

HOW DOES
THE EUROPEAN UNION
RELATE TO THE WORLD?


Second edition



Europe ...
questions and answers



Europe
on the move



This booklet is published in all the official languages of the European Union: Spanish, Danish, German, Greek, English, French, Italian, Dutch, Portuguese, Finnish and Swedish.

A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://europa.eu.int>).

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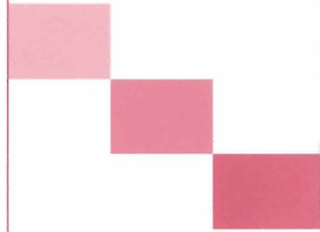
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EUROPE ... QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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The terms 'European Community' and 'European Union' are used in this booklet to refer to the political entity which started life as the European Economic Community (or Common Market) under the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and subsequently evolved first into the European Community and then the European Union under the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, as amended again recently by the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997).

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The European Union means many things to many people. Some see it as central to the efforts over the last fifty years to keep the peace in a continent which has often been riven in the past by rivalry and suspicion. Others talk of its political impotence: why, if it is a political union, has it been unable to intervene effectively in former Yugoslavia?

For a great many people, the Union is first and foremost about the single market and the opportunities and benefits for businesses, students, pensioners and holidaymakers.

But there are also those who feel it is increasingly difficult to see the wood for the trees. Looking back, they wonder whether the Union's current activities are actually living up to the dreams of its founders or whether that vision has become lost somewhere in the tangles of a post-cold war Europe. Should we not be asking whether the Union still has a purpose today?

The Union's institutions are inundated every day with enquiries from people asking such questions. This booklet is one of a series which seeks to give succinct answers to the most frequent of these questions.

In the end, the Union is about more than just the sum of its parts. The Member States brought it into being to help solve problems that can no longer be dealt with effectively by individual countries acting alone. Far from erecting barriers, the European Union is about opening up opportunities.

The European Union in the wider world

Broadly speaking, what are the EU's powers in external relations?

The EU plays a wide-ranging and significant role on the world stage, particularly in terms of economic relations, on which it negotiates and concludes international agreements. External trade is covered by a common commercial policy, which has replaced the individual policies formerly pursued by the Member States. The EU also has special responsibility for economic assistance, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, conducting a policy designed to complement and coordinate those of the Member States. However, in traditional areas of foreign policy-making, such as defence and security, the EU itself has less say, these areas remaining either national or intergovernmental. Yet it is clear that since the end of the cold war the EU has a potentially more complex and significant political role

to play on the world scene. This has been apparent in a number of recent challenges, including the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the Gulf War.

The EU needs to strengthen its identity on the international scene and to respond quickly and effectively to such events, something the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), agreed upon at Maastricht, has only partially addressed. Just how this can be improved will be central to Europe's continued integration.



What are the benefits of a common commercial policy?

The founding fathers of the Treaty of Rome decided to establish a common commercial policy, since this was the logical counterpart to the creation of a customs union between the Member States, the key component of which was the establishment of a common customs tariff *vis-à-vis* third countries. Based on uniform principles, the common commercial policy provides for negotiation of changes in tariff rates, conclusion of tariff and trade agreements, an active strategy on opening up markets to third countries, a policy on exports and export credits, and measures to protect trade such as those to be taken in the event of dumping and subsidies etc. Over the years, the common commercial policy has become one of the keystones of the EU's policies owing to the fact that the EU, as the world's largest trader, accounting for almost one fifth of world trade, is conducting a coherent single policy towards the outside world.

Acting under the Treaty of Rome the European Commission conducts trade negotiations on behalf of the EU. This has clearly proved to be of benefit: the solidarity of 15 Member States considerably strengthens the Union's negotiating hand and enables it to deal as an equal partner with the other major trading powers in the world. This added political weight, which was a key factor in ensuring the success of the multilateral Uruguay Round negotiations, also plays a large part in the conclusion of different kinds of bilateral or regional agreements with third countries.

