking into account the "bounded rationality" (Newell and Simon 1972) of actors and the fact that the assessment may follow a political rationality (which also implies that the assessment may not be done by a unitary actor but may be the result of a political process involving various actors) (Pollack 2001; Moravcsik 1999).

Employing interest analysis as an analytical tool for the explanation of actors' behaviour presents considerable challenges. While it may be intuitively convincing to assume that actors try to pursue a course of action that is beneficial for them, determining the interest or preference of an actor independently from his or her behaviour is far from trivial. On the one hand, the researcher may use some "objective" indicator or indicators (economic, political, etc.) which the actor may not have taken into account at all when pursuing her interest. On the other hand, starting from the "interest" publicly announced by actors may fall into the trap of their strategic action in that they may pretend to have a certain preference while actually pursuing another one. In other words, determining the actual interest or preference of an actor implies using indicators that are independent of the actor's behaviour (to avoid tautology), while ensuring that the factors considered are actually part of the decision-making process of preference formation of the actor. This may be done by both collecting data on likely factors underlying the interest/preference of an actor and reconfirming that the actors actually considered these factors (through document analysis, interviews, etc.).

In addition to the interest of actors, the resulting interest constellation may also constitute an important explanatory variable. In terms of international cooperation that is the central object of international institutions, game theory has been employed to distinguish the varying chances and obstacles that different interest constellations pose. For example, "coordination games" in which each actor involved has a clear preference for cooperation but the exact terms of this cooperation (including the exact distribution of the resulting benefits) need to be sorted out are easier to resolve than "coop-

eration games” in which cooperation brings overall benefits to the community of actors but achieving cooperation requires arrangements for insuring against deviating behaviour because individual actors have an incentive to take a free ride on cooperators. Various different interest constellations or ‘games’ can be distinguished on this basis (Stein 1983; Zürn 1992).

The interest constellation underlying an international institution may be an important explanatory variable with respect to individual actors in particular in two respects. First, it provides an important reference point for assessing the effectiveness and influence of an actor such as the EU on the policies of an international institution because it enables us to distinguish easier from more difficult constellations. For example, the EU may find it much less demanding to realize a strengthening and deepening of international policies in an institution characterized by a “coordination” game than in one characterized by a “cooperation” game. Second, the interests actors pursue are themselves seriously affected by the context in which these actors operate. The interest constellation as such usually limits the available policy space that is considered by actors (see, e.g. Kubalkova *et al* 1998).

### Institutional Setting

Institutional arrangements can be important explanatory variables with respect to the role of the EU in international institutions at two levels. First, international institutions in general determine a framework for decision-making that affects the ability of its members and other stakeholders involved to pursue and realize their interests. They therefore are an important component influencing the process of preference building of actors, including the EU. Second, EU foreign policy in international fora itself arises on the basis of internal decision-making procedures and a specific division of competences between EU member states and the EU’s supranational institutions (in particular, the European Commission). These internal arrangements determine the chances of EU actors to realize their individual interests when EU positions are formed.

Three aspects of international institutions are particularly relevant for the international decision-making process and thus the chances of actors to realize their interests in this process. The *delimitation of an issue-area* and the applicable *membership rules* have far-reaching implications for the related decision-making process. The issue-areas of international institutions, including their membership rules, are not externally given, but are socially constructed by the participants in the process of their interaction (Haas 1975). Adding and subtracting issues and parties will change the constellation of interests and determine the potential for cooperation (Sebenius 1983). Furthermore, the

decision-making rules and frameworks are decisive when it comes to the chances of actors to influence rule making in international institutions. Voting rules are an obvious component affecting the ability of individual actors to affect outcomes. In addition, actors may devise decision-making procedures by means of delegation to specialized and possibly representative bodies/committees. Thereby, decision-making capacity is enhanced as a result of increased recourse to expert knowledge and established criteria, while the ability of actors to pursue their individual interests is constrained (Oberthür/Gehring 2004: 364-369).

We can expect that (rational) actors operating within this framework will strategically adapt their preference formation accordingly so as to optimize the chances of realizing their interests. The delimitation of issue-areas determines the scope for possible package deals. The membership rules determine the scope of potential winning coalitions. Decision-making procedures determine the possibilities for forming such winning coalitions. Actors operating within international institutions, such as the EU, will have to take these framework conditions into account when determining their preferences and devising their negotiating strategies. For example, consensus decision-making requires more compromises or side-payments than majority decision-making in order to push through a decision (but less in order to prevent a decision). We can thus expect the EU to be significantly affected in its preferences, positions and strategies within international institutions by these institutional framework conditions.

