THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

WITNESSING THE EVOLVEMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL ACTOR?

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Illustration 1: Map of Israel/Palestine in 1947, 1967 and 2004
1. Introduction

“Over the last ten years, Europe has become a global player whose voice is heard on every continent. We have developed a foreign policy, with the structures and tools to underpin it.”

(Javier Solana, 2009)

In a speech concluding his ten years term in office as the EU High Representative, Javier Solana accredited the evolvement of the EU into a global player with an internationally heard voice and policy instruments to fortify its impact. However, contrary to his assessment, many scholars are less optimistic about the EU’s global influence. Whereas many academics have by now recognised the impressive presence and progress the EU has achieved in foreign relations (Ginsberg, 2001; Hill, 1993; Smith, 2003), conventional criticism concerning the intergovernmental nature of EU foreign policy-making, the lack of crucial policy instruments and the absence of internal coherence and consistency, leads to perceptions of the EU as a weak international actor in the realm of high politics (Baun, 2005; Krotz, 2009; Orbie, 2008; Rhodes, 1998).

Taking up these critical positions, this paper aims at analysing; to what extent the EU can presently be classified as an international actor, capable of influencing global politics. In opposition to much of the existing literature, emphasising the limitations and obstacles to EU foreign policy and evaluating actorness as an entity’s current status, this paper argues that EU actorness shall be regarded as a continuing process, in which the EU has progressed considerably since its early establishment. Not only has it constantly engaged in and worked on strengthening its internal coherence, but it has also developed an increasingly effective array of policy instruments and has expanded its foreign involvement to a degree, which nobody would have expected at the beginning of European integration. These developments clearly indicate the enormous potential the EU possesses for becoming influential in the international system and lead us to argue that EU actorness has not yet reached its limits.

The paper is composed of three chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to the establishment of a theoretical framework, which structures the subsequent analysis. It applies the concept of actorness, in order to establish criteria for evaluating the EU’s international impact. The second chapter analyses the EU’s general position in the international political system. Apart from applying the prior outlined criteria for international actorness, this chapter corresponds to the academic divergence, which is evident when discussing the EU’s international impact and underlines our overall argument of the EU as an evolving actor. The
third chapter, by making use of a case study on the EU’s involvement in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP), shows how the increasing evolvement of EU actorness has proceeded in practice. As the Middle East constitutes one of the first foreign policy projects of the EU and is thus characterised by a lengthy involvement, it allows us to trace the development of EU actorness over the last decades. The analysis proceeds by referring to three major time periods: first the period between the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and 1979, second the period between the 1980 Venice Declaration and 2001 and last, the period starting with EU membership in the Middle East Quartet ranging to the present. The chapter concludes by providing a short future outlook, discussing the perspectives for further evolvement of EU actorness under the Lisbon Treaty.

As its research strategy, this paper basically applies a content analysis of relevant documents, legislative acts and declarations, issued by the EU and other important actors. In addition, it makes use of existing literature and places its argument within the existing academic debate.

2. THE CONCEPT OF ACTORNESS

In order to be able to analyse the strength and influence of the EU in international politics, it is beforehand necessary to establish certain criteria through which this impact can be examined systematically. Consequently, this paper makes use of the concept of actorness. Nevertheless, it needs to be noticed beforehand that the major function of this concept will be to structure the subsequent analysis and to indicate the EU’s potential for international actorness and will not be a means to measure its impact quantitatively.

The concept has originally been introduced by Sjöstedt (Sjöstedt, 1977) but since then has consistently been adapted, complemented and devised by several scholars (Hill, 1993; Jupille & Caporaso, 1998; Bretherton & Vogler, 2006). With the purpose of establishing the criteria which are most suitable for our analysis, this paper does not merely apply the classical concept of actorness but combines various ideas from different scholars, which are shown in Table 1 and will be elaborated upon in the following chapter.
Table 1: Criteria for International Actorness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autonomy</th>
<th>Actor capability</th>
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<tr>
<td>• External Autonomy (Delimitation from environment &amp; others)</td>
<td>• Legal Competence to Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Internal Autonomy (Institutional distinctiveness)</td>
<td>• Ability to identify priorities &amp; formulate internally consistent policies (coherence &amp; consistency)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Access to &amp; capability to use resources &amp; instruments</td>
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<td>• External Recognition &amp; Negotiation Capability</td>
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Generally, the term international actor refers to entities, which are capable of generating effects internationally and are seen as constituting the political system on the largest scale (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p.18; Lyons, 2009, p.7). Nonetheless, in order to classify an entity as an actor in global politics, further criteria need to apply. Sjöstedt, in his frequently quoted work, distinguishes these criteria into two broad requirements, namely autonomy and actor capability. Whereas, autonomy denotes the detachment of an entity’s institutional system from external and internal forces, actor capability refers to its ability to “behave actively and deliberately in relation to others in the international system” (Sjöstedt, 1977, p.15). As illustrated in Table 1, we adopted this distinction and further divided it into six tangible criteria, which will be outlined subsequently.

