Policy Networks and the Analysis of EU Foreign Policy

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(Comments are welcome)

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Introduction

The foreign policy of the EU is not only determined by its ‘multi-pillar’, ‘multi-level’ and ‘multi-location’ characters (Knodt and Princen, 2003; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008; Wallace, 2005), but also by its ‘multi-network’ character with regard to both policy making and policy implementation. Underneath the visible and formal ‘common’ foreign policy of the EU (through the first and second pillar) lays a partially segmented foreign policy based on the functional specialisation and division of tasks through noticeable yet informal small groups of actors, both in the European Union and in relationship to international actors. The best-known examples are the ‘directoire/directorate’-type activities of France, the UK and Germany in the context of the EU3 negotiations with Iran (together with the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy), and the Contact Group for the Balkans (together with Italy, the US and Russia). Besides, there are other less evident informal groups, which include smaller member states as well as representatives of EU institutions. Examples include the informal Contact Groups on Afghanistan and on the DRCongo, and the ‘EU Core Group on Somalia’.

These small informal groups of a limited number of member states and representatives of EU institutions - sometimes complemented, in a broader line-up, by a limited number of other international actors (international organisations and third countries) - can be captured by the concept of policy networks as developed in the existing literature on public policy and EU policy-making. Drawing on the definitions of Peterson and Bomberg (1999: 8) and Börzel (1998: 254), we define networks as semi-stable informal clusters of interdependent actors, who have or take a specific interest or stake in solving a certain policy problem and who dispose of resources required for shaping and implementing the policy, and who are willing to mobilize and pool these resources. In the existing literature on policy networks, both in general and in relations to EU policy-making, networks are characterized by their informality, lack of hierarchy, flexibility, speed, technicality and expertise to enhance the problem-solving capacity. Moreover, functional differentiation, sectoralization, the existence of societal subsystems and subsystems of actors are recurrent themes in the network literature. This attention for differentiation and segmentation are also central in the context of an analysis of European foreign policy networks. The assumption is that, beyond its common policies, EU foreign policy is indeed also characterized by a considerable degree of segmentation and differentiation.

The objective of this article is to examine whether and how concepts and theoretical insights from the policy network and network governance literature can be used to analyse the role of small informal groups of actors in European foreign policy. The purpose is to connect two separated research areas, on EU foreign policy and on policy networks, and to fill a gap in both sets of literature by applying and adapting the network concept to the field of foreign policy. The central argument of this article is that there are good reasons to assume, theoretically, that policy networks do also play a major role in EU foreign policy and, analytically, that the policy network concept is relevant and useful in the analysis of the foreign policy.

This article first focuses on the theoretical and empirical literature on policy networks in the political sciences and gives an overview of the main dimensions and typologies, and core definitions of policy networks used in political sciences. The next section evaluates the limited number of publications that make use of the network literature in the field of EU policies.

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1 In both cases, also the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Mr. Javier Solana, or one of his representatives, is also involved in the deliberations. For an analysis of the arguments pro and contra directorates, see Keukeleire (2001). For the Contact Group on the Balkans, see Schwegmann (2000), Keukeleire (2001) and Gégout (2002). For the EU3 on Iran, see Delpech (2004; 2005), Borda (2005) and Posch (2006).
foreign policy. The third section situates the application of the network concept on EU foreign policy within the broader theoretical debate on foreign policy, and applies and adapts the defined network dimensions and typologies to the analysis of EU foreign policy. The final section gives an overview of useful future research on networks and foreign policy, and also points to some methodological challenges and constraints that need to be overcome.

**Mapping policy networks in political sciences**

In political sciences, the concept of ‘policy networks’ has been applied to different subfields like public management and public administration, interest representation, and international relations and negotiations, as a tool to describe and analyze the complex relations and interactions of multiple actors in specific policy sectors. The following simplified classification of various network-approaches in political sciences starts from the different basic assumptions that policy networks have. The bulk of the theoretical and empirical literature on policy networks takes an interest mediation approach, focussing on the instrumental relations between state and civil society or business. Another approach in the policy network literature can be classified as the ‘governance school’, which ‘focuses on the structures and processes through which joint decision-making is organized, i.e. governance’ (Börzel, 1998: 259). A third approach we distinguish, is the use of policy networks in the literature on inter-organizational coordination. This literature starts from the ‘shortcomings of formal co-ordination structures’ between actors and organizations from multiple organizations dealing with the same issues and ‘the relative effectiveness of informal ones’ (Alexander, 1995: 95). These approaches are initially developed in public policy research and adopted in the literature on the EU and international relations.

**Interest mediation approach**

The ‘interest mediation school’, which has been developed mainly by Anglo-Saxon scholars, focuses on the relationships between the state and interest groups; on interest mediation between state and business or civil society, as a meso-level concept (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992: 249; Van Waarden, 1992: 31). As an alternative to pluralism and corporatism, networks are understood as a model of state-business relations, including ‘a large number of public and private actors from different levels and functional areas of government and society’ (Jordan and Schubert, 1992: 11). Core dimensions in the typologies of Marsh and Rhodes (1992), Marsh (1998), Rhodes (1999), Van Waarden (1992), Jordan and Schubert (1992) are: the degree to which the network members are integrated and upon the nature of the members and their resources and power; the number and type of the actors involved; the major function of the networks; and the extent of the balance of power. What characterizes policy networks in the interest mediation approach is the instrumental relationship between public and private actors. Public actors need information for policy-making, political support and assistance (technical and material) in the implementation of policies; while interest groups desire access to public policy formation and implementation. These interdependences between public and the relevant private actors leads to network structures where expert knowledge and information exchange procure access and influence to policy-making for interest groups and coalition partners for public authorities.

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2 This is a preliminary overview of the use of policy networks in political sciences. Other approaches to policy networks in political sciences still have to be investigated.
However in the same set of literature, the concept of policy networks does not exclusively serve as a metaphor to encompass public-private relations at the meso-level. Focusing on policy-making and implementation, Rhodes extends the concept of policy networks to exclusively intergovernmental relations, between local and central public authorities. Specific to these intergovernmental networks are the limited vertical interdependence and the extensive horizontal articulation as key characteristics (Rhodes and Marsh, 1992: 183). The lack of 'service delivery responsibilities' strengthens the informal horizontal coordination in intergovernmental networks without a central authority.

