European Integration and EU External Action

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Nino Bakovic

European Integration and EU External Action: Climate,

Security, Diplomacy and Legal Fragmentation (Part 1: Nikolay Barekov, Part 2: Nino Bakovic)

Part 1: European Integration in Climate Policy, Security, and Diplomacy

Opening

European Integration for a while has been not only just about economic cooperation or the single market. The EU now acts collectively in areas of: climate policy & environmental protection, peacekeeping & conflict prevention and international relations and diplomacy. This has led to analysis that EU integration is specifically strongest when it comes to climate policy, since the EU creates binding targets regarding such policies, while integration has become weaker when it comes to both peacekeeping and diplomacy, since those areas heavily rely on agreement between Member States. This policy brief will recommend: improved and more coherent external actions from the EU overall, improved crisis-response capacity from the EU, and a stronger implementation when it comes to climate law.

Climate Policy & Environment

Climate policy is one the EU's strongest examples when it comes to European Integration. This is the case since the EU has binding legal targets regarding climate policy, along with member states being expected to follow common climate goals and because policy

regarding the climate affects agriculture, transport, energy, trade and importantly industry. There are also specific EU laws that are important to mention. Regulation (EU) 2021/1119, which is also referred to as the European Climate Law, makes the EU's goal of climate neutrality, specifically by the year of 2025, a legally binding matter. Furthermore, it sets a target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions specifically by a minimum of 55% by the year of 2030, compared to the levels of 1990. Another policy worth mentioning is the Fit for 55 package. This package is a set of reforms which are set out in order to assist the EU in reaching their 2030 emission target. This specifically affects the areas of: renewable energy, energy efficiency,

transport, land use, and emissions trading. A noteworthy case study example of climate policy and environment is

the Nature Restoration Regulation, which is Regulation (EU) 2024/1991. This regulation

requires action by the EU in order to restore damaged ecosystems. With the regulations setting out the aim to restore a minimum of 20% of EU sea and land areas by the year 2030. This is significant since it shows the EU's environmental ambition while also displaying the political tensions due to some industries, farmers and even member states, worrying about economic costs. Overall for the section, climate integration is in a legally advanced stage, but can cause potential political resistance in the case where Member States and affected sectors feel

unsupported. The policy recommendation here being, that the EU should provide more technical and financial support in order for Member States which are specifically implementing climate laws. With this being specifically important for: poorer regions in the EU, farmers, fossil fuel dependent Member States industries which are energy-intensive.

Peacekeeping & Conflict Prevention

Regarding peacekeeping and conflict prevention, they show a significantly limited type of European Integration. This is the case since the EU can launch missions abroad, but despite that it heavily depends on Member States for factors like: exports, police, funding, troops and political agreement. This does signify EU activity in security, but definitely way less integrated, than the integration regarding climate law. A significant EU framework for this topic is the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The CSDP is within the EU's wider security and foreign policy. The CSDP allows the EU to conduct: military missions, civilian missions, crisis management, border assistance, conflict prevention, rule of law support and training missions. A specific legal factor for this topic is Article 42 TEU. This article provides the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy basis. Furthermore, the following article, Article 43 TEU is

responsible for tasks like: conflict prevention, peacekeeping, humanitarian & rescue tasks, crisis management and post conflict stabilisation. A case study example for this topic is the EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is an EU military operation that supports stability in

Bosnia and Herzegovina. It serves as an example of the EU's role in preventing conflict in the Western Balkans. It also shows the EU's interest in enlargement and stability. Overall, the EU has developed security tools, despite that they are limited in this regard due to Member States' current willingness to cooperate. The policy recommendation here would be for the EU to

strengthen their civilian crisis-management capacity and rapid deployment. With that they should also improve cooperation with the UN, NATO, local governments in conflict regions and regional organizations.

International Relations & Diplomacy

For International Relations and Diplomacy, EU diplomacy is important since the EU acts as a global economic, regulatory and diplomatic actor. The EU uses actions like: sanctions, trade agreement, climate diplomacy, development aid, enlargement policy and diplomatic partnerships. Even with this, the EU's foreign policy can be limited if Member States disagree. A specific EU law treaty for this topic is the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). It is based on EU

treaties, specifically, Title V of the TEU. Further Article 21 TEU, says that external action should be encouraged: rule of law, democracy, human rights, peace, international law and sustainable development. A specific policy example is the Global Gateway strategy. It serves as the EU's external investment and partnership strategy, supporting projects with: infrastructure, climate & energy, digital connectivity, health, transport, education & research. It matters since it shows the EU using economic power as a diplomatic tool while helping the EU compete in developing regions. A specific case study is the EU climate diplomacy which displays the EU promoting