As a first criterion, an actor should be externally autonomous, meaning that it shall be delimitated from the environment and others to a certain degree. This criterion is crucial, as an entity is only “capable of volition or purpose” (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p.20) if it is not constrained by other actors or its external environment. Second, collective actors, such as the EU need to possess a degree of “institutional distinctiveness” (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998, p.216), which involves that they shall not only be independent from their environment, but also distinguishable from their constituent parts (Sjöstedt, 1977, p.15).

Third, an actor needs to be endowed with the legal competence to act, to be capable of taking legitimate decisions on behalf of its members (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998, p.216). Fourth and closely related, it should be able to “identify policy priorities and formulate coherent policies” (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p.30). Satisfying this criterion necessitates a certain degree of coherence and consistency within the policy-making processes. In case of the EU, consistency denotes the extent to which national policies and bilateral relations are in
accordance with EU policies, whereas coherence refers to the degree of harmonisation of the internal policy processes of the EU. Fifth, being an actor requires having access to sufficient resources and instruments and the ability to use them effectively (ibid). These instruments for instance include budgetary instruments, diplomatic capabilities, as well as political instruments to exert pressure on non-cooperating partners. Sixth, the final criterion constituting actor capability is external recognition and negotiation capability. External recognition refers to the “acceptance of and interaction with the entity by others” (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998, p.214) and is central to an entity’s impact, as it can only generate effects internationally, if it is perceived as being an influential and serious actor externally. Additionally, generating effects in the international arena also depends on an actor’s ability to conduct negotiations with third parties (Hill, 1993, p.309), as an entity, which is not effective in communicating its political preferences to other actors and seeks to have them implemented, will fail to have an impact.

Thus, in order to qualify as an international actor, a range of internal, as well as external criteria need to apply. The fulfilment of these criteria arguably constitutes a challenge, as it presupposes a high degree of autonomy, coherence and political capabilities. As a consequence, many scholars argue that the internal structures and remaining obstacles of the EU make its evolvement into an international actor unlikely (Baun, 2005; Krotz, 2009; Orbie, 2008; Rhodes, 1998). However, as we argue that EU actorness is not merely a question of yes or no, the next chapter outlines the academic debate more closely and investigates to what extent the actorness criteria apply to the EU.

3. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

As has been outlined previously, questions related to the EU’s international role and its global impact, are subject to contentious debate. Whereas there seems to be general agreement that the EU has by now achieved a considerable degree of actorness in the domain of economic policy, its status and impact in the realm of high politics are more ambiguous (Krotz, 2009, p.557; Allen & Smith, 1990, p.19; Jørgensen, 2007, p.33). On the one hand, the conventional view of the European Union as a weak actor in the domains of foreign policy, defence and security policy persist (e.g. Orbie, 2008). On the other hand however, enthusiasm for the notion of the EU as an actor “under construction” (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006, p.24) is evident in academic analysis, indicating the potential which the European Union possesses
(see also Rosecrance, 1998). As will be shown in the following chapter, this academic divergence is clearly evident when applying the six criteria of international actorness, illustrated in Table 1.

First, when investigating the EU’s external autonomy, special attention needs to be devoted to the European-Transatlantic relationship. On the one side Europe’s persisting security dependence on the US and NATO and several member states’ sensitivity to American concerns in the domains of security and defence, indicate the limits of the EU’s external autonomy (Krotz, 2009, p.566). Nevertheless on the other side, the development of a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) reveals a European “quest for autonomy from American preponderance” (Krotz, 2009, p.560), which is also shown in an increasing number of collective EU interests and political approaches, that differ from those of the US (Smith, 2003, p.104) and lead to the perception that the traditional historic relationship with the US as the “strategic leader” and the EU as a “mere follower and junior partner” (Baun, 2005, p.18) no longer reflects reality.

Second, evaluating the EU’s internal autonomy or institutional distinctiveness is equally twofold. Whereas, it is beyond doubt that the EU has shown an unprecedented degree of cooperation in foreign policy, security and defence and has demonstrated an “indigenous and uniquely European quality” (Ginsberg, 2001, p.31), the final say on high policy matters remains with the national governments, and frequently reflects their national preferences (Krotz, 2009, p.567). As a consequence, foreign policy is still “widely associated with nation states” (Rhodes, 1998, p.12), which fosters the impression, that the EU is not more than the sum of its constituent parts.

Third, the EU has been endowed with the legal competence to act in so far, as “member states have committed themselves to a Common Foreign and Security Policy” (European Commission, 2009) and a CSDP and thereby established a legal framework for action. Moreover, EU foreign-policy-making enjoys a high degree of public affirmation, which constitutes a further legitimating factor (Krotz, 2009, p.559). Nonetheless, the intergovernmental nature of decision-making and the still often required unanimity vote, often seriously hamper the EU’s capability to act, as it “requires all 27 member states to agree before action, [which is] a somewhat rare occurrence” (Lowrey, 2009, p.1).

