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***Evolution through learning?  
Epistemic communities and the emergence of  
Security Sector Reform (SSR) in European security cooperation***

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## Abstract

*Why and how do security institutions evolve? How is it that the European Union security architecture has changed so rapidly over the past ten years, without member states agreeing on a common vision of European integration in this field?*

*This paper engages the current debate on the evolution of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) by investigating the role of knowledge and ideas in influencing further European integration. Structural and functional explanations – whether realist or liberal – are underdetermining, since they don't fully account for the process of almost permanent expansion and reform that institutions and procedures underpinning CSDP have undergone over the last ten years. I argue that these theories need to be complemented by an approach emphasizing the role of “knowledge” as a key intervening variable between structure and agency. Accordingly, my research demonstrates that transnational networks of experts have fostered institutional and policy learning by promoting new principled and causal beliefs, leading to new values and strategic prescriptions.*

*From an empirical standpoint, this research focuses on the development of a comprehensive approach to security, and specifically it analyzes the introduction of Security Sector Reform (SSR) principles and practices in the EU security policymaking. Since these new precepts have tremendously impacted on the current shape and activities of CSDP, locating their intellectual cradle and understanding how these norms were diffused is pivotal to gain a clearer idea of the institutions that handles security matters in today's Europe. While structural conditions after the end of the Cold War underpin the new strategic prescription of “comprehensive approach” and “security-development nexus”, the way communities of experts responded to these conditions and redefined EU security interests is essential to explain change at the institutional and policy levels.*

**Keywords:** EU security and defence policy, CSDP, security sector reform, institutional learning, epistemic communities.

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## Introduction

Security challenges and threats are, by definition, subject to change, and so are security institutions and policies created to address them. Policymakers are always confronted with the difficult task of making sense of this evolution by assessing and tackling increasingly complex and diverse risks. In the contemporary post-1989 and post-9/11 international system, this sentiment of uncertainty and instability vis-à-vis international security seems to be predominant. The UK National Security Strategy released by the Coalition Government in October 2010 acknowledges that “Today, Britain faces a different and more complex range of threats from a myriad of sources” and that “no single risk will dominate...Therefore, achieving security will become more complex”<sup>1</sup>. In the same line, the European Security Strategy as of December 2008 states “twenty years after the end of the Cold War (...), globalisation has made threats more complex and interconnected”<sup>2</sup>.

The complexity of security challenges requires states to rely on international institutions and multilateral forms of security governance to confront common threats. From a theoretical standpoint, the neoliberal institutionalist literature has exhaustively accounted for the creation of institutions as a way to address these problems and foster cooperation among states on specific issues (Keohane and Nye, 1977; Keohane, 1989, 1990; Moravcsik, 1992; Deudney and Ikenberry, 1991).

As a result, we know why institutions are created. But the question of “why and how” these institutions change and adjust their structures to new security concerns is one that still triggers fierce debates among IR scholars. Do processes of institutional change depend on systemic factors (as IR realism argues) and essentially rest on interstate bargains, spurring from the combination of exogenous/fixed member states preferences (Moravcsik, 1999)? Or do other mechanisms endogenous to institutions act as important drivers of change? And, since better institutions increase the prospects for cooperation, to what extent do institutions themselves really matter in fostering security cooperation among states?

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office, “A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty”, The National Security Strategy 2010, October 2010, pp. 3 and 18

<sup>2</sup> European Council, “Providing security in a changing world”, Report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy, Brussels, 11 and 12 December 2008, p. 1

The European Union, and the constant process of institutionalization of its security policies all through the 2000s, is a case in point of this debate. Deficiencies of prevailing theories in accounting for ten years of increasingly institutionalized security cooperation within the EU are manifest. The neoliberal argument of a hard bargain among states as the only possible method of reaching consensus is not fitting in accounting for security integration. If we read the evolution of CSDP with neoliberal lenses, we would expect negotiations over European security and defence to result in a lowest-common denominator outcome, if not in a quasi-impasse, given the widely diverging preferences of EU member states when it comes to security integration.

The reality of the last ten years shows an opposite picture. While the normative vision of the EU as the guarantor of a comprehensive approach to crisis management gradually became the hallmark of the EU's role as a global security provider, unprecedented institutional developments cropped up across three dimensions. First, the building up of institutions and the consequent process of institutional reform, leading to the implementation of existing structures and the creation of new pivotal ones. Second, the emergence of a European strategic debate, leading to the adoption of the European Security Strategy (2003) and to the report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy as of December 2008. Finally, the operational experience gained by ESDP missions from 2003 onward (Grevi, Helly and Keohane, 2009). In March 2003, in fact, the European Union launched its first military operation (EUFOR Concordia, in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) using NATO assets under the "Berlin Plus agreement", while the first autonomous ESDP military deployment came about only a few months later, in May 2003, with the launch of Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (RDC).

