

# THE BIG THREE IN EU FOREIGN POLICY

**Stefan Lehne**

**JULY 2012**

**CARNEGIE EUROPE**

**CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

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Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
Publications Department  
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Tel. +1 202-483-7600  
Fax: +1 202-483-1840  
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## Summary

To an outside observer, Europe acts as a bloc with all 27 member states discussing issues and unanimously making decisions on foreign policy. But behind the scenes lies a tacit agreement that the largest member states with the most resources take the lead. Three of those states are in a category of their own: France, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

Several factors differentiate these three countries from most other member states. First, the Big Three states can still rely on their own weight to influence developments and are less dependent on multilateral institutions. Second, they can forum-shop; the EU is just one of several relevant institutional frameworks in which they can operate. And third, the Big Three are involved in shaping policies across a much wider range than other states.

While these three countries are the only global actors among the 27, they will lose some of their ability to independently influence international developments as other actors rise and their demographic, economic, and military weight diminishes. They will have to adjust their foreign policies to the new power dynamics of a globalized world.

Of course, there is also huge variety among them. Germany is clearly a reluctant leader in this area. It is an indispensable factor for strengthening European foreign policy structures, but it is at present not prepared to take up the challenge. France and the UK remain the most significant and ambitious foreign policy actors in the EU, but they are also very protective of their sovereignty. Over time, Paris, with a desire to play a leading role in the EU, might have to become more ready to act in the framework of European institutions. London, meanwhile, has not sorted out the fundamental question of whether it really belongs in the union at all.

Their involvement in the most important forums of multilateral diplomacy and their comprehensive approach gives the Big Three enormous influence in shaping the EU's foreign policy decisions. Yet, the leadership role of the big states could diminish over time as the EU's common institutions are gradually strengthened, in particular the European External Action Service.

The euro crisis, however, will likely constitute the crucial factor in determining the future development of the EU's foreign and security policy. If the eurozone breaks up, the EU's foreign policy would simply be part of the collateral damage. If the monetary union can be consolidated, either a gradual recovery of the EU's foreign policy based on the current structures or a

## 2 | The Big Three in EU Foreign Policy

far-reaching reform based on a federalized eurozone could be the result. On this too, much depends on the Big Three: whether Germany finds the political will to assume greater leadership in this area, whether France opens up to a more integrated approach to foreign policy, and whether the UK chooses to remain involved at all.

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## An Unspoken Understanding

The European Union's foreign and security policy is essentially based on decisionmaking by unanimity, which means that all member states theoretically are equals. The smallest, Malta, has legally the same ability to promote and block policy decisions as the largest, Germany. Without strong common institutions, EU foreign policy is driven by the member states. Of course, in reality, some member states are "more equal than others."

That is not a bad thing for the EU. International bodies in which large and small countries have truly equal weight in decisionmaking, such as the United Nations General Assembly, have their quasi-parliamentary functions, but they are rarely very relevant for shaping and making foreign policy decisions. Moreover, the fact that the economic, political, military, and diplomatic capacity of a member state plays an important role in determining its influence in EU bodies is a reflection of the current international system, which remains based on power relationships.

The process of making foreign policy in the EU is currently based on an unwritten bargain between the bigger countries and the rest. The bigger countries, which own the major share of the EU's assets in this area, play an informal leadership role in shaping EU foreign policy. To a large extent this comes naturally, since they simply have more to bring to the table. On many foreign policy developments, particularly in faraway regions, only the big countries currently have the capacity to assess the situation and to suggest a policy line. It is also generally accepted that with the increasing speed and complexity of foreign policy developments and the greater range of issues the EU is facing today, discussions among the union's 27 member states are often not a practical way to develop policy.

In contrast to other areas of EU work where precise rules apply, there are only tacit understandings on the relationship between the bigger and smaller states in the consensus-based foreign policy area. It is not even politically correct to discuss the subject (or to write articles about it). Everyone prefers the comfortable pretense of the sovereign equality of all member states in this area.

The bigger countries' informal lead is tolerated by the other members since the system offers them a greater influence on international developments than they would have otherwise. Of course, the smaller states will resist any open attempt to set up a directorate. They reacted extremely negatively, for instance, when the then-British prime minister, Tony Blair, invited his French and

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German counterparts to London to discuss Afghanistan in 2001. From the point of view of the smaller member states, it is crucial that important concerns any member states might have about a particular issue are taken into account and that there is sufficient time for an inclusive debate before the relevant decisions are made. However, they tolerate the fact that many important foreign policy discussions in the EU are preceded by informal (and usually discreet) consultations involving just the bigger countries,

the result of which is then fed into the process of the 27.

In the absence of clear rules, this relationship remains inherently unstable. There is a constant concern among the smaller countries that the informal steering role of the big states might turn hegemonic and that they will increasingly be confronted with pre-cooked decisions. The smaller member states with active and ambitious foreign policies of their own are frequently unhappy that the established consultation formats limit their input into the policy-shaping process. Conversely, the bigger countries often express frustration about the impossibility of a really confidential debate among the 27. They also get impatient when what they see as urgent decisions are held up by protracted debates and objections from countries that might not have much to offer in terms of actually addressing the problem in the real world.

The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty has affected the balance between bigger countries' leadership and the need for inclusiveness. In some ways it strengthens the leadership role of the big; in others, it might over time reduce it. Before Lisbon, only the rotating presidency had the formal legitimacy to lead the policy-shaping process. It usually served as a link between the big countries and the rest, but sometimes it was also a corrective to "directoriate tendencies" among the bigger states. With the pride of a sovereign country it would fight back if the pressure from the big became too overbearing. Now, the European Council president, Herman Van Rompuy, and the high representative, Catherine Ashton, in their roles as "mere" functionaries, find it more difficult to resist initiatives and positions that have been predetermined by a small circle of member states.

It is also true, however, that the central innovation of the Lisbon Treaty, the European External Action Service (EEAS), which Ashton heads, could over time develop into an increasingly important player in shaping EU positions and initiatives. Thus, it might gradually take over some of the steering functions that are currently informally assumed by the big member states. For this to happen, the EEAS's capacity would have to be significantly upgraded. In many areas, the service lacks the critical mass of expertise to make it a significant player, and there would have to be a greater sense of ownership and support from the member states as well as from the European Commission if the EEAS hoped to become a major player.

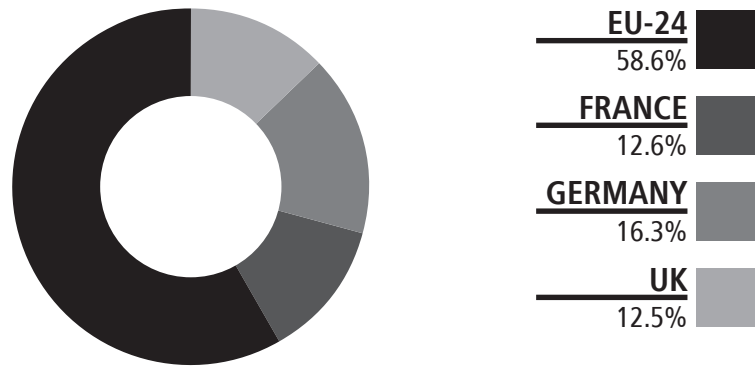
## The Big Three

Of the bigger member states, three are in a category of their own. The United Kingdom, France, and Germany are the only EU countries that are generally perceived as global players. The first two base their claim on their permanent membership in the Security Council, on their status as nuclear-weapon states, on the regional influence left behind by their colonial empires, on their diminishing but still relevant military intervention capacity, and on their first-rate diplomatic machines. Germany does not share all of these assets and for many years the trauma of recent history constrained its foreign policy ambitions. However, Germany's weight as the fourth-biggest economy and the second-biggest export nation in the world necessarily also brings with it a prominent global role. Italy, Spain, and Poland, the other large countries, have significant capacities and ambitions but primarily focus on particular regions to which they are linked by history and geography. They do not play in the same league.

