

Rules of Secondment – The Role of Seconded National Experts in the Development of the CFSP and ESDP

DRAFT VERSION. PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE

Paper presented at the 11th EUSA Biennial International Conference, Los Angeles
23-25 April, 2009

Yannick Hartstein
Academic Assistant
Department of EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies
College of Europe
11 Dijver
B-8000 Bruges
Belgium

yhartstein@coleurop.be

Abstract

This study aims to analyze how the secondment of public servants has affected the development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). I will look at how these officials influence, and are influenced by, EU decision-making processes; how their baggage of knowledge and assumptions change with their secondment; and how they, in turn, transform decision-making processes in their respective institutions. It is hypothesized that these networks, through processes of mutual learning and socialization, contribute to the Europeanization of national foreign policies, on the one hand, and to the development of common assumptions, approaches and values in foreign policy, on the other.

Basing myself on academic discussions of socialization in international institutions and in the Union in particular, I shall look at how these patterns of socialization translate into the development of a common set of assumptions and approaches. A series of interviews will give flesh and depth to the theoretical findings.

Introduction

As the European Union (EU) has seen its capacities for external action grow tremendously, policy-makers and academics started thinking about the EU's international identity. On the diplomatic side, the Common and Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) has enabled the EU to act as a unified actor on the international scene. Operationally, the creation of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) gave the Union the instruments necessary to back up its political dialogue with coercive means. Over the past 15 years, the Union's foreign policy machinery grew, became more institutionalized, and developed important operational capacities as well as experience. And yet, while the research community has studied these institutional evolutions, and their consequences, widely and extensively, a few elements of analysis have been missing, and this paper modestly attempts to answer some of these lacunae. In this context, the question arose, if this new policy environment was perhaps capable, by coordinating national foreign policies, and more and more, establish novel approaches and rules of behaviours, of slowly changing the way governments and public opinions shape their countries' foreign policies.

Within this research agenda, a question that has not often been asked is what the impact of individual policy-makers is. There is a strong American tradition of analyzing foreign policy in bureaucratic and organizational terms¹. And while some recent European research has taken an institutional look at the new policy environment², the role of individuals, as shapers of policy has been overlooked in studies of CFSP and ESDP.

With this framework in mind, the question I endeavour to answer in this paper is how do seconded national experts (SNEs) impact the making of European foreign policy, and whether or not this impact has a meaning for a convergence of national foreign policies towards a form of European "ideal". It is hypothesized that SNEs, who come to Brussels socialized within their countries' own cultural and historical baggage, can, through certain social and learning mechanisms, constrain both European and national foreign policy-making

¹ See Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1999, and Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS and NSC*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999.

² See for example Simon Duke and Sophie Vanhoonacker, "Administrative Governance in the CFSP: Development and Practice," *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 11, n. 2 (April 2006), pp. 163-82; Ana Juncos and Christopher Reynolds, "The Political and Security Committee: Governing in the Shadows," *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 12, n. 2 (April 2007); pp. 127-147; and Hylke Dijkstra, "The Council Secretariat's Role in the Common Foreign and Security Policy," *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol 13, n. 2 (May 2008), pp.149-166.

into acting in ways that are mutually acceptable. If these processes continue over time, this may signal a convergence, or Europeanization, of foreign policy, both in its actions, its instruments, but also in the norms and values they seek to promote.

Firstly, I will take a closer look at Europeanization theory, which claims that national policies are influenced by European policy-making, which constrains them and slowly makes them more similar. Such analyses have only recently been used in the context of foreign policy, and will be looked at as well. I will also analyze one of the mechanisms of Europeanization, socialization. Here, individuals may change in their habits of thought and behaviour simply by joining a new group, or a new institutional setting.

Secondly, some data gathered from interviews with SNEs working in the European institutions will be analyzed. I look at SNEs because they are an archetypal case: national civil servants, and therefore deeply socialized into national habits of policy-making, but who, for the time of their secondment, are fully independent of their home employer and are totally loyal to their new institution. As we shall see, they have developed certain mechanisms to cope with this ambiguous position, mechanisms that, if used properly, can trigger changes both in European and national foreign policy apparatuses.

Processes of Europeanization and socialization in foreign policy

Seen by some as existing mid-way between intergovernmentalism and supranationalism³, the theory of Europeanization posits that EU membership will affect national political and policy processes, by constraining the range of possible and acceptable actions. While the Europeanization approach has been widely used in most fields of European Community (EC) competence⁴, its use in the analysis of European foreign policy and its effects on national foreign policies has been less studied. This is mostly due to the fact that, if cooperation in these matters dates back to the 1970s and European Political Cooperation (EPC), its lack of formalization and institutionalization weren't seen as conducive to such processes of Europeanization. However, with the advent of CFSP, and the further institutionalization and operationalization of ESDP, academics started wondering if the development of a European foreign policy was conducive to changes in national foreign policies. The first part of this section will look at what this means.

³ Reuben Wong, *The Europeanization of French Foreign Policy – France and the EU in East Asia*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2006.

⁴ For a recent look at the state of the art, see Paolo Graziano and Maarten Vink (eds.), *Europeanization – New Research Agendas*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2007.

One of the key mechanisms of Europeanization is socialization. Defined by Jeffrey Checkel as the “process of inducting actors into the norms and rules of a given community,”⁵ it is oriented towards analyzing changes in beliefs, values and actions within *individual* actors who enter a new institutional setting. In this sense, it is an important mechanism if we are to analyze the work of Seconded National Experts (SNEs), national policy-makers who exist with pre-existing norm- and action-expectations, and penetrate a new social environment. In this section, we will therefore look, in the second part, at the theoretical mechanisms leading to socialization.