Since then, the EU engaged in more than 25 operations, thus becoming a significant actor in crisis management and conflict prevention in many regions of the world (Western Balkans, Africa, Middle East, Caucasus, Asia). Besides military operations, the EU's civilian commitment to crisis management embraced a broad span including police, rule of law, assistance, planning, monitoring and border missions.

How did the EU accomplish this if the French and the British can't agree on a single point of the EU security design, and intergovernmental negotiations (i.e. Lisbon Treaty) usually witness harsh conflicts between member states as well as between EU institutions themselves?

Neo-functionalism, certain sub-fields of the neo-institutionalist theory, and more recently social constructivism, have shown that endogenous factors can and do influence the evolution of institutions, such as culture, ideas, shared meanings, discourse, socialization and norms (Haas, 1964; March and Olsen, 1984; North, 1990; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991; Stone Sweet, Sandholtz and Fligstein, 2001; Peters, 2005; H eritier, 2007; Checkel 2001; Legro, 1997, 2000; Adler, 1997; McNamara, 1999). By questioning structuralist and rationalist arguments concerning the purely instrumental nature of institutions, these approaches contend that what is “inside” institutions (as opposed to what is external to them, that is at the “state” or “systemic” levels) is important to determine why and how change occurs. Institutions do not just serve state interests: they can and do actually shape them.

Knowledge is one of these factors. In a wide range of policy areas, knowledge, broadly defined as ideas, information, expertise and understanding about a subject, of the issues and problems concerning these areas is thus required by policy-makers in order to take decisions. As such, knowledge and new ideas may also serve as a driving factor leading to institutional or policy change (Haas E.B., 1990; Risse-Kappen, 1994). The same logic also applies to international security cooperation, where the increasingly technical and complex nature of threats demands for an even more significant involvement of experts in the decision-making process leading to security decisions.

In the field of European security cooperation<sup>3</sup>, networks of experts or epistemic communities (Haas E.B., 1990) have emerged and exerted influence in shaping policy formulation and institutional development (Cross, 2007). As demonstrated by Adler and Haas in other policy areas, these communities of experts play a pivotal role in the transfer and diffusion of knowledge by promoting *a*) policy innovation; *b*) policy diffusion; *c*) policy selection and *d*) policy evolution as learning (Adler and Haas, 1992).

However, their role in shaping security policies has been largely neglected, leading to the persistence of two gaps in the literature as yet. First, within the wide literature on endogenous processes of institutional change, no extensive study has thus far investigated the role of transnational networks of experts in shaping European

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<sup>3</sup> Cooperation in the field of security includes, but is not limited to, the European Union. Other organizations are NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe.

security decisions (a notable exception being Cross, 2007, 2008), and in particular their explanatory power vis-à-vis competing explanations of institutional and policy change. Second, theories of IR have failed – if they attempted at all – to explain why and how particular types of knowledge are selected and other are discarded<sup>4</sup>, that is what are the governing dynamics of epistemic communities and the consequence on the security decisions taken by international institutions. Third, the literature has so far treated institutional and policy change as separated focuses of research. Although analytically different, policy and institutional change are embedded in the same, overarching learning process, which impact on both the structures and dynamics leading to policy outputs. In other words, the very definition of “learning” in international relations makes sense only if it fastens policy change to institutional evolution.

On that account, my claim is that students of epistemic communities and theorists of learning have missed a good opportunity to refine the analytical foundations of their approaches by not taking into account the way European security complex system, and in particular the EU, is changing to cope with new security concerns. This contrasts with the large amount of writings produced in other fields. As a matter of fact, the end of the Cold War and the enormous amount of foreign policy change witnessed at the time actually pushed scholars to investigate how experts had influenced national foreign and security policy-making, with a number of publications produced throughout the 1980s and 1990s<sup>5</sup>. Another stream of publications would use epistemic communities to explain international cooperation and institutional change in technical areas such as environment, food aid regime or central banks<sup>6</sup>. However, the research agenda has kind of “gone to Rome without seeing the Pope”, since the concept of epistemic community has not been employed to investigate change in

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<sup>4</sup> With the exception of Risse-Kappen’s (1994) analysis of the role of transnational coalitions in producing foreign policy change leading to the end of the Cold War. Another exception is the “Advocacy Coalition Framework” (ACF) model developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith in the late 1980s. Although it was developed initially with the American experience in mind, the model applies well to the complex nature of European institutions and to cross-national policy research in Europe (Sabatier, 1998). That being said, the ACF framework presents a major shortcoming in that its applicability is limited to situations characterized by well-defined coalitions driven by belief or knowledge-driven conflict, thus leaving unexplained these situations where conflict between different coalitions is less evident.

