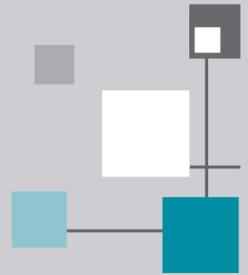




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The Political and Security Committee: a Case Study in 'Supranational Intergovernmentalism'

> **Jolyon Howorth**

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**The *Political and Security Committee*: a case study in
'supranational inter-governmentalism'**

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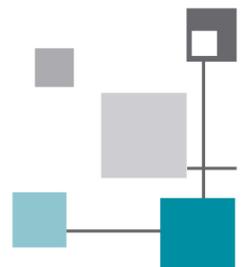
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Abstract:

The distinctive profile of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) as it has emerged to date is complex and far-ranging. It involves the mobilisation – in the cause of international crisis management, regional stabilisation, nation-building and post-conflict reconstruction – of a vast range of policy instruments: from sophisticated weaponry and robust policing capacity, to gender mainstreaming techniques and cultural assistance; from rapid-reaction “battle-groups” and strategic transport aircraft, to judges, penitentiary officers and human rights experts; from state capacity-building resources to frontier-control expertise. The role, in this gestation, of the key policy-shaping instrument which has underpinned ESDP – the *Political and Security Committee* (PSC) – has been noted by several scholars.

The principal substantive argument of this study, the first comprehensive analysis of the workings of this committee, is that the normative socialisation processes which inform the work of the PSC have succeeded to an appreciable extent in allowing a trans-European strategic culture to begin to stamp its imprint on one of the EU's principal foreign policy projects. A supranational culture is emerging from an intergovernmental process. The PSC has emerged, to a significant degree, as script-writer for ESDP.

Résumé :

La spécificité de la politique européenne de sécurité et de défense (PESD), telle qu'elle a émergée jusqu'à aujourd'hui est complexe et porteuses de nombreuses implications. Elle repose sur la mobilisation (que ce soit en cas de gestion de crise internationale, de stabilisation régionale, de construction nationale ou de reconstruction après un conflit) d'un large éventail d'instruments : de la mise à disposition d'armement sophistiqué et de capacités de maintien de l'ordre à des techniques de *gender mainstreaming* ou à de l'assistance culturelle ; du déploiement de bataillons de reaction rapide et de moyens de transport aérien stratégique à celui de juges, de personnel pénitentiaire et d'experts en droits humains ; de la fourniture de ressources en matière de renforcement des capacités de l'Etat à de l'expertise en termes de contrôle des frontières. Dans ce cadre, le role de l'instrument essentiel d'élaboration de politiques qu'est le Comité politique et de sécurité (COPS) a été souligné par de nombreux travaux.

Cette etude constitue la première analyse exhaustive du fonctionnement de ce comité. Son argument principal est que des processus de socialisation normative sont visibles dans le travail du COPS et ont permis, dans une large mesure, à une culture stratégique européenne d'imprimer sa marque sur un des projets principaux de la politique étrangère de l'Union européenne. Une culture supranationale est en train d'émerger d'un processus intergouvernemental. Le COPS est devenue, à un degré significatif, le scénariste de la PESD.

Keywords: committee governance; European Security and Defense Policy; European strategic culture; Political and Security Policy; supranational inter-governmentalism; socialisation.

The *Political and Security Committee*: a case study in ‘supranational inter-governmentalism’

Since the launch of the *European Security and Defence Policy* (ESDP) in 1998/1999, there has been intense speculation, both in the media and in academia, as to the precise profile which such a project might eventually assume. The controversy surrounding ESDP has always been more intense than that of the policy area to which it is officially subordinated – the *Common Foreign and Security Policy* (CFSP), which dates from the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. One debate focused on the potential loss (or perversion?) of European identity if what had hitherto been a strictly “civilian power” Europe were to take on military instruments (Whitman 1998; Smith 2000; Manners 2002; Telo 2006). Another debate focused on the extent to which the identity of the new policy instrument would be created in opposition to – or at least with close reference to – the United States and/or NATO (Hunter 2000; Quinlan 2001; Howorth & Keeler 2003; Cimbalo 2004). A third debate raged around the extent to which the assumption of defence responsibilities would alter the strictly intergovernmental nature of Pillar Two and lead inexorably towards greater federalism and even a “European army” (Echikson 1999; Weston 2001; Evans-Pritchard & Jones 2002; Salmon & Shepherd 2003). In one of the earliest studies of the infant ESDP, I suggested that the institutional framework already emerging might eventually be thought of as a form of “supranational inter-governmentalism” (Howorth 2000). The present paper takes that concept a little further through an in-depth analysis of the workings of one key body in ESDP – the Political and Security Committee (PSC)

What few analysts appreciated in the early years of these debates, and what all too few commentators appreciate even today, is that the specific profile of ESDP is by no means a fixed or pre-determined category. It is gradually emerging – and is continuing constantly *to evolve* – as a unique, unprecedented and vast range of military and civilian instruments geared to the post-modern challenge of international crisis management. It is very much a work in progress. To this extent, much of the earlier discussion, especially when essentially theory-based, remained purely speculative – and wrong. Most of it has already been overtaken by events. The emerging profile of ESDP has developed as a composite of the different strategic-cultural inputs of the EU’s many different member states. ESDP, which was launched by France and Britain, has not assumed the expeditionary, militaristic features which some feared would be the case given the martial and interventionist nature of those two countries’ approaches to international affairs. But neither has it emerged as a purely “soft” humanitarian, United Nations-mandated peace-keeping organisation – as some assumed would be the case if the project were dominated by the more pacifistic aspirations of what probably amounts to a majority of the EU member states. Binary polarities have not framed the reality of ESDP. Each member state in the EU has its own unique and somewhat distinctive strategic culture, which reflects the specific “strategic cultural identity” of the citizens of that state. For ESDP to acquire operational and political reality, it could only ever have been as a result of a process of pooling or merging those distinct national strategic cultures in a broader, consensual European strategic culture.

The distinctive profile of ESDP as it has emerged to date is complex and far-ranging. It involves the mobilisation – in the cause of international crisis management, regional stabilisation, nation-building and post-conflict reconstruction – of a vast range of policy instruments: from sophisticated weaponry and robust policing capacity, to gender mainstreaming techniques and cultural assistance; from rapid-reaction “battle-groups” and strategic transport aircraft, to judges, penitentiary officers and human rights experts; from state capacity-building resources to frontier-control expertise. This has slowly emerged as the unique footprint of ESDP as it has developed empirically in twenty-one overseas missions since 2003. The role, in this gestation, of the key policy-shaping instrument which

has underpinned ESDP – the *Political and Security Committee* (PSC) – has been noted by several scholars (Duke 2005; Meyer 2006; Juncos & Reynolds 2007). The PSC is a central Brussels-based body comprising one representative (of ambassadorial rank) from each of the twenty-seven member states, plus one representative from the Commission. It meets at least twice weekly in formal mode¹ and its members also meet in other informal groupings on a regular basis. This paper’s principal substantive argument is that the normative socialisation processes which inform the work of the PSC have succeeded to an appreciable extent in allowing a trans-European strategic culture to begin to stamp its imprint on one of the EU’s principal foreign policy projects. A supranational culture, in short, is emerging from an intergovernmental process. The PSC has emerged, to a significant degree, as script-writer for ESDP.

The paper contributes to our understanding of three key aspects of the European integration process. One is the phenomenon of *committee governance*, which has hitherto been studied more in terms of its role and function within the policy-making process (Majone 1989; Hooghe 1999; Christiansen and Kirchner 2000) than in terms of its membership, internal workings and decision-making dynamics. The other is the phenomenon of *policy-creation* in the field of security and defence policy, which has hitherto been studied more in descriptive and narrative terms (Howorth 2000; Salmon & Shepherd 2003; Dumoulin et alii 2003) than in terms of the gradual generation, as a result of a complex iterative process between the member states and their Brussels-based institutions, of an inchoate European security culture or operational strategic identity. In addressing these two key phenomena, the paper also contributes to a growing literature on institutional socialisation processes within the EU (Beyers and Dierickx 1998; Johnston 2001; Checkel 2003, Checkel 2005, Lewis 2005; Hooge 2005; Quaglia et alii. 2008) by offering detailed empirical evidence of the micro-processes involved in one specific body – the *Political and Security Committee*.

