

HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION RELATE TO THE WORLD?



Europe ...
questions and answers



Europe
on the move

EUROPE ... QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION
RELATE TO THE WORLD?



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The terms **'European Community'** and **'European Union'** are used in this text to speak of that political entity which was born as the European Economic Community (or Common Market) through the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and subsequently evolved first into the European Community and finally to the European Union through the Maastricht Treaty of 1991, or the 'Treaty on European Union' as it is formally known. The legal construction of the latter treaty, in so-called 'pillars', stipulates that most policy matters fall legally under the scope of the still existing European Community (e.g. everything relating to the single market and the common agricultural policy), but two important areas, the common foreign and security policy and justice and home affairs form the second and third pillars. They have a different legal framework under the 'roof' of the European Union.



The EU means many things to many people. For some it has been at the core of efforts to help maintain peace over the past 50 years in a continent which in the past has been riven by rivalry and suspicion. Others, however, talk of its political impotency. Why, they wonder, as a supposed political union, has it not been able to intervene effectively in the former Yugoslavia?

For many the EU is primarily about the single market and the opportunities and benefits this presents to businesses, students, pensioners and holidaymakers.

A number of people feel that it is becoming increasingly difficult to see the wood through the trees. They look back and ask whether the EU's current responsibilities really are fulfilling the visions of its founders, or whether those visions have themselves become lost in the ambiguities of post cold-war Europe? A fair question would be: What exactly is the EU for now?

Likewise, you may want to know how the EU benefits you directly, in practical terms.

The EU's institutions are inundated daily with enquiries by people hoping to get to the root of many such questions. This booklet, in a series of several, seeks to give brief but concise answers to the most frequent of these questions.

Ultimately, the EU is more than just the sum of its parts. Its Member States created it to help solve problems that cannot now be effectively tackled by countries acting alone. The point is that the EU offers opportunities, not restrictions.

The EU 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 where it has the power to conduct a common commercial policy and to conclude different kinds of agreements with individual countries, with groups of countries or at a multilateral level. The EU also has special responsibility for economic assistance, development cooperation and humanitarian aid, where it conducts a coherent single policy towards the outside world, though to varying degrees.

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 activities. Yet, it is clear that the EU has a potentially more complex and significant political role to play on the world scene since the end of the cold war. This has been apparent in a number of recent challenges, including the activities in relation to 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 and is, therefore, one of the major subjects on the agenda of the Intergovernmental Conference.

What are the benefits of a 'common commercial policy'?

The founding fathers of the Treaty of Rome already 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 latter consisting i.a. in 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, achievement of uniformity in measures of liberalization, export policy 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 due to the fact that the EU as the world's largest trader, accounting for over one fifth of world trade, is conducting a coherent single policy towards the outside world.

The Treaties of Rome established that the European Commission conducts trade negotiations on behalf of the EU on the basis of a mandate from the Member governments. This has clearly proved to be of benefit to the EU: 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 ne-

gotiating strength was most successful during the multilateral Uruguay Round negotiations but also bears fruit with regard to the conclusion of different kinds of bilateral or regional agreements with third countries.

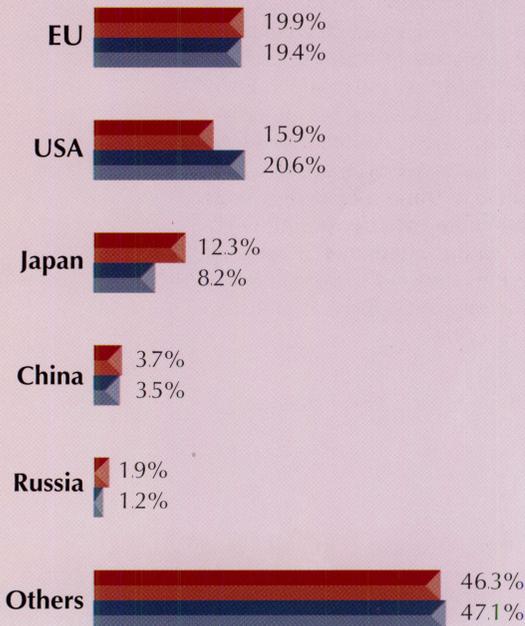
It should be noted that the European Commission's exclusive negotiating powers under the common commercial policy are mainly limited to negotiations concerning goods. However, negotiations in the services sector, on the protection of intellectual property and on foreign direct investment play an increasingly important role internationally and in particular for the EU. The importance of services has grown steadily over the last decade. In 1990, services contributed nearly half of the EU's GDP and provided employment for 42% of the EU work force. The equivalent figures for the industrial sector were 34% and 33% 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 worldwide 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.

