

Introduction

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) controls the efforts of EU member states to act in a unified way on foreign policy and security affairs. The CFSP has received extensive attention in recent years as the EU has attempted to carve out an independent role for itself in foreign policy. Some member states, such as France, see this as a way of setting the EU up as a superpower to balance the strength of the USA. Other states view it as a way to improve the manner in which the EU can cooperate with and support the USA. Because of these differing agendas, progress in setting a clear direction for CFSP has been slow, although important changes have occurred.

History

Until the Maastricht Treaty came into effect in November 1993, the EU had no official role in foreign affairs and could not speak on behalf of member states in this policy area. The Maastricht Treaty committed EU member states to develop a foreign policy and, for the first time, allowed the EU to speak with a single voice in this area.

Under changes made by the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) this process was solidified into the CFSP. The Treaty created a post of EU High Representative for the CFSP, able to represent the European Council abroad. The 1999 Cologne European Council committed the EU to develop the ability to take independent military action, a policy which was pursued by the High Representative under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). As a result, since 2003 the EU has deployed teams of international observers and peacekeeping forces, such as the team deployed to Chad in 2008. The Lisbon Treaty (2007) brought about huge changes to the CFSP. First, it combined the roles of 'High Representative for the CFSP' and the 'External Affairs Commissioner' to create a single EU Foreign Policy post of **High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**. The position is currently held by the UK's Catherine Ashton. Secondly, it created a new **European External Action Service (EEAS)** to bring diplomatic missions together under the authority of the new High Representative. Thirdly, whilst ESDP decisions were previously made by member states in the Council of the European Union (each state had a veto), the Lisbon Treaty increased the use of **Qualified Majority Voting (QMV)**, reducing the number of areas in which the veto is used. Crucially, decisions on military or defence issues must still be unanimous.

How does the CFSP work?

The High Representative for Foreign Affairs is responsible for co-ordinating the EU's foreign policy and building consensus between member states. The High Representative's specific powers are largely undefined and are likely to be shaped by Catherine Ashton in the coming years. However, actual decisions on CFSP are still made by member states in the European Council. It was agreement here that involved the EU in peacekeeping in Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Congo in 2003, as well as observer missions in Gaza (2004) and Indonesia (2005). In 2007, EU foreign ministers agreed to implement sanctions against Iran following its refusal to halt uranium enrichment. In 2008, sanctions were imposed against Zimbabwe following a violent and undemocratic Presidential election, and the EU launched its first maritime operation to prevent piracy off the coast of Somalia. The European Council also issues 'common strategies' on issues about which members states agree, many as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). These include strategies on promoting democracy and peace in Russia, the eastern Mediterranean and the Ukraine. The EU has diplomatic missions in several important countries, under the authority of the High Representative.

The use of QMV in CFSP increased under the Lisbon Treaty, but member states retain the right to veto all EU foreign policy decisions and strategies. For example Poland blocked a new Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) with Russia in 2005-07 in protest at an ongoing Russian ban on Polish meat imports. Also Spain, Greece and Slovakia opposed UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari's plan for Kosovan independence from Serbia, but an EU mission was sent to Kosovo when it declared its independence in 2008. Member states still have the freedom to pursue their own foreign policy goals as Britain and some other members did in 2003 when they decided to join the US-led invasion of Iraq, despite the opposition of other member states. In 2011, the EU was criticised for its fragmented response to the uprisings in Libya. Germany opposed a no-fly zone and in the end, it was the France and UK-led coalition that took action.

Arguments

For

- ❖ The CFSP is an effective way of enhancing security around the EU by emphasising shared goals and values.
- ❖ Co-operating on foreign policy gives countries a louder voice on the world stage.
- ❖ Pooling diplomatic and defence resources allows members to save money because they can share know-how and hardware.

Against

- ❖ The EU should not 'go it alone', but it should instead maintain traditional links with the USA through NATO and the UN.
- ❖ Setting foreign policy is one of the most important jobs of a national government. Un-elected European officials should not be given this power.
- ❖ Member states find it very difficult to agree on foreign and security policy, so the CFSP can only ever have limited effectiveness.
- ❖ CFSP allows some countries to do less about their security because they can ride on the back of more powerful countries, like the UK or France.

"For decades we had been confronted by various forms of crises on our doorsteps – but without the means to address them. Now we have..."

Javier Solana, High Representative for CFSP, 2006

Technical Terms

- ❖ **Veto**: the right of one country to block a decision.
- ❖ **Qualified Majority Voting (QMV)**: A proposal can only be passed if it has the support of 65% of the EU population from at least 55% of EU member states.

Links

- ❖ http://eeas.europa.eu/cfsp/index_en.htm
- ❖ <http://www.euractiv.com/en/security>