

A Global Civilian Power?: The Future Role of the European Union in International Politics

Bedrudin Brljavac, M.Sc. in European Politics, Lund University and **Maximilian Conrad**, Assistant Professor, University of Iceland

Abstract

Questions about the future of the European Union as an international actor continue to puzzle students of international relations and particularly students of EU foreign policy. What kind of predictions can we make about the future role of the EU in international politics? While the question is often framed in terms of military versus normative and/or global civilian power Europe, there are indications that ambitions in both directions may very well coincide. However, despite the EU's development towards deepened defense integration since the 1990s, such developments are by far outweighed by developments pointing in the direction of the EU consolidating its role as a global civilian power. In this article, we analyze the union's civilian policies and contrast the findings of our analysis with developments in the field of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Based on our analysis of EU enlargement policy, external aid, global environmental policy and the union's commitment to multilateralism, our conclusion is that the EU's international role in the next decades will continue to be best described in terms of a global civilian power.

The European Union's international role: Global Civilian Power or Military Superpower in the Making?¹

"The Union has translated its value-based identity into normative action, as promoter of human rights and sustainability across the international system. As a development and humanitarian actor the Union is distanced from the imperial legacy of the Member States and has developed a distinctive approach" (Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler, *The European Union as Global Actor*)

Background

Questions pertaining to the nature of the European Union's power and its role in international politics have puzzled students of European integration and international politics virtually since the beginning of the European integration process in the 1950s. Throughout the Cold War, the European Community's international role was characterized as that of a *civilian power*, mainly because the EC did not possess any relevant military capabilities and instead had to rely on economic and diplomatic

means to achieve influence in world affairs (Smith 1998: 67). In fact, the rejection of the treaty on the European Defence Community by the French national assembly in 1954 effectively turned defense issues into a taboo topic among the six member states of the time.

When European Political Cooperation (EPC) was launched in 1970, it was established merely as a consultation platform *on a voluntary basis*, excluding any defense issues, leading François Duchêne to describe the EC's role in international politics as that of a purely *civilian power*, “long on economic power and relatively short on armed force” (Duchêne 1973: 17). Similarly, Ian Manners argues that the EU is primarily a *normative power*, to be distinguished from a military power in the conventional sense (Manners 2002; 2006: 184). Although the notions of civilian and normative power are sometimes used interchangeably, this study evaluates the identity of the EU in terms of its external policies as a civilian power. In this study, we are primarily interested in trying to pin down what role the European Union is going to play in international politics in the near and medium term. This question is highly topical not least because it is at the core of debates on the future of the union, both in present member states and in countries aspiring to future EU membership. Already the debate on the Constitutional Treaty and on the Lisbon Treaty highlighted the prominent nature of this question (e.g. Conrad 2009).

Debates on the future international role of the EU tend to juxtapose two seemingly dichotomous avenues: the EU is portrayed either as developing into a military superpower, possibly as a partner of - or counterpart to - the United States. Alternatively, the EU's role in international politics is frequently described as a “normative power” (Manners 2002) or as a “civilian power” (e.g. Harnisch & Maull 2001). It should be made clear from the outset that these two labels - military power versus normative power and/or civilian power - are not to be seen as a dichotomy. We would argue instead that we can observe more or less simultaneous developments in both directions. As Erik Oddvar Eriksen points out, coercion cannot by any means be seen as “foreign to a ‘humanitarian polity’”. As law requires sanctioning mechanisms in order to compel compliance, “the defining characteristic of a ‘civilian power’ cannot be the absence of coercive means”. Instead, the defining feature of a civilian power should be “whether it respects basic humanitarian principles” (Eriksen 2009: 102). We are therefore not interested in determining the future role of the EU in an either/or fashion. Instead, we want to point out the development in the direction of a global civilian power while at the same time highlighting the difficulties involved in taking a more decisive step in the direction of a military power. We want to make clear that the status of the EU as a global civilian power does not by any means imply that the union's member states do not also have hard power interests. We are discussing the role of the union as a whole, and this role can only be understood in relation to other institutional arrangements such as (and principally) NATO. States that are members of both NATO and the EU tend to use the two organizations for very different purposes. Alyson Bailes has described this relationship as the “yin and yang of Western democratic politics, with the darker, more passive and complicated female principle

of the yin corresponding to the EU and the shiny activist masculine principle of the yang to NATO” (Bailes 2009: 91).

Our analysis is *not least* motivated by normative questions about what the international role of the European Union *could* and *should* be, i.e. whether it should promote its role as a normative or civilian power, or aspire to become a more traditional military power.² The EU is a distinctive international actor because it “exercises influence and shapes its environment through what it is, rather than through what it does” (Maull 2005: 778). This argument has a strong normative side to it. Whereas previous world powers promoted their own values, culture and way of life through the use of hard power, Jan Zielonka argues that “[o]pting for a civilian power Europe would represent one of the basic strategic choices that could help the Union acquire a distinct profile – so important in terms of identity and legitimacy” (1998: 229). Indeed, we may argue that the EU’s international power is based on its normative appeal as the institutional embodiment of peace and reconciliation, democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, liberty, and solidarity which are all enshrined within the *acquis communautaire* (Aggestam 2008: 363).