Fourth, the EU’s capability to identify priorities and formulate internally consistent policies is subject to the same constraints. For the one side, the traditional critique about member states’ conflicting views and national prerogatives, which pose an obstacle to “creating more supranational foreign policy-making machinery” (Smith, 2003, p.105),
remains intact. From this perspective, policy outcomes reflect the lowest common denominator, as “intergovernmental bargaining and horse-trading” (Baun, 2005, p.4) compromise the effectiveness and consistency of policies. Moreover, the complexity of the EU’s decision-making processes, as well as the artificial separation of policy areas, which even though formally abolished by the Lisbon Treaty, is nevertheless upheld in practice, often undermine the EU’s effectiveness in formulating coherent policies, as political authority is dispersed to a multitude of actors and institutions (Krotz, 2009, p.563). For the other side however, it cannot be denied that member states have managed in an impressive manner to agree on common policy objectives and “mobilise collective and national resources” (Smith, 2003, p.105). Since the establishment of CFSP with the Maastricht Treaty and the subsequent creation of an CSDP, an extensive array of foreign policy instruments has been developed, which indicate the EU’s potential and willingness to act collectively (Baun, 2005, p.3; Krotz, 2009, p.560).

Fifth, as implied above, the EU has by now managed to develop considerable resources, which “other international actors cannot fail to notice” (Smith, 2003, p.104). The access to these resources and the capability to use them effectively could give the EU a remarkable influence in world affairs. Its various instruments range from external policies and instruments (e.g. the adoption of a European Security Strategy; the building of military capacities and the general advancement of the CSDP) to economic instruments (e.g. trade, cooperation or association agreements), humanitarian aid, diplomacy and the promising instrument of prospective membership. Since its early beginnings the EU has steadily expanded its foreign involvement through the introduction of new policy instruments, most recently with the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty and has succeeded in affecting other global actors through its internal policies to a degree which nobody expected at the beginning of European integration (Smith, 2003, p.104). Nonetheless, apart from these positive developments, several obstacles remain. In particular the prevalent lack of own military capabilities and the related inability to apply “force or coercion” (Krotz, 2009, p.557), undermine the EU’s ability to realise its full potential of intervening in crisis situations. Furthermore and closely related, the EU has also repeatedly failed in imposing “non-violent coercion” (Smith, 2002, p.106), such as economic sanctions, which has severely reduced its impact on several occasions (Keukeleire & MacNaughtan, 2008, p.296). In addition, an insufficient budget to finance certain policy instruments persistently hampers the EU’s rapid transformation into a fully-fledged international actor and indicates a lack of collective political will (Krotz, 2009, p.564; Kern, 2010) in this regard.
Sixth, similar to other criteria, the EU’s external recognition and its negotiation capability are also affected by the Union’s intergovernmental structure. As it is still often the individual member states which occupy the centre of the political arena, the EU’s international impact as an “entity rather than a collection of nation-states frequently goes unacknowledged” (Hänsch quoted in Piening, 1997) and common positions reflect lowest common denominator outcomes. Moreover, the EU’s institutional complexity and the internal overabundance of different agents, claiming to represent Europe confuse outsiders and combined with the first factor weaken the overall negotiation position of the EU, especially vis-à-vis strong foreign policy actors. Nevertheless, in contrast to these constraints, the EU is in principle well equipped for conducting diplomacy (Maull, 2005, p.784) and on occasions on which it manages to speak with one voice internationally, it has far more impact, than it would have if its constituent parts spoke individually (Ginsberg, 2001, p.27). In addition, its economic power, combined with its soft approach to foreign policy makes the EU an “actor (...) which attracts countries” (Rosecrance, 1998, p.16) rather than causing opposition towards it and thus is arguably recognised externally to a severe degree. This external recognition is further strengthened by the EU’s multidimensional presence in a wide range of international forums.

Finally, this chapter has shown that there are two perspectives when discussing EU actorness. The first perspective emphasises the limitations of EU actorness and focuses on the incomplete and fragmented fulfilment of the actorness criteria. In opposition, the second perspective, besides acknowledging the obstacles which remain, outlines the steady progress which the EU has undergone and its potential for becoming an influential actor. Thus, it becomes clear that EU actorness is not a question which can be answered in simple yes or no terms. Arguing more in line with the second perspective, this paper holds that the EU shall be classified as an evolving actor, which has steadily progressed. Instead of evaluating merely the fulfilment of the actorness criteria, EU actorness also involves a time-dimension. The next chapter, by analysing the EU’s involvement in the Middle East Peace Process, will clarify this step-by-step approach towards achieving international actorness.

4. Case Study: EU Representation In The Middle East Peace Process

Prior to conducting the actual analysis, the relevance of this case study needs to be explained. First and foremost, the Arab-Israeli conflict is not only one of the “most enduring and explosive of all the world’s conflicts” (BBC News, 2010), but it also constitutes one of the first foreign policy projects of the EU and accordingly is characterised by decades of
European involvement. As the EU’s role in the MEPP was “gradually developed in parallel with the evolution of the European foreign policy system” (Gianniou, 2006, p.20), analysing this case does not merely enable us to trace the development of EU actoriness in this particular case, but additionally allows us to draw some general conclusions on the evolution of European foreign-policy-making over the last decades. By reflecting simultaneously the challenges to a common EU foreign policy and the internal evolution of common instruments, this case suggests the ongoing strive for a complementary but independent EU role with its heart in Brussels and introduces a time-dimension to the concept of actorness (Gerring, 2004, p.341).