The paper follows a fivefold structure. First, it assesses the political and strategic reasoning behind the launch of the PSC in 2000 in a context marked by the proliferation of other institutional actors in foreign and security policy. It notes the divergent interpretations, in different national capitals, of the committee’s objectives and rationale. Secondly, it offers a socio-political profile of the committee’s individual members based on structured interviews and a questionnaire. These data reveal an intergovernmental body composed of national representatives who are deeply committed to the cause of European integration. Thirdly, it showcases some of the key issues in ESDP which the PSC has to grapple with and offers a number of case studies of decision-shaping in action, demonstrating the gradual emergence of the PSC as a crucial decision-maker and profile-former for ESDP and, to a certain extent, CFSP. Fourthly, it focuses in some detail on the strong socialisation processes which inform the debates and decisions of the committee. It scrutinises the working practices of the PSC and notes the ways in which they have evolved during the tenure of three distinct generations of ambassadors. It offers a case study in complex decision-making about ESDP operations and it evaluates the specific role of PSC in constructing the “security identity” of ESDP. Finally, the paper hazards some conclusions as to the implications of its findings both for international relations and European integration theory and for the empirical reality of ESDP now and in the future.

The study, the first comprehensive analysis of the workings of this committee, is based on primary data derived from two interconnected exercises. In the first place, a structured and semi-structured face-to-face interview (lasting between 45 minutes and 90 minutes) was conducted with 27 of the 28 ambassadors to the PSC as well as with four deputy ambassadors. These interviews were in almost every case tape-recorded and subsequently

¹ During the German presidency in the first semester of 2007, for instance, the PSC met in formal mode on fifty-one occasions. Allowing for vacation periods and other days when the committee cannot hold its regular meetings, this averages about 2.5 meetings per week.

transcribed. During the course of the interview, reference was made to the structured questionnaire designed by the European Commission’s FP6 *IntUne* project² and specifically tailored for this policy area to include questions about the key options facing decision-makers in CFSP/ESDP. In some cases, the questionnaires were filled out as an integral part of the interview; in others, the interviewee returned the questionnaire in his/her own time after the interview had been completed. Twenty questionnaires were thus completed, a number of interviewees having neglected (despite several reminders) to return their forms. In addition to the members of the PSC, interviews were also conducted with a further forty officials or experts closely involved with decision-making in ESDP. These included senior officials from the General Secretariat of the European Council (10), European Commission officials (4), national officials from both MFAs and MODs in France, the UK, Germany, Poland and Russia (14) and experts from security and defence policy oriented think-tanks (12). A further twenty questionnaires were returned by these interviewees, thus allowing for comparative and contrastive analysis as between the responses of PSC members and those of the other actors in ESDP.

1. The sources of the PSC: why yet another foreign policy actor?

At the time of the Saint Malo summit in December 1998, CFSP had been in operation for six years, ever since the ratification of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1992 (Rummel 1992; Peterson & Sjursen 1998; Smith 1998). CFSP was the logical successor to European Political Cooperation (EPC) which had existed since the 1970s (Allen et alii 1982; Ifestos 1989; Nuttall 1992; Nuttall 2000). Prior to Saint Malo, in addition to the long-standing *national* institutions in each member state such as ministries of defence and foreign affairs, defence chiefs etc, there were already no fewer than nine *European* bodies with inputs to EU foreign and security policy³. The Saint Malo Declaration (Rutten 2001: 8-9), with its call for “appropriate structures”, instead of leading to rationalisation of these bodies, merely layered on several new ones, of which three have already established themselves as crucial to the definition of an ESDP identity or profile: the *Political and Security Committee*, the *EU Military Committee* and the *EU Military Staff*, all of which are roughly modelled on their NATO equivalents. With so many cooks in the kitchen, it is, in some ways, amazing that any broth is produced at all (Howorth & Menon 2009).

And yet, decisions *are* taken, policy *is* made and ESDP *has*, over the last few years, gone rapidly from strength to strength (Howorth 2007). One of the key explanatory factors is the existence of the PSC. The Committee was designed to correct two weaknesses in the previous institutional arrangements for foreign and security policy making. The first was the lack of continuity and permanency in the personnel involved in key organisms (the six-month presidency, and the regular rotation of ministers and other officials). The second was the shifting location of meetings, which tended to follow the six-monthly roster of each presidency, the circus moving on constantly from one capital city to another. This was particularly true of the meetings of the *Political Committee* (PoCo), the predecessor to the PSC. The PoCo (which had gradually emerged out of the EPC process) comprised the Political Directors of the member state *Ministries of Foreign Affairs* (MFAs). Prior to 2000, this body had traditionally met monthly, with a view to coordinating foreign and security policy at senior MFA level. As CFSP began to demand more and more of the Political Directors’ time, and as ESDP began to flood their agenda, it became apparent that what was required

² This research was funded by a grant from the INTUNE project (Integrated and United: A quest for Citizenship in an ever closer Europe) financed by the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Union, Priority 7, Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge Based Society (CIT3-CT-2005-513421). For the project itself, see www.intune.it

³ Namely: European Council; General Affairs Council; Coreper; Political Committee; Council Secretariat; rotating EU Presidency; European Commission; European Parliament; High Representative for the CFSP.

was a permanent body, based in Brussels, comprising ambassadors with a substantial (three to four year) term of office. Hence, the birth of the PSC.

The Political and Security Committee: Treaty remit and working practice

The Political and Security Committee (often referred to after its French acronym as COPS) was enshrined in the Treaty of Nice under Article 25:

“Without prejudice to Article 207⁴ of the Treaty establishing the European Community, a Political and Security Committee shall monitor the international situation in the areas covered by the common foreign and security policy and contribute to the definition of policies by delivering opinions to the Council at the request of the Council or on its own initiative. It shall also monitor the implementation of agreed policies, without prejudice to the responsibility of the Presidency and the Commission.

Within the scope of this Title, this Committee shall exercise, under the responsibility of the Council, political control and strategic direction of crisis management operations.

The Council may authorise the Committee, for the purpose and for the duration of a crisis management operation, as determined by the Council, to take the relevant decisions concerning the political control and strategic direction of the operation [...]”

PSC as an institution was first convened on an interim basis in March 2000, becoming permanent in January 2001. The detailed remit for its activities was contained in Annex III to the *Presidency Report on ESDP* which was itself Annex VI to the Presidency Conclusions of the Nice European Council (Rutten 2001: 191-193). The fifteen (later twenty-five, then twenty-seven) permanent representatives with the rank of ambassador, meeting twice to three times a week in Brussels embarked on the work of monitoring the international situation, contributing to the formulation of policies by drafting opinions for the Council and also overseeing the implementation of the agreed policies.