Moving to European Union policy-making, the policy network approach is widely applied in the study of interest mediation and civil society representation; encompassing different ways of public-private interaction and privileged access and relationships with European institutions and actors. Following the interest mediation approach, the majority of publications on policy networks in the EU focuses on internal policy areas like the CAP, the internal market, competition, health and environment, where socio-economic and business interests seek to ‘lobby’ and influence the differentiated, complex, and highly technical process of EU policy-making, including agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making and implementation (e.g. see Peterson, 2004; Skogstad, 2003; Falkner, 2000). This sectorized nature of EU policy-making makes information and expert knowledge a valuable tool for interest groups and business to influence EU policy-making. Specifically at EU level, this access and consultation is often encouraged or even guaranteed by the ‘under-resourced Commission’ (Kassim, 1994: 13) who wants to increase its problem-solving capacity and implementation-effectiveness, which gives this relationship an instrumental nature. The Commission plays indeed a central role as mediator or ‘broker’ (see Borrás, 2007) in this approach of networks. However, this approach is not applied to foreign policy in the existing literature on networks in EU policy-making.

Governance approach

The ‘governance approach’, which was originally mainly developed by German scholars, treated ‘policy networks as an alternative form of governance to hierarchy and market’ (Börzel, 1998: 255). ‘Co-ordination’ and ‘networks’ are key components in the governance-approach which emphasizes ‘the coordination of multiple players in a complex setting of mutual dependence and refers to the patterns that emerge from governing activities among these actors [...] independent of the existence of a central authority [...]’ (Jönsson et al., 1998: 321; Kohler-Koch, 1996: 188-9). What characterizes this network governance approach is its focus on ‘structures’ and ‘processes’ (Börzel, 1998: 259) and its emphasis on informal dynamics of co-ordination, negotiation and continuous process of interaction between actors in the policy-making process. In this approach, networks are formed among actors ‘who take an interest in the making of a certain policy and who dispose of resources (material and immaterial) required for the formulation, decision or implementation of the policy’ (Börzel, 1998: 259).

In the multi-level governance context of EU policy-making, the concept was also introduced into the EU literature to conceptualize the actual functioning of day-to-day policy-making (Jachtenfuchs, 2001: 254). The concept has been mostly applied to capture the multi-level and multi-actor negotiation processes on specific issues and with it the tendency of creating informal networks and coordination structures in the complex EU policy-making setting (Jönsson et al., 1998: 322). The need for more flexible negotiation mechanisms to overcome problems of deadlock on policy-making is also reinforced by the multitude of issues on the agenda (Pfetsch, 1998: 311). Through their informality, networks provide a
setting to overcome paralysis in negotiations and to mediate policy preferences. The notion of networks has unfolded as an alternative mode of policy coordination, acting as a ‘condition as well as a consequence of the growing differentiation of functional subsystems’ (Kohler-Koch, 1996: 188). In the publication of 2005 on network governance in an enlarged European Union, Kohler-Koch explores the EU ‘as a system of multiple networks’ (2005: 36) which is especially developed in the Community pillar. However, Kohler-Koch briefly applies the network concept to a specific case in foreign policy, the contact groups for Bosnia and Kosovo. Although these contact groups realised an informal but intensified coordination between international organizations, Kohler-Koch decouples the participation of EU member states in the contact groups from a common EU foreign policy, and subordinates capabilities and interests of network-members to their role ascription (2005: 49).

**Inter-organizational coordination**

A specific set of literature where the network approach is an important analytical framework, deals with informal co-ordination structures between different organizations dealing with the same issues, mostly referred to as multi- or inter-organizational coordination (e.g. see Alexander, 1995; Chisholm, 1992; Hanf and O’Toole, 1992; O’Toole, 1997; Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1999). Hanf and O’Toole (1992: 166) refer to inter-organizational networks to grasp the functional dependencies among individual components of the politico-administrative system, ‘relationships between levels as well as across functional boundaries.’ In this approach, coordination and adjustment in networks are becoming increasingly important in public administration and the field of policy implementation where multiple organizations are involved. Policy networks in public management indicate ‘patterns of relations between interdependent actors, involved in processes of public policy-making’ (Kickert, Klijn and Koopjan, 1999: 6). Central to the creation of inter-organizational networks is the notion of critical resource dependencies between functionally differentiated organizations in policy-making and implementation. Drawing on the inter-organizational theory, ‘all organizations are dependent on certain fundamental and critical resources. Functionally specialized organizations need to exchange resources with each others in order to achieve their goals’ (Hertting, 2007: 47). Coordination and adjustment are essential within inter-organizational networks to counter the problems of mutual dependencies between organizations in realizing their own (potentially conflicting) interests and goals (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000: 142). The need for each other’s resources and the realization of burden-sharing leads to resources exchange and pooling of capacities in networks and ‘cause[s] interactions between actors, which create and sustain relation patterns’ (Klijn, 1999: 31).

We find elements of this approach in the literature on (multi-level) coordination in the European Union. As Jordan and Schout (2006: 7) argue ‘networks are, in some situations, capable of providing alternative means of fulfilling complex policy goals to hierarchy. This is because in modern policy systems (particularly polycentric ones like the EU), central bodies have a diminishing capacity to exert hierarchical authority, and should instead be viewed as a participant – albeit a special one – in inter-organizational networks’. In European policy-making, the existence of inter-organizational networks plays an important role in resolving problems of horizontal and vertical coordination, both in policy formulation as in policy implementation. Especially for the latter, European actors and national administrations are mutually dependent and need to collaborate, given the scarcity of resources.

