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Understanding the development of the ESDP: Perspectives and insights from historical institutionalism and theories of learning

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How can we best understand the emergence of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)? This paper applies the theories of historical institutionalism and experiential learning to offer a dynamic conceptualisation of moves towards an ESDP which highlights some of the causal factors that a more temporally-restricted analysis would miss. It firstly shows how the institutional and functional expansion of European Political Cooperation (EPC) over the course of the 1970s and 80s gave rise to a context in which the development of a security and defence dimension came to be viewed as more logical and even necessary. It then goes on to analyse some of the external factors (in the form of actors, events and institutions) that further pushed in this direction and proved to influence the policy's subsequent evolution. The paper is therefore intended to act as a first-step to understanding the ESDP's development from this perspective.

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INTRODUCTION [1]

How can we best understand the emergence of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)? What processes led member states to move beyond the conception of the European Union (EU) as purely a "soft" or "civilian" power and instead pursue a foreign and security policy reinforced for the first time in its history with military capabilities? This paper rejects a narrow focus on the relatively rapidly unfolding events of 1998-99 that ostensibly led to the institutionalisation of the ESDP in favour of a more historical approach. It argues that by process-tracing back to the inception of foreign policy coordination within the EU in the Luxembourg Report of 1970 we can illustrate the evolution and consolidation of the *idea* of a security and defence dimension to the project of European integration, as well as the contribution and impact that geopolitical events had on this eventuality. In so doing it illustrates how while not strictly inevitable, a number of historical processes and events lead us to the conclusion that ESDP was essentially the logical outcome of the conjuncture of a number of different causal sequences. These causal sequences are explained through the application of theories of both historical institutionalism and learning. The paper shows how a loosely institutionalised system of foreign policy coordination and cooperation that began in the 1970s came to evolve into a sophisticated and highly institutionalised foreign policy system in which the creation of a security and defence policy in the late 1990s came to be considered as possible, logical and even necessary. It equally highlights the geopolitical events that acted as catalysts for moves towards an ESDP and which provided much of the incentives for policy makers to seek to improve the efficiency and widen the competence of the system that they had created through a process of "learning" that was to manifest itself through attempts at institutional change. The paper is therefore intended to act as a first-step towards understanding the ESDP's development from this perspective. I begin by briefly outlining the theories employed, and then go on to offer a historical perspective on foreign and security policy cooperation in the EU with these approaches in mind.

I. THEORETICAL APPROACHES

1. Historical Institutionalism

It has become something of a platitude to assert that institutions "matter" in the study of political science, so much so in fact that there is now little "new" about so-called "New Institutionalism" (Hall and Taylor 1996, Peters 1999). However, of particular relevance to the present research is the strand of institutionalist theory known as Historical Institutionalism, which is to say an approach that emphasises that both institutions and history can be said to "matter" (Steinmo and Thelen 1992, Pierson and Skocpol 2002, Pierson 2004). History matters because many social processes are considered to be incremental, hence an explanation of causal outcomes requires an understanding of their development over time. This points to the importance of introducing a degree of process-tracing to our analysis. History also matters, so Historical Institutionalists assert, because policy-making and institution building are considered to be cumulative or "path dependent" in nature, in that positive feedback mechanisms "lock-in" previous decisions and influence and restrict subsequent ones (Pierson and Skocpol 2002, 7-8). Such "residue" may be unintended by policy makers or institutional designers given the high degree of complexity and uncertainty in institutional design and decision-making more generally, and hence the existence of unintended consequences is taken as given.

And yet while the question of institutional and political path dependency in European foreign and security policy represents a paper in itself, here the objective is to account for processes of policy and institutional *change*. How and why do institutions, defined by March and Olsen (1998) as "relatively stable collection[s] of practices and rules defining appropriate behaviour for specific groups of actors in specific situations", actually change? While certainly Historical Institutionalism speaks more of institutional stability, it does not deny that change occurs. It does, however, suggest that fundamental change can be difficult to effectuate because of path dependent processes and that consequently change will often be incremental and occur at the institutional margins rather than the core. Moreover, larger scale change is considered more likely to occur as the result of something that Historical Institutionalism conceptualises as "critical junctures".

Such "critical junctures" can be understood as the conjuncture or interaction of different events or developments (whether international, domestic or both) in a way that creates a pressure for political or institutional change. Historical Institutionalism emphasises that precisely because many causal processes in politics are slow moving, it will generally take a long time for a "critical mass" of different factors to develop in favour of change, or else the conjuncture of events of sizable significance. Such an amount of pressure is required because of the strength of positive feedback pressures outlined above. Once this "tipping point" is reached, the costs associated with change are considered to be reduced, and the ability of policy entrepreneurs to act as "triggers" is greatly increased (Pierson, 2004). Therefore although change will not invariably occur, the *potential* for it to occur is increased. Pierson (2004) uses the analogy of an earthquake, where the event itself happens quickly but the necessary pressure has taken years to build up.

While this approach points to "when" change will occur, other theories point to "how" such change will occur. Different strands of Historical Institutionalism incorporate different interpretations of change, but here I want to take more of what can be termed a "cultural" approach (Hall and Taylor 1996, 8). This suggests that actors define their preferences endogenously, rather than exogenously, to institutional interaction and therefore accepts that institutional preferences are not fixed (Thelen 1999). Accordingly I focus on the theory of learning and its application to understanding and explaining the creation and subsequent institutional development of the ESDP.

2. Learning

In a sense, learning is a difficult concept to pin-down. This is not least because, as so often in political science, it is essentially a contested theory. It is difficult to be clear on what exactly we are looking at when even terminologies vary: Hall (1993), for example, refers to "social learning", while Levy (1994) focuses on "experiential learning". There is no agreement on who learns, why they learn, how they learn, nor on the consequences of such learning. Thus if the concept is to be any use to us then some clarification is certainly in order. As a starting point we might follow Bennett and Howlett's (1992:276) general observation that all learning theories essentially take as their starting point the fact that: "states can learn from their experiences and that they can modify their present actions on the basis of their interpretation of how previous actions have fared in the past". However, we must acknowledge that not all learning will result in an actual "modification" in action, simply because there may be institutional or other constraints to such change, particularly in a multi-level governance structure such as the EU. Therefore we might more fruitfully employ Levy's (1994:283) definition of (experiential) learning as "a change in beliefs (or the degree in confidence in one's beliefs) or the development of new beliefs, skills, or procedures as a result of the observation and interpretation of experience." Learning is therefore understood as a two-stage process in which first the observation and interpretation of experience leads to a change in individual beliefs, and secondly this change in beliefs is considered to influence subsequent behaviour (Levy, 1994:291). This of course leaves of a host of unanswered questions in its wake.