Trade has always played a major role in Europe's history, and commerce with the rest of the world is still the 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 Organization.

Share of world trade, 1994

8

 = Exports
 = Imports



The EU's powers in these sectors, which have so far been poorly defined and led to needless procedural wrangles between the EU and its Member States, should be clearly defined in the future. This would enable account to be taken of the radical changes in the structure of the world economy in which these sectors play an increasingly important role. The Intergovernmental Conference will be a most welcome opportunity to clarify these issues where adaptations to the Maastricht Treaty will be discussed.

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 about one fifth of world trade in goods (as compared to 18% for the United States and 10% for Japan). The European Commission estimates that between 10 and 12 million jobs depend directly on its exports. These exports, which go to the whole world, provide approximately 10% of the Union's wealth, as represented by its GDP. The EU is also an attractive market for imports which represent also approximately 10% of its GDP. With its 370 million inhabitants, the EU has created the world's most important market. Exporters from outside the EU are fully benefiting from the completion of the single market with a uniform (or mutually recognized) set of norms, standards and procedures. Like local EU firms, they need to respect only one set of standards in manufacturing their products in order to market their goods anywhere in the EU. They no longer have to face 15 different national requirements.



EKA

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 one quarter of foreign direct investment worldwide. The stock of foreign direct investment in Europe amounts to USD 460 billion, and foreign direct investment directly supports millions of jobs in the Union. Trade and direct investment are closely interlinked, also through their mutual reinforcement. It is therefore important to assure a favourable environment for foreign direct investment world-wide at the same time as trade is being increasingly liberalized.

As briefly demonstrated, the EU's economic welfare depends on a liberal, multilateral world economic order. Progressive opening of its own market parallel to assuring improved access in third countries are chief aims of the EU. For this reason the EU has played a prominent and active role in the multilateral Uruguay Round trade negotiations which lead to the WTO

agreement. This agreement which will substantially liberalize international trade is not an end in itself. Remaining obstacles in third-country markets, which prevent European business from competing on even terms, should be removed; acceleration of tariff reduction commitments under the Uruguay Round results and further tariff reductions should be considered and new items such as on trade and environment, trade and competition, etc., should be included in the WTO. The EU must take a lead in pressing for further trade liberalization and strengthening of the WTO.

How can the EU protect its industries against unfair trade?

The EU, which makes the trade policy for its Member States, holds 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, for example in the textile sector. Consequently the EU has a very high import penetration (import share or value per capita).

However, through internationally agreed rules (GATT/WTO), the EU can also legitimately defend its industries against unfair competition from third countries. This trade defence policy mainly counteracts dumping and subsidizing 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. However, the EU uses its trade defence instruments in a very liberal way; it only imposes measures at the minimum level necessary to remove the injury suffered and it takes no measures at all if this is in the Community's overall interest. In these two elements the EU is much less protective than its major trading partners, such as the US. In fact, only about 0.7% of the overall trade volume of the EU is actually affected by defence measures.

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 and attack trade restrictions or discriminations for Community firms in third countries, in order to actively promote the free trade principles of the WTO.

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 70 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.

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, and a number of countries in Asia and Latin America. However trading relations with these latter 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 two examples.

The EU's commitment towards developing countries can be seen in the ongoing exchange over the validity of the EU's preference for Caribbean bananas over those from Latin America, one which reflects individual Member States' close and long-standing relationships with former colonies in the Caribbean. In this instance critics cite the Community's obligations under the Lomé Convention as being contrary to the spirit of the free trade agreement on agricultural products as concluded in the last round of the GATT talks. Notwithstanding this pressure, the current Lomé Convention will run until the year 2000 — which should provide the stability on which many of these countries rely.

Equally, businesses as a whole outside the Community should now find it much easier to target and gear their products, as imported products have only to conform to one set of national or Community standards rather than 15. This is helped by the fact that, once inside the Community, imported products can then move as freely within its borders as local goods are able to. This is made all the easier thanks to the development of Community standards for industrial and agricultural goods.