Research Design

In our analysis, we apply the definition that Harnisch & Maull (2001) have offered for a civilian power. For them, the foreign policy identity of a civilian power is characterized by six elements:

- 1 Efforts to constrain the use of force through cooperative and collective security arrangements;
- 2 Efforts to strengthen the rule of law through multilateral cooperation, integration, and partial transfers of sovereignty;
- 3 Promotion of democracy and human rights, both within and between states;
- 4 Promotion of non-violent forms of conflict management and conflict resolution;
- 5 Promotion of social equity and sustainable development;
- 6 Promotion of interdependence and division of labor. (Harnisch & Maull, 2001: 4).

In assessing the EU’s international role, we look into the EU civilian policies such as *enlargement*, *external aid*, *environment*, *peace-keeping*, and *multilateralism*. We then relate the findings of our analysis to the development of the EU in the field of defense policy integration. The fourth part on the EU’s peace-keeping role is of particular interest because in this context. There, we contrast the EU’s military operations with its civilian missions. This part is relevant because it underlines that while the EU does engage in military missions, the latter support humanitarian goals, which is consistent with Eriksen’s understanding of a global civilian power that utilizes coercive means for *humanitarian ends* (Eriksen 2009: 102).

In our analysis, we apply a social constructivist perspective emphasizing immaterial features such as identity, values, norms, culture, ways of life, and ideas (Waever, 2000: 333). Within this broader constructivist perspective, we are also adopting the Habermasian-inspired notion of a logic of arguing (Risse 2000) or logic of justification

(Eriksen 1999). Both at the level of political elites and ordinary citizens, EU foreign policy is highly dependent on a shared understanding about the global role of the EU and about the values and ideas it should promote and defend (Keukeleire & MacNaughton 2008: 334), arguably more so than domestic foreign policy. From this perspective, EU foreign policy is under constant pressure to act in accordance with a logic of justification, i.e., the European institutions have to be able to produce good arguments for their international activities. This is a pertinent point because of the member states' diverging foreign-policy traditions and affiliations. On this basis, one way of looking at EU foreign policy would be that it tends to take the form of lowest-common-denominator solutions, which testifies to the logic of justification.³ Another way of looking at this would be that the logic of justification, taking the member states' diverging foreign policy traditions and orientations into account, produces EU collective positions that actually go far beyond lowest common denominators and instead typically reflect *the most altruistic* position on any given issue: since collective positions have to take all member states' positions into account, they have to be free of *particular* national interests. And most importantly, issues of the union's self-understanding also play a role in the context: EU members aim at promoting the union's positive image as an international actor. On this basis, the shared values underpinning such lowest-common-denominator solutions therefore tend to be very abstract. Unsurprisingly, the EU's core norms are often said to be liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law; to some extent also social solidarity, non-discrimination, sustainable development and good governance (Orbie 2008: 18). This logic of justification furthermore questions the applicability of realist reasoning to the study of the EU's international role. While realist thinkers argue that states define their national interest by reference to the quest for survival and power (Barnett 2008: 192), such considerations play only a secondary role in the context of the EU's foreign policy. This is particularly clear from our next subject, namely EU enlargement. While the fifth round of enlargement in 2004/2007 was certainly driven, at least in part, by strategic security interests, these went hand in hand with considerations based on kinship and a sense of duty to the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Enlargement policy: A Cosmopolitan Vision

Enlargement policy is widely perceived as one of the most important aspects of EU foreign policy. A commitment to enlargement is explicit in the Amsterdam Treaty (signed in 1997), stating that “any European state that respects the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, may apply to become a member of the Union” (Articles 5 and 49). In this respect, the EU has explicitly demonstrated its commitment to promoting democratic values and fundamental freedoms despite the associated economic costs of the enlargement process. Enlargement policy is important mostly because the enlargement process's *political conditionality* is viewed as an instrument of “soft power” (*cf.* Nye 2004) in the spread of democracy and human rights to other parts of Europe: it is the

EU's "power of attraction" (*ibid.*), *not* its coercive force that brings about democratic reforms in potential candidate countries that did not previously live up to the EU's standards in this regard. The fifth round of enlargement, i.e. the "big bang" enlargement in 2004, is possibly *the* prime example of this, although the issue is of course also highly salient in the context of, e.g., Turkey's, or the remaining former Yugoslav republics', bids for EU membership.

In the process of the fifth enlargement to the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the "European perspective" (i.e. the prospect of EU membership) played a key role because it acted as an engine of domestic democratic reform. On this count, the fifth enlargement has to be distinguished from prior, and to some extent also from future, rounds of enlargement. The fourth round of enlargement, for instance, was a very different experience. When Austria, Finland and Sweden joined in 1995, they did not need go through a lengthy democratic reform process. As a matter of fact, Sweden used its first Council Presidency in 2001 to promote more democracy in the EU by pushing for increased transparency and better access to documents stemming from the EU institutions (Bjurulf 2001; Broman 2008; Tallberg 2003). Similarly, the Icelandic experience so far underlines that Iceland's adaptation to the EU will be of a predominantly technical nature, as the Commission's first progress report on Iceland underlines. The report "confirms the assessment [...] that Iceland meets the political criteria" and that the country "is a functioning democracy with strong institutions and deeply rooted traditions of representative democracy" (European Commission 2010: 6).