We might begin by asking where learning takes place. Firstly, it is important to be clear that learning takes place within the individual. Hence when we speak of "governmental" or "organisational" learning, for example, we refer to the process that learning at the individual level becomes aggregated and translated into wider governmental or organisational action. By implication, learning may take place among political actors at different political levels. Given the complexity of EU governance structures and the number of actors and institutions implicated, this makes learning within a multi-level system all the more complicated and intriguing. The potential therefore exists for "top-down" learning, which is to say among governmental elites who act as entrepreneurs to mobilise a coalition for change, but also "bottom-up" learning in which bureaucrats or political and / or technical experts may attempt to "sell" their ideas or beliefs to political leaders (Levy, 1994: 301-1). Within the EU, such experts might also include supranational institutions, such as the Commission. Conditions for their success may include the power of their ideas, their access to those at leadership levels, their political skill, as well as the degree of congruence between their ideas and those in decision-making positions (Levy, 1994:301).

However, if one focus is on a change in *beliefs* then we might point out that learning can take place at different cognitive levels in the sense that core beliefs might be less subject to learning and subsequent change than lower-level beliefs (Tetlock 1991, Sabatier 1993, Hall 1993). Applied to an institutional setting, this implies that actors' cognitive ordering of institutional rules and procedures according to importance might render change among those rules that correspond to their core beliefs

less likely than among those ordered lower down the hierarchy. That is not to say that change in core beliefs is impossible, but rather that it is more likely to occur as the result of a significant catalyst, such as a "critical juncture", or over an extended period of time. More generally, the above logic also implies that those actors with more entrenched beliefs are less likely to "learn" than those less committed to their beliefs (Levy, 1994:302).

We must also ask why and how experience might cause political actors to change their beliefs and how this change itself translates into subsequent (institutional) change. If we accept that actors will seek institutional change when they consider the potential benefits of alternative arrangements to outweigh the costs implicit in existing structures and the process of their reform (Cortell and Peterson, 2002:8), then in most cases some external catalyst or "environmental trigger" is required to question the existing equilibrium and precipitate actors to re-evaluate such costs and benefits. Of particular importance therefore, particularly in a structure of foreign policy cooperation, are geopolitical events. Where institutional structures are considered to have been inefficient in enabling actors to achieve their desired response to a particular event, then the actor's experience of this event may cause them to question the existing system and to consequently seek to effectuate change. Thus it is the event itself that has led the actor to change their beliefs or preferences regarding the existing institutional structure and attempt to develop new procedures as a result. Within EU foreign policy, we might point to the Union's experience in dealing with the Balkan crises of the 1990s and how this translated into institutional change in the Amsterdam Treaty (see below). This however raises the question of where actors might draw these ideas or models for new procedures from. Given scarce resources as well as the impossibility of knowing the consequences of untried or tested procedures, actors may seek examples of institutional "best practice" for these new procedures and subsequently to transfer institutional models perceived as more efficient from another time or place. This can be termed "policy transfer" (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996; Evans and Davies, 1999).

Exactly how such learning is translated into change (or not) clearly depends upon the political system under analysis. But if we examine the EU, and the CFSP more specifically, the challenge of aggregating learning in a system with 25 member states, each with a potential veto over change, is clear. Given that different actors at different levels within each member state might learn in different ways, and that even if this is aggregated into a governmental position this position then has to be reconciled with those of the other 24 states, we might hypothesise that we are more likely to see stability in CFSP structures, if only because of the "joint-decision trap" (Scharpf, 1988). Clearly change does occur, and perhaps surprisingly frequently, therefore how member states come to formulate reform proposals (the Commission had initially no right of initiative and today has only a shared right of initiative in CFSP) and then translate these proposals into agreed institutional change is of particular interest.

II. INSTITUTIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL DYNAMICS OF EUROPEAN POLITICAL COOPERATION (EPC)

The next section of this paper examines both the evolution and institutional and functional expansion of European foreign policy cooperation with these previous theoretical points in mind. Firstly, it attempts to highlight the importance of institutions in this process, both in terms of internal processes but also with regards to external institutions. We must continually bear in mind that EPC was entering a pre-existing institutionalised environment and therefore had to be reconciled with existing institutions, most particularly NATO. Indeed, that there would be an automatic division of labour between the two organisations (the EU as a "soft power" on the one hand, with NATO a "hard" military power on the other) was virtually taken for granted and was one reason for the "stickiness" of the EU as a "civilian power". Given the strategic imperatives of the Cold War, institutional change within EPC would have to be compatible with its position vis-à-vis NATO, and certainly the United States has long been the "ghost at the table" (Sloan, 2000) at all discussions in this policy field. Secondly this paper aims to show how we might begin to employ theories of learning to explain the institutional change that, it is argued, was a necessary pre-requisite to the pursuit of the option of the EU as a security and defence actor, and which in itself also helped to create a momentum towards such an eventuality. Thirdly, it attempts to track the evolution of the *idea* of an ESDP. Although the idea of a European defence independent of the United States is actually long-standing and stems back at least to proposals for a European Defence Community (EDC) in the early 1950s (Fursdon, 1980), the paper shows how the idea gradually crept onto the agenda and into the rhetoric of European foreign policy in the years preceding ESDP's creation.

1. Institutional Expansion

A convergence in interests is clearly a pre-requisite for states to engage in policy cooperation. Yet while EU member states had apparently long agreed on the need to cooperate in the field of foreign policy (as the fact that they had entered into both the EDC and Fouchet negotiations testified), they had long diverged in their visions of the institutional form such cooperation should take (Bodenheimer, 1967). This was largely a manifestation of the long-standing ideological conflict between intergovernmental and supranational visions of integration, with the issue of national sovereignty at its core (Hoffmann, 2000). In foreign policy this was a particularly sensitive issue, most especially for the larger member states whose greater power in the international system and broader range of foreign policy options generally rendered them more reluctant to be bound by integration in this field. Hence the normative model of integration in the European Community, with its empowerment of supranational actors such as the Commission and Court of Justice (ECJ), offered an example of what many member states, and in 1970 in particular the French, did *not* wish to replicate. Therefore when a system of cooperation did emerge in 1970, in the form of European Political Cooperation (EPC), its structures were markedly distinct from the Community model. As Smith (1998: 307) states:

> "it had no permanent budget or staff for many years, no resources of its own, no meeting place, no secretariat-general or chief official, and no specific areas of competence. It had no compliance procedures, legal obligations, or enforcement mechanisms to speak of, and it formally required little more than a commitment (not an obligation) among member states to consult with each other and to coordinate their foreign policies if possible."