<sup>5</sup> See the debate on change in US and Soviet foreign policies, which provided new insights on how bureaucratic élites or leaders learn or change their beliefs even when security matters are at stake, such as in the case of the arms control regime and the antiballistic missile treaty (ABM). On the role of ideas and knowledge in foreign policy, see Goldstein and Keohane (1993), Breslauer and Tetlock (1991), Checkel (1993), Mendelson (1993), Stein (1994).

<sup>6</sup> See Haas, P.M. (1990), Hopkins (1992), Odell (1988), Drake and Nicolaidis (1992).

critical cases such as international security institutions (i.e. NATO, the EU or OSCE) as it dramatically and incrementally set off after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The paradox described above has affected the academic debate on why and how security institutions, and European ones in particular, evolve. Of course, the concept of epistemic community in itself is not sufficient to account for complex mechanisms of change and institutionalization of new norms, practices and instrumental or principled ends (another way to define institutional change). Why do epistemic communities are, supposedly, so crucial? Because they enable institutions to learn, when a conceptual or technical innovation is introduced into the decision-making.

The conceptualization of institutional learning in IR theory has suffered from the same anomaly that characterized the operationalization of epistemic communities. Scholars have studied how complex learning occurs in foreign and security policies at the governmental level and, as a result, impact on security regimes; theories of policy learning have been applied to the analysis of change within international organizations, in a wide range of policy area except for security and defence. No learning theory explains us today why NATO has evolved from the end of the Cold War or how is it that the European Union's common security and defence policy has exhibited such a degree of institutional evolution since its creation.

The argument of this paper is as follows. Change in European security institutions is to be understood and explained as a process of institutional learning. Epistemic communities play a key role in prompting the learning process, since they act as carriers of new knowledge (innovations) into the decision-making. As a result, security institutions evolve according to a process of "epistemic learning"<sup>7</sup>, meaning that epistemic communities are the main actors responsible for policy and institutional evolution as learning. In a field that is traditionally the breeding ground for rationalist and realist theories of IR, I seek to demonstrate that knowledge, a factor endogenous to institutions, plays a role in fostering policy and institutional change, through processes of "epistemic learning".

To test this argument, I look at the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which in the last 10 years have gone through an incredible evolution and exhibited a high degree of change, both in institutional and policy terms. I therefore analyze the role of transnational epistemic communities in influencing the

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<sup>7</sup> I identify three typologies of learning: epistemic, experiential and isomorphic. This paper, as the first chapter of my thesis, introduces and develops the first typology.



introduction of Security Sector Reform (SSR) policies and practices (and related processes of institutional reform) within CSDP. However, as Risse-Kappen put it, I acknowledge that knowledge does not float freely (Risse-Kappen, 1994). Structural factors within international security organizations facilitate or hamper the impact of epistemic communities on decision-making and the effectiveness of the cognitive content they carry through. I will demonstrate that the EU system of governance in the security domain is experts-prone and it actually encourages the emergence of transnational networks having a real impact on what is understood by EU member states as “common security”.

Conclusions are expected to give us greater understanding about the evolution of European security institutions and to provide theoretical guidelines for the further study of epistemic communities in the field of international security.

I will proceed as follows. The first chapter provides an overview of the literature on the rise and development of European security cooperation and spots out the limitations of prevailing approaches to explain institutional and policy change. The second chapter gives a general review of the concept of epistemic communities and theories of institutional learning. The third chapter presents the analytical framework of the paper and the relation between epistemic communities and institutional learning. The fourth chapter investigates the emergence of Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Europe as a case of “epistemic learning” through which EU institutional structures and security policies have evolved. In the conclusion, I draw the implications for further research in the field of international security.

## 1. The rise of EU security cooperation

The academic debate on the rise and evolution of the EU security and defence policy originated as a result of the failure of the EU common foreign policy to deal with the Yugoslav Crisis throughout the 1990s. In particular, the debate revolved around the causes and remedies to the EU's diplomatic *échec* in the Balkans<sup>8</sup> and the redefinition of the European security configuration according to the transformations in the post-1989 international system, namely vis-à-vis the U.S. and NATO (Kupchan, 2003). In this regard, the impuissance showed by the EU in the Yugoslav tragedy not only reflected a fundamental split in the interests of the three larger member states (France, Germany and the UK), but was also the logic consequence of the lack of a military underpinning characterizing a European diplomacy "without teeth" (Jopp, 2009). As a result, the first attempts to account for the launch of ESDP at the December 1998 Saint-Malo Summit, and its official establishment six months later at the Cologne Summit, described the initiative mainly in terms of a reaction to external developments affecting European security (Pond, 2002; Duke, 1999; Cornish and Edwards, 2001; in Giegerich 2006). These "external developments" refer to the situation in the Balkans, but also the shifting strategic interests of the US from Europe to the Middle East and Central Asia, and the ensuing uncertainty about the future role of NATO as a security provider in a globalized, multipolar and no longer Eurocentric world.