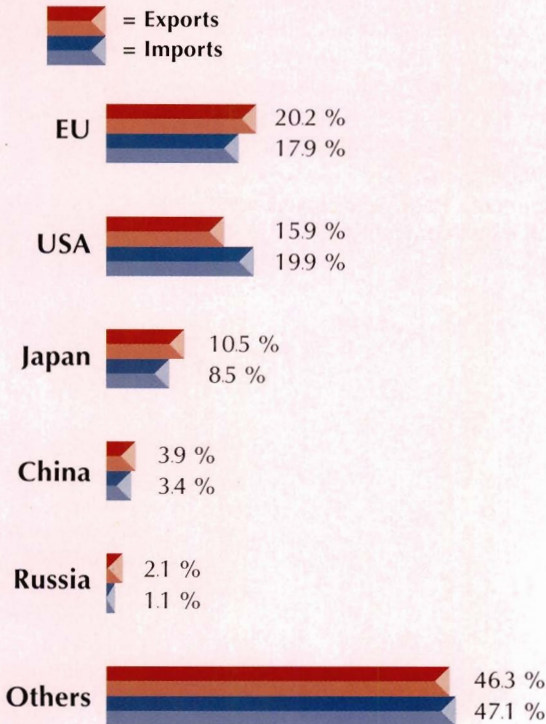
It should be noted that, in strictly legal terms, the common commercial policy does not cover the entire field of external trade. Trade in services, goods covered by intellectual property rights and direct foreign investment all play

an increasingly important role internationally, in particular where the EU is concerned. The importance of services has grown steadily over the last decades. In 1994, services contributed nearly 66% of the EU's GDP and provided employment for 64% of the EU workforce. The equivalent figures for the industrial sector were 30% and 29% respectively. Over one quarter of all EU export income is derived from the activities of the services industry. Furthermore, an ever increasing percentage of world trade involves intellectual property, be it related to pharmaceuticals, computer software, the music industry etc., which needs to be protected world-wide against counterfeiting and copying. Because of the increasing importance of these sectors they were included in the Uruguay Round negotiations, where international rules on trade in services and trade-related investment measures were established for the first time. The future effectiveness of the common commercial policy will thus depend increasingly on whether Community law can keep pace with the realities of world trade ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ For more information on the common commercial policy, contact the Commission at its Internet address: (<http://www.cc.cec:8080/en/comm/dg01/dg1.htm>).

Trade has always played a major role in Europe's history, and commerce with the rest of the world is still the main source of our wealth today. Even leaving trade between its Member States out of the equation, the European Union is the largest trading entity in the world (see chart). Trade is what drives growth and creates jobs in manufacturing, transport, research, banking, insurance and many other sectors. The creation of the single market has freed internal trade of most obstacles. The EU plays a leading role in negotiations within the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and its recently created successor, the World Trade Organisation.

Share of world trade, 1996



Why does the EU attach such importance to international trade? What benefits does it bring?

The EU is the world's largest trading entity. Most of its economic success is due to foreign trade and investment. The EU accounts for 19% of world trade in goods (as compared to 18% for the United States and 10% for Japan). Millions of jobs depend on its exports. And these exports, which go to the whole world, provide almost 10% of the Union's wealth, as represented by its GDP. The EU is also an attractive market for imports, which represent about 9% of its GDP. With its 373 million inhabitants, the EU has created the world's largest market. Exporters from outside the EU are also benefiting from the completion of the single market with its uniform (or mutually recognised) set of norms, standards and procedures. Like local EU firms, they benefit from the European harmonisation of manufacturing standards and can now market their goods anywhere in the EU. They no longer have to face 15 different national requirements. Once imported products have entered the Community, they can move as freely as local goods within the EU frontiers; such movement is further facilitated by the fact that Community standards have been laid down for industrial and agricultural products.

Foreign direct investment is also an important feature of the global economy and an area in which the EU has a strong interest. Foreign direct investment by Europe in third countries accounts for over one quarter of such investment world-wide. Foreign direct investment in Europe amounts to over ECU 1 000 billion and supports millions of jobs in the Union. Trade and direct investment are closely inter-linked, through their mutual reinforcement. It is therefore important to ensure a favourable environment for foreign



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direct investment world-wide at the same time as trade is being increasingly liberalised.