We should therefore be careful about the general conclusions that the highly specific context of Eastern and Southern enlargement(s) allows us to draw about enlargement *per se*. Nonetheless, we can claim that the fifth enlargement round questions rationalist assumptions about EU enlargement as an *exclusively* interest-driven project. Costs to EU member states have been high, not just in material, but also in institutional terms. Eastern enlargement took place against the backdrop of debates over the union's so-called *absorption capacity*, i.e. its ability to cope with large numbers of acceding countries in institutional terms (Smith et al. 2008: 374). Of course, a rationalist might object that such material and institutional costs are outweighed by the union's collective security gains. We should not forget that only a few months prior to the 2004 enlargement, the European Security Strategy made it clear that "the European perspective", i.e. the prospect of EU membership, is a major incentive for domestic political reform in states hoping to join the union. From the perspective of the EU's collective security, this drive for domestic reform is important because it contributes to regional stability around the Southern and Eastern borders of the union, i.e. to the creation of "a ring of well-governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean" (Council of the European Union 2003: 6). It would therefore be naïve to think that member states' collective security interests are irrelevant in the context. Even constructivists agree that states' security interests are crucial driving forces in foreign policy. Our point is rather that a rationalist emphasis on the member states' collective security interests

only explains the fifth EU enlargement in part and overlooks important ideational aspects. Most importantly, it cannot explain why only full membership should be able to provide security. This also makes it difficult for rationalists to explain why the union has been much more active in assisting democratic consolidation in Poland than for instance in Turkey (Lundgren 1998). In this context, Helene Sjursen has pointed out that the fifth enlargement was not primarily driven by instrumental concerns, but was based on ethical-political concerns, i.e. notions of *kinship* and a *sense of duty* towards the acceding countries (Sjursen 2002).

Identity, values and norms thus played a considerable role in the enlargement process (*ibid.*) and can therefore be said to go hand in hand with both the member states' and the acceding countries' collective security interests. Furthermore, since its foundation the EU has traditionally acted as a "soft community", pursuing cooperative networks through the promotion of its values and norms instead of through the use of coercive means. This is soft power along the lines of Joseph Nye, i.e. "the ability to get what you want through *attraction* rather than *coercion* or *payments*. In Nye's understanding, it arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies" (Nye 2004, authors' italics). For instance, what attracted the peoples of the Western Balkans to the EU is that the EU is perceived as a peace project. Or, as Timothy Garton Ash argues, the EU's soft power is underlined by the fact that not only millions of individuals, but also whole states, want to enter it (Garton Ash 2003). Possibly the biggest success of EU foreign policy so far relates to reshaping the identity, values and norms of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) (Keukeleire & MacNaughton 2008: 334). Symbolically, the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe viewed EU membership as their "return to Europe" after the bipolar world of the Cold War (Cremona 2003: 2; Gänzle 2006: 110). The transformation of their stagnant political, economic, and social systems following the collapse of communism was explicitly organized in the framework of their strong commitment to core European values and norms (Smith et al. 2008: 367).

Furthermore, enlargement has been framed as a question of morality and shared identity. As the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair once pointed out, the EU had a "moral duty to offer them the hope of membership of the EU..." (Blair 1999: 371), underlining Helene Sjursen's conclusion that the fifth enlargement was largely driven by kinship-based, ethical-political concerns (Sjursen 2002). It has been objected that the enlargement process's political conditionality is in fact a coercive instrument. While there is some truth to this claim, we maintain that the EU's soft power of attraction plays a much more central role in the enlargement process. Candidate countries pursue domestic reforms because they see the prospect of EU membership, not because the EU coerces them.

The EU as a Humanitarian Actor

The external aid policy of the EC/EU stretches as far back as the 1970s. Spending in this area began to increase in the beginning of 1990s, with nearly 800 million ECU from the EC budget reserve devoted to the humanitarian crisis in Iraq after the Gulf War of 1990-91 (Brusset & Tiberghien 2002: 55). External aid provided by the EU member states can by all means be considered an important instrument of civilian power in terms of the union's foreign policy activities. In this context, Ginsberg argues that the outputs of the EU's 'External Relations System' can be measured taking into consideration, among other things, the Union's development and humanitarian aid (1999: 4). In fact, the EU and its member states together are the largest aid donor in the world. In 2008, the aid programs of the EU member states and the European Commission amounted to 69.2% of all Official Development Aid (ODA) disbursements (see Table 1). EU foreign aid managed by the EU Commission represents 12% of all international financial aid (Börzel and Risse, 2009: 9).

Table 1. Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) by major Development Assistance Committee (DAC) countries, 2008.

