Franco Algieri

A Weakened EU's Prospects for Global Leadership

The European Union has developed a significant presence as a regional and world actor, but its goals at times exceed its capacity to act as a supranational entity. With roots as an economic bloc, the EU has over the years attempted to correct the imbalance between its global economic and political presences, developing the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and later the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) to allow for a more effective external profile. It has also increased the number and significance of its diplomatic and politico-military initiatives with other states and regional organizations. Since the Treaty of Maastricht creating the EU and CFSP took effect in 1992, however, the deepening process has proceeded rather slowly, puttering ahead with various treaty reforms but improving the operational capabilities rather incrementally.

EU widening, on the other hand, has surged ahead. On May 1, 2004, 10 new member states, eight of which are eastern European countries, joined the EU in the union's most significant expansion since the signing of the Rome treaties in 1957. Further enlargement rounds are being sketched out with the confirmed addition of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and talks on Turkey and Croatia having already begun. The waiting list is growing: the Balkan states, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova in the east and Morocco and others in the south.

The EU's major strategic objective is to secure its expanding neighborhood, which now stretches from the eastern parts of Europe over the Balkans to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, against global threats such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflict, failed

Franco Algieri is a senior research fellow at the Center for Applied Policy Research (CAP) at Ludwig-Maximilians University in Munich. He is also a guest professor at Renmin University in Beijing.

The Washington Quarterly • 30:1 pp. 107–115.

states, and organized crime. If the EU were to admit Turkey, it would share borders with Iran, Iraq, and Syria, among others. With its expanding radius, the EU will have to improve further a variety of tasks, including humanitarian aid, rescue missions, peacekeeping, disarmament, and counterterrorism.[1]

The clamor for EU membership evident in enlargement has sparked high hopes for the EU project. In 2005, however, the integration project skidded to a halt when France and the Netherlands rejected the EU Constitution. EU member states' governments, publics, and EU institutions themselves have shown an increasing and critical hesitance toward further enlargement. As of late, debate revolves around whether the enlarged EU has the capacity to absorb even more members.

Consequently, the European integration project has reached a crucial stage. EU members clearly struggle with the conflict between their desire to exert power on the world stage as a larger entity and hesitance to surrender national sovereignty. Where do the failed referenda leave the EU as a global actor? With an expanding neighborhood comes greater responsibility and risks, as the EU's territory and mandate edges closer to potentially high-risk regions and problems. With pressures increasing out of area and member populations unwilling to "deepen," how can the EU adjust to address its changing political environment? How can it remain relevant in world affairs given its internal stalemate?

Small Steps toward Consensus

The idea that the EU should speak with one voice in world affairs has become more prominent over the course of the European integration process, but history reveals that merging national policies is a most difficult task. The global changes of the early 1990s, including the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the transformation of Eastern Europe, the reunification of Germany, the Persian Gulf War, and conflicts in the Balkans, demonstrated the need for a broad legal and institutional base for a common European foreign policy. Provisions for the CFSP were integrated into the Maastricht treaty, which formally created the EU as it exists today. Yet, despite the new legislation, the minimum consensus reached by EU member states for the CFSP, or rather their hesitance to bind national foreign policies more closely together, did not sufficiently increase the efficiency of the EU's foreign policy mandate. The CFSP framework regularly and systematically coordinated EU member states' national foreign policies on the supranational level. It soon turned out that further improvements for the CFSP were needed.

The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam brought additional institutional developments and instruments, allowing the possibility of common strategies. The most outstanding innovation was the creation of the position of high repre-

sentative for the CFSP, later filled by former NATO secretary general Javier Solana, and the creation of the policy unit inside the secretariat general of the council to be his strategic and planning unit. Moreover, the wording of the Amsterdam treaty clarified security and defense guidelines, giving member states the option to move in the direction of a common defense if they so desired. Again, however, international responsibilities took precedence when challenges arose in the Balkans and in places not in the immediate vicinity of the EU, such as the Caucasus and northern Africa.