Indeed, EPC was intended as a pragmatic, flexible mechanism for foreign policy coordination and cooperation among sovereign states that would be as loosely institutionalised and binding as possible. Discussions in EPC would be limited to foreign policy, and would avoid security and defence issues entirely so as not to undermine cooperation within NATO. It would be wholly separate from the Community, and have its own distinct procedures and rules. The European Commission would only be "consulted" if its work was "affected by the work of the ministers" in EPC (Luxembourg Report, 1970: part two), and since EPC was not part of the EC legal framework the ECJ would have no jurisdiction whatsoever. Moreover, all meetings were to be held in the capital of the country holding the Presidency, not in Brussels, illustrating that member states – most especially France – wanted to "keep the new procedure untainted by the insidious atmosphere of Brussels" (Wallace, 1983:381). On one occasion this even went to the extreme of foreign ministers meeting as EPC in Copenhagen in the morning and then flying to Brussels to meet as the Council in the afternoon (Nuttall, 1992).

And yet in spite of the clear determination of member states to establish only an informal, loosely institutionalised and intergovernmental system of cooperation, EPC slowly became a *more* formalised, *more* institutionalised and *less* intergovernmental system which steadily eroded the gap between itself and the Community. And this in a system of cooperation based on unanimity and therefore the consent of each member state. Indeed, by the time of the Single European Act (SEA) of 1986, the European Commission had become "fully associated" with EPC and was jointly responsible with the Council for ensuring its "consistency" with the Community; discussions had widened in scope to include "the economic and political aspects of security"; new institutions, most notably an EPC secretariat, had been established; previously informal rules had steadily became semi-formalised as a kind of "soft-law" through their codification in successive EPC reports; and a system of policy cooperation and coordination had become one of policy-*making*, with the EU for example using EPC to take decisions on imposing economic sanctions on Argentina in the wake of the Falklands / Malvinas crisis in 1982 (Smith, 2004).

Despite the lowest-common-denominator structure established by the Luxembourg Report, therefore, it appears that member state preferences did not remain fixed regarding the future institutionalised form that European foreign policy cooperation might take. Rather it appears that member states adjusted their preferences as a result of their interaction with the system they had created, i.e. endogenously, rather than exogenously, as rational choice theorists presuppose. Therefore in understanding the institutional progression towards a CFSP and ultimately ESDP it is worth asking how preferences came to be adjusted in this way. How did, as Smith (1998:310) puts it, "an informal, decentralized, non-coercive institution [which] did not enjoy strong public support or interest…[result] in an expansion of foreign policy cooperation and changed state interests and preferences"?

The most thorough and detailed coverage of the institutionalisation of EPC is offered by Smith (2004). He explains how a range of factors led member states to re-evaluate their interests and preferences regarding the institutional forms of foreign policy cooperation. These range from the imperative of ensuring consistency and the role of policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission to the perceived necessity of off-loading the Presidency's increased workload to a secretariat, even though the creation of such an institution had been discussed and rejected in 1970 (Wallace, 1983).

However, the application of learning offers a potentially useful conceptualisation of institutional change at this time that builds on the dynamics that Smith highlights. Firstly, learning emphasises pragmatism, something which most authors consider to be one of the key's to EPC's success (Nuttall, 1992; de Schoutheete, 1980; H.Smith, 2002). The institutional preferences of member states were clearly not set in stone, but rather appeared to adapt pragmatically according to experience. As ideologically insistent as the belief in intergovernmentalism of some states may have been, they did not, for example, block the increased association of the supranational Commission with EPC, even though the existence of unanimous voting meant that they would have been able to. It appears therefore that their use of the structures in place illustrated the necessity of Commission involvement. Experience and new knowledge meant that they came to reinterpret the Commission's participation as being in their collective interest. The realisation among member states that their collective interest in a strong EPC able to exert influence in the international environment required increased Commission involvement, particularly given both the imperative of ensuring consistency with Community action and the Commission's expertise and global representation, led to an attempt to improve the efficiency of their structures by welcoming in the Commission. Had this been already "known" to the Member States we would have expected them to have done so as early as 1970. This was therefore an "unanticipated consequence". Certainly this process of learning may have been facilitated by the "bureaucratic politics" perspective that the Commission would have itself exploited its own institutional position, to both prove the value of its participation on the one hand, and fill the gaps left by member states on the other. Certainly its strength within the Community would have helped it achieve both, and it cannot have been harmed by the fact that the Community represented a normative model of efficient cooperation to the member states. Given that EPC was an innovative and experimental policy field, there were few other analogous systems of "best practice" which member states could use as models. Looking to the Community for transferable models, despite the supranational implications, may therefore have been unavoidable.

We might also take the example of the creation of the EPC secretariat. Again, the preference among Member States as expressed in 1970 was that there should no be secretariat (Nuttall, 1992). The issue had also been a sticking point during the Fouchet negotiations (Bodenheimer, 1967). However, as the competence of EPC extended, the need for some sort of institutional memory became more apparent. Firstly, the EPC archive had no permanent home and travelled with the six-month rotating Presidency. This naturally proved cumbersome, particularly as it grew in size. Secondly, with responsibility for EPC changing every six months there was little way to ensure both continuity across presidencies and attention to the precedents set by previous decisions (Smith, 2004). The initial response was the creation of the so-called *Coutumier*, "a compilation of all formal and informal [EPC] working procedures" and the *Receuil*, a collection of all substantive EPC texts produced under each presidency (Smith, 2004:124/136). This was later reinforced by the creation of a Troika consisting of the previous and subsequent presidencies to ensure continuity. This innovation subsequently paved the way for the creation of an EPC Secretariat in the SEA in 1986 (Nuttall, 1992:19-20). Given previous incremental developments, the creation of a secretariat no longer appeared as such a big jump. This points to the fact that member state institutional preferences appeared to have changed, and to the fact that the nature of the system created was itself a catalyst for later reform, i.e. without the six-month rotating presidency such a secretariat would not have been needed to overcome the lack of continuity (Regelsberger, 1997:73). Thus again, we might well argue that this occurred as a result of learning-by-doing. At each stage we appear to see an attempt to improve the efficiency of the system in place, first through the consolidation of the texts, later by the bringing together of diplomats through the Troika and subsequently through the creation of a permanent secretariat. This shows experimentation, a preference for incremental adjustment, and again learning. The "beliefs" of member states regarding their institutional preferences appeared to adapt or change according to their experience in using the structures they had created and their perceptions of its performance. Hence when institutional structures did not produce the efficiency they had hoped for, governmental preferences appeared to change. And these preferences slowly moved the system created away from the rigid intergovernmentalism that had initially been foreseen.

