

“Europe’s Common Foreign and Security Policy: The Art of The Possible”

Wilton Park Conference Report
WP790 of 7-10 July 2005

Jonas Hagmann¹

This is a conference report on this year’s European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) conference at Wilton Park held at Wiston House near Steyning, Southern England. I am grateful to the Swiss Association for Foreign Policy for its generous financial support, which made participation in this conference possible.

The conference commenced just hours after multiple terrorist attacks struck the London public transportation networks. Throughout the conference these events were referred to as a prominent reason for an increasingly coherent and potent European security posture. This view based on current events came at the stark backdrop of the ongoing European ‘constitutional crisis’, which seem to negate all thrust for reinforcements of ESDP structures and capabilities.

Conference proceeding

Program overview

The conference program was revised given the special circumstances of the day. Indeed, the conference had strictly focused on ESDP when the conference was first announced back in early 2005: Since the onset of the European Union’s ‘constitutional crisis’ however the subject had been enlarged to “Audits and Prospects of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).” This change has gone unnoticed to many participants, leading to some confusion in the utilization of the terms CFSP and ESDP.

Many conference participants had difficulties reaching Wilton Park because of travel restrictions in South-East England; hence the first day program was delimited to a review of the ‘constitutional crisis.’ On day two ‘European power’ was put in relation with other major powers such as the United States, China and Russia. CFSP and EDSP were also put into relation with international organization such as NATO or the African Union. Four workshops were scheduled in the afternoon of day two on the topics of Euro Med, psychology and cooperation, policy coherence and defense procurement. On day three, discussion focused on specific current issues such as counter-terrorism and indirect and regional security approaches through, for instance, development aid. The conference

¹ PhD Candidate in International Relations at IUHEI Geneva, jonas.hagmann@alumni.tufts.edu. Do not hesitate to contact by email.

ended on Sunday morning. For the full conference program including panelist names and affiliations, see at the end of this conference report.

Central themes

Conference discussions can be resumed under three major and three minor themes or headings: Major topics addressed included (1) ESDP structure, strategy and capabilities, (2) the relations between CFSP/ESDP and NATO, and (3) the relations between CFSP/ESDP and non-EU powers and institutions such as the PRC, Russia or India, the United Nations system and other security frameworks. The three minor themes are discussed in the subsequent section.

(1) Much regret was aired at the unclear institutionalization of ESDP within the European system. CFSP and ESDP practitioners expected this situation to continue given the stalled ratification process of the Constitutional Treaty. There was yet a general sense that capabilities and structures will be further developed on an ad-hoc basis. In particular, ongoing ESDP operations in the field are understood to be the key drivers for ESDP consolidation over the next years. This understanding reflects an unarticulated preference of conference participants to consolidate ESDP institutionalization 'by practice'. Such consolidation is deemed unproblematic as current CFSP and ESDP operations are not understood to fully exploit the formally possible today. Regarding capabilities, there was an understanding that the imminent creation of EU Battle Groups suffices for the time being.

(2) The strategic aspect of ESDP was mostly discussed under the heading of ESDP-NATO relations and with allusion to the shared-facilities agreement between the two. In general the relationship and allocation of security tasks between ESDP and NATO was yet not critically analyzed, nor were pragmatic solutions put forward. Rather, all central issues associated with such 'job sharing' remained unaddressed. It remained hence unclear how ESDP strategy and capabilities relate to NATO today, and how they are envisaged to resonate in the future. It also remained unaddressed whether ESDP should complement -and if so: to what extent- national security policies in Europe.

(3) The third central theme, relations with major third parties such as the US or the People's Republic of China were subsumed to disagreements on the International Criminal Court, environmental protection, the Middle Eastern conflicts, Taiwan, and the lifting of the EU arms trade ban on the PRC. On transatlantic relations US participants asked for greater European contributions to NATO. In turn, Europeans asked Americans for participation in the ICC, Kyoto and similar agreements. On security issues there seemed to be a tacit agreement among European Foreign Service staff to gradually uncouple European policy making from the transatlantic partner and to no longer wait for US consultations. American and Chinese participants disagreed on Taiwan. Discussion in this module was informed but the most 'diplomatic' of all of the conference.

Further themes

Secondary themes often implicit in those three central discussion topics outlined above were (i) the ‘potentials’ of ESDP, (ii) the state and future of the European Union’s Mediterranean democracy, human rights and trade promotion programs, (iii) the combat of terrorism in general, including the use of indirect approaches designed to tackle this particular threat.