Compared to the other member states, the Big Three have a clear lead in most categories. Together, they represent more than 40 percent of the EU's population (Germany with 16.3 percent, France 12.6 percent, and the UK 12.5 percent—see figure 1) and nearly half of the EU's GDP (Germany has 20.3 percent, France 15.8 percent, and the UK 13.8 percent—see figure 2). In the current crisis, Germany seems to be economically in a preeminent position. This is likely to be a passing phenomenon, however, with longer-term projections putting all three countries close together in the global economic rankings.

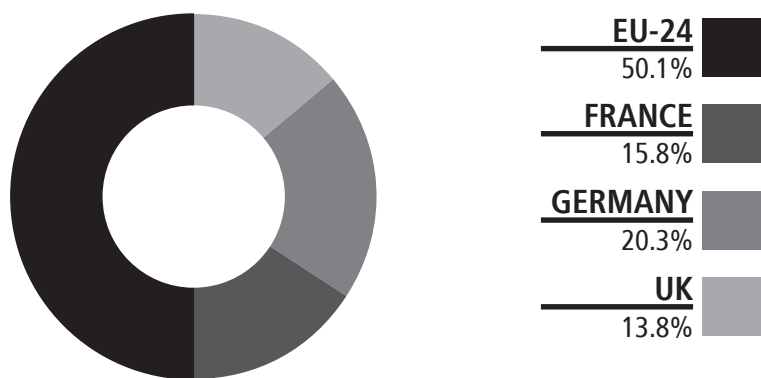
With almost 60 percent, the three have the largest share of the EU's military expenditures—Germany at 16 percent, France at 21.4 percent, and the UK at 21.4 percent (see figure 3). In terms of foreign policy assets, just under 40 percent of the EU's diplomats work for the Big Three (Germany 12.5 percent, France 12.1 percent, the UK 14 percent—see figure 4), and those countries' diplomatic networks are the most extensive with together more than 750 bilateral and multilateral diplomatic missions.

Figure 1. **Big Three's Percentage Share of EU Population, 2011**



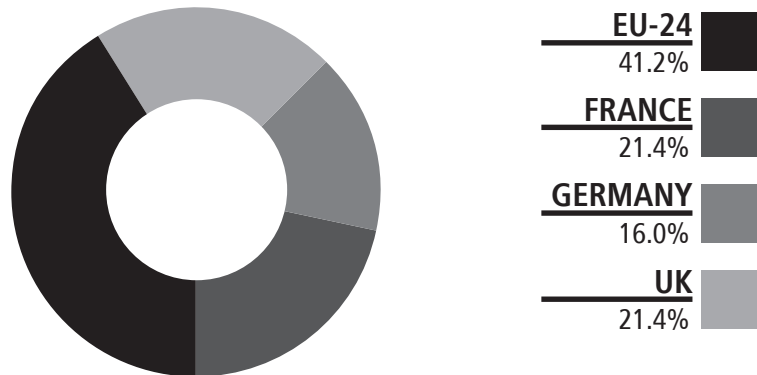
Source: Population Reference Bureau, "2011 World Population Data Sheet," [www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet\\_eng.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet_eng.pdf).

Figure 2. **Big Three's Percentage Share of EU GDP, 2011**  
(current prices)



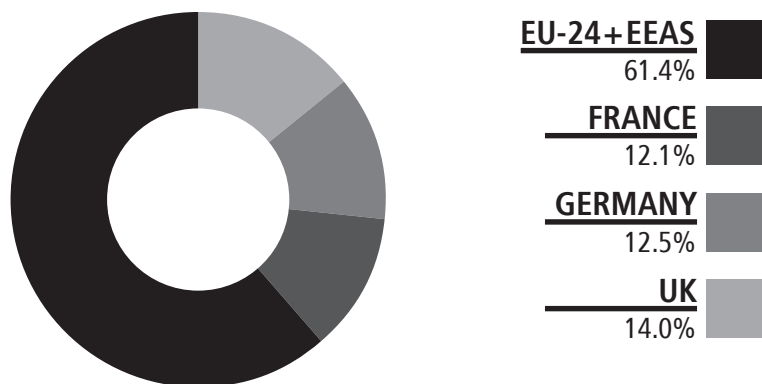
Source: International Monetary Fund, GDP 2011 (current prices), WEO Data, April 2012 Edition.

Figure 3. **Big Three's Percentage Share of EU Military Expenditures, 2011** (2011 prices)



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2011, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2011, [www.sipri.org/databases/milex](http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex).

Figure 4. **Big Three's Percentage Share of EU and Member State Diplomats**



Note: The differing status or classification of staff members as well as staff fluctuation impair the accuracy of the statistics.

Source: M. Emerson, R. Balfour, T. Corthaut, J. Wouters, P. Kaczynski, and Thomas Renard, "Upgrading the EU's Role as Global Actor," CEPS 2011.

There are several factors that differentiate the Big Three from most other member states. These factors influence the whole range of foreign policy issues the EU confronts today, from political and defense cooperation to the economic crisis. By and large, the Big Three are:

**1. Capable of Acting Independently:** Most member states can only influence developments in other regions in the framework of multilateral institutions. The Big Three can still rely on their own weight to effect developments. While this capacity is diminishing in the light of the changing global power balance and is today primarily focused on particular regions, it still offers them a far larger range of foreign policy options.

**2. Not Tied to the EU:** For most of the smaller states the EU has become the primary forum for foreign policy. A major part of their diplomatic resources is devoted to participation in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) machinery, and raising foreign policy concerns in Brussels is the default option for most of the capitals.

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**For the Big Three, the EU is just one of several relevant institutional frameworks in which they can operate.**

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For the Big Three, the EU is just one of several relevant institutional frameworks in which they can operate, including the UN Security Council, the G8, and NATO. Especially for the UK and France, there is no question that they consider their permanent membership in the UN Security Council as a higher priority than their contribution to an effective EU foreign policy. Sometimes they

will deal with a problem within the EU framework if it offers an opportunity to give greater international weight to their own policies, but they will avoid the forum if they see EU involvement as a potential limitation to their room of maneuver. In addition, the same foreign policy problem is frequently discussed in a number of frameworks. This again strengthens the influence of the big countries, as only they are comprehensively involved on all levels.