	USD million	% of total
DAC-EU countries	70 974	58.4
United States	26 842	22.1
European Commission	13 179	10.8
Japan	9 579	7.9
TOTAL DAC	121 483	100

Source: OECD Development Cooperation Report 2010.

The EU's commitment to external aid should also be viewed in relation to the union's spending on defense and military issues. The union's humanitarian assistance budget is approximately €937 million, and its operational European Security and Defence Policy budget is €250 million (Driver, 2010: 149). Furthermore, the EU and its member states spent more than €49 billion in 2008 in external aid to developing countries, equivalent to 0.4% of their GNP. This is higher than the per capita aid levels of the United States or Japan (European Commission, 2008).

At the same time, some analysts argue that the EU aid is unequally distributed, depending on the geo-strategic interests of the member states. This has to do with the simple fact that EU development assistance is not paid from the Commission's "bucket" alone, but rather from at least 27 more member state buckets, "all shaped differently, with different sizes and made of different material" (Grimm 2008: 3). But even considering this qualification, EU aid is spread more evenly around the world than that of other aid donors such as the US and Japan. For instance, 55 countries receive more than 50% of their total development aid from the EU. By comparison,

US aid is primarily concentrated on the Middle East, while Japanese aid is concentrated on other Asian countries (Keukeleire & MacNaughton 2008: 215). The equal distribution of EU aid suggests that the union's external aid program is an ideal of solidarity and sense of duty to other countries and parts of the world. From a constructivist perspective and from the point of view of a logic of justification, this is also consistent with the EU's core values and the union's self-understanding as an international actor. In the Commission's self-perception, the EU

“acts out of enlightened self-interest just as much as global solidarity. On an increasingly interconnected planet, supporting economic development and political stability in the wider world is an investment in one's future. By helping others, the EU helps to make life safer within its frontiers for its own citizens.” (European Communities 2007: 4).

In addition, one of the fundamental objectives of EU humanitarian aid policy is to reach as many people as possible wherever they live. To illustrate this argument, it is useful to point out a few concrete examples of where the EU's external aid arrived. The African continent was among the first recipients of EC development aid, based on the 1963 Yaoundé Convention between the EC and 18 African countries. In 2006, the EU member states provided 48% from its budget to the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (European Commission, 2006). Under the revised Cotonou Agreement, the tenth European Development Fund (EDF) today provides development assistance to the 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries that are party to the agreement. For the period between 2008 and 2013, the fund provides a budget of close to €22.7 billion. The EU has also been the largest aid donor in Afghanistan, spending about €800 million in the year after the war started and providing another €1.9 billion for 2002-2006 at the January 2002 donor conference in Tokyo (Hill & Smith, 2005: 168). Lastly, as Table 2 shows, EU external aid is widely distributed across the globe. The largest part of EU ODA disbursements goes to Sub-Saharan Africa, but also all other regions of the developing world are covered.

Table 2. Regional Distribution of EU Official Development Assistance (ODA) disbursements

Recipient	ODA (in millions of US dollars)
Sub-Saharan Africa	4 868
Europe	2 041
Middle East and North Africa	1 729
Unspecified	1 425
South & Central Asia	1 252
Latin America and Caribbean	1 114

Source: OECD Aid at a Glance Chart 2008-2009.

The Yugoslav crisis in the 1990s underlines the EU's commitment to the provision of humanitarian aid (Juncos 2005: 95). While the crisis underlined the union's military and defense incapacity, the US ensured military infrastructure from the very start of the wars. The EU, in turn, focused its efforts on ensuring humanitarian aid. The EU's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) provided emergency supplies, technical assistance and related support since the war first broke out in 1991. The scope of activities that ECHO pursues is widely defined: while assistance, relief and protection were considered core operations, short-term rehabilitation and reconstruction, and also preparedness for natural disasters or comparable exceptional circumstances, have been accepted as relevant (Brusset & Tiberghien 2002: 56).

Similarly, the EU has been the main external aid provider to the Gaza population. At the Sharm El-Sheikh Donors' Conference, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner pointed out that "the Commission intends to play a major role not only in helping to meet immediate humanitarian needs, but also needs in the early recovery phase", stressing that basic principles of humanitarian aid must prevail (2009). This position reflects a wider consensus among EU member states (Koen De Groof, 2009: 13). In December 2006, the Commission furthermore initiated a wide-ranging consultation of Member States and humanitarian organizations on a proposed EU Consensus on humanitarian aid that would deal with the main issues confronting humanitarian activities. The outcome of this initiative was a joint statement called "The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid", signed in December 2007 by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, expressing consensus on the values, guiding principles and policy scope of EU humanitarian aid. All this underlines the notion that EU external aid policy supports the image of the EU as a civilian power.

The EU's role in global environmental politics: still a global leader?