Europeanization of national foreign policies

Historically, the notion of foreign policy is state-centred, since only those political entities with clear, discernible *national* interests could use policy tools to influence world politics. If we take this notion of interest as the key element, then we must conclude that the EU is not a unified actor with an identifiable interest⁶. And yet, it is difficult to analyze European Union foreign policy (EUFPP) as strictly intergovernmental: as Michael E. Smith points out, national preferences and interests, as spelled out at the European level, are not formed independently of others and a priori⁷. Even more so in the CFSP, Europeanization is a midway between supranationalism and intergovernmentalism, since member states adapt to CFSP structures and norms, but contribute (heavily) to their creation⁸. In other words, its “complex administrative governance” means that CFSP decisions go beyond the lowest common denominator⁹. Indeed, Smith sees what he calls a “problem-solving approach” to EUFP, through appeals to common values rather than interests¹⁰.

In this sense, national foreign policies are more and more seen as the result of a series of negotiations between governments, institutions and personnel, and policy learning¹¹. Paraphrasing Tonra, Wong defines foreign policy Europeanization as a “transformation in the way in which national foreign policies are constructed, in the ways in which professional

⁵ Jeffrey Checkel, “International Institutions and Socialization in Europe: Introduction and Framework”, *International Organization*, vol. 59, n. 4 (Fall 2005), p. 804.

⁶ Wong, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁷ Michael E. Smith, “Toward a Theory of EU Foreign Policy-Making: Multi-Level Governance, Domestic Politics, and National Adaptation to Europe’s Common Foreign and Security Policy”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 11, n. 4 (August 2004), p. 741.

⁸ Reuben Wong, “Foreign Policy”, in Paolo Graziano and Maarten Vink (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 322.

⁹ Duke and Vanhoonacker, “Administrative Governance in the CFSP”, p. 181.

¹⁰ Michael E. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 741.

¹¹ Wong, *The Europeanization of French Foreign Policy*, p. 17.

roles are defined and pursued and in the consequent internalisation of norms and expectations arising from a complex system of collective policy-making.”¹²

In his book on the Europeanization of French foreign policy, Wong identifies three approaches to the process. Amongst these, “*identity reconstruction*” (“crossloading”¹³) is how Wong terms sociological institutionalism, and it denotes the development of new conceptions of interests and identity. According to this approach, CFSP institutions have socialization effects: elites internalize supranational norms and interests and feed them back to national administrations¹⁴. Possible signs would include the development of common norms among policy-making elites, or even shared definition of EU and national interests¹⁵. This will be the topic of the second part of this section.

If we follow Wong down this path, two problems arise as to research methodology. Firstly, how does one define causality in Europeanization? Indeed, inasmuch as the mechanism is supposed to be a two-way process, the relation between dependent and independent variables blur: to get back to the supranational-intergovernmental dichotomy, while the end-result of Europeanization is a European Union foreign policy, this will be conceived at the national level¹⁶. The second methodological issue regards identifying and measuring such foreign policy change. According to the author, “Studies on foreign policy Europeanization have ... tended to rely heavily on interviews with national officials and Commission in Brussels ... for evidence. But can these officials seriously be expected to tell the researcher that they do not subscribe to the ideals of a coordinated, coherent CFSP?”¹⁷

Institutional socialization mechanisms in CFSP/ESDP

Studies of socialization start off with a basic assumption: “Actors who enter into a social interaction rarely emerge the same.”¹⁸ We can consider international institutions, at the individual level, as such social interactions or environments. Within the research, one strand considers international institutions as *promoters* of socialization, while another sees them as *sites* of socialization, in other words, “insulated setting[s] where social pressure is absent or

¹² Wong, “Foreign Policy”, p. 323.

¹³ Wong, “Foreign Policy”, p. 325.

¹⁴ Wong, *The Europeanization of French Foreign Policy*, p. 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁶ Wong, “Foreign Policy”, p. 330.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

¹⁸ Alastair Iain Johnston, “Treating International Institutions as Social Environments”, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 45, n. 4 (December 2001), p. 488.

deflected” and agents “adopt multiple roles”¹⁹. Whatever approach one adopts, it is nonetheless a fact that, as Christoph Meyer says: “close proximity and high frequency of interactions induce individuals to mutually adapt their perceptions and attitudes in order to minimize cognitive dissonance.”²⁰ So the question we want to ask in this context is *when* do these institutions create new senses of “togetherness”, and *what* do these processes mean “for individual and state allegiances, interests, and identities?”²¹

Within CFSP, academics have analyzed, since the inception of European political cooperation (EPC) a so-called “coordination reflex” defined by Simon Nuttall as the “automatic reflex of consultation brought about by frequent personal contacts with opposite numbers from the other member states.”²² This leads to the appearance of a new logic of appropriateness, meaning that agents think more in terms of what is *appropriate* in the specific setting instead of what is *expected* of them and others, called the logic of consequence²³.

Jeffrey Checkel identifies three mechanisms of socialization, each of which may play a role when one looks at the structures of CFSP.

Strategic calculation works through social and material, positive or negative incentives. Here, agents adapt to the rules to pursue their own given interests²⁴. Hence, Juncos and Pomorska show that in CFSP Council working groups (CWGs), strategic socialization takes place, because CWG members must guarantee their reputation and legitimacy (by “playing the game”) in the short- and medium terms, to keep negotiation leverage for their governments’ long term interest²⁵. On its own, however, strategic calculation does not lead to internalization, since here, socialization is only a tool of instrumental rationality; nonetheless, if compliance to norms is sustained over time, Checkel believes that individual preferences may change²⁶. Such factors as the insulated setting of

¹⁹ Checkel, op. cit., pp. 806-7.

²⁰ Christoph Meyer, *The Quest for a European Strategic Culture – Changing Norms on Security and Defence in the European Union*, Houndmills, Palgrave, 2006., p. 37.

²¹ Checkel, op. cit., p. 802.