The initial inclination to emphasize external factors as the driving forces behind the creation of ESDP fit in well with the neo-realist paradigm, emphasizing changes in the international distribution of power as the key variable affecting states' behaviour and interstate relations. Accordingly, neorealist writings maintain that an increase in European security cooperation took place from the late 1990s because of a fundamental change in the structure of the international system, which eventually affected European states behaviour in an integrative way so as to balance against the United States (Jones, 2007; Posen, 2006)<sup>9</sup>. By pointing to the importance of the end of the Cold War in providing an unprecedented stimulus for ESDP, Seth Jones argues

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<sup>8</sup> As Fraser Cameron put it, "the lessons of the Yugoslav conflict were never far from the minds of the negotiators at the 1996 IGC preparing improvements in the CFSP" (Cameron, 1999: 32).

<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Kupchan (2003) maintains that the EU is developing into a peer competitor of the United States, and portrays integration as a way to acquire power and project the geopolitical ambitions of Europe as a whole.

that European states intensified defence cooperation both to increase Europe's ability to project power in an otherwise US-dominated world and to prevent a reunified and powerful Germany from developing hegemonic ambitions in Europe (Jones, 2007; Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2009). Similarly, Adrien Hyde-Price challenges the argument that Europe is "a hard case for realism" (Waltz, 1979). He argues that a "balanced multipolarity", that is a rough equilibrium between Europe's great powers, has reproduced a situation similar to the Concert of Europe that favours a degree of cooperation to address shared security concerns and generates a complex mix of cooperation and competition characterizing the early twenty-first century Europe (Hyde-Price, 2007). Hyde-Price's conceptualization of "shared security concerns", however, raises the troublesome issue of the building up a foundation of common security interests, a puzzle that the neorealist analysis has failed to address.

The liberal intergovernmentalist school questions the neorealist approach to security and defence cooperation and points out the role of absolute gains in shaping EU institutional development. Neoliberal institutionalism's conceptualization of the "cooperation under anarchy" shares all realist core assumptions, but disagrees on the likelihood of international co-operation among self-interested actors (Risse-Kappen, 1995). Accordingly, Andrew Moravcsik stresses the importance of endogenous sources such as the convergence of member states interests and interstate bargains or the pressure from domestic groups having an interest in areas such as the production of weapons, economic sanctions and the creation of joint military forces (Moravcsik, 1999). Without denying the primary role of power and interest in shaping interstate relations, Moravcsik contends that the preferences of domestic actors and political processes in the domestic policy shape an institutional setting whose inner functioning abide by the rules of intergovernmentalism.

The state remains the main focus of analysis in Michael Smith's institutional theory of the development of CFSP. The central logic of institutionalization, however, pinpoints the processes by which an informal, extra legal and improvised system gradually fostered the achievement of cooperative outcomes and progressively enhanced its own procedures to improve the prospects of these outcomes (Smith, 2004). Such paradigm stresses path-dependent effects and incremental institutional development as key variables affecting the rise of foreign and security cooperation within the EU.

Moving beyond the nation state, and drawing from Bertrand Badie's theorizing of the crisis of the nation state and its impact on post-1989 international relations, Frédéric

Mérand sets the emergence and development of ESDP in the broader context of the decline of nation state's authority and the advent of transnational governance as a driver for institutionalized cooperation in the field of security and defence (Mérand, 2009).

The main problem major IR paradigms are faced with in explaining ESDP is that they all fall short of examining the interplay of domestic, institutional and external factors on the evolution of member states' position on ESDP since 1998, thus failing to provide a thorough and comprehensive account. For this reason, some attempts have been made by scholars to overcome theoretical hurdles in order to capture all the contrasting dynamics shaping the evolution of security cooperation in Europe and conceptualize ESDP. Christopher Hill, in his formulation of the famous "capabilities-expectations gap", pioneered the conceptualization of European foreign and security policy by suggesting that the EU represents a sub-system of the international relations system, which can be understood as composed of three dimensions: a) the national foreign policies of member states; b) the CFSP; c) the external relations of the European Commission (Hill, 1993).

Jolyon Howorth's *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union* (2007) provides a more normative explanation of ESDP. Structural change, according to Howorth, is not the only factor that spurred European security cooperation. Two sets of combined explanatory variables (exogenous and endogenous factors) account for the EU's move towards a global security commitment (Howorth, 2007)<sup>10</sup>.

