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EFPU roundtable: 'EU Foreign Policy after Lisbon: the Common Security and Defence Policy'

Blog editor



On 17 November 2011 the LSE's European Foreign Policy Unit hosted the first of ten roundtables on 'EU Foreign Policy after Lisbon'. In this series policy-makers, experts and other stakeholders are invited to share their views on the EU's role and impact in international affairs.

To kick off the series, the first roundtable covered the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The panellists were Jolyon Howorth from Yale University, Anand Menon from the University of Birmingham and Nick Witney from the European Council on Foreign Relations and the former head of the European Defence Agency.

The major point to be drawn from the discussion was that the CSDP is in a state of institutional crisis. There was widespread agreement among the panellists that the enduring core problems of the policy area are a lack of strategic rationalisation and of member state commitment.

In a way the roundtable could be seen as something of a misnomer. Apart from the EU Training Mission Somalia, the CSDP has not produced any new crisis management missions in the post-Lisbon period. It is this obvious and crucial fact that set the general tone for the roundtable, a tone which at various points may be described as one of disappointment and even disillusionment.

The unanimous verdict seemed to be that the project CSDP has run out of steam. The fact that the EU could not agree to meet the challenge Libya posed in the spring of 2011 – arguably presenting a *Kosovo revisited*, and thus exactly the type of crisis scenario for which the CSDP was originally conceived – leaves the policy in disarray. While European leaders may feel rather distracted by the Euro crisis, the institutional deficiencies of CSDP have been apparent for some time, and the Lisbon Treaty does not seem to have made a fundamental difference in this regard.

The revamped post of High Representative was received very critically by all members of the panel, which is as much to do with its (intended) political weakness as it is with Baroness Ashton's interpretation and execution of her mandate. While there are important new provisions – *Permanent Structured Cooperation* holds promise for reinvigorated defence cooperation in military R&D and hardware – these have not fostered greater member state commitment, which remains the most fundamental concern of CSDP.

All three speakers (to varying extents) identified this lack of political will with a lack of strategy at the heart of the enterprise. Europeans feel safe by and large – the language of (new) 'threats' engulfing the epistemic community of European security eludes them – and politicians have found it hard to justify the role of military power in Europe. The question 'what kind of an actor in international affairs does the EU aim to be' remains unanswered.

So is the project doomed to irrelevance? Jolyon Howorth and Nick Witney shared some cautious optimism that all is not lost, as the stakes are high and member states show more agreement than disagreement on the issues. Conversely, Anand Menon portrayed the CSDP as inherently pathological in as much as it has allowed member states not to 'do defence': CSDP has actually made matters slightly worse.

In any case, with the background of the present economic crisis it seems unlikely that the CSDP will re-emerge with much vigour anytime soon. This is partly due to political expediency, partly due to the lack of financial resources. The UK's disenchantment with the present course of European integration puts another question mark to the viability of 'EU defence'. If the CSDP indeed continues to lack both operational and strategic substance, then narrowing Christopher Hill's infamous *capability-expectations gap* will remain a difficult task.

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