

EU foreign policy as others see it – images of the EU as an international negotiator

Themes, purpose and approach

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What is characteristic of the European Union (EU) as a foreign policy actor, and what impact does the EU have on the international arena? As the EU has emerged as an autonomous source of influence in world politics, a lively debate has started on what influence it actually has ("is the EU a new superpower?"; see i.a. Haseler 2004; Rifkin 2004; Reid 2004), its degree of coherence ("does the Union speak with one voice?") and on the qualities that characterize its policies (does it act as a leader? Are EU policies consistent across time and space?).

Most accounts of EU foreign policy consist of scholarly analyses of EU behaviour over time. At times, EU policy documents or speeches are used to characterize the identity of the EU as a foreign policy actor. This study instead puts its focus on the EU as other see it: the *purpose* is to investigate how non-EU actors perceive the motives behind, the performance and the impact of EU foreign policy in concrete cases of international negotiations. This is a novel perspective, called for by practitioners and well suited to add new theoretical and empirical insight of EU policy.

Empirically, the project will highlight on-going negotiations between the EU and regional groupings of African, Carib-

bean and Pacific countries (the ACP countries), with the aim of creating Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs) on development aid and trade between the parties. Such agreements between regional actors are in themselves innovative and have been described as "potentially groundbreaking", linking politics, aid, and trade "in an as yet untested way" (Holland 2002: 232; 224; cf. Babarinde & Faber 2004: 45-7). The negotiations leading to such agreements are therefore well worth scientific enquiry.

Among the theoretical advances that could be achieved by a focus on outsiders' perceptions is a deeper penetration into some alleged gaps between EU policy performance and impact. First, between others' expectations and Union capacity; second, between rhetoric and actual action; third, between EU aspirations and its success in affecting change. The proposed project could also cast further light on the nature and essence of asymmetrical negotiation processes, and on the foreign policy roles of the EU.

Interviews will be carried out with representatives of ACP countries in Brussels, with experts from development non-governmental organization (NGOs), and documents from these sources will be analysed. These data will be compared with results from interviews with Commission negotiators and EU documents to compare others' perceptions with EU self-images, or identity. NGO material is useful as it offers insights, often critical, from outsiders on on-going negotiation processes. The proposed project builds on and develops my previous research on EU foreign policy roles, which includes analyses of others' perception of EU foreign policy in other arenas of international negotiations (Elgström 2006; Elgström & Smith 2004).

Research on EU foreign and development policy

The literature on the EU as an external actor has over the years become rather impressive. There is a comprehensive discussion on whether, and to what degree, the EU should be considered an autonomous foreign policy actor. One usual approach has been to scrutinize deficiencies in the actorness of the Union: lack of clear goals, an ambiguous division of competencies and responsibility between various institutions, incoherence between different issue-areas. There is a dividing line between those who compare the EU with "other state actors" and those who view the EU as a unique type of actor, as *sui generis*. While adherents of the first group tend to underline the weaknesses and problems associated with EU actorness, the latter tend to emphasize the evident influence of the Union (Allen & Smith 1998; Ginsberg 2001; Whitman 1998). Another line of demarcation goes between those who solely study the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (c.f. Peterson & Sjursen 1998; Zielonka 1998) and those who are interested in the whole array of EU international activities, regardless of policy area (Piening 1997; Rhodes 1998; White 2001). The first mentioned are more interested in institutions and procedures, the latter in "what the EU is actually engaged in" (H. Smith 2002). Finally, a distinction can be made between those who analyse the EU in terms of a traditional great power role (Zielonka 1998) and those who describe the Union as a new type of power, a civil or normative great power (Hill 1990; Manners 2002; K. Smith 2002).