Moreover, the MEPP is also highly interesting from a historic and economic perspective. Inter alia due to the deep involvement of France and the UK in the creation of the conflict and Germany’s historic responsibility to the Jews, the MEPP is of enormous interest to the European member states and has frequently been defined as a “strategic priority for Europe” (European Commission, 2010b). Furthermore, European economic interests are also of vital importance. The EU has not merely invested heavily into the infrastructure of the region, but it also presently constitutes the largest financial donor to Palestinians and Israel’s most important trading and research partner (European Commission, 2010a; Aoun, 2003, pp.1-2). This profound interest of European states in the region suggests that the EU has undertaken significant efforts to establish itself as an actor in this case, which is confirmed by EU statements, highlighting its “essential role in the Middle East peace process” (Council of the European Union, 2008) and by the extraordinary degree of internal consistency among the member states, which is outlined in the subsequent analysis.


One of the factors, being at the very core of the Arab-Israeli conflict is clearly the question of land and who controls it. Since the 1967-war, Israel, which emerged victorious, has occupied more land than originally foreseen by UN Resolution 181(II) (1947, p.3), as displayed in Illustration 1, causing several outbreaks of violence between it and the Palestinian Territories.
Immediately after the war, the USA established itself as the most dominant actor, launching and leading the first peace negotiations. However, as obstacles on both sides were too intense for a direct, unilateral-negotiated resolution, Washington’s efforts were merely the starting point of enduring settlement negotiations (Quandt, 2005, p.1). In sharp contrast to the American dominance, Europe was quite absent at the beginnings of the peace process. Although the EC developed a more coherent and consistent manner over the years, it did not fulfil any actorness criteria until 1980.

The EC’s external autonomy was severely constrained, because the USA was opposed to the inclusion of it in the peace process (Allen & Smith, 1990, p.28). In addition, several member states’ preference “of American reassurance regarding decisive aspect of their security over exclusive European reliance” (Krotz, 2009, p.566) further limited the possibility of pursuing an autonomous European approach. This transatlantic orientation also affected the EC’s internal autonomy, because it obstructed a closer cooperation within the EC, as “some Member States [were] extremely reluctant to agree to (...) EC positions that might conflict with those of the United States” (Smith, 2003, p.104). Accordingly, the EC members increasingly acted on basis of national preferences. Whereas Germany and the Netherlands did not want to upset their relations with neither Israel nor Palestine, France entirely supported the Palestinian authorities and Italy strongly sided with the Israelis (Nuttall, 1992, p.67). In addition, due to a lack of institutionalisation and foreign policy instruments (actor
capability) at that time, some of the EC member states, such as Belgium, preferred the UN over the EC as an international negotiation platform (Soetendorp, 1999, pp.97-98).

A turning point in this respect was the introduction of European Political Cooperation (EPC), whose “object [was] consultations between the Member States in foreign policy matters” (Europa Glossary, 2010). The member states’ reasons for introducing this increasing foreign policy cooperation were twofold. Firstly, the emergence of the oil crisis in the beginnings of the 1970s and the frustration, resulting from the EC’s inability to coordinate the aftermath of the 1967-war, clarified the general need for closer cooperation mechanisms (Soetendorp, 1999, p.100). Secondly, especially France’s national effort to improve and advance the EC’s political coordination, in order to enhance its own international influence, further fostered the development (Smith, 2008, pp.31-32). Besides the introduction of EPC, the EC was additionally strengthened through the accession of three important European states, namely the UK, Denmark and Ireland.

The newly composed EC, tried to advance its role in the MEPP, by issuing a declaration, which recognised and referred to the legitimate rights of the Palestinians for the first time and thereby opposed UN Resolution 242 (1967, p.8), in which they were termed “refugees” (European Communities, 1973). The declaration, even though it was not translated into any concrete policies, constitutes a decisive development, as for the first time, EC member states formally “departed from their previous rather unconditional support to Israel and explicitly broke with the American vision” (Aoun, 2003, p.291). Thus, the “new consensus-building procedures” (Nuttall, 1993, p.66) succeeded in increasing the EC’s internal consistency, by moderating the pro-Israeli position of some member states.

Despite these positive developments, the EC’s actoriness nonetheless remained marginal. The newly formed EPC was still in an introductory phase and consequently was not yet backed by a sufficient degree of institutionalisation, resources and political will. Moreover, besides strengthening the EC externally on the one side, the accession of the three new states, especially the traditional US ally Great Britain, also limited the EC’s autonomy on the other side, as it increased the internal differences of the EC. In addition, as the EC was just starting to develop its foreign policy cooperation, it was not formally recognised as a negotiation partner at that time and was therefore neither endowed with the legal competence to act, nor was it capable of negotiating the peace settlement.
Even though the formation of EPC has not directly transformed the EC into an international actor, it was nevertheless an important preparation phase in the EU’s overall process towards achieving international actorness. One of the most crucial advancements in this phase, which has also been a reason for developing EPC, has definitely been the realisation of the value of providing “an alternative view to that of the United States, both within the western world and on behalf of it” (Hill, 1993, p.311). Through the commencing institutional backing by Brussels and the development of new policy instruments in the period from 1980-2001, the “distinctive Western voice” (ibid) slowly took shape.