In an attempt to map the various approaches of policy networks in public policy, EU policy-making and international relations, this section has identified main features and assumptions
of policy networks in policy-making. Common to these different understandings is the assumption that policy networks provide an alternative setting for actors to solve ‘the tension between dependencies on the one hand and diverging and conflicting interests on the other (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000: 142). In this view, the creation of policy networks is subsistent to the need for coordination and collaboration between the relevant actors in order to overcome complexities in policy-making, and to step up to enhanced and more effective problem-solving policies. Similar assumptions can be found in the application of policy networks in the literature on EU policy making, arguing the fragmented and sectoralized nature of the EU leads to the creation of policy networks. However, these applications focus on policy-making in internal EC/EU policies. In the following section we provide detailed analysis of the limited number of publications on EU foreign policy where network-constellations were examined.

**Policy networks in EU foreign policy literature**

Recent publications on EU foreign policy refer to the growing importance of new flexibility mechanisms and the intensified pooling of know-how and capabilities to counter the current deficits in EU foreign policy. However, in most of this academic research on the foreign policy of the EU, the theoretical and analytical concepts of policy networks are almost completely ignored. This has been the case in most recent theoretical and empirical publications on European foreign policy (such as Knodt and Princen, 2003; Tonra and Christiansen, 2004; Schimmelfennig and Wagner, 2004; Carlsnaes et al., 2004, Hill and Smith, 2005; Bretherton and Vogler, 2006; Elgström and Smith, 2006; Smith K., 2003; Smith and Laatikainen, 2006; Cameron, 2007; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008). Remarkably, this is also the case in publications that focus on the institutional dimension and policy-making in EU foreign policy (such as Smith, M.E., 2004). As will be shown later on, some publications briefly and *en passant* mention the role of small groups of member states, without though elaborating on this and, particularly, without linking this with the rich literature on policy networks. Only a limited number of publications form an exception to this phenomenon and do extensively use the network concept to analyse EU foreign policy. Most important are the monograph (2003) of Krahmann, the edited volume of Elgström and Jönsson (2005), and the journal articles of Pfetsch (1998) and of Filtenborg, Gänzle and Johansson (2002). The following paragraphs illuminate how these authors use the network literature, and point to the assets and limitations of the application of the network concepts on the analysis of EU foreign policy.

Some other works (e.g. Peterson and Bomberg, 1999: 246-249; Smith M.E., 2004) do speak about networks, yet with the word ‘networks’ having a different contents. The networks refer in these publications to the interactions between diplomats and specialists from all member states on a sub-systemic level, through committees and working groups in the Council and through the Coreu network that links diplomats from all Ministries of Foreign Affairs. ‘Most pre-decision deliberation takes place within such expert working groups, and their role in framing problems and suggesting appropriate policies is crucial to the smooth operation of the CFSP’ (Smith M.E., 2004: 751). These network-labels refer to the Council’s substructure as a maze of working groups and expert committees where COREPER and Council decisions are predetermined (Peterson and Bomberg, 1999: 246). In this article, networks do not refer to these (semi-)institutionalized lower hierarchical levels of policy-shaping but focus on informal constellations of small groups of member states in the entire process of policy-making.
The first important work is *Multilevel Networks in European Foreign Policy* (Krahmann, 2003). Starting from the understanding of policy networks as ‘all actors who share an interest in a specific issue area and who are linked to each other through stable formal or informal relationships’ (Krahmann, 2003: 11), Krahmann transforms this British policy network approach into a multilevel network theory and applies it in combination with rational choice theory. The question the multilevel network theory brings into focus is ‘how actors are able to influence each other’s policy preferences and ultimately the outcome of the decision-making process’ (Krahmann, 2003: 33). In the three case studies Krahmann analyses, the main focus is the ability of actors at different levels to exert influence, based on the concept of power to analyse the power relations and the structure of the networks. The outcome of the decision-making process results from a sequence of preference changes and the exertion of pressure, and finally the existence of a winning coalition in favour of a particular policy linked directly to the ultimate decision-making unit (Krahmann, 2003: 157). What distinguishes and makes the multilevel network theory Krahmann develops relevant in comparison to different network approaches, is the possible integration of the national, European and international (transatlantic) level; the influence of national and international actors in European foreign policy networks; and the analysis of EU foreign policy-making and policy-outcomes.

Half of the publication of Elgström and Jönsson (2005) on *European Union Negotiations. Processes, Networks and Institutions* is devoted to the EU as an actor in international negotiations. In the second chapter, *Negotiations in Networks*, Jönsson and Strömvik elaborate the features of ‘networks’ in terms of their informality, lack of hierarchy, effectiveness; and their contribution to EU policy-making in terms of willingness to share information and to make implementable decisions. Moreover, they give an example that illustrates the existence networks and their effectiveness in the CFSP (with the launch of an EU mission in the DRC in 2003 on request of the UN), which confirms the possible application of the policy network approach in the area of high politics. In describing the internal debate on a possible EU mission in the DRC (especially when there is no agreed EU foreign policy, as was the case here) the networks- in which some member states together with the High Representative are present- play an important role in the policy formulation. However, the example seems rather isolated. Although ‘the role of informal networks in the ‘least likely’ case of the highly sensitive decision to send an EU military mission to Congo indicates their omnipresence’ (Jönsson and Strömvik, 2005: 26), the authors don’t make theoretical inferences on the applicability of the literature to policy networks in EU foreign policy, neither is the concept applied in other chapters of the book on the EU in international negotiations.

A similar analysis is made by Pfetsch (1998: 310-313) in *Negotiating the European Union: A Negotiation-Network Approach*, where he deals with negotiations of the EU with the outside world and the role of networks in these negotiations. In this article, Pfetsch focuses on the internal negotiation structures in relation to the settlement of external crises. Pfetsch argues that this multi-actor, multi-interest and multi-issue negotiation process of the EU in international politics is the core deficiency in the EU apparatus to face international crises, and calls upon this perspective for organizational frames like networks and assemblies. Although he suggests a network-approach in EU foreign policy negotiations – which ‘should be based less on a broad net of participants, and instead concentrate on a few politicians able to act in the name of the Union’ (Pfetsch, 1998: 313) – he does not develop the linkage between networks and EU foreign policy in a more concrete way.

