

Capability and expectations gap in the eu



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The European Union (EU) is an important actor within the international arena. Due to the positive actions of enlargement and the single market, there has always been expectations attached to this organisation. Along with every new treaty and policy, the EU aims to improve the capacity of resources and structures to reach what is expected. However, as stated by Christopher Hill, the EU are in a position where they face a Capability and Expectations Gap. Although the Treaty of Lisbon has made great progress in trying to close this gap, limitations, indifferences and unwillingness has meant that this gap continues to exist. To answer the proposed question and to explain why the EU still endures this gap, a few key terms must first be acknowledged, including the Capability and Expectations Gap (CEG) and the EU's Foreign & Security policy.

The Capability and Expectations Gap is a term that has been associated with the European Union for a number of years and derived from the studies of Christopher Hill (1993). The term studies the gap between the level of power that states and actors expect the EU to have and the level of power that the organisation literally holds. In the international arena, the EU is a major actor. Although not a superpower in all aspects of its policy concerns; the EU stands apart from other major actors due to it being known as a *Sui Generis* organisation. With no other international organisations resembling the EU, it is one of a kind. Due to this stance, external actors and European citizens place high expectations on the EU. They expect it to be able to intervene in conflict or issues worldwide, to protect and improve their rights as citizens and run a coherent and co-ordinated organisation. These tasks can “ pose a serious challenge to the actual capabilities..., in terms of its *ability to agree,*

its *resources*, and the *instruments* at its disposal" (Hill; 1993). When new policies and institutional structures are created to address various issues or reach new goals, capability levels are unintentionally assumed.

Foreign Policy focuses on the activities and interactions one state has with other states through its diplomatic dealings. The EU's Foreign policy can be seen as " multi-faceted" due to the wide range of areas that it overlooks, including the Common Foreign & Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security & Defence policy (CSDP), migration etc. (Keukeleire, Delreux; 2014, 11). Although foreign policy overlooks a broad range of policy sections, there was an ultimate aim for the European Union; for either the intergovernmental coordination of pre-existing national foreign policies (at a minimum) or the supranational governance of a single European Foreign policy (at a maximum) (Carbone; 2018).

In 2009, the Treaty of Lisbon was brought into action with the desire to improve on previous EU treaties and " with a view to enhancing the efficiency and democratic legitimacy of the Union and to improving coherence of its actions." (ToL; 2009). This treaty resulted from the " negative referenda in France and the Netherlands" towards the failed Constitution in 2001 (Pleska: 2010, 92). The Treaty of Lisbon hoped to increase the level of coherence and co-ordination regarding a number of policies within the EU. The Lisbon Treaty abolished the previous constitutional " three pillar" structure, that had been implemented in previous treaties, including the Treaty of Maastricht and then Amsterdam. The structure had been one of the main causes of the lack of coherence within the EU. Justice and Home Affairs was now a fully incorporated policy

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area and the European Community was now replaced by the European Union. Three Pillars could now be seen to be merged together under one umbrella of the EU. The Treaty of Lisbon was seen to simplify certain structures and to unite aspects together to produce a more coordinated organisation, seen to be speaking with one voice which would theoretically reduce the gap between expectations and capabilities.

One of the sectors of the EU that was adapted by the Treaty of Lisbon was the institutional framework. Prior to 2009, the Treaty of Amsterdam created the position of the High Representative for the CFSP. The position was to be a speaker for the EU, along with the Presidents of the Council and the European Commission to external actors. The Lisbon Treaty then expanded on this role, giving the holder an increased number of certain responsibilities. After 2009, the position was extended to a three-hat position, incorporating the roles of the Vice-President (VP) of the Commission and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC). This post held onto the majority of the same powers as before, including overlooking the CFSP, coordinating between EU institutions, creating a consensus between the Member states, amongst other roles. Incorporating these positions together was believed to advance the levels of continuity and consistency of the EU External Action. The role within the Commission was to link together the responsibilities of the Commissioner on internal policies and their separate external dimensions, whilst following the structure of the functioning Commission. However, this was made difficult due to the role held within the Commission as they must co-operate with the European Council on matters of foreign policy, which is still linked to the intergovernmental method. As Pleszka notes, “ in reality

the HR is much more dependent on the European Council and her work in the Commission is limited by her responsibilities as President of the Foreign Affairs Council" (2010, 96). The position has managed to hold two of the preceding pillar structure but in a single function, with the expectation that negotiations between the previous pillar matters would be simplified.