As briefly demonstrated, the EU's economic welfare depends on a liberal, multilateral world economic order. Progressive opening of its own market, parallel to obtaining improved access to third countries, are chief aims of the EU. For this reason the EU played a prominent role in the multilateral Uruguay Round trade negotiations, which led to the conclusion of 28 multilateral agreements or arrangements, including the agreement setting up the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Thanks to these agreements, substantial progress is being made in the liberalisation of world trade. There is still a need, however, to remove the obstacles which continue to block access to markets in third countries and to prevent European business from competing on an equal footing. The Commis-

sion has listed these obstacles in its market access database on the Internet (<http://mkaccdb.eu.int>). The EU is implementing a market access strategy to remove such obstacles and will continue to work for this within the WTO, in particular by drawing up rules to cover new areas such as trade and environment, trade and investment, and trade and competition.

How can the EU protect its industries against unfair trade?

The common commercial policy, which has been in existence for almost 40 years, has given the EU one of the most liberal trade regimes in the world. Its import tariffs are among the lowest and it has abandoned all quantitative restrictions or will soon let them expire, e.g. in the textile sector. Consequently the EU has a very high import penetration (import share or value per capita).

However, thanks to the WTO rules, the EU can legitimately defend its industries against unfair competition from third countries. This trade defence policy mainly counteracts dumping and subsidising practices by which countries or foreign companies sell their goods at artificially cheap prices for export and threaten to wipe out EU industries without necessarily being more competitive or more efficient. But the EU uses its trade defence instruments in a very limited way; it only imposes measures at the minimum level necessary to offset the injury suffered and it takes no measures at all if the imports concerned are in the Community's overall interest. In both respects the EU is much less protective than its major trading partners, such as the US. In fact, protective measures are applied to less than 0.7% of the overall trade volume of the EU.

In addition, the EU has created the legal means to force other countries to open their markets. The so-called trade barriers regulation can be used to investigate restrictive or discriminatory practices applied against Community firms in third countries and thus improve the access of European traders to the markets concerned.

How is the EU helping developing countries in terms of trade?

The EU actively helps developing countries and, at the core of its trading relationships, is the Lomé Convention, to which 71 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (the so-called ACP countries) are signatories. Through the Convention the EU gives practically all industrial and agricultural goods from these countries duty-free access to the single market, without EU products having to be given the same treatment in return.

The EU has also granted preferential market access to a wide range of other countries — its neighbours in the Mediterranean and in central and eastern Europe, whilst a number of countries in Asia and Latin America also receive preferential treatment for most manufactured goods and qualify for reduced rates of duty on certain agricultural products. However, trading relations with these countries tend to be less structured and on the whole more geared towards supporting regional economic integration, as is true of agreements signed with bodies such as ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) and the Andean Pact (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela), to take just two examples.



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What assistance does the EU extend to poor countries in terms of development and overcoming humanitarian crises?

The EU takes Third World issues seriously. Few people realise that the EU is the world's largest donor of humanitarian aid for refugees, emergency aid and food aid for victims of natural disasters and armed conflicts. It has provided more than 60% of all humanitarian aid to the former Yugoslavia since the beginning of the war, and through its humanitarian aid office ECHO it is financing aid efforts in dozens of other countries, including Rwanda, Liberia, Cambodia, northern Iraq, Afghanistan, Haiti and Cuba.

Humanitarian aid from the EU is not an end in itself. There is no doubt that there is a direct correlation between underdevelopment and humanitarian needs; clearly both of these need to be treated in parallel. Most natural crises, such as famine and disease, and some armed conflicts could be avoided or at least their consequences limited if adequate measures were taken in time to mobilise the international community.

The EU is also by far the biggest donor of world development aid and much the largest importer of manufactured products from developing countries. The EU's development programmes for third countries (including those of eastern Europe) accounted for some 7.5% of the Community budget. To this sum must be added the bilateral aid granted by Member States.

