

EU AS A GLOBAL ACTOR. THE DEBATE ON THE COMMON FOREIGN POLICY¹

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Abstract. In this article, we will review the main debates on the issue “EU as a global actor” or “EU in the world” and we will analyse the possibilities for the EU to have a more integrated foreign policy and to be a more active global power – especially in “high politics” –, one of the topics in which the decision-making requires the agreement of all Member States. We will focus on the debate “if the EU is a global actor” or not and on the public declarations of the European leaders as well as on the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty on the common foreign and security policy, focusing on the common foreign policy.

Keywords: *European Union; Global Actor; Conference on the Future of Europe; Common Foreign Policy*

One of the topics of the Conference of the Future of Europe (officially opened on 9 May, 2021) is *EU in the World*. What can the European Union do to be a global actor and a more united and powerful voice in the world? This is the question to which the European Commission hopes to find at least satisfactory answers. But the answers are not easy to find, many actors involved being reluctant to the possibility of coagulation of a real common foreign policy of the European Union.

This issue is an old one but it was brought back to the attention by the French president Emmanuel Macron and it is supported by the political and bureaucratic elite of Brussels. In this article, we will review the main debates on this issue and we will analyse the possibilities for the EU to have a more integrated foreign policy and to be a more active global power – especially in “high politics” –, one of the topics in which the decision-making requires the agreement of all Member States. We will focus on the debate “if the EU is a global actor” or not and on the public declarations of the European leaders and on the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty on the common foreign and security policy, focusing on the common foreign policy.

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¹ A Romanian version of this article was published in *Revista de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale*, No. 4/2021.

Is European Union a Global Power?

The debate on whether or not the EU is a global power has divided the researchers into two categories: those who claim that the Union is already a global power and those who challenge its quality or, moreover, consider it to be in decline. Supporters of the global EU generally refer to “civilian, normative and ethical power Europe”², as a power that promotes democratic values in the whole world. And of course, to perhaps the most important component of the Union’s global power which is the economic one. Most of the studies and volumes – there is an extensive literature on this – dealing with the issue of the EU as a global player have largely stopped at the economic component of the Union’s global power, an obvious one since the European economic space is the largest market in the world. Perhaps the most important contribution in this regard is the recent book *The Brussels Effect. How European Union Rules the World*, signed by Anu Bradford which combats the discourse of the inevitable decline of the EU and argues that “EU remains an influential superpower that shapes the world in its image.”³

Despite all the crises it has gone through – populism, terrorist attacks, the refugee crisis, Brexit, etc. – the Union has “a power that remains unaffected by the recent crisis – the EU’s unilateral power to regulate global markets.”⁴ The EU is a global player in the world economy and its influence is felt throughout the world. The main instruments of this influence are the regulations that the EU adopts and which end up shaping the entire global market. How does this phenomenon happen? Mainly through European producers and those from outside the Union who have come to build their businesses considering the strict rules specified in European regulations. The world’s second largest economy cannot be ignored by world producers, who must meet the high standards of quality, environmental protection, food safety etc. adopted at Community level. In this way, the entire global market is adapting and evolving, to a good extent, in line with these European rules and standards. It is a unique form of global influence, which Anu Bradford calls the “Brussels effect”, through which European norms are converted globally, “as companies voluntarily extend the EU rule to govern their worldwide operations.”⁵ The Brussels effect thus refers to the “EU’s unilateral ability to regulate the global market”⁶.

European standards are the most restrictive in the entire world economy, and here we find the reason why global companies adopt these European standards at the level of their global operations by turning European regulations into global rules. Other major economies of the world also have such regulations, but not as restrictive as the European ones. The United States of America, for example,

² Isabel Ferreira Nunes, “Civilian, Normative and Ethical Power Europe: Role Claims and EU Discourses”, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 16, No 1, 2011, pp. 1-20.

³ Anu Bradford, *The Brussels Effect. How European Union Rules the World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. XIII.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. XIII-XIV.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. XIV.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

“effectively cedes this power to the EU by choosing to promulgate less-stringent regulatory standards across most policy-domains, relegating the regulation of key areas such data protection largely to the markets.”⁷

These regulations make the EU “a global regulatory power”, acting not “through multilateral mechanisms or political institutions”, but “through unilateral actions facilitated by the market and private corporations.”⁸ And the economic influence that the EU has around the world is having an impact on the entire current world order, a world in which the economic capacities and capabilities of the states are decisive in their qualification as global powers.

