

Andre Brie, 10. Juli 2007, Antworten auf die Fragen des japanischen Doktoranden Sumiko Iwasaki

How do you evaluate the EU foreign policy? What has been the achievement of the EU in its foreign policy?

The dominant principle of the European integration after the Second World War has been securing the peace. Co-operation has been the main tool of the European Union to contribute successfully to a peaceful development, and the Common Market created important prerequisites for a gradual prosperous development within the Member States.

The history of the EU has been one of permanent expansion, and the prospect of membership has been and remains one of the EU's most effective foreign policy tools and should therefore be used more effectively also in the future.

However, regardless of these achievements and more than 50 years after its foundation the European Union today finds itself in a very serious crisis, which cannot be limited only to the rejected Constitutional Treaty because many of the current conflicts date back many years.

What do you think of the roles of the EP in the EU foreign policy? What roles do you expect it to play or it should play?

How do you evaluate the work/outcome of the AFET?

How effective/ influential is the AFET over the EU foreign policy?

Is there any expectation gap of the work of the AFET between the theory and the practice?

Although it has gained a significant role in several areas of the European Union (EU) over the years, the European Parliament still plays a rather marginal role with respect to the EU's external relations. It has only limited powers as regards Community external policies (mainly the powers of assent on international treaties and the budgetary power) and a mainly consultative role under the EU's second pillar (the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy).

In spite of this limited role, the European Parliament (EP) has often adopted autonomous foreign policy stances and has on several occasions also entered into opposition with the Council.

Therefore, while constrained by a lack of adequate power, the EP has developed an autonomous foreign policy, aimed mainly at promoting European values around the world.

Despite the relatively limited role of the EP (as regards CFSP and ESDP) it has a privileged position vis-à-vis national parliaments regarding its access to information relating to CFSP & ESDP. Unlike national parliaments, the EP regularly receives high-level briefings by the Presidency, the High Representative/Secretary General (HR/SG) and the Commission on the broad developments of CFSP and ESDP, as well as briefings by EU staff on specific operations and institutional developments. Moreover, since 1999, the Council provides the EP with an annual report on the financial implications of CFSP for the Community budget and the EP enjoys co-decision powers regarding the Community budget. Consequently, the EP, in practice, has influence over a number of CFSP and ESDP relevant activities that the Commission implements, including, but not limited to conflict prevention and civilian crisis management activities, and disarmament and non-proliferation programmes.

The future European Parliament's foreign policy should be inspired by the fundamental values that underlie it today. I am afraid, however, that liberal principles are likely to receive more attention than social ones, and there is also reason to believe that in the future debates about the CFSP and the ESDP those will prevail who propagate a more active military engagement of the Union instead of strengthening it as a civil power.

With regard to the work of the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET) it has to be said that in early 2004 it has been decided to improve the scrutiny of the EP of foreign affairs and defence by creating a Sub-committee on Security and Defence (which has been working since). Apart from the fact that the AFET has been over-crowded with work, another reason has been the fact that the development of ESDP and the EU's increasingly active role in crisis management (in particular) warranted greater attention (by the Parliament).

The (new) Sub-committee on Security and Defence has not been given a full decision-making role in areas specific to ESDP, and instead it rather prepares the decisions of the AFET. It is also different in its working methods and qualitative approach; its focus is more on creating a forum for in-depth debate of the issues, rather than a committee structure focused on formal decision-making.

Why did you become an MEP and chose to become a member of the AFET?

I used to work as a scientist in the field of international politics, mainly international security and disarmament. After ten years as the head of the election campaigns of my party in Germany I saw a new chance to continue my previous work and interests with a mandate in the EP, and of course, especially as a member of the AFET.

Concerning the assent of the EP to accession treaties (legislative assent), what is a role of the EP?

Parliament has an important role to play in the enlargement process in that it must give its assent to the final terms of accession before the Treaty can be signed and ratified. It therefore has to closely monitor the negotiations, and the Commission keeps Parliament informed at all key stages of the accession negotiations. The constitutional basis for the cooperation between the European Parliament and the Commission is the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission, which was signed by the Presidents of the two institutions on 5 July 2000. The European Parliament also has an important role to play in the financial aspects of enlargement in its capacity as one of the two arms of the budgetary authority. In particular, it has stressed the fact that agreement on a new financial perspective for the period beyond 2006 requires its approval.

What do you think is a contribution of the EP in "Annual Report on CFSP" (non-legislative, own initiative) and "Annual report on HR"?

Taking for example the "Annual Report on CFSP" which has been adopted on the 14th of April 2005 (on the Annual Report for 2003) the rapporteur suggested that instead of informing Parliament of CFSP matters after the Council has implemented its policy, the Council should consult Parliament at the start of the year on main aspects and basic choices envisaged for the future.

This idea was approved by Parliament in the Resolution and constitutes a radical departure from the so far existing inter-institutional practice. The Resolution called it a proposal to increase the democratic accountability of CFSP. The aim was also to give national parliaments a greater role in scrutinising European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) issues and making the CFSP budget subject to European Parliament scrutiny.