Lately, precious works have been produced on the application of constructivist-oriented perspectives to ESDP (Christiansen et al., 2001; Keukeleire, 2010). According to the social-constructivist approaches, structures of international society are not only material, but also "ideational": the nature of actors' interests and goals depends on their identities, social roles and the norms they abide by (Sjursen, 2003): constructivism is interested in understanding "how material subjective and intersubjective worlds interact in the social construction of reality", thus seeing agency and structure as mutually constitutive (Adler, 1997; Wendt, 1999). As regards Europe, constructivist scholars are concerned with the question of why and how do individual leaders and institutions of the EU form their preferences, attitudes

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<sup>10</sup> Besides exogenous forces, Howorth identifies three underlying drivers behind ESDP: (1) new tasks and concept entered the IR lexicon in the post-Westphalian "new world order", such as crisis management, that meshed easily with most of the EU's values; (2) the reappearance of military conflict in the European continent (i.e. Western Balkans); (3) the development of a European defence industry.

perceptions and identities in the EU (Ginsberg, 2007). Checkel, for instance, defines ESDP as an institutional context within which actors' identities and interests develop and change through interaction (Checkel, 1999). Ben Tonra rejects Moravcsik's approach based on sheer intergovernmental bargain and claims that ESDP's rules and norms actively contribute to create a structure for collective action and sustain the building up of a collective identity (Tonra, 2001).

The constructivist alternative to the study of CFSP/ESDP paved the way for the application of the concept of Europeanization to ESDP, in order to test processes of adaptation of member states norms and strategic cultures, or to analyze changing national security interests through social constructivist lens. Some useful country-based comparative analyses discovered patterns of adaptation of national cultures to the emerging EU strategic culture (Giegerich, 2006) or compared the evolution of public and elite opinion in selected countries to find areas of shared consensus and norm compatibility fostering the convergence of national interests (Meyer, 2006). Eva Gross analyzed British, French and German policies with respect to CFSP/ESDP in two specific crises (FYROM and Afghanistan) in order to determine whether Europeanization of national foreign security policies occurred or whether other considerations (such as the influence of the transatlantic alliance) were more pertinent to explain national preferences (Gross, 2007). These writings provide a valuable contribution to theorizing European security and defence, as they show the extent to which member states' cultures, values, norms and policies have been affected by EU policies.

These theories, however, do not fully account for changes in CSDP structures and policies. Neoliberal institutional approaches maintain that states cooperate with the assistance of international institutions, and that change essentially relies on the bargaining between fixed member states preferences. But how can rational choice explain CSDP evolution if states hold different – and in most cases incompatible – visions of security integration in Europe? At the same time, while Reflectivist and Constructivist writings provide interesting insights into the relation between (European) structures and (national) agencies, and appraise the extent to which the former induce change in the latter. But they don't tell us much about the processes leading to the implementation of new policies or to the reform of existing institutional structures according to changed strategic prescriptions.

In other words, all these approaches need to be supplemented by a framework of analysis taking into account non-material drivers of change to bridge rational choice and prevailing institutional theories to explain the source of not only interests but also of institutional change. Therefore, I argue that the diffusion of knowledge, and the consequent process of collective learning triggered by transnational communities of experts, is one of the key elements of this new approach.

## 2. Epistemic communities and learning: “conceptual minefields”?

This chapter provides a general review of the concepts of epistemic communities and institutional learning as provided by the literature. It therefore paves the way for the setting up of the analytical framework defining the dynamics of “epistemic learning”.

### 2.1 Defining Epistemic Communities

What is “expertise” and why should it matter in international relations? John G. Ruggie introduced the concept of “epistemic communities” in a special issue of *International Organization* (1975) co-edited with Ernst B. Haas. According to Ruggie, processes of institutionalization<sup>11</sup> involve not only the grid through which behaviour is acted out, “but also the *epistemes* through which political relationships are visualized”. Ruggie borrowed the term *epistemes* from Michel Foucault (1970), and came to define “epistemic communities” as “a dominant way of looking at social reality, a set of shared symbols and references, mutual expectations and a mutual predictability of intention” (Ruggie, 1975, 569-570; Foucault, 1970). Ernst Haas later articulated the idea of epistemic communities as “professionals who share a commitment to a common causal model and a common set of political values (Haas E., 1990; 41). A more precise conceptualization was finally given by Peter Haas, who defines the concept as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> Michael E. Smith’s defines institutionalization as “the process by which institutions, understood as behaviours, norms or beliefs, are created, develop and change over time (Smith, 2004).

*“An epistemic community is a network of professionals from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. They have (1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members; (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which they serve as the basis for elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes; (3) shared notions of validity – that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise; and (4) a common policy enterprise – that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed, presumably out of the conviction that human welfare will be enhanced as a consequence”*

(Haas P.M., 1993)

The emergence of epistemic communities is therefore related to the increasingly complex and technical nature of the issues decision-makers need to address. Accordingly, complexity and uncertainty push decision-makers to seek the advice of experts, which hence contribute to the way interests are formulated and decisions are taken.