At the same time, we can expect the EU's role within international institutions to be heavily influenced by the internal institutional arrangements for determining EU positions. In contrast to international institutions, the supranational framework of the EU provides that membership is not as variable (except if the international institution is not open to all EU member states). Similarly, the EU cannot diverge from the delimitation of the issue-area determined by the international institution. The procedures for arriving at decisions within the EU, however, are particular and variable. An important component concerns the division of competence within the EU because it significantly affects the framework for elaborating the EU's position (see above). Whether an issue-area falls within exclusive EC competence, mixed competence of the EC and its member states, or member state competence determines the role of the European Commission and the degree to which member states have to coordinate their positions. Of similar importance and related to this question, different decision-making procedures (consensus, qualified majority voting, comitology) apply to different issues under the varying policy areas of European law and determine internal decision making on EU positions in international institutions. We may therefore expect to be able to explain a large part

of the variance of EU policy-making with respect to international institutions with reference to the internal division of competence, the respective roles of the European Commission and the member states, and the applicable voting rules.

### **3. A Challenging Research Agenda**

Our task in this paper is thus to highlight the potentials and possibilities for a research agenda in the relationships between the EU and international institutions. Above, we have highlighted the background to our investigation, and the rationale behind a series of approaches including the establishment of a series of key variables that can, in the first place, be used in order to generate our research agenda, which is challenging in more than one sense. Our proposed agenda challenges four aspects of contemporary research into international institutions: (1) major theoretical orientations; (2) global governance literature; (3) the contemporary focus on U.S. – II relations; and (4) the traditional divide between rationalists and constructivists.

The project challenges several major theoretical orientations and the encounter seems, in our assessment, to be worse for the theories, not the research programme. Most realists will have two problems with our agenda. In the first place they claim that international institutions do not matter but merely reflect the ever changing balance of power (for a typical argument, see Mearsheimer 1995). Even the few realists who do accept a significant role for international institutions in world politics have avoided attention to the relationship between the European Union and international institutions (cf. Grieco, 1996; Glaser 1995). Second, the state-centric perspective on things leads realists to see 27 relatively insignificant states. In other words, they do not regard the EU as an international player. At best they can imagine the potential emergence of a European power, yet they regard it unlikely. However, even if realists tend to dismiss the relevance of our agenda, it might nonetheless be possible to draw on a range of realist first order theories, such as the theory of hegemonic stability and power transition theory in order to outline hypotheses to be examined. Grieco (1997) has emphasized the interest among smaller states in multilateral institutions. As most EU member states according to Grieco's yardstick are small states, his understanding gains in potential relevance for our agenda.

For most of the post war period, European integration has been the darling topic of many liberal theorists. It was within the liberal tradition that Ernest Haas developed neofunctionalism, i.e. one of the first theories of European integration. Though attention subsequently shifted to theories of inter-

dependence, it was with the addition that Europe is the most interdependent region in the world. Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane readily admit that European integration has functioned as an intellectual eye opener (Katzenstein, Keohane and Krasner 1998). More recently, it is from within the liberal tradition that Andrew Moravcsik's liberal intergovernmentalism has emerged. In short, there has for decades been very close relationship between liberal theoretical reflections and European political and legal practice. It is significant, however, that liberal analysts always have followed the path of Ernst Haas in the sense of paying attention to processes that might eventually create a political community. It was the potential transformation of European states to member states of the European Union that triggered these liberal instincts. Hardly ever have liberal theorists reflected on how the genesis of a political community subsequently would create a relationship between the political community, the European Union, and the wider world, including the world of international institutions. In a sense the liberal tradition has been overwhelmed by its own success in predicting the emergence of a new community.