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

The EU takes third world issues seriously. Few people realize 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, is financing aid efforts in 60 other countries, including Rwanda, Liberia, Cambodia, northern Iraq, Afghanistan, Haiti and Cuba.

Yet 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 had been taken in time to mobilize the international community.

The EU is also by far the biggest donor of world development aid and the largest importer of products from developing countries. The EU's common overseas development programme accounted for over 6% of the Community budget in 1994. Were this figure to include the European Development Fund (separate from the Community budget, and endowed directly by the Member States), it would account for over 9%, a sum of ECU 15.7 billion.

Much of this aid is directed through the Lomé Convention, an agreement which covers trade, aid and political issues and which is an expression of the EU's affinity with its Member

States' former colonies. Among others, it provides for ECU 12 billion in subsidies and low interest loans to finance economic and social investment projects, of which 80% goes to rural development projects.

The EU and its Member States are the world's largest donors of development aid. The EU runs an agency ECHO (European Community Humanitarian Office) 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.





How is the EU helping its neighbours to the East towards democracy and the free market?

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 (1990-94). These countries have now made it clear they want much closer ties with the EU; many have since declared their ultimate goal to be full membership of the Union. To achieve this goal much preparation has to be made by both the candidate countries, by the EU itself, and by both sets of partners working closely together.

At the core of these efforts are the 'Europe Agreements' negotiated with each country, and which aim to open up free trade, provide economic and technical assistance and establish closer political dialogue. The Heads of State and Government confirmed at the European Council in June 1993 in Copenhagen that those countries which had signed could join the Union as soon as they fulfilled the economic and political requirements for membership. These countries

currently include Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria. Agreements have been signed with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania but have not been ratified. The one with Slovenia has been initialled.

The Europe Agreements are backed up financially by the Phare programme for technical assistance and

In order that the transition from centrally planned to market economies is successfully achieved, the EU's Tacis programme finances the exchange of knowledge and expertise through partnerships, links and networks at all levels of society. Tacis currently supports the reform of public administrative bodies, social services and education and funds nuclear safety and environmental projects, amongst others in the New Independent States (NIS). Substantial allocations — ECU 2.3 billion in 1991-95, including Russia — have been made available from the Tacis programme to the NIS to aid their transition to a market economy and to entrench democracy.

infrastructure development. So far, over ECU 5 billion has been committed by Phare, a figure which will rise to ECU 11 billion by the end of the decade. These funds take the form of grants, which have an important multiplier 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 republics of the former Soviet Union through bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and under the Tacis programme. The most ambitious of these is with Russia itself, covering trade, financial and technical assistance, setting the basis for political dialogue and agreeing to a timetable for the introduction of free trade. The trade provisions of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement entered into force on 1 February 1996.

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. On its behalf, as a way of improving living conditions, increasing employment levels and reducing the development gap in the Mediterranean region, the EU recently agreed to increase aid to its Mediterranean neighbours to ECU 4.6 billion for 1995-99, to be spent mainly on infrastructure and training.