The article of Filtenborg, Gänzle and Johansson (2002) *An Alternative Theoretical Approach to EU Foreign Policy: “Network Governance” and the Case of the Northern Dimension Initiative*, calls for a network strategy in EU foreign policy, involving the member states most concerned and ‘the external actors who possess politically relevant resources,
thereby allowing the EU to attain its individual foreign policy objectives by improving its policy-shaping and implementation capacity’ (Filtenborg et al., 2002: 389). This analysis is particularly relevant because it applies core dimensions and theoretical insights of the network approach on a specific EU foreign policy initiative and draws our attention to an additional function of networks specifically in EU foreign policy, namely the cooperation and coordination of policies and capabilities with third countries. This network strategy enables the EU to enhance its problem-solving capacities and to create the necessary ‘pragmatic cooperation between the EU and external actors’ (Filtenborg et al., 2002: 389).

Literature on enhanced cooperation, directories, contact groups and core groups have paid more attention to the phenomena that reflect networks, but without linking it to the theoretical network-concept and literature (Keukeleire, 2001; Gégout, 2002; Rynning, 2003; Schwegmann, 2000). Moreover, these publications focus mainly on crises in which the military security dimension prevails and in which the largest member states dominate. However, most of this literature refers to directorates and contact groups as a substitute to a common European policy (Schwegmann, 2000: 22), where the great powers do ‘not want to be restricted by consensus formation within CFSP […] and were not representing a common EU position (Kohler-Koch, 2005: 49). An exception is the analysis of Keukeleire (2006) on core groups in EU foreign policy, where also the relevant small member states and EU actors can participate in ‘core groups’ providing support and strengthening the effectiveness of EU foreign policy.

Other publications refer to new directions in analyzing EU foreign policy, and, more in particular to the creation of flexibility mechanisms and network-related concepts without ‘networks’ being main topic or angle of these publications. In the edited publication of Knodt and Princen Understanding the European Union’s External Relations (2003), ‘functional’ network-constellations are seen as an important element of the governance characteristics in the European multi-level system where ‘multiple levels and pillars also offer opportunities for actos to choose arenas and to exploit the possibilities inherent in the differences between levels and pillars. That way, they can actively make use of the implications that multiplicity offers for outcomes and interest configurations’ (Princen and Knodt, 2003: 200). However, these theoretical assumptions do not lead the analytical framework of policy networks in the examination of the Union’s external relations.

In some publications, the growing importance of the role of informal small groups of states is explicitly referred to as a mechanism to counter the complex institutionalization of EU foreign policy, however, this is done without approaching this from the network concept. As Cameron (2007: 211-2) points out ‘[…] one likely trend will be the further development of smaller groups dealing with specific issues. It does not make sense for all twenty-five member states to become involved in the details of every issue. What is likely to happen, therefore, is that there will be mini-groups that lead on certain issues’. In the edited volume of Elgström and Smith (2006), Jørgensen refers to it as ‘minilateralism’ which can be defined as ‘the creation of core groups and the multilateralisation of their agreements’ (2006: 36). Starting from the complex process of institutionalization, especially in the domain of foreign policy and ESDP, M.E. Smith (2004: 261) argues in his concluding chapter ‘the only way to achieve cooperation in military affairs would be to allow either a “concert” approach (whereby the ESDP is effectively led by the EU’s most willing states) or an institutionalized two-speed Europe […]’.
The relevance of networks in EU foreign policy

Before adapting and applying the various network typologies to the field of EU foreign policy, this section first explains why several core features of the various network approaches can be deemed valid for the analysis of EU foreign policy. We understand networks as semi-stable informal clusters of interdependent actors who have or take a specific interest in solving a certain policy problem and who dispose of resources required for shaping and implementing the policy, and who are willing to mobilize and pool these resources.

Conceptually, there are several good reasons to assume that policy networks do also play a major role in EU foreign policy and, consequently, that the policy network concept can be applied in the analysis of the foreign policy. The various conditions for the creation and functioning of networks as defined by the various policy networks approaches – and as analysed in the previous session - indeed seem to also exist in the field of EU foreign policy. Even more, the argument can be made that there are good reasons to assume that networks exists in the field of foreign policy more than in the first pillar policy areas. We evaluate successively the need to overcome complexity and hierarchy in formal policy-making and the need for coordination, focus on problem-solving, flexibility and informality.

Overcoming complexity and hierarchy in formal policy-making

Internal coordination

A first major reason why informal networks are formed is to overcome the constraints of complex institutional settings and to overcome the obstacles and even the deadlock in formal policy-making. As Jönsson and Strömvik (2005: 17) emphasize, the ‘formal organizational apparatus of the EU is extraordinary complex and cumbersome, with diffuse and overlapping competencies and responsibilities. […] That EU works, has to do a lot with the informal networks that have evolved in the shadow of the formal bodies’. Analysing the institutional setup of the making of foreign policy in the EU makes clear that this is even more complex, contains more potential obstacles and more risks of deadlock than is the case in the EU’s first pillar. This is a result of not only the multi-level but also multi-pillar character of EU foreign policy, of the complex set of (mainly shared) competences in the field of foreign policy, and the inherent limitations of the Council of Ministers.

EU foreign policy is not only developed through the EU’s second pillar (CFSP and ESDP), but also through the EU’s first pillar (through its trade instruments, assistance programmes, development policy, and its wide range through its contractual relations). The result is that EU foreign policy is to be made through a complex mixture of various policy-making regimes - with different formal competences for the EU, different sets of institutional actors being involved or excluded, different procedures to be followed, and different legal instruments to be used. Moreover, variations in policy-making regime do not only exist between the first and second pillar, but also within the first pillar itself (see, for instance, the difference between the areas of economic sanctions and development cooperation) (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 98-123).