²² Quoted in Ana Juncos and Christopher Reynolds, “The Political and Security Committee: Governing in the Shadows”, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol. 12, n. 2 (April 2007), p. 132.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Checkel, op. cit., pp. 808-9.

²⁵ Ana Juncos and Karolina Pomorska, “Playing the Brussels Game: Strategic Socialization in the CFSP Council Working Groups”, *European Integration Online Papers*, vol. 10-11 (2006). Available at <<http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2006-011a.htm>>.

²⁶ Checkel, op. cit., pp. 808-9.

certain CWGs, the complexity of issues, the frequency of rotation, or the autonomy given to the agent may increase the potential for internalization²⁷.

Secondly, groups or institutional settings may provide “simplifying shortcuts” in situations where resources and attention are scarce, and rationality is bounded²⁸. In this case, agents adapt in an automatic or unconscious fashion to their environment: Checkel calls this *role playing*²⁹. Role playing works in small groups, where contacts happen over a sustained period, and depends on the agents’ previous exposure to such groups or tolerance for new settings³⁰.

If one looks at the literature, it would seem that role playing would be the type of mechanism at play when analysing the role of civil servants (whether national or European) in the development of an EU foreign policy approach. First of all, the need for rotation (through Directorates at the European level, through postings at the national diplomatic level) prevents deep self-reflection³¹. However, it is a fact that, as Duke and Vanhoonacker point out, CFSP institutions create “new rules and practices ... which create new opportunities as well as constraints for the actors involved.”³² In their article, they take an “administrative governance approach”, defined as the “contribution and impact of *non-elected officials*” on the policy process³³. According to them, “at the decision-shaping level, the exchange between the national and Brussels actors is critical in both the processes of injecting and transforming national interests into the European context and, correspondingly, to gradually Europeanize foreign policies and foreign policy-making in the national context.”³⁴ However, while “diplomatic intersubjectivity” creates, according to some, a common code of CFSP conduct³⁵, the same authors argue that the further legalization and bureaucratisation of CFSP/ESDP will come at the expense of informality and socializing opportunities³⁶. Those fears are not shared here, inasmuch as the legalization of ESDP is still in its infancy and that, therefore, member states keep a close eye on developments in this regard. Nonetheless, it will be interesting to see how policies on secondment of national experts can be devised to better take account of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 810.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Meyer, op. cit., p. 126.

³² Duke and Vanhoonacker, op. cit., p. 164.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 177.

³⁵ Juncos and Pomorska, op. cit.

³⁶ Juncos and Reynolds, op. cit., p. 143.

this. While rotation is definitely an obstacle to deep internalization, it is nonetheless possible that the practices learned in the new setting will propagate once the rotation is done: Juncos and Pomorska do point out that national civil servants in CWGs are twice embedded (in national and European environments), and that, as they learn new practices and norms, “diplomats sometimes act as ‘change agents’ in relation to their own national administration”³⁷. Their influence may even be stronger after these people return to their capitals (a normal diplomatic rotation does indeed alternate work abroad and in the Ministry), what the authors call the “contagion effect”³⁸. While the article does analyze the work of national diplomats working in permanent representations, the situation would seem to be the same for SNEs, especially since, for the time of their secondment, all working links to the national government are technically cut. Nonetheless, we should not forget that it will always be difficult to trace the dual dynamics of, on the one hand, pressures from capitals (the former in-groups), and on the other, the task of gaining comfort and legitimacy, for the long term, in the current environment³⁹.

Finally, the deepest type of socialization mechanism is what Jeffrey Checkel calls *normative suasion*: here, agents “play games” of argumentation, persuasion and convincing, leading them to reflect on their own beliefs and preferences, and eventually redefining them⁴⁰. Active and reflective internalization takes place: individuals in this situation would say that they act in manner X because “this is the right thing to do.”⁴¹ In this case, the “scope conditions” are the newness and uncertainty of the environment, which favours curiosity and openness to new ideas; few pre-existing beliefs opposing the new environment; the authority of the persuader; the fact that work functions through deliberation, not order-giving; and if the environment is a less politicized and more insulated setting⁴².

However, it should be said that some of the scholarship, drawing on extensive data, points to the fact that this sort of intense socialization process cannot take place at the European level. In her study of European Commission civil servants, Liesbet Hooghe claims that support for international (or EU) norms exists, not because Eurocrats are socialized into the European institutional setting, but rather, because “national experiences motivate them to

³⁷ Juncos and Pomorska, op. cit.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Meyer, op. cit., p. 118.

⁴⁰ Checkel, op. cit., p. 812.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Checkel, op. cit., p. 813.

do so”, either through national support for supranationalism, or because “rational” cost-benefit analysis makes it worth it⁴³.

A final way of analyzing socialization processes at the European level is to look at the work of national civil servants, and SNEs in particular, as a way to “focus on avenues where both national and supranational actors participate and interact.”⁴⁴ In EU settings, national civil servants may play three different roles: national government representatives, sectoral experts, or supranational actors working for the EU. There is therefore a triple balance to be played, between political loyalty, professional autonomy and supranational allegiances, respectively⁴⁵. In the case of SNEs, all idea of direct government representation is by definition not applicable: however, the concept of “ambiguous representation” defined by Trondal and Veggeland is an interesting one here: in this case, “the representative has multiple obligations, institutional affiliations and allegiances.”⁴⁶ The idea is appealing because the authors’ hypothesis is that the supranational and expert roles will only supplement, never replace, national roles, since national civil servants are institutionalized (or socialized) that a national role conception is difficult to redefine⁴⁷.