Internal and external expectations grew that the union should take primary responsibility for conflict management and resolution of the former Yugoslavia to assert its authority in its "backyard" and assume a greater share of the global security burden. In December 1998, France and the United Kingdom released a joint declaration at St. Malo calling for the EU to possess the power of autonomous action and the appropriate military resources, a groundbreaking step forward.[2] At that time, however, the EU lacked a common structure for defense policy, so the Kosovo mission had to be conducted within the NATO framework and with U.S. support. In June 1999, building on the experiences of the Kosovo conflict and the St. Malo "spirit," EU member states agreed at the European Council in Cologne to develop and strengthen the ESDP as part of the CFSP. Subsequently, provisions for the ESDP were fine-tuned and integrated into the Treaty of Nice, which became the current treaty of reference for the CFSP/EDSP when it came into effect in 2003. The ESDP was a qualitative leap forward, paving the way for civilian, police, and military missions as parts of the EU's foreign policy.

The EU's goals at times exceed its capacity to act as a supranational entity.

Over time, EU member states have gradually strengthened the ESDP to put the union in a position to assume more responsibility for international security. Although the ESDP still has major shortcomings, especially in the military domain, 16 civilian, police, and military operations have been conducted throughout the world within the ESDP framework as of July 2006. These operations have mainly been concentrated in the EU's neighborhood and in Africa, but there also are ongoing missions in the Palestinian territories and Aceh, Indonesia.[3] The EU has shown proficiency in lower-end crisis management operations in these missions.

Its member states do not, however, show a uniform readiness for a far-reaching military integration on the European level, most having reduced their defense expenditures following the Cold War. Since 1994, the level of support for the CFSP within the EU-15 has been consistently higher than 60 percent.[4] In the spring of 2003, 74 percent expressed support for a common

security and defense policy, and 50 percent stated that decisions relating to defense issues should be made at the European level. Yet, although European publics do recognize the need for the CFSP and ESDP, they express limited interest when the idea of increasing defense budgets comes up, and many governments avoid this unpopular topic. Consequently, even though the EU has an impressive catalogue of declarations and institutional agreements expressing the intention to become a comprehensive security political actor, they must take U.S. interests into account when considering major military operations. They are in need of U.S. assets in the NATO framework, 19 of whose members are also EU member states.

EU member states still want to delay an answer to the constitutional question.

The overlap of EU-NATO members and missions is another thorny issue among the EU member states and between the EU and the United States. The United States has historically been skeptical of any project that would decouple the EU from the larger NATO decisionmaking framework; duplicate military planning, command structures, and supply decisions; or discriminate against non-NATO EU members. The United Kingdom and most eastern European members want to maintain close links with Washington and to coordinate European and U.S. interests. They see NATO as the primary guarantor of defense policy and as a direct connection to the United States. On the other hand, France and some other EU member states would prefer to see a Europe that is more independent from United States, particularly in terms of decisionmaking procedure and capabilities. Such incoherence among EU member states damages the deepening of a real European security and defense policy. Moreover, the image of the EU as a single actor is compromised when member states accuse each other of not being committed or willing to develop the ESDP.

Iraq Reveals the EU's Fissures

A strengthened ESDP cannot prevent basic policy conflicts among EU members, especially with their recently expanded ranks. As European governments dissented over the U.S. plan to invade Iraq in 2003, for example, a debate over a CFSP collapse abounded. Although many EU members shared the goal of restraining the United States from taking extreme action, the EU as such did not appear as a singular entity. This episode revealed that the CFSP reflected an ambitious integrationist goal but not the true condition of European foreign and security policy.

While France, Germany, and Belgium led the way in protesting President George W. Bush's planned invasion of Iraq, the Czech Republic, Denmark,

Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom declared their transatlantic solidarity in the January 2003 "Letter of the Eight."[5] In reaction to this western European initiative, the 10 countries of the Vilnius Group—Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia—also wrote a letter declaring their solidarity with the United States. To these young democracies, the United States was the principal guarantor of stability and success. Alarmed by the possible ramifications of alienating the United States, these eastern European countries assured Washington of their undiluted loyalty.

These different approaches of countries of western and eastern Europe revealed splits on several levels: among the EU member states, between the old and new EU members, and between the member states and the supranational level. Although President of the Commission Romano Prodi and High Representative Javier Solana were working intensely on a European position, the member states' counterproductive behavior damaged the overall performance of the EU. At this stage, enlargement would clearly prove to be a severe test for further development of the CFSP and ESDP.

