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**European diplomatic practices:  
contemporary challenges and innovative  
approaches**

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# EUROPEAN DIPLOMATIC PRACTICES: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

*Federica Bicchi and Niklas Bremberg*

## **Abstract**

As the aim of this special issue is to show practice approaches at work in the case of European diplomacy, this introduction provides readers with a hands-on sense of where the conversation about practices and European diplomacy currently stands. By introducing the key terms and overviewing the literature, the article contextualises the guiding questions of the special issue. It starts by reviewing how practice approaches have evolved in IR debates. It then describes European diplomacy's nuts and bolts in a post-Lisbon setting. It continues by focusing on specific practices and analytical mechanisms that contribute to understand European diplomacy's transformations and the role of security. While the debate about practices goes beyond the case of diplomacy, the latter has become a showcase for the former and this special issue continues the debate on practices and diplomacy by zooming in on the EU.

## **Introduction**

The aim of this special issue is to show practice approaches at work in the case of European diplomacy. We assume that our readers have a (maybe vague) interest in practices and/or in European diplomacy and we aim to help them gather a better understanding of both. We want to highlight the interesting analytical patterns that emerge when embracing practice approaches, very much as a landscape emerges when seen from a vantage point. And we want to emphasize what is interesting in European diplomacy post-Lisbon Treaty, especially in the area of security. In a nutshell, we want to show how practice approaches can be done and what to appreciate in contemporary European diplomatic practices.

This introduction, therefore, is not just aimed at clarifying the terms and the key questions for the pieces that follow. It also aims to provide readers with a hands-on sense of how to do practice approaches from a variety of perspectives, with a special emphasis on processes in connection with the European Union (EU) foreign policy. It is a "Practices 101" as well as a "Contemporary European Diplomacy 101," in order to better understand the sophisticated analyses that follow, as well as to invite readers to continue this conversation beyond this special issue with instruments that are, to borrow from a different debate, "simple enough and robust enough to work in the hands of novices" (Dick et al., 2009, p.9)

But let us start from the beginning. The key questions the articles gathered here are going to address are: what are the patterns, the mechanisms and the processes of European diplomatic practices? How is European diplomacy actually 'done' (as in: produced, represented)? How do practices "work" in European diplomacy? This collection will have fulfilled its goal if readers will take home a clear understanding of the mechanisms through which practices are relevant to politics in the case of European diplomacy. They will also get a good sense of what is to be gained by looking at politics through the perspective of practices and how to "do" practice approaches in their own work, if they so wish.

Therefore, as a whole this special issue has a twofold aim. The first is description. The special issue presents an analysis of European diplomacy's nuts and bolts in a post-Lisbon setting. Much has changed since the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the drastic reformulation of the post of High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) and the consolidation of crisis-related procedures.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, changes have largely occurred in the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, thus pertaining to local and/or post-Lisbon interpretations of what the Treaty meant. Therefore, it is only with a thorough scrutiny of how the Treaty has been translated into practice that a real sense of the changes' magnitude can emerge, as well as a feeling for the patterns that characterise European diplomacy.

The second goal is analysis. The articles gathered here provide a contribution to IR debates about the nature of European cooperation, of European diplomacy and, more generally, of practices in social sciences. Practice approaches might be the new boy on the block and get ranked among the "dissident voices,"<sup>2</sup> but they have generated a high degree of interest and intellectual curiosity. As a substantial body of literature has emerged, it is time to take stock of it and understand the implications for all scholars interested in IR theories as well as in European studies.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, while the debate about practice approaches goes beyond the case of diplomacy, the latter has become a showcase for the former. This special issue continues the debate on practices and diplomacy,<sup>4</sup> by zooming in on the special case of the EU.

This Introduction will start with a focus on IR and practice approaches. As much has been written to explain what practice approaches are, the focus here is on the current conversation in IR and on how to expand it, rather than on what practice approaches bring to the debate (about which articles in this collection also provide insights). Second, this Introduction addresses European diplomacy as a key example of practice and of practices, before turning in the third section to look at Europe as a practice.

### **Who can do practice approaches? Or: where we are in the IR conversation about practices**

Since the early call by Iver Neumann to "return practice" to our analyses of global politics (Neumann, 2002), the debate about practices has evolved and gathered momentum. Fifteen years afterwards, it is time to take stock and highlight not only the benefits of practice approaches, but also how to do practice approaches "in practice" and the type of theoretical, epistemological and methodological commitments they entail. This section thus provides a summary of how we got here and an indication of how interested scholars can pick up this conversation if they so wish. In short, it suggests that anybody can do practice approaches (and without necessarily having to get a PhD in Philosophy and another one in Social Theory).

