

EU foreign policy co-operation: A millstone or a multiplier for the UK?

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By participating actively in EU foreign policy co-operation, the UK can get 27 other countries to take co-ordinated actions aligned with British aims. It could achieve even more if it invested more political and human resources in working with EU partners on foreign policy issues. If the UK left the EU, it would gain some freedom of manoeuvre, but at the cost of policy impact.

Since the Maastricht Treaty established the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1992, the UK has been one of the most active member-states in launching European foreign policy initiatives. Successive British governments have clearly seen CFSP as a tool which helps them to achieve national foreign policy goals, beyond what the UK can accomplish on its own. Were these governments right, or does CFSP get in the way of the UK pursuing its national interests?

The best way to answer this question is to use the FCO's published 'Purpose' and 'Priority Outcomes' for 2014-2015; and to compare them with EU documents on the Union's foreign policy aims, including the annual report to the European Parliament by the EU's high representative for CFSP, Federica Mogherini. The EU does not set out

its priorities and objectives in the same format as the FCO, but it is easy to see where the UK and EU are trying to achieve similar results. This submission looks at a few examples of how UK and EU activities interact, and recommends ways in which the UK can ensure that European foreign policy co-operation contributes as much as possible to UK national objectives.

One of the FCO's stated purposes is to "deliver more effective and modernised international institutions, particularly the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the European Union, the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe". Taking the UN and the OSCE as examples, how do UK and EU aims in these organisations relate to each other?

The UK and the EU at the UN

In relation to the UN, it is important to remember that EU foreign policy is decided by unanimity. The UK is only ever obliged to promote EU policies to which it has already agreed, therefore. Moreover, the Treaty on European Union recognises that while member-states who are members of the UN Security Council should defend the

positions and the interests of the Union, they have to do so without prejudice to their UN Charter responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Apart from any foreign policy goals it pursues through the UN, Britain's aims for the organisation include

improving the UN's finances and ensuring that it is leaner and more effective. The EU's objectives are entirely consistent with what Britain wants: they include reforming the methodology of assessing the UN regular budget (which currently disadvantages a number of European countries including the UK); reviewing potentially redundant activities and staff requirements; and demanding that the UN streamline its structures, budget and working methods.

The UK's contribution to the UN regular budget is 5.2 per cent; to the peacekeeping budget it is 6.7 per cent. The contributions of all 28 EU member-states total 35 per

cent and 36.8 per cent respectively. The UK is much better placed to lobby for greater UN efficiency if it can do so as part of a group of countries that pay more than a third of the UN's bills, rather than on its own as a country that pays little more than a twentieth. It is worth underlining that the UK has traditionally been one of the loudest voices in the EU in calling for savings in UN budgets (and the budgets of other international organisations); and it has generally been successful in getting other member-states, not all of whom instinctively share Whitehall's rigorous approach, to sign up to a common policy. It would be harder for the UK to corral the EU if it were no longer a member.

The UK and the EU at the OSCE

Both the EU and UK would like the OSCE to be more effective. EU member-states provide 70 per cent of the OSCE's budget and make up almost half the membership of the organisation (28 out of 57 participating states). Unfortunately, since the OSCE takes decisions by consensus, Russia and other undemocratic former Soviet states all have a veto on the sorts of improvements that the UK and other Western countries would like to see, which would strengthen the organisation's role in human rights protection and conflict prevention. Nonetheless, EU and UK aims for the OSCE in its current form are closely aligned. The UK seeks to improve military security by encouraging greater openness, transparency and co-operation. The EU supports the full implementation and modernisation of the Vienna Document on military confidence- and security-building measures, which codifies the steps countries should take to be more transparent about military activities. The UK sees the OSCE's work on human rights, fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and democracy as essential. The EU has called for the full implementation of OSCE commitments in the area of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The OSCE has played a vital role in monitoring the situation in Ukraine since Russia's intervention there; again, both the UK and the EU have supported this role politically, financially and practically. The UK has provided the OSCE's monitoring mission with more than 20 monitors and 10 armoured vehicles. Altogether, EU member-states have provided more than 70 per cent of the staff of the mission. In addition to contributions by member-states, the Union provided the mission with €7m in funding, 40 unarmoured vehicles and 4 armoured vehicles.

The OSCE shows how the UK can sometimes influence outcomes through the EU, but at the expense of its own national profile. With rare exceptions, the member-states of the EU do not speak in the formal meetings of the OSCE's Permanent Council; instead, the EU representative speaks on their behalf. Thus the UK's voice is only heard on topics which are of special interest to Britain, such as the campaign led by the former Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague, on the Prevention of Sexual Violence in Conflict.