The European Parliament adopts each year a report on human rights and democracy in the world. In the past, this report dealt with country situations and specific issues and was considered to be a "shopping list" of concerns. Only recently the EP has been successful in reviewing the structure and content of this report and to transform it into a genuine tool for evaluating the implementation of EU instruments in the field of human rights and democracy. In this sense, the European Parliament would gain more credibility with the Council and the Commission by focusing on the evaluation of EU human rights policy and by making concrete recommendations on this matter. The new structure of the report therefore reinforces the role of the Parliament and Parliament's recommendations can also be better taken into consideration by the Council and the Commission.

What factors shape the foreign policy outcome in the EP?

Sorry, I am not able to answer this question.

Is there any specific position that the EP takes vis-à-vis the Council?

As regards the competencies of the European Parliament the first significant improvements were agreed in the Amsterdam Treaty, and it is probably fair to say that at that time nobody had

expected the IGC to result in a 'land slide' regarding EP competences in EC/EU decision-making. Since then co-decision has been perceived as the standard procedure, and consultation or cooperation have become the exception of the rule only. Nevertheless this improvement hasn't seemed to change the public perception of the EP's powers vis-à-vis the Council.

The European Parliament has on many occasions reiterated the necessity to strengthen the parliamentary component of the European institutional system in order to remedy the democratic deficit and ensure greater democracy in the Union. The people of the Union are represented to the full by the European Parliament and the national parliaments, each in its own realm; consequently the necessary parliamentarisation of the Union must rely on two fundamental approaches involving the broadening of the European Parliament's powers vis-à-vis all the Union's decisions and the strengthening of the powers of the national parliaments vis-à-vis their respective governments.

When do you think the EP is powerful? Please give some examples that the EP played an influential role in the EU foreign policy.

Under current constitutional arrangements in the EU, the role of the European Parliament in CFSP is limited to two tasks: scrutiny of the EU executive and approval of the general budget. Scrutiny powers are all the more important for the European Parliament given the reluctance of the EU executive branch (the Council or Commission) to consult the Parliament on CFSP matters prior to 'legislating' on them without prior reference to the Parliament. By contrast, shared authority on the annual budget obliges the executive branch to cooperate with the Parliament early on in its preparation.

As an example when the European Parliament tried to increase its role as regards the EU's foreign policy I'd like to refer to a statement of the AFET mad on the 21 of March 2005 - "Report on the annual report from the Council to the European Parliament on the main aspects and basic choices of CFSP, including the financial implications for the general budget of the European Communities – 2003" Instead of limiting the report's scope to the subject narrowly defined, the rapporteur (Elmar Brok) and other members took the opportunity to present a vision of an expanded role for the European Parliament in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In issuing the report, the Parliament thereby took a stand in the debate between the Council and the Commission over the control of new bodies created by the Constitutional Treaty. In this report, AFET argued that the Constitutional Treaty fell short of breaking new ground regarding the role of the Parliament in foreign and security affairs. The report argues that some of its current powers were not extended whilst others were not recognised.

Another critique in the report focused on the implementation of foreign and security policy. The report sought to promote the importance of inter-parliamentary relations ('parliamentary diplomacy') in CFSP. It thereby raised questions about the scope of the Constitutional Treaty. As a matter of fact the Parliament didn't call for radically new powers; instead it asked the Council to acknowledge its potential for further contributions in CFSP and its right as the democratically elected representatives of EU citizenry to exercise greater influence.

Do you think the EP should play a more important role in the EU foreign policy? Why and how? Or why not?

As highlighted in the aforementioned point the European Parliament should not only actively make use of its powers (within the current scope of inter-parliamentary relations) but it should increase its say in all matters that concern the CFSP and the ESDP as the democratically elected representative of EU citizens. From the perspective of the Parliament it is unacceptable that foreign policy decisions (of the EU) escape the democratic control of both national parliaments and the European Parliament itself, especially since at the moment the CFSP is placed in the hands of poorly scrutinized, intergovernmental departments and agencies.

To enhance its authority, the Parliament should develop much closer ties with other legislative bodies, especially in EU member states. Such exchanges would allow the EP to get up-to-date information on national policies in the field of CFSP and further foster its indirect influence on the Council by feeding into scrutiny of member states at national level.

The Parliament should build up stronger relations with the Council's CFSP Working Groups, whereby the Foreign affairs Committee (AFET) could rely on inter-parliamentary delegations and fellow Committees to counter the 'information dominance' of the CFSP Working Groups. The Parliament should forge closer links with significant non-official actors, such as non-governmental organisations, institutes and think tanks with an interest in CFSP issues. They are important sources not only of new policy ideas but also of critical perspectives on Council and Commission activities.

With regard to the public, the Parliament should promote a greater visibility of its work in its concerns on CFSP. To this end, it should increase the visibility of interinstitutional coordination since this could promote the idea of a European Parliament as a relevant factor in EU policy-making.