The complexity is further increased through the composite distribution of competences, with potential problems not only arising from the many grey areas between EC and CFSP/ESDP competences (Duke, 2006), but also from the fact that foreign policy is predominantly a shared competence between the EU and its member states (see Gauttier, 2004) and that, for the member states, the EU is not the only international organization to pursue common or coordinated foreign policy.
The chance of problematic policy-making and even of deadlock is further increased as a result of the institutional features and decision-making system in the Council of Ministers – which is the actor that bears the main responsibility both in the decision-making process and in assuring vertical and horizontal consistency (art. 3 and 13(3) TEU) (see Nuttall, 2005). This is not only characterized by the still predominant unanimity rule in the second pillar, but also by the dual disease of too many items on the agenda of the “EU’s impossibly busy Foreign Ministers” (Gomez and Peterson, 2001) and of too many participants in the meetings of the Council of Ministers and its various substructures (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 69-81). The institutional setup of the Council and its substructures do not allow for serious coordination and cooperation in the broad range of issues that are on the agenda of Council, COREPER, Political and Security Committee and many specialized Working Groups. It is indeed impossible to ‘coordinate’ policy with 27 Ministers or 27 diplomats around the table; with also the Presidency, the High Representative and the Council staff not being able to help the Council overcoming this constraint with regard to all foreign policy issues.

The specific multi-pillar and multi-level character of EU foreign policy leads to a very clear need of coordination, both horizontally (across the pillars and between the institutions) and vertically (in view of the sharing of competences between the national and EU levels), in order to overcome constraints and potential deadlock of formal policy-making. However, the current institutional setup does not include satisfying mechanisms and settings to assure or at least facilitate the coordination between the various pillars, various institutions and various European and national actors – leading to a context which is conducive for the formation of networks to overcome these institutional constraints.

An additional reason is related to the important position which coordination and cooperation – in addition to ‘common’ action via ‘common’ instruments and ‘common’ actors – occupies both in the second pillar and in the field of development cooperation in the first pillar. ‘Strengthening systematic cooperation between member states in the conduct of policy’ (art. 12 TEU) is one of the methods which are formally foreseen in the Treaty to pursue the objectives of the EU’s CFSP. Also other Treaty articles in the Treaty’s CFSP chapter point to the need of cooperation and coordination between the embassies and delegations of the member states (and the Commission) in third countries, international organisations and conferences (arts. 16, 19 and 20 TEU). Provisions on development cooperation explicitly state too that the EC and member states may not only undertake joint action, but also shall coordinate their policies and shall consult each other on their programmes (Art. 180 TEC) (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 159-161).

In view of the dynamic described in the literature on coordination and policy networks, it seems to be logical that the actors who have most interest in a better coordination will fall back on a system of networks to at least allow for the necessary coordination between the most relevant and most interested actors. Internally, a network provides a small informal framework to intensify internal coordination or tackle differences among relevant member states – as a prerequisite to tackle issue-area. Networks answer to problems of hierarchy and coordination in formal settings and to the problem of limitations of the EU foreign policy mechanism through its support for the preparation, elaboration, implementation and follow-up of EU policy, and through the intensification and pooling of the own efforts and assets of the network members. Networks can provide support for the Council, the Council’s substructures, the High Representative (or EU Special Representative) and/or the Commission in preparing new EU initiatives and decisions; and/or in concretising, implementing and assuring the follow-up of the decisions of the EU vis-à-vis this area or issue. European foreign policy networks allow to coordinate not only different relevant actors, but also the activities developed within different but overlapping policy areas (such as conflict prevention, mediation, financial support, development policy, security sector reform…). A network can
examine and propose measures to strengthen the various dimensions of horizontal and vertical consistency – with a special focus on the consistency of the national policies of the member states in the network.

In short, there are sufficient reasons to assume that - at least as much as in first pillar policy making - member states and institutions have to resort to what Héritier (1997: 172) labelled in her analysis of policy-making the first pillar as “subterfuge”: the creative use of informal strategies to avoid deadlock in formal policy-making. The following sections give further support for the argument that the creation and use of networks can be a major element of these informal strategies.

**External coordination**

The need of coordination is also the result of the – often disregarded - ‘multi-location’ nature of foreign policy (Wallace, 2005: 78). The EU is only one of the international organisations and forums through which member states pursue foreign policy objectives and is thus only one among the various relevant locations and settings for foreign policy-making, alongside NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Council of Europe, the UN, the IMF and World Bank, the Commonwealth, sub-regional cooperation forums, and bilateral relations. Most foreign policy challenges are tackled by a wider set of international organizations, which is logical in view of the multifaceted nature of most foreign policy challenges, the different competences and specialization of the various international organizations, and the different organizational preferences of the member states. The result is that nearly all foreign policy actions undertaken by the EU are developed in parallel to the actions of other international organizations (and sometimes also on their initiative or at their request). This multi-location nature of foreign policy-making explains the strong need to coordinate policy with other international organizations and other relevant third countries - both on the general level (objectives and strategies) and the level of the nitty-gritty of specific foreign policy dossiers.

However, despite the strong need for inter-organizational coordination, formal coordination mechanisms with other international actors are in general too weakly developed (or do simply not exist) for allowing intensive and detailed coordination on specific foreign policy dossiers. Whilst stronger coordination mechanisms have been developed with the UN in the last couple of years, particularly in the field of crisis management, the ‘intersection of the EU and UN multilateralisms’ in general still remains ‘dysfunctional’ (Laatikainen and Smith, 2006: 21-22; see also Wouters et al., 2006). The situation is even worse with regard to most other international organizations and particularly the international financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, even though their policies have major foreign policy implications (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 307-310; McNamara and Meunier, 2002). Finally, even if some formal coordination mechanisms do exist on a bilateral basis (EU-UN, EU-OSCE, etc.), what does not exist at all are formal coordination mechanisms that bring together a larger number of international actors - even though precisely this is needed in view of the ‘multi-location’ nature of foreign policy-making towards most issues.

3 Whereas this phenomenon can be pointed to as ‘multilevel’ foreign policy (cf. Krahmann, 2003; Knodt, 2004), we prefer the label ‘multi-location’ foreign policy (Wallace, 2005) in order to avoid the notion of hierarchy often implied by the multilevel concept. This is important in this context, because it is precisely the lack of hierarchy between international organizations (with the partial exception of the UN) which makes inter-organizational coordination more difficult.