This pattern seems to be followed by the EU also in terms of climate change. The EU aims to become “a global climate leadership”⁹, as the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, recently stated. European Green Deal is the most ambitious programme in the world, through which Europe aims to become “the first climate neutral continent in the world by 2050”¹⁰. The recovery plan of the EU, Next Generation EU, has a big part for the programme “Make it Green”, that intended to transform the European economies and societies and to make EU “a leader in climate action”¹¹. Climate change is a major global problem that can only be solved at a global level. But the EU is committed to becoming an example to the whole world through this programme, despite all the criticisms, often even violent – being considered devoid of realism and entailing huge social costs – which were brought to it even during the negotiations for its adoption.¹²

Anu Bradford balanced the discourse about the EU’s ability to act globally, by highlighting its ability to influence the global economy, in the face of the absolute challengers of the Union’s global power, those who argue that it plays no role in international politics. But the economic normative component (including the forward-looking one that concerns climate change) is only one aspect that defines a global power. In its basic sense, a global power requires a political, military, security, societal power, etc. that influences other actors of the international scene. And on these dimensions, the EU is at least deficient (given its construction), hence the strong reactions that have emerged and are emerging in the European public space that demand that the Union really become a global player, counting on most of the levels of influence of international society.

The dimension revealed by Anu Bradford of the EU’s economic normative power with an impact on the global economy is not perceived as sufficient for its ability to act and influence the international system at the political, diplomatic, security level, etc. This is where most of the criticisms about the EU’s inability to be a global player come from.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. XV.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_4701, accessed at 15 August 2021.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en, accessed at 15 August 2021.

¹¹ https://europa.eu/next-generation-eu/index_en, accessed at 15 August 2021.

¹² See, for example, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/green-package-unleashes-criticism-against-von-der-leyen-inside-the-college/>, or <https://en.irefeurope.org/Publications/Online-Articles/article/The-European-Green-Deal-will-cause-more-harm-than-good>, accessed at 19 August 2021.

In everything related to the ‘hard’ sphere of international politics – army, security, foreign policy – the EU does not have the tools to be considered a global power. In fact, the EU was not even concerned until recently with the real development of these capabilities, given that throughout the cold war and during the period of the absolute and undisputed supremacy of the US in international politics, the United States acted as a “protective umbrella” for the Europeans. UE wasn’t so much concerned about “high politics”. “Many of the fundamental decisions were shaped over and above the heads of west (and east) Europeans.”¹³ But lately, the international system is in a continuous dynamic, accentuated by the pandemic that the whole world is going through, and the EU must reconsider its position and role on the international stage.

In the current era, when realism is coming back with force and assumed in international relations and the international system is moving from a unipolar to a multipolar one, the capacity for action on these dimensions is felt even more acutely at the level of the European elites who launch into the public space more or less applicable ideas about what the Union should do in order to be a real global power, able to defend their interests and contribute to the shaping of international society.

The position of France and the mainstream of the Brussels

In the 2017 presidential campaign, the French president presented his vision on “a sovereign Europe”¹⁴, an integrated concept that includes defence and security, migration, sustainable development, economy, digitalization etc. It includes, of course, the foreign policy that, in the view of Emmanuel Macron, must focus on “a Europe that looks towards Africa and the Mediterranean: Europe must have a foreign policy that focuses on certain priorities: first of all, the Mediterranean region and Africa. It must develop a new partnership with Africa based on education, health and the energy transition”¹⁵. This vision Emmanuel Macron had on the foreign policy of EU didn’t actually seem to be a vision on the foreign policy of the EU, since it refers only to the Southern neighbourhood of the EU – the immediate area of interest for France. It excluded the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU and the transatlantic relation – the traditional relation for the European countries. The French proposal raised many questions, remained unclear for many European leaders and many observers did not understand the concept proposed that lacked its institutional foundations.¹⁶ The French president himself did not

¹³ Simon Duke, *Europe as a Stronger Global Actor: Challenges and Strategic Responses*, London Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 59.