From the outset, the committee was the subject of multiple political sensitivities. In particular, the national capitals, having agreed on its very necessity and indeed its inevitability, were nevertheless keen to ensure that it remained under strict MFA control. In a repetition of the discussions over seniority after the 1997 decision to create the post of High Representative-CFSP⁵, the big debate during the Finnish presidency (June to December 1999) was over the level of representation of the ambassadors to the PSC. France, confident that the very existence of this committee would consecrate “*l’Europe de la défense*”, leaned towards “senior ambassadorial” representation. Paris never doubted for a moment the *Quai d’Orsay’s* capacity to keep its own senior ambassador “on message”, and by the same token it saw in the PSC a golden opportunity for France to lead the debate on European security. France argued that, unless the PSC became a high-level body with genuine ability to influence policy, it would prove to be somewhat redundant. In addition, since the EU had selected the heavyweight Javier Solana for the post of HR-CFSP, France argued that it would be illogical to have him presiding over a lightweight PSC. The British preference for a lower level of seniority in the envoys to PSC (deputy political director) reflected in part a desire to keep this

⁴ This article refers to the establishment of COREPER and the disclaimer effectively ducks the issue of potential turf battles between COPS and COREPER

⁵ After the decision was taken, at Amsterdam in June 1997, to create the post of HR-CFSP, member states quarrelled for eighteen months over the level of seniority of the individual to be appointed. In the event, Javier Solana appeared as an appropriate and consensual appointee because of his effective, but discreet role as NATO Secretary General, particularly during the Kosovo crisis of 1999.

institution firmly under national control and in part a sense of unease about what seemed to be becoming the lionisation of EU institutions. In addition, the UK was preoccupied with US suspicions that the proposed new body would escape all control from NATO. The UK initially proposed that the permanent representatives to PSC should be “double-hatted” with the permanent representatives to NATO – a proposal which was dismissed out of court in Paris (Interviews in Paris and London 1999). Eventually, the British trade-off in the run-up to the European Council in Helsinki (December 1999) was agreement to accept a relatively high-profile PSC in exchange for a genuine commitment, at Helsinki, to the elaboration of serious European military capacity. The wording of the Helsinki documents speak of PSC as being made up of “senior/ambassadorial” officials. In the event, member states sent a variety of different level envoys to constitute the first generation of PSC representatives (2000/1-2003/4), ranging from very senior and experienced ambassadors to mid-career diplomats. The large countries, France included, proved, in the event, most anxious to keep their representatives on a tight leash and tended to send more junior officials than some of the smaller countries eager to help develop CFSP/ESDP and willing to engage a senior ambassador (Howorth 2007: 67-75).

The sensitive issue of the division of labour between COREPER and PSC, both of whom found themselves legally responsible for preparing Council meetings (Duke 2005: 10-12), was partially resolved at the Seville European Council in June 2002 by the introduction of the distinction between the “internal” and “external” agendas of the *General Affairs Committee* (GAC), henceforth re-titled as the *General Affairs and External Relations Council* (GAERC). The former meeting is now essentially prepared by COREPER and the latter by PSC. Formally, COREPER II (comprising the permanent representatives of the member states) enjoys hierarchical superiority to the PSC and the latter’s decisions go via COREPER to the ministers sitting in the GAERC. If PSC ambassadors (as happens occasionally) cannot reach consensus on a particularly sensitive issue, then the dossier “goes up” to COREPER for resolution. This happens roughly once a month. Although this is an improvement on the previous overloaded agenda of the GAC, the situation remains unsatisfactory given the growing volume of business in the strictly security and defence field. The PSC thus theoretically deals with all aspects of the common foreign and security policy, although interviews with current and former ambassadors suggest that it works best in what is considered its “core business” – the planning, preparation and oversight of operations, whether civilian or military. In this sense, it tends to spend most of its time on ESDP matters. A representative of the Commission is also present to ensure cross-pillar consistency and coherence and meetings are attended by four representatives of the Council Secretariat. The work of the committee is assisted by “European Correspondents” based in the MFAs who form a liaison between the political directors and the representatives to PSC (Duke 2005: 20). The agenda is agreed by the rotating Presidency and by the Council Secretariat. Meetings are regularly attended by Robert Cooper, the Director-General of DG-E within the Council Secretariat, who is considered to be Javier Solana’s closest adviser. The wide-ranging remit of the committee generates, by all accounts, a vast amount of paperwork, thus intensifying the workload of its members. This pressure is somewhat alleviated by the assistance of the Politico-Military Working Party, comprising Brussels-based officials from both MFAs and MODs and which convenes up to four times per week, dealing with both the diplomatic aspects and the technical details of planned operations, including relations with NATO. In addition, PSC agendas are prepared by a working group (sometimes referred to as the ‘Nicolaidis group’ after its first chairperson during the Greek Presidency in early 2003). This group fixes the most logical order for discussion of agenda items and indicates in advance where member states have concerns that they may wish to raise. Interviews with the ambassadors to PSC revealed a relatively widespread sense of dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of these preparatory committees. A large number of members deplored the fact that the committee itself spends too much of its precious time on “nuts and bolts” issues, which should have been the subject of preparatory agreement in the subordinate working groups, but too often this is not the case. In the view of some of the interviewees, this goes

back to the vexed question of seniority. For the most part, ‘Nicolaidis group’ members are junior diplomats who are hardly in a position to resolve tricky technical or political issues on their own. Several ambassadors insisted that this was deliberate policy on the part of a number of member states. For these critics, the solution would be to upgrade ‘Nicolaidis’ members to junior ambassador status, thereby allowing for greater decision-making at that level, leaving the PSC itself to tackle only the really thorny issues.

2. The PSC and its Members: a socio-political profile

The interviewees in this study were, in most cases, from the “third generation” of PSC members. The period of service is generally three to four years. The “first generation” sat from early 2000 to about 2002/2003. The “second generation” served from about 2002/2003 until 2005/2006. For the most part, current members of the Committee were appointed in 2005/2006, although some – particularly several ambassadors from the 2004 accession states, who arrived as observers in 2003 in the run-up to accession and subsequently joined as full members, are still in post. Of the twenty-eight members of PSC, only four (14%) are women. Members of the Committee tend to be mid-career to senior diplomats in their late forties and early fifties. The average age of those responding to the questionnaire is just short of fifty (the youngest being 38 and the oldest 61). While no accurate date is available on the age-profile of the two previous generations of PSC members, impressionistic evidence⁶ suggests that the age – and therefore the seniority – of PSC members is nudging upwards. Most have previously had at least one major overseas posting involving security and defence issues. All have spent at least three months living in another EU member state. All have a university degree, most commonly in Political Science, History or Law, the majority having also completed a Masters degree. Two have completed doctorates.

Most speak three or four languages (the average number of languages spoken by the interviewees being 3.7). All speak at least English and French, the two working languages of the committee. It has been suggested that between 70% and 80% of PSC business is conducted in English and 20% to 30% in French (Meyer 2006: 126). Meetings under most Presidencies are conducted in English – with one or two ambassadors occasionally expressing themselves in French. However, whenever the Presidency of the EU (and therefore the chairmanship of the PSC) is held by France, Belgium or Luxembourg (11% of the member states), the pattern is reversed, business – and much of the accompanying paperwork – being conducted essentially in French, with the occasional “lapse” into English on the part of an individual ambassador or two. Between them, by definition, the members of this key committee cover all the languages of the EU, plus Russian and Norwegian.

The permanent affiliation of twenty-seven of the Committee members is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of their respective member states, the final member being a representative of the European Commission. All of them, again, almost by definition given the remit of this particular committee, engage in interaction with other EU actors or institutions at least once a week and 55% of them also engage with non-EU actors and institutions with the same frequency, the remainder for the most part fulfilling this function once a month. In other words, interaction with EU and international actors and institutions is the stock-in-trade of these committee members. They function permanently in an international, multilateral, inter-governmental context whose focus is foreign and security policy.

⁶ The author interviewed several members of the two previous generations of PSC ambassadors over the period 2000 to 2004/5 and it is his impression that the current generation is slightly older and more senior.

Identity

Evaluating the “identity” of two dozen sophisticated, well-travelled, multi-lingual ambassadors is a sensitive task. Nothing in terms of age, educational background, length of service or experience of living abroad offers any clue to their own self-definition in terms of identity. Inevitably, these interviewees spend most of their careers living in “foreign” countries (not necessarily EU countries), absorbing and learning to respond to other cultures, learning other languages, appreciating diversity. At the same time, they are professionally committed to serving and defending the interests of their respective member states (cf the old adage: “diplomats are people who are sent abroad to lie for their country”). It is therefore interesting to note that, while they have rather diverse feelings about their native town or village and even more diverse feelings about their region of origin – ranging from very attached (50%) to not at all attached (20%) – they have much more solidly anchored feelings about their own country and about the EU. It is hardly surprising that not one of them feels “little” or “no attachment” to their home country, but it is noteworthy that as many as 36% of them see themselves as only “fairly attached” as opposed to “very attached” (64%) to their own country. This no doubt helps to explain the fact that all of them confess to feeling “very attached” (53%) or “fairly attached” (47%) to the EU.