4 These problems of inter-organizational coordination are also related to another fundamental constraint: that is that both the member states of the EU and other third states have proved extremely reluctant to accept the EC or EU as a member of international organizations, which obviously further complicates the possibility of coordination and cooperation (Govaere et al., 2004; for a comprehensive overview of the status of the EU in international organisations, see Wouters et al., 2006: 402-405)
The conclusion is clear: the strong need for coordination of actions of various international actors, in combination with the limitations (or absence) of existing formal inter-organizational co-ordination, lead to a context which is conducive for the formation of informal networks in order to create an adequate setting for coordination. The coordination with and assurance of a close and permanent interaction with other actors is often also one of the main motives behind the creation of an EU foreign policy network. A network can, in a systematic way, intensify the coordination with other external actors that are active concerning the area or issue at stake. A network can broaden and intensify the political dialogue with third countries or regions and regional and international organisations allowing a more flexible, frequent, intensive and purposive interaction.

European foreign policy networks can also be part of a broader international foreign policy network. As noted by Börzel ‘networks can provide additional, informal linkage between the inter- and intra-organizational decision-making arenas. Such informal linkages, based on communication and trust, overlap with institutionalized structures of co-ordination and link different organizations independently from the formal relationships between them. Networks help to overcome the structural dilemma of bargaining systems because they provide redundant possibilities for interaction and communication which can be used to solve decision-making problems (including bargaining dilemma)’ (Börzel, 1998: 262).

The growing problem-solving expectations of the EU

The first section pointed to the need for increased coordination - overcoming intra- and inter-organisational policy-making problems - as a key factor in explaining the creation of networks. Equally important factor is the pressing demand for effective external problem-solving. There is a need to increase the problem-solving capacities in an increasingly complex and differentiated international environment. Most concrete foreign policy problems, crises and conflicts are of high complexity, and are also very different. In other words, the conflict in Kosovo is very different than that in Somalia, which is again different from the one in Iran. With all these conflicts being characterized by their own intricacies, this has several consequences. Firstly, this points to the need of a solid and detailed knowledge of all dimensions of the foreign policy issue, as well as of the capacity to get hold on sensitive inside information and to gain information of the most recent developments. Secondly, this implies that, to be relevant and potentially effective, a foreign policy needs to be adapted and fine-tuned to the specific issue and has to be continuously adapted – with only a limited number of actors being capable to do just that. Thirdly, the nature of the foreign policy issue often makes informal setting essential – and thus induces or requires creation of informal networks.

Hence, there is a multiple dynamic that can lead to the creation of networks in EU’s foreign policy. The statement that ‘member states shall support the Union’s external and security policy actively...’ (Art. 11 TEU) is more than an optimistic treaty article. Support, particularly from those member states that can make a difference in specific policy dossiers, is often essential for EU action and success. A lack of support can also explain the lack of success of EU foreign policy initiatives. Cooperation and coordination are also important components in first pillar policy domains such as development cooperation.

The problem-solving focus of interested states (stakeholders)

This problem-solving focus is mirrored in the strong willingness and motivation of highly interested actors or ‘stakeholders’ to seriously address a specific foreign policy issue - which is discussed in this section. It is also mirrored in the willingness and ability of the stakeholders
to mobilize and pool the necessary resources to tackle this foreign policy issue - which is discussed in the next section. Members of a policy network are not merely interested in a policy issue and do not only have interests to defend that policy issue, but they are also interested and willing to deal more intensively with that policy issue and to find a solution for the related problems.

Two observations can be made with regard to the first dimension. A first observation is that a discrepancy can exist between the priorities and resulting problem-solving focus of the EU and those of each of the member states. The EU has developed a foreign policy towards more or less all parts of the world and all possible foreign policy issues. However, it is obvious that the EU has defined priorities both thematically and geographically (with the Balkans being the main geographic priority), and does not always have an active operational policy that goes much beyond the level of declaratory diplomacy, ‘political dialogue’ and traditional contractual relations with a country or region. This can lead to frustration among member states which do not see their problem-solving focus, vis-à-vis a specific third country or foreign policy issue, to be matched by a similar problem-solving focus in the EU.

A second observation is that a wide diversity exists in the priorities and problem-solving focus of the member states. Historical, geographical, economic and other factors explain why – with the exception of the major issues in international relations – most foreign policy issues are only of interest for a limited number of member states, and why – beside the largest countries - most member states only have a strong problem-solving focus with regard to a limited number of third countries, regions or foreign policy issues. The indifference of member states towards each other’s foreign policy priorities and the resulting obstruction of a more activist and problem-solving EU foreign policy can lead to frustration in those member states demanding a more dynamic EU policy towards a specific third country, region or issue (Keukeleire, 2006: 5-6; Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 130-141).

Taken together, both observations explain why countries with a strong problem-solving approach towards a specific issue may seek to find other actors within or outside the EU framework to compensate for the limitations of EU foreign policy – providing a good basis for the development of informal networks.

**Problem-solving capabilities and resource dependency**

The problem-solving focus also explains the importance of mobilizing the resources necessary to tackle a foreign policy issue. This brings us to the issue of resource dependency, which is considered in the various sets of network literature as one of the main factors for explaining the creation of networks. As Börzel (1998: 263) points out, ‘Actors form networks to exchange their resources on which they are mutually dependent for the realization of common gains (policies)’. This implies that the creation of a network depends on actors who not only have or take a strong interest in dealing with a certain policy problem, but which also dispose of the necessary (material and immaterial) problem-solving capabilities.

Translated to foreign policy, these resources can be related to both material and immaterial resources. Material resources are related for instance to budgetary resources (for development aid, for peace keeping operation, for macro-economic support, et); personnel (having a well-functioning foreign office, being able to rely on specialized civil servants or diplomats, possessing an extensive diplomatic network in another region, etc); or military resources (military personnel for peace-keeping operation in that area, military bases in third countries, intelligence, transportation facilities). Examples of immaterial resources are knowledge, expertise and experience in a specific foreign policy domain or region, credibility, influence and prestige, high-level contacts with other relevant actors, etc.