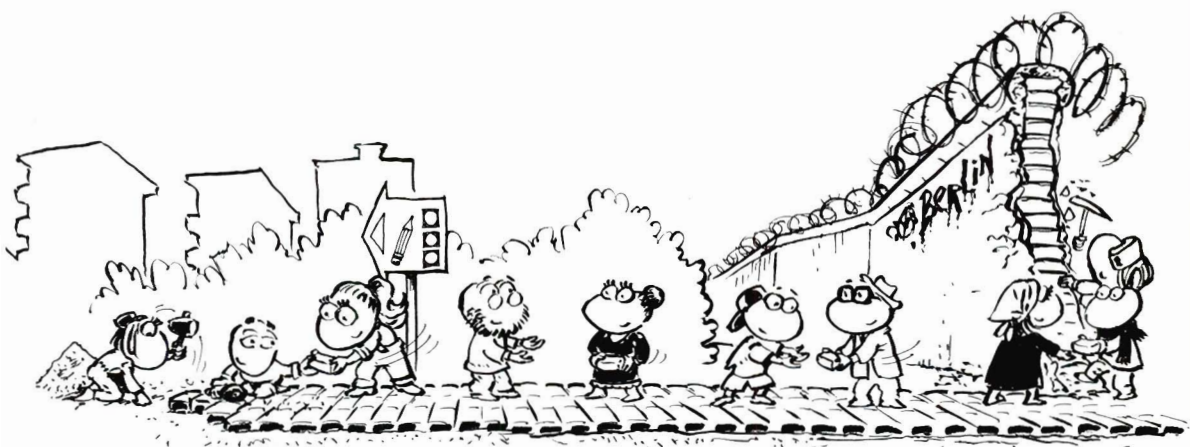
The EU and its Member States are the world's largest donors of development aid. The EU runs an agency (the European Community Humanitarian Office, or ECHO) to help victims in the world's crisis areas, be it in man-made crises like the civil war in Ethiopia (photo) or in areas hit by natural disasters.

Much of the EU aid is directed through the Lomé Convention, an agreement which covers trade, aid and political issues and is an expression of the EU's affinity with its Member States' former colonies. The convention provides for the granting of almost ECU 15 billion in subsidies and low interest loans over a five-year period to finance economic and social investment projects, 80 % of them rural development projects.

What is the EU doing to facilitate the integration of its neighbours to the east?

Since the dramatic events of 1989 the EU and its Member States have encouraged the reform programmes in the countries of central and eastern Europe, providing over 60% of all aid in terms of grants and credits. Ten of these countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovenia) have applied to join the EU, as has one Mediterranean country (Cyprus).

At the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 the Heads of State and Government declared that these countries could become members of the European Union once they met the political and economic conditions for accession. In July 1997, following the conclusion of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the European Commission opened the way for negotiations by publishing opinions which provided a detailed analysis of the situation in each of these countries and their ability to meet the accession criteria.



At the same time the EU is encouraging the countries of central and eastern Europe to pursue their political and economic reforms, as the best way to prepare for accession. With each of the countries concerned the EU has concluded a Europe agreement with a view to establishing free trade, developing economic and technical co-operation and initiating political dialogue.

The Europe agreements, which are tantamount to association agreements, are supplemented by the PHARE programme, which provides over ECU 1.2 billion annually for technical assistance and infrastructure development projects. Funds are provided in the form of grants, which have an important knock-on effect, stimulating investment by the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the private sector.

The EU is also developing its relations with Russia and the other States which form part of the former Soviet Union. It has concluded various bilateral partnership and cooperation agreements aimed at fostering dynamic relations and thus preventing a new division of the European continent. These agreements cover questions of trade, provide for financial and technical assistance and lay the basis for political dialogue. In most cases, interim arrangements have enabled the trade provisions of the agreements to enter into force. Among the various means used by the EU to assist these countries, mention should also be made of the TACIS programme, food and humanitarian aid and financial assistance.

To strengthen democracy and the rule of law and thus ensure that the transition from centrally planned to market economy is successfully achieved, the EU's TACIS programme finances the exchange of knowledge and expertise with the new independent States (NIS) through partnerships, links and networks at all levels of society. TACIS supports the reform of public administrative bodies, social services and education and funds nuclear safety and environmental projects.

Does this mean that the EU's neighbours in the Mediterranean have tended to be ignored?

No, the EU has close historic and cultural ties with its Mediterranean neighbours, with whom it has long conducted special economic and trade relations. The EU feels it has a very real responsibility for the region's social and political stability; hence its active support for the Arab-Israeli peace process, for instance.