Whether this is as a result of their personal preferences, their international life-style or their experience of working on the PSC, the data do not allow us to conclude. Common sense would suggest it is a mix of all three. But, clearly, the ambassadors to the PSC feel strongly that the European project, to which their work is devoted, is an important and worthwhile cause. All of them believe that ESDP as a policy area is “important” (50%) or “very important” (50%) for the development of an EU identity. Interestingly enough, in answer to the question about their “primary association”, respondents gave rather different answers (probably owing to the potential ambiguity of the question). While 43% identified the European Council as their “primary association”, 25% saw this as being their national government or MFA, while 29% saw it as the PSC itself (the remaining one member, of course, seeing his “primary association” as being the European Commission). Since all PSC members (except the Commission representative) are *at one and the same time* attached to the Council, to their national government via their respective MFA, and to the PSC, the diversity of priority is understandable. While a majority (64%) felt that the nature of their work had not changed over time, those 36% who did feel that it had changed were *unanimously* of the view that the EU level had become more important.

In some ways, the most revealing answers were expressed over the “necessity”, “desirability” and “likelihood” of the development of an EU identity. Combining the two categories of “agreement” and “agreement with reservation”, no fewer than 80% believed an EU identity to be necessary, while 86.6% believed it to be desirable and, somewhat astonishingly, the same percentage (86.6%) believed it to be likely (although only 7% felt it likely *without reservation*, whereas no fewer than 64% felt it to be desirable *with reservation*). One ambassador noted that he could not answer this question because, in his view, an EU identity “already exists”. The real question, he insisted, was on “how deep or large it is or should be”. Even allowing for a degree of latitude in different individuals’ interpretation of the precise meaning of the three terms in question, these figures suggest an extraordinarily high degree of belief in the intrinsic wisdom and virtue of the European integration project. This has bearing on the socialisation phenomena we shall shortly analyse. There is a strong sense among the members of the PSC that they are deeply involved in taking the EU forward.

Representation

PSC ambassadors are appointed, by their respective member states, to represent the interests of those same member states in the forging of a common foreign and security policy. In answer to the question as to *whom they represent*, there was no ambiguity. With the sole exception of the Commission representative, they all – unsurprisingly – saw

themselves as representing “their country”. Given the data we have just analysed concerning identification with the EU, there is clearly a unanimous feeling, in the minds of PSC members, that national interests and European interests are entirely compatible. When asked about the most appropriate role they felt they played, answers were quite diverse. Allowing for multiple responses, the largest group (35%) believed that their role on the committee consisted of devising “politically feasible solutions”, while 26% saw themselves involved in seeking “technically feasible or efficient solutions”, a further 15% believed they essentially “provided input through their expertise”, with only 12% seeing that role as being “to support specific (presumably national) interests” and a further 12% as “mediating different arguments”. Since this question allowed for multiple responses, this range of views is hardly surprising. Indeed, PSC members clearly feel that, depending on the issue, they will be likely to switch roles from case to case. If one interprets the categories “politically feasible solutions”, “mediation between different arguments” and “support for specific interests” as being essentially *political* roles, then we find that 59% of the responses fall into that box, while “technically feasible solutions” and “expertise inputs” could be interpreted as essentially technocratic roles (41%). This accurately reflects the primary purpose of the committee. The results correlate exactly with the answers to a later question about the relative importance of technical as opposed to political considerations. Here, the committee was split, with (unsurprisingly) 56% disagreeing that the technical should outweigh the political (albeit all “with reservations”), while 44% tended to agree (again, all of them “with reservations”). Similar findings emerged from the question about the legitimacy of the PSC as a body, with 44% seeing it as a body which “follows procedures established by the Treaty”, while a further 31% saw it as “representing legitimate interests” and the remaining 31% valuing its ability to “provide feasible solutions”.

In terms of the *working style* of the PSC, the answers were unequivocal. There was virtual unanimity behind the belief that *the prevalent style of interaction* in this committee is “consensus based” and this was confirmed explicitly in the structured interviews by every ambassador – including the single individual whose questionnaire returned “evidence based”. This degree of unanimity contrasts somewhat with the results of the questionnaire among the broader policy community (Council Secretariat, Commission, Think-Tanks and national officials), where 73% nevertheless felt that “consensus-seeking” was the dominant mode, with 14% indicating “evidence based”, and 10% “chaotic and unstructured”. The PSC ambassadors were also relatively agreed on the *prevalent attitude* within the committee, 63% defining it as “cooperative and consensus-seeking”, the remaining 37% opting for “rational bargaining”. This reflects very nicely the subtle socialisation pressures of this particular committee: its members are in fact supposed to defend national positions; in reality, they succeed in doing this while actively seeking consensus. This phenomenon is analysed in more detail below. It is striking that all the members of the PSC chose one or other of these two responses, whereas in the broader policy community, small numbers returned “adversarial” or even “inquisitorial” as the *prevalent attitude* within their committee, or indeed failed to respond to this particular question. As to the *prevalent source of conflict*, opinions in the PSC were quite divided, 25 % seeing the problem as “sectoral interests”, a further 25% opting for “political beliefs”, 13% seeing the main problem as “divergences vis-à-vis the USA” (a rather low figure given the emphasis in the structured interviews on the difficulty of reaching agreement on a collective attitude towards the USA) and a further 12% seeing “territorial interests” as the main problem. This diversity is no doubt explained by the huge range of issues dealt with by this committee. Interviewees were no doubt influenced in their choice of response by specific issues on which their particular member state had (perhaps recently) found itself defending an important national interest.

Finally, under the heading of “Representation”, there were two questions about the *extent to which the media covered the work* carried out by the PSC and the *way in which it was reported*. The results were straightforward. There was virtual unanimity behind the fact that significant media coverage exists (the issues dealt with by the PSC are in the headlines

almost on a daily basis), with only one member of the committee demurring. A clear majority (56%) felt that the reporting was, on balance, “positive” (although significantly no member of the committee saw it as “very positive”). The remainder (44%) took refuge in “neutral” as the manner of reporting. Nobody felt that media coverage was in any way negative – a remarkable finding given the controversy surrounding some of the ESDP operations in a number of EU member states.

Scope of Governance

The questionnaire data also revealed important insights about the perception of PSC members concerning the *comparative importance of a range of EU governance bodies*, the *constituencies whose views are most valued*, the *performance of democracy*, the *role of market and social protection agencies* and the extent to which *governments are aware of and respond to public opinion*. Some of these questions were general and non-policy specific, and others were explicitly framed within the context of CFSP/ESDP. The answers to the former were less clear-cut in the case of PSC ambassadors than those to the latter. For instance, in response to a question about whether “more things should be left to the market”, 25% of interviewees either failed to reply or pronounced themselves indifferent (indifference being in fact an exceptionally rare value in these data). Of the remainder, opinion was strongly marked by disagreement (25%) or disagreement “with reservations” (38%), only 12% of respondents agreeing – all of them “with reservations” – with the proposition that “more things should be left to the market”, and none of them expressing outright agreement. For these diplomats and servants of the public sphere, market forces should clearly be kept in their place.

One area which they did see as appropriate for such forces was competitiveness in the economy, only 19% expressing disagreement (albeit “with reservations”) with the proposition that “it is essential that the EU makes the European economy more competitive in world markets”, while 75% agreed with the proposition, 44% of them strongly and 31% “with reservations”. Only one committee member declared himself to be indifferent on this issue. However, the non-partisan nature of the PSC revealed itself in the answers to the question as to whether the EU should provide “better social protection for its citizens”. The widespread support for economic competitiveness proved to be entirely compatible with a belief in greater social protection, which was supported by 69% of respondents (a large majority of these expressing some measure of reservation) while 31% of members disagreed – but only one of them “strongly”. What these findings suggest is that, in a policy area relatively unrelated to their professional expertise, these unambiguously pro-EU ambassadors felt that the Union should *both* promote more economic competition *and* ensure greater social protection. Interestingly enough, there is absolutely no correlation whatever between specific groups of member states or individuals (more Atlanticist ones, more recent accession states, large or small ones or whatever) and the expression of these mild political positions.