Can and Should the Constitution Be Saved?

EU member states have chosen strikingly comprehensive and muscular defense-related political provisions and instruments in the ESDP and deliberately have not set geographical limitations on its area of operation. Although this indicates a highly ambitious project, the extent of EU action in any given conflict remains a highly intricate political decision. The EU has quickly developed an ambitious foreign and security policy agenda but cannot expand respective operational capabilities and coherence at the same speed, an obstacle that has become even more serious in the current internal reform crisis.

The helplessness of political elites in the aftermath of the negative French and Dutch referenda on the constitution left them no alternative other than rethinking their priorities and goals and hopefully "enabl[ing] a broad debate to take place in each of our countries, involving citizens, civil society, social partners, national parliaments and political parties."[6] The member states agreed to revisit the issue, but one year later, the assessment was rather sobering. The European Council's decision in June 2006 to now "focus on delivery of concrete results and implementation of projects"[7] indicates that EU member states want to delay an answer to the constitutional question. In political and academic circles, the analysis of the European Constitution as a dead project is gaining ground.

The negative votes in the French and Dutch referenda on the constitution were a political shock for EU governments. More and more European voters

are concerned that European integration is a runaway train that is too complex and that has been disregarding democratic control. In France, the Netherlands, and other member states, people worry about issues such as immigration, crime, an out-of-touch bureaucracy, and loss of sovereignty and national identity. Accordingly, most analyses assert that the "no" votes had little to do with the constitution itself and more with frustration with the way that Europe is being built and with the political class. Nonetheless, the French and Dutch rejections of the European constitution reveal that Europe lacks an integrative will that no legislation or policy initiative can create. The old integration pattern of the twentieth century has lost its appeal and function, and a new vision and form of European integration does not yet exist.

The EU will remain an indecisive actor until about 2009.

Yet, this does not mean that the EU should abandon its project altogether. Europeans should not wait for a final conclusion on the fate of the European constitution but should move forward on improving the institutional and procedural framework for the CFSP/ESDP. Developing the governance of European foreign policy will make it easier to bring national interests together and to avoid overstretching the efficiency and effectiveness of the CFSP/ESDP. Currently, it is rather difficult to expect a major breakthrough, considering the centrality of the Big Three—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—who rarely see eye to eye on the details of integration. Moreover, as of late, the topic of European integration is used rather hesitantly in national political debates. France is waiting for its next presidential elections in April 2007, the United Kingdom is facing the end of the leadership of Tony Blair probably in 2007, and the German grand coalition government is concentrating on surviving a full term.

This is where reviving parts of the constitution could prove useful. One of its more valuable features is a new central actor in European foreign policy, the EU minister for foreign affairs. This position would help to consolidate foreign policy competencies at a supranational level, enhancing the EU's policy coherence and its representation on the international stage. In contrast to the high representative for the CFSP, this new actor would have more competencies to act and a more powerful position inside the European Council and the European Commission, allowing it to create more coherence in the EU's foreign policy. Linked to this is the creation of a European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Defense Agency. The EEAS would serve as an important and necessary support function for the foreign minister. The European Defense Agency, in effect since late 2004, works to improve the efficiency of the European armaments sector, thus helping to develop Europe's military capabilities.

Also, the constitution's allowance for "permanent structured cooperation" would allow those member states whose military capabilities fulfill higher criteria and who make binding commitments to each other regarding the implementation of highly demanding missions to move forward with integration while allowing others to be less involved. As such, the European integration process would become more differentiated and allow the EU to maintain its power to act.

Considering the current state of European affairs, it is more necessary than ever to ensure that forms of flexible integration permit smaller groups of interested members to go further than others. Otherwise, if EU member states choose to arrange their foreign, security, and defense policy activities outside the EU framework by building ad hoc coalitions, the EU's role as a global actor will come into question.

Looking at today's EU, its member states have to accept that only through cooperation and by pooling power will they be able to have a lasting global impact. If the member states do not come to terms on how best to organize supranationality in foreign policy, then they as individual states and the EU as a whole run the danger of rendering themselves inconsequential in world affairs. The United States, Russia, China, India, and other powerful actors are not patiently waiting for Europeans to have their self-awareness debate concluded.

