

The EU as a Global Actor: "Myth or Reality?"

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The idea of the EU as a global actor is a myth, and it is not likely to be a reality unless the European Union undertakes a series of radical structural reforms. The EU's ability to project power as a global actor in the international realm is directly related to its internal decision making structure on formulation and implementation of its foreign and security policies. In order to be a truly global actor, the European Union should integrate the second pillar into the first pillar, and accordingly increase the role of the European Commission in both formulation and implementation of the EU foreign and security policies.

The role of the European Commission in the EU external policy has increased in terms of its implementation over time, whereas it has remained quite limited in terms of its formulation. It has become more of a clerk, but not of a decision-maker. In the area of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) where the EU does not legislate and the decision making task is undertaken by the member states, the role of the Commission remains quite limited compared to that of the Council of Ministers. Nonetheless, the involvement of the European Commission in the EU external policy has increased mainly in the areas of EU enlargement and the new neighborhood policy. In addition, the Commission's responsibilities have increased within the first pillar policy areas, such as budget planning and monitoring, competition policy, border control, immigration policy, and common agricultural policy, as they relate to the enlargement and the new neighborhood policy. Basically, the Commission's role in the EU external policy has increased not in formulation but in implementation.

The founding principles of the European Union prevent the Commission from taking an executive role in formulation and implementation of the core EU external policy which is the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The European Commission, as Van Oudenaren puts it, is the executive body of the EU, which enjoys an exclusive right to propose legislation in most policy areas, and works with the member states to implement and enforce EU policy and law.¹ Its main responsibility constitutes overseeing the European Union integration process. In this regards, it monitors the member states' status with regards to their conformity to the EU laws and regulations. In case of unconformity, it possesses authority to take action to bring the member state or states that are not complying with the EU laws and regulations to the European Court of Justice. As I will elaborate more in the following, the Commission's involvement in the spill over policy areas also stems from its monitoring role within the union. Nonetheless, the Commission has more direct involvement in the EU enlargement policy as it prepares opinion on the EU candidate countries, and advises to the Council of Ministers on whether the accession negotiations for those candidate countries should start or not. For instance the Council of Ministers asked in 1993 the EU Commission to prepare opinions on the post-Soviet Central and East European candidate states. Accordingly the Commission conducted questionnaires with these states and evaluated their preparedness for the EU membership. The Commission's role in implementation of the EU external policy has increased through enlargement especially after the 2004 EU enlargement with ten new members. Consequently, the Commission's role in the external policy will increase as it monitors the integration of these ten new member states.

¹ Van Oudenaren, John "Uniting Europe: An Introduction to the European Union", Rowman & Littlefield Press 2005, p.71

The EU Commission exercises more power in the first pillar policy areas such as EU budget policy and competition policy. Under the EU budgetary procedures, the Commission prepares a draft budget for the EU and presents it to the Council of Ministers. Even though the Council most of the time amends the budget, occasionally the Commission passes the draft budget plan as it wants just as it happened when the Commission President Romano Prodi rejected the EU budget's leading contributors' demand to cut off the EU spending, by arguing that it would be short-sighted to do so in the midst of integrating ten new member states.² Similarly, the Commission exercises power in maintaining fair competition within the EU single market based on the authority it was given by the Treaty of Rome and the merger regulation. In this regard, it monitors the merger of companies, and it brings the merging companies to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in case it concludes that the merger violated the EU antitrust laws. Moreover, the Commission monitors the member states in terms of the subsidies that they give to particular industries. If these subsidies are not given for social development purposes, instead are given to support particular industries as they might distort trade among the member states, the Commission follows the legal procedure to bring these member states to the EJC. It holds the authority to fine the member states that are violating the EU competition policy.

Moreover, the Commission is responsible for monitoring the economic performance of the member states every year and evaluates their compliance with the economic policies of the EU. It holds the authority to recommend the Council of Ministers to take action against the member states who do not maintain their budget deficit at the level determined by the guidelines of the EU economic policy. Upon its recommendation, the Council of Ministers takes action via qualified majority voting

² Ibid. pp. 114-5, The leading contributors – Germany, France, the UK, Sweden, Austria and the Netherlands-asked the Commission to prepare the budget based on a ceiling of 1 percent of GDP for the 2007-2013 period instead of 1.27 percent.

against the member states in question. Enlargement and the subsequent policy areas make the Commission ever more involved with the external policy, mostly with the intra-EU policies. However, its involvement does not alter from passive involvement to active involvement.

What are the prospects for an increased role of the EU commission in the formulation of the core external policies; foreign and security policies? Not much unless the European Union undertakes structural reforms with regards to its common foreign and security policy. The Integrationists advocate the idea that the second pillar of the EU should be integrated into the first pillar; the CFSP should be given a supranational nature; and hence the European Commission role in formulation and implementation of the CFSP should be increased. In order for the EU to become a truly global political actor and pursue effective foreign and security policies, the integrationist approach provides a sound strategy. However, the current structure of the European Commission constitutes another obstacle for it to be an effective decision maker and implementer of foreign and security policies. The European Commission consists of twenty five representatives from the EU member states, one from each. Even though the commissioners are supposed to be impartial, and could be indeed acting impartially, the number of the commissioners makes it difficult to formulize and implement foreign and security policies in case needed immediately. Moreover, the Commission's decision making system, which requires consensus among the commissioners, constitutes another obstacle for it to be active as a formulator and implementer of EU external policy. For instance, one could reasonably argue that the EU was quite unsuccessful in terms of stabilizing the ethnic conflict in the Balkans after the disintegration of the former-Yugoslavia, because the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was supposed to be formulized and implemented by the self-interested member states. Since they could not reconcile their conflicting interests with regards to

the EU intervention, in the meantime the Serbs continued their ethnic cleansing. Today, it is far from certain if the EU Commission in charge of formulating and implementing the CFSP would be any more effective and quicker in handling such hard security problems by its current decision-making structure. One solution could be the establishment of an EU Security Council of five members, including France, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, and Turkey, with rotating non-voting members. Such a small body would allow the EU to be more responsive to the security threats and to formulize effective foreign policies towards a wide variety of surrounding regions from North Africa to the Middle East and to the Caucasus.³

³ Yet another reason for why the EU should accept Turkey to the union. Turkey, with its military weight and regional and cultural proximity to the North Africa, the Middle East and the Caucasus, would be an effective member of such an executive body within the EU.