Resource dependency is also highly relevant in the context of EU foreign policy and can thus be seen as conducive for the creation of foreign policy networks within the context of EU...
foreign policy. This is related to both the limitations and the very large differences in problem-solving capabilities of the member states (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan, 2008: 125-141; see also IISS, 2006; SIPRI, 2006). In view of their limited foreign policy resources, most member states are able to develop an active and operational foreign policy towards only a limited number of foreign policy issues. Put differently, for most foreign policy issues, it seems that only a limited number of member state and/or institutional actors are relevant in terms of possessing problem-solving capabilities. Moreover, even if countries or institutions are relevant actors, it is rare that one actor possesses all required resources to tackle an issue, which is true both for the EU (and its pillars and institutional actors, such as the Council, Commission and High Representative) and for the member states.

These elements not only points to the strong mutual dependence and need to pool the foreign policy resources of the relevant actors: within the context of the EU as well as within a broader international setting in view of the above-mentioned multi-location nature of foreign policy-making. The fact that existing EU foreign policy system and international system do only to a limited extent provide mechanisms and structures to practically facilitate pooling and mobilization of sources between limited numbers of interested relevant actors, is conducive to the forming of informal networks as adequate settings for joint resource mobilisation. These networks may include only EU actors (member states and/or EU institutions) or EU actors and other international actors.

Within the context of the EU, with its 27 member states, it is obvious that the largest member states, particularly France, the UK and Germany, not only have interests and are interested in problem-solving in a larger number of foreign policy issues, but can also rely on a much wider arsenal of problem-solving capabilities. However, this picture has to be nuanced, as this does not mean that networks developed in the context of EU foreign policy will only consist of the largest member or that the largest member states will systematically be part of all foreign policy networks. Also London, Paris and Berlin are confronted with limitations in terms of foreign policy sources, and will neither be willing nor be able to deploy foreign policy resources for the wide array of foreign policy issues. Moreover, as power is defined in terms of ‘policy-specific capacity to act’ (Kohler-Koch, 1999: 31), networks can also include small or medium-sized member states which in general might indeed have limited power in terms of resources, but which nevertheless possess the required policy-specific problem-solving capabilities. In short, the question is not whether a country is small or large, but whether a country is relevant for a specific foreign policy matter and can provide an added-value in terms of mobilizing relevant problem-solving resources.

However, central in the notion of interdependency is the concept of power, referring to the possession of the policy-specific resources and the position in the network. The degree of interdependency varies according to the distribution of power between the network members ‘which is of course a function of the distribution of resources and needs among the actors’ (Van Waarden, 1992: 36). The power relations among the network members vary according to the possession of material and immaterial resources and according to the position a member occupies in a network or in multiple networks. The latter refers to the ‘significance of so-called linking-pin organizations, which occupy central positions in terms of being reachable from, and able to reach, most other organizations in the network and may serve as brokers and communication channels’ (Jönsson and Strömvik, 2005: 18). A linking-pin actor is characterized by its centrality in a network and its intermediary position between other actors. In most network analysis of EU policy-making, the European Commission emerges as a linking-pin actor in networks. However, in European foreign policy networks, these linking-pin actors can also be the Council’s secretariat, the High Representative or a member state.

In European foreign policy networks, stakeholders are in the first place public actors: representatives of relevant governments and EU institutional actors. In a wider setting,
networks can also include representatives of other relevant international actors, such as third states and other international organizations. Furthermore, we also have to include the possibility of non-public actors participating in the networks. These non-public actors, like non-governmental organisations and multinational corporations can play an important role in the development of policies and implementation capabilities through their potential expertise and resources.

However, various possible differences also exist not only regarding interest, capacities, interdependencies, but also in approaches and strategies. Variations are also possible in the intensity of membership, leading to a kind of variable geometry in the foreign policy networks. Networks can indeed exist in different compositions, reflecting variations (also among network members) of interest and power and resulting in different areas of attention within a given network, in a factual division of labour, and differentiation in involvement of the different members. This means that networks can consist of various sub-networks and consist of different types of members. The status of actors within a network and – related to this – the existence of sub-networks is a function of time, substance, intensity and power/influence. Divergence in the resources, power and (intensity of) interests can explain different layers in a network, leading to the co-existence of both a core group and a peripheral group within the network on a specific issue area, and subgroups within the network. However, division of labour is also possible among core members, with member states focussing on different dimensions of the issue area.

**Flexibility and informality**

Two last interrelated conducive conditions for the creation of networks are the need of greater flexibility and informality, which are directly linked to both the internal and external problem-solving focus. As Jönsson and Elgström indicate, ‘one of the main advantages of networks over formal organizations is that they allow informal interorganizational coordination, which avoids problems associated with hierarchy and representation, while facilitating the development of trust and frank exchanges of information’ (2005: 3). This flexibility is both related to the number of actors involved in a network, as to the ability of the network to react to the changing policy context. As Börzel indicates, ‘networks serve as an ideal institutional framework for horizontal self-co-ordination between [public and private] actors, on which policy-making is relying in an increasingly complex, dynamic and diversified environment where hierarchical co-ordination is rendered dysfunctional’ (1998: 263).

The nature of the foreign policy issues and the recent developments in the EU’s foreign, security and defence policy in particular further increase this need for flexible and informal networks. Small informal and flexible frameworks are often crucial for effective foreign policy actions. The limitation of the number of actors makes it easier to share sensitive information, to act swiftly to external changes and to conduct complex negotiations on differentiated and often technical issues. This again points to the need of a solid and detailed knowledge of all dimensions of the foreign policy issue, as well as of the capacity to get hold of sensitive inside information and to gain information of the most recent developments – which is easier to achieve in small informal settings.

Moreover, the EU in the last five years has gradually increased its own foreign policy capabilities: through the new military and civilian crisis management tools within both ESDP and the EC’s toolbox and through the strengthened institutional setup of the second pillar. This also resulted in growing expectations about the EU’s foreign policy actions, and induced the EU to be increasingly involved in problem-solving actions towards a rising number of issues in an increasingly complex and differentiated international environment. Paradoxically,
although this pointed to the growing problem-solving capacities of the foreign policy of the EU, this in turn also elevated the resource dependency of the EU which is forced to increasingly go beyond the level of declaratory diplomacy, ‘political dialogue’ and contractual relations. The result is that it is nearly unavoidable that ‘effective problem-solving capacity disaggregates into a collection of sub-systems of actors with specialized tasks and limited competence and resources’ (Hanf and O’Toole, 1992: 166).