**3. Drivers of Policy:** Whereas most member states focus their efforts on a few areas in which they have particular interests and essentially follow the lead of others in other areas, the Big Three are involved in shaping policies across the board. This does not mean that they always take the lead on an issue. Many initiatives and ideas come from other countries. But if the three are united and actively push for a policy, it is very likely that it will eventually become the policy of the 27. If they are negative or divided, the EU will be effectively paralyzed.

The Big Three's overall foreign policy situation is paradoxical. In some regions of the world, the countries' influence remains strong and might even have increased over the past years, but they face a significant decline of their weight on the global scales. During the Cold War, the Soviet threat from the East and a dominating protector in the West had imposed severe constraints on these countries' room for maneuver. In the early 1990s, the Soviet threat disappeared, which reduced discipline within the Atlantic Alliance and particularly boosted the international position of the reunited Germany.

Now, twenty years later with the rise of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), the world has become multipolar, creating new possibilities for the bigger countries of Europe. Moreover, the ongoing, gradual U.S. disengagement from the European neighborhood translates into greater independence for the big European players. The Libya intervention of spring 2011 led by the UK and France demonstrates the continuing leadership potential of the big European states, but only time can tell whether that will become a model or remain an exception.

Though the Big Three states continue to exert influence in Europe and in the regions where they have traditionally played an important role, their increased freedom of action contrasts with the gradual decline of their global influence. In terms of demographics, economic weight, and military capacity, all three countries' global position will diminish in the coming decades. By 2060, Germany's population will likely have declined from 82 to 69 million, France's and the UK's will have increased moderately (from 63 to 72 million and 62 to 75 million, respectively), while the world population will have increased 36.8 percent from 6.9 billion to 9.5 billion.<sup>1</sup> In terms of share of world GDP, Germany's share could fall from 3.96 percent to 2.01 percent, France's share from 2.85 percent to 1.90 percent, and the UK's share from 2.98 percent to 2.00 percent (see figure 5).<sup>2</sup> While all three countries continue to reduce their military expenditures every year, most of the BRICS are rapidly building up their military capacity.

**Figure 5. 2009 GDP and 2050 Projected GDP for the Big Three**

2009 GDP at Market Exchange Rates (constant US \$bn)			2009 GDP at Market Exchange Rates (constant US \$bn)		
1	United States	14,256	1	China	51,180
2	Japan	5,068	2	United States	37,876
3	China	4,909	3	India	31,313
4	Germany	3,347	4	Brazil	9,235
5	France	2,649	5	Japan	7,664
6	United Kingdom	2,175	6	Russia	6,112
7	Italy	2,113	7	Mexico	5,800
8	Brazil	1,572	8	Germany	5,707
9	Spain	1,460	9	United Kingdom	5,628
10	Canada	1,336	10	Indonesia	5,358
11	India	1,296	11	France	5,344

Source: Price Waterhouse Coopers, *The World in 2050: The Accelerating Shift of Global Economic Power: Challenges and Opportunities*, January 2011, [www.pwc.com/en\\_GX/gx/world-2050/pdf/world-in-2050-jan-2011.pdf](http://www.pwc.com/en_GX/gx/world-2050/pdf/world-in-2050-jan-2011.pdf).

This relative decline of the big European countries will inevitably impact their standing in terms of foreign policy. Their ambition to serve in partnership with the United States as arbiters of international problems such as Iran's nuclear program will increasingly be challenged by rising powers. The same holds true for their traditionally disproportionately large presence in international organizations and processes.

These trends appear irreversible. They correspond to a fundamental rebalancing of the international system, as other continents catch up with Europe's position. Yet, there are a number of ways in which big European countries can respond to these developments. They can passively resign themselves to their diminishing influence and adjust their ambitions to the reduced prospects. They can try to mobilize their considerable remaining resources and through clever networking and alliance building with the new players attempt to remain in the game as actively as possible. Or they could respond to the change of global power structures through a structural adjustment of their own, namely by allowing the EU to act more coherently and effectively on international issues and thus ensuring that at least collectively Europe can continue to play an important role in global decisionmaking.

The future of the EU's foreign policy will depend to a large extent on how the Big Three will respond to these challenges. While they face similar problems, there is also huge variety among them, and they might position themselves in very different ways. Interviews the author conducted in Berlin, Paris, and London shed light on how the Big Three's stances are likely to evolve in the future, and what that means for EU foreign policy.

## Germany: The Reluctant Big Power

Of the Big Three, Germany is clearly the state that is most open to a much stronger role for the EU in the formation of foreign policy. Different from the UK and France, which have proud unbroken traditions as great powers and are highly sensitive to infringements upon national sovereignty, Germany emerged from the catastrophe of World War II with a fundamentally changed mind-set. It neither perceived itself as a major power, nor did it want to be perceived that way. It rejected power politics altogether. In its stead, Germany committed itself to multilateralism and international law and developed a distinct aversion to the use of military force. The transatlantic and European institutions that had allowed its return as a well-accepted European partner had Germany's enthusiastic support. It was a long-standing axiom in German political circles that "more Europe" would inherently be good for Germany.

It has been pointed out many times that the two decades since the country's reunification have brought a certain "normalization" of German foreign and

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security policy. Twenty years ago Germany seized the historic opportunity offered by the end of the Cold War, regained its unity, overcame the constraints imposed on it after the war, and returned to a central position on the continent. The “taboo” concerning the deployment of German troops abroad has been overcome; the idealistic faith in multilateralism as a way to a better world has waned. First in the economic sphere but later increasingly also on foreign policy, national interests have reasserted themselves as one of the foundations of Germany’s external relations.

Commitment to the EU and NATO remains solid and based on a broad consensus, and, diverging from most member states, Germany has not (yet) seen the emergence of an anti-European and anti-immigration populist Right. However, German support for further EU deepening is more cautious and qualified than it used to be, and particularly as a consequence of the euro crisis, there is also much greater awareness of the costs of European integration.

Germany may still be, by a large measure, the most “postmodern” of the big European countries and the one that would be most ready to surrender parts of its foreign policy independence in the interest of an effective European common policy. Yet this readiness does not mean that Berlin would be prepared to exercise strong leadership in this direction. In the debates about treaty reform that took place in recent decades, Germany always belonged to the reform-minded group of member states. However, when it came to negotiating the final outcomes, frequently on the basis of joint French-German proposals, Germany usually deferred to the French preference for a more intergovernmental approach to foreign and security policy.

Berlin’s reluctance to take the lead in this area partly results from the long-standing “grand bargain” between France and Germany, according to which France acknowledges Germany’s preponderance in economic matters while Germany accepts French leadership on political issues. But it also corresponds to a general lack of strategic vision in foreign and security policy. To some extent this is rooted in Germany’s current security environment, which has probably never been as favorable as it is today. Germany has become the classical status quo power, at peace with itself and its neighbors, embedded in stable multilateral security structures, and facing few acute challenges in its region.

Moreover, Germany after World War II never developed the strategic culture and global perspective that in the UK and France form part of the state’s identity. Abandoning *Weltmacht* ambitions also meant a narrower horizon, more limited overall international engagement, and on many issues a greater readiness to follow rather than to lead. Germany’s considerable international influence today is to a certain extent not so much the result of national ambitions but rather a side effect of its great success as an economic power and export champion. And ensuring that the international environment remains conducive to continuing this economic success story appears to be one of the



top priorities of German foreign policy. This explains Germany's particular emphasis on stability over many other foreign policy objectives.