(i) ESDP ‘potentials’ were understood as considerable, and un-captured. This ‘potential’ referred to the possible roles of the European Union institutions as facilitators, mediators, or third party interveners. It referred to security hardware availabilities on the margins, only. In this view, ‘Europe’, the European Union in particular, is understood to enjoy significant credit with a series of foreign governments that could and should be seized and utilized for peace promotion strategies. Such use of European credit is especially central in areas where poor US standing disallows for US peace promotion policies. European panelists and participants did yet not straightforwardly call for the seizure of this European credit. Also, possible ways to utilize such credit practically and effectively were not discussed.

(ii) The Euro-Med discussion joined well to this issue: The European Mediterranean dialogue is understood to be stalled, requiring a forceful re-launch. Problems were linked to the absence of reform in North African countries. Practitioners acknowledged confusion that arose from the multiplication of EU regional strategies such as the Barcelona Process or the Neighborhood Frameworks. Relationships between such EU strategies are not understood by the wider public. Workshop discussants advocated for a re-launch of the dialogue based on increased educational exchange programs, programs designed to foster yet primarily South-South exchanges. EU sponsoring of education centers and programs should focus on establishments in Northern Africa rather than programs linked to the European continent. Centers based in Europe are understood to have been misused as platforms for immigration into the EU area. Consequently, past programs did not create the desired transfer of acquired knowledge to target countries.

(iii) Terrorism was the recurring reference point of discussion. Discussants largely agreed against the pooling of intelligence capabilities at the European level, considering such a move ‘unrealistic’. Emphasis was given to indirect approaches, understood to be a synonym for development aid, for terror prevention. Discussions around this approach were vague and non-committal, seemingly due to the particular context of the conference which had shifted the concerns of many to more immediate anti-terror measures within national borders.

Conference considerations

The conference provided for much informed insight into the working of European and Euro-Atlantic security discussions. It also showed central hot topics of disagreement between European, American, Russian, Chinese and other governments.

Personal discussions at Wilton Park, facilitated by a highly professional conference organization and Wiston House's beautiful setting, were impressively frank, critical and personal. In these talks a series of personal contacts were made that will be drawn on for future research projects and inquiries.

The most informative insights resulted from personal, not from plenary discussions. Plenary discussions served to set out selected issues but were accompanied by much unsaid. The reliance on personal discussion for true insights was a lesson to learn at this conference. The uncritical adherence of policymakers to pre-fixed policy lines and the combination of such stances with non-problem solving and non-committal lingo in the plenary was often disappointing and sometimes revolting.

Issues related to Switzerland

Final considerations pertain to conference issues related to Switzerland. Participants invited non-EU countries to join security operations as partners. Past and ongoing security operations in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq were cited as composite-operations examples. Participation in ESDP operations might prove highly fruitful for Switzerland. First, it is a possibility to engage in international security operations in an intergovernmental, non-integrated mode. Second, participation in such operations also allow for the co-shaping of the emerging ESDP modes of operations. Third, joining ESDP operations now permits learning on international security operations together with other new peacekeeping countries.

Finally, EU Wilton Park conference participants were strongly linked within a Europe-wide network of policymakers, practitioners and scholars. Their discussions off the plenary were very personal and pragmatic. In contrast especially Swiss conference participants stood out as isolated spectators to the conference. Contributions by Swiss participants were often uninformed and generally lacked policy backing by third parties. The costs of policy passivism were a powerfully lesson at Wilton Park.

Conference Program²: 790th Wilton Park Conference

Thursday, 6 July

- The European Constitutional Treaty, what now?
Bogdanor (Oxford), Seregin (MFA Russia)

Friday, 7 July

- Europe as an effective power: Where should the strategic focus lie?
Crowe (ex-Council), Avery (DG External Relations), Klava (MFA Latvia)
- CFSP: A function of US foreign policy?
Basham (Cato Institute), Scott (MFA United States)
 - Panel 1: What incentives to co-operate on ESDP?
Beecroft (MOD United Kingdom)
 - Panel 2: The Euro Med Partnership: What progress?
Brincat (Parliament, Malta)
 - Panel 3: EU external policy: Improving coherence
Dun (DG External Relation)
 - Panel 4: Defence procurement
Feuchtwanger (The Evening Standard)

Saturday, 8 July

- Effective responses to conflict: An agreed division of labour?
Abbott (EU Military Staff), Bennett (NATO)
- Terrorism: Nature of the threat, coordinating effective EU response
Haine (IISS), Keohane (Centre for European Reform)
- European institutions and the responsibility to protect: Indirect approaches
Missiroli (European Policy Centre), Klingebiel (German Development Institute)
- Closing session and panel wrap-up
*Glass (2020*Vision Limited)*

Sunday, 9 July

- (End of conference)

² As actually followed = second revision since first conference announcement.