Questions for future research

This application of networks on EU foreign policy raises several questions for further research, but only some of them will be formulated here. A main objective of future research is to test the hypothesis whether the foreign policy of the EU is not only determined by its multi-pillar and multi-level character, but also by the ‘multi-network’ character of the policymaking. Is it correct to state that - underneath the visible and formal common foreign policy of the EU (through the first and second pillar) – there appears to be a partially segmented foreign policy, based on the functional specialisation and division of tasks through informal, small and often slightly visible networks which consist of a limited number of member states, representatives of EU institutions and - in a broader constellation - representatives of limited number of other international actors (international organisations and third countries)? In this view, the first task is to investigate under what conditions foreign policy networks are created, and ‘are also relevant for the policy process and policy outcome by, for example, enhancing or reducing the efficiency and legitimacy of policy-making […] and under which conditions policy networks may enhance the efficiency and legitimacy of policy-making’ (Börzel, 1998: 267). This is an important question, considering that most literature takes the positive effect of policy networks in policy-making and implementation for granted. One of the basic assumptions is that network structure partially determines policy outcomes (Peterson, 2004: 134). However it is important to investigate under what conditions networks affect the outcome of policies, both on EU level and the international level. Is it correct that these networks are essential to avoiding blockages in both policy-making and implementation, to accommodate the great diversity in power, interests and preferences of the member states, and to attune the policy to that of other important actors? Subsequently, is the concept of ‘policy network’ more than a metaphor to describe informal relations between actors?

A second theoretical challenge concerns the definition and operationalization of the concepts and dimensions. First of all, this challenge comprises the ‘proliferation of concepts attempting to capture different kinds of communities, networks and associations that often intersect, overlap or operate at different levels of analysis’ (Lindquist quoted in Howlett, 2002: 247). The varying definitions and understandings of the ‘policy network’ concept and its dimensions hamper empirical research and theoretical inferences, and require a careful operationalization (see Goertz, 2006).

Related to this is the development of a typology of European foreign policy networks, based on the existing typologies of policy networks in political sciences. Firstly the membership can vary according to the interests and willingness, and to the disposition of resources. The latter not only refers to the relevant members, but also to the network structure. This encompasses the degree of interdependency and subsequently the power relations among the network members and the de facto degree of hierarchy this might imply. This also raises the question of the degree of openness and diversity of the network, which can exist in variable compositions and different levels of integration. Besides membership and structure, the functions of European foreign policy networks and the nature of the relations with other
actors are important topics for further research. This relationship can have a supportive or a complementary nature, but other possibilities have to be included in further research.

Another research question is how the network analysis can contribute to the study of informal decision-making in the EU, and particularly in EU foreign policy. The existing literature on informal policy-making and everyday decision-making in the EU (see Lewis, 2003; 2005; Smith, H., 2002; Rittberger and Stacey, 2003) comprises informal dynamics in the EU, but does neither describe nor theoretically analyse these informal networks. The same conclusion holds for the research and literature on policy-making in the Council (see Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace, 2006) where the Council is perceived as a setting for ‘networked governance’, however without attention for networks with only a limited number of member states. The Council is too much seen as a cluster of 27 member states and set as a central actor, with specific roles and features, with voting procedures and inter-state bargaining, and relative power of the various actors determining the outcomes of the deliberation in interaction with other institutional actors. In concrete issues, however, only a limited number of member states are really involved. This connects to what Hazel Smith (2002: 8) emphasis as the institutional fallacy: the too much focus on institutions and formal rules and procedures as defined by the member states themselves in their intergovernmental bargains, and too much focus on ‘visible’ aspects in the policy process.

The research results can also serve as the basis of other research questions in which it would be possible to go deeper into what Peterson (2004: 133) in his evaluation of the ‘policy networks’ literature indicated as one of the most important challenges for the future: ‘develop overtly normative analysis of how policy networks can be constructed to help solve problems of compliance […], management […] and legitimacy […].’ Similar questions related to the normative implications of policy networks for representative democracy are formulated by Marsh and Rhodes (1992: 249).

However, further research on the role of networks in EU foreign policy will be hampered by serious methodological and operational challenges. Insight in national foreign policies of the relevant member states enables to map the participants and the structure of EU foreign policy networks – contrary to Jönsson and Strömvik (2005: 23) who argue that this is one of the most difficult challenges due to the ‘sensitive nature of the issues involved and the relatively fewer participants of a non-governmental nature’. However, the main obstacles to research on networks in EU foreign policy we identify are the collection and availability of current and historical data on network membership, structure and functions. Due to the limited formalisation, institutionalisation, the informality and limited visibility of the interactions (with the importance of mail correspondence), networks are difficult to observe. The value of interviews is rather limited and the need of participative observations is crucial. As Sørensen and Torfing argue (2007: 311) ‘another methodological challenge is to develop more interactionist research practice based on a continued dialogue with the knowledgeable and reflexive policy actors inhabiting the empirical field that we are studying’.

**Conclusion**

The concept of policy networks and its dimensions and features can constitute a useful tool in the analysis of EU foreign policy. Functional differentiation, sectoralization, the existence of societal subsystems and sub-systems of actors are recurrent themes in the network literature. This attention for differentiation and segmentation are also central in the context of an analysis of foreign policy networks. The assumption is that, beyond its common policies, EU foreign policy is indeed also characterized by a considerable degree of segmentation and differentiation.
As we have argued, there are only a limited number of publications that refer to networks in EU foreign policy. However, there are good reasons to assume, theoretically that policy networks do play a major role in EU foreign policy and, analytically, that the policy network concept is relevant and useful in the analysis of EU foreign policy. The main arguments we define are the need to overcome complexity and hierarchy in formal policy-making, the need to increase effective problem-solving and the need for flexibility in a differentiated international environment. Both internally within the EU and externally in relation to other international actors, these conditions increase the necessity to create and sustain informal networks to procure enhanced coordination and strengthened effective problem-solving mechanism.
References