The Role of SNEs in European foreign policy processes

As previously mentioned, SNEs are at the nexus of national and European decision-making, but at the same time, their regulatory statute means that they are fully independent of their government during the time of their rotation; in other words, their allegiance in Brussels is wholly to the institution they are seconded to. This makes them particularly interesting subjects in the design of the European Union in general, and in the newly institutionalized field of CFSP in particular. My discussions with SNEs show that they present certain traits as possible feedback “conduits” between Brussels and their capitals, on three levels: as *lobbyists* for European instruments or specific regional or functional approaches during their secondment; as national *insiders* able to explain their governments’ “red lines” to their Brussels hierarchy; and as *advocates* for a general European approach on foreign policy, after their return in their home bureaucracy.

⁴³ Liesbet Hogghe, “Several Roads Lead to International Norms, but Few Via International Socialization: A Case Study of the European Commission”, *International Organization*, vol. 59, n. 4 (Fall 2005), p. 862.

⁴⁴ Jarle Trondal and Frode Veggeland, “Access, Voice and Loyalty: The Representation of Domestic Civil Servants in EU Committees”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 10, n. 1 (February 2003), p. 59.

⁴⁵ Jarle Trondal, “Governing at the Frontier of the European Commission: The Case of Seconded National Officials,” *West European Politics*, vol. 29, n. 1 (January 2006), p. 156.

⁴⁶ Trondal and Veggeland, op. cit., p. 62.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 63-4.

After looking at the rules and regulations surrounding secondment, and a brief methodological explanation, I will look at the issues raised by the SNEs interviewed, both in their functions and their vision of secondment.

Rules and regulations of secondment

According to the relevant Council and Commission decisions regulating secondment, SNEs are there to “foster the exchange of professional experience and knowledge of European policies by temporarily assigning to the [General Secretariat of the Council or the Commission] experts from the member states’ administration.”⁴⁸ SNEs are therefore particularly important “in areas where such expertise is not readily available.”⁴⁹ As one Commission *fonctionnaire* told us, security policy as a field of competence has grown only recently, and the Commission “hasn’t been good at it.”⁵⁰ In this sense, the importance of SNEs in foreign policy-making at the European level is key to the development of knowledge and competence in these matters.

While SNEs remain in the service of their home employer and continue to be paid by it⁵¹, they should “carry out [their] duties and shall behave solely with the interests of the GSC [Commission] in mind”, are responsible to their manager, and “shall accept no instructions from [their] employer or national government”⁵². As already said, this sort of “institutional schizophrenia” or “dual embeddedness” creates tensions that could be used to the benefit of both European institutions and member state governments.

The length of secondment is two years, with possible extension up to a total of four years. Also, there is a mandatory six-year “cooling-off” period between two secondments⁵³. As we shall see, SNEs interviewed believe this is ill adapted, since it prevents the development of European experience and of a culture of secondment, whereby civil servants

⁴⁸ Council of the European Union, *Council Decision concerning the rules applicable to national experts and military staff on secondment to the General Secretariat of the Council and Repealing the Decisions of 25 June 1997 and 22 March 1999, Decision 2001/41/EC and Decision 2001/496/CFSP*, Doc. n. 2003/479/EC, 16 June 2003, OJ L 160/72 (hereafter *Council Decision*), whereas 2. The language of the Commission decision is similar, see Commission of the European Communities, *Commission Decision laying down rules on the secondment of national experts to the Commission*, Brussels, C(2006)2033, 1 June 2006 (hereafter *Commission Decision*). Available at <http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/job/sne/index_en.htm>.

⁴⁹ *Council Decision and Commission Decision*, whereas 1.

⁵⁰ Interview with *fonctionnaire*, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 4 April 2007.

⁵¹ Art. 1-2, *Council Decision and Commission Decision*.

⁵² Art. 5-1, *Council Decision*, and art. 7-1, *Commission Decision*.

⁵³ Art. 2-1, *Council Decision*, and art. 4-1, *Commission Decision*.

could rotate between capital- and Brussels- (institutions) based postings, creating a sense of mutual knowledge.

Unlike trainees, who by statute perform the same tasks as administrators in the Commission, both decisions explain that SNEs are there to “assist” permanent staff⁵⁴. However, in practice, SNEs are considered full-time staff for the purposes of their work, and carry out the same functions as *fonctionnaires*.

What is also interesting is what these statutes do not regulate. For instance, while the deputy Secretary General of the Council establishes rules of recruitment for SNEs⁵⁵, there is no provision establishing a uniform application process at the national level. While this makes sense so far as SNE applicants remain national civil servants, subject to national rules, this also prevents the development of a strategic approach to secondment. In light of the benefits we will look at in the following sections, it would be wise to come up, at the member state or at the EU level, with rules that ensure that the best use is made of SNEs, both during their time in Brussels and after their return.

Secondly, nothing in the statutes provides for training, once SNEs have arrived in Brussels. This question has not gotten a clear answer amongst the SNEs interviewed, because some of them feel that “on the spot” learning is sufficient to acclimate oneself with EU policy processes.

The regulations set out the conditions of secondment quite precisely: SNEs remain organically within their national bureaucracies, including on issues of promotion, but must be totally loyal to their new institutional setting during the time of their secondment. This was shown through a survey conducted by Jarle Trondal⁵⁶. This creates opportunities to use secondment to diffuse European foreign policy approaches to the national level, and reciprocally.

Methodological issues

For the purposes of this paper, besides a few permanent *fonctionnaires*, I interviewed five current and former seconded national experts, including a military officer. All wished to remain anonymous, and work (or have worked) in the field of CFSP/ESDP. Two of them

⁵⁴ Art. 4-1, *Council Decision*, and art. 6-1, *Commission Decision*.

⁵⁵ Art. 1-3, *Council Decision*.

⁵⁶ Trondal, “Governing at the Frontier of the Commission,” p. 151.

worked in the Commission, and three in the Council Secretariat, including the European Union Military Staff (EUMS). They represent a balance of countries and security traditions.