¹⁴ <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/president-macron-gives-speech-on-new-initiative-for-europe>, accessed at 14 August 2021.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ There are some studies and books that are dedicated to this subject. For example, N. Walker (ed.), *Sovereignty in Transition*, Oxford, Hart, 2003, in which N. Walker, in the study “Late Sovereignty in the European Union” defined the sovereignty as “a speech act” (Matej Avbelj, “A Sovereign Europe as a Future of Sovereignty”, in *European Papers*, Vol. V, 2020, No. 1, pp. 299-302, https://www.europeanpapers.eu/en/system/files/pdf_version/EP_eJ_2020_1_19_SS3_Insights_Matej_Avbelj_00382.pdf).

explain what he meant by this concept of sovereign Europe, which led to an open disagreement with Germany, his most powerful ally in the EU.¹⁷ The sovereign concept is characteristic of the state which the EU is not, but it leads to the idea of an EU' federalization that is not accepted by many Member States.

However, the proposed concept was interpreted through the prism of the tradition of French foreign policy, as a recognition of the lack of leverage necessary for France to compete with the great powers of the moment, in this case the US and China, the French president wanting to use the full capacity of Europe for his own French national interests. The concept of sovereign Europe "stems from the idea that France, like all other European states, has an increasingly limited leverage in a world of great power competition, and that its national interests are best defended and promoted at the European level."¹⁸

It is a fact that no European state – not even the most powerful – can carry out today a policy at a global level, comparable to the great powers of the moment. It is a truth tacitly accepted by all EU member countries, aware that only together they can be a force in international politics. But how the EU should act in international politics should be decided by all member countries, according to the provisions of the treaties in force.

The idea of Europe as a power – with its corollary "a sovereign Europe" – was predominant in the official discourses of the French president on foreign policy in the next years. It was taken over by the Brussels elite and integrated in speeches and official documents.¹⁹ The Brussels elite has always supported initiatives leading to a *de facto* federalisation of the EU, since this implies the concentration of the decision-making power in its structures to the detriment of the nation states. This duality of power between the Member States and Brussels is clearly inclined towards the Member States in the field of foreign policy, which significantly reduces the possibilities for expression of the Union as a whole. The only way seen by the Brussels elite to increase their capacity to act as a global player in 'hard politics' is to concentrate power in the community structures and deprive the Member States of the capacity they now have to block decisions that do not benefit them.

Jean-Claude Juncker, the former president of the European Commission (2014-2019) sustained this vision and worked for the EU "to become a stronger global actor"²⁰. "Europe as a Stronger Global Actor" was the name given to one

¹⁷ See Martin Quencez, "Europe as a power: A French Vision for Europe in the World", <https://www.boell.de/en/2021/01/08/europe-power-french-vision-europe-world>, accessed at 20 August 2021.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*. This strategy was implemented by France, in the recent case of the so-called submarine crisis, when with the announcement of the strategic partnership between the US, the UK and Australia, the submarine contract between Paris and Canberra was denounced, and France placed the issue at EU level. See, for example, Ursula von der Leyen's declarations on CNN, <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/tv/2021/09/20/amanpour-ursula-von-der-leyen-aukus-eu-france.cnn>, accessed at 20 August 2021.

¹⁹ See, for example, the document "For a United, resilient and sovereign Europe" signed by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Vice-President of the European Commission and Thierry Breton, European Commissioner for the Internal Market, responsible for defence industry, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/breton/announcements/united-resilient-and-sovereign-europe_en, accessed at 22 August 2021.

²⁰ President Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union Address 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_17_3165, accessed at 20 August 2021.

of Jean-Claude Juncker's early initiatives... with the emphasis upon coherence across the EU's external actions with the objective of strengthening the Union as a global actor"²¹ He called in 2017 for foreign policy decisions to be taken more swiftly and for Member States to agree on which decisions the unanimity procedure can be replaced by that of qualified majority²² Josep Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission of the European Union also stressed the idea that "The EU has to learn to use the language of power"²³, with reference to the fact that the EU, if it wants to be a global power pole, must speak and act as such, in one voice.

Ursula Von der Leyen, the actual president of the European Commission, speaks often about global Europe (as a more active player in international affairs). In one of the most recent discourses "The State of the Union Address" (2021) the president of the European Commission, introduced a significant nuance to the speech of its predecessor, saying: "If Europe is to become a more active global player..." This "if" denotes the reluctance of the Member States to the form in which Europe can become a global power and represents a step backwards from the much more optimistic speeches of its former predecessor.