However, a combination of fast-rising populations, limited economic growth, immigration pressures on the EU and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and political instability has recently prompted both sides to seek closer ties. As a way of improving living conditions, increasing employment levels and reducing the development gap in the Mediterranean region, the EU agreed to increase aid to its Mediterranean neighbours to ECU 4.6 billion for 1995 to 1999, to be spent mainly on infrastructure and training.

New forms of cooperation were agreed at the Barcelona Summit in November 1995. Ministers agreed to the creation of a Mediterranean free trade area by 2010, with closer cooperation in specific areas such as intellectual property rights, transfers of technology, energy and support for small businesses. There is also to be a strengthening of cooperation to reduce migratory pressures and tackle terrorism, international crime and the drugs trade more effectively.

Why have a common foreign and security policy (CFSP)?

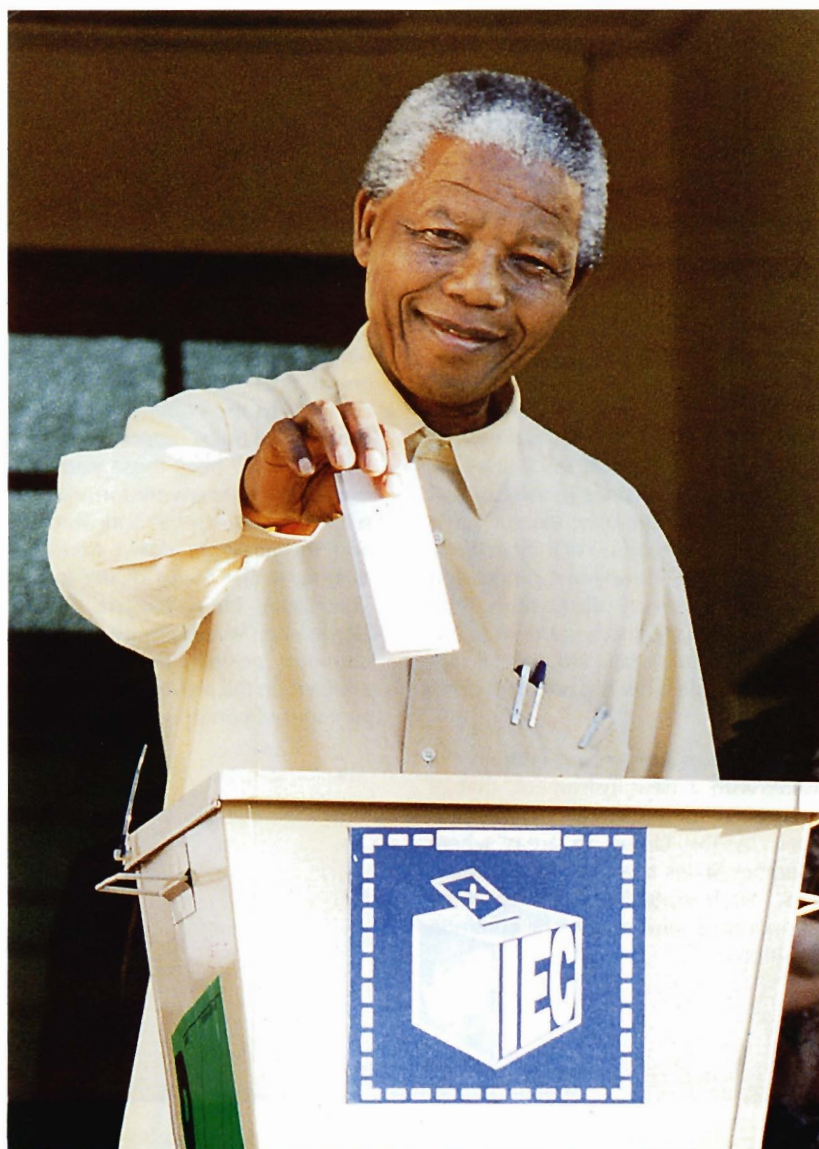
World events are constantly challenging the Union to act with the determination and cohesion expected of a world entity of its population size and economic strength. The Treaty on European Union, which came into force in November 1993 and was recently amended by the Treaty of Amsterdam, responded by setting as a Union objective the definition and implementation of a common foreign and security policy, covering all matters relating to the security of the Union and including the progressive framing of a common defence policy.