The questions asked to them were “marginal” ones. The point here was not to ask them directly their role in European foreign policy, but rather, to see how they saw themselves in their “new” institutional setting, and how they viewed their position within the hierarchy compared to their colleagues. In this sense, the discussion was kept quite open, to enable my interlocutors to reflect on their work, rather than answer a set of structured question. Indeed, quite a few of them recognized that they had never thought of their role in such a way. Interview time with SNEs varied between 45 minutes and an hour and a half.

In such a paper, I could only modestly endeavour to uncover some of the trends in the Europeanization of foreign policy. Therefore, besides a larger call for comparative research in the role of individuals (SNEs, fonctionnaires, etc.) in CFSP/ESDP, I believe the agenda would benefit from studying the very specific role of SNEs *on the field*, especially in civilian crisis management⁵⁷.

The Experience of SNEs

Recruitment and application

As has already been mentioned, each member state adopts its own recruitment procedure. In the case of a Mediterranean member state, two people work fulltime in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on promoting the presence of civil servants. However, according to our discussions, this is a two-way street, since once the posting is published, there is a need to lobby to get more information on the job⁵⁸. According to this SNE, the interest of the government in secondment is growing, but developing a strategic approach to the issue is of course more difficult for a small diplomatic service. On the European side, however, the interviewee believes that the structure of the General Secretariat of the Council (GSC) is complicated: too many people often work on the same issues, and there is no comprehensive questioning on “what is the added value of person X.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ This point was echoed by a *fonctionnaire* in the Council Secretariat, DGE. Interview, 7 February 2007.

⁵⁸ Interview with SNE, DGE8, Council Secretariat, Brussels, 9 August 2007.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

According to an SNE from a large member state, who himself was never a national civil servant, but was nonetheless sent to the GSC by his government, there is a quick loss of institutional memory on the field. In this sense, there is a strong need for people “in the know”. At the same time, however, our discussant felt that the secondment system was not well promoted by the member states⁶⁰.

An SNE from another large member state, working in the Commission, points out that her “[Ministry of Foreign Affairs] is a nightmare, administratively” when it comes to the application process⁶¹. Indeed, another SNE from the same country, who recently left the Commission, told us that, while it sometimes happens that an institution or a member state will want a specific person, or a specific nationality, to fill the post, most of the time it is incumbent upon the applicant to take the initiative⁶². While this might seem to be a case of what Lisbet Hooghe calls “self-selection”, in the eyes of this SNE, it isn’t necessarily “euro-enthusiasts” who apply, and the motivations may be various⁶³. Nonetheless, it does seem that the process is not an easy one, as pointed out in a survey of UK SNEs that says that “Many national experts find that they have to do much of the running in managing the secondment.”⁶⁴ This is, according to our interviewees, quite unfortunate, since secondment is a major commitment for a member state: there is a tremendous loss on return, since the government keeps paying a salary, while losing experienced staff for a two to four year rotation⁶⁵. This is all the more reason for governments to ensure a comprehensive approach to secondment, so as to maximize the “return on investment” by easing the process on the potential SNE, thereby making secondment a normal part of a career track and ensuring that the experience gained will be used to its full potential once the SNE goes back to his/her home employer.

A *fonctionnaire* from the Council Secretariat did tell me that most of the time, nationality does not play any role in the selection process: the GSC often identifies a need, and selects SNEs on the basis of their expertise and policy strength⁶⁶. However, it is also true, as a Commission civil servant said, that certain countries (such as France and the UK) are

⁶⁰ Interview with SNE, DGE, Council Secretariat, Brussels, 26 July 2007.

⁶¹ Interview with SNE, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 17 August 2007.

⁶² Interview with former SNE, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 24 July 2007.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ UK Section of CLENAD, *Career Management for UK Seconded National Experts in the EU Institutions*, March 2003, p. 6. Made available to me by former SNEs.

⁶⁵ Interview with SNE, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 17 August 2007.

⁶⁶ Interview with *fonctionnaire*, Council Secretariat, DGE, Brussels, 7 February 2007.

good at using secondment: this is not to say it is a bad thing, since they gain a “unique insight into how we work”, and it is expected that active, or larger, member states want to exert influence and receive knowledge⁶⁷.

Arrival and training

A consensus emerged amongst our interviewees that, while formal training is at a minimum for newly-arrived SNEs, this is not necessarily a bad thing: besides offering some modules on inter-institutional decision-making, most of the learning should happen “on the job”. Furthermore, some things are not easily taught or learned: for our Mediterranean SNE, working in the GSC, one of the most difficult things to learn are the so-called national “red lines” that cannot be crossed when developing CFSP/ESDP instruments. Indeed, an SNE has to learn to “work with 27 masters”, instead of one, when in the Council.

Two *fonctionnaires* from the GSC said that, in their experience, an SNE either learns the procedures and processes, and accepts them as his own, or the expert refuses to learn, and applies his own (often national) rules, and in this case, *fonctionnaires* must constantly follow up and correct errors, resulting in waste of time and resources, and potential errors. Given the institution’s strong administrative culture, in their words, an “SNE must adapt or fight”⁶⁸. While this doesn’t seem to be a widespread problem, it does indeed go against the general idea of this paper, that SNEs, by being open to European norms and rules of behaviour, spread these elements within their national administration.

If seconded civil servants are sometimes at fault, however, it must be said that neither the home government nor the European institutions prepare the future SNE for the “culture shock” of Brussels⁶⁹. While one Commission SNE took a three day training in policy processes at the inter-institutional level, the MFA offered no help, whether in terms of language training – an important element, given the requirements of the job –, of housing or other administrative help⁷⁰. There is therefore a strong need, as recognized by the UK section of the SNE Liaison Committee (CLENAD), for advance training with the home employer, on

⁶⁷ Interview with *fonctionnaire*, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 4 April 2007.

⁶⁸ Interview, Council Secretariat, DGE, Brussels, 7 February 2007.