However, Catherine Ashton, the first High Representative after the Treaty of Lisbon, had the task of unifying the varying interest of the Commission and the Council, which was proven difficult. " She needed to decide how to conduct policies in both institutions without creating conflicting ideas" (Meinen; 2015, 25). As Meinen explains, within the Commission the High Representative had to represent the interests of the EU as a Commission member without national considerations. Whereas in the Council, her role was to represent the interests of the Member States; therefore in one institution supporting the Member States Interest and in the other, the EU interests. This hindered the level of accountability held by the High Representative as she was " unsure of where her loyalties lie" (Pleszka; 2010, 97). Being appointed by the European Council, whom can appoint and end the position's term, high levels of accountability can be forced to lie here. However, the President of the Commission holds a certain amount of power over the High Representative, due to the ability of being able to force the High Representative to resign. Due to this split accountability, the capacity to execute the responsibility of improving the cooperation and horizontal coherence of these institutions was low. In both institutions, the High Representative had limited resources, for example, being a steering role and not a decision making role and needing the coordination and support of the institutional members. Although Ashton was a good, starting

role-model, seen by her dialogues with members and consultations in meetings, the role of the High Representative is viewed on occasion as a position with heavy responsibility but one which lacks real power.

Another institutional change was in the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which was the first task of the new High Representative role in aiming to improve the Foreign policy's effectiveness and coherence. Based in Brussels, known as the Diplomatic corps of the EU it was made up of " 6, 000-strong diplomatic service... working alongside national embassies" (Helwig, Peterson; 2107, 318). It was expected to be the " potential driving force in the foreign policy-making structure of the EU" (Marques; 2016, IX). Bringing employees from the Commission, the Council and the Member states, the service can be summarised as " linking the Member States, the Commission, the European Council, and the Council, and the centre of coordination among them" (Marques; 2016, 37). With the main aim to improve coherence both vertically and horizontally within the EU. Firstly, the horizontal coherence suffered regarding the EEAS. Horizontal coherence considers the level of coordination between institutions. The EU Commission has always held a large amount of responsibility over a varying range of policy areas, for example Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Policies. As Koenig states, " Cooperation and Humanitarian aid policies are very often coordinated with CFSP, which is under the authority of the EEAS. Both institutions wish to keep control of their formal proficiencies linking their interests. Tension between the two is seen to increase due to " lack of communication and interaction between the EEAS and the Commission" (Koenig; 2011, 19). Competences from each institution began to coincide

and a lack of communication leads to slow reflexes and action towards external relation problems. An example, discussed by Marques, is of the 2010 Haiti earthquake (Marques; 2016). Due to the lack of communication coordination was heavily effected with many criticising the EU for not acting quick enough to the natural disaster. Notable to all international actors was the lack of solutions generated by the Commission subsequent to the risks being identified. Clear deficiency within the interaction between the Commission and EEAS was noted and although the EEAS was a new institutional resource created for the EU's Foreign Policy, the capability has not been able to reach it's full potential. Consequently, the expectation of better institutional coordination has not been reached.

As previously mentioned, the EEAS hoped to also improve vertical coherence, overlooking the consensus between EU level policies and the policies employed by Member States. Along with the High Representative role, the aim was for the EU to have an institutional structure to have the ability to talk with one voice. However, with 28 Members of the EU, vertical coherence is a difficult task. With National interests and ideas differing for each Member State, coming to the conclusion of one common policy or strategy is a battle. Nevertheless, the EEAS and High Representative, along with the Lisbon Treaty, were expected to bring the varying range of interests together and talk with one voice. As these were new structures, some Member States seemed unable to fully trust them and unwilling to reduce their level of sovereignty. This resulted in a reluctance to provide either the High Representation or the EEAS with the full responsibilities that were assigned to them in the treaties. Adding to the problem of reluctance,

Member States are bound by agreed common approaches but have no obligation to consult with one another (Carbone; 2018). Members do not have to exclusively delegate Foreign Policy action to the High Representative, or even conduct it through the CFSP. Therefore, the expectation of the EEAS and High Representative regarding vertical coherence with Member States is difficult to reach. Although the resources are theoretically in place, the differing actions of Member States makes it difficult for them to be used effectively, if at all. One crisis that shows the difference of actions that can be taken by Member States is the Arab Spring in 2010. After realising that majority of Tunisian refugees were proceeding towards France, Italy began to distribute, to refugees, temporary residence permits. These permits allowed for “ free circulation in the Schengen area” (Koenig; 2011, 21). Afterwards, at a meeting in Luxembourg, other Member States (headed by France and Germany) faulted Italy of breaching the ‘ Schengen Spirit’ with the punishment of reinstating border controls. Here we can see that individual states’ national policies lead to them acting unilaterally, therefore creating an incoherence. The inability to coordinate between states, results in resources and capabilities not being available to their full expected potential.