Epistemic communities constitute an extremely useful conceptual tool, since they have provided an important stimulus to research aimed at explaining how policies are crafted according to knowledge flows wielded by transnational networks. In fact, they allow researchers to identify the missing link between political objectives, technical knowledge and the formation of interests. This has profound consequences for the study of international relations. In the current international society characterized by globalization and interdependence, knowledge and ideas must spread across state boundaries in order to be recognized by the wider international community. As a consequence, networks of experts cannot be conceived as belonging to single national communities separated one from each other. Epistemic communities are transnational precisely because their expertise and their “vision” is carried over from the national levels into the international (global or regional) arena.

Rejecting simple notions of causality, in *When Knowledge is Power* (1990) Ernst Haas maintains that international organizations are created to solve problems that require collaborative action (among states) for solution; therefore, “the knowledge

available about “the problem” at issue influences the way decision-makers define the interests at stake in the solution to the problem; (...) when knowledge become consensual, we ought to expect politicians to use it in helping them to define their interests” (Haas E., 1990, 9-12).

But how do these networks exert influence on policy-making and how do they produce policy evolution? Although the relationship between an epistemic community and a policy-maker is complex and operates at multiple levels, Adler and Haas (1992) have identified four steps.

First, epistemic communities act as policy innovators by identifying the nature of the issue-area and framing the context in which new data and ideas are interpreted. By framing the context, experts guide policymakers in the choice of the appropriate norms, tools or institutions within which to manage problems. State interests are therefore a consequence of how issues are framed by experts setting the standards of *policy innovation*.

Second, epistemic communities diffuse their policy recommendations transnationally, through communication and socialization processes. New knowledge is shared and exchanged across research groups, national governments and international organizations through different channels (conferences, meetings, transnational research networks). This process of *policy diffusion* fulfils two purposes. On the one hand, it allows innovation to become consensual among members of the community and translate into an effective policy advice. On the other hand, it pushes government and institutions (who participate to the process) to redefine their expectations, reach common understanding and coordinate their behaviour accordingly.

Third, *policy selection* mechanisms intervene to select certain advice and discard others. Domestic political factors prove important in policymakers’ solicitation and use of knowledge provided by epistemic communities. Several other factors, however, can hinder or facilitate policy selection, such as timing, regime structure, culture or the consensus among community members themselves as well as the content on the innovation and the way it relates to the mainstream. The literature on this aspect of epistemic communities offers divergent perspectives, depending on the actors, institutions and policy involved<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> See Adler and Haas (1992); P. Haas (1989) and Sabatier (1998)



Finally, *policy persistence* refers to the continuation of consensual knowledge about an issue within the members of an epistemic community, to determine how long it will remain influential. The degree of consensus among community members is certainly one of the key factors affecting policy persistence (Peterson, 1992; Adler and Haas, 1992).

This four-step process involving innovation, diffusion, selection and persistence is therefore understood as the core dynamics leading to policy evolution. In a world characterized by increasing interdependence and complexity, conceptual innovations are diffused nationally, transnationally and internationally by epistemic communities and pave the way for new international practices or institutions. Socialization plays a key role in fostering the diffusion and a shared understanding of the issue among members of the community and policy-makers.

Epistemic communities are, therefore, a fundamental source of learning, to the extent that they produce permanent changes in the epistemological assumptions and interpretations that help frame and structure collective understanding and action (Adler, 1991).

There is no shortage of studies that have used this concept to understand broader or specific issues related to institutional or policy change. Besides Ernst Haas' pioneer work on learning and adaptation in international organizations (Haas, 1990), the concept of epistemic communities has been applied to a wide range of policy areas from environmental issues to central banks (Sebenius, 1992; Kapstein, 1992; Haas, P., 1990; Drake and Nicolaidis, 1992; Hopkins, 1992), last but not least in the field of European Studies (Richardson, 1996; Zito, 2001; Marier, 2009; Radaelli, 2009; Verdun, 1999) to illuminate the previously neglected endogenous sources of international policy coordination. European Union's member states too have often chosen to rely on a group of experts' suggestions to agree on a specific course of action for increased integration or policy co-operation, as in the case of the creation of the European Monetary Union (Verdun, 2010) and more in general in the EC decision-making process (Vos, 1997; Radaelli, 1995, 2000, 2009; Richardson, 1996; Zito, 2001, 2009).

However, little attention has been paid to international security organizations and, in particular the EU, which in the transition from the Cold War to the post-1989 international system, and to the post 9/11 era, have experienced significant transformation and have undergone a remarkable process of institutional change.

## 2.2 *Conceptualizing institutional learning*

This section introduces the concept of institutional learning as provided by the literature. What do we mean by saying that “international organizations learn” and what are the theoretical implications of this claim?