Germany's ambitions for European integration have also weakened over time. As in other European societies, German public opinion has over recent years become more cautious toward European solutions. Of course, this could

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change as a result of the current euro crisis. The sheer necessity of avoiding the breakup of the eurozone might galvanize elite and public attitudes to allow a "great jump forward" toward much-deeper integration, within the eurozone at least. The call for "more Europe" to solve the crisis has recently become part of standard government

rhetoric. Such a development could also over time raise German ambitions for the common foreign and security policy. But we are not there yet.

The fact that Germany's weight in Europe and therefore also its relevance to international partners has recently increased in the context of the euro crisis is noted with discreet satisfaction in Berlin. There is no interest in celebrating this development very loudly, not least out of concern for Germany's European partners. And there are no signs yet that this increased weight is leading to a more assertive or ambitious foreign policy.

This relatively low level of ambition partly also results from changes in the state's institutional setup. Similar to developments in other European countries, Germany's center of gravity in foreign policy has shifted in recent years from the Foreign Ministry to the Federal Chancellery. But paradoxically, now that the chancellor has become the top foreign policy player, she has little time for it, being otherwise occupied with euro-crisis management.

In talking with officials in Berlin one also encounters a sense of disillusionment. Many of the key elements of the foreign policy reforms in the Lisbon Treaty go back to ideas originally proposed by Germany, and officials in Berlin acknowledge freely that the present state of the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty falls short of their expectations. They claim to have favored more ambitious solutions for setting up the EEAS that were blocked by the more restrictive approaches of other states, and they express frustration about the stagnation of CSDP.

However, the relative underperformance of European foreign policy does not from the point of view of Berlin constitute a major calamity. As a significant power, Germany has sufficient resources to participate in the diplomatic game through consultations with other big European countries and the United States. It is also in view of its economic weight an important partner for the BRICS. Thus, the opportunity cost of going without a more effective European foreign policy is not very evident. Indeed, one might actually say that the present arrangements suit the limited ambitions of Berlin in foreign and security policy rather well.

Germany is clearly a reluctant leader when it comes to EU foreign policy. In terms of its capabilities and its overall pivotal role in European integration today, it is an indispensable factor for strengthening European foreign policy structures, but it is at present not prepared to take up this challenge. Developments outside of the EU or a new internal dynamic of European integration that might emerge from the current crisis could, however, trigger a new German interest in a reinforcement of the EU's capabilities as an international actor.

## France: More Europe Should Not Mean Less France

Of the three “alpha animals” in the EU's menagerie, France has always held the central position in defining the scope and the ambition of EU foreign policy. The underlying philosophy of French engagement in this area has been a belief in the primacy of national foreign policy as a core element of state sovereignty. France traditionally considered the EU's external relations as complementary to member states' foreign policies. It supported the development of the EU's foreign policy primarily as a force multiplier of the French approach, as an instrument to ensure a strong and visible leadership role for France in Europe.

France genuinely wants “more Europe” but not if that means “less France.” Different from Germany, France so far has been quite unwilling to subordinate its national foreign policy to common European efforts. It always preferred the intergovernmental approach over the Community method and remained hostile toward majority voting and a stronger role of the European Commission.

France understands itself to be “European by choice” and different from Germany, Italy, or Spain, which it sees as “European by destiny.” It prides itself on its strong ancient identity as a powerful state. Nowhere else in Europe does one find such a preoccupation with the state's “rank” in the world. The old Gaullist notion of “l'Europe des patries” therefore remains dominant, and the German federalist concept of sharing sovereignty in a broader European structure finds little support. As foreign policy is seen as a core element of state sovereignty, it can be Europeanized only to the extent it remains French.

The country still has a wealth of foreign policy assets, which give it considerable weight as an individual player. It is a member of the most exclusive economic and political “clubs,” a nuclear weapon state, a serious military power, and the fifth-largest economy in the world. It has effective diplomacy, enjoys significant regional influence particularly in Africa, and actively promotes its culture across the world.

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**France genuinely wants “more Europe”  
but not if that means “less France.”**

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The effectiveness of France's foreign policy is further enhanced by a constitutional system that gives the French president unrivaled authority in this area. As foreign and security policy forms part of the "domaine reserve," the president can take the initiative without extended interagency consultation without much parliamentary control and without having to pay attention to the sensitivities of coalition partners. He can also rapidly resolve disagreements within the bureaucracy.

The French president thus enjoys a greater foreign policy freedom of action than any other EU leader. The job comes, moreover, with the expectation of the public that the incumbent makes use of these vast powers and plays an active and leading role in this field. More than any other European leader, he embodies the representational dimension of foreign policy, through which a state demonstrates its standing in the world, appealing to patriotic sentiments and national pride.

Obviously, this uniquely powerful position makes the French president not necessarily the ideal European team player. There is a natural tendency to take the lead but also a temptation to act individually or with like-minded players if the EU process proves heavy and cumbersome. There is also a tendency to prefer to deal with other leaders of big countries rather than with the smaller ones or with the representatives of the EU's institutions.

Nicolas Sarkozy's five years as French president showed both the potential and the limitations of this approach. Essentially, he launched a number of high-profile initiatives, which sometimes helped the EU overcome its bureaucratic inertia and produced good outcomes, but at other times resulted in dead ends.

Sarkozy's successful mediation efforts as president of the European Council in the Georgia war of 2008 certainly constituted a high point for EU foreign policy, and the French presidency also launched the EU's military operation in Chad. French-led efforts in Ivory Coast in 2011 to loosen Laurent Gbagbo's grip on power and secure the elected president Alassane Ouattara's position were another case of an effective combination of creative and determined leadership from Paris combined with the collective weight of the EU.

On the other side of the spectrum, France under Sarkozy was also largely responsible for the long-term, uncritical collusion between the EU and the authoritarian regimes in North Africa. And his improvised initiative for a Union for the Mediterranean had to be adjusted significantly in the light of German and European Commission opposition, but even in its revised form contributed little to the promotion of democracy and human rights in the region.

The limits of French influence became very evident in Middle East diplomacy. Sarkozy was interested and active in this area, but his efforts were handicapped by the established international framework for Middle East diplomacy, namely the Quartet, which comprises the United States, Russia, the United Nations, and the EU. France thus had no visible role. Paris repeatedly tried to break out of this institutional straitjacket through initiatives and ideas for

conferences to be held in Paris, but those efforts regularly foundered for lack of international support.

Overall, in terms of enhancing the EU's institutional capacity as an international actor, Sarkozy's contribution was limited. The primacy of national foreign policy always remained predominant, and highly personalized, impulsive leadership from one member state is ultimately hard to reconcile with the workings of a complex multilateral organization.

In spite of some differences of emphasis, it is unlikely that the new French president, François Hollande, will depart in major ways from Sarkozy's policy line. The contrast will probably be greater in temper and style than in substance. Quite likely, Hollande will at least initially adopt a lower profile than his predecessor and work in a more collegial manner. It can be assumed that Hollande's attitude toward European foreign policy, which the foreign minister will certainly follow, will be essentially positive.