The catalysts for this learning may have been several. Certainly, dysfunctions in the institutional structure created may have precipitated change. As shown above, a secretariat eventually became necessary because of the nature of the structures established and the increased pressures upon them over time. But dysfunctions would in many cases have been rendered particularly apparent only once these structures were put to the test, so to speak, particularly in times of crisis. Only then would member states "learn" which mechanisms were capable of producing efficient outcomes and which were not, and only then would they "learn" to what extent their policy ambitions could be achieved through the institutions they had created. A mismatch or imbalance between ambitions and capacities may well have driven change. And as Nuttall (1992:4) argues, "the way in which EPC reacted to events determined the type of organisation it became" and as Wallace (1983: 378) states, "throughout [EPC's] history, external events have provided much of the impetus." Certain events were to starkly expose such problems. For example, a clear illustration of change occurring in the wake of events was the decision in the London Report of 1981 to introduce an emergency crisis procedure in order to be able to call meetings within 48 hours. This can be understood as a direct reaction to EPC's impotence during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Wallace, 1983:397).

However, within EPC how did the identification of a problem come to be translated into policy and subsequently institutional change? It is one thing to say that institutional dysfunctions were recognised by member states, but another to show how member states came to agree on the particular change that was to be effectuated in response. What were the mechanisms of change and who were the agents of change? And how were perceptions aggregated into change? Further research here is required, but certainly a couple of observations might be in order.

Firstly, the importance of the Presidency as a mechanism of learning. Smith (2004:128) observes that the observation and attempts at the replication of "successful" presidencies helped to "advance new procedural norms of European foreign policy" through a sort of transfer and imitation of best practice. This in itself can be considered as a form of learning. But more than this, the fact that assuming the EPC Presidency threw a member state into the heart of EPC/CFSP procedures gave them a valuable first-hand opportunity to perceive the system's strengths and weaknesses. Wallace (1983:397) for one observes how the British Foreign Office "had been pressing since its first period in the presidency in 1977 for improvements in procedures", many of which turned up in the London Report of 1981, while Belgium's over-burdened Presidency of 1977 was the first to borrow a diplomat from the outgoing British Presidency as well as later lend one to the incoming Danish presidency (Nuttall, 1992:172). This practice appeared to be a response to the difficulties Belgium had faced in assuming the Presidency, and later came to be institutionalised as the Troika in the London Report. Presidencies also offered member states a chance to put issues on the agenda, and therefore to directly propose institutional reform.

As also illustrated above, learning appears to be in many cases precipitated by events. Events trigger change "by underscoring the costs of existing institutions and emphasising the potential benefits of alternative institutional arrangements" (Cortell and Peterson, 2002:8). Particular geopolitical events appeared to make actors question their own institutional preferences by exposing the weaknesses or problems with existing structures. Such events might therefore be understood as catalysts that provided an impetus for change. However, with first six and later nine or more member states implicated in the system, each holding a potential veto, it is important to ask how the *perception* of the need for change translates or is aggregated into *actual* change. Within the EU this is clearly complicated, but again we would expect the Presidency to hold a key role, given its agenda-setting powers, although unanimity might be expected to cause lowest-common-denominator or sub-optimal reform. And yet Smith and Nuttall both highlight that the approach of policymakers within EPC, particularly at the sub-systemic levels where most business was conducted (the Political Committee and Working Groups, for example), was more of a "problem-solving" one rather than a bargaining one. They highlight the mutual interest all sides had in developing trust, reciprocity, in being constructive, and in improving the structures they had put in place since a strengthened EU foreign policy was considered beneficial for all concerned. Again, this appears to contradict a simple rational-choice account.

2. Functional Expansion

So this illustrates elements of EPC's *institutional* expansion. However, it is also important to note its *functional* expansion (Smith, 2004: 52-3). EPC began by discussing issues of foreign policy only. With

the Cold War still at its height, security and defence issues were kept squarely in NATO. There was therefore something of a hierarchical division of labour. Although it was the British and Dutch who were particularly insistent on this, it was clear that any perceived threat to NATO's hegemony would have been counterproductive to say the least. Moreover the neutrality of Ireland and the general hostility of Denmark also proved to be brakes on any vaulting ambition. However, it would be wrong to assume that EPC's institutional deepening was in no way matched by a widening of its agenda. Certainly as member states grew in confidence the range of subjects that they discussed and took positions upon through EPC steadily increased. And slowly but surely, despite the constraints of the Cold War, the taboo of widening EPC's scope towards security and defence questions began to be weakened, again incrementally, to the point that by the time the Treaty on European Union was signed in 1991, "virtually no subject was off limits" (Smith, 2004:144).

Again, an initial reluctance appeared to be challenged by the pragmatic perception of reality. In discussing many issues of global politics, for example, in reality it proved rather difficult to avoid security and defence questions: in discussing crises in the Middle East or progress in the CSCE touching on broader security issues could hardly be avoided (Nuttall, 1992; Smith, 2004). So it was that whereas the Copenhagen Report of 1973 had stated that "governments will consult on all important foreign policy questions", by the London Report of 1981 this had been extended to "foreign policy questions bearing on the political aspects of security". By the time of the Solemn Declaration of Stuttgart in 1983 this had been extended to include "all major foreign policy questions of interest…[and] the political and economic aspects of security". That some sort of rubicon had been crossed appeared to be confirmed by the decision in October 1984 to reactivate the Western European Union (WEU) as a kind of ready-made defence institution that would henceforth be put at the EU's disposal. In their statement, WEU members announced that the "better utilization of WEU would not only contribute to the security of Western Europe but also to an improvement in the common defence of all countries of the Atlantic Alliance" (WEU, 1984). The idea was that those EU member states that were also members of the WEU could "outsource" the discussion of security and more particularly defence issues to a ready-made, external institution through twice-yearly ministerial meetings. This avoided the difficult issue of Irish neutrality and also did not pose difficulties for Denmark or Greece since they were not WEU members. Neither did it directly threaten NATO, nor broach the long problematic issue of a common European defence policy within the EU. But clearly the genie was out of the bottle.

The Single European Act (SEA), which for the first time collated EPC rules and procedures into a legally-binding treaty, also made some rhetorical progress on the question of tackling security. It stated that member states "consider that closer cooperation on questions of European security would contribute in an essential way to the development of a European identity in external policy matters. They are ready to coordinate their positions more closely on the political and economic aspects of security." (SEA, Title III, 6). As in all previous reports, however, it was reaffirmed that "nothing in this title shall impede closer cooperation in the field of security between certain of the High Contracting Parties within the framework of the Western European Union or the Atlantic Alliance." As they had and would continue to be, therefore, the consideration of the other European security institutions and commitments were seen to be imperative and hence the EU's institutional trajectory can also be understood to have been heavily impacted upon by the existence of such external institutions.