This is a new objective for the Union but a very important one. The Treaty of Amsterdam, which is now in the process of ratification, defines the objectives of the CFSP as follows:

- to safeguard the common values, fundamental interests, independence and integrity of the Union in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter;
- to strengthen the security of the Union in all ways;
- to preserve peace and strengthen international security, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter as well as the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the objectives of the Paris Charter;
- to promote international cooperation;
- to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Everyone agrees that the speed of development of a common foreign and security policy cannot be forced. Member States must see it as a natural means of furthering their national interests as well as those of the Union.

Progress made so far has built on the launch in 1970 of European political cooperation (EPC), which has created vital habits in Member States with regard to the exchange of information, consultation and policy coordination in external political relations.



One of the main aims of the EU's common foreign and security policy has been to place democracy on a firm footing in South Africa.

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The Treaty on European Union has taken EPC's 25 years of experience further by creating 'common positions' and 'joint actions' as new instruments of the CFSP, the traditional instruments of which were joint declarations and common approaches. The Treaty of Amsterdam also introduces a new concept, namely that of 'common strategies'.

What is meant by Europe's common foreign and security policy being the second 'pillar' of the Treaty? How does the CFSP work?

Under the Treaty of Maastricht the edifice of European Union is supported by three pillars: the European Community, the common foreign and security policy, and the areas of justice and home affairs. Where the CFSP is concerned, procedures are intergovernmental and, therefore, different from those which apply to external economic relations. It is the European Council of Heads of State and Government and the Council of Ministers which have overall control: the European Council defines the principles and general guidelines for CFSP, and all decisions in the Council are taken unanimously, except some on the implementation of joint actions. However, the European Commission participates in all discussions, can make proposals, and has a right of initiative. The European Parliament is regularly consulted but has no direct powers.

The Treaty of Amsterdam endows the CFSP with a new instrument, that of common strategies, which will be pursued by the Union in areas where Member States share important interests. Such strategies may lead to the adoption of joint actions or common positions.

- Joint actions are binding legal instruments which commit the Member States to addressing specific situations where operational action by the Union is deemed to be required. Significant joint actions have been adopted to deal with the problems of the former Yugoslavia: assistance with the organisation of elections; involvement in the structures established by the peace agreements; convoying of humanitarian aid, etc. Other such actions have included the appointment of special envoys to the Middle East and to the African Great Lakes region and assistance with parliamentary elections in Russia, South Africa and the Middle East. The Stability Pact for central Europe, established in 1994 to foster good neighbourliness, democracy and human rights in the countries of the area, was the result of a successful joint action.
- Common positions define the approach of the Union to a particular problem. Member States must ensure that their national policies conform to the common positions. Among the most important so far adopted have been those establishing a broad framework for relations with Albania, Cuba and Rwanda and those laying down measures relating to the States of the former Yugoslavia, Haiti, Nigeria, Sudan, Libya and Myanmar (Burma). A common position has also been adopted on the prevention and management of conflicts in Africa.

Is the EU working towards a common defence? Is there to be a European army?

As a result of the new post-cold war scenario, it has become apparent that the EU must take more responsibility for its own security and must prevent and manage any local conflicts which arise. The threats confronting the Union are not directly military but more related to nuclear safeguards, organised crime, environmental disasters, illegal trafficking of nuclear materials, overpopulation, poverty, mass migration and ethnic and regional conflicts in the vicinity of the Union.

The CFSP as defined in the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties should help the EU meet these challenges.

Once the Treaty of Amsterdam enters into force, the Union will be able to take responsibility for operations to manage certain conflicts, including

the use of military force. Crises such as those in the former Yugoslavia or Albania have shown the importance of such operations, which up until now the Union has not had the authority to mount. Moreover, under the new Treaty the Union will gradually frame a common defence policy, with the Member States cooperating in the field of armaments. At the same time, it is generally acknowledged that NATO will continue to play a fundamental role in the territorial defence of Europe.