⁶⁹ UK Section of CLENAD, *Draft Review of Career Management for Current and Former UK Seconded National Experts in the EU Institutions*, April 2007, p. 2. Made available to me by former UK SNEs.

⁷⁰ Interview with SNE, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 17 August 2007.

institutional processes and languages, as well as more help and training opportunities (technically not available to SNEs) from the institutions themselves⁷¹.

Work and integration in the unit

This is the heart of the matter. Indeed, if we are to accept that SNEs learn European patterns of behaviour and make them their own, we should try to find out what their work and integration into their unit mean. Are these the reflection of the fact that they are “part of the team,” or do those variables signify that, because of their particular status, they are regarded “differently”? The latter case would be a hindrance to any process of internalization, since there is no encouragement to assimilate within the environment. As we shall see, this has not been the case.

For our Southern SNE, day-to-day work in the institutions is more open than in a national administration; in that sense, it is “enlightening” working inside, even if the processes are also more difficult. In her specific unit, there are few “experts” besides SNEs, especially since, given the functioning of the bureaucracy, and even if ESDP has evolved quickly, job positions have not changed much. Nonetheless, the specificity of ESDP procedures means that, *fonctionnaire* or SNE, “you don’t stop studying”⁷².

Our discussant felt fully integrated vis-à-vis the *fonctionnaires*, whether in team work, or in meetings, where she wasn’t regarded as somebody with a specific status. The SNE also learned to “become more pragmatic” in terms of her thinking, and has come to recognize that some things can and cannot be done. However, since career advancement is not at stake at the Council, she feels SNEs can be more proactive and speak more freely⁷³.

Our Council interviewee from a large member state, who had already been employed by the Council on the field, believes it is absolutely necessary to have SNEs who have the appropriate expertise and knowledge, especially in security policy, since there is a lack of operational experience amongst *fonctionnaires*. At the same time, ESDP is attractive as a career path, so self-selection is strong, in the sense that *all* those participating in it “want it to work.” In this sense, there is a collective approach, a “socialization of the European interest”, and teams form no matter the specific status: people do not know, or care about, administrative differences between directorates or units, even if there might be a suspicion

⁷¹ UK Section of CLENAD, *Career Management ...*, pp. 7-8.

⁷² Interview with SNE, DGE, Council Secretariat, Brussels, 9 August 2007.

⁷³ Ibid.

(quickly forgotten), at the political level, that an SNE is trying to push a national position⁷⁴. As one SNE said, “We do not think according to nationality here. That is irrelevant. Nationality is only interesting over a cup of coffee.”⁷⁵

In the Commission as well, SNEs are treated as full members of the team: while formally, they cannot speak on its behalf, they often must and do so, and are then recognized externally as agents of the Commission. One national expert currently in the Commission’s CFSP Directorate also reiterates the point that SNEs can be more proactive than *fonctionnaires*, who, for career advancement reasons, must be minimalist, while seconded experts must make themselves visible and make the most of their secondment time. In terms of thinking about foreign policy, this SNE believes she did develop different assumptions from those in the MFA, and that when she goes back, she will probably exercise those modes of thought⁷⁶.

A former SNE in the Commission pointed out that, although technically, SNEs provide only advice and assistance, this is changing: our discussant represented the Commission in policy-making meetings and abroad. In this sense, SNEs serve more and more as substitutes for *fonctionnaires*; not only does this mean that SNEs are fully integrated in the process, but at the same time, the Commission can learn from this as well⁷⁷. In the end, what counts according to our discussant, is, on the one hand, whether or not the seconded civil servant has the correct mix of technical expertise, and grasp of historical national experience, that he can use at the Brussels level, and on the other, whether or not SNEs or colleagues are changed by experience. Here, there is a need to “go with the flow”, and open up to the policy-making process, to understand that the potential is enormous⁷⁸.

According to a Council *fonctionnaire*, and following what her colleagues said on training and procedures (cf. supra), SNEs exist along a continuum, with the two extremes being, at one end, those who consider themselves “policy advisers”, who believe they already know everything, which makes them difficult to monitor, and at the other, those who think of themselves only as technical experts, and must fit in. The latter case is more useful for the

⁷⁴ Interview with SNE, DGE, Council Secretariat, Brussels, 26 July 2007.

⁷⁵ Trondal, op. cit., p. 155.

⁷⁶ Interview with SNE, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 17 August 2007.

⁷⁷ Interview with former SNE, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 24 July 2007.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Council and most beneficial for both parties, as they are both willing to integrate and learn new information and capabilities, especially since there is a need both for topical knowledge (specific regional or functional expertise) and long term planning capabilities (development of instruments). In the end, given their short time of stay, SNEs should seek to bring their own culture, but not necessarily to confront it with others, since the goal in the GSC is not consensus, but rather, to be informed of all national positions⁷⁹.

Another permanent staffer of the Council, following the official regulations, told us that SNEs are in the Council Secretariat as technicians, not as diplomats or politicians. However, they cannot but help, through their expertise and experience, the GSC take care of subjects of interest to member states. This, in turn, reinforces the trust of member states in the institution, and therefore, paradoxically, its independence. At the same time, SNEs understand better how the GSC works, and can explain it when they go back to their home employer⁸⁰.

SNEs on the field, for their part,⁸¹ contribute heavily, according to the same *fonctionnaire*, to the development of an ESDP culture, because they create, from the ground up, new chains of command, new logistics mechanisms, etc. Furthermore, the structure of operations itself is already very Europeanized, at the level of the concepts and values, so much so that there is a growing pool of talent and expertise, which wishes to go back regularly on missions⁸².

According to an official working in Javier Solana's Policy Unit (a temporary agent, fully paid by Council), the detached agent quickly distances himself from his capital, and is no longer a "national pawn", but yet still uses his information network. In this sense, the agent works both for questions where his country has interests or strong opinions, and also, helps explain the workings of Brussels to a sometimes not so knowledgeable national bureaucracy⁸³.