On the other hand, the current European Commission seems to be using other methods to increase its influence on foreign policy. They are aimed at obtaining significant public support for the Commission's projects. Two examples: introduction to the debate on the Conference on the Future of Europe, the topics "EU in the World" and the introduction of specific questions in Eurobarometers. Conference on the Future of Europe has been severely criticised in terms of the relevance of the results and the representatives of the Community institutions still do not know how they will centralize the conclusions that will be presented in the final report of the Conference, expected to be made public in spring 2022. But it is already appreciated that "if enough European citizens get involved and demand change, it will be hard for national leaders and the European authorities to ignore their voices."²⁴ The inclusion of the EU in the World topic in the Conference debates has exactly this purpose: to gain the support of citizens for the Union to have a prominent role in international relations. In other words, European institutions should have the power to act externally in spite of the very nation states themselves. But what does "enough European citizens" mean? Is a certain number or a percentage of the total EU population enough, and what would that number be? It is such a random and subjective matter that it leaves ample room for manoeuvres for the bureaucrats who will make the final report.

This topic, included in the Conference on the Future of Europe debate, correlates very well with a question that arises in Standard Eurobarometer: "You feel you are a citizen of the EU?" In the most recent edition, Spring 2021, "Public

²¹ Simon Duke, *Europe as a Stronger Global Actor: Challenges and Strategic Responses*, London Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 1.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20190926IPR62260/hearing-with-high-representative-vice-president-designate-josep-borrell>, accessed at 24 August 2021.

²⁴ Paul Taylor, "Hijack the Conference on the Future of Europe!", Politico, 7 May 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-citizens-ideas-online-participation/>, accessed at 20 August 2021.

Opinion in the European Union”, 72% answered yes. Even if it is a slight decrease of 2 percent compared to the previous edition, it remains an extremely high percentage for citizens who declared that they feel citizens of the EU.²⁵ These citizens feel represented, theoretically, by the community institutions that can act on their behalf, including in the field of foreign policy. This, although Special Eurobarometer, Future of Europe, October-November 2020, had a question relating to EU in the World, but not at all aimed at the Union’s foreign policy.²⁶ These are steps through which the Brussels institutions seek to obtain the direct support of citizens, over the Member States, for the actions and projects they have, including in the field of foreign policy.

In public speeches, most European leaders agree that Europe can and needs to play a more prominent global role, but none comes with solutions about how it can be achieved. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in 2017 that “We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands”²⁷. In June 2021, the German Chancellor also said that “A sovereign EU, in my opinion, should also be able to represent the interests of the EU in such a similar conversation”²⁸, after other leaders of the European states reject the idea of a EU-Russia Summit. And at the end of the Franco-German Security Council (5 February 2021), the official statement said that “Germany and France will together help step up the EU’s own capability to act to ensure common security with the Eurodrone, FCAS and MGCS, France and Germany are taking very concrete steps to enhance European sovereignty. These are Franco-German projects that are also open to other European partners”²⁹, without any reference to the EU’s foreign policy.

The Benelux, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg countries, some of the biggest supporters of in-depth integration in different dimensions of the Member States, “recognise the need for more EU cooperation on common foreign and security policy to enable the EU to confront the challenges of the 21st century.”³⁰ They said that “ensuring and increasing coherence between different instruments is key to further developing a resilient and powerful EU capable to engage with other global powers on an equal footing.”³¹ But no one comes with an effective action plan towards a more integrated European foreign Policy. The different interests between the Member States in this area are so big that it is really difficult to conceive how they can project an accommodation between foreign policies of the 27 Member States.

²⁵ See <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2532>, accessed at 27 August 2021.

²⁶ “Two-thirds of Europeans (66%, 3 percentage points since 2018) agree that the EU project offers a future perspective for Europe’s youth, while a similar proportion (65%, 11) agree that the EU is a place of stability in a troubled world.” See <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2256>, accessed at 27 August 2021.

²⁷ <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-europe-cdu-must-take-its-fate-into-its-own-hands-elections-2017/>, accessed at 27 August 2021.

²⁸ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/merkel-says-sovereign-eu-should-be-able-to-talk-to-putin/>, accessed at 29 August 2021.

²⁹ <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-en/news/franco-german-defence-council-1851544>, accessed at 20 August 2021.