As to the EU *bodies which play a fundamental role* in the overall EU process, there was no equivocation in the views of these foreign and security policy officials. They were unanimous (100%) in seeing both the European Council and the PSC itself as playing a fundamental role, while 50% of them also thought that Council working groups were crucial. Interestingly, given the growing role played by the European Commission in ESDP operations, only 25% of them saw the Commission as playing a fundamental role, the same percentage as felt this to be the case with Coreper, a body with which the PSC has a tense relationship. The European Parliament was felt to play a fundamental role by only 13% of respondents, while very few saw such a role as being played by Commission working groups, civil society or academics (6% for each category). None of the ambassadors considered that any major role should be played by business (indicating that their reading of the question was specific to their policy-area rather than general). These figures also reveal a degree of variance as against the responses to the questionnaire from other expert groups (Council Secretariat, Commission, Think-Tanks and national officials). Among this broader constituency, while

there was a similar level of recognition of the fundamental importance of the Council and the PSC (almost 87% and 83% respectively), 33% felt that the Commission played such a role, while only 13% felt this to be the case for the European Parliament and Coreper, only 6% seeing a major role for civil society and a mere 3% for academics. On the other hand, 6% of the larger group saw a fundamental role for EU level business.

In response to the question about *which bodies had increased their role*, almost 70% put the PSC itself in prime position (they, after all, are in an excellent position to testify!), with 25% detecting an increasing role both for the Council and for the European Parliament, and 12% for civil society. These figures are corroborated by the responses of the broader constituency, the largest percentage of which (40%) also saw the PSC as having increased its role the most, while the figures for the Council (26%) and the Parliament (23%) dwarfed those for civil society (10%). There is little mystery behind these results. ESDP is a policy area massively dominated by the Council and, within the Council, by the PSC. It should be noted that “member states” was not included in the questionnaire as a possible category playing a “fundamental” or “greater” role – but then none of the respondents inserted this in response to the optional category “others”. When asked which bodies *should* play a greater role, the relatively poor earlier scores of the Commission and of academics were somewhat rectified, these being the two categories where significant numbers of respondents (19% for each) felt that something was amiss. Other categories which elicited responses were the Council, Council working groups, the EP, Coreper and civil society (6% each). Significantly the largest group (31%) felt that no group at all needed even greater influence. By contrast, among the broader community of experts, 20% felt that the Parliament should have a greater role, 17% the Commission and 13% academics. While the relative faith expressed in the academic community is heartening in the context of the *IntUne* project, this researcher also wondered whether the responses in this area did not contain at least some measure of good-will gesturing, even though those who mentioned academe as being an appropriate candidate for a greater role justified it by stating that the university is the repository of independent and scientific advice.

Similar results were recorded in response to the question as to *whose views were most valued*. Not surprisingly, given that, for this question, “national governments” figured as a possibility, there was virtual unanimity (94%) in seeing the member states as the main source of valid opinion. Thereafter, there was strong appreciation for military and defence bodies (75%), for think-tanks (63%) and for global organisations and civil society (38% each), with the EP (19%) and academia (13%) trailing. None of the PSC members admitted to paying any attention whatsoever to either industry or trade unions. There are no surprises in these results. Moreover, they reflect quite closely the corresponding responses of the broader expert community which established the following pecking order in terms of views valued: national governments (83%), think tanks (73%), military and defence bodies (67%), global organisations (40%), civil society (33%), the EP and academics (23% each) while some 6% recognised value in the views of business.

Satisfaction with performance seemed relatively strong. 75% of ambassadors found themselves to be satisfied with the EU’s problem-solving capacity in their policy area, but 69% qualified this with the adverb “fairly”. 25% on the other hand felt themselves to be “not very satisfied”. The levels of *satisfaction with the workings of democracy in their home countries* were even stronger, with only 12% declaring themselves “not very satisfied” while 88% felt satisfied, 25% being “very satisfied”. *Satisfaction with democracy in the EU* was (somewhat surprisingly given the media and academic literature about an alleged “democratic deficit” in the Union) even higher, none of the respondents declaring him or herself either “not at all satisfied” or “not very satisfied”. 100% of the respondents felt happy with the workings of democracy at EU level, albeit only 6% of them being “very satisfied”, the remainder taking refuge in the rather bland concept of “fairly satisfied”. It is not clear what the analyst is to make of this, other than to formulate the hypothesis that, as government

officials representing their member states in an EU institutional setting, there was an inherent reluctance to criticise either level of democratic governance. This hypothesis is borne out by the results from the broader constituency of experts where much higher levels of dissatisfaction were recorded: 37% with EU problem-solving, 27% with the workings of democracy in their home country and 20% with democracy in the EU itself.

Ambassadors also opted for “democratic correctness” concerning the question of whether it was *important for governments to know what the public wants* in this policy area. 69% thought it “important” (56%) or “very important” (13%), only 31% expressing a neutral view and nobody feeling it was unimportant. However, they were less convinced that governments were in touch with public opinion, 50% of them feeling that the reliability of politicians’ knowledge of what the public wants was “mostly good” (nobody opting for “important”), while another 50% took refuge in neutral agnosticism. On the other hand, none of them felt that politicians’ understanding of the public’s wishes was poor. Far higher percentages of the broader community of experts expressed some degree of scepticism about the connection between policy and opinion, 40% being unconvinced that it was even necessary to pay attention to public opinion in this policy area and only 36% being of the opinion that politicians were in touch with the public mood, the remainder being split between those who felt unconvinced (17%) and those who expressed agnosticism (37%).

3. The PSC and European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)

Six questions focused on some of the major issues facing ESDP as a policy area. The first dealt with the extent to which PSC ambassadors felt that *specific issues were important for good policy-making* in CFSP/ESDP. Two categories above all vied for pole position. 28% saw “inter-agency coherence” as an important objective, with 25% opting for “strategic vision”. However, when factoring in first, second and third choice preferences, these rankings are reversed, with 56% of respondents placing “strategic vision” in first place while only 12% put “inter-agency coherence” in the top slot. What this tells us is that ambassadors are agreed that both objectives need further attention. Strategic vision, the structured interviews reveal, is believed to be an absolute necessity (the EU has to have a clearer view of what it wishes to achieve in this policy area and how it intends to achieve it). But inter-agency cohesion has also proven to be a major problem in the operational realities of overseas missions. Again, the face-to-face interviews revealed considerable concern about this issue – as indeed has a mass of academic and policy-based literature on ESDP. However, the general feeling among all interviewees (as strongly felt among the broader community as it was among the ambassadors) is that things are getting better. Lessons learned on the ground in the Balkans, in Indonesia, in Palestine, Africa and Ukraine/Moldova have been acted upon, joint Council/Commission working groups have been established, the role of the Commission in ESDP operations is less and less contentious. There is no doubt still a long way to go, and the fact that respondents highlighted this issue reveals a genuine problem which needs to be further addressed. All this is entirely consistent with the underlying hypothesis behind this study: that the PSC is proving to be instrumental in defining an ESDP “identity”.

A further 21% of PSC members saw “response to crises” as a key issue, indicating that the EU’s emerging profile is one in which civilian and military capacity can be held in readiness in order to respond rapidly to crises as and when they arise. It is significant that this issue (rather than inter-agency coherence) was the second highest category (after strategic vision) receiving first ranking – among 25% of respondents. These results contrast somewhat with the responses of the broader policy community, where the overall priorities were seen as “response to crises” (28%), “strategic vision” (22%) and “inter-agency coherence” (19%). However, when factoring in first choices, “strategic vision” again emerges as the clear front-runner (45%), followed by “response to crises” (28%) and – as a poor third – “inter-agency

coherence” (10%). While the respective rankings of the first and second choices are consistent with the views of the PSC ambassadors, the relative down-grading of “inter-agency coherence” among the broader policy community highlights the fact that, for those directly responsible for the oversight and political control of ESDP missions, inter-agency coherence remains an important problem.