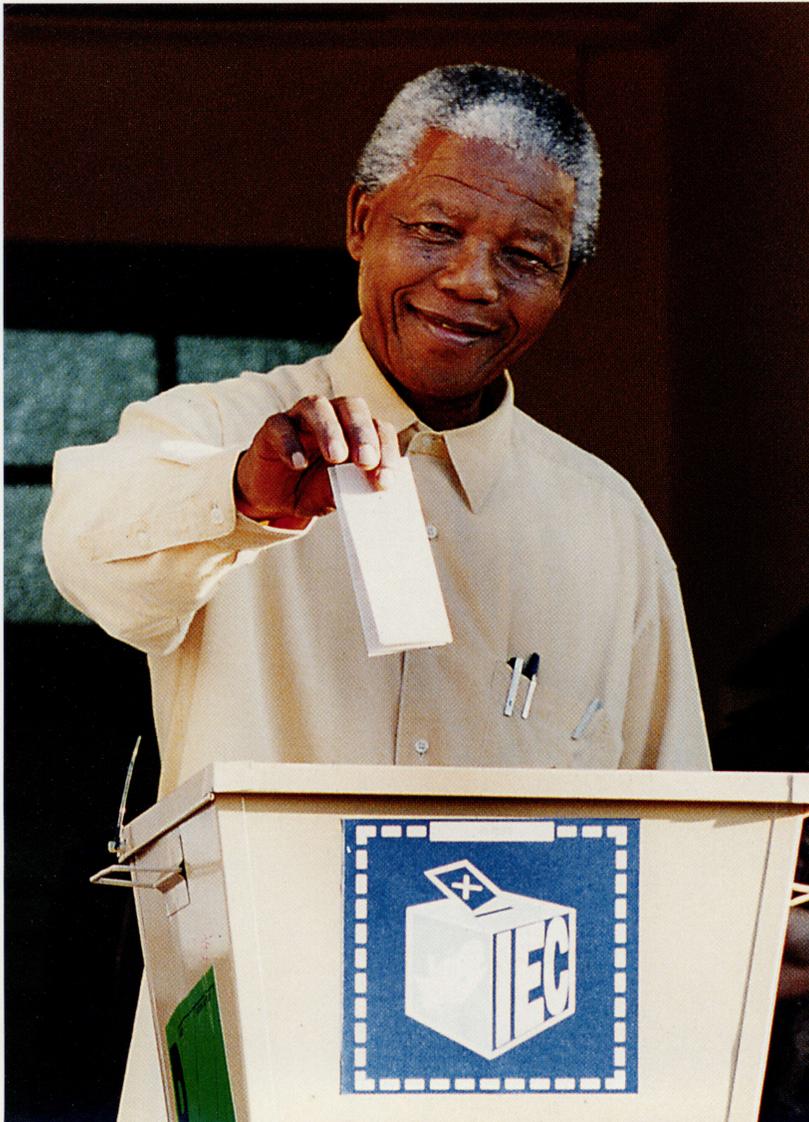
New levels of cooperation were agreed at the Barcelona Summit in November 1995. Ministers agreed to the creation of a Mediterranean free-trade area by the year 2010, with closer cooperation in specific areas such as intellectual property rights, transfers of technology and energy and support for small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

Why have a European 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, responded by fixing as a Union objective 'the implementa-

tion of a common foreign and security policy including the eventual framing of a common defence policy'.

This is a very recent and relatively untried ambition compared with the European Union's long-established constitutional responsibility to act on behalf of its Member States in the fields of external economic relations and development policies.



Photorenews

Helping to establish democracy in South Africa has been one of the EU's common foreign and security policy's main objectives.

The Treaty says that the objectives of a CFSP are:

- (i) to safeguard the common values, fundamental interests and independence of the Union;
- (ii) to strengthen the security of the Union and its Member States in all ways;
- (iii) 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;
- (iv) to promote international cooperation;
- (v) 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 of exchanging information, consultation and policy coordination in external political relations.

The Treaty on European Union has taken EPC's 25 years of experience further by creating 'common positions' and 'joint action' as new instruments. CFSP is carried out within the framework of the Union's institutions. Its aim is to create consistent policies which are preventive rather than reactive and which assert the EU's political identity.

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

Decision-making: 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 has overall control: the European Council defines the principles and general guidelines for CFSP, and all decisions in the Council are taken unanimously, except some about implementing 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.

In legal terms the CFSP lies outside the provisions of the EC Treaties (hence the 'pillar' status often associated with Maastricht).

Common positions: once a common position has been defined by the Council, Member States must ensure that their national policies conform with it. Some have been politically important, such as those establishing a broad framework approach for the EU's relations with Rwanda, the Ukraine and Burundi, while others have been purely technical.

Joint actions: these commit the Member States to acting in a certain way in support of a common position. Significant joint actions have included the convoying of humanitarian aid in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the administration of the town of Mostar in the former Yugoslavia with policing supplied by the West European Union, sending observers to parliamentary elections in Russia, South Africa and the Middle East. The Stability Pact for Central Europe, established in 1994 to foster good neighbourliness and democratic and human rights principles with the countries of that area was the result of a successful joint action.

Is the EU working towards a common defence?

As a result of the new post cold-war scenario described above, it has become apparent that the EU must take more responsibility for its own security and the new threats the Union is confronted with. These are not directly military but more related to for example, nuclear safety, organized crime, environmental disasters, illegal trafficking of nuclear materials, overpopulation, poverty, mass migration and ethnic and regional conflicts in the vicinity of the Union. The European Union has of course to be equipped with the means to tackle these challenges.