The early call by Neumann came in reaction to the "linguistic turn" in IR, which, according to Neumann, unduly excluded non textual elements from the analysis of social and political life. In his view, it was important to "complement all the good work already done in the wake of the linguistic turn in IR by bringing practices back in" (Neumann, 2002, p.651). This was to entail looking at discourse and practice as engaged in interplay, with one affecting the other and none able to preclude change.

This call found the perfect respondents in Adler and Pouliot (Adler and Pouliot, 2011a, Adler and Pouliot, 2011b, Pouliot, 2008), who proceeded to provide working definitions of

practices, as well as to engage scholars from proxy approaches. They define practices as “competent performances,” or “socially meaningful patterns of action, which, in being performed more or less competently, simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world.” (Adler and Pouliot, 2011b, p.4). On this basis, they edited a volume, in which a range of distinguished scholars approached world politics through the lens of practices and “played” with the concept.

Responses to Adler and Pouliot’s definition and approach have varied. A key issue has focused on the definition of practices. Can we have a single definition that acts as the focus of an inter-paradigmatic debate centred on the concept of practices, as suggested by Adler and Pouliot? There are a number of definitions out there, on top of Adler and Pouliot’s. A crucial reading is the book by Schatzki et al. (2001), which Schatzki conveniently summarised in his “primer on practices” (his title) (Schatzki, 2012). It is here that he stresses how a practice is “an organised constellation of different people’s activities” (idem, 13), a definition that should appeal to a very broad audience. Adler-Nissen picks a different section from this text for her definition, focusing on practices as “open-ended, spatially-temporally dispersed nexus of doings and sayings” (idem, 14).

But things can get more complicated, if you want to complicate (or clarify?) things. Ringmar challenged the sheer possibility to provide a single definition of practice “there is no definition of practices that can command broad assent and yet retain sufficient explanatory power” (Ringmar, 2014, p.4). In his view, we are all talking about different things when we talk about practices, depending on our different theoretical backgrounds and aims. Some authors have also highlighted key differences in the concept and in the way practices have been defined. Aristotle is generally considered as a key precursor in partial opposition to key assumptions in classical realism (Brown, 2012) and the role of Wittgenstein has also been contested (Frost and Lechner, 2016).

The second key issue here is whether we have one practice theory or many – and if the latter, how much breadth is possible to accommodate before falling into the trap that Ringmar underscores, of losing explanatory power. The consensus here is that there is not a single practice theory. Outside IR but much to the point, Nicolini succinctly and bluntly puts it “a unified theory of practice does not exist” and practice theories can only be approached “as a plurality” (Nicolini, 2013, p.1). The matter therefore is how to structure the conversation within practice approaches, as well as between practice approaches and alternative ones. Others have suggested that “practice theory” is an “intellectual space,” or an “intellectual trading zone” for ideas, in which IR practitioners meet and trade ideas related to practices while maintaining fundamental disagreements over the meaning of core concepts (Bueger and Gadinger, 2014, p.12). In a similar fashion, Adler-Nissen suggests that we think of “practice theory” as a “broad intellectual landscape” with roots in pragmatism, phenomenology and critical theory (2016). But the problem is not fully resolved, though, as in these views such a space is not boundless. There are ins and outs of this trading zone, as traders in practice theory share a commitment to specific epistemological and ontological commitments (such as a performative understanding of the world), which is the ticket to be paid for entering the zone.

In this special issue, we suggest a catholic – ecumenical, even! – take on the debate and a cheap ticket entry, with the hope to democratise practice approaches and free them from the elitist, “dissent” label that has so far stuck to them. In our opinion, at this moment in time and given the existing body of literature in IR, the goal is to engage and elaborate, rather than

