

# Towards a Systematic Analysis of the EU as an Actor in the UN System

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**Panel: “A systematic analysis of the EU as an actor in the UN system,”** by Jan Wouters (Leuven University) at the 2009 ECPR General Conference in Potsdam

## Reviewed Papers

1. “Multiscalar Approaches of Voting Behaviour of European Countries in the United Nations General Assembly,” by Laurent Beauguitte, Université Paris 7
2. “Is the European Union a Normative Power? An interim assessment on the CFSP,” by Po-Kuwan Wu, European University Institute
3. “European Policy towards UNSC Reform under Construction: What Role Does Europe Play in a Changing World?” by Ji Lei, Fudan University
4. “Beyond Chapter VIII: Limits and Opportunities for Regional Representation at the UN Security Council,” by Edith Drieskens, Clingendael Institute
5. “Euratom’s Future Status at the Agency: Enhanced Observer or Member?” by Cliff Farhang, Leuven University
6. “The EU’s Endorsement of the Principle of Responsibility to Protect: Paving the Way for a New Doctrine of International Law,” by Elitsa Mincheva, College of Europe

In 2007, Karen Smith received the Anna Lindh Award for her outstanding research on European foreign and security policy. In the award lecture, she reviewed the state of the art in her field of expertise and presented some directions for further research (Smith 2007). Smith concluded that the academic interest in studying “the EU in the world” had been growing healthily, with topics like the EU at the UN being very popular. But there was great need for more substantial analysis with historical depth and for knowledge accumulation, as there were still large knowledge gaps to fill.

The same could be said about research on EU–UN relations, even if the topic has been fashionable in recent years. In the six years since the European Security Strategy defined “effective multilateralism” as the guiding principle of the EU’s external relations, a growing group of scholars has analyzed the interrelationship between the EU and UN, focusing on the implementation of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) at the UN. Smith herself has made an important contribution in that regard, editing (together with Katie Laatikainen) a collection of papers exploring the EU at the UN, seeing those multilateral organizations as “intersecting” ones (Laatikainen and Smith 2006).

Taking a similar initiative, Jan Wouters has done his share in advancing knowledge on EU–UN relations. Compiling an edited volume (together with Frank Hoffmeister and Tom Ruys), he brought scholars and practitioners together as to examine the cooperation and coordination between both organizations (Wouters et al. 2006). The panel he organized and chaired at the ECPR General Conference in Potsdam in September 2009 could be seen as a continuation of that project. Indeed, the largely attended workshop intended to explore in more consistent way the activities of the EU in the UN context and its impact therein. While contributors were free to choose their topic, they were encouraged to explore it from a EU, UN, and inter-relational perspective. Such an approach would allow for cross-case comparison. Whether or not they have followed those instructions is discussed below.

Back in 2003, the impact of the EU at the UN inspired the European Commission to issue a communication on “The European Union and the United Nations: The Choice of Multilateralism” (European Commission 2003). Writing in September 2003, only a few months after the Iraq crisis had divided the EU Member States at the UN Security Council (UNSC), the commission stated that substantial challenges remain for the EU as to fulfill its potential at the UN: it has moved progressively toward speaking with one voice, but its real influence falls short of its economic, financial, and political weight. Therefore, the Commission suggested a “front-runner approach,” implying the EU would adopt common positions as early as possible.

Given that context, it is no surprise scholars decided to examine the implementation of the CFSP at the UN or that many of them have turned to voting cohesion as to support their arguments. Paul Luif set the standard, offering a detailed empirical exploration of the voting behavior of the EU Member States at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) (Luif 2003). A review of the literature reveals his example has been widely followed. Scholars have also questioned the use of voting cohesion (Kissack 2007; Smith 2005; Jørgensen 2004). Indeed, it may be a suitable proxy for measuring the realization of the CFSP at the UNGA but not for all UN bodies. Moreover, voting records only say something on the end result of what is often a complex and informal negotiation process. That being said, both Laurent Beaugitte and Pokuwan Wu decided to have a fresh look at the voting behavior of the EU Member States at the UNGA for their Potsdam papers.

Starting from the geographic term of “scale,” Beaugitte analyzed that behavior in a quantitative way. Looking at the years between 1985 and 2007 and arguing that phenomena at a particular scale (like the EU) may only reflect phenomena existing at a larger one (like the Council of Europe), he decided to explore the voting of the EU Member States at different levels (i.e., national level, EU-15, EU-27, and Council of Europe). Most interestingly, his cartographic testing did not reveal a EU effect but showed that common voting is an European phenomenon rather than an EU one.

Giving a statistical reinterpretation of the data collected by Erik Voeten and Adis Merdzanovic, Wu answered the question whether the EU Member States have been voting in a more coherent way following the consolidation of the CFSP. In addition, he researched whether the voting behavior of those Member States is less distant from the EU position after their accession than before, zooming in on Austria, Finland, and Sweden. Wu found the CFSP

and its consolidation have helped the EU Member States to coordinate voting positions. Yet, the EU's impact on the new Member States is less significant for normative issues than for military ones.

A second set of papers dealt with the UNSC. Ji Lei studied the question of UNSC reform, exploring the preferences of the EU Member States. Looking into official interventions and statements, she argues that one can identify a series of shared views on UNSC reform, like on the necessity of improving the working methods and on limiting the use of the right to veto. In her view, recent developments show a conscious European aspiration to construct and express a common policy in that regard.

Focusing on the UNSC as well, I explored the legal parameters defining regional actorness directly and indirectly, looking at the theory and practice behind Articles 52, 23, and 103 of the UN Charter. My exploration of the UNCH, and of the way that it defines regional actorness directly and indirectly, illustrated the external context is a crucial factor for understanding the limits and opportunities in that regard. Global roles and responsibilities frame regional ones, on paper, and in practice. Provisions from the UNCH determine not only shape the representation of the EU and its Member States at the UNSC but also frame the representation behavior of the latter.

Cliff Farhang decided to build upon existing knowledge on the EU at the UN as to explore Euratom's representation at an organization that is independent from but closely related to the UN: the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Euratom enjoys the status of observer in that organization, but the European Commission envisages a more enhanced position. Taking the EC's membership of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) as point of reference, Farhang's work revealed that membership will not increase the effectiveness in coordination. Moreover, membership claims are weak.

The panel concluded with Elitsa Mincheva's paper on the EU's support for the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Taking an international law perspective, Mincheva analyzed to what extent developments at the level of the UN have influenced the EU position, as well as to what extent the EU has been able to influence the debate within the UN. She found there is much uncertainty about the doctrine, about its scope, and operationalization. That uncertainty is not limited to the EU. Rather, it is a global reality.

The papers confirmed that scholars tend to explain the EU's performance at the UN by EU-related variables, in particular by the EU's representation. Few look into the impact of the UN as an external setting in which the EU is represented. Oriol Costa's decision to organize in Potsdam a specific panel on the influence of international organizations on the EU illustrates that analysts of the EU's international relations have become more aware of the impact of that setting. The EU may have the ambition of becoming a "structural power" in global politics (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008) but is also a structured one, namely a power structured by the context in which it(s) (Member States) operate(s) (Drieskens 2009). Wouters' decision of asking panelists to look into the EU's activities by combining internal, external, and inter-relational perspectives was thus not only ambitious but also timely. And even if not all the contributors managed to combine successfully those perspectives, the presentations and the discussion triggered by them provided inspiration for future research along those lines.

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