After the first United Nations Conference on the Environment in 1972, the European Commission became active in designing EC policies in this area. Following the European Council's commitment in 1972 to create an EC environmental policy, the first Environmental Action Programme (EAP) was decided upon in November 1973, establishing that "the protection of the environment belongs to the essential tasks of the Community". Additionally, the Single European Act (1986) was a milestone agreement in the development of EC environmental policy, requiring that environmental protection be considered in all new Community legislation. In this context, diverging environmental standards were viewed to pose a barrier to the single market. The SEA therefore established environmental policy as an explicit constitutional interest of the EC (Sbragia 1992). In fact, national environmental policies have to some extent become EU-driven. In terms of global environmental politics, the prestige of global leadership played an important role in the decision to propose an energy/CO₂-tax before the UNCED conference in June 1992. This was the first tentative step for the EU to become the world leader in environmental protection.

The EU has played a constructive role in global environmental politics. In fact, Article 174 of the TEC on the Environmental policy explicitly states that "promoting

measures at the international level to deal with regional or worldwide environmental problems” is a critical objective of the EU. External environmental policy has thus been a key aspect of the EU’s foreign policy.

The EU began to emerge as a global leader in environmental politics from the late 1990s and onwards, as this role was gradually abandoned by the US (Vogler, 2005: 835). The EU has played the most visible role in the negotiations leading up to the Kyoto protocol, an agreement which the US famously declined to ratify. At the 1997 UN Conference on Climate Change in Kyoto, EU member states pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 8% by 2012 compared to the levels of the early 1990s. This also underlines the EU’s more cautious, risk-averting approach to global climate policy (Baker, 2006: 92). When the US government announced in 2001 that it would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, thereby threatening the agreement’s entry into force, the EU effectively saved the process by securing Russia’s ratification of the protocol. The EU supported Russian membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) on the condition that Russia ratify the Kyoto Protocol (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006: 109). We can view the EU’s strong commitment to sustainable development and global welfare as a clear indication that the union’s international approach is very much in line with Harnisch & Maull’s definition of civilian power. In fact, we can even go so far as to claim that Kyoto also performs an important symbolic function in the union’s self-understanding as an international actor. It has become as important as an *identity goal* as it has been as a *policy goal*. This is not least clear from the difficulties that EU member states faced in ratifying the protocol and complying with its targets (Keukeleire & MacNaughton 2008: 248).

The 2008 EU Climate Change Agreement resulted in the so-called “20-20-20 targets”. Those targets prescribe (1) a reduction in EU greenhouse gas emissions by 20% compared to 1990, (2) a 20% reduction in primary energy use through improved energy efficiency, and (3) that 20% of EU energy consumption be derived from renewable resources. To meet these ambitious commitments, the Emissions Trading System (ETS) was created in 2003, placing limits on the amount of CO₂ that firms can produce in 6 key industries: energy, steel, cement, glass, brick-making, and paper. The introduction of the Emissions Trading System has also been described as an “ultra-quick political ‘pregnancy’”, as the scheme was in place less than two years after the Commission submitted its initial proposal (Wettestad 2005). This is testimony to the member states’ commitment to a global leadership role in environmental politics. This commitment, it has been pointed out, was only partly due to the “post-Kyoto climate policy hangover” and the overall favorable atmosphere among the member states; also the strong entrepreneurial role of the European Commission and its Environment Commissioner Margot Wallström was crucial in the process (ibid.). In line with this commitment to fill the global leadership void in environmental politics, EU leaders agreed to an increase of the Union’s commitment to greenhouse gas reductions from the previous target of 20% to 30% just ahead of the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009.

The most recent indication of the overall direction of EU environment policy is

laid out in the action program “Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice”. This action program concentrates on four priority areas: climate change; nature and biodiversity; environment and health; and natural resources and waste. The Environment and Health Action Plan for 2004-2010 also promotes a close relationship between health, environment and research policy. Obviously, the EU has developed a plan to tackle existing global environmental problems systematically.

In the aftermath of the UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December 2009, the EU’s global leadership in environmental politics has occasionally been questioned. Prior to the conference, the European Union was broadly recognized as a global leader and a credible actor with the potential to lead the way towards a replacement of the Kyoto Protocol upon its expiry in 2012. Given its known commitment to environmental protection since the earliest climate talks at the global level and the union’s strengthened position after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the union was in the favorable position to speak with one voice at the Copenhagen conference and strengthen its leadership position. However, the conference did not result in any binding commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions. In the course of the negotiations, the EU also ended up being increasingly sidelined by the US, China and others, as any compromise in the vicinity of the union’s objectives turned out to be unrealistic (Groen and Niemann, 2010: 16). In the end, the ‘Copenhagen Accord’ merely established that cuts in global gas emissions will be required to keep the overall rise in global temperature below 2°C and that countries will take all necessary measures to achieve this target. This result fell far short of the hopes that EU leaders had expressed prior to the conference. Günther Oettinger, the Commissioner designate for energy, pointed out that the EU was unable to play a decisive role in tackling the stalemate (Financial Times, 2010).