The ambivalence and uncertainty concerning what type of actor the EU actually is in world politics is also reflected in the

discourse on EU roles in international negotiations. A conventional view is that of a reactive, conservative international negotiator, that tends to be inflexible and unwilling to make concessions, as its negotiation mandate has been preceded by complicated bargaining between the member states. The EU is thus often portrayed as a foot-dragger in international negotiations (Elgström & Strömvik 2004). But the Union has also been described – not least by EU representatives – as a leader and a facilitator in many multilateral contexts. In the – quite few – studies that exist on the EU's foreign policy roles (Hill 1990; Cremona 2004; Elgström & Smith 2004; cf. Jørgensen 2004), we find references to traditional great power roles (defender of self-interests; regional power; stabilizer) as well as to roles that would mark the EU as a "different" great power (champion of multilateralism; norm exporter; promoter of its regional integration model).

The literature on EU foreign policy often underlines the importance of other actors' perceptions, and expectations of EU policy. Bretherton & Vogler (1999) submit that "the relationship between internal coherence/consistency ... and perceptions of the EC's presence ... are of central importance". Others' expectations are a central component in Chris Hill's (1993) ideas on a "capabilities-expectation gap". Nevertheless, there is in fact a lack of theoretical probes into this area, as well as an absence of empirical investigations of actual role conceptions (Bretherton & Vogler 1999 is a partial exception). As noted by Nicole Gnesotto in her motivation for a recent collection of scholarly essays on "Global Views on the European Union", "Quelle image projetée aujourd'hui l'Union européenne sur des continents...? ...C'est cette curiosité – renforcée par la

rareté des études ... sur ces perceptions lointaines de l'Union – qui fut largement à l'origine de ce Cahier de Chaillot" (Gnesotto 2004: 7). Thus, the proposed study would indeed fill a gap in EU foreign policy studies.

In the proposed project, I focus on one particular aspect of EU foreign policy: its development policy (I have previously researched EU roles in international trade negotiations, and the findings from the proposed project can be added to and compared with these existing research results). Existing scholarly work on EU-Third World relations either consists of chapters in books giving a broad overview on EU external activities, or focus solely on the EU's development policy. In both cases, they are overwhelmingly empirical and self-contained. Whilst some authors cover all relations with developing countries (Grilli 1993; Holland 2002; Lister 1997), and others concentrate their attention to EU-ACP relations (Babarinde 1994; Ravenhill 1985; Whiteman 1998), they are all primarily descriptive or, to the extent that they have analytical ambitions, focus on peculiar traits of EU development relations. John Ravenhill (1992) thus investigates EU-ACP relations in terms of weak state power and Martin Holland (2002) links EU development policy to theories of European integration. Little integration exists with existing theoretical perspectives on EU foreign relations (in itself an undertheorized field).

Theoretical perspectives

This project submits that other actors' images and perceptions of the EU is an important object of study. First, outsiders' views give an alternative and fresh perspective of an actor's motives, performance and impact and may point to and in-

dicating novel ideas and theoretical insights. Secondly, they in themselves influence the behaviour of the actor in the same way as self-images and identity help to constitute an actor's preferences.

My study also contends that issues of theoretical importance from the literature on EU foreign policy should be brought into the analysis of EU development policy. As indicated above, too much of the EU-Third World discourse has been atheoretical and self-contained. More specifically – and linking this point with the previous one made above – I believe that an investigation into others' perception of EU development policy is especially well-suited to probe deeper into three theoretical puzzles that have been discussed in the EU foreign policy discourse. All these three themes relate to potential gaps between EU performance and EU impact. First, the idea of a capability-expectations gap introduced by Chris Hill (1993; 1998), pointing to the risk of discrepancies between others' high expectations of EU support and the EU's capacity to deliver. Second, a potential gap between EU rhetoric, as expressed in policy documents and official statements, and what the Union actually does. It has thus been suggested that the EU cannot always live up to its official goals and promises because, i.e., of internal disunity and/or bureaucratic inefficiency. Third, a gap between EU aspirations and what it can actually achieve. Some authors venture that the Union, despite its economic power and all its policy instruments, does not neither have the clout nor the means necessary to produce policy change in other countries. EU policies towards Burma and Zimbabwe and towards its Mediterranean neighbours as regards human rights have been given as examples (K.Smith 2004; Panebianco 2004).

The proposed study could furthermore shed new light on some persistent concerns raised both by the EU foreign policy and the EU development policy literatures, namely the possible existence and effects of lack of perceived EU coherence and consistency. Coherence here refers to the risk of variation across policy areas. Does, for example, the EU pursue the same policy goals in trade, aid and agricultural policies? Consistency refers to both consistent behaviour towards different actors (for example, are human rights based sanctions uniformly applied?) and consistent behaviour over time. The empirical case at hand will probably bring all these issues into the limelight.

The case chosen also highlights the EU's ambitions to export its own model of regional integration to other parts of the world (cf. Cremona 2004; Knodt & Princen 2003). As a consequence of its own success, a belief in the benefits of close economic and political integration has become part of EU identity. Therefore, demands for regional co-operation has become an integrated part of EU negotiations with regionally concentrated actors. The partnership agreements are an innovative experiment in applying this ideal also to a Third World setting. An investigation into how different actors perceive and evaluate this phenomenon is valuable for an increased understanding of the EU's character of a post-modern foreign policy actor (Cooper 2003).

The project could contribute to the research field of asymmetrical negotiations (Habeeb 1988; Elgström 1992). This literature proposes various types of weak state influence, but also delimits the boundaries of the "power of the weak". The applicant has in previous research on the Cotonou negotiations maintained that the EU determines the over-all structure of

any EU-ACP agreement, but that the ACP bloc may well achieve substantial successes as regards tactical goals, derogations and time-limits (Elgström 2000b). This study would continue this line of investigation, but with an emphasis on how perceived weaknesses and other EU characteristics are utilized by the weaker party. Through research co-operation with Dr Martin Holland, University of Canterbury, my focus on EU-ACP negotiation processes will be combined with an investigation into concrete effects of these processes on the states in the Pacific regional grouping, carried out by researchers in New Zealand.

EU external relations and role theory

One important ambition with this project is to link my findings on how others perceive EU foreign policy to an analysis of what roles the EU is playing in international negotiations. It is not uncommon to find the concept of 'role' in the EU foreign policy literature. It is most often used as a synonym for influence ('the important role of the EU in international politics'), but sometimes also as an umbrella concept for general patterns of EU policy behaviour. There is seldom, however, a specification of what roles the EU is actually engaged in, and never any reference to role theory (Aggestam 2005; Holsti 1970; Walker 1987, 1992; Le Prestre 1997). Those scholars that do utilize the role concept in a more systematic way (Hill 1990; Bretherton and Vogler 1999) tend to refer, in their categorizations, to a power dimension: to traditional great power roles, linked to position and status (balancer, intervenor, supervisor, patron, global or regional leader), but also to roles that have previously been mostly associated with small states (mentor, model,

bridge-builder, mediator, norm entrepreneur). Once again, the distinction between the EU as a military or civil power comes to mind.

In this project, I argue for explicitly linking role theory to the analysis of EU external action. Roles, in my opinion, refer to patterns of expected or appropriate behaviour (Elgström & Smith 2004). Roles are determined by both an actor's own conceptions about appropriate behaviour and – especially important in this project – by the expectations, or role prescriptions, of other actors (cf. Holsti 1970: 238-9). Looking at roles in this way, a direct connection can be made to neo-institutional theory and its emphasis on a 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen 1988). According to this logic, actors behave in the way they believe is expected from them in a particular situation or context. Actors cannot independently decide what roles to play, as roles are also influenced by the expectations of other actors, often linked to positions in social structures. The 'role-taking' side of the equation' is necessarily combined with a 'structural, role-constituting' side (Wendt 1999: 227-8).

Role 'performance' refers to how, in what ways, a role is played. Also role performance, the actual behaviour of actors, is influenced by external perceptions of how a certain role should be, has been, and is enacted. Once a role is defined and has become institutionalized, it will act as a constraint, but also as an instrument of empowerment, for the role player. Enacting a role is not something you do mechanically. Roles ordinarily allow for a certain freedom of manoeuvre and interpretation, albeit within limits (Wendt 1999: 227). Agency as well as structure are important (Aggestam 2005).

Besides role conceptions, the *images* others have of an actor seem to influence

their assessment of role performance. 'Image' here refers to perceived actor characteristics in terms of, for example, degrees of unity, flexibility, openness, willingness to compromise and inclination to take initiatives. Images influence *how* actors are perceived to play a certain role and therefore also indirectly influence the impact actors have on their environment.

Roles are in several ways closely intertwined with *identities*. In my view, the role conception of an actor constitutes a behaviourally related element of an actor's identity, linked to its relations with other actors. Roles are thus related to the *social* identity of an actor ('sets of meaning that actors attribute to themselves while taking the perspective of others'; Larsen 2003), in contrast to the actor's *intrinsic* identity (Jepperson *et al.* 1998: 59; Kowert and Legro 1998: 475-7; cf. Wendt 1999: 226-7). Own role conceptions are sometimes defined in contrast to roles played by certain other actors, or to the ways in which other actors perform a role, thereby reflecting the basic 'we-and-them' character of social identities. Empirically, identities are reflected both in the role conceptions and in the self-images expressed by the actor. Self-images involve notions of how, in what ways, you typically enact a certain role.

Roles are often associated with certain positions ('great power roles', 'presidency roles') (cf. Holsti 1970: 239-40). 'The sharing of expectations on which role identities depend is facilitated by the fact that many roles are institutionalised in social structures that pre-date particular interactions' (Wendt 1999: 227). In the case of the EU, references to the power-based role dimension alluded to above, essentially mirroring a traditional great power role versus a normative inclined civilian power role, are expected to be found. But

I also expect to discover roles more directly linked to the concrete negotiation situation, referring to functions that are commonly carried out in multilateral for a: leadership, mediation, defence of national interests, etcetera.

Roles may also, however, be connected to the behaviour of an actor in a specified issue-area or in a certain organizational forum. Roles are thus, at least to a certain degree, contextually determined - as are identities. We can therefore expect the EU to perform different roles under different circumstances and in different issue-based contexts. In order to explain such variety, we need to refer to both internal and external factors. Preliminarily, it might be suggested that *characteristics of the EU itself*, in terms of its actorness (Bretherton and Vogler 1999: 38) is one important explanatory factor. Roles are hypothesized to vary with different combinations of policy coherence, divisions of competencies, access to policy instruments and the clarity of EU goals. Variation may, however, also be linked to *external policy context*, for example in terms of the negotiation situation at hand EU roles may thus be different depending on, for example, the power distribution between the negotiators (Elgström and Strömvik 2004) or on the orientation to change of the EU (cf. Meunier 2000).

In the case at hand, we have a situation which is highly asymmetrical in terms of power, and where the EU is bent on changing existing rules. These contextual factors, together with EU internal characteristics - as perceived by the ACP country representatives - will be considered in trying to reach an enhanced understanding of the roles the EU are claimed to play in EU-ACP negotiations.

Empirical focus: EU-ACP negotiations on regional partnership agreements

After a lengthy negotiation process, the Cotonou agreement between the EU and the ACP countries was signed in 2000 (for analyses, see Babarinde & Faber 2004; Elgström 2000b; Forwood 2001). Much of the general framework of the preceding Lomé agreements was retained (the contractual nature, the long-term commitment, and not least protecting the integrity of the ACP as a group). But some major changes were introduced: the emphasis on political preconditions for development, as expressed by the "political dialogue", was sharpened (i.a. introducing good governance as a "fundamental element" of the relationship), an involvement of civil society in the development process was envisaged and, most importantly, free trade was embraced as the best mechanism for growth and development, replacing the previous reliance on ACP trade preferences (Babarinde & Faber 2004; Holland 2002: 196-212).

This commitment to free trade was a paradigmatic and radical departure from the "spirit of Lomé", transition periods and safeguards notwithstanding. Furthermore, it was combined with the novel principle of "differentiation" (Babarinde & Faber 2004: 36): the Cotonou agreement differentiates between ACP states on different levels of development, essentially letting the traditional Lomé approach govern relations with the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), while better off developing states were supposed to create regional free trade groupings, which were then to enter into regional partnership agreements with the EU (Holland 2002: 209). The radical reform of trading relations therefore applies spe-

cifically to non-LDC ACP states. It remains unclear, however, how LDCs within the regional blocs to be created will be distinguished in the agreements from economically more able nations.

Negotiations on RPAs started in 2002 and are to be terminated before 2008 (although observers have claimed that this is probably an unrealistic date). The EU is simultaneously negotiating with six different prospective regional units (East, South and West Africa, the Caribbean states and the Pacific states). A review of these processes is to take place in 2006. It is predicted that the Cotonou agreement will not reach its full impact until in 2020 (Holland 2002: 210).

The EU effort of regionalizing EU-ACP relations mirrors the Union's principled attempt to export its regional integration model globally. The blessings of a regional approach, with the EU itself as a role model, is one of the norms and ideals that the Union tries to transfer to its cooperation partners, besides democracy, human rights and good governance. At the same time, regional integration is by the EU seen as the most effective route through which the ACP states can re-enter the international economy. In brief, attempts to export regional integration schemes are a key element in the foreign policy model of the "experimental Union", and highlight the innovative, post-modern character of EU foreign policy. An analysis of the REP-negotiations is therefore also one way of critically examining the new roles (civilian and normative) supposedly played by the EU in world affairs. Furthermore, the Cotonou framework can be interpreted as a blueprint of EU development policy later to be applied globally (Holland 2002: 196). It is also a testing ground for the development role of the EU, compared to its

member states. For all these reasons, a scientific analysis of the post-Cotonou negotiations is highly germane and promises to be highly rewarding.

Methodology

The analysis will be based primarily on interviews and documentary sources. First, interviews will be carried out with ACP ambassadors (or other ACP representatives) to the EU in Brussels to provide material on how others perceive the EU. RPA negotiators from three of the six regional groupings are to be selected (preliminarily from the South and East African groupings and from the Pacific one). Second, discussions will be held with development NGO representatives, both to give another outside perspective and to provide a critical assessment of the material emanating from the participating states. Third, interviews will be conducted with EU negotiators to provide material for a comparison between others' images and self-images. Documents from all these sources are also to be perused, providing for another type of material that reflects the images and perceptions we are looking for.

My empirical findings will then be situated in the context of existing research on the EU as a foreign policy and development policy actor, and analysed in the theoretical terms described above, as well as in terms of roles and images (see Elgström & Smith 2004 for a theoretical framework).

Qualifications and research networks

The applicant, professor of Political Science at Lund University, has previously been engaged in research a) on foreign aid

negotiations (Elgström 1992; 2000b; 2001), b) on the importance of images to explain foreign policy strategies (Elgström 2000a), and c) on EU foreign policy roles with an emphasis on others' role conceptions (Elgström 2004; Elgström & Smith 2004). The proposed project continues and brings together all these strands of research. The applicant has wide experience from elite interviews, including diplomats from developing countries (Elgström 2004), NGO representatives (Elgström 2001) and EU officials (Elgström 2001; 2004). He has contacts within the European Commission that may facilitate access to interviewees.

Being part of wider national and international research networks is a crucial element for research success. The applicant is co-editor of a volume on EU foreign policy roles (together with Mike Smith), building on an ECPR workshop and involving 12 other scholars in this area of research (Elgström & Smith, 2006). He cooperates with Martin Holland, one of the major experts on EU policies towards the Third World, with the immediate aim of producing a joint article on EU-Pacific negotiations and on EU's impact on the Pacific states.

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