Hollande is unlikely to continue the distinctly Atlantic orientation that marked Sarkozy's presidency. Though Hollande will likely refrain from revising the key steps of that policy, in particular the full integration of France into NATO, he will probably display greater commitment to the EU's role in foreign and security policy and might be more open to a stronger role for the Brussels institutions in this area.

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The central strategic challenge that France under President Hollande will have to confront is how to reconcile the country's ambition to remain a global actor with its limited resources and its diminishing weight on the global scene. France's traditional strengths are still very significant, but they are becoming more constrained and will be barely sufficient to secure for the country the international profile it has been used to in the past. Permanent membership in the UN Security Council will certainly remain the "crown jewel" of French foreign policy for many years, but in many areas, Paris might find that it will have to rely more and more on its participation in the EU.

In this regard, Paris will be facing a dilemma, for in the EU, too, France now finds a more challenging playing field. Its traditional leadership role can no longer be taken for granted. An organization of 27 member states is more difficult to steer informally from Paris than the smaller EU of the past, and the readiness of Germany to defer to French leadership on political and security issues seems increasingly at odds with the way power is actually distributed.

As EU foreign policy is thus unlikely to become more French in the future, French foreign policy might have to become more European. Moving beyond its traditional intergovernmental approach, France might decide to support a real strengthening of the EU's institutional capacity in order to secure and promote European interests in a globalized world.

## The United Kingdom: Indispensable, But Still Available?

If foreign policy were an Olympic discipline, the UK would certainly be among the champions. Its global network inherited from a long period as a world-spanning empire is second to none among European countries. As the language of international business and diplomacy, English is an invaluable source of soft power, which also manifests itself in a number of media outlets with global reach, such as the BBC, the *Financial Times*, and the *Economist*. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is generally regarded as the Rolls Royce among foreign ministries; more than other European diplomacies, it still attracts top-level university graduates. The UK's development agency, DIFID, belongs to the key players in the area of international development cooperation. From the UK's membership in the most important international forums and its military strength to London's position as a financial center and the British Council, the list of the UK's international assets is long and impressive.

One of the most complex parts of the UK's international position is its relationship with the EU. Public opinion remains so skeptical that almost fifty years after the UK joined the organization, the question of membership still remains unresolved. Currently, the tendencies for calling a referendum on the issue are gathering momentum. The uncertainty about the UK's future in the EU is further heightened by the euro crisis and Prime Minister David Cameron's decision to stay outside the EU's fiscal pact.

With 40 percent of its trade with the EU, the UK's economic well-being crucially depends on the success of the efforts to manage the crisis. This had prompted a number of conservative politicians, including the chancellor,

George Osborne, to support the development of a fiscal union within the eurozone. While the Tories had opposed the monetary union and had no intention of joining it, once it came into existence, further deepening was urgently required in order to make it sustainable. As a result of these developments, the UK's debate on Europe has shifted significantly. To be at the heart of Europe, as

Tony Blair famously demanded just a few years ago, is no longer the issue. Today's question is rather whether the UK remains in an outer circle of a deepening eurozone or whether it leaves the EU altogether.

The UK's difficulties with the EU also influence its approach to the EU's foreign policy. Whereas Germany needs to be part of a European foreign policy and France wants to lead it, the UK hardly identifies with the project as such. By far its most important foreign policy relationship remains with the United States. Whenever the institutional development of the EU's foreign policy came up for discussion, the UK consistently took positions that safeguarded the primacy of the national foreign policy of the member states.

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It was on London's insistence that Declaration 13 was attached to the Lisbon Treaty to underline that the CFSP provisions "do not affect the responsibilities of the member states, as they currently exist, for the formulation and conduct of their foreign policy nor of their national representation in third countries and international organizations." However, the UK's restrictive attitude toward structural issues contrasts with its very active and pragmatic use of the EU whenever such an association serves to promote national interests and positions.

The Cameron government certainly does not lack ambition in the area of foreign policy. The overriding objective is to ensure that the UK continues to punch above its weight in the multipolar G20 world of tomorrow. This involves mobilizing all the assets and networks at the disposal of the UK, redeploying resources from Europe to particular dynamic regions such as Asia and Latin America, and developing strong relationships with the emerging powers, including not just the BRICS but also important second-tier countries like Turkey and Indonesia. More than ten years after 9/11, there is also a clear shift of priorities from security to the "prosperity agenda." At a time of great economic challenges, British foreign policy is expected to make an important contribution to the promotion of trade and investment. This again requires the UK to focus on where the real action is in terms of growth and development, rather than on the relatively stagnant European region.

This foreign policy philosophy propagated in particular by the foreign secretary, William Hague, does not tell the whole story, however. While the EU offers just one of several institutional settings in which London can seek support for its policies or find instruments to put them into action, it nonetheless continues to be of crucial importance for the UK's foreign policy. As a large group of generally like-minded countries with significant carrots and sticks at its disposal, the EU certainly constitutes one of the most useful influence multipliers for UK foreign policy. A prime example is the EU's sanctions policy, which has become one of the union's most frequently used policy tools. Obviously, whether in the case of Iran, Syria, or Belarus, individual action even by large countries counts relatively little compared to the collective weight of the 27. The UK also strongly supports enlargement and the neighborhood policy, which are considered useful instruments to stabilize the countries surrounding the EU and to support structural reforms.

When it comes to the EU's efforts to develop more coherent policies toward big third countries—so-called strategic partners—the UK's attitude is more ambivalent. To the extent that the EU's collective position coincides with the UK's stance, London is certainly supportive, but it is quite unwilling to subsume its own relationship with important international partners into a collective policy.

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And then there are a number of areas in which the proverbial British pragmatism reaches its limits and London's general EU skepticism asserts itself. Thus the UK is fighting a major and essentially lonely battle to restrict the right of EU institutions to speak on behalf of the EU countries in areas where competencies of the member states are also involved. Out of concern that a more open attitude on this issue would lead the EU (and in particular the European Commission) to extend its competencies in external relations, London has blocked dozens of EU declarations in multilateral institutions, even though it usually fully supported the substance of these statements. The current London government has downgraded the UK's involvement in the CFSP and hardened its positions as well.

Despite these constraints, the UK is certainly one of the most active and influential participants in EU foreign policy. Indeed, the UK's contribution is so important that a British decision to leave the EU would be a massive

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blow. At the same time, quitting the EU would amount to a serious loss of the UK's influence in the world. Without access to the EU's toolbox, London will find it much harder to promote its foreign policy interests. But that is not all. What UK politicians perhaps do not fully appreciate at this stage is that membership in the EU is also a major factor for the success of London's current strategy of developing relations with emerging new powers across the globe. The economic and political interest these countries have in the UK will be significantly bigger if London is fully participating in European decisionmaking. If the

UK is out or only at the margins of the EU, it will carry a significant handicap compared to the big countries within the eurozone.

External policy is unlikely to be a decisive factor in determining the future fate of the UK in the EU. Domestic politics, economic developments, and the evolution of the euro crisis will probably carry much greater weight. In a way this is unfortunate, because in terms of the UK's position in the world, it is very easy to make a powerful case that by leaving the EU, the UK would have a lot to lose and practically nothing to gain.