exclude and select. In order to foster conversations across all possible fields, we suggest to stick with the definition by Adler and Pouliot, but bracket the somehow more restrictive formula of “competent performance” in favour of the similar, but not identical, “socially meaningful patterns of action.” We justify this take on the IR debate about practices in two ways. First, according to Schatzki, a “practice approach” and the “field of practices” include all analyses that develop an account of practices and treat practices as the place to study human activities (Schatzki, 2000, p.2-4). Therefore, we rely on the broader expression of “practice approaches” or “practice perspectives,” in order to harness the plurality of views on the issue of practices. Moreover, what has been happening in other disciplines also highlights the broader spectrum of possibilities out there. In the case of communities of practice, for instance, the term has been used so widely across all possible theoretical continuums in Organization studies and Management, that it is simply arbitrary to limit the discussion to a given set of authors. Moreover, the debate about “best practices” has been around in the analysis of international organisations and private companies since at least the 1990s. And while it is arbitrary to suggest that practice can be turned into a variable, as long as there is clarity about the purpose and the meaning of such a move, we welcome the debate that comes with that, the richness of which this special issue demonstrates.

How to study practices in practice, then (if you forgive the pun)? What does a focus on practice mean for IR scholars, if they are interested in dabbling with practices? At the risk of oversimplifying and with the goal of complementing rather than pre-empting the theoretical discussion on practices, we would like to flag five issues: 1) attention to time (and thus to processes and the daily occurrences), 2) attention to space (and especially localism and situatedness), 3) attention to social groups (as opposed to individuals as well as to social macro structures), 4) patterns of practices (instead of patterns *in* practices), and finally 5) creativity about methods.

Time, space and social groups are crucial, as a focus on practices requires looking into what social groups are doing and their understanding of it, at a specific time and in a specific place. Rather than prioritising institutions or formal arrangements, practice approaches name and frame processes unfolding at a given time/space in a specific group. As the articles gathered in this special issue show, institutions and treaties, for example, are part of the processes and thus of what social actors are doing, rather than pre-determining what actors will actually do. The relevance of localism, of the local dimension, is particularly relevant for a discipline steeped in the global dimension. Therefore, rather than looking at the macro-picture, practice approaches privileges micro-movies and micro-stories, and how they underpin the macro-picture. The daily experience of social actors thus enters forcefully into the picture, to at least complement the broad-brushed portrait and give shape to the wide, overarching ideas (Certeau, 1984).<sup>5</sup> The emphasis on social groups not only contributes to bring a synthesis between agency and structure, as often emphasised by in the literature on practices, but also shows how practice approaches talk directly to both rational choice and constructivism, as the former is based on methodological individualism and the latter on social structures. A “practice turn” in rational choice would thus see (and has partly already seen) the individual embedded in a small but social context, whereas a “practice turn” in constructivism would bring (and has already brought) an attention to networks and policy entrepreneurs as agents of change and continuity, given that “ideas don’t float freely.” Patterns of practices is where the debate currently stands, in the attempt to show e.g. the relations that matter to practices (like anchoring, about which see Mérand and Rayroux in this collection), the forms that social groups can take (such as communities of practice, see Baylon, Bicchi and Graeger in this

collection) and the way in which power, agency and continuity play out (see Bremberg, Bueger and Chelotti in this collection).

Methodologically, while providing explanatory leverage, practices are best understood as “accounts of” European diplomatic practices, rather “accounting for” them via an analysis of motives and rationales (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot, 2014, p.891). It is not a matter of reinventing the wheel or to suggest only the most difficult route of participant observation or ethnography (on which see Kuus 2013). Rather, again as Kuus stresses, it becomes important to do “slow research” (2015) looking for the “dirt” that gives depth to the material as well as the “stories” that make up the big picture. But this does not mean we must discard well established methods such as interviews or surveys, which both figure in this collection as useful methods for listening to practitioners and interpreting their doings. Rather, the idea is to apply a degree of creativity to our understandings of methods, for instance by looking at interviews in a different way (e.g. Nicolini, 2009) or by tracing practices instead of processes (Pouliot, 2014). It is about creativity while “gittin’ real with what we do.” (sic Saldaña, 2014, p.976)

Therefore, our understanding of who can do practices, given the current debate in IR, is broad and the broader the conversation zone, the more value added there will be. Much of this also applies to the study of European diplomacy.