A first step in this process was the Venice Declaration, which the nine issued in 1980 and which constituted the “most fundamental and most far-reaching common policy statement on the Arab-Israeli dispute” at that time (Soetendorp, 1999, p.103). In their declaration the EC member states did not only state that Palestine should be granted “to exercise fully its right to self-determination” (European Commission, 1980), but it also suggested the inclusion of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the peace negotiations. With this formal declaration, the EC openly opposed the Israeli and American view, who both labelled the PLO a terrorist organisation. In this regard, the EC progressed decisively in increasing its external autonomy from America and thereby undertook its first decisive step towards evolving as an international actor. In addition, it also demonstrated for the first time, its ability and willingness to identify distinct and internally consistent policy priorities. Closely related, its distinct position strengthened the EC’s external recognition by Palestine, as it began to regard the EC as a counterweight to the US position, which it perceived as “permanently biased in favour of Israel” (Musu, 2007, p.2). As a result, the Venice Declaration “constituted an absolute success for the system of European political cooperation and contributed to the upgrading of the European role as a diplomatic actor in the international scene” (Gianniou, 2006, p.5).

However, apart from this progressive development, EC actorness in the MEPP was strongly limited after the declaration. Immediately after the issuing of the Venice Declaration, the US and Israel “abruptly rejected this initiative [and] as a result, it went nowhere” (Kemp, 2003, p.165). The nine had to experience that without the legal competence to act, external recognition by all parties involved and its own capability to negotiate with third parties, their impact remained marginal. The rejection of the Venice Declaration indicated the limits of the EU’s external autonomy and strongly constrained its actorness and influence. Resulting from
this negative experience, “Europe’s willingness to stake out policy positions at odds with Washington” (Kemp, 2003, p.166) was hampered at the time being and led to the limitation of the EC/EU’s\(^1\) role in the MEPP, to solely supporting the US during the following years. At the subsequent official peace negotiations in Madrid and Oslo, the EU was even excluded by the US and Israel, “although they were expected to pay the bill and help implement the agreement” (Keukeleire & MacNaughtan, 2008, p.286; see also Gomez, 2003, pp.124-132), which again clarifies the limits of EU actorness during these years.

Nevertheless, in parallel with its passive role in the MEPP, the EU’s institutional structure underwent considerable progress, especially in the field of foreign policy and strengthened the Union’s actor capability, which can be classified as a second step in the EU’s evolving actorness. Through the creation of a CFSP in 1992, the introduction of the post of the EU Special Representative in 1996 and the agreement to develop an ESDP\(^2\) in 1999, the EU has been endowed internally with a clearer legal competence to act. Moreover, it was given access to several new policy instruments and resources and internal coherence and consistency have been fostered by the increasing political institutionalisation. Especially, the creation of the function of the EU High Representative in 1999 “has improved very significantly the capacity of the EU to speak with one voice and to operate on the international stage as a unified actor” (Soetendorp, 2002, p.284).

In addition to these internal institutional advancements, the EU also intensively engaged in structural foreign policy, which constitutes a third decisive step. Structural foreign policy refers to the promotion of structural changes “both in the internal situation of the countries concerned and in the inter-state relations and general situation of these regions” (Keukeleire, 2003, p.47). In other words, it denotes a foreign policy, which allows the EU to make use of its full economic power. Applying this approach, the EU has provided enormous financial aid through development and trade, committing approximately €2.66 billion in assistance to the Palestinians alone in the period from 1994-2006 (EU Commission, 2010a). Likewise, it accounts for “one third of Israeli exports and over 40% of Israeli imports, and [constitutes] a major economic, scientific and research partner.” (EU Council, 2005, p.2). Hence, even though the EU was not a formally recognised actor in the peace process at the time, it has nevertheless strongly progressed during these years. Through the institutionalisation and strengthening of the internal coherence and especially the augmentation of its economic power, the EU managed to foster its external recognition and

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\(^1\) In 1992, the EC was transformed into the EU with the Treaty of the European Union

\(^2\) ESDP has been renamed by the Treaty of Lisbon to Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)
has laid basic foundations for being capable of negotiating and emerging as an international actor.

Additionally, with the failure of the US-led peace process and the eruption of the second Intifada in 2000, which resulted in the destruction of EU-funded infrastructure, the EU departed from its passivity, modified its approach and again “attempted to assume a more proactive role” (Keukeleire & MacNaughtan, 2008, p.286) in the MEPP. The EU realised that an exclusively unilaterally-negotiated peace had no real prospects of success and that itself could provide an important voice in the conflict. Consequently, in a series of “high level public statements” (European Commission, 2010c) the EU clearly committed itself to the establishment of a Palestinian State and demanded the recognition of the legitimate right of the Palestinians (Berlin Declaration, 1999).

Finally, even though EU actorness was severely limited during the period from 1980-2001, it has nevertheless been characterised by enormous process and can be seen as a starting point in the EU’s strive for finding its own autonomous position and voice. Although it was not yet recognised as a full actor and formal negotiation partner, its renewed engagement in the conflict after the failure of the peace process introduced a period of steady and deep EU involvement in the Middle East.