## The Lisbon System

The UK, France, and Germany played a crucial role in shaping the foreign policy reforms of the Lisbon Treaty. While most of the negotiations took place in the 2002–2003 Convention on the Future of Europe, with the active participation of EU and national parliamentarians, the basic parameters were set by the member states and particularly by the big ones. The UK and France made sure that EU foreign policy would continue to be based on the inter-governmental approach: the role of the European Commission, Parliament,

and Court would remain weak, and the unanimity principle would continue to dominate the decisionmaking process.

The real innovation of the Lisbon Treaty is its establishment of a stronger and more focused central foreign policy operation with significantly upgraded tools at its disposal. While many of the smaller states would have preferred retaining the role of the rotating presidency in foreign policy, the larger countries wished to ensure greater continuity and supported upgrading the position of the high representative and giving her the role of chairing the Council of Ministers. It was France in particular that fought for the creation of the position of a permanent president of the European Council, whom it saw as a useful counterweight to the Commission president and who would have foreign policy functions as well.

The bigger countries also agreed that merging the positions of the high representative and the external affairs commissioner would help to ensure greater coherence between the CFSP and the external action of the Commission. They argued that the services supporting these two functions should be brought together within a new European External Action Service, which should be further reinforced by national diplomats. Characteristically, the UK vetoed the idea that the new (much strengthened) high representative should carry the title “EU foreign minister.”

As a result of the Lisbon reforms, the high representative, currently Catherine Ashton, combining the roles of the previous high representative and external affairs commissioner as well as that of the presidency, sits at the heart of the EU’s foreign policy system and is also the primary partner for the big EU member states. She and her staff are in daily contact with the capitals of the big member states and provide a link between consultations within smaller circles and the collective foreign policy machine. However, it is also now her task to ensure that the foreign policy development process is inclusive in practice, and that all member states are comfortable with the way policies are made. It is crucial that she is not perceived as an envoy of the big countries but enjoys the confidence of all 27 regardless of their size.

In line with their overall role, the Big Three play an important part within the new system. Of the five members of the corporate board at the top of the EEAS, three are nationals of these countries, namely the High Representative Ashton (UK), the secretary general, Pierre Vimont (France), and the political director, Helga Schmid (Germany). While the Big Three are also well represented in other top management positions (managing directors, EU special representatives), many diplomatic highfliers from these countries are not overwhelmingly interested in joining the EEAS. Whereas for ambitious diplomats from smaller member states, the EEAS can offer positions that are more interesting and influential than anything on offer in their respective national foreign policy frameworks, this is evidently not the case for their British, German, or French colleagues, though that might change over time



if the EEAS grows in foreign policy importance. Just as military officers are expected to spend some time on a NATO assignment, it might become part of the normal career path of the best national officers to do a turn in the EEAS.

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In view of its complex structures and unwieldy decisionmaking process, the EU's foreign policy operation in Brussels can hardly be compared to a state's foreign ministry. However, the EU is certainly making progress in the foreign policy realm. As a result of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has acquired a proper diplomatic network of about 140 embassies, which is comparable to that of a fairly big country. The decision to transform the Commission's foreign offices, which have been limited primarily to playing trade and development roles, into EU delegations cover-

ing foreign and security policy issues as well is likely the most far-reaching element of the Lisbon reforms. With their comprehensive mandate, the EU ambassadors have become important interlocutors between the EU and their host governments. Their reporting provides valuable input into the policy-shaping process in Brussels, and they have also acquired significant coordination functions as they chair the meetings of the local EU heads of missions.

It will take time and effort to fully exploit the potential of this step. The EU delegations are still badly underresourced when it comes to political functionality, and many heads of delegation have yet to get used to their new responsibilities. But it is likely that within a few years, the EU ambassador will become one of the key diplomatic players in many countries, often more relevant than the representatives of the big EU countries. Combined with an enhanced capacity in the EEAS for analysis and planning, this development could over time change the constellation of forces within EU foreign policy. The big member states will still play a crucial role, but they will have to work with a more capable institutional counterpart in the EU. Rather than playing the instruments of EU foreign policy like organists, they will have to take their seats in the orchestra.

## **The Common Security and Defense Policy Slowdown**

The unequal distribution of power among the EU member states is particularly accentuated in the area of military capabilities, with the UK and France in a category of their own. Even though they are also affected by budgetary constraints as all EU countries are, they still possess armed forces capable of projecting power to other regions. They also have the tradition and the will to actually deploy their troops and use military force. It is in this respect that Germany in particular, despite its sizable military establishment, cannot keep

up due to its constitutional limitations and a pacifistic aversion to the use of military force.

France and the UK have therefore always been and remain crucial for the development of European security policy. The two have not necessarily agreed on approach. In the 1990s, France and its followers aimed for the creation of autonomous European defense structures, and the UK-led Atlanticists advocated the primacy of NATO's role in this area. That confrontation blocked progress for many years. In light of the experience of the Balkan wars, which demonstrated the EU's blatant deficits in security policy but also the continued essential role of the United States, then–prime minister Tony Blair and president Jacques Chirac finally forged a compromise at the Saint-Malo summit in 1998 and agreed to develop European defense policy in a manner that would be complementary to the Atlantic Alliance and not in competition with it. This led to the rapid buildup of EU crisis management structures and—beginning in 2003—to the deployment of more than twenty civilian and military operations.

This “boom” in European defense and crisis management activities came to an end in 2008. Since then, few new missions have been launched and some of the existing ones remain significantly underresourced. In terms of institutional development, the process ground to a halt. The rather ambitious provisions in the Lisbon Treaty, particularly the concept of permanent structured cooperation on military security between the most militarily capable states, remain unimplemented.

This general slowdown of CSDP is partly due to the financial and economic crisis, which not only absorbed most of the attention of the EU's leadership but also greatly diminished the available resources. The expensive involvement of many member states in Afghanistan imposed further constraints. However, changes in the attitudes of member states, in particular in the Big Three, also played an important role.

Nicolas Sarkozy's decision in 2009 to fully reintegrate France into NATO had important repercussions on CSDP. Initially, Paris announced that the return to NATO would be balanced by a dynamic development of European defense policy, but little was actually accomplished. This was partially due to lack of support from other European partners, but the French defense policy establishment, absorbed as it was by the demands of the new NATO policy, also did not really try terribly hard.

Progress on European defense policy became more difficult once the Conservative-Liberal government in the UK came into office in 2010. David Cameron and William Hague take a much more restrictive line on CSDP development than their predecessors did. Traditionally, the UK's skepticism regarding European defense was based on its concern about preserving

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NATO's primacy in security policy and the transatlantic link. This does not appear to be the central consideration anymore. In fact, for some time now Washington has appeared to be more open toward the development of the EU's defense structures than London. Today, the overall skeptical attitude toward the EU both in the Conservative Party and in public opinion informs London's position on CSDP issues. With important exceptions, such as the ongoing Atalanta mission to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia, the UK has reduced its overall engagement with CSDP and has blocked further institutional development, such as the creation of operational headquarters in Brussels or the strengthening of the European Defense Agency.