SNEs as lobbyists

⁷⁹ Interview with *fonctionnaire*, Council Secretariat, DGE, Brussels, 7 February 2007.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ From our discussions, it appears that SNEs on the field – by definition, all staff sent on ESDP mission except in specific cases – are a particular category which, for obvious reasons of research, could not be analyzed in depth for the purposes of this paper.

⁸² Interview, Council Secretariat, DGE, Brussels, 7 February 2007.

⁸³ Interview, Council Secretariat, Policy Unit, Brussels, 15 February 2007.

Beyond team integration and behaviour learning, a second mechanism by which SNEs may diffuse European ideas on foreign policy is through “advocacy” during their secondment. This is a sensitive topic, since this happens on a totally informal and “off the record” basis, given the basic prohibitions on working for one’s home employer.

According to the Mediterranean SNE, a diplomat has to keep good relationships, since it is part of the job, but there is a very clear understanding amongst colleagues at the GSC that the expert does not have any national “hidden agenda.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, some info could not be shared by a national government with a *fonctionnaire*. In the other direction, the discussant saw her role as a “facilitator” with her government for the Council, a mix of “teacher and advocate”. In the last analysis, however, the SNE’s loyalty is very clear, and it is to the Council⁸⁵.

The large member state SNE from the Council we spoke to reasserted the informality that has to surround any discussion with a member state government, but analyzed the process as a two-way game of mutual influence, especially in the case of the intergovernmental ESDP: it is a game, he claims, that “SNEs are well placed to play.”⁸⁶ The interviewee also described the job of SNE as that of unofficial “political commissar”, on the one hand, and advocate of the European position vis-à-vis his home country, on the other⁸⁷.

One former Commission SNE told me that an expert’s contacts are a great value to one’s work in the Commission, since even they must work by consent within the decision-making process. This civil servant considers SNEs as the best advocates for their institutions vis-à-vis the national government: once the Commission starts spending money on issues of interest, “I was more influential, and there was a logic to my being there.”⁸⁸ For example, at the time the Commission revamped its Rapid Reaction Mechanism into the Instrument for Stability, our interlocutor was the Commission’s point man to explain its use and value to his government⁸⁹.

⁸⁴ Interview with SNE, DGE, Council Secretariat, Brussels, 9 August 2007.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Interview with SNE, DGE, Council Secretariat, Brussels, 26 July 2007.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Interview with former SNE, Commission, DG Relex, Brussels, 24 July 2007.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

While this aspect of the work of an SNE seems more topical than the social learning analyzed above, there is no doubt that lobbying, or advocacy, makes for a mutually beneficial relationship between the European and national levels, and in this sense, there is perhaps an openness to new ideas, approaches, and instruments of foreign policy.

The case of military SNEs

This is a specific case of secondment, which is why it is being analyzed separately. Military SNEs work only in the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), which itself is only made up of SNEs, and have very specific tasks: their secondment is ruled by a specific statute (within the Council Decision on secondment), exemplified by the fact that their recruitment is directly drafted by the office of the Secretary General/High Representative⁹⁰. Just like their civilian colleagues, military SNEs are still paid by their national armed forces⁹¹, but work under the direct authority of the SG/HR⁹². Their secondment lasts a maximum of four years, with a three year cooling off period⁹³.

According to an officer formerly seconded to the EUMS, the key issue within the Staff is that of integration of these diverse personnel, each with their strong national cultures and background⁹⁴. This is confirmed by a recent article on the topic, based on a wide-ranging survey of military officers working in Brussels: what the military see as crucial is the unity and uniqueness of civilian-military command structures, because this is a translation of the (functional) global reach of the European Union's external action⁹⁵. At the same time, this integration also creates a "positive" challenge of bringing together different military cultures, and in this regard, feedback from returned SNEs is very good: the impact of these cultural clashes is actually appreciated by these officers⁹⁶. The civilian-military framework also creates a new intellectual approach, since officers must adapt to this framework, but also to a multinational environment. This global concept of crisis management is new and quite attractive to the military⁹⁷. At the military staff, according to Bagayoko's survey, citizenship

⁹⁰ Art. 25, *Council Decision*.

⁹¹ Art. 24, *Council Decision*.

⁹² Art. 28, *Council Decision*.

⁹³ Art. 27, *Council Decision*.

⁹⁴ Interview with former officer, European Union Military Staff, Brussels, 22 August 2007.

⁹⁵ Niagalé Bagayoko-Penone, "L'Européanisation des militaires français : socialisation institutionnelle et culture stratégique", *Revue Française de Science Politique*, vol. 56, n. 1 (February 2006), p. 52.

⁹⁶ Interview with former officer, 22 August 2007.

⁹⁷ Bagayoko-Penone, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

doesn't matter, since professional cultures take over national cultures⁹⁸. However, there is still a certain unease, within the institutions, with "the military thing": there is a misunderstanding, amongst civilians, of the specificities of the soldier's work, which is "to die or to kill", as well as of the importance of codes and symbols⁹⁹. "It therefore appears necessary that the military be able to have their values recognized within the EU."¹⁰⁰

Expertise and technical knowledge are the most important added value of officers¹⁰¹, since the EUMS is the "EU's main source of military" knowledge¹⁰². But it is a particular type of expertise, given in very specific political and military conditions¹⁰³.

However, according to our discussant, the role of military secondees as lobbyists and advocates should play an important part in their work: in this sense, returned officers should try to improve ESDP at the national level¹⁰⁴. This is what Bagayoko calls the "pedagogical function" of the military in the EU¹⁰⁵: one of their roles is to explain CFSP/ESDP processes to often reluctant army corps, whose ignorance is sometimes staggering¹⁰⁶. Here, such initiatives as the European Security and Defence College, joint training and exercises are important, as they seek to create a "European culture of security in the ESDP"¹⁰⁷. A majority of those interviewed by Bagayoko believe that ESDP institutions mean a transfer of power towards the GSC, so much so that "a certain number of officers ... claim to wish to emancipate themselves from their state's supervision and their desire to be at the service, if not of Community institutions, at least of institutions embodying the European interest."¹⁰⁸ The EU's military organs seek to defend European dynamics, and in this sense wish that institutions worked more closely together¹⁰⁹.