The next and arguably most important step towards achieving actorness has been the EU’s inclusion in the Middle East Quartet. In 2002 the EU joined the UN, the US and Russia in this multilateral framework, which provides Europe with the possibility to impact the peace negotiations as it was recognised as a formal partner. As a first official act in this forum, the EU was responsible for drafting the Quartet’s ‘Roadmap’ (EU@UN, 2003), which, even though it has by now exceeded still constitutes, the main orientation and reference point of the Quartet (Council of the European Union, 2010a). The Roadmap displays mutual obligations of both the Palestinian Authority and Israel “in political, security, economic, humanitarian and institution-building fields, with a negotiated two-state solution (...) at its core” (Keukeleire & MacNaughtan, 2008, pp.286-287; see also Ginsberg, 2001, p.106). Consequently, through its inclusion in the Quartet, the EU managed to become a “necessary and serious player – and not

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3 Intifada: Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, areas that had been occupied by Israel since 1967” (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2008)
only a payer” (Gianniou, 2006, p.11). However, in how far it really managed to evolve as a full international actor needs to be subjected to further analysis.

Before investigating the external autonomy, which the EU’s Quartet membership has generated for it, it first needs to be clarified that external autonomy in the MEPP, due to the multilateral character of the negotiations, cannot be understood as a complete delimitation from the environment and other players. Rather the EU’s external autonomy in this forum is reflected by the degree to which the EU is able to have its own position on the conflict within the overall negotiations. Especially the traditional transatlantic orientation of the EU is of interest here. With its accession to the Quartet the EU undertook a decisive step in this regard, as it finalised the evolvement from a mere follower of US political initiatives to a formally recognised equal negotiation partner (Musu, 2007, p.16). Although the quest for autonomy from American dominance and the ambition to be recognised as a partner in its own right have started in prior phases, only with the accession to the Quartet, have they been formalised. Nonetheless, the formal recognition has not been translated entirely into equality in practice, as due to its historic role and military capabilities, the US remained the most influential actor, also within the new framework. Anyways, the EU succeeded in “finding a complementary role to that of Washington” (Gianniou, 2006, p.17) and has become a “second fiddle” to the US, which is nevertheless “instrumental to the performance of the orchestra” (Ginsberg, 2001, p.105-106). This achievement can partly be attributed to the EU’s distinct and civilian approach to foreign policy, which has turned it into a legitimising force and made it a vital partner in phases in which the US was unable to make further progress (Soetendorp, 2002, p.290). Therefore, even though Quartet membership has not delimited the EU from its external surroundings, it has nevertheless made it more equal compared to other actors, influential and able to develop its own policy positions, anchored in its own approach.

Furthermore, this period of EU actorness has not merely witnessed a progress in external autonomy, but has also been characterised by an extraordinarily high degree of internal autonomy within the EU. Instead of primarily pursuing their national agendas, member states have shown a strong commitment to cooperation. Whereas some EU states such as France and the UK work closely together with the EU institutions (Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2010; Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et Européennes, 2009), other member states, for instance Germany, even embed their national policy in “Europe’s own policy for the region” (Auswärtiges Amt, 2010) and thereby internally strengthen the EU.

The accession to the Quartet had similar consequences for the Union’s actor capability. Whereas, as outlined in the previous subchapter, the EU has increasingly been
endowed with the internal legal competence to act by the member states through the developments of various policies and instruments, in the period preceding the Quartet membership, the EU did not have a clear external legal competence to act. Quartet membership and in particular the “adherence to the Roadmap” (Council of the European Union, 2010a) altered this fact and gave the EU a formal competence to act within the framework of the Quartet.

As already mentioned before, the EU’s involvement in the MEPP since the accession to the Quartet has been marked by a high degree of cooperation among the member states and thus indicated a willingness to identify priorities and formulate coherent policies to a severe extent. The period from 2002 to 2010 has seen the issuing of various declarations, in which the “EU [collectively] calls upon all parties (...) to prevent a further escalation” of the conflict (Council of the European Union, 2010b). This consensus is remarkable, as in the past it was a common habit for member states to “practice their own diplomacy, when their national view reached beyond the common position of the EU” (Soetendorp, 2002, p.294). Much of the credit for this increasing cooperation appertains to former EU-HR Javier Solana, who “ended this practice” (ibid) through his personal commitment and effort to develop a coherent and consistent foreign policy in the region, based on increasing cooperation between the European states (ibid).

Likewise the EU realised that recognition as a serious international actor in the peace process required it to make increasing use of the resources and instruments at its disposal. Being a formally accepted Quartet member, endowed it with the legal competence to act in the region and thus made it easier to effectively use its resources and instruments. Accordingly, it engaged in a CSDP civilian police mission in the Palestinian Territory (EU COPPS) and the border assistance mission at Rafah (EU BAM Rafah). In this respect, the EU managed to build up “a degree of credibility as an actor involved not only in the financial dimension of the peace process, but also – if to a lesser extent – in the security dimension, which remains the crucial one” (Keukeleire & MacNaughtan, 2008, p. 287; Musu, 2007, p.15).