EU statements express the consensus view of EU member-states, and as such may sometimes be less hard-hitting than the UK would like; but Britain's network of diplomatic posts throughout the OSCE area ensures that it is usually better informed than most member-states, and therefore in a position to ensure that EU statements are up-to-date and well-targeted.

EU statements in the OSCE gain extra weight because of the number of countries that back them. Apart from the 28 member-states, candidates for EU membership like Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro often align themselves with the statements, as do countries like Norway and some of the members of the EU's Eastern Partnership including Moldova and Ukraine. Altogether, around 40 of the 57 participating states may sign up to a single, EU-drafted point of view, giving it much greater diplomatic weight. Were the UK to leave the EU, it would probably speak more often in the Permanent Council on a national basis (as Canada or Switzerland do), but it would lose the chance to get a coalition of 40 states behind it; indeed, on many occasions it would probably align itself with EU statements, but without being able to influence the drafting.

The EU and UK foreign policy priorities

If one examines the FCO's 'Priority Outcomes for 2014-2015', there is a particularly close relationship between UK and EU aims in relation to security, where the FCO's

overall aim is to "safeguard Britain's national security by countering terrorism and weapons proliferation and working to reduce conflict".

Iran

In relation to Iran, the UK sought “a comprehensive nuclear agreement with Iran, a more constructive Iranian role in the region and a more substantial bilateral relationship”. The nuclear agreement reached in July 2015 reflected the patient work of EU high representatives, first Baroness Ashton and then Federica Mogherini, on behalf of the so-called E3+3 – France, Germany, the UK, China, Russia and the US. Given high levels of distrust between Iran on the one hand and (especially) the UK, France and US on the other, it was preferable for these Western states to keep a low profile when possible. The EU therefore played a vital role in negotiating with Tehran on behalf of the other members of the group.

The Union’s role was also important in putting pressure on Iran through far-reaching sanctions. Not all member-states were initially enthusiastic about imposing sanctions, particularly on the import of Iranian oil. Iran was Greece’s largest oil supplier until 2012, when Athens joined the EU consensus in favour of an embargo. It would certainly not have been any easier for the UK to persuade Greece if it had been trying to do so from outside the EU, rather than from inside and in concert with France and Germany.

Russia

The FCO’s objectives in respect of Russia included achieving “more stable relations between Russia and Ukraine, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Russia’s neighbours”. Since Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU has consistently called for the conflict to be resolved by diplomatic means; it has supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and at the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit in May 2015 it restated its support for “the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all its partners”.

The FCO claims credit for a “successful campaign to get robust EU sanctions” against Russia; while the UK was certainly not the only country to push for tough action, Britain’s support for strong measures was important, not least because some member-states were suspicious that the UK would try to protect the interests of Russian investors in the City of London. If the UK had been outside the EU, it could have imposed unilateral sanctions on Russia; but the impact would have been limited. Trade between the UK and Russia is relatively insignificant: the UK accounted for 4 per cent of Russia’s exports and 3 per cent of its imports in 2013. By contrast, the EU as a whole accounted for 57 per cent of Russia’s exports and 46.5 per cent of its imports. The UK’s participation in CFSP meant that it was in the room and able to argue the case for restrictive measures on Russia that supported UK objectives; if it had not been an EU member, it would have had much less influence over EU policy.

Africa: Somalia

In Africa, FCO objectives for 2014-2015 included reducing the risk of conflict, particularly in East and Central Africa and the Sahel; and reducing the terrorist threat to the UK, particularly from East Africa. Again, EU efforts supported UK aims. The Horn of Africa provides a particularly good example of how the two dovetail.

The British government said in 2013 that Somalia was a top foreign policy priority, and that the UK had concerns about terrorism, piracy and migration. The FCO reported this year that the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia, AMISOM, had made progress in reducing the territory controlled by militants. The EU has spent over €580 million on supporting AMISOM. The EU has also contributed to international efforts to improve security in Somalia in several other ways:

- ★ the EU Training Mission in Somalia has trained about 5000 local troops and police since 2010;
- ★ the EU has deployed the EU Mission on Regional Maritime Capacity Building in the Horn of Africa (EUCAP Nestor) as part of its (largely successful) effort to tackle piracy emanating from Somalia;
- ★ the EU naval force Operation ATALANTA (for which the UK provides the operational headquarters at Northwood and the operation commander) has operated very successfully against pirates in the Gulf of Aden;
- ★ the EU plans to spend €286 million on development assistance to Somalia from 2014-2020.