While France pushed less and the UK resisted more, Germany maintained its traditional stance of constructive passivity. Berlin continues to be positively disposed to a more effective defense policy. For instance, together with his French and Polish colleagues, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle sent a letter to the high representative (dubbed the "Weimar Initiative") in December 2010. They suggested that EU-NATO cooperation should be strengthened, the EU's capability to plan and conduct operations enhanced, the "Battlegroup" concept reviewed, and cooperation on the development of capabilities bolstered.

Yet, there is not much determination behind these efforts. Germany sees NATO as the primary forum for defense cooperation and would like to see continued U.S. engagement on European security. Given current fiscal constraints, Germany is not interested in duplicating NATO efforts and investing more in European defense. Most importantly, as its abstention from the Libyan operation has shown, Germany's aversion to the use of military force remains an important factor. In fact, the present German leadership is unlikely to enter into engagements that would lead to further military interventions outside Europe.

The Libya crisis highlighted the dilemma of the EU's role in the area of common defense. At the beginning of the conflict, Paris briefly considered using CSDP as the basis for the intervention, but in view of British and American objections, NATO was chosen. France's efforts to ensure that the EU too would have a military role led to a decision to launch an EU operation that would support the provision of humanitarian assistance. That operation, however, never got off the ground. NATO's Libya operation put France and the UK in a leading role and the United States in the backseat. Only a minority of NATO partners participated in the operation, but a number of outsiders made significant contributions. If that innovative configuration becomes a model for future operations, "European" missions could be carried out within a NATO framework and some of the rationale underlying the development of CSDP would be called into question.

Given that budgetary constraints most member states are growing even more severe, the topic of pooling and sharing resources is dominant in the

post-Lisbon debate on military security. There is obviously a strong case for more synergy and division of work, and often this will be the only way of preserving and upgrading key capabilities. While the EU institutions have strongly endorsed pooling and sharing and the European Defense Agency plays a coordinating role on some projects, the process is still essentially in the hands of the member states.

In a way it was logical that the UK and France, as the countries with the most capable militaries in the EU, would link up for an important project in this area, namely the Lancaster House Treaties of 2010 covering military cooperation on aircraft carriers and the deployment of ground troops as well as cooperation in the nuclear field and in the armaments industry. Nonetheless, this development was generally not seen as good news for CSDP. Twelve years earlier at St. Malo, the UK and France had provided a strong impetus to a multilateral European defense policy. The new agreements were exclusively bilateral in character and—as UK officials made abundantly clear—were not designed to strengthen European defense policy. France, of course, insisted on their compatibility with the development of CSDP, but many observers nevertheless interpret the UK-French treaties as a sign of the weakening of French commitment to this objective.

In view of the challenging security situation in the southern and eastern neighborhood and the U.S. pivot to Asia, it is not hard to make the case for renewed CSDP efforts, and a number of member states including Poland, Italy, and Spain seem prepared to move forward. However, without leadership from the three biggest players in this area, it will not happen. Many expect President François Hollande to try to reinvigorate the French efforts to strengthen European defense policy. But it remains to be seen how much energy he will devote to this objective and whether he can obtain the necessary British and German buy-in. The overall circumstances for relaunching this project are not favorable as long as the euro crisis is not under control.

## The Euro Crisis and the EU's Foreign Policy

The main factor in shaping the future of the EU's foreign policy is not to be found in the foreign policy realm at all. It is the ongoing financial and debt crisis. If these problems are not sorted out, and if the eurozone eventually implodes, it is hard to envisage anything other than a prolonged period of painful decline. The EU's foreign policy is likely to be part of the collateral damage. If, on the other hand, the EU manages to overcome the crisis, the external challenges will certainly move up the agenda again and will prompt renewed efforts to strengthen the EU's capacity in this area.

The way the EU deals with the foreign policy implications of the euro crisis depends on the attitudes of the member states and of the Brussels institutions. The positions of Germany, France, and the UK will play a decisive role as well. Three different futures can be envisaged.

One scenario departs from a continuation of the current unsatisfactory state of EU foreign policy. The last eighteen months have been full of dramatic developments in the EU's southern and eastern neighborhoods, and the EU's response has not been up to the challenge.

The euro crisis has been a huge blow to the EU's work in this area. Permanent crisis management absorbs most of the attention of the political

leaders, distracting them from foreign policy. The crisis has undermined the confidence of the EU and reduced the resource base for an active foreign and security policy. It has also deeply hurt Europe's standing in international relations and reduced European soft power in other regions of the world. What's more, behind the curtain is a dangerous centrifugal tendency, a creeping "renationalization" of foreign policy that started with the bigger countries and gradually gained adherents. Outside the EU institutions, member states are today more likely to take their own national positions without coordinating with

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Unless the euro crisis can be overcome, this double loss of ambition and coherence must of necessity result in the marginalization of EU foreign policy. EU foreign policy is unlikely to be given up altogether, as there are certain instruments such as sanctions and assistance that are hard to replace. But it is likely to be limited to the role of a toolbox and the EU will not allow the EU to develop into a coherent actor in this area. The Lisbon structures, in particular the EEAS, will not be given the necessary resources and political support, and the CSDP will remain at a dead end.

Europe will become a more fragmented place, in which individual states and groupings of states pursue their own policies. The UK, France, and Germany will continue to play a prominent role, but tensions ensuing from the euro crisis could cripple their ability to work together. And if they do work together, much of their cooperation will take place outside the EU framework. Coalitions of the willing might become the normal European manner of tackling international problems. The ability of the EU as such to shape developments in its neighborhood as well as global decisions would diminish drastically.

The second scenario assumes that the EU succeeds in overcoming the euro crisis and that the UK reaches some kind of durable accommodation with the EU, even though it will probably remain outside the eurozone. In this scenario, pressing external challenges will inevitably come to the forefront

and require a more effective response from the EU. This will probably not lead rapidly to far-reaching changes in the foreign policy structures of the EU—neither the UK nor France nor some other countries seem to be ready for this—but it could mean that the Lisbon reforms are implemented in a more ambitious manner.

This would entail reinforcing the EEAS's capacity and giving a stronger political mandate to the high representative. If the member states invest more in the EEAS, the Commission might also overcome its currently restrictive approach to the new service and thus facilitate greater coherence between foreign policy and areas such as trade, development, energy, and environmental policy as well as home affairs and justice. Overcoming the euro crisis could also reinvigorate European defense policy, possibly on the basis of strengthened institutional cooperation and a new division of labor between the EU and NATO.

Such an evolution would not eliminate the duality between national and EU foreign policy, but it would permit a gradual strengthening of the institutional basis of the EU's efforts in this area. The member states will maintain their identity and presence on the international scene, but an increasing part of foreign policy will be conducted within the framework of the common EU institutions.

The Lisbon reforms are, however, unlikely to remain the last word under such a positive scenario. If treaty reform were once again on the agenda—probably triggered by the need to complement the monetary union—it is likely to extend to foreign and security policy as well. Given the positions described above, a far-reaching jump toward a more integrated foreign policy remains less probable than yet another attempt to achieve greater effectiveness within intergovernmental structures.