The Union will intervene in the management of local crises through the Western European Union (WEU), which represents the defence component in the process of European integration. The WEU, which has its headquarters in Brussels, has recently developed a substantial operational capability. In the recent past it has intervened in Bosnia (to maintain order in Mostar) and in Albania (to train the local police). It can also call on national armed forces, it has a military planning unit and other specialised bodies, it encourages cooperation in the field of armaments and it can avail itself of NATO resources. Membership of the WEU falls into various categories: there are ten full members (which are also members of the EU), three associated members (Turkey, Norway and Iceland, which are members of NATO but not of the EU), five observers (members of the EU but not of the WEU) and ten associate partners in central and eastern Europe. The Treaty of Amsterdam provides for the possible integration of the WEU into the European Union at a future date.

At this stage a European army would appear to be a very distant prospect. Such an army would never come about without the approval of each Member State and no plans exist to compel any Member State to commit its own troops without the approval of its government, a point that the reflection group confirmed in its report to the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.

Such a significant decision as whether soldiers should be sent to war or not will remain the prerogative of the nation State.

The current Euro corps was set up by France and Germany as the potential beginnings of a future Euro-army. Spain and Belgium also participate and, depending on the situation, the operational command may be either the WEU or NATO. With a multinational HQ and a mixed HQ battalion, it is expected to grow to over 50 000 soldiers and has been fully operational since October 1995.

Has the CFSP lived up to expectations?

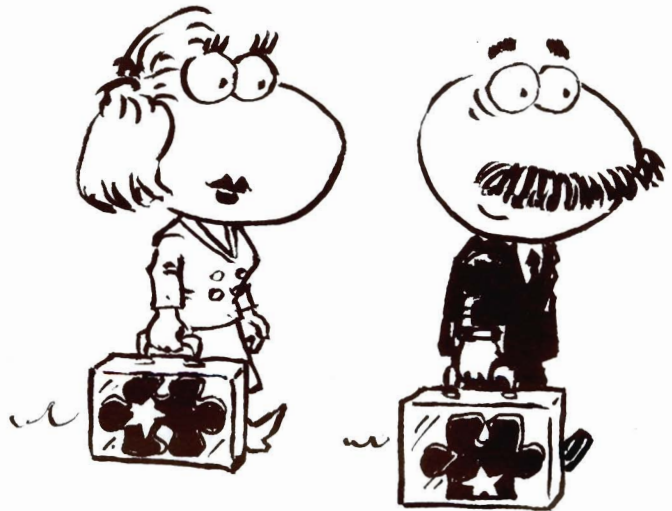
The CFSP has been in existence now for just over four years and it cannot be compared to the foreign policies of the Member States, which have developed over centuries. However, now that the Treaty has established a single institutional framework covering economic affairs, trade, foreign policy, justice and home affairs, a more comprehensive and more consistent approach to foreign policy is gradually evolving.

The EU's relations with central and eastern Europe cover all of these facets, as do to varying degrees those with Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union, Asia (including Japan and China), Africa and Latin America. The EU has also been actively supporting the Middle East peace process, in particular through the work of its special envoy to the region.

The nature of the EU's relationship with the United States confirms its status in the world. The EU and the US are now consulting closely on all major international issues. This new relationship was further extended at the EU-US summit in Madrid in December 1995, where both sides agreed to cooperate more closely on a wide range of issues, including combating the drugs trade and international crime.

Where the CFSP has not appeared to be wholly effective (for example, in the former Yugoslavia), much can be explained by the lack of substantial progress in integrating the EU's political and economic foreign policies. As the Albanian crisis recently demonstrated, coordinated intervention by the international community at political, economic and security levels can guide a country back towards economic sanity and the democratic process. The role of the EU was decisive in this context.

The Intergovernmental Conference which drew up the Treaty of Amsterdam made a number of changes which should improve the visibility and coherence of the CFSP: a joint planning body (the Political Committee) will be set up to provide a political analysis of situations and a High Representative for the CFSP will be appointed once the Treaty enters into force. As already mentioned, the common strategies represent a further innovation but these are only modest improvements and the Union will have to do more if it is to articulate clearly its common interests and speak with a single voice on the international stage.



European Union

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