This is not to argue that all EU programmes in Somalia have been successful – the country is still a failed state – but the UK could not on its own have funded all these initiatives; and it is not clear that other EU member-states would have reached the same conclusion as the UK about the importance of the security risks emanating from Somalia.

Africa: North, West and Central

EU missions are also operating in other priority areas of Africa, including a border assistance mission for Libya, capability-building missions in Mali and Niger and an EU military training mission in Mali, a military advisory mission in the Central African Republic and a security-sector reform mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Instability in these and other countries in Africa contributes to security threats to the UK including terrorism, drugs smuggling and illegal migration. The UK would certainly not choose to get involved in all these conflicts on a national basis if the EU did not, but such missions under the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) contribute to improving security in unstable areas of concern to the UK, so it is in the UK’s interest to be involved in decisions on whether to deploy them and with what mandate.

Conclusion

The EU is not relevant to every UK foreign policy priority – it is a marginal player in relation to the Commonwealth (although EU sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe were intended, like the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth, to bring about political change there). The EU plays little role in relation to consular services, though British citizens can seek assistance from another EU mission in places where the UK does not have consular representation.

But where the EU is relevant, as seen in the examples above, it helps rather than hinders the UK in achieving its goals. As restrictive measures against Iran and Russia show, economic sanctions are increasingly used as a tool of coercive diplomacy; and the size of the EU market and its importance in international commerce mean that it can exert economic pressure more effectively than the UK can by itself. If the UK left the EU, its ability to influence the CFSP decision-making process would be dramatically reduced, even if UK and EU views on international problems might still be similar, at least initially. The UK would probably have regular political dialogue meetings with the EU, as the EU's main partners including the US, Canada and Japan do currently at a variety of levels from summits to expert working groups. But EU positions are generally agreed in advance of such meetings, leaving non-members to be briefed on them but not to influence them.

Even as a non-member, the UK would still have the chance to second personnel to EU CSDP missions in areas of importance to it, as other non-member states do. To do so, it would have to sign a 'framework participation agreement' with the EU; but such agreements stipulate that the EU retains decision-making autonomy. As Thierry Tardy of the EU Institute for Security Studies wrote in a March 2014 paper on third-country participation in CSDP operations, "Even once the operation is launched, the various mechanisms in place ... limit the involvement of partners, effectively reducing them to second-class stakeholders".

If the UK were outside the EU and unable to block decisions with which it disagreed, it might also find its interests damaged in other ways. As one of the EU's most pro-NATO members, the UK has been able to block efforts to build up the Common Security and Defence Policy in ways that might harm NATO. More positively, it has worked (as the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review stated) to "foster better EU-NATO cooperation and ensure that both organisations can call on scarce national military planning and civilian resources; sharing expertise and developing complementary, rather than duplicate, skills and capabilities". As a non-member of

the EU, the UK could no longer veto steps agreed by the remaining members of the EU even if they increased the gap between the EU and NATO, or weakened NATO's role in providing for Europe's defence.

CFSP is not perfect. Because decisions are taken by unanimity, one country can block or dilute an EU response to an international crisis. On the other hand, unanimity also provides a guarantee that the UK can never be forced to follow an EU policy in the foreign affairs field with which it disagrees; the worst that can happen is that it fails to persuade its partners to adopt a policy that the UK supports.

The UK's biggest problem with CFSP at present is not that the EU is too active in areas that the UK does not support; it is that Britain is not investing enough in making European foreign policy work more effectively for UK interests. This is partly a matter of political will: the UK neither pressed to be included in the 'Normandy format' for negotiations on the conflict in Ukraine, leaving it instead to France and Germany to talk to Ukraine and Russia; nor did it try to get the European External Action Service included, though putting the EEAS in the lead had been successful in getting a nuclear deal with Iran. Even if the UK did not want to play an active role in brokering peace, pushing for an EEAS role would have ensured that the views of all EU member-states, including close allies of Britain like Poland and the Baltic States, would have been better represented in the negotiations.

Insufficient influence is also a matter of inadequate resourcing. The UK is significantly under-represented in the European External Action Service, both in Brussels and in EU delegations abroad. Britain, with 12.4 per cent of the EU population, has only 7.2 per cent of the positions in the EEAS – fewer than France, Germany, Italy or Spain. It does even worse in civilian CSDP missions – contributing fewer personnel than Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, France, or Finland. Whitehall departments should be able to do better than this. The French have a proverb "les absents ont toujours tort" – "those who are absent are always in the wrong". The UK is only half-present in EU foreign policy today; leaving the EU would compound the mistake.

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