### **European diplomatic practices: continuing an old conversation with new insights**

What does it mean to study European diplomacy through the lens of practice approaches? Of course, we do not assume that there is only one way to do this but we suggest that the starting point is that insights from practice approaches help us specify the unit of analysis - i.e. practices as socially meaningful patterns of action - in contrast to the usual theoretical dichotomies of structure and agency that tend to organize debates in IR and EU studies. As Adler-Nissen puts it, practice approaches aim “to liberate agency – and the human, bodily experience of the world – from the constrictions of structuralist and systemic models while avoiding the trap of methodological individualism” (Adler-Nissen 2016, p.2). Trying to capture the lived experience of European diplomacy is not only a way of getting a different understanding of how, for example, negotiations between ambassadors in the EU’s Foreign Affairs Council are performed . We argue that a focus on “European diplomatic practices” as an object of study moves our analytical attention away from reified structures of institutional affiliations, divisions and boundaries between state actors and regional organisations that are often thought to make up the “European sub-system of the international system” (Jorgensen 2015, p.25) . We aim to direct gazes instead to patterns actions, sites, artefacts and tacit understandings that are made use of in contemporary European diplomacy and foreign policy. To do so, we need to clarify what is implied by “European” and “diplomacy”.

First of all, what qualifies as European is a potentially endless discussion, one which is only slightly reduced if we throw the EU into the equation. As one seasoned EU official put it “If you go into a country and say ‘I’m the Ambassador of France’, everybody thinks they know what an Ambassador is and what France is. If you say ‘I’m the Head of the Delegation of the European Commission’, they really haven’t got the slightest idea what you’re talking about” (Benson-Rea and Shore 2012, p.480). Even now, that the title has changed to “EU Ambassador,” things are not easier. A national Ambassador from a European country presenting his credentials was greeted with enthusiasm, because – the Director General of the ministry of Foreign Affairs of the hosting country remarked – relations between states are “easier to understand” than relations with the EU via the EU Ambassador.<sup>6</sup>

We propose to make a (working) distinction between the EU, its member states and European non-member states, while keeping in mind that European diplomatic practices necessarily cut across these demarcations. Borrowing from Bourdieu, we suggest that European diplomacy should first and foremost be understood as a field of practice which is not primarily demarked by geography but by what is at stake to the actors involved (Adler-Nissen 2014, Kuus 2014, Pouliot and Cornut 2015). This means not only that European diplomacy is fuzzy at its borders but also that it makes little sense to distinguish between European and national practices when it comes to diplomacy and foreign policy. To what extent this fuzziness applies to security and even military practice is something to be explored and in our view practice approaches provide new ways of thinking about “hard” issues of security (e.g. Bremberg, 2015, Pouliot, 2010) just as much as “soft” issues, such as developmental assistance and human rights (e.g. Stein, 2011).

Furthermore, the mutually exclusive juxtaposition between the European and the national “levels” has long since been challenged in European integration theories, from a plurality of perspectives. In a realist vein, Milward argued that European integration has been the rescue of the nation state in Europe (1992). From a constructivist point of view, analyses of European identity have shown the enmeshment of European and national identities, which does not translate in convergence nor homogeneity across the EU (Risse, 2005). More recently, the point has been made by stressing state transformation as the main effect of European integration (Bickerton, 2012). Drawing on practice approaches, Adler-Nissen argues that a distinctive feature of diplomatic practice among EU member states is the day-to-day management of the tension between the aim of forging an “ever closer union” while trying to keep their separateness visible (2014).

Second, while defining diplomacy is potentially more straightforward, it is perhaps less so than first expected. According to Satow’s classical textbook reference, diplomacy is “the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states, extending sometimes also to their relations with vassal states” (Satow, 1917/1979, p.1). To be sure, this reference betrays a Euro-centric quality to contemporary diplomacy given its European/Christian origins dating back to Renaissance, the emergence of the modern state system and Europe’s expansion. However, the origins of a given practice need not compromise that practice *ipso facto* (Neumann 2012, p.300). More up-to-date definitions (which leaves Satow’s vassal states aside) generally include actors other than states, ranging from NGOs to international organisations (e.g. Barston, 1997). In terms of actions, diplomacy is often equated with the art of negotiation (see Berridge, 2010), and the implementation carried out by civil servants of decisions made by governments (Cooper et al., 2013, p.2).

Nonetheless, the key point to highlight from a perspective on practice is that “[w]hat it means to practise diplomacy or be diplomatic remains an open question” (Constantinou and Der Derian, 2010, p.6) and we do agree that we need to cast “a wider net and locate both traditional and non-traditional diplomatic agents as part of an evolving configuration of social relations” (Sending et al., 2011, p.528). This is all the more true when we are focusing on European diplomacy, which includes traditional national diplomacies, but also aspiring diplomats such as EEAS officials.