Yet as shown, even during the confines of the Cold War, member states were making no secret of their longer-term ambitions. Indeed, a WEU ministerial statement issued at The Hague in October 1987 stated that its members were "convinced that the construction of an integrated Europe will remain incomplete as long as it does not include security and defence." (WEU, 1987). It should come as no surprise, therefore, that with the end of the Cold War came increased pressure to achieve this very outcome. This point shall be examined further below.

So this then can be understood as one dynamic towards a security and defence policy in the European Union: the existence since 1970 of foreign policy cooperation among EU member states, and the slow but steady deepening of its structures and degree of institutionalisations on the one hand, and the widening of its policy scope to include security and even defence issues on the other. These tendencies continued to maintain momentum over time. The point therefore is that if we see foreign policy cooperation at one end of a continuum, and a common EU defence policy at the other, then the history of EPC shows us an incremental progression from one towards (if not yet reaching) the other. Progression along this continuum was achieved by taking a pragmatic, problem-solving approach to institutional reform. Dogmatic intergovernmentalism, which appeared to define the initial approach of some member states to cooperation, gave way to a more flexible, pragmatic approach in

which institutional preferences changed and member states attempted to improve their efficiency through learning. Such learning was often driven by external events and the weaknesses or problems that they exposed. This progression does not, however, lead directly to the creation of the ESDP. At some point such progression along the continuum would eventually meet a wall. And this wall was arguably first the Cold War and the imperatives of Alliance cohesion, and secondly a British veto. The ending of the Cold War in 1991 naturally removed the first obstacle, but the second proved more enduring, only being lifted much later as we shall go on to see. But it is important to note the hurdle that had been overcome: that of discussing security issues and the admission of the aspiration towards a defence role. Paul Pierson (2004:217) quotes Thomasina in Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia* who asks "why can you stir jam into pudding, but you cannot stir it out?" The point is that once security and defence questions had been stirred into EPC, they too could not be stirred out. The same could be said of many other developments in EPC, including the "full association" of the European Commission and the creation of EPC secretariat. They developed a "taken for granted" quality and constituted a sort of "deep equilibrium" that came to be accepted and unquestioned (Pierson, 2004:220). Yet further dynamics were required to move this system towards an ESDP.

III. EXTERNAL FACTORS AS DYNAMICS TOWARDS AN ESDP

Above we have seen how the institutional and functional expansion of EPC gave rise to a context in which the development of an ESDP became more logical and perhaps even necessary. This next section aims to show how what might be termed "external" factors, in the sense of external institutions, external actors and external events, pushed towards and influenced the development of the ESDP. The point is that once progression within EPC had hit the geopolitical wall of the Cold War, it required major changes in the international environment, in particular the end of the Cold War and the flux that this created in inter-institutional relationships across Europe, to create something of a "critical juncture" which on the one hand created greater pressure and indeed support for further European defence autonomy and on the other created an environment in which such a development became both conceivable and possible. Although we might ultimately point the finger at Blair's policy u-turn in 1998 and the tangible, qualitative leap that this resulted in, developments since the end of the Cold War created pressures in this direction, with previous movement within the EU facilitating such an eventuality. These factors combined in a "window of opportunity" during which time the costs of mobilising support for such a policy change were reduced and the benefits more apparent. Hence again we might see learning as a central factor, with the agents of policy change revising their strategies based on new information or perceptions of events.

1. The End of the Cold War: Geopolitical Change and Institutional Competition

A starting point is therefore the end of the Cold War and the removal of what had been perceived as a key obstacle to European security and defence autonomy. The subsequent change in NATO's role and position led to a reappraisal of that of the EU: with the Soviet threat gone, and with it the Alliance's very *raison d'être*, suddenly the EU appeared well placed to assume a more central position in European security. This was because, firstly, proposals for European defence could no longer be automatically held hostage to the geostrategic imperatives of the Cold War. And secondly, as a *de fault* multidimensional actor and "civilian power", the EU appeared as the very embodiment of the post-Cold War international actor. These two factors might appear contradictory: that history had suddenly removed an obstacle to the EU becoming a military power, whereas on the other hand its new position in the international system was based largely on the fact that, in the post-NATO and Warsaw Pact era, the EU was not an "old-fashioned" military alliance. Indeed, such an issue remains a key dispute: does the acquisition of military power render obsolete the notion of "civilian power"? (Stavridis, 2001).

But despite the potential for such a "critical juncture" to effectuate significant institutional change, such change certainly did not occur immediately. NATO did not disappear, as Realist scholars suggested, and the EU did not suddenly acquire a defence policy. This might be explained by a number of factors. For example, we might suggest that even if a "window of opportunity" is opened, actors can still be constrained in their ability to actually bring about change, particularly because of the restrictions of existing institutional arrangements (Cortell and Peterson, 2002). Hence in a unanimous decision-making system, the veto of one actor is sufficient to scupper change. Thus in the case of moves towards an ESDP, the British veto at Maastricht might be one important factor. This in itself appeared

motivated by the fact that NATO's very success was considered by some to be a reason for it not to be jettisoned. Margaret Thatcher argued at the time that "you don't cancel your insurance policy just because there have been less burglaries on your street recently." (quoted in Evans, 1998). This might illustrate that learning is essentially an "analytic construction" (Levy, 1994) since a person's own belief system and world view will invariably lead them to perceive different lessons to another, even from the same event.

Thatcher's comment, however, was certainly representative of the British desire to maintain American engagement in Europe. And the US "factor" remained and does remain an important consideration in all related initiatives, and not solely for the UK: worries about US disengagement, particularly as a result of its search for a peace dividend in the wake of the Cold War and what this might mean for NATO, were widespread. Europe's general lack of modern military capabilities as well as command and control structures *outside* of NATO meant that any weakening of the Alliance without any commensurate strengthening of other European structures was certainly not an attractive option. In the immediate post-Cold War period, therefore, there was in fact little option other than NATO, although the EU was well-placed to begin to exploit the new ambiguities in NATO's responsibilities and authority to its own advantage. Yet for some a greater European drive on capabilities and structures was also seen as a necessary reinforcing and rebalancing of the Alliance, and by implication a way of dissuading US disengagement rather than inciting it. The Maastricht Treaty was symbolic of greater ambitions, as shown below, but it would require further events and further learning until such an idea became more widespread.