A Commitment to Multilateralism

In today’s global politics, a large number of international organizations, particularly the United Nations, have a strategic tendency to maintain the idea of multilateralism, i.e. the practice of contemporary world politics based on shared principles and mechanisms that increasingly influence international relations and also domestic affairs. Thanks to its presence and actions in the major multilateral interventions of the last decade, the EU has demonstrated its commitment to this approach (Attina, 2008: 2). For this reason, the EU is generally perceived as a strong supporter of a global order based primarily on international organizations and rules, which is in itself a reflection of the EU’s attempts to establish interstate relations on common principles and institutions among its members (Keukeleire & MacNaughton 2008: 299). A good example is the formulation in the Maastricht Treaty that EU foreign and security policy objectives are to be pursued in accordance with the principles and rules of the UN Charter and of the OSCE (Art. 11 TEU). Therefore, the EU’s international role is founded on the most widely accepted international rules, principles and regulations. Simply put, the EU’s international role is founded on a commitment to multilateralism.

This is clearly expressed in the European Commission’s communication entitled

'The European Union and the United Nations: the choice for multilateralism' (Louis 2007: 15). As Marsh and Mackenstein conclude, the EU "clearly has a significant global presence and a 'Mister Nice Guy' image in international relations on account of its devout multilateralism and its traditionally non-coercive approach to its external relations." (2005: 251). Similarly, the member states' collective experience of regional integration has made Europeans naturally more inclined to contemplate multilateral rules, regulations, and institutions for the management of global interdependence (Hill & Smith, 2005: 238). Even the European Security Strategy (ESS) is based on dialogue, bargaining, cooperation, partnership and institutionalized, rules-based multilateralism (Howorth, 2007: 204). Two strategic objectives can be identified within the ESS, namely, building security in Europe's neighborhood and promotion of an international environment based on effective multilateralism (ESS, 2003). In fact, the ESS has been built on a strategic premise that "leaves no room for an alternative' to multilateral action" (Mitzen 2006: 283), underlining the EU's role as a global civilian power exerting influence through multilateral channels.

There have been many examples where the EU member states sought to work together with other global actors to solve international problems. Indeed, the EU has constantly defended the institutional strengthening of international organizations such as the UN, NATO and the WTO, and also actively promoted the construction of new global regimes as well as the strengthening of global civilian policies (Telo, 2007: 54). Therefore, since the early 2000s, the EU has displayed a highly proactive approach towards multilateral policy-making together with the UN. If EU foreign policy has been successful in the Balkans region, the main reason is that its actions were carried out in cooperation with the UN, the World Bank, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and NATO (Keukeleire & MacNaughton 2008: 302). In the financial sector, EU states contribute about 38% of the ordinary budget, 50% of the contributions to special funds and programs, and 40% of the UN peace operations costs (Attina, 2008: 7). Once again, the EU's global policy revolves around cooperation with other international organizations. Simply, the EU's international activities are directed towards the "production of public goods" that are aimed at global prosperity. In other words, power politics has been overcome through multilateral cooperation in international affairs, as Harnisch & Maull concluded in their conceptualization of civilian power. Needless to say, any organization, institution or country must explicitly demonstrate its will and commitment to global cooperation if it is to maintain itself as relevant actor in today's era of global interdependence. As Maull argues, a civilian power concentrates on economic and non-military means to achieve its objectives, emphasizes multilateral cooperation, and develops supranational structures to cope with international problems, and thus perceives "the military as a residual safeguard" (McCormick: 2007: 70; cf. Eriksen 2009: chap. 6). In today's world, the EU is well equipped to promote and defend the idea of multilateralism (Mayer & Vogt, 2006: 71). With its emphasis on multilateral intervention in international affairs, the EU is proving itself as a strong civilian power.

A Persistent Myth: The Dawn of an EU Army?

When the Yugoslav crisis erupted in early 1990s, Jacques Poos, the head of the EC Presidency at the time, famously declared that it was *the hour of Europe*, not the hour of the United States (Gordon 1997/1998, 75). Yet the EC/EU member states did not rise to the challenge. The breakup of Yugoslavia and the ensuing wars are now considered one of the biggest failures of European foreign policy, and also a clear illustration of the obstacles to closer defense and security integration. To the extent that the EU demonstrated its inability to act as a unified international actor, the Yugoslav crisis did indeed turn out to be the hour of the US. Yet while the EU's lack of cohesion, determination and instruments made it unable to bring the crisis under control (Lehne, 2004: 11), the situation also prompted new military and defense initiatives. This development throughout the 1990s may be viewed as challenging the idea of the EU as a civilian power. But most of all, such developments further underline the difficulty of integration in defense and security and explain why the union's focus on civilian power comes as an almost natural choice.