The EU as an Indecisive Actor

The EU faces an external-internal divergence dilemma. The union is working to develop its role as an international actor. At the same time, it is confronted internally with a stalled reform process and an existential debate about its governance structures and future shape. This dichotomy has lasting consequences for the future of the EU as a global actor. In the short term, or until about 2009, the EU will remain an indecisive actor. If member states succeed in ratifying something like a European constitution by then, it will be much easier to describe the union as a global actor. If this project fails, the whole concept of the EU must be reconsidered.

The EU has a patchwork of policies rather than a common global vision and strategy. European foreign security and defense policy can be expected to be guided by multilateralism as expressed in the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS).[8] The member states' agreement on the ESS was largely a reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and their repercussions, including the Iraq conflict, all of which made it impossible for the EU to be inactive. Some observers in Europe interpreted the ESS in part as a response to the 2002 "National Security Strategy of the United States." Such a comparison seems problematic, not least because the ESS remains

vague on the questions of when and how to use military means in defense of European interests. Rather, this document can be considered a reference for the broad orientation of the EU as a global actor. It regards cooperation with other powers, such as the United States and Russia, to be essential and defines the transatlantic relationship as irreplaceable. Furthermore, it declares Canada, Japan, China, and India to be strategic partners of the union. The ESS reveals the great importance the EU attaches to the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, and NATO as well as regional organizations, for example, in Asia or South America.

Enlargement might turn out to be the beginning of the end for Europe's global aspirations.

Will this be sufficient to meet the global challenges of the twenty-first century and to shape international relations powerfully? An internal dilemma is no novelty for the European integration process, but in view of the current enlargement debate, it has a new significance. The old pattern of deepening and widening does not work any more, if it ever worked efficiently. The number of actors involved and the heterogeneity of interests of 27-plus member states is overstretching the current EU governance system. Consequently, further and substantial extension of the union's presence in the outside world cannot be expected; in this case, bigger does not mean more powerful. On the contrary, as long as there is no substantial internal reform, enlargement might turn out to be the beginning of the end for Europe's global aspirations.

This would have major consequences for the EU's influence in the Middle East and other trouble spots. Moreover, its internal divisions allow external actors to play EU member states against each other or, as China does so well, to manipulate single European states for its own purposes. In the case of Asia-Pacific security, for example, China and the United States will not carve out a role for the EU in that region. As power politics are on the rise, the EU needs more than a basket full of carrots and only some incrementally developed sticks to compete.

Even though the EU is still a world champion in trade policy and development aid, it is in danger of becoming an irrelevant power. There is still hope for Europe if the respective provisions foreseen in the European constitution can be saved, not necessarily as a constitutional treaty. If this goal does not come to fruition, the concept of the EU as a global actor will have reached its end, and the reemergence of single European powers will be unavoidable.

Notes

1. On the EU's civilian crisis management and coordination of civil-military operations, see Catriona Gurlay et al., "Civilian Crisis Management: The EU Way," *Challiot Paper*, no. 90 (June 2006), http://www.iss-eu.org/chaillot/chai90.pdf.
2. See "Joint Declaration on European Defence," December 4, 1998, http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029391629&aid=1013618395073.
3. For an overview on ESDP missions, see "European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) Operations," http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showPage.asp?id=268&lang=en.
4. See European Commission, *Eurobarometer*, no. 59 (Spring 2003), http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb59/eb59_rapport_final_en.pdf; German Marshall Fund of the United States and Compagnia di San Paolo, "Transatlantic Trends Overview: 2003," http://www.transatlantictrends.org/index.cfm?year=2003.
5. See José María Aznar et al., "Europe and America Must Stand United," *London Times*, January 30, 2003, http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/media/2003/0130useur.htm.
6. "Declaration by the Heads of State or Government of the Member States of the EU on the Ratification of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe," SN 117/05, June 18, 2005, http://www.consilium.europa.eu./ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/85325.pdf.
7. "Brussels European Council, 15/16 June 2006: Presidency Conclusions," 10633/1/06 Rev. 1, July 17, 2006, p. 16, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/90111.pdf.
8. See "A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy," December 12, 2003, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf.