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EU Security Policy:  
What It Is, How It Works,  
Why It Matters

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

THE GOAL OF THIS BOOK IS TO INTRODUCE READERS TO THE security and defense policy of the European Union (EU). The thesis that animates the book is that in EU jargon what is known as the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is important to international security affairs and to the management of global order. Moreover, through whatever theoretical lens one looks at the CSDP, structural dynamics both internal and external to the EU push it toward becoming a powerful global security actor—which is not to deny its many shortcomings.

The fact that the EU is a security actor that matters and is bound to matter more in the future is not widely known. Undoubtedly, this has to do with the fact that the CSDP is a relatively young venture, launched in 1999. Moreover, the CSDP has specialized in stabilization and reconstruction operations, rather than fighting wars. As it is war fighting that captures most of the public's attention rather than the dull business of nation-building, the CSDP has gotten less publicity than it deserves. Yet the EU is not blameless when it comes to the lack of public awareness of and knowledge about the CSDP. The CSDP is unduly complex and complicated. Those inside the beltway of the EU headquarters in Brussels use unfamiliar acronyms when they write and speak about it. They refer to the RRF, CPCC, CONOPS, and lessons learned as if it were self-evident what these terms mean. They invent awkward and difficult-to-understand phrases such as *external action service* to replace perfectly good and understandable ones such

as *diplomatic service*. While the EU sports a nice-looking Web portal, anyone who has ever tried to use it to get beyond generalities and official statements knows that the portal yields little information about the ins and outs of the CSDP. The seemingly transparent EU is actually quite opaque. Even well-informed observers of the CSDP often find it hard to understand what goes on behind closed doors in Brussels and on the ground in theaters of operation. In short, the CSDP is not user-friendly. The book addresses this problem.

The book offers a descriptive analysis of the CSDP and covers what happens at EU headquarters and among Brussels and the capitals of the EU states in the making of the CSDP. Moreover, it discusses what happens in CSDP theaters of operation and how the CSDP has affected transatlantic relations, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and relations with Russia. In addition to this descriptive analysis, the book provides an in-depth overview of what the main international relations and EU studies theories have to say about the CSDP. The empirical chapters that make up the bulk of the book draw on the concepts and insights laid out in Chapter 2. Finally, the book makes predictions, based on theoretically informed scenarios, about the future of the CSDP and its impact on European security and world order. Based on existing evidence, it evaluates the plausibility of these contrasting predictions.

### **Why the CSDP Matters**

There are at least four reasons why students and interested observers of international relations ought to familiarize themselves with the CSDP. First, with the CSDP the EU has graduated from security receiver to security provider, quickly evolving into a “recognised and sought-after security actor.”<sup>1</sup> While this may sound like self-congratulatory hype, it is not. As this book will show, the conclusion of a RAND Corporation team investigating six European-led military nation-building missions can be generalized to the more than twenty civilian and military peace-keeping, stabilization, and reconstruction operations fielded so far by the CSDP, which have established “a short but respectably positive record in the field” (Dobbins et al. 2008: xxxiv).

The second reason why it is important to study the CSDP is that the EU’s role in international security management is bound to grow as global security interdependence rises, which has sharply increased since the end of the Cold War and will continue to do so. Global

security interdependence is driven by a number of factors, notably technological progress, the growing importance of transnationally operating nonstate actors such as organized crime and terrorist networks, and the proliferation of nontraditional security threats such as those associated with failed states and energy dependency. To deal effectively with the proliferation of sources of insecurity and the intensification of security threats brought about by deepening security interdependence, the EU will have to upgrade its foreign policy toolbox, including the CSDP.

The third reason why the CSDP matters is that the growth of the EU's military power will hasten the end of the US unipolar period in international security affairs. Even as national defense outlays have stagnated, EU governments have built up their collective military capabilities through reinforcing their cooperation on military research and development, procurement, and the pooling of capabilities. The global financial crisis of the late 2000s, whose ramifications have badly affected some of the weaker EU economies, even threatening the survival of the EU's Economic and Monetary Union, has put further pressure on EU nations to join forces. Military cooperation saves money and enhances the collective punch that the EU countries can pack on the international stage. Extrapolating from its current development trajectory, the CSDP will be one of the elements shaping the posthegemonic international security order that is likely to arise in coming decades. It is important to know how the CSDP has emerged, what it is, how it works, and its current contribution to global security in order to get a sense of where it is headed and how it will impact the world.

Finally, students of world politics cannot afford to ignore the CSDP as a real-world laboratory in which academic theories can be tested. The main theories in the study of international relations and the EU have very different explanations of the causes and workings of the CSDP and very different predictions of where it is headed. It is only recently that scholars have become aware of the theoretical significance of the CSDP. Much remains to be done to develop and systematically apply contrasting theories to the CSDP and to evaluate their relative explanatory power.

While there are powerful reasons to study the CSDP, so far only a charmed circle of mostly European scholars, analysts, and journalists have explored the CSDP in any depth. The inevitable result is confusion about the policy. Take the following two widely differing assessments by two well-known US observers of international affairs. Robert Kagan likened the foreign and security policy of the EU to the

chorus in a classical Greek tragedy: “It comments on the action. It reacts with horror and praise. It interacts in various ways with the protagonists. But the singers themselves play no part in the plot” (cited in *The Economist* 2005). Conversely, Andrew Moravcsik referred to the EU as the quiet superpower, attributing to it nearly as much global influence as to the United States. The EU, Moravcsik argued, was “the world’s pre-eminent civilian power, and its second military power” (2009: 403; 2010). This book will debunk such exaggerated views and enable readers to get a more accurate understanding of EU security and defense policy.

### **What the CSDP Is (and What It Is Not)**

What the CSDP is seems simple enough. But a closer look reveals that the answer is far from straightforward. The CSDP is an integral part of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which is one component of the multilayered European foreign policy system. The other components of this multilayered system are the separate national foreign policies of the EU states and the supranational foreign policy managed by the European Commission, which includes trade and development policy. The CFSP is not (yet) the main component of European foreign policy. Furthermore, for the time being, the CSDP is not (yet) about the territorial defense of the EU, the “D” in its name notwithstanding. As it stands, the CSDP gives the EU an operational capacity to carry out military and civilian stabilization and reconstruction operations abroad. Planning and preparations are under way in the EU to enable the CSDP to do more robust interventions such as peace enforcement.

The CSDP is shaped by what the EU is not. Because the EU is not a nation-state, the CSDP cannot draw on a European army. Nor does it have an EU peace corps whose members go out into the world to be a force for good and conduits of European soft power. Moreover, the community of military action created by the CSDP is less integrated than that created by NATO. Unlike the alliance, the CSDP does not have a supreme commander responsible in peacetime for planning the battles of the future and in war for the overall command of military operations. The CSDP is a sophisticated framework for cooperation on security and defense policy among EU nations.

The CSDP relies on the voluntary pooling of national manpower and capabilities and the convergence of national political will. It

works well in cases in which EU governments share similar views of the security threats and challenges they face and when they agree that the CSDP is the best tool to tackle them. In cases when such cross-national convergence of views is absent, the CSDP becomes a paper tiger. In short, the CSDP is an intergovernmental capability pool run by EU governments on the basis of consensus decisionmaking. Yet this is not the whole story. The day-to-day operation of the pool generates supranational dynamics. EU rules, norms, and ways of doing things influence—often only at the margins but sometimes in more fundamental ways—how EU governments interpret security problems and how they define their national interests.

### **Plan of the Book**

The book is organized into four parts. Part 1 defines the CSDP, Part 2 looks at the CSDP operations, Part 3 analyzes how the CSDP has affected transatlantic relations and EU relations with Russia, and Part 4 offers scenario-based predictions about the likely future of military power in Europe. To keep the text reader friendly, the book consistently refers to the EU and the CSDP even when it refers to the pre-Maastricht European Community (EC) and the pre-Lisbon European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Only Chapter 3, which puts the CSDP in historical context, uses chronologically correct labeling.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the main theories of the creation, development, and functioning of the CSDP. The chapters that follow make use of the arguments and concepts discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 traces the post-1945 precursors of the CSDP as well as its proper development. In the 1950s and 1960s, innovative and ambitious Western European efforts to develop common foreign, security, and defense policies failed. In the 1970s, a more modest project to coordinate foreign policy succeeded, which allowed EU states to fashion a common European identity on the international stage. Since the end of the Cold War, the EU has transformed itself into a military actor. In the new millennium, considerable progress has been made. Chapters 4 and 5 draw on the notion of principal-agent relations to explore the CSDP policymaking process. Chapter 4 focuses on the key political actors—the principals—and discusses their competencies and functions in the CSDP policy process. It shows that the CSDP is at core an intergovernmental policy system shaped by EU governments and the high representative of the EU for foreign affairs



and security policy. Yet there is more to the CSDP than intergovernmentalism. This is highlighted in Chapter 5, which brings into focus the supranational processes that loosen the grip of the member states on the CSDP. Brussels-based national delegates and EU officials—the agents—enjoy some leeway in shaping the CSDP.

Chapter 6 looks at the civilian and military capabilities available to the CSDP and considers what the EU has achieved so far and where it has fallen short of expectations. Chapter 7 draws on the concept of Europeanization to examine to what extent national threat perceptions, security policies, and institutions have converged across the EU. It analyzes the European Security Strategy (ESS), including the security philosophy that underpins it, and the EU-level pressures on member states to adapt their security policies and structures. The impact of Europeanization has been patchy. Important cross-national cleavages remain in relation to the CSDP and are the topic of the second part of the chapter.

Chapter 8 discusses the process by which military and civilian operations are planned, launched, and run. Chapters 9 and 10 map and analyze all CSDP operations that have been launched so far. Each mission is contextualized, in terms of both the security problems faced by the host country and the EU motives for the deployment. This sets the stage for the investigation of mission objectives, the internal and external challenges faced by the mission, and its impact on the ground. Drawing conclusions from the discussion of the operations, Chapter 11 looks at their performances, employing different criteria to offer a nuanced judgment of the CSDP record so far. Moreover, it identifies the main reasons for performance shortcomings.

Chapter 12 focuses on transatlantic relations. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, the EU and the United States started to build a new European security architecture. The construction has been a conflictual process of trial and error that has pitted supporters of NATO and the CSDP against each other. At first, Washington was concerned about the impact of the CSDP on transatlantic relations. The diplomatic fallout from the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq nearly killed the CSDP. However, the challenges of global security management prompted the United States and the EU to focus on pragmatic cooperation. In the absence of an overall grand strategy, a new transatlantic division of labor in security affairs has emerged. The EU has acquired the capabilities to deputize for the United States in lower-intensity peacekeeping, stabilization, and reconstruction missions. Yet shortcomings in EU-NATO cooperation remain, and US support for the CSDP remains qualified.

Chapter 13 looks at EU-Russia security relations since the end of the Cold War. It shows that the CSDP has been one, albeit not the most important, element in the relationship. Initially, the EU had high hopes for integrating an enfeebled Russia into a European security order centered on the EU. Yet the EU's Eastern policy did not bear fruit. After the Kremlin took measures to reverse the country's decline, its foreign policy became once again more assertive. By the middle of the 2000s, frictions had markedly increased in relations between Brussels and Moscow, especially in relation to regional and energy security. Though internally divided over the right policy toward Russia, the EU has hardened its Eastern policy in response to Moscow's new assertiveness. It has mustered the political will to act more resolutely in post-Soviet space, including through the CSDP. EU-Russia cooperation on the CSDP, about which Moscow initially was optimistic, has suffered from the accumulation of disagreements and conflicts. Unlike in the transatlantic case, there is little prospect for transforming the CSDP into an opportunity for improving EU-Russia relations.

The final chapter draws on the theories laid out in Chapter 2 to extrapolate two contrasting futures of military power in Europe. The chapter asks where the CSDP is headed and what its impact on international order will be. The available empirical evidence is used to assess the plausibility of the two scenarios.

## **Note**

1. This is how the foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Poland characterized the CSDP in a joint letter to EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton (Rettman 2010).