In our view, insights from practice approaches can above all be used to ask questions about changes to European diplomacy in terms of who is doing it and how it is done while not

completely fixing the research object from the onset. For example, European diplomatic practices can in this way be understood as the embodied experiences of a certain tradition of political representation derived from centuries of state-making and war-making on the European continent and beyond (cf. Tilly 1992) or as a shared repertoire of actions through which certain actors seek to distinguish themselves from others in global politics. The collection of articles in this special issue are primarily focusing on two themes in relation to the question of change in European diplomacy, namely practices in the field of diplomacy and foreign policy rendered possible by European integration and practices that make “Europe” into something to represent, act upon and ultimately defend in global politics.

### **Anchoring European diplomacy**

It is often assumed that the process of European integration has had a limited impact on foreign, security and defence policy in Europe compared to many other policy fields, but there is no secret that there is a long standing history of European cooperation on foreign policy. From its early days in the 1970s in the framework of the European Political Cooperation, EU foreign policy has developed and morphed into the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Smith’s (2004, p.45) characterization EU foreign and security policy as emerging out of “informal customs” through day-to-day interactions of national officials and developing into more formalized rules and norms basically tells the story of how practices precede institutionalization. More recently, the Lisbon Treaty has brought about the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which has acquired most of the characteristics of a diplomatic service but in the name (Edwards, 2014, Spence, 2009, Koops and Macaj, 2014, Cross, 2007, Bátorá, 2005, Carta, 2012). Therefore, European diplomacy does not only refer to the diplomatic services of states based in Europe, but also to the EEAS, which is in itself a “hybrid model” (Balfour et al., 2015, Smith, 2014), composed of both detached national diplomats and EU officials with a diplomatic status.

The argument that we want to make is not that European integration eventually and necessarily will lead to a single EU foreign and security policy that subsumes national foreign and security policies. Instead, we argue that European integration over time has led to that certain diplomatic practices “anchor” others in a European setting. The general idea here, espoused by Sending and Neumann in their work on assessing performance in the World Bank, is that some practices work as “anchoring practices” to the extent that they render other practices possible, providing and structuring “tools” and “resources” that actors need to engage with other practices (Sending and Neumann 2011, Swindler 2001). Conventional constructivist explanations would possibly assign this anchoring role to norms, identities and discourse whereas a focus on practice privileges the “unspoken realities” upon which symbolic and linguistic activities are based, and rather sees anchoring practices as: “the infrastructure for repeated interactional patterns” (Swindler 2001, p.94).<sup>7</sup> The point here is that the above mentioned changes to European diplomacy would not be possible where it not for the emergence of pluralistic security community that today include the majority of European states, including some non-EU states (cf. Deutsch, et al. 1957, Adler and Barnett 1998, Wæver 1998).

At the core lies the practice of self-restraint which means that conflicts are self-evidently handled through compromises and that the threat of inter-state war is absent from the shared repertoire of possible actions within the community (Adler 2008, Pouliot 2008). This is surely a distinctive feature since it is often assumed that “threatening, often by invoking military capabilities, is a practice inherent to all known diplomatic systems” (Neumann 2012, p.314). The development of common European military and civilian crisis management



capacities (also as they preserve a strong trans-Atlantic component) is a striking example of how changes to European diplomatic practices have been made possible due the ways in which national armed forces interact as a consequence of war not being a conceivable option among EU and NATO member states (Mérand 2010, Graeger 2014). But this does not only condition interactions between members as it can be said to predispose them to act in certain ways towards and with non-members. For example, the EU's efforts at creating association agreements, partnerships, regional focal points, transnational dialogues, etc. illustrate: "a disposition towards spreading the community outward through explicit or implicit practices of socialization or teaching" (Adler and Greve 2009, p.72). NATO's eastern expansion can also partly be explained by its adoption of cooperative security practices after the end of the Cold War (Adler 2008).