A further important advancement which the EU experienced due to its accession to the Quartet was an increase in its external recognition by other actors and a strengthening of its negotiation capability. Whereas its recognition by third actors, especially Israel, before had rather been based on its economic position and its structural policy in the region, Quartet membership upgraded it to a political partner next to the US, Russia and the UN. Whilst the Palestinians highly appreciate the EU’s involvement in the peace process and see it as a
potential counterweight to US dominance, Israel has traditionally been quite suspicious of it, as it perceives the EU as Arab-biased (Aoun, 2003; Musu, 2007). Even though this suspicion has remained deeply embedded in the Israeli position, the EU’s inclusion in the Quartet and the accordingly close coordination with America allow the EU to “share the aura of legitimacy which the USA enjoys in Israel” (Harpaz, 2008, p.122) to a certain extent. Especially, American declarations, emphasising that the EU is to be regarded as “a full partner in the Quartet,” (U.S. Department of State, 2009) have generated fear in Israel that a political collision course with the EU might result in a “loss of international legitimacy and increased isolation of the Jewish state” (Baun, 2005, p.12-13).

Additionally, as the Middle East Quartet is the major forum of negotiations in the MEPP, the EU’s negotiation capability has been fostered accordingly. Notwithstanding, the “cumbersome structures of EU diplomacy” (Musu, 2010, p.96), have appointed three EU representatives4 into the Quartet, the EU-HR Solana was the one who “has spoken with an astonishingly clear and unified [European] voice” (Aoun, 2003, p.305), and has thereby increased the EU’s standing within the negotiations. Not only did he foster the EU’s visibility and presence in the Middle East, by frequent visits and close personal relations to the involved actors in the region, but he also became the “symbol of that still nebulous thing, European foreign policy” (BBC News, 2007) and a key actor in the negotiations. Nevertheless, despite this progress, the strict reluctance to impose punitive sanctions of any form on the two conflicting parties has weakened the EU’s negotiation position and its potential to realise its demands (Youngs, 2010). This is sadly demonstrated by recent developments, in particular Israeli plans to enlarge settlements in the Palestinian territories (CBS News, 2010). However, there also lies a chance for the EU in these developments, as the settlement issue has severely obstructed the traditionally close US-Israeli relationship. If the EU and the US used this opportunity to collectively assert pressure on Israel, by combining EU economic sanctions, with the traditional political US influence on Israel, this could strengthen their negotiation position to an enormous extent (Mack, 2010).

Concluding this subchapter, it can be said that the EU’s inclusion in the Quartet was a major step in its evolvement as an actor. Even though the EU has not entirely emerged as an actor during the current phase, it has nevertheless increasingly proceeded in fulfilling the criteria of international actorness. The most important advancement compared to earlier periods was undoubtedly the formal recognition of the EU’s political role in the process, which allowed it to emerge from a payer into a player.

4 The High Representative for CFSP, Commissioner for External Relations and the Foreign Minister of the member state holding the Council Presidency
4.4. AN INTERNATIONAL ACTOR IN THE FUTURE?

This case study has clarified that the EU has evolved at least to a certain degree as an international actor in the Middle East Peace process, capable of influencing the peace negotiations. In the beginning of the MEPP, the EU was clearly absent as an international actor, incorporating a role as silent observer. However, the increasing institutionalisation and coordination among member states advanced Europe’s role within the peace negotiations. As indicated in Table 2 and elaborated upon within the case study, EU actorness evolved step-by-step throughout the MEPP.

Table 2. Evolvement of EU actorness throughout the Middle East Peace Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Key Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Silent Observer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Venice Declaration - Identifiable EU position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Quartet membership - formally equal negotiation partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;2010</td>
<td>Lisbon Treaty - increase in coherence: Further step in becoming an actor?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As has been repeatedly clarified, achieving autonomy and developing actor capabilities is an enduring and continuous process. The EU’s current state of actorness is arguably not the last phase in this process, but constitutes just another step in the ongoing general evolvement.

The next step could already be the currently enacted Lisbon Treaty, which gives the EU a more coherent and vigorous external voice by uniting the functions of the EUHR with that of the Commission Vice-President. It “raises the EU’s profile in the world, “putting a face” on the Union” (Europa, 2010). Moreover, this “dual role” of the HR is supported by the newly created European External Action Service (EEAS), which resembles a European Foreign Ministry. The creation of the EEAS, whose formation is not yet finalised, “will be a major step for European integration and the development of the EU as an international actor” (Vanhoonacker & Reslow, 2010, p.17).

Nonetheless, as the Lisbon Treaty only recently entered into force, its long-term impact remains to be seen. Until recently, Javier Solana was the one who put a face to Europe’s foreign policy and upgraded Europe’s influence in the MEPP. Through many trips
to the region, personal networks and extraordinary efforts, he managed to elide the entanglement about who speaks for Europe in the peace negotiations. As the Lisbon Treaty unifies and further strengthens EU’s external representation, Solana’s successor Baroness Ashton “will be predestined to play a key role in ensuring a more unitary representation of the Union in international affairs” (Gaspers, 2008, p.24). Consequently, the institutional reforms of Lisbon “should give the EU more unity and clout to play an effective role” in the MEPP (Young, 2010).