Other issues which were seen as important included “accountability” (10% of PSC respondents but with none of them placing this in first position); “military capability” (9%, again with none placing this in first place – an interesting reflection of the fact that ESDP has increasingly shifted away from emphasis on military missions and is more focused on civilian-military synergies); and “historical necessity” (2% - albeit in this case seen as of primary importance, reflecting the view that ESDP is impelled by shifts in geo-strategic tectonic plates rather than by the preferences of political leaders or member states). Interestingly a further 2% of respondents felt that “military autonomy” was key, while another 2% insisted on the importance of “alliance backing”. This neat dichotomy reflects both the reality of an Atlanticist/Europeantist tension within the committee, but also the fact that this is no longer perceived as a central problem area (none of those responding in these two categories saw it as their first choice). Finally, no member of the committee felt that “transparency” in ESDP was a problem area at all. This is interesting only insofar as several members in a later question thought it essential “to explain ESDP properly to the citizens”. The respective results from the broader policy community are not dissimilar, “military capacity” (12%) and “accountability” (9%) swapping places as compared with the PSC results, but still within the same ball-park; “historical necessity” and “alliance backing” both weighing in with 5% each; while “military autonomy” slipped to bottom ranking with only 2% (all of them placing it in third position). Again, no respondent saw “transparency” as of any significance.

Another question focused on *the major challenges for the future of ESDP*. Here the results contrast in interesting ways with the answers on good policy-making. In first place comes the “development of civil-military tools” (20%), followed closely by three other issues – “EUisation of strategic vision”, the “creation of the Foreign Minister position”, and the “resolution of tensions between ESDP and NATO” (16% each). Again, these findings reveal the extent to which the PSC is helping define an ESDP identity. Interestingly, the resolution of inter-agency turf battles drops to 8% as a priority for the future, which is the same score as that given to “explaining ESDP to the citizens” – a feature which appears to be perceived as an issue for the future if not a problem for the present. 6% of respondents saw the development of the European Defence Agency as a future priority, while insignificant percentages backed the Neighbourhood Policy (4%); increasing military capacity (2%) and rationalisation of defence spending (2%). Opinion among the broader community of experts reflected a much more balanced spread. While these respondents opted for the same top four issues, albeit in a slightly different order (civil-military tools and EUisation of vision at 16% each, the foreign minister post at 15% and the resolution of ESDP/NATO tensions at 14%), they felt more strongly about developing military capacity (8%), while the same figure (8%) backed the resolution of turf battles (identical to the PSC ambassadors – as was the score for the defence agency, 5%). Comparable numbers of the broader community also attached importance to the rationalisation of spending (7%), explanations to the citizens and the neighbourhood policy (5% each). Finally, while none of the PSC ambassadors attached any importance to “involvement of the EP”, “the struggle against terrorism” or “aid and development”, the latter two *were* backed by the broader community but only to the tune of 2% each, while again nobody wanted greater involvement for the EP (a fact which contrasts starkly with the support for that institution in response to questions on good governance – see above).

When asked about the *involvement of different actors in ESDP*, there was almost unanimous support for the view that opportunities for EU policy-shaping in this area had increased at the

level of European institutions (96%), among national defence ministers (96%) and among think tanks (81%), while 44% even believed that opportunities to influence ESDP now exist for European citizens. The scores on this question for the broader policy community were almost exactly the same. 96% of ambassadors were also of the view that the efficiency of ESDP has increased in recent years and the same percentage believed that inter-agency cohesion has also increased (which is consistent with the views expressed above about turf battles). These were higher figures than among the broader policy community where the respective scores were 87% and 73%.

Finally, when asked about *the future role of the European Commission* in this policy area – which has been a contentious issue in recent years – the results were revealing. Almost 40% felt that the Commission’s role should essentially be confined to implementing decisions taken by the Council, with a further 23% valuing the Commission’s role as a source of funding for ESDP, 15% seeing it as a source of consultation and advice, a further 15% being prepared to accept a Commission role in policy initiation, and virtually nobody prepared to give it a role in external representation (3%) or in partnership (3%). This contrasted markedly with the greater spread of views among the broader policy community where the scores were: implementation of Council decisions (29%), funding (26%), consultation and advice (21%), policy initiation (14%) and even external representation (10%).

4. Socialisation and the Quest for Consensus: The PSC as a Unique Case?

The political and strategic conclusions from the structured and semi-structured interviews with PSC ambassadors will be the subject of a separate academic study. However, a brief glimpse into the substantive findings from the interviews is in order. I shall make an initial (and rather cursory) attempt to situate these findings in the context of recent socialization theory. Jeffrey Checkel (2005) has set down some basic prerequisites for socialization processes to work and has theorised the distinctions between three different types of process: strategic calculation, role playing and normative suasion. He suggests that when actors move from conscious strategic calculation to conscious role playing within an institutional setting, “Type I” socialisation has taken place. When they go beyond role playing and accept the collective norms of the group as “the right thing to do”, they have exhibited features of “Type II” internalisation. He also lays out some thoughts about optimum “scope conditions” under which socialisation is likely to occur. In particular, he identifies several key conditions: when individuals are in settings where contact is long and sustained, as well as intense; and those with prior experience in international bodies or settings tend to accept socialisation more readily and more speedily. These conditions do tend to apply very directly in the case of the ambassadors to the PSC. Liesbet Hooge (2005), on the other hand, has argued that, even in the case of a supranational body such as the European Commission, socialisation is less the result of interaction within the institution than the consequence of subtle forms of prior national socialisation. My findings suggest that there is a real difference between the Commission actors she studied and the ambassadors I have studied.

How influential is this “linchpin”, this “work-horse” in forging a consensual European strategic culture, a type of “ESDP identity”? Christoph Meyer produced the first scholarly analysis of the workings of the Committee (Meyer 2006: Chapter 5). His research set out to establish to what extent the working of the PSC “has set in motion dynamics of social influence that can mould a group of national officials into a socially cohesive policy community with shared objectives and increasingly shared attitudes concerning the use of force” (Meyer 2006: 112). Employing recent research methods in the field of social psychology, he examined the extent to which two dynamics are at work: “compliance or normative pressures, which make group members conform in public to dominant attitudes or views; and personal acceptance of these group norms through informational influence based on better arguments or superior expertise of in-group persuaders” (Meyer 2006: 117).

His conclusions were based on considerations of group characteristics, discursive dynamics and capacity to persuade. First, the PSC ambassadors have felt themselves to be pioneers in a very important policy area and, given that their remit was to seek consensus, their propensity to compete with one another has been kept in check. The frequency of their meetings in various official formats rose from an average of ten per month in 2001 to an average of over 15 per month in 2005. Meyer concluded that PSC constitutes “an unusually cohesive committee with a club atmosphere, high levels of personal trust and a shared ‘*esprit de corps*’ driven by a common commitment to pioneer cooperation in a new, labour-intensive and particularly sensitive policy-field” (Meyer 2006: 124). In terms of discursive dynamics, the tendency of newly-appointed ambassadors in their early meetings simply to read out instructions from the national capital rapidly fades and is soon replaced by a consensus-seeking discursive approach which results in even envoys from major countries shifting their initial stance in the greater cause of forging an EU policy. Although both Paris and London are keen to “tele-guide” their envoys, they are also keen to ensure that ESDP be made to work. Thus, the language and codes through which the meetings are conducted were rapidly established in a form, which actively promotes group cohesion. Finally, individual ambassadors, for a wide variety of reasons – seniority, longevity on the committee, personal charm, in-depth knowledge, relevance of their country to the issue under discussions (the Baltic states and Poland have been instrumental in taking forward policy towards Russia) – have found that they have considerable potential to influence the group by the strength of their argument, so long as it is couched within a collectively recognised normative framework. Meyer’s conclusion was tentative but unequivocal: The PSC

“has developed into a multiplier of social influence, both through informational influence as well as peer pressure. It has managed to manufacture consent and broker compromises even in areas where national strategic norms would initially indicate incompatibility. [It] remains one of the most important ideational transmission belts of a gradual Europeanisation of national foreign, security and defence policies.” (Meyer 2006: 136-137).