However, it also needs to be asked whether other practices anchor European diplomatic practices. After all, it seems far-fetched to assume that the perhaps most archetypical anchoring practice in international politics, namely balance of power would not play any role what so ever (cf. Waltz 1979, Bull 1977, Kaufman, et al. 2007). Balance of power as a practice between states relies on the disposition of "rational mistrust" and the persistent calculation against taking risks on the behaviour of others (Adler & Greve 2009, p.69). As such, it anchors diplomatic practices albeit on the basis of inter-state war being a conceivable, if not expected, option. Even though security communities and balance of power rely on analytically distinct practices, this does not imply that there are neat and clear-cut boundaries between them. Indeed, overlaps between set of practices is possible to conceive in the sense that dispositions and expectations of particular actors might respond more or less simultaneously to two ways of doing diplomacy and exercising power. Moreover, Swindler notes that practices: "remain stable not only because habit ingrains standard ways of doing things, but because the need to engage one another forces people to return to common structures. Indeed, antagonistic interchanges may reproduce common structures more precisely than friendly alliances do" (Swindler 2001, p.94). This is a highly relevant theme to explore in relation to what is currently going on in Eastern Europe where Russia's annexation of Crimea and its hybrid warfare in the eastern parts of Ukraine explicitly challenge the normative foundations of the post-Cold War security architecture in Europe. The ways in which the EU and NATO struggle to come up with a response to Russia's behaviour is not only a matter of calibrating the right level of sanctions but also, and arguably more important, a question of whether to evoke diplomatic and military actions that many perhaps thought were irrelevant in post-Cold War Europe.

### **Doing Europe, making it happen**

Studying European diplomatic practices as socially meaningful patterns of action suggests that we need to look at the sites where European diplomacy is produced, or "where it happens" to paraphrase Neumann (2013, p.4). Zooming in on the EU, this might entail the describing the practical knowledge that goes into drafting political reports in EU Delegations around the world or understanding the tacit rules by which controversies are settled in the Political and Security Committee. Although it might be tempting to equate European diplomacy only with what comes out of the perpetual negotiations between EU member state representatives and EU officials in Brussels, from the perspective of practice there is no reason to limit our focus to this (see above). In order to address the question of change in European diplomatic practices, we argue that it is imperative to look beyond the institutionalization of EU foreign and security policy. As the literature on Europeanisation of foreign policy has shown (e.g. Wong and Hill, 2011), the "impact of Europe" on foreign

policies of member and non-member states varies, but it exists and it can be assessed – all the more so in terms of practice approaches.

This relates to a claim common to most practice approaches, namely that agency is a property of practice. Action is constitutive of practices but action is specific and located in time, practices are general classes of action which need not be limited to any specific enacting (Adler and Pouliot, 2011). For example, Kuus (2014) notes that “Europe” is both a cause and an effect of contemporary European diplomacy as it is invoked but not defined, assumed but not explained, in everyday interactions of diplomats and officials in Brussels. To understand how someone or something, such as the EU, becomes a diplomatic actor we need to investigate how EU officials as well as national diplomats participate in diplomatic practices that engage other actors. It is not so much a question of whether national diplomats and EU officials are truly socialized into always thinking of what are “Europe’s” interests and how can they be promoted, it is rather a question of how “Europe” becomes something that has a stake in regional and global politics and therefore needs to be represented, if not defended. If we want to understand how “Europe” is “done” on an international stage, and how international agency is produced in consequence we need to closely scrutinize specific sites and their practices.

Of course, this is yet one of many possible examples. The main point is that we should not necessarily assume that Brussels or national capitals are always the main sites as European diplomatic practices can be understood as assemblages of manifold yet inter-linked practices manifested in various concrete settings. This does not only challenge conventional thinking on what (strategic) level the action takes place (e.g. Brussels vs. national capitals), it also calls for a kind of horizontal approach to account for the ways in which European diplomacy is embedded in communities of practice bringing together various practitioners from regional organizations beyond the EU (e.g. NATO, OSCE, Council of Europe) as well as member states and even non-members. Take the example of the EU’s to date largest military operation, EUFOR Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It took over from NATO SFOR in 2004 and NATO’s SHAPE has served as the operation’s headquarters and NATO’s JFC in Naples has retained an important coordinating and extraction role, and most commanding officers are double-hatted. Moreover “NATO procedures are used, and the military chain of command leads up to NATO DSACEUR... the operation builds on interoperability standards of NATO and suits the professional practices associated to NATO” (Mérand 2010, p.371).