Much has been written on the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) at Maastricht and the extent to which it represented or not a qualitative improvement on the previous system of EPC (e.g. Forster and Wallace, 1996, 2000, Winn and Lord, 2001). It is not necessary therefore to go over this here. However, for our analysis at least two changes are of significance. Firstly, with the confines of the Cold War gone, the Maastricht Treaty for the first time in an EU document articulated the Union's interest in pursuing a common defence. Article J.4.1 stated that "[t]he common foreign and security policy shall include all questions related to the security of the Union, including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence." Thus even as early as 1991 the intellectual seeds of the ESDP were being sown, and the ambitions to such being articulated.

Secondly, the CFSP provided for action rather than mere coordination or consultation. Not only did it create "new" policy instruments in the form of "Joint Actions" and "Common Positions" but it also stated that the WEU would henceforth be called upon "to elaborate and implement decisions and actions of the Union which have defence implications" as the defence arm of the Union, but again in a way that "shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and shall respect the obligations of certain Member States under the North Atlantic Treaty and be compatible with the common security and defence policy established within that framework." (Art J.4, TEU). Thus the WEU remained the favoured institutional option for an EU defence policy, as opposed to the establishment of such institutions within the EU itself. This might have been because of the same points that made the WEU the preferred solution in 1984. We might also hypothesise that this was so because of the costs of institutional creation: in a world of scarce resources, adapting existing institutions to accommodate new tasks may often in the first instance be preferable to building new institutions from scratch (Aggarwal, 1998:24) But we must also remember that NATO considerations remained of primary importance, and even if the EU can be understood to have been exploiting a "window of opportunity" to effectuate institutional change, there was a prevailing awareness that this must be achieved in compatibility with NATO.

Thus geopolitical change introduced an element of competition into the European security architecture. It was a fundamental irony that NATO's ultimate success in the Cold War was now the very reason that its existence was challenged. Whereas NATO had previously reigned supreme, it was now having to contend with increasing European ambitions on the one hand and calls from Russia for a reinforced role for the OSCE on the other. As theories of bureaucratic politics and institutionalism would have predicted, NATO reacted in an attempt to redefine its role and demonstrate its continued relevance. Accordingly, the Alliance launched its "Partnership for Peace" outreach programme in 1994 and more significantly for our analysis the Common Joint Task Force (CJTF) initiative, arguably "the key internal military innovation undertaken by NATO" (Terriff, 2003:39). Put briefly, the intention was to allow particular NATO assets and command structures to be used on a case-by-case basis for operations led by the WEU, and therefore without the necessity of US

leadership (NATO, 1999). From one perspective this was an example of an institution adapting to changed circumstances, attempting to render its forces more deployable and more flexible. However, it could also be seen as a direct reaction to developments within the EU: if the WEU could use NATO command structures and assets, so the logic might have gone, then there would be less need for EU member states to develop their own outside of NATO. NATO might therefore scupper moves towards greater European defence autonomy by providing that very autonomy itself.

Yet from a European perspective, CJTF might have been perceived rather differently. For one thing, the offer of NATO forces and command structures to a nascent European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) appeared to be a much-needed American endorsement of the idea and therefore offer something of a political green-light. Given sensitivities towards the American reaction to moves in this direction, this point should not be understated. And in giving such a green light, it also precipitated France's reintegration into several of NATO's command structures, something that also in itself led towards a stronger European pillar within the Alliance and in fact to bringing France closer to the British position (Forster and Wallace, 2000). Equally, in a sense we might also see it as representing a degree of "forum-shopping" for the Europeans, allowing EU member states to experiment with different institutional possibilities beyond the EU before deciding to seek a solution from within. Certainly what CJTF did not offer was European autonomy, however. The release of structures and assets would have to be approved unanimously by the North Atlantic Council and therefore offered non-EU members a veto over EU-only missions (Terriff, 2003).

2. War in the Former Yugoslavia: Learning the Institutional Lessons

This strand leads us to the late 1990s and the resuscitation of the ESDP debate. However, developments within the EU also continued apace. Almost as soon as the ink had dried on the Maastricht Treaty, civil war broke out in the former Yugoslavia and the new procedures were quickly thrown into hot water. And whereas expectations of the EU were high, both from external actors such as the US which was keen to see the EU assume more responsibility for ensuring security in its neighbourhood, and from EU member states themselves, their capabilities actually remained limited. In one famous comment, Jacques Poos, then Luxembourg's foreign minister, declared that "this is the hour of Europe, not the hour of the Americans" as he walked into broker a cease-fire between the warring parties (quoted in Peterson and Bomberg, 1999:242). That ceasefire quickly broke down and fighting soon reintensified. This was the perfect illustration of what Christopher Hill (1993) has famously termed "the capability-expectations gap", with the expectations of what the EU *should* be capable of far out-stripping what it was *actually* capable of. This again can be considered a dynamic of change.

The Maastricht Treaty had recognised that the new provisions should be subject to revision in 1996. There was, therefore, an in-built mechanism for learning: only once member states had worked with the structures in place would they be able to determine their success. Few, however, had counted on the CFSP being thrown so quickly and dramatically into assuming responsibility for resolving such a conflict. But the institutional changes that were to come in the Amsterdam Treaty appeared in many cases to be a clear reaction to the "environmental triggers" of the EU's failings in the Balkans, and thus represented an attempt to at once learn from and improve upon previous institutional "errors". Thus agreement was finally reached on reforms that had long been on the table, supporting the thesis emphasising the importance of external events as a driving force for institutional change.

Firstly, and perhaps most significantly, a French proposal to create a High Representative for the CFSP was agreed upon (Forster and Wallace, 2000:482). Although the precise reasons for its proposal and subsequent adoption are explored in detail elsewhere (e.g. Peterson, 1998), certainly the problems of continuity and confusion caused by the rotating Presidency and the multi-cephalous external representation of the Troika proved particularly problematic in the Balkans. Moreover, member states even agreed to the appointment of a high profile figure to the position, Javier Solana. The appointment of a former NATO Secretary-General was symbolic of the inter-relationship and inter-dependence between the two organisations and also perhaps an acknowledgement of the need for a mutual understanding. Indeed, Solana's successor was the former British defence secretary, George Robertson, who had himself been a driving force behind the creation of the ESDP.