climate goals, through green investment, development partnerships, renewable energy support and international negotiations. Overall, the EU does have diplomatic influence, but the external action that it carries out can seem disconnected when its Member States disagree on key

diplomatic priorities. A policy recommendation here would be that the EU should improve its external policy by connecting: trade, security, enlargement, diplomacy, development aid and climate policy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the three discussed areas display an uneven European Integration. Climate Policy is by far the strongest due its reliance on binding EU leave, while diplomacy and peacekeeping heavily depend on Member States agreeing. The EU should strengthen their

climate funding, cooperation with NATO and the UN, its crisis response and logical external action.

Part 2: Bridging Legal Fragmentation in EU External Action: Security, Human Rights, Economic Policy, and Digital Governance

The European Union's external action framework specifically across security and defence, human rights, economic relations, and digital governance is structurally fragmented despite valuable legal development. While areas like trade policy showcase strong supranational integration, others particularly security, defence, and cybersecurity are characterised by intergovernmental decision-making and limited legal enforceability.

This brief identifies key weaknesses in the EU's legal architecture and argues that fragmentation undermines coherence, enlargement alignment, and global strategic effectiveness. It recommends targeted legal clarification, greater institutional coordination, and selective expansion of supranational mechanisms.

Problem Statement

The EU aspires to act as a coherent global actor, as reflected in Treaty on European Union (TEU) provisions on external action. However, its legal framework is uneven across policy domains: security and defence remain politically driven and weakly institutionalised, human rights lack a clear legislative competence and consistent enforcement, economic external action is fragmented beyond trade policy and emerging domains such as AI and cybersecurity are only partially harmonised.

This fragmentation creates legal uncertainty, weakens enforcement, and complicates the accession process under Article 49 TEU, where candidate states must align with EU law despite inconsistencies within it.

Policy Context

Security and Defence (CFSP/CSDP)

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) are governed primarily by intergovernmental mechanisms. Although Article 24 TEU establishes EU competence, decision-making relies on unanimity, and national sovereignty

remains central.

Critically, Article 4(2) TEU preserves Member States' exclusive control over national security, limiting EU legislative capacity. Judicial oversight is also constrained under Article 275 TFEU.

International Economic Relations

The EU holds exclusive competence over trade through the Common Commercial Policy (Art. 207 TFEU), making it a strong global trade actor. However, development cooperation and financial assistance operate under different legal regimes, creating fragmentation.

"Mixed agreements," requiring ratification by Member States, further complicate external economic governance and slow policy implementation.

AI and Cybersecurity

Recent legislation such as the AI Act (Regulation 2024/1689) and the NIS2 Directive reflects growing EU engagement in digital governance under the internal market legal basis (Art. 114 TFEU).

However, these frameworks exclude defence and national security applications, leaving critical gaps. Cybersecurity governance remains largely national, and the external dimension of cyber policy is underdeveloped.

Key Weaknesses Across Policy Areas

The absence of a clear competence category for CFSP creates constitutional uncertainty. Across domains, overlapping legal bases and divided competences prevent a unified external strategy.

Security and defence policies rely on unanimity, limiting effectiveness and slowing decision-making. This weakens the EU's capacity to respond to crises.

Limited jurisdiction of the Court of Justice in CFSP and the political nature of human rights enforcement reduces legal accountability.

Enlargement and external relations rely on policy-based criteria rather than fully codified legal standards, reducing predictability for candidate states.

AI and cybersecurity frameworks are advanced but incomplete, particularly regarding military applications and external governance.

Policy Options

Option 1: Clarify Competence Structures

Pros:

Cons:

Option 2: Expand Qualified Majority Voting in CFSP

Pros:

Cons:

Option 3: Strengthen Judicial and Enforcement Mechanisms

Pros:

Cons:

Option 4: Enhance Integration in Digital and Cyber Policy

Pros:

Cons:

Recommendations

It is necessary to provide an approach that is combined:

These reforms would enhance the EU's capacity to act as a consistent and credible global actor while maintaining respect for Member State sovereignty.

Conclusion

The EU's external action framework reflects a tension between supranational ambition and intergovernmental control. While strong in specific areas such as trade, it remains legally underdeveloped in security, fragmented in human rights enforcement, and incomplete in emerging technological domains. Addressing these structural weaknesses is essential not only for

internal coherence but also for the EU's effectiveness in enlargement, global governance, and strategic competition.