My own interviews with the members of the PSC reveal a unanimous sense that, above all, the Committee seeks to achieve consensus. All ambassadors felt strongly that the PSC is a forum in which consensus can usually be achieved. Ambassadors were asked to think of an example of an initiative taken by PSC which had been illustrative of the search for this consensus, if possible showing how an initial *tour de table* had revealed a wide diversity of viewpoints, whereas further discussion, and several iterations between Brussels and the national capitals, had succeeded in narrowing the gaps or even in achieving unanimity. The answers varied widely, no doubt reflecting the time-pressured nature of an interview. But that very variety illustrated the point. Between them, the ambassadors cited missions as diverse as the Aceh monitoring mission, the EUFOR-Congo military mission, the Ukraine-Moldova border mission, the rule of law mission in Iraq, the Afghanistan police mission and one or two others. The point is that, in most cases, the starting positions of EU member states are at variance. But the process involved in decision-making via the PSC most often ends up with a broad consensus or even unanimity. There was, naturally, a range of opinion as to how *deep or serious* the consensus actually was. But none disputed that consensus emerged, or that the quest for consensus was the basic stock in trade of the PSC members.

All members of the committee stress its “club-like” atmosphere and insist that a significant measure of socialisation ensures that the dominant mode of interaction is consensus-seeking rather than bargaining around fixed national positions. The vibrant (albeit, to date, brief) history of ESDP shows that a viable consensus normally emerges. The degree of socialisation which functions in the committee is a major factor in generating compromise. The members know one another extremely well. Their average tenure is around three years. When, for example, the French ambassador lays out her country’s position on, say, the EU mission in Afghanistan, the others know immediately how to read that position, how to react

to it and how to work with it and around it to achieve consensus. The key element is a deeply-rooted sense of mutual trust. The following is taken from the transcript of an interview with an ambassador who had been in post for just over two years. It is reproduced here because it encapsulates very articulately and very concisely the importance of mutual trust:

“I think we all have a trust in each other that whatever compromise is possible we will find it. [...] We often take some minutes off in the meeting when somebody needs to call home and say “Hey, this might be a possible compromise line, couldn’t we follow that?” And so, even if you have instructions where you have to cross your own red lines, you can then get back to capitals. It is really true that there is a trust among colleagues that they try to find wherever a common basis is possible. It would be a different thing altogether if you always met 26 different colleagues. You simply would not have that crucial element of personal trust that everybody is doing their utmost, whatever is possible to find the best compromise. That is the main element which helps”.

Several ambassadors stressed that it is often sufficient for one of the group to be replaced by his or her deputy for the trust-based group dynamics to break down and for consensus to be more difficult to achieve.

In many instances, the majority of member states are unlikely to have a very strongly held national position on a given proposal (say, to mount an ESDP mission in Indonesia or in Congo). In that case, they see it as their duty and role to help – wherever and if possible – those who do have strongly held positions to reconcile their differences. Here we encounter very strong evidence of the switch from strategic calculation to role playing which Checkel sees as fundamental to Type I socialisation. For those states which do have strongly held (or felt) positions, the object of the PSC exercise is to try, through an astute mix of personal persuasion, subtle “pitch” and reasonable bargaining, to find a way of persuading those holding a different line to shift their position. And, when the proceedings reach an impasse because an ambassador has received strict instructions from his or her MFA Political Director to defend a given “red line”, then a telephone conversation to the national capital can often be sufficient to get the discussion moving forward again. But the quality of the arguments deployed is also crucial. Another quotation illustrates this point:

“There is something which struck me when I first came and it was rather unexpected. You have to defend your case *very well*. The argument counts. The rational discourse is very important, because there is a clear dynamic. If you just have a certain position and you say “Ah, but my minister wants this, and that is that [...]”. That, obviously, is not convincing. So you have to *prepare your case* and you have to *present it well* and then sometimes a certain dynamics come into play. Because countries come in which don’t necessarily have any interest in the case, and say: “Yes, this seems a very good argument, a sensible line to follow” and then you see that a general mood arises. And then it is very difficult if you are against it. If a wave of consensus starts and you are the only obstacle, then you have to have exceptionally good arguments to turn the tide. Sometimes, colleagues have to say: “I just can’t, because my minister is not willing to move”. That happens. But that is not a very comfortable position to be in and nobody likes to say: “Yes I understand everybody else, and I would love to agree but I simply have to call home”. Then everybody will agree to let him/her call home. Very, very often, I would say, it is also the case that the colleague will come back and say: “Yes, OK we agree!” Because if there is a very strong sense of consensus, if common sense suggests that such and such is a good compromise, so let’s go for that, unless it is some absolutely essential policy point for a minister, then colleagues can and do convince their capitals. So *argument counts* and you can create a certain wave where opinions go”.

Here we see the crucial importance of the normative suasion which Checkel identifies as the first sign of a shift towards Type II socialisation.

That national capitals are prepared thus to compromise is so for several reasons. These reasons give us insight into the scope conditions which allow socialisation in this particular committee to take place. First, although member states retain their longstanding autonomy in national foreign-policy making (the UK *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, the German *Auswaertiges Amt* or the French *Quai d’Orsay* are no more likely to suddenly throw in the national towel and accept wholesale Europeanisation of foreign and security policy than are the Lithuanian or Maltese Foreign Ministries), they all know that they have a strong vested interest in making CFSP and ESDP work. In these policy areas above all, there is a recognition that, most often, the whole will prove to be greater than the sum of the parts. Secondly, there is a strong collective desire to achieve results. Having established the PSC in order to achieve consensus in foreign and security policy, the member states all seriously want the process to be a success. For this reason, it is rare for a proposal to come up to the PSC which is clearly going to run up against strongly entrenched national interest on the part of one or more member states. What the PSC is in effect doing is writing on a blank sheet of paper the limits of the possible in CFSP/ESDP (and, by the same token, the profile of the impossible). It is, in a sense, *creating* an entire policy area from scratch. It is a kind of script-writer for the ESDP story. Debates thus tend to turn around proposals that have a realistic chance of success. In this context, knowing intimately the sense of the prevalent collective mindset, ambassadors will sometimes pitch their initial bargaining positions slightly closer to what they feel would be a consensual position than might have been the case in, say, the PoCo. Thereafter, as they feel their way through the ensuing discussion, they know rapidly what margin of manoeuvre exists and are in a good position to contact the national capital with a suggestion as to how best to progress business.

Thus, while the ambassadors are involved in a constant *European learning process* through daily interaction with their peers, they also perform a second suasion or didactic function with respect to their national capitals, communicating the sense of collective European opinion in the PSC and suggesting ways in which national positions can be modified in order to achieve collective results:

“With our regular meetings, we have a really good feeling of what the mood is in the national capitals. This helps *them* in the decision-shaping process at home. There are a lot of policy fields where our policy is defined along national lines. And there are a lot of others where we really have no national interest, where we just ask ourselves: is the best option A, B, C or D? When we can see that the mood in PSC is moving towards ‘B’, we can argue at home, ‘OK let’s go with B... This is obviously the majority mood here’. And one can convince one’s own capital readily easily, as long as there is no direct national core interest at stake.”

Timing is also important. The fact that the PSC is, in some ways, ahead of the game, allows the ambassadors to avoid their minister being caught off guard by a tricky question from a journalist:

“We can streamline things at an early stage. Because once you have ten foreign ministers and three have publicly said we would like A and three have gone for B and three are backing C and one has said D, then to bring them back to a common position is very difficult. So early warning is very important – early signalling. They had better not take too early a public position. To be able to inform the capital that the mood seems to be behind B, that helps. Ministers sometimes come up with a position simply because some journalist happens to ask them a question – and then it is difficult to back-track. So that is also one of the functions we can fulfil [...]”