In November 1993, the Maastricht Treaty institutionalized Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as one of the three pillars of the newly founded European Union. It even included the formulation of "the eventual framing of a common defense policy which might in turn lead to a common defense". By the end of the 1990s, the EU had furthermore given itself a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), challenging our view of the EU as a civilian power. As Howorth pointed out, "the genie was out of the bottle and the common defense project had begun to take on a life of its own" (2000: 31). As part of this process, the Helsinki Summit of 1999 produced the so-called *Headline Goals*, stating that "cooperating voluntarily in EU-led operations, member states must be able by 2003, to deploy within sixty days and to sustain for at least one year military forces up to 50,000 – 60,000 persons capable of the full range of Petersberg Tasks" (HEC: 2000). The Lisbon Treaty, in force since December 2009, goes one step further and states that

"member States shall undertake progressively to improve their military capabilities. The Agency in the field of defense capabilities development, research, acquisition and armaments (hereinafter referred to as 'the European Defence Agency') shall identify operational requirements, shall promote measures to satisfy those requirements, shall contribute to identifying and, where appropriate, implementing any measure needed to strengthen the industrial and technological base of the defense sector, shall participate in defining a European capabilities and armaments policy, and shall assist the Council in evaluating the improvement of military capabilities".

Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty extends the principle of enhanced cooperation to the area of defense, allowing a minimum number of countries to take part in the EU common defense framework while allowing reluctant countries to abstain. In the wake of these developments, some scholars have started to ask questions regarding

the possible transformation of the EU from a civilian to a military power in the conventional sense (Smith, 2004: 261). At the same time, it is relevant to look at these developments in relation to the EU's continued civilian activities. Only if we see the union's military activities in relation to its civilian efforts can we arrive at a more nuanced image of the union's international role in broader terms. Maybe even more importantly, we also have to see these developments in relation to a fundamental distinction between the EU's involvement in civilian and military missions *abroad* and the its role in the direct collective defense of Europe itself.

Regarding the first point, once again, our claim is not that the union's international activities are unidirectional, either in terms of its military or civilian activities and capabilities. Due to the prevalence of a logic of justification in motivating the union's common international actions, however, we can understand the much stronger development in the direction of a global civilian power. Along these lines, mere rhetoric about increased ambitions in the direction of a common defense within the EU is not reflected in any substantial increase in the Union's military and defense capabilities in practice. Simply put, there is no indication that the idea of a civilian power Europe (CPE) is undermined, as some scholars point out (Acikmese, 2002: 11). Over a decade after the Saint Malo Agreement, in which the French President Chirac and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair jointly declared their support for a common defense and security policy, no European army in a conventional sense is anywhere in sight. Indeed, EU military capabilities are not achieved by creating permanent European armed forces, and even less by establishing a permanent EU army. Instead, they are based on voluntary and temporary member state contributions (Keukeleire & MacNaughton 2008: 179), meaning that the area of defense is still under the control of the member states. Moreover, a number of member states have remained neutral as far as defense issues are concerned. In a sense, we can therefore still speak of a clear "capabilities-expectations gap", as Christopher Hill famously formulated it almost two decades ago (Hill, 1993).

Paradoxically, the CSDP depends to a large extent on the NATO framework to provide access both to military instruments and to planning facilities and to help the EU acquire an autonomous military capacity (Howorth, 2007: 176). The EU military mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been among the clearest examples of the Union's dependence on NATO. In 2004, the EU took over leadership of the mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina from NATO through the European Union Force (EUFOR). However, before the very start it was agreed that the mission should fall within the so-called *Berlin Plus* framework. *Berlin Plus* refers to arrangements agreed in late 2002 and early 2003 on institutional and operational links between NATO and the EU that grant the EU access to NATO planning and assets for operations in which NATO is not engaged. Even though the EU mission in Bosnia is widely perceived as a success story, it would have been impossible without the permission and subsequent military support of NATO. Furthermore, 21 out of the 27 current EU member states are also members of NATO and base their defense cooperation on NATO rather than on the EU defense framework. To underline this point, Article

42 of the Lisbon Treaty states that “commitments and cooperation in this area [defense] shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, which, for those States which are members of it, remains the foundation of their collective defense and the forum for its implementation”.

In addition, CSDP operations can be military, civilian or a combination of both. For instance, although the EU carries out military operations, the majority of operations has been civilian (see Table 3). The EU has managed to make valuable civilian contributions in conflict and post-conflict environments, especially when they are close to Europe (Chivvis, 2010). The two most important EU civilian missions have been the integrated rule of law mission in Kosovo and the EU police-training mission in Afghanistan. In these missions, NATO has been responsible primarily for the military aspect of peace building, while the EU mission has focused primarily on its civilian aspects. The bottom line is that despite significant commitments towards designing a common defense framework, the EU’s international role is still best described as civilian in character.

Table 3. Overview of CSDP Operations until February 2011.

Type of Operation	Number of Operations
Military	7
Civilian	16
Military/Civilian	1

Source: European External Action Service.