In order to arrive at a well-argued research agenda, it is necessary to examine potential theoretical perspectives in a comprehensive fashion. It has become commonplace to include realism, liberalism and constructivism. This habit implies a number of problems. First, the three perspectives have fundamentally different characteristics and are hardly comparable. Second, the three perspectives are inapplicable in empirical research. Their function is to provide ontologies of the world, i.e., world-views. They tell you what exists and whether it is important or not. They provide the contours of often most different worlds. Robert Keohane is very explicit on this point, arguing that his own creation, neoliberal institutionalism is not a theory but a theoretical perspective:

“Neoliberal institutionalism is not a single logically connected deductive theory, any more than is liberalism or neorealism; each is a school of thought that provides a perspective on world politics. Each perspective incorporates a set of distinctive questions and assumptions about the basic units and forces in world politics. Neoliberal institutionalism asks questions about the impact of institutions on state action and about the causes of institutional change; it assumes that states are key actors and examines both the material forces of world politics and the subjective self-understanding of human beings.” (Keohane 1989: 2)

Realism, liberalism and constructivism share the feature that they can not be tested negative, that is, they cannot be proven wrong.

In contrast, first order theories all have the quality that they can be applied, and therefore enable us to carry out theory-informed empirical studies. Each of the above mentioned theoretical traditions have been capable of generating a range of often very different first order theories. If we first con-

sider realism, it has generated theories such as balance of power, alliance theory, hegemonic stability theory, power transition theory. Within the liberal tradition we have seen the emergence of the democratic peace theory, liberal intergovernmentalism, neofunctionalism and many more theories. Constructivism is defined by its focus on social ontology and social institutions, spinning off theories of identity-formation; theory of international cooperation (Wendt 1999), and a theoretical framework that can guide us when exploring linkages between identity, interests and policy-making (Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein 1996).

Furthermore, the project challenges a major part of the literature on global governance. It seems to us that most studies on global governance have been sleeping through the night, in the sense of paying little attention to the role of the EU in international institutions specifically or concerning global governance generally. In a certain sense, it is a well-known story or a *déjà vu* experience. For a long time, part of the literature in our field analyzed the European Union's external relations as if the member states or their foreign policies did not exist. Now analysts of global governance repeat the mistake, resulting in the absence of the EU as an actor in a large number of studies.

In addition, the project potentially challenges findings in the literature on the United States and multilateral institutions. It seems to us that this literature - due to its overwhelmingly state-centric characteristics - draws a number of problematic conclusions (Karns and Mingst 1990; Foot, MacFarlane and Mastanduno, 2003; Patrick and Forman, 2001). They all conclude that US behaviour towards international institutions is better explained by domestic than international factors. Though this seems to be an accurate conclusion concerning the US case, it might also be correct that the US case is not representative for dynamics in relations between states or other international players and international institutions. Thus, when Foot, McFarlane and Mastanduno conclude, "As for multilateral institutions themselves, they will continue to operate within the direct and indirect constraints that US instrumentalism imposes", it is a conclusion that has to be read very flexibly in order to make sense for UNESCO (during the time the US opted for the exit strategy), the UN as such (during the time the US has lost interest in the General Assembly).

Finally, our research agenda goes to the heart of two contending perspectives on international institutions that have been on the agenda for the last twenty years. The wide interest in international regimes triggered an increasing awareness of the existence of two contending perspectives. Stephen Krasner (1983) edited the first significant volume on international regimes and provided one of the standard definitions of international regimes. Subsequently, Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986) pointed

out inconsistencies between the ontology of regimes and the epistemological strategies that have been employed in order to understand regimes. Robert Keohane summarized the debate and coined the terms rationalist and reflectivist. Onuf (1989) and Wendt (1992) replaced the term 'reflectivism' with 'constructivism' and research on international institutions has since been characterized by the rationalism-constructivism divide. Lisa Martin's *International Institutions in the New World Economy* (2005) is one among several studies that represents the rationalist camp and Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore's *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (2004) is written from a constructivist perspective. The title of Michael Tierney's (forthcoming) *The Politics of International Organizations: Bridging the Rationalist-Constructivist Divide* obviously suggests a transcending perspective.

How do we dare to make such bold challenges to contemporary research programmes? In the first place because existing studies suggest that there is sufficient beef to make a comprehensive research agenda worthwhile (Jørgensen forthcoming). Furthermore, it is our contention that data available concerning the relationship between the EU and international institutions make a hard or critical case, and not a soft case. The intuitive assessment would point to the lack of brute military force and conclude that we have chosen a soft case, that is, that we might well run in open doors. We claim that international institutions that are created by and for states make a hard case for the European Union. It is far from only a question of lacking formal representation and sometimes also political recognition as a player. It is also a question of playing in an arena that structurally constrains the role of the EU.

#### **4. Future Directions**

Thus far we have outlined our analytical set-up and we have summarized the different approaches that characterize contemporary research on international institutions. In this section, we focus on a range of research questions that emerge from contemporary literature, and, by highlighting areas of interest and gaps in this research, we outline a proposal for a research agenda.

Research questions emerge from two different sources.<sup>5</sup> In the first place research questions originate in the policy-world. Hence, they emerge from political debates on European foreign policy strategies. Recurrent themes of this debate include:

- Europe as a model for global governance, the global polity or multilateralism
- Europe's international or global responsibilities
- Europe as a normative power, i.e., a promoter of human rights, democracy, environmental values, etc.
- Europe as a security provider, not consumer

A few examples illustrate our point. In the FP7 research programme, the European Commission specifically focuses on topics such as “the EU and the world” and “multilateralism.” Some national scientific funding bodies, such as the Dutch NWO, have recently funded programmes on “Shifts in Governance,” which calls for, amongst other things, an examination of the relationships between national, European, and international institutions. Worldwide and European perspectives into governance questions are also part of the UK's Economic and Social Research Council current priorities, and the British Council, along with the Foreign Policy Centre in the UK, recently carried out a project on a ‘Network Europe.’ Obviously, such topics are not research questions as such but they do, given the importance they have in policymaking circles, contribute to framing the range of possible research questions.

The policy world furthermore raises the need for an investigation into the effectiveness of the European Union's policies in international institutions. Effectiveness in this context may be measured in various ways (e.g. the impact of the EU on policy outputs; consistency of EU policies). The master variables as defined above can provide the basis for building a much-needed explanatory framework of such an investigation. Such a framework could serve as the basis of a comparative analysis of the impact of the EU in various international institutions. Linking to policy, this will enable research to contribute to debates on the general conditions that enable and encourage effective EU conduct in international decision-making processes.

The second source of motivation for a new research agenda is to be found among theories of international relations, in particular because it is on the basis of theoretical assumptions, propositions and claims that we are led to expect that specific events will take place in a designated way. While the major theoretical traditions are capable of making macro-perspectives available, it takes first

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<sup>5</sup> Sometimes these sources produce similar research questions but one should not take such overlaps for granted.

order theories to generate expectations about real world actors, structures and processes. The process behind this has been described in the previous section; here, we briefly illustrate this argument with a sample of expectations. We will start by mining the existing literature for research questions, which will lead into the development of our own research agenda. In each case, we begin with a brief account for a given position. Subsequently, we proceed by discussing potential avenues for future research.

Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore address the following question: “do international organizations really do what their creators intend them to do” (1999: 699). They explain the rationale of their endeavour by pointing out that most analysts aim at explaining why international organizations have been created. Barnett and Finnemore aim at explaining what international organizations do, once they have been created. In order to examine this question, they draw on constructivist sociological institutionalism. They claim such a choice has three advantages:

1. “It offers a different view of the power of IOs and whether or how they matter in world politics (...)
2. Provides a theoretical basis for treating IOs as autonomous actors in world politics and thus presents a challenge to the statist ontology prevailing in international relations theories (...)
3. Offers a different vantage point from which to assess the desirability of IOs” (1999: 700-701).

The authors subsequently expanded their article into a book, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics* (2004). Both publications offer a rich source of inspiration for our research agenda. For an initial step, it is possible (in principle) simply to plot in the European Union and address the issues Barnett and Finnemore have outlined and demonstrated the value of. Hence, we could explore the power of the EU and whether or how this particular international institution matters. Similarly, we could analyze the EU as an autonomous actor and assess the desirability of EU action, including the possible presence of dysfunctional or pathological action.

Darren G. Hawkins et al. (2006) have published a very rich, coherent and informative volume on delegation and agency in international organizations. They address two key issues:

1. “Why do states delegate certain tasks and responsibilities to international organizations rather than acting unilaterally or cooperating directly?
2. “How do states control IOs once authority has been delegated? Specifically, what mechanisms do states employ to ensure that their interests are served by IOs?” (Hawkins et al., 2006: 4).

Furthermore, they enable studies of international institutions as actors in world politics. This is as far from the image of international institutions as mere arenas as one can possibly get. On the other

hand, traditional state centrism is reproduced in the vocabulary of principal agent theory. Similarly, though the volume is couched in the language of universality, it is almost exclusively focused on US relations with international institutions. The direct consequence of this focus is that the 400 pages long volume has no mentioning of the EU, apart from Mark Pollack's chapter on the EU as an agent created by EU member states to do certain tasks, that is, the traditional image of the EU as an international organization.

Despite the recognition that "looking at...international organizations in terms of legal systems is rather uncommon," there have been efforts to look at the relationship between the EU and international institutions from a legal perspective (notably, Wessel 2000: 507). These examine the legal nature of the EU as their first point of departure, noting the ambiguity concerning the treaty-making competence of the Council. The distinction between the European Community and the European Union, and the responsibilities that lie between the supranational and national levels of power, are of key interest. There is a tendency, from a legal perspective, to focus on issues of EU/EC/member state representation in international institutions; asking the question 'exactly who is represented here?' Fassbender examines the "marginal role" of 'Europe' in the foundation of the UN, going on to describe the current situation for the EU in the UN's General Assembly and the Security Council (Fassbender 2004). The distinctions in these two are that the EU's member states have equal status in the General Assembly, yet are unequal in the Security Council. The latter situation contributes to difficulties in understanding the role of the EU in international institutions that deal with security issues, such as the UN Security Council. In addition, there has been an initial examination of the increasingly important role the European legal order takes in relations with international institutions, notably the UN (Wessel 2006).

In general terms, of course, the answer to the question of EU/member state representation depends upon the issue, with the EC possessing exclusive competence with respect to international trade, and security issues being placed more in the area of member states (see Winham 1998 for a description of the EU's role in the creation of the WTO). One way of dealing with this is to clarify the structure of the EU, which currently lacks explanatory power (Wessel 2000). Many suggestions have been made as to new representations of our understanding of the EU's currently formulated pillar system (see, e.g. Weiler, 1999). These promise to facilitate clarity of the division of roles of the different components of the EU.

When reading studies on the relationship between the US and multilateral institutions, it becomes clear that such studies can serve as a very helpful point of departure, especially if the relationship between the EU and international institutions is seen from an EU agency perspective. It is somewhat surprising to realize the degree to which it makes sense to apply the analytical frameworks, developed as they are for state-centric studies. In order to fully understand the potentials of specific studies, we will briefly outline the issues that these studies address. Margaret P. Karns and Karen Mingst (1990) explore patterns of changing instrumentality and influence in the light of the image of declining US power. Karns, Mingst and their team of contributors first describe the changed pattern of instrumentality and subsequently examine a range of factors that potentially can explain the changes described. The analytical objectives of Stewart Patrick and Stepard Forman's *Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy* and Rosemary Foot, S. Neil MacFarlane and Michael Mastanduno's *US Hegemony and International Organizations* are slightly different, particularly because they examine the relationship in the context of the contemporary unilateralism/multilateralism schism - lurking during the Clinton Administration and manifest since the arrival of George W. Bush. In general, these volumes raise questions about the relationship between power, perceptions of power, unilateralism and (instrumental) support for multilateral institutions.

An analysis of some of the directions taken by this literature shows that some avenues are clearly available to scholars who wish to investigate the role of the EU in international institutions. Contemporary legal literature, some of which is highlighted above, shows that discussion is apparent regarding the status of the EU in international law. Analysis of U.S. – II relations, although leading to different conclusions than those that would be apparent in studies concerning the EU, do ask questions that could be useful for those wishing to examine EU – II relations. The examination of agency, as described above, in international institutions can be applied to the case of the EU.

Our motivation for this paper is to generate a research agenda for the relationship between the EU and international institutions. The analytical framework presented above, and the review of existing contemporary research shows that there is scope for such an agenda. In the quest for comparability between research results, we believe that the existing research can be integrated into a comprehensive research agenda, which incorporates different theoretical approaches, relates to different levels of analysis, employs different (sets of) explanatory variables, and links directly into topics of a policy-related nature.

We propose a matrix of research opportunities that can serve as a framework for a comprehensive research agenda on the EU and international institutions. The matrix builds upon the agency-structure paradigm by distinguishing between the EU (agent) and international institutions (structure) as two possible starting points/independent variables for exploring their relationship. It also makes use of the levels of analysis approach by distinguishing the level of individual international institutions from the multilateral system of international institutions as two dimensions that can serve as sources and targets of influence.

	Agency	Structure
Individual international institutions	(1) What are the effects of the EU on individual IIs?	(2) What are the effects of individual IIs on the EU?
'System'	(3) What are the effects of the EU on the system of IIs?	(4) What are the effects of the system of IIs on the EU?

On the basis of the matrix, different sets of research questions can be systematically distinguished. A first set of questions relates to the role of the EU in individual IIs and its influence on them (cell 1). How effective is the EU as an actor influencing the policies and the design of IIs? To what extent does this effectiveness of the EU vary across different IIs? How can similarities and differences in the EU's impact on IIs be explained? What does the existence and the influence of the EU mean for individual institutions and effective governance in them? These are only some of the questions that could be raised with respect to the role of the EU in individual international institutions.

Another set of research questions relates to the reverse influence of individual international institutions on the EU (cell 2). To what extent, how and why/through which mechanisms do individual international institutions influence the EU and EU member states? What kind of effects exist/prevail (implementing behaviour, knowledge and perceptions, etc.)? Again, research questions on the influence of individual IIs on the EU could be further differentiated and detailed.

A third set of research questions addresses the broader effects of the EU on the international system of governance institutions at large (cell 3). Does the involvement of the EU in international institutions lead to a "Europeanization" of the multilateral system? Does it strengthen governance through international institutions? In what other ways may EU involvement affect the system of interna-

tional institutions? The investigation of these and other related research questions may benefit from (comparative) studies exploring systematically the influence of the EU on various international institutions.

Finally, we may also explore questions related to the repercussions of the system of international institutions on the EU (cell 4). Is EU multilateralism reinforced by, or even the result of, the EU's involvement in international institutions? Does EU involvement in IIs lead and contribute to an "internationalisation" of the EU? How, in which ways and with which effects does EU involvement in and commitment to international institutions affect EU governance (vertical and horizontal division of competences, etc.)? Again, the investigation of these and related questions may benefit from larger-scale studies exploring the EU's role in a wider range of international institutions. Eventually, this kind of research would also enable us to explore the interplay between agency and structure and thus how the EU and international institutions 'co-constitute' each other.

We shall be able to carry out empirical (comparative) research across different sectors and policy domains by employing different (sets of) master variables. At the current stage, concrete empirical studies are best suited to advance our understanding of the relationship between the EU and international institutions. General lessons learned in these studies may then help inform and further develop our questions at the empirical stage. The master variables introduced above may well serve a double-purpose in this process. On the one side, they may be employed as explanatory factors in the analysis. On the other side, they may well inform the further development of relevant research questions regarding identity, power, interests and institutions.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper has provided initial thoughts on a nascent research agenda for examining the relationship between the European Union and international institutions. The area is currently ripe for research for three main reasons:

1. the discussions over the (currently stalled) European Constitutional Treaty currently taking place have provided impetus to the bureaucratic and political debate as to what the European Union should actually be, not only to its member states, but also to the external world;
2. deliberations over the future of the currently embattled international system of states are paramount in the minds of many observers, particularly since the new threats to states from non-state 'terror';
3. the increased role of the EU as a global actor by simple empirical analysis, and limited existing research, reveals that the EU, both quantitatively and qualitatively is playing an increasingly important role in participating in, and even promoting the world's international institutional frameworks.

There is, from a more normative – and policy-related – perspective, a scope and a motivation for further investigations into the potential benefits of involving the European Union in future studies of multilateral and international institutions. This secondary outcome of the intended research agenda is relevant to contemporary policy concerns.

This paper has addressed several different concerns in developing a research agenda. It has shown that there is a need for increased research into the relationships between the EU and international institutions, and it has suggested that there are several key issues that need to be addressed in such an agenda, described, notably, through a series of key ‘master variables’ at different levels of analysis, and taking into account the value of examining international institutions both as structures and agents. Furthermore, it has proposed that an elaboration of those considerations should encompass major theoretical approaches, including those that may traditionally find investigation of the EU problematic. Subsequently, different first order theories are used to provide testing ground for our investigations. This leads to systematic generation, through our analytical framework, of a list of research questions that can be set forth in a dedicated research programme.

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