Further changes at Amsterdam included the creation of a "Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit (PPEWU) whose responsibilities included "monitoring and analysing developments in areas relevant to the CFSP" as well as "providing timely assessments and early warning of events or situations which may have significant repercussions for the Union's foreign and security policy, including potential political crises". Its creation can therefore be interpreted as a response to criticism that the CFSP was far too reactive in nature, only responding to events once they had happened rather than anticipating them. In providing a forward-planning capability, again it would give the EU "what it sorely lacked in the post-Maastricht period (particularly as regards the former Yugoslavia[)]" (Peterson and Bomberg, 1999:231). Other innovations also appeared to be representative of a problem-solving approach: the introduction of a "constructive abstention" procedure seemed motivated by the need to avoid the potential paralysis of the CFSP should the newly acceded "neutrals" of Austria, Finland and Sweden wish to opt-out of certain actions without exercising a veto over them. From the point of view of a common defence, the principal change was only in wording. With Blair having vetoed the integration of the WEU into the EU (although other states, particularly the neutrals along with Portugal, were also reluctant) all that could be agreed was that the CFSP "shall include all questions relating to the security of the Union, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy…which might in time lead to a common defence, should the European Council so decide." (Article 17, TEU). The Treaty did, however, leave the possibility of integrating the WEU into the EU open.

These changes are important to our analysis because they again illustrate the collective will to strengthen existing structures, particular in the light of their previous performance, and to thereby move further towards a system that could be said to be increasingly "Brusselised" (Allen, 1998) and if not supranationalised then certainly *less* intergovernmental. Thus, what we saw was a confluence of two essentially complementary strands: on the one hand, the gradual strengthening of EU foreign and security policy structures, including the long-term aspiration to a defence role, and on the other the end of the Cold War, worries about US disengagement and a potential weakening of Europe's only extra-national capacity to take military action, NATO. This combined with events in Bosnia and subsequently Kosovo, with the US in both cases initially reluctant to get involved, and the awareness on behalf of the Europeans that they were wholly dependent upon the US to back up their diplomacy with the threat and the actual use of military force. The combination of these developments appear to have produced a "window of opportunity" during which time moves towards greater European autonomy appeared more necessary and possible than at any time previously.

IV.   THE BLAIR U-TURN

Despite the confluence of the above factors, this is of course not to state that this development was inevitable. Indeed, history could always have been different: simply because a historical event occurred does not mean that it necessarily had to (Schulin, 2004). What is more, even if various political leaders were thinking along similar lines, they did not invariably all reach the same conclusion. France for a long-time had pushed the WEU as the most appropriate forum for future European defence autonomy, for example. And yet by the end of the 1990s "the WEU had seemingly outlived its usefulness" (Latawski and Smith, 2003:130) with member states proving reluctant to either upgrade its operational capabilities or to use it in times of crisis. The expiration of its original Treaty in 1998 therefore seemed rather symbolic. But the NATO option had also essentially been tried and tested and rejected. Indeed, even as early as the Alliance's Berlin Summit in 1996 the idea that CJTF could function as an alternative to greater European security and defence autonomy had essentially been scuppered. Against this backdrop, therefore, the idea of equipping the EU with its own capability therefore appeared more attractive than ever. Yet even despite the confluence of these contextual streams, and the strength and importance of institutional factors in bringing political leaders so far, we must not deny the importance of agency: ultimately it was Blair's role as a "trigger" that made the ESDP possible. Whether a Conservative election victory in 1997 would have resulted in the same support for an ESDP will invariably remain an open question. Certainly that party's rhetoric has remained against, its 1997 election manifesto stating that "NATO will remain the cornerstone of our security. We will resist attempts to bring the Western European Union under the control of the European Union, and ensure that defence policy remains a matter for sovereign nations" (Conservative Party, 1997) and again in 2001 under a changed leadership reaffirming that "Conservatives have always supported stronger European defence co-operation, but always inside NATO. We will not participate in a structure outside NATO, but will insist instead that any European initiative is under the NATO umbrella." (Conservative Party, 2001).

Then British Foreign Minister Malcolm Rifkind is even reported to have toured European capitals just before the 1997 election campaigning rigorously against such a European initiative, which Howorth (2004) attributes to Rifkind's party leadership ambitions. Yet that he could apparently gain standing in his party by espousing such rhetoric signalled the strength of anti-European feeling within his party and the unlikelihood that such moves would have found support there. Yet equally for the present analysis it is interesting because it represents an acknowledgement that there was "something in the air" regarding the idea of European defence.

However, we must also remember that Blair's initial instinct, despite his more pro-European credentials, was to maintain the outgoing government's position on the issue and indeed he vetoed the integration of the WEU into the EU at Amsterdam (Whitman, 1999). He commented at the time that: "getting Europe's voice heard more clearly in the world will not be achieved through merging the European Union and the Western European Union or developing an unrealistic common defence policy. We therefore resisted unacceptable proposals from others." (quoted in Latawski and Smith, 2003: 128). Even as late as May 1998, the British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook stated that: "we do not see the European Union becoming a defence organisation… we will be working for better cooperation between the EU and the WEU but not for merger between them" (Latawski and Smith, 2003: 128).

Hence in the case of the Blair government we have to account for a policy reversal in the space of only several months. Whereas in mid-1998 the government apparently stood firmly against European defence autonomy, by October 1998 in Pörtschach, Austria, Blair was speculating openly on the desirability of a NATO-compatible defence role for the EU (See Rutten, 2001) while by that December he was standing alongside President Chirac and Prime Minister Jospin at St Malo suggesting that the EU "must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises" (see Rutten, 2001).

 As shown above, this policy change cannot be accounted for by the simple notion of electoral "turnover". Had this been the case we would have expected the change in the British position to have come sooner, perhaps at Amsterdam. Moreover there was no indication prior to Blair's election victory that Labour had been considering any move in this direction: the party's 1997 manifesto simply stated that, "a new Labour government will build a strong defence against [post-Cold War] threats. Our security will continue to be based on NATO." (Labour Party, 1997) This in itself is of course not concrete proof that Blair did not have ambitions in the field of European defence: the party manifesto also made no mention of its wish to make the Bank of England independent, even though this was announced on 6th May 1997, only four days after he assumed office. But its actions and discourse at Amsterdam would appear to reinforce the view that the Blair government underwent a change of thinking on European defence in a relatively short space of time.

Again, the theory of learning might well be fruitfully applied to understanding how and why. We have seen how contextual events made such a policy change more plausible, more possible, and in a sense also more necessary. However, it remains of interest to ask how this change was effectuated. And equally, what caused "the British decision to end a fifty-year veto on European defence integration" (Howorth, 2000: 29) at this particular time? Certainly, theories of experiential learning emphasise the importance of experience in leading to change. Political actors will adjust their beliefs on the basis of their personal experience, or even on their interpretation of the experience of others. The interpretation of experience however is subjective, and is considered to be affected by new information, ideas, and by offered expertise, potentially through the kind of "bottom-up" learning that was highlighted earlier. Hence if we focus on the role of Blair as Prime Minister in opening up the British position on European defence, we might ask to what extent Blair was being offered advice, ideas and information in this vain and perhaps more importantly from whom.