When on secondment, my discussant sees himself as a purely European officer, and believes this is the case for most. Given the very open working methods and procedures in the Military Staff, there is an opportunity to develop a military culture through secondment,

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 70.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 70-1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 71. Translation mine.

¹⁰¹ Interview with former officer, 22 August 2007.

¹⁰² Bagayoko-Penone, op. cit., p. 56.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 57.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with former officer, 22 August 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Bagayoko-Penone, op. cit., p. 60.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions*, 17 November 2003, quoted in Bagayoko-Penone, op. cit., p. 61.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 64-5. Translation mine.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

and to work with civilians to create a civilian-military culture¹¹⁰. In this sense, our SNE comes with an open mind, if not a blank slate, and sees this as an opportunity to develop his EU experience, and use it at his return. He went on to say that the role of officers in the EUMS is to spread a European spirit, and the real task starts back at home. He also pointed out that an officer's formal education is strong on socialization, since one of the basic lessons of military academies is to learn to work in a staff¹¹¹. In his opinion, the secondment of military personnel should be mandatory (and not only to the EUMS). To sum up his thoughts, the military SNE I spoke to described his ideal case as a military officer who would come with a "blank page" to Brussels, to be filled with this new EU approach, and then disseminate it in his/her Ministry of Defence¹¹².

In her third category of analysis (with expertise and pedagogues), Bagayoko analyzes officers as diplomats – when participating in Council Working Groups or informally sounding out member state delegations. This presents three difficulties: this is a new function for military staff; they must negotiate both at the operational and political levels, since they must both create ESDP (a profoundly political task) and plan operations; in this sense, military SNEs are ideas-, rather than mission-, driven, which is not something the military usually does¹¹³. This means that, within the staff, there are constant informal negotiations, and this helps understand how "the military, like other categories of *national* civil servants, adapt to the models of behaviour produced by the European institutions."¹¹⁴

Those officers that Bagayoko met were, if not Euroseptics, at least not enthusiastic about the project: once in Brussels, they quickly became Europhiles. This is striking in itself for any category of civil servant. This is even more surprising here, since the military is a very recent referent in a classically civilian Europe¹¹⁵. This is partly due, it seems, to formal military education, with its emphasis on teamwork and adaptability. It may also be due to a certain sense of curiosity over this new instrument of European external action. In any case, this does mean that slowly, European military officers are becoming socialized into a new environment, filled with new meanings and symbols, and that they are keen on spreading these norms throughout their national ministries.

¹¹⁰ Interview with former officer, 22 August 2007.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Bagayoko-Penone, op. cit., p. 58.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 59. Translation and emphasis mine.

¹¹⁵ Bagayoko-Penone, op. cit., p. 51.

Conclusions

As in any European policy process, and even more so in the intergovernmental second pillar, European foreign policy is the result of a constant negotiation between national interests, European approaches, and individual preferences. In this context, institutional settings are important, as they are conducive to preference change and self-reflection on the part of agents working in these settings. However, these processes of internalization are not so clear: if, as Liesbet Hooghe argues, Commission *fonctionnaires* do not seem to be socialized into a European way of thinking, then a fortiori, it cannot be argued that *fonctionnaires* in the Council Secretariat, or even SNEs, can internalize European norms, values, and patterns of behaviour.

From my discussions, it does appear that individual SNEs can play a role in bringing together various national approaches to foreign policy. While their case cannot be generalized, national experts do bring two interesting things with them. Firstly, by appearing totally loyal to their institution of secondment, they gain the trust of both sides (member states and the Union) and help the latter develop independently, within the confines of national “red lines” which are, amongst others, incarnated in SNEs. Secondly, by integrating into teams, and gradually becoming full members of them, SNEs start to question their own thought processes, prejudices and assumptions about how to approach difficult concepts of security and politics. All those I spoke to told me that they became more pragmatic with time, and that they further wished to bring that pragmatism back to their home employer. This was particularly the case with military SNEs, who saw the ESDP as a new and exciting tool, one that they wished to understand better and disseminate amongst their colleagues “back home”.

Given the importance, both for foreign policy identities and for the expertise and development of ESDP/CFSP, of secondment, there is a need, at the European and national levels, to address the issue in a more comprehensive and strategic way. Member states invest a lot of resources (not least financially) into sending civil servants to Brussels, where they cannot themselves benefit from their knowledge, and yet, there does not seem to be a holistic idea of what member states want to do with secondees.

Member state governments and European institutions must therefore ensure that secondment become a normal part of a civil servant’s career development and professional track, including making sure that professional assessments, training and promotion

opportunities be open to SNEs. Secondly, better support, both prior to secondment, during the stay in Brussels, and around the time of return, is necessary, to make the process as seemly as possible for civil servants, and avoid compounding the administrative culture shock with the burdens of practical life. Finally, and related to the first point, at the time of return, home governments must take account of an SNE's knowledge and experience (as developed in the institutions) when re-locating the civil servant to a national bureaucracy.

Secondment has been and is an important part of the development of CFSP/ESDP processes over the years, since security and defence are not issues that the Union has historically dealt with. Secondees bring a wealth of information, knowledge and experience, and themselves are somewhat transformed by their time in Brussels, transformation which they seek to benefit from at the national level, entailing a slow convergence of national foreign policies and identities. As member states think on the structuring of the future External Action Service (EAS), it may be time to think over the ways in which civil servants participate in European foreign policy making.