The CFSP as agreed in the Maastricht Treaty sought to fill this gap.



It did so by agreeing to draw upon the West European Union (WEU), of which ten Member States are members, the remaining five observers, and a number of Central and East European States associate partners), for CFSP actions with defence implications and ultimately, for it to become the cornerstone of an 'eventual' common defence policy. The WEU's own role has been strengthened with a new planning cell, regular meetings of chiefs of defence staff and more cooperation in the arms procurement field.

In 1998 the Treaty establishing the WEU expires, and at that point there might be an extension of the status quo, it could become the military arm of the EU or, alternatively, develop into the 'European pillar' of NATO. These three scenarios clearly have different implications for the EU and for the control of its own defence, and will be addressed at the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference. NATO, however, will remain fundamental to Europe's territorial defence for the foreseeable future, although the strengthening of the EU's defence identity, chiefly through the WEU, will also strengthen NATO.

Is there to be a standing European army?

The Maastricht Treaty allows the EU to include security issues in the CFSP, 'including the eventual framing of a common European defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence'. If this is to be the case, a European army cannot be discounted.

However, 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 to whether the 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.

Why has the CFSP not lived up to expectations?

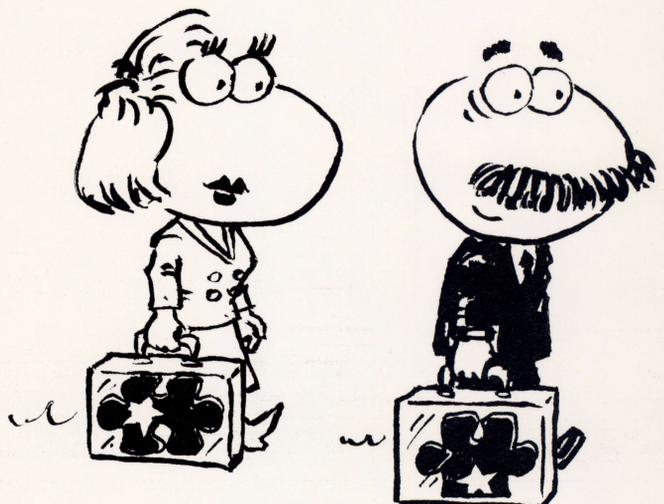
It would be unfair to assume that the EU has achieved little in foreign policy since its inception in 1993. As there is now much more room for the EU and its Member States to operate within a single institutional framework covering political, economic, commercial and judicial affairs, a more comprehensive and coherent approach to foreign policy is gradually evolving.

The EU's relations with Central and Eastern Europe cover all of these facets, for instance, as do, to varying degrees, those with the former Soviet Union, Japan, China and Latin America. The EU has also been actively supporting the Middle East peace process, and has sent observers to ascertain whether free and fair elections took place in Russia, South Africa and in the West Bank and Gaza.

In addition, 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 has been 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.

However, 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 and the inability to project credible military force. The EU has as yet rarely acted as one in handling serious political crises, especially those involving armed conflict.

To overcome this, the EU needs to articulate more clearly its common interests, and for this to happen, a formula needs to be found which will make decision-making easier than it is at present. More majority voting in the Council of the European Union on foreign policy issues is the most obvious solution. On the other hand, no single Member State should be able to prevent action by a majority of Member States wishing to act together but this should not force any Member State to participate in operations against its own will. This diplomatic puzzle will hopefully be solved at the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.



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COMMISSION REPRESENTATIONS

Office in Ireland	18 Dawson Street, Dublin 2 — Tel. (1) 662 51 13
Representation in England	Jean Monnet House, 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT — Tel. (171) 973 1992
Representation in Wales	4 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 9SG — Tel. (222) 37 16 31
Representation in Scotland	9 Alva Street, Edinburgh EH2 4PH — Tel. (31) 225 20 58
Representation in Northern Ireland	Windsor House, 9/15 Bedford Street, Belfast BT2 7EG — Tel. (232) 24 07 08
Information Services in the USA	2100 M Street, NW, Suite 707, Washington DC 20037 — Tel. (202) 862 95 00 305 East 47th Street, 3 Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, New York, NY 10017 — Tel. (212) 371 38 04

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