³⁰ <https://www.government.nl/documents/diplomatic-statements/2020/10/07/joint-declaration-benelux-summit>, accessed at 15 July 2021.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

Limitations provided by the Treaties

“The EU’s international role rests explicitly on the constitutional base established in the treaties.”³² The Lisbon Treaty has specific provisions on foreign policy, contained in several articles. Art. 10 A states that “The Union shall ensure consistency between the different areas of its external action and between these and its other policies. The Council and the Commission, assisted by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall ensure that consistency and shall cooperate to that effect.”³³

But the main European institution with foreign policy responsibilities is the European Council, which “shall identify the strategic interests and objectives of the Union. Decisions of the European Council on the strategic interests and objectives of the Union shall relate to the common foreign and security policy and to other areas of the external action of the Union. Such decisions may concern the relations of the Union with a specific country or region or may be thematic in approach. They shall define their duration, and the means to be made available by the Union and the Member States.”³⁴

The European Council, the intergovernmental body par excellence, is also the one that takes decisions based on the unanimity of the Member States, a rule that would like to be changed. However, other institutions are also involved in the application of this policy: “The common foreign and security policy shall be put into effect by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and by Member States, in accordance with the Treaties. The specific role of the European Parliament and of the Commission in this area is defined by the Treaties. The Court of Justice of the European Union shall not have jurisdiction with respect to these provisions, with the exception of its jurisdiction to monitor compliance with Article 25b of this Treaty and to review the legality of certain decisions as provided for by the second paragraph of Article 240a of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.”³⁵

Although it has set out clear responsibilities for the European institutions with regard to the Union’s foreign policy, the Treaty of Lisbon has created a much more complex system of negotiations in this area, which makes any decision-making process difficult and protracted. But perhaps more importantly, the Treaty has established just as clearly the differentiation of Community from national powers, in favour of the latter. Unlike other areas whose rules are subject to common rules and regulations, the common foreign policy is subject to specific rules and procedures: “The common foreign and security policy is subject to specific rules and procedures. It shall be defined and implemented by the European Council and the Council acting unanimously, except where the

³² Jeremy Richardson (Editor), *European Union. Power and policy-making*, Abingdon, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 282.

³³ Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007, Art. 10A, http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/688a7a98-3110-4ffe-a6b3-8972d8445325.0007.01/DOC_19, accessed at 1 September 2021.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, Art. 10B.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, Art. 10C.

Treaties provide otherwise. The adoption of legislative acts shall be excluded.”³⁶ This last sentence prevents the development of any common foreign policy other than that specified in this Treaty, which would be possible only through an amendment of the Treaty.

The Union’s foreign policy must be based on political solidarity between Member States, a goal that is difficult to achieve in today’s political conditions, when there are such different political interests and strategic visions between Member States³⁷: “Within the framework of the principles and objectives of its external action, the Union shall conduct, define and implement a common foreign and security policy, based on the development of mutual political solidarity among Member States, the identification of questions of general interest and the achievement of an ever-increasing degree of convergence of Member States’ actions.”³⁸

Solidarity is a principle of high value, but often eluded in the practice of international politics, in which interests have always prevailed. This is also the case within the EU, and the Lisbon Treaty has failed to find ways to ensure the Union’s coherence in its external action. “By multiplying the number of European Union actors, the Treaty increased the need for more complex negotiations, not only between Member States and EU institutions, but among the institutions themselves. The complexity of the Lisbon system makes the process of shaping external policy, weakening the coherence of external action by the Union more difficult. The coherence of EU foreign policy can’t be merely the result of institutional cooperation, but needs to be enlarged to include the Member States who will remain the most important actors in European foreign policy.”³⁹

EU Foreign Policy in the “Crisis Era”

The current functioning structure of the EU is one that does not facilitate its potential capacity to act as a global player. “There is a gap of expectations between what the EU is supposed to deliver and the present state of affairs of EU foreign and security policy.”⁴⁰ There is also a gap between the economic influence of the UE in the world market and the influence of the UE in the international politics. And there is another gap between the wishes of some European leaders and the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty for a common foreign policy. The constitutional provisions place the Member States at the heart of the decision on the Union’s external action and any change to this equation can only

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ The policy towards Russia is one that divides the Member States into multiple categories: on the one hand between the Western states, without a communist past and those that were part of the former communist bloc, among the latter being different visions - for example that of Hungary differs greatly from that of Poland or the Baltic states.

³⁸ Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007, Art. 10A, http://publications.europa.eu/resource/ellar/688a7a98-3110-4ffe-a6b3-8972d8445325.0007.01/DOC_19, accessed at 1 September 2021.

³⁹ Astrid Boening, Jan-Frederik Kremer, Aukje van Loon (Editors), *Global Power Europe - Vol. 2, Policies, Actions and Influence of the EU’s External Relations*, Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, Springer, 2013, p. VI.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. VIII.

be made by amending the Treaty of Lisbon. The European Commission's approach to gain the support of citizens for a deeper cooperation in the common foreign policy through the Conference on the Future of Europe cannot take the place of constitutional provisions, nor does it guarantee that future Commission proposals (which we do not yet know will be) be approved by the majority of citizens of the Member States.