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed the degree to which the EU can currently be classified as an international actor, capable of influencing global politics. Prior to revealing the results of the analysis the limitations which the paper is subject to need to be clarified. Due to the limited scope of the paper, only one case study could be conducted. In order to obtain a complete picture on international EU actorness, it seems useful to consider additional cases in further research. However, due to the exceptional duration of the EU’s involvement in the MEPP, this case has nevertheless enabled us to draw some valuable general conclusions on the EU’s potential of becoming an international actor, as EU actorness in the MEPP went hand in hand with the general advancement of its foreign policy.

The first part of the analysis, by corresponding to the academic divergence, has clarified that the question of EU actorness cannot be answered in simple black or white terms, but involves two different perspectives. The first perspective, through strictly applying the actorness criteria, leads to the conclusion that EU actorness until now, remains incomplete and fragmented and that it is not an actor in the traditional sense of the concept. This perspective emphasises the remaining obstacles, which are inter alia the EU’s security dependence on the US, the intergovernmental nature of decision-making in areas of high politics and the member states’ persisting reluctance to compromising more sovereignty in these domains. Proponents of this perspective regard the emergence of EU actorness as unlikely (Maull, 2005, Orbie, 2008, Krotz, 2009).

However, this paper holds that this perspective misses a crucial point. We argue that EU actorness cannot merely be defined as the entity’s current status but needs to be perceived as a continuing process and thus requires the consideration of a time dimension. Therefore we argue more in line with the second perspective, which highlights the potential the EU
possesses for becoming influential in world politics. Throughout the years of European integration, the member states have developed and improved common policy instruments, have shown an unprecedented degree of cooperation and cohesion and have reached an impressive multidimensional presence on the world scene (Hill, 1993; Allen & Smith, 1990; Ginsberg, 2001). Simply classifying the EU as a weak actor in high politics does not allow for acknowledging these developments and therefore neglects the specific nature of EU actorness. Consequently, even though we agree that EU actorness has not yet been achieved and will most probably remain a time-consuming process, we regard the EU as an evolving actor, who has not yet reached its limits.

The case study on EU involvement in the MEPP has underpinned our line of reasoning. By outlining how EU actorness has since 1967 step-by-step evolved, the relevance of the time dimension has become clear. The early stages of the peace negotiations have been characterised by the EC’s lack of political resources and instruments, the absence of collective political will and accordingly an insufficient degree of coordination among the EC member states. In addition, the EC has not been perceived as being an influential actor by any of the parties involved. However, in parallel with the internal institutionalisation, in particular the introduction of foreign policy instruments from the EPC over CFSP to CSDP, EU actorness has slowly taken shape over the decades and finally resulted in the formal recognition as an equal negotiation partner with the inclusion in the Middle East Quartet in 2002. Even though, the analysis has unfolded, that EU actorness in the Middle East has still not been completed with the inclusion in the Quartet, merely classifying the EU as not being an actor, would be oversimplifying. Since the early beginnings of EU involvement in the region, member states have undertaken an enormous effort in advancing the EU’s actorness. Through various reforms in Brussels, internal coordination mechanisms have been steadily improved, the traditional pursuance of national agendas has been limited and new important EU representatives have been introduced. Thus, the case study has shown that over the years, the EU has succeeded in increasingly fulfilling the actorness criteria and although there remain several steps to go, this process needs to be acknowledged. The current degree of actorness is just another phase in an ongoing process and the next step could already be the Lisbon Treaty, which further streamlines the EU’s internal structure.

These findings are not constrained only to the Middle East Peace Process. As, we have mentioned repeatedly, the EU’s role in the Middle East, has developed in parallel with the overall advancement of EU foreign policy. Through the introduction of new policies and an extended competence to act externally, the EU has turned into a “global player” (Javier
Solana, 2009) to put it in Javier Solana’s words, who has increased its foreign involvement to a degree which nobody had expected thirty years ago. This increasing involvement is not only reflected in the Middle East, but also by EU police missions in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia or Congo and many other missions worldwide. Through the increasing institutionalisation and the realisation among the member states of the value of collective action, the EU has been able to strengthen its actorness in various fields and has constantly demonstrated its ambition to develop its own distinct role in high politics. Nevertheless, the case of the Middle East was a special case, in so far as it has been marked by an extraordinary degree of consistency among the member states and a strong personal commitment of former EU-HR Javier Solana. Hence, the question arises whether the evolvement of EU actorness will proceed to a similar degree in different cases in which consistency among the EU members is not comparably strong. In addition it remains to be seen whether the new EU-HR Catherine Ashton can tie in to Solana’s success in the Middle East, without having at her disposal the close personal ties to the region and the network. These questions will have to be answered in further research on EU actorness. Possible fields of research could be other strategic priorities such as the EU’s diplomacy with Iran or the stabilisation of the Western Balkans, including Europe’s engagement in Kosovo. To conclude, for now it can be said that the EU is in the middle of the process of evolving as an actor and notwithstanding the processes’ finalisation is far from foreseeable, the EU can succeed if it realises its full potential.


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