Regarding the second point referred to above, we also need to say a few words about the role that the EU could play in the collective defense of Europe itself. At the outset, the European Security and Defence Policy was explicitly limited to crisis management operations, which is in itself testimony to the argument we made at the start of this article: EU collective positions are not merely lowest-common-denominator positions derived from the member states’ diverging foreign policy traditions and orientations. Since they are purged of considerations of national interest, they tend to take the form of highest principles that the member states can agree on. Consequently, this is what EU force capabilities were earmarked and designed for and this is to a significant extent what contributes to the image of the EU as a global civilian power. Article 47.2 of the Lisbon Treaty does not change much in this respect. Although member states are now obliged to defend each other against military attack, the article has virtually no practical implications due to a variety of qualifying clauses, as discussed above. “Hard defense”, in line with our argument above, is still *de facto* in NATO’s hands.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections on the Future

In this concluding discussion, we want to revisit Harnisch & Maull's definition of a civilian power (Harnisch & Maull 2001) and reiterate to which extent the European Union's international role can be characterized as that of a global civilian power. In light of the developments towards increased security and defense integration since the 1990's, we also have reviewed these findings in relation to the observation that the EU's civilian operations are increasingly backed up by coercive means as well. To us, this does not, however, contradict the notion of a global civilian power since, as we have pointed out, the defining feature of a global civilian power cannot be the lack of coercive instruments, but must instead be the adherence to humanitarian principles (Eriksen 2009).

For Harnisch and Maull, the first defining characteristic of a global civilian power is that it undertakes "efforts to constrain the use of force through cooperative and collective security arrangements" (Harnisch & Maull 2001: 4). Our discussion on the EU's commitment to multilateralism above certainly supports the view that this applies in the case of the EU, although some might object that this is due to the fact that the EU quite simply has no other choice than to promote multilateral solutions to international problems. This is so because member states not only have different, and in certain cases conflicting, foreign policy traditions, but also because they are also members of a variety of other international organizations. From a theoretical angle, we should add that the logic of justification, as discussed throughout the paper, places rather severe constraints on unilateral action. Simply put, as a union of sovereign member states, the EU has to obtain a consensus on its international activities and thereby provide good reasons for proposed courses of action in the international arena.

This point does not only connect to the view that civilian powers have to undertake "efforts to strengthen the rule of law through multilateral cooperation, integration, and partial transfers of sovereignty" (Harnisch & Maull 2001: 4). It also ties in with Harnisch & Maull's point on the promotion of non-violent forms of conflict management and conflict resolution as a characteristic of civilian powers. Our overview of the union's civilian and military missions has shown that the majority of the union's activities are civilian in character. The fact that the union does in fact engage in military operations to begin with, once again, does not contradict this assertion. For one, the union's military operations can be explained by reference to the commitment to multilateralism, as they are usually embedded in other institutional arrangements, most notably NATO. The Lisbon Treaty makes it clear that the member states' commitments in the area of defense have to be consistent with NATO commitments, and most importantly that NATO remains the foundation of the existing NATO member states' collective defense. In this context, it is also relevant that the view of a civilian power does not categorically preclude the use of coercive means as long as the union's actions are consistent with humanitarian principles.

The union's enlargement policy, and in particular its focus on political conditionality in the accession process, supports the view that the EU fulfills the criterion of

promoting democracy and human rights. Our analysis has also demonstrated the role that the EU – in combination with its individual member states – plays as a contributor of development assistance. As the largest aid contributor in the world, the EU member states and the European Commission play an integral part in promoting social equity and sustainable development. This is also reflected in the union's role in international environmental and particularly climate policy, as our discussion of the Kyoto and Copenhagen processes has underlined.

In sum, while developments since the early 1990s may be construed as a challenge to the view of the union as a civilian power in international politics, two aspects should be emphasized that in our view clearly confirm the civilian role that the union currently plays and will continue to play in the near and medium term. On the one hand, the union does engage in military operations. But it has to be absolutely clear by now that these operations are joint operations by sovereign member states. In addition, they are embedded in multilateral arrangements and tend to work hand-in-hand with the United Nations or NATO. Most importantly, there is absolutely no indication of the coming of any form of European armed forces. EU defense and military capacity is and will continue to be based on the *voluntary* and *temporary* contributions of member states and will continue to be dependent on NATO military instruments in the Berlin Plus framework.

The second point to be emphasized is that even civilian powers may have coercive powers at their disposal. In this sense, no advance in defense and security in integration should be misconstrued as a departure from the civilian principles on which EU foreign and security policy continues to rest. As a matter of fact, one might even go so far as to argue that even civilian powers are dependent on having military resources at their disposal. As the law in itself has little motivational force *unless backed up by coercive force*, it should be clear that the EU's humanitarian actions may amount to little more than rhetoric unless they can, if necessary, be backed up by force. What defines a civilian power in this respect is, after all, that its actions have to be consistent with humanitarian principles.

Notes

- 1 The authors would like to thank Alyson Bailes and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on the first draft of this article.
- 2 We need to distinguish here between the concept of “normative power Europe” as developed by Ian Manners (2002; 2006) and broader normative questions about the future role of the EU in international politics. If you will, we are asking a normative question about the EU's status as a normative power.
- 3 Some observers describe this as one of the major weaknesses of European foreign and security policy: since member states have such diverging foreign policy traditions and affiliations, intergovernmental decision making on foreign and security policy is often painfully difficult. The failure of the EC/EU to speak with one voice in the break-up of Yugoslavia is still considered one of the clearest and most dramatic examples of this (see below), but also the fundamental split between EU member states over the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the recognition of Kosovo as a sovereign state are cases in point.

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