Moreover, European diplomatic practices might be studied through artefacts, such as objects and technologies but also concepts or metaphors (i.e. language artefacts). The idea here is that certain ways of doing and handling things are inscribed in an artefact, and by observing how it is used these practices might be interpreted. Technologies are examples of such artefacts and in IR examples would be information technologies spurring certain ways of doing public diplomacy or weapons technologies spurring different practices of deterrence, non-proliferation, containment, etc. Documents would be another kind of artefacts as well as the core material of international policy-making “Documents are circulated to reach different sites. Large organizations are highly dependent on circulation to ensure the flow of information between various sites. Physically disconnected sites – an office around the corner, an office in a different continent and time zone, a library, an archive, or assemblies and court rooms – become connected by documents” (Bueger 2014, p.16). Just think of the 2003 European Security Strategy and its later incarnations, or the European Neighbourhood Policy. A third kind of artefact would be concepts and metaphors which allow for different

kinds of actions, for example the failed state concept, the responsibility to protect or the EU's "comprehensive approach" to security.

## **Conclusions**

This introduction has presented a (hopefully user-friendly) entry point into debates about practice approaches and about European diplomacy. While practice approaches challenge well established ways of doing research in IR, they also offer a set of tools that can be handled by all interested people. As participants to the project culminating in this special issue, we have come to gravitate around certain concepts and themes that further elaborate on the premises exposed above. We believe they also serve to structure the contributions to this special issue around three loose themes: anchoring practices (or the relations between practices, as briefly described above), communities of practice (or the forms that social groups can take based on shared practices); and the way in which power, agency and continuity play out in patterns of practice (also addressed above). The main message is for anybody interested in practices to give it a go and dabble with them. Hopefully the pointers offered above will be of help and so will the articles in this collection.

The issues of anchoring practices and communities of practice is taken up by Frédéric Mérand and Antoine Rayroux. In their article, they look specifically at how European states decide on their contribution to peace operations, whether in an EU, NATO or UN context. Burden sharing (i.e. how states share the costs of supplying a public good among themselves), they argue, is an anchoring practice, that is, an institutionalized social referent that is shared by European security practitioners and shapes their political struggles around the stake of coordinating crisis management operations. The field of European security has given birth to a "community of security practice" around the more or less routine task of determining national contributions to crisis management operations. In the European security field, practitioners from different professional and national backgrounds understand each other's positions, the structure of power relations and the diversity of strategic cultures. Everybody is in the business of sharing the burden but they do it in different ways. Mérand and Rayroux show that a focus on practice refines the traditional rational choice vs. constructivist debate on burden sharing. Their article does not suggest that national interests or norms do not matter: strategic considerations, economic benefits, prestige, and international legitimacy are all taken into consideration by security actors when they make decisions about the planning of operations. But these various motives are entangled in patterns of social relations, institutions and power structures that blur the realm of possibilities in every contribution decision.

Federica Bicchi focuses on an example of community of practice, composed of European diplomats in the Jerusalem-Ramallah area. Her article shows how Europe practices on the ground its stated position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by highlighting the existence of a community of European practitioners in the Jerusalem area. The often-stated EU support for a two-state solution could appear meaningless in the absence of peace negotiations. However, European diplomats (i.e. diplomats of EU member states and EU officials) in the East Jerusalem-Ramallah area are committed to specific practices of political resistance to Israeli occupation and recognition of Palestinian institutions. These practices have led not only to a specific political geography of diplomacy, but also to a community of practice, composed of European diplomats and based on their daily experience of resisting occupation and bestowing recognition. It is this group of officials who represent and actively 'do' Europe's position on the ground and under occupation.

How informal EU-NATO cooperation practices have evolved and expanded into new areas despite the political stalemate caused by the “Cyprus issue” is analysed by Nina Græger. Drawing on the post-2008 Kosovo missions and cooperation patterns in Brussels headquarters, Græger shows how and where informal interaction, which now form the nexus of EU-NATO relations, have been enacted and produced over time. Her main argument is that practice approaches are best suited to capture how EU and NATO staff at all levels of responsibility engage each other in practical knowledge, developing shared repertoires of interaction and also learn from each other. An important “anchoring practice” in this informal European security diplomacy is shared “background” knowledge, embedded in professional training and education, experience and human skills. While rivalry and competition clearly exist, the article argues that looser community structures among EU and NATO staff in offices and in field missions are visible, which constitutes the contours of loose communities of practice-in-the-making.

