

## Balance of Competences (BoC) review: foreign policy report

### Event at British Embassy Berlin, 26 February 2013

British Embassy Berlin hosted key Berlin thinktankers and political commentators on Europe and foreign policy to collect evidence for the BoC foreign policy report. The following is a summary of key points made by participants. As such it does not reflect BE Berlin or FCO views. We framed the discussion around three questions:

#### Where does the EU add value on foreign and defence policy?

- Where Member States (MS) share common interests, the combined weight of like-minded states is greater than the sum of its parts; e.g. on Iran (sanctions), the Arab Spring (European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)), Western Balkans.
- But the fact that CFSP is not binding, and requires unanimity, is both a strength (as above) and a weakness (e.g. Libya).
- Day-to-day coordination in Brussels and overseas works well (e.g. Heads of Mission meetings / reports). Although the headline stuff happens at the Council of Ministers, most of the decisions are forged at lower levels and very effectively.
- International trade policy is where the EU really adds value, in particular in setting international norms and standards. Access to the internal market gives the EU leverage in demanding higher standards on e.g. human rights, labour rights, animal welfare etc. in third countries like India and China. This would not have been achievable by individual MS.
- One participant cited a study which found that the EU remained active, despite the financial crisis, in those areas where the Commission had the most influence. This was because the EU was subject to longer-term financial planning (e.g. Multiannual Financial Framework), while national budgets (defence, Overseas Development Aid) had been considerably scaled down.
- The EU adds greater value to the small MS, who don't have global impact alone, and who now rely on the External Action Service (EAS) for their reporting.
- Specific EU successes include:
  - Kosovo talks (where Ashton and Cooper played leading roles);
  - Iran nuclear negotiations (where Ashton and Schmid took on leading roles in the negotiations and contributed to a new impetus for talks);
  - Operation Atalanta (the rate of piracy has decreased and the EU has acted as a hub with the rest of the international community);
  - Arab Spring (where EU engagement with Egypt and Tunisia on closer economic cooperation has brought them closer to the EU framework)

- Sanctions policy (Libya, Syria, Iran, DPRK, Burma). Only the EU as a whole has the capacity to have a significant impact.
- Addressing new threats: terrorism, data security, piracy, cyber security

### How effective is the EU at combining its foreign, defence, economic and civil protection policy instruments?

- The institutional framework needs to be clarified; overlap between the Commission and EAS on CFSP leads to confusion. Double-hatting Ashton has not succeeded in resolving institutional conflicts. There is also confusion within the EU's instruments, for example sanctions are covered by CFSP but also the Regulation. The decision-making chain is also unclear, leading to confusion over who leads on particular portfolios, and who represents the EU in which forum.
- To address some of the institutional problems, more EU diplomats should be brought into the Commission and EAS to lend it greater strategic vision. The EAS also needs time to bed in, and in time a new figurehead might also address some of the problems.
- Too much is dependent on personal relationships; e.g. ENP works well because Ashton and Fuhle work well together. There needs to be more stringent division of competence and / or inter-institutional agreement.
- The EU has a number of sub-strategies (ENP, Sahel etc.), but these are not linked to its broader strategies (e.g. CFSP / CSDP).
- The fact that MS had different strategic priorities also means that it's difficult to align / combine policy instruments. For example, Mali is a strategic priority for France, but not for Germany (although supporting France is a strategic priority for Germany). There is a need for MS to convince each other to share a strategic vision, and to think about the global application of their national interests; so need to think about Mali strategically as about the need to tackle global terrorism, or think about India in the context of global competitiveness.
- Hard to decide under which umbrella to address specific problems, for example Mali could be a terrorism lead. Or a state-building / development lead. Or as Sahel Strategy lead. It's not clear who decides where issues sit and who takes the lead. But would MS grant the authority to the Commission or EAS to decide? Probably not.

### How effective are the EU's delivery mechanisms?

- EU delivery mechanisms are too reactive; for example the EU should have been engaged with Mali before the crisis erupted, with cooperation on e.g. training. The EU doesn't have the ability to identify problems in advance and put the structures in place before a situation becomes an emergency.
- The EU is also not able to respond quickly to crises (e.g. Mali).
- Sometimes delivery is hampered by over-ambition. It promises more than it can deliver, which drains confidence. More humility, and an ability to align capabilities with aims would make it a more effective foreign policy player.

- Delivery is also hampered where there is no consensus. On trade, the EU is successful, as its values are deeply embedded. But where there is divergence – for example over Turkey’s Association Agreement – there is an increased danger of MS trying to undermine what agreement there is.
- The EU has a lot of additional competence but not the resources to deliver.
- At national level there are problems coordinating foreign, defence, development and trade policy – not surprising that it’s a challenge at EU level.
- EU diplomats are an effective delivery mechanism, and the secondments of national diplomats are a success – they bring best practice and expertise to and from the EAS.

#### Other points

- A plea that the UK and France continue to take the lead on an activist EU foreign and defence policy, as Germany wouldn’t.
- Consensus that MS needed to justify / re-shape the narrative for why the EU was relevant. One participant suggested that the EU should shift its narrative from being inwardly-focussed (no war in Europe) to an outward focus (what the EU can bring on the world stage).
- One participant defined the EU’s value-add on foreign policy as “the facilitation of joint action by Member States”.
- One participant said that the BoC review should be an open topic in all EU capitals; there is lots that many agree on. Another said that the BoC review was “great”, wishing that Germany would do the same.