Along with the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU upgraded the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) into the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) which is a vital part of the CFSP. Although the CSDP was not established until 2009, the first statement that can be linked to it was during the 20th Century; “ the security of the European continent should logically be delivered through Europe’s own resources” (Howorth; 2017; 347). The treaty

encompasses all the developments of the CSDP together from previous treaties, since the Cologne European Council (1999) and aimed to strengthen the coordination of Member States. A unanimous decision making process by the European Council was also adopted under this policy, where civilian military crisis management instruments are controlled, aiming to “ underpin and implement the EU’s foreign policy and to reinforce the potential and credibility of the CFSP” (Marques; 2016, 4). The policy’s missions were an extension of the pre-made Petersberg Tasks, which were a number of priorities based on military and security policies that were included in the ESDP. Examples of the CSDP are “ Joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, conflict prevention and peacekeeping tasks” (CORDIS, 2015). The CSDP was outlined as interplaying soft and hard power techniques to tackle external security issues, i. e. using the ability to attract and co-operate rather than only using coercion. A balance between the two were expected from the EU, however this has not been met as there has been a greater number of civilian missions than military since 2009 (Howarth; 2017). This is understood to be caused by the lack of military capabilities held by the EU. For this policy to work, the idea would be for Member States to combine certain aspects of their national militaries to the EU level. Along with the European council making the unanimous decisions of deployment, these are components that restrict the capabilities of the CSDP. Foreign policy is still held under national authorities, therefore if Member States were to delegate any section to the EU, they would forfeit their levels of sovereignty. The EU Battle Groups are an example. Consisting of “ rotating troop contingents from member states” that are equipped to be deployed within 10 days’ notice (Besch; 2016). However, since their creation,

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they have never been used due to Member States being unwilling to volunteer their troops to the groups. It has been roughly estimated that “ only 70% of the EU’s military are able to be deployed only within their National territory” (Helwig, Peterson; 2017, 323).

Another expectation that developed with the policy change, was that the EU would now act autonomously. Before, the EU had continuously relied on either NATO or the USA for survival. With the goal of bringing military and civilian resources together, the idea was to be able to intervene within external issues alone, as coherence and coordination between Member States were expected to be improved. Although the EU conducted the Artemis Military Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was the first military mission without NATO assistance in 2003, since then the EU have tended to heavily rely on the other actors for security. The 2011 Libya War was fronted by various EU Member States and linked to many of the ideas held in security and defence policies. Nevertheless, due to the struggle of arriving at an internal agreement, NATO had to step in to help control. Not only that, but the USA also played a role through a considerate contribution(Nielson; 2013). Even though the EU appears to be taking the necessary actions to be able to act autonomously in the international world, Howarth states that the “ collective defence remains, in all official discourse, the responsibility of NATO.” (Howarth; 2017, 2nd week).

As Nielsen continues, the Libya War and the reliance on NATO and the USA also effected the EU’s capacity to improve on their soft power and influencing power as they focused on what the EU had to do within the organisation, rather than considering the new security problems that had

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risen in Libya. The EU's aim to improve the internal aspects of Foreign Policy links to the goals of improving the ability to encourage the European norms on to external actors. The EU's normative approaches include peace and human rights. Due to the 28 Member States, the EU is unable to promote one specific interest of norms but nonetheless promote the core norms held between the Members, i. e. the Rule of Law. By leading by example, the EU hopes that other states will decide to follow or adapt as a result of the carrot and stick approach; offering a reward if the state conforms to EU ideas. And with the creation of new treaties, one would assume that the EU's ability of influence would develop. However, tending to focus on developing countries, for example in Africa, the EU is increasingly becoming less influential. This is due to the rising powers of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). Unlike the EU, other countries do not place heavy conditionalities onto the developing countries, therefore allowing China and the other countries to try and influence. In Africa the thought is "the Chinese build bridges for us, the EU supervises our elections" (Nielsen; 2013, 734). If the developing countries are able to reap the same rewards from powers that are not imposing conditionalities and are not as focussed on normative concerns, they are more likely to steer away from the EU. This would result in the EU losing its ability and standing in the international arena due to its inability to influencing the normative approaches on developing countries.

To conclude, over the years the European Union continues to try and bridge the gap between the expectations placed on it and the capabilities that it holds. Treaties have been created, improving on their predecessors to raise the capacity levels within the organisation. As we have seen the capabilities

have increased, however sometimes only in theory. And in a parallel motion, the level of expectations increases. Therefore, the EU's foreign and security policy has been unable to close the Capability and Expectations Gap.

For the EU to be able to act in external relations to what is expected, it must first focus on the internal relations and structures.

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