In order to have a coherent common foreign policy in the EU, there should be coherence at the level of European society as a whole, which is far from happening. European citizens should feel represented by the decisions taken at European level in the common foreign policy. This raises a number of difficult questions that should be answered: for example, will the Germans or the Dutch accept foreign policy decisions made in Brussels? Or will the French accept to be replaced by the EU in the UN Security Council? In the absence of positive responses, we will not be able to talk about a common foreign policy of the Union, in the sense that it is intended to be implemented by some European leaders.

However, there is currently a paradoxical situation with the Union's representation in international organizations. There are organizations where the EU has no representation and other organizations where the EU has a place alongside other Member States. For example, in G20, EU is one of the members alongside Italy, Germany, France and Spain.⁴¹ How are the Italians, Germans, French and Spaniards represented in this organization? By their own state or by the EU? If we ask them, what will they answer? Or the EU whom it represents in this organization: only Belgians, Czechs, Finns, etc. or also Italians, Germans, French, Spaniards? Are there divergent views held in this organization (and in others where we encounter a similar situation) between Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the EU? How are they reconciled? Another example: EU is a permanent observer at the United Nations. All Member States of the EU are represented in the UN. Who does the EU represent in UN structures? What if, for example, we have different positions between the EU and Hungary or Germany, for example? Who will the citizens of these countries support? These are questions to which we do not yet have an answer.

The institutional approach to the EU's common foreign policy seems to block any attempt to develop this policy. The provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon are sufficiently restrictive to allow significant developments without amending the basic Treaty. But European bureaucrats and leaders have focused more on what they cannot do in the current institutional context than on what they could do, even within the limits of the Lisbon Treaty. The Treaty does not preclude initiatives which could arise at Union level and which advance foreign policy cohesion between Member States. An example: the recent crisis in Afghanistan has put countries in the world, including European countries, in a position to quickly remove their own citizens from the Taliban-occupied country. Fortunately, the European states have managed to act quickly and protect their own citizens from the possible repercussions of the new power takeover in Afghanistan. But there

⁴¹ See <https://www.g20.org/about-the-g20.html>, accessed at 1 September 2021.

has been no initiative at Union level, by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, for cooperation and coordination between Member States for the withdrawal of European citizens from Afghanistan. There have been occasional collaborations between some Member States, but not at Union level. Such gestures would strengthen citizens' confidence in the Union's institutions and at the same time increase their efficiency.

In the current era of successive crises, it is inevitable that crises of various kinds will occur in the international system. And the EU should have quick and unitary responses to them. The current foreign policy decision-making system places the sole responsibility on the nation states. Then how can these two seemingly convergent realities be reconciled? The EU could set up a system for rapid consultation and/or decision-making on foreign policy, or at least for crises in the international system. Such a quick consultation and/or decision-making system can be created right at the level of the European Council, which has the most important responsibilities in foreign policy. The EU must adapt to the realities of international politics and be able to respond quickly to future challenges, even in the frame of the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The centralization of power and decision-making in European foreign policy does not seem possible today, given that pure realism and sovereign states have returned in force in international politics. But in the case of the EU, the Member States know that they can only have the influence they want through everyone's cooperation. Geography cannot be changed and Member States must preserve, continue and deepen the achievements of the last decades: peace, democracy and prosperity on the European continent. The lack of European leaders with visions that come with forward-looking and realistic projects on the future of the EU, projects that resonate with a significant percentage of the European population, can be replaced by wiser national leaders who know how to work together for the benefit of all.

Conclusions

It has often been argued that the European Union's inability to determine in which direction the process of European integration will go – intergovernmentalism or federalism – is the structural cause of the EU's modelling as a global player. However, this dualism of the European integration process is the specific feature of the European Union. Europeans are “doomed” to learn to cooperate, including in the field of foreign policy. What the Member States could bring new would be for this collaboration to be done on a basis other than that of the current international system, in a framework that would become a model for the rest of the world. Cooperation and collaboration between Member States is needed, as part of a comprehensive strategy, so that all citizens of the Member States to feel represented in the decisions taken. Harmonization of interests should be the norm in relations between the Member States of the Union. Any other strategy to gain the consensus of Member States for foreign policy decisions is doomed to long-term failure.

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