The notion of “learning” is, to use Jack Levy’s famous expression, a “conceptual minefield (...), difficult to define, isolate, measure, and apply empirically” (Levy, 1994). The literature provides several definitions of learning that cannot be congregated in the same formula or channelled through core tenets. A good way to put some order to this heterogeneity is to select a limited number of criteria that will highlight the key differences between the various definitions and perspectives over learning.

### *Individual vs Collective Learning*

The literature distinguishes two fundamental categories of learning: individual learning and collective learning. The interaction between the two is a critical factor in learning theories. Levy gives a basic definition of *individual* learning as “a change of beliefs (or the degree of confidence in one’s beliefs) or the development of new beliefs, skills, or procedures as a result of the observation and interpretation of experience” (Levy, 1994). This type of learning is, as Tetlock put it, “intrapyschic in focus”, in the sense that is learning occurs within the minds of particular policy makers or individuals (Tetlock, 1991). Using this approach to individual learning, Janice Gross Stein (1994) has attempted to explain the development of Gorbachev’s cognitive constructs as a case of trial-and-error learning through failure.

On the contrary, *collective* learning implies the possibility that a group of individuals (a government, an organization, an institution) could learn in much the same way as single individuals do, thus having their distinctive (but shared) goals, beliefs, and memories. Collective learning, in turn, is commonly classified into two similar, but not identical categories: organizational learning and institutional learning. The literature on collective learning is extensive and it constitutes the bulk of the analyses on learning that have been carried out since the 1980s (March and Olsen, 1988; Etheredge, 1985; Downie, 1998; Breslauer and Tetlock, 1991; Haas, 1990). Cyert and March have tackled how organizations learn, emphasizing the parameters that

organizations set to assess their environment and changes in the rules governing their search for information (Cyert and March, 1992).

Yet part of the scholarship disputes the theoretical viability of collective learning. Argyris and Schon, for instance, suggest that “there is no organizational learning without individual learning (...): organizational learning is a metaphor” (Argyris and Schon, 1978), and Levy contend that the “reification of learning at the collective level is not analytically viable”. Nonetheless, when claiming that “an international organization *learns* is a shorthand way to say that the clusters of bureaucratic units within governments and organizations agree on a new way of conceptualizing a problem”, Ernst Haas made clear that learners are indeed bureaucratic entities, thus rejecting the rigid divide between individual and organizational, and singling out a collective categorization of learning (Haas, 1990). If we take this view, we can take as an assumption that organizations are able to learn through collective cognitive processes that are something more than the sum of individual learning. Although individuals do play the critical role of setting learning processes in motion (Friedman in Dierkes et al., 2001), the individual learning can be seen as a necessary, but insufficient basis for organizational learning (Nye, 1987).

### *The Diffusion of Learning*

The question of the processes leading to the diffusion of the lessons learned, or the “how” question, is another crucial aspect of learning. Crossan et al. have specified how the process of transmission of knowledge moves from the individual to the group: individuals shape insight and innovative ideas, but these ideas have to be shared, given intersubjective meaning and then adopted for action, with the ultimate aim of being embedded in the organization and made routine (Crossan et al., 1999). Accordingly, through a multi-level interaction between individuals, groups and organizations, knowledge undergoes a process of communication, integration and routinisation leading to its final institutionalization (Zito, 2009). The diffusion of knowledge was also addressed by Everett Rogers in *Diffusion of Innovations* (1962). Rogers defines the diffusion process as one by which (1) an innovation (2) is communicated through certain channels (3) over time (4) among the members of a social system (Rogers, 1983, 10). Yet Levy is right when he observes that the conditions under which new knowledge is diffused and become effective policy change are problematic since they vary across different types of political systems: the

multistage organizational learning process, Levy claims, can be blocked at any point and not all organizational change derives from learning (Levy, 1994). In other words, learning itself is not policy change: a combination of different factors (such as decision-making structure or orientation of leadership) may determine and explain variations in the policy impact of learning, as shown by Risse-Kappen (1994).

### *Simple vs Complex learning*

The literature makes a differentiation between two levels of learning, according to the degree of complexity and the impact of learning on the actors' behaviour. As Zito put it, learning theories vary on what exactly is being learnt, whether learning involves simple instrumental change or complex belief change (Zito, 2009). The distinction is therefore between "simple" adaptation and "complex" learning, although the same notions have been given different labels by students of learning. Argyris and Schon break organizational learning into two types: "single-loop" and "double-loop" learning. While the former stresses learning that is "instrumental", and therefore does not change the fundamental organizational values, the latter implies that the feedback loop triggers a value change transforming the inner mechanisms of organizational behaviour (Argyris and Schon, 1996: 20-1).