The third scenario assumes that the euro crisis can only be resolved through a massive deepening of integration on the basis of the eurozone. The transfer of fiscal and economic policy competencies could be so far-reaching that it eventually leads to the formation of a new “hard core” of the EU, organized on federalist principles. Presumably, not all countries outside the eurozone would wish to join this group. The UK in particular would stay outside but would have to find a way to ensure that it did not lose influence on matters related to the internal market and external policies. If that turns out to be difficult, or if the EU-skeptic tendencies in public opinion become unstoppable, the UK might decide to leave the EU altogether.

Dynamic deepening of integration within the “hard core” would probably be accompanied by the gradual atrophy of the EU structures as such. This could lead to the development of a foreign and security dimension of a federalist eurozone. In this context, the attitudes of Germany and France would be crucial, as the former would have to display much-greater readiness for

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leadership in this field and the latter would have to open up to a more integrated approach to European foreign policy.

Such a foreign and security arrangement of a deeply integrated eurozone could represent a significant gain in coherence and effectiveness compared to the existing situation. As the entire structure would be based on federalist principles, it would also be possible to develop a foreign and security policy with efficient decisionmaking, a stronger strategic vision, and upgraded instruments. There would be, of course, a price to pay in terms of a loss of inclusiveness as a number of EU member states, including the UK, would presumably be left out. In order to avoid being divisive, such a new federalist entity would have to develop strong mechanisms to engage other European states in close cooperation.

## Conclusion

France, Germany, and the UK are likely to remain by a large measure the most capable foreign policy actors in the EU. In terms of demographics, economic power, and military and diplomatic capacity, they will remain in a category of their own. With respect to each other, their global rankings will probably move closer together, as Germany's current advantages in terms of population and economic power are going to erode over the coming years.

Their ability to affect international developments by themselves, while likely to diminish as a result of the rise of other actors, will continue to set them apart from other EU member states. Their involvement in the most important forums of multilateral diplomacy and their comprehensive approach will give them enormous influence in shaping the EU's foreign policy decisions.

Relations between the big and the not so big member states are likely to remain based on tacit understandings. It is sometimes suggested that in the context of a new treaty reform rooted in intergovernmental principles, some kind of European security council might be set up with permanent (big members) and non-permanent (smaller members), which together with the high representative could take the lead on EU foreign policy. While such an arrangement could have advantages in terms of the efficiency of decision-making, it is quite unlikely to be acceptable, as it would amount to a radical departure from the prevailing notion of sovereign equality in foreign policy.

More likely, the leadership role of the big countries could diminish over time in parallel with a gradual strengthening of the EU's common institutions, in particular the EEAS. An upgraded service with stronger analysis capacity that uses its network of EU delegations effectively could gradually assume a leadership role, both in initiating policy and in its implementation.

This trend would be helped along if the big EU countries understand that as their individual weights on the global scales diminish, they should invest more in the collective efforts of the EU.

Germany appears in principle ready to move in this direction. Even though Germany has become a more “normal” country in the two decades since reunification, it still maintains the basic conviction that doing more together on the European level is the right way forward. Being part of the EU has become part of its identity, whereas having a strong and independent foreign policy is not. However, despite this fundamentally positive disposition, Germany seems—at least for the moment—reluctant to take the lead in forging a stronger European foreign policy. This results to some extent from Germany’s overall lack of strategic vision and ambition in this area but also from more pressing priorities, such as the euro crisis.

France and the UK remain the most significant and ambitious foreign policy actors in the EU. For them, foreign policy is not just a means to protect interests and promote values; it is an indispensable component of their self-understanding and a highly valued foundation of their place in the world. The idea that their national policy could be subordinated to a common European policy and that, for instance, their seats in the UN Security Council could be transformed into one joint European seat sounds today equally far-fetched in Paris as it does in London.

This is not to say that such a development should be completely excluded for the long term. After all, few people would have predicted in the 1970s that Germany would eventually give up the deutsche mark. But nothing short of a revolution in international relations would have to take place in order to convince these two countries to genuinely share sovereignty within an EU foreign policy. The ongoing shift of economic and political power toward Asia is certainly not sufficient. Paris and London acknowledge that their relative weight in the world is bound to decline, but they remain convinced that their considerable foreign policy assets will allow them to remain for quite some time successful players in the multipolar G20 world.

Nonetheless, there are important differences in the two countries’ attitudes toward the EU’s foreign policy. France is perhaps the only country in Europe with a well-developed strategic vision. And in this vision, national foreign policy and the EU’s foreign policy do not contradict each other. Rather, the latter is somehow perceived as the natural extension of the former. The French ambition to play a leading role in the EU might be more challenging now in a larger and more diverse union, but it is still very much alive. This relatively high degree of identification with the European project means that France is unlikely to turn away from it altogether. And it is entirely possible that France might gradually adjust to working more in the framework of stronger and more integrated European structures.

With the UK almost the exact opposite seems to be the case. London has not sorted out the fundamental question of whether it really belongs to the

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EU. And as long as this question is not resolved in a sustainable manner, its engagement in EU foreign policy will always have a provisional and somewhat opportunistic character. British actors in this realm do not doubt the usefulness of the EU framework for the purposes of their foreign policy. In many ways they work the system more successfully than any other member state. However, they will be wary of any commitment that might limit the UK's room for maneuver and they will be restrictive when it comes to institutional developments that might imply a transfer of competencies to the European level. When a serious problem comes up, they will also look more toward Washington than Brussels.

The scenarios sketched out above have illustrated that the euro crisis will probably constitute the crucial factor in determining the future development of the EU's foreign policy. A failure to resolve the crisis will further damage the EU's standing as an international actor and result in a weak and fragmented Europe. Success in consolidating the monetary union could lead to a gradual recovery of EU foreign policy, based on the intergovernmental approach of the Lisbon Treaty but with more ambition, energy, and resources. Alternatively, rescuing the euro could also require a much more radical deepening of European integration on the basis of the eurozone, which would be transformed into a federalist "hard core" of the EU, possibly with its own foreign and security dimension.

France, Germany, and the UK will also play a decisive role in handling the foreign policy implications of the euro crisis. To a large extent, the future of the EU's foreign and security policy will depend on whether Germany finds the political will to assume greater leadership in this area, whether France opens up to a more integrated approach to foreign policy, and whether the UK chooses to remain involved at all.

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## Notes

- 1 Population Reference Bureau, “2011 World Population Data Sheet,” [www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet\\_eng.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf11/2011population-data-sheet_eng.pdf).
- 2 Goldman Sachs, “Brics and Beyond,” Study of BRIC and N11 Nations, November 23, 2007.



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## About the Author

**Stefan Lehne** is a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, where his research focuses on the post-Lisbon Treaty development of the European Union's foreign policy, with a specific focus on relations between the EU and its member states.

From 2009–2011, Lehne served as director general for political affairs at the Austrian Ministry for European and International Affairs. Prior to that position, from 2002–2008, he served in the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union as director for the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. Previously, he was head of the Task Force for Western Balkans and Central Europe. He has held a number of other appointments in the Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and was a researcher at the Austrian Institute for International Politics.

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