In Blair's case, that Britain should consider moving ahead with European defence autonomy had been suggested independently by two close advisors to the Prime Minister within a relatively short space of time. Robert Cooper, a senior FCO official and trusted advisor of the Prime Minister, was charged by Blair in the summer of 1998 with drafting a policy paper on the future of Europe. As part of a wider rethink of British EU policy it proposed "a European capacity to act independently in the defence field" (*The Economist*, October 8th, 1998). This position was reinforced by a policy paper published in October 1998 by Charles Grant of the London-based *Centre for European Reform*, a think-tank close to New Labour, which concluded that "post-Amsterdam…Europe's security architecture remains an

unsatisfactory mess" and subsequently proposed the abolition of the WEU and the merger of its political functions into the EU via a fourth pillar (Grant, 1998). This, interestingly, was an idea said to have already been considered by the Major government in 1994 (Whitman, 1999). Yet despite admitting that such an idea had "been mooted in the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence" Grant accepted that "[t]hese ideas are far from being adopted as British policy" (Grant, 1998: 45-47).

New ideas are one thing, of course. But learning theories suggest that information received must generally conform to pre-existing ideas, and that recommendations not confirming to pre-existing ideas will often be rejected: essentially, such advice will only accelerate change if it falls on fertile ground or if the political actor's beliefs are not deeply entrenched. While William Wallace (1983) pointed out that the Council Presidency led the British to push for reform of EPC in the late 1970s, so might Blair's holding of the Council Presidency in the first half of 1998 also have impacted upon his thinking. From the view of experiential learning, his increased awareness and first-hand experience of using EU structures, particularly for our study in foreign policy and against the backdrop of the Kosovo crisis, may well have served to move Blair away from his previous apparent antipathy to defence cooperation outside of NATO to one where such an eventuality seemed more desirable. For example, when briefed in the spring of 1998 on the state of European capabilities should military action need to be taken in Kosovo, particularly should the Americans choose to not get involved, Blair was said to be "appalled". As Philip Gordon (2000) explains, "[t]he endless, complex series of meetings, committees, and untested arrangements that such a scenario would entail made the idea of a solo operation seem fantastic." The situation was that one institution, the EU, would by unanimity delegate another institution, the WEU, to take defence decisions on its behalf which, in the wake of the CJTF initiative, would then be executed by a third institution, NATO, which itself also operated by unanimity. As George Robertson was to comment in early 1999, "[t]here are plenty of ways to design and redesign the security architecture of Europe. There are wiring diagrams by the thousand, but a wiring diagram cannot be sent to a crisis." (Hansard, 22 March 1999)

These observations and experiences may have led Blair to recalculate the costs of the existing structures in comparison with the benefits of change and the rationalisation of existing sructures. With the NATO option exhausted and in any case not offering true autonomy and the WEU widely perceived to have been a failure given that it had been so often over-looked by its member states, the EU's time seemed to have come. Yet it is not even necessary for us to go so far as to say that Blair's fundamental interest or even preference changed, even if it could be argued that this was the case. At a minimum we could say that the process of learning led to a change of *strategy*: fundamentally Blair maintained the unwaivering atlanticism and belief in transatlantic relations of the previous administration, but can be understood to have altered his strategy of how best to achieve and maintain this (Howorth, 2000). He moved from an extension of the previous government's position that European defence would weaken the Alliance to the perception that such an eventuality was finally necessary and could in fact complement it and even strengthen it. Indeed, the EU's incapacity to act illustrated the importance of such a reform to strengthen the Union itself. This reversal occurred in a very short space of time. And in so doing Blair would also be able to exploit Britain's leadership role in this field, thereby both concretely illustrating his desire to lead in Europe and enabling him to have a determining impact upon the nature of subsequent structures and developments (Jopp, 1999). Blair had a strong hand to play: in unblocking the British position he was able to call the shots and ensure that events moved on his terms. As for the French, they were simply glad that there was movement in the British position.

A Franco-British Summit was an obvious place to make the leap, given that rapprochement between these two members of the dominant actor coalition in this policy field would inevitably lie at the heart of any defence initiative. Blair had already offered earlier soundings at Pörtschach, but it was by the autumn of 1998 that his "conversion" appeared to have become more concrete. This corresponded, as mentioned above, to the advice he was getting. Moreover, the following Council Presidencies would be those of Germany, Finland and Portugal. Each could be expected to be constructive and, in the case of Germany and Portugal, Atlanticist in its perspective on European defence. Had a French or Belgian Council Presidency immediately followed, for example, might Blair have been more reluctant? Such a consideration might also help us account for Blair's perception of a "window of opportunity".

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to introduce the application of historical institutionalist and learning perspectives to the study of the development of the European Security and Defence Policy. It has illustrated that in gaining an understanding of institutional dynamics in this policy field over time we can see moves towards the ESDP as occurring along something of a continuum. A more temporally restricted analysis would miss many of these factors. Indeed, although the election of the Blair government in 1997 was undoubtedly one of the keys that unlocked the ESDP, this development needs to be placed in a much broader context and would have been unlikely to have had the same impact were it not for a range of other factors.

Certainly, as has been shown, the idea of European defence is by no means new, and such rhetoric has long accompanied the integration project. Although we might not exactly term it "spill-over", the perception of success of EPC/CFSP and the will of member states to both deepen it institutionally and widen it functionally was an essential foundation to the ESDP. Yet the possibility of moving forward was unblocked only by the end of the Cold War, and the tentative use of the WEU for military operations in the early part of the 1990s was illustrative of an EU looking to find its feet in this area. Once member states had experienced the weakness and indeed complexity of WEU structures and membership, however, then another solution needed to be found. Despite attempts to harness NATO in this regard, its inflexibility and the ultimate reliance on US leadership led to its rejection. Hence we see an element of "forum shopping", with ESDP therefore coming to represent something of a "winning formula".

The move towards the EU "option" was facilitated by geopolitical events. They illustrated that existing EU structures and capabilities were inadequate for the role to which the EU aspired in the changed security environment of post-Cold War Europe. Equally, Europe was seeing a US increasingly reluctant to be the both the continued paymaster of European security and to take a leadership role in intervening in crises when it considered its vital interests to not be at stake. These strands combined and were assisted by a softening of French attitudes towards NATO and by its reintegration into some command structures, as well as by a more pragmatic conception of neutrality among the EU's neutral member states.

Some of the suggestions in this paper certainly need to be supported through further empirical research. However, the intention has been to show that institutionalist and learning theories can offer useful insights into understanding political and institutional developments in this policy field. Both approaches might also offer fruitful lines of inquiry into accounting for the actual institutional structures created to govern the ESDP, with our previous analysis suggesting that we might well find examples of path dependency on the on hand, and institutional transfer on the other.

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