In this way, although the PSC ambassadors remain under the hierarchical control of their respective Ministry of Foreign Affairs, their capacity to influence thinking and opinion both at home and in Brussels is considerable. A number of them explicitly made the point that they see themselves rather as “two-way ambassadors”, facilitating consensus seeking in both directions. They are involved in a constant, albeit inchoate, process of generating a

specifically European strategic culture which amounts to much more than the lowest common denominator of the EU’s member states. This poses the question of leadership. Traditionally, all international actors, and especially powerful actors, have developed a hierarchical relationship between policy-making institutions and central leadership. The former may offer divergent and even at times contradictory advice; but the leader – usually the head of state or government – arbitrates, decides and leads. Nowhere is this process clearer than in countries such as the United States, France and the UK. Over the centuries, this has been the *sine qua non* of international great power impact. And yet, the EU is, in a very real sense, *leaderless* (Menon 2007). It is, in many ways, the exact opposite of a great power such as the USA. Ultimate decision-making power rests in the hands of the intergovernmental European Council, represented by its heads of state and government. The EU is hugely constrained by the requirement that its security (and even more so its defence) policies be the object of unanimous agreement between twenty-seven sovereign entities. In this sense, it is – almost inevitably – lacking in strategic thrust or “heroic” objectives. US analysts who, detecting intentions from outcomes, have sensed in ESDP an attempt to balance against the US, have seriously misunderstood the processes involved in security and defence policy-making in the EU⁷. But to the extent to which the definition of a “new way of doing IR” is being forged, it is primarily within the PSC that this gestation can be perceived.

Finally, it is appropriate to consider some of the differences between PSC ambassadors and the Commission officials studied by Liesbet Hooge (2005). First, the EC officials are in post for very long periods, often for a lifetime and socialisation processes take place very much more slowly than among PSC ambassadors who have a three to four year period to achieve results. Although both sets of officials are to some extent subject to both self-selection and selective recruitment processes (which pre-condition them to function well in their respective institutions), pressures of “utility maximisation” – concern for one’s own career and material rewards – work in quite different ways among the two groups. Above all, the EC officials are preoccupied with the working style of the Commission and eager to merge their previous professional baggage with the new environment. But they are not primarily driven by the need to devise successful policy options. It is here that utility maximisation and socialisation tend to merge in the case of the PSC ambassadors. Their professional success as PSC ambassadors stems directly from their ability to write the ESDP script – to come up with policies, missions and operations for the EU which will allow it to demonstrate both its usefulness and its importance. This also differentiates the PSC from, say Coreper, where there are many more national red-lines to be defended.

Conclusions: Measuring Convergence and Divergence

In conclusion, several brief remarks. First, one should not overstate the success rate of the PSC in forging consensus. There are three areas where members of the committee felt that the achievement of consensus remains very difficult. The first is what might be called “America policy” – the formulation of a collective response to US diplomacy and strategy around the world. The Iraq war is the classic example of the capacity of transatlantic relations to divide Europeans among themselves. During the Iraq crisis of 2002-2003, for instance, the PSC, notwithstanding the text of article 25 of the Treaty stating that it should contribute to the definition of policies by “delivering opinions to the Council”, was kept entirely at arm’s length from what was certainly the most significant foreign and security policy issue of the entire five year period following Saint-Malo. Many PSC ambassadors received “very strict instructions” (Interviews in Brussels June 2004) from their respective MFAs that Iraq was to be kept

⁷ Jolyon Howorth & Anand Menon, “Complexity and International Institutions: why the European Union isn’t balancing the United States”, paper currently under consideration with *International Security*.

rigorously off the agenda. This stark reality speaks volumes about the relative salience of *national* security policies as opposed to *European* policy on security when push really comes to shove. The ability of the US to dispense patronage, to twist national arms and to sow the seeds of division remains very considerable.

However, a dominant view among PSC ambassadors is that the traditional division of EU member states into “Atlanticists” and “Europeanists” – a dichotomy much favoured by academics – is no longer accurate or, at the very least, is far too simplistic. Many ambassadors insist that there is no such automatic grouping, and that the way in which different member states will line up on an issue dominated by US policy considerations is essentially issue-specific. Thus the EU-27 would not line up in the same way on the proposed missile-defence scheme as they might on US policy towards Iran, or on US attitudes towards Cuba. The chances are that, on any really contentious issue involving the US, they will break up into opposing groups and that consensus will prove difficult to establish. But all were agreed that simplistic or caricatural designations of various member states as “Atlanticist” or “Europeanist” no longer wash. To some extent, this is actually the consequence of the Iraq crisis, when lessons were drawn in several national capitals about the divisive effect of taking too stark a national position. Thus, neither the traditional UK position of relatively automatic alignment, nor the perceived French position of systematic opposition has any chance of commanding consensus within the EU (or indeed within the PSC). EU diplomats are learning how to couch *national* responses in such a way as to make them appear to be *European* responses – the better to attract support within the PSC and the EU. Time will tell how this develops, but there is widespread agreement that, although reaching agreement on “America policy” is always tricky, the lines of division which ran through the EU in 2002-2003 no longer hold. EU member states are learning how to react to one another in more subtle ways.

The second difficult policy area is “Russia policy”. Since 2004 and the last big round of enlargement to former Soviet bloc countries, there have been at least three separate groups of countries in the EU with regard to “Russia policy”: those, predominantly but not exclusively from the former Soviet bloc, who are overtly confrontational with Moscow; those predominantly but not exclusively from Western Europe, who are convinced that a pact with Russia (delivering guaranteed oil/gas supplies) is a strategic necessity and are therefore prepared to turn a blind eye to most internal developments in Russia; and those who strive to marry pragmatism with principle. This picture, however, is already changing somewhat as events in Russia as well as discussions within the PSC demonstrate the limits of the possible with respect to “Russia policy”. The elements of convergence towards a pragmatic policy towards Russia are slowly emerging, both as the new accession states learn empirically that some of their more impulsive suggestions about confronting Russia will never find consensus and as some of the “least principled” member states are forced to face up to the realities of human rights and democracy violations in Russia. There were already, prior to the Georgian crisis in summer 2008, signs that both poles were converging on the centre. The Georgian crisis accelerated that trend. Renewed interviews with several ambassadors to the PSC in September and October 2008 produced significant findings. At meetings of the Committee, as well as at the various meetings of the European Council and the General Affairs Council, an astonishing degree of unity apparently emerged. Interviewees testified that all those involved had themselves been surprised by the degree of EU unity which formed around the need to develop a common, robust and subtle strategic policy towards Moscow. The future will tell whether this development consolidates or whether Russia will succeed once again in dividing the Europeans among themselves. But the role of the PSC in preparing the groundwork for the emergence of a united approach in summer 2008 cannot be underestimated.

Finally, on the Middle East, assessment of the collective mindset within the Committee varies somewhat. Some of the ambassadors insist that – especially when compared with the situation ten or even five years ago – there is little substantial difference between the

positions of all 27 national capitals. Others continue to feel that there are still real differences between distinct groups of member states – particularly over issues of “toughness” towards Israel or “indulgence” towards the Palestinian Authority. Yet others insist that these two assessments are by no means contradictory. While every EU member state, they argue, accepts the same bases for “final status” (two states living side by side in stability and harmony, an end to Jewish settlements, an end to suicide missions and a just solution to the problem of refugee return), they can differ over the most appropriate tone for a statement of regret about a particularly muscular Israeli intervention, or over the most acceptable way of interacting with Hamas, or over the most realistic timetable for the further implementation of the Road Map⁸. It has been suggested that the fact that the EU did not decide on an ESDP mission (as opposed to a UN mission) in the aftermath of the war in Southern Lebanon in 2006, demonstrates the very real limits to the consensual potential of European foreign and security policy that ESDP may in fact already have reached its peak (Podrazic 2007). But ESDP does not aspire to take out a patent or to establish a monopoly on crisis management missions. It is content to help out (the UN, NATO) wherever and whenever it can. That is also an important part of defining the identity of ESDP.

These difficult policy areas apart, however, the PSC has demonstrated, in its brief existence, a remarkable capacity to develop initiatives, to mount overseas missions and to manage operations which help define the parameters of an entire new policy area. They have, in short, used intergovernmental procedures to achieve supranational outcomes.

⁸ In July 2007, ten EU foreign ministers – from the Mediterranean countries – issued a joint letter to Tony Blair (in his capacity as newly appointed envoy of the Quartet) arguing that “the Road Map is dead”

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