The question of continuity and change in European diplomacy is addressed by Niklas Bremberg in his analysis of EU’s response to the Arab spring. Bremberg shows how a repertoire of dispositions and background knowledge, developed over several decades vis-à-vis EU’s Mediterranean policies, served as a baseline from which EU officials and diplomats acted. The main argument here is that change often happens as a function of revisiting past practices and adopting them to new circumstances. In fact, seemingly path-dependent processes might contain more contingent feature than perhaps usually acknowledged. This claim is substantiated by an empirical account of incremental, step-wise change of EU foreign policy that is different from interest-based or norm-based accounts that would posit that in order for policies to change it is necessary that actors’ preferences change. Instead, policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) – the EU’s flagship initiative – change as EU diplomats and officials learn to more or less cleverly apply the skills necessary to muddle through.

Nicola Chelotti provides a different take on continuity and change in EU diplomacy. By analysing the weekly negotiations between diplomats within the EU Council, he argues that changing nationally-oriented ways of doing things is difficult, even in a highly institutionalised setting such as EU foreign policy. The normative thick environment of Brussels-based institutions has certainly created a conspicuous set of social practices and made the negotiation process a cooperative enterprise. These social practices, however, remain often subordinated to nationally-oriented, consequentialist ways of doing things. Consequentialist practices perform an anchoring function, in that they define the parameters around which other (including social) practices operate. This helps to understand why the products of EU foreign policy often seem to reflect the lowest common denominator of states’ positions or the preferences of the biggest states. In addition, by showing the relatively high autonomy national diplomats enjoy in their activities, the article also argues that there is a mix of partial agency and persistence of the overarching national disposition in performing negotiating practices.

How does our understanding of international agency change from a practice theoretical viewpoint? Arguing that agency is a practical achievement that implies to participate and enact practices, Christian Bueger explores how the EU became a core actor in the field of international counter-piracy. Revisiting the different practices that aim at dealing with Somali piracy, Bueger shows how the EU turned from a marginal actor into the international leader of the fight against piracy. In recasting this story, he is able to document how becoming an international actor requires significant work. In consequence we should not think about

international actors as fixed or pre-determined entities, but as relational phenomena. To understand how the EU is made and gains the capacity to act on the international stage, Bueger argues, we need to investigate the practices in particular issue domains, such as counter-piracy.

In studying a professional school of diplomacy opened by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Donoxti Baylon analyses the practice of training through the case of a cohort's learning experience. Drawing on recent developments in social theory of learning and identity work he suggests that the school can be conceptualised as an "identity workspace" where entering diplomats engage in identity work through three key social mechanisms: social defences, sentient communities, and rites of passage. This article contributes to the literature on communities of practice by focusing on the notion of identity but it also speaks to the ongoing debate on the lack of "esprit de corps" in the European External Action Service. Donoxti argues that the training offered by the EEAS would have to complement the acquisition of operational skills (based on an acquisitive view of knowledge) with the social, relational, bodily, emotional, and symbolic elements of learning.

There are, therefore, different "reading paths" in this special issue, as all authors contribute in a different way to the research questions addressed in this introduction. It is our hope that readers will find them inspiring to the point of taking the discussion further.

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<sup>1</sup> See Keukeleire and Delreux (2014), Smith (2014) and Spence (2015) for an overview of the changes brought by the Lisbon Treaty.

<sup>2</sup> See the Special Issue of the *Journal of Common Market Studies* 2016, vol.54, n.1.

<sup>3</sup> See the Symposium on the Practice Turn in IR in the *International Studies Quarterly*, published online December 2015 <http://www.isanet.org/Publications/ISQ/Posts/ID/4955/categoryId/102/The-Practice-Turn-in-International-Relations>



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<sup>4</sup> Edited by Sending, Pouliot and Neumann (2011) *International Journal* and by Cornut and Pouliot (2015) *Cooperation and Conflict*.

<sup>5</sup> In the case of Europe, see for instance McNamara, 2015, Adler-Nissen, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Interview, November 2015.

<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Diez (2014) has stressed how discursive practices have a legitimising effect in EU foreign policy, both enabling and constraining legitimate action. His argument expands on Waever's analysis about discourses, which delimit what can be said and what not (Waever 2002). A similar way to conceptualise this point is provided by Hansen, when she argues that "[s]pecific practices are performed as exemplars of a general practice, which means that they are measured against the – socially constituted – understanding of what a general practice implies" (Hansen 2011, p.)