In a similar way, Ernst Haas defines *adaptation* as the process by which "behaviour changes as actors add new activities (or drop old ones), thus altering the means of actions, but not the ends of the organization", whereas *learning* occurs when "the ultimate purpose of the organization is redefined as means as well as ends are questioned and new ends are devised on the basis of consensual knowledge that has become available" (Haas, 1990). As a result, "true" learning would involve a reassessment of fundamental beliefs and values and entail a reconsidering of how policy makers approach a major problem, hence referring to a situation in which the policymakers' comprehension moves towards a more complex and integrated understanding of an issue accompanied by a new formulation of the problem-solving. Adaptation, on the contrary, refers to the neorealist reward-punishment conception of learning as a response to external contingencies.

From this perspective then, complex learning is the "true" one, which must include the development of more complex cognitive structures as well as changes in content (Tetlock, 1991) leading to new priorities and trade-offs (Argyris and Schon, 1996). It involves a shift from simple generalizations to "complex, integrated understandings

grounded in realistic attention to detail” (Etheredge, 1985), which occurs internationally when new knowledge is used to redefine the content of the national interest (Haas, 1980).

However, conceiving learning on a too restrictive complex-single basis has made the concept much harder to operationalize. To face this problem, Nye (1987) and Downie (1991) have suggested a distinction between broad and restrictive definitions of institutional learning. Nye recognizes that there are different degrees of learning along a continuum ends-means relationship, from very simple to highly complex. Complex learning often involves “evaluative ambiguity”, as perceptions and ideology play a larger role in it, thus making it necessary for the students of these processes to be explicit about the values involved (Nye, 1987). Downie (1998) explicitly distinguishes between broad and restrictive definitions of institutional learning, and suggests that neither of them is practical for empirical application as they either widen or restrict too much the range of organizational that appear or may be considered to be learning (Downie, 1998).

*Policy change, progress and collective cognitive processes: competing visions of learning?*

Since the 1980s, mainstream research on learning in international relations has gone in three directions. A first strand of studies has analyzed processes of policy change (foreign policy in particular) building on both collective and individual approaches to learning. A second strand has focused on the broader question of international cooperation and how learning between two or more states could lead to some form of progress in international relations. Finally, the most recent social constructivist literature on learning has emphasized processes of collective learning leading to the diffusion of norms.

The “policy learning” strand follows up Deutsch’s work on learning as an element of rationalist decision-making theory (1963). Hecló (1974) introduces the concept of “political learning”, linking it to underlying processes of “social learning” by which “networks of policy middlemen” would convey new ideas into the society and its policy making processes. Sabatier constructs the Advocacy Coalition Frameworks (ACF) model to argue that, within a given policy subsystem, advocacy coalitions composed of actors with similar core beliefs or values play a critical role in shaping the learning process through the promotion and diffusion of ideas. Other scholars

have built upon an individual approach to learning, based on the lessons that individual actors (leaders or senior policymakers) draw from history (Etheredge, 1985; Hemmer, 2000; Farkas, 1998; Stein, 1994; Levy, 1994).

Research on learning in international regimes and international organizations developed as a result of the pioneering writings of Ernst Haas and Peter Haas (1980; 1991: 1997) and Adler and Crawford (1991), interested in explaining why and how cognitive evolution leads to shared learning (and learning leads to progress) in international institutions. These works provide a helpful guidance in order to explain how learning may lead to the creation of regimes and regimes, in turn, may promote further learning<sup>13</sup> (Nye, 1987), and to identify the factors facilitating or hampering this process. International learning, as defined by Knopf (2003), is a shared learning process in which a set of states agree on some premise that was not always part of their past thinking. Such cross-national definition rejects the tenets of the decision-making approach to learning (Levy, 1994; Etheredge, 1985) and tries to better explain, to use Haas' words, how a common understanding of causes is likely to trigger a shared understanding of solutions (Knopf, 2003).

Due to the importance granted to intersubjective understandings, shared learning has captivated the attention of the social constructivist scholarship of international relations. Social constructivism also found a particular interest in collective learning, namely "shared" learning due to the importance given by this scholarship to the diffusion of norms and the processes of socialization. In fact, social learning is well placed to be a primary driver of change in Wendt's theorization of social constructivism. Checkel investigated social learning to account for the spread of human right norms in Europe (Checkel, 2001). Finnemore has analysed processes of internalisation of new norms by states and found out that "countries learn from the international environment" (Finnemore, 1996). Yet a major contribution from the social constructivist literature on learning processes is still lacking, specifically a work that would define in greater detail the advantages and pitfalls of using a lessons learned model within a constructivist perspective.

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<sup>13</sup> In his analysis of the impact of learning and regime in U.S.-Soviet security relations (1987), Nye maintains that regimes may foster organizational learning by creating or reinforcing institutional memory: in fact, by establishing standard operating procedures, regimes constrain certain ideologies and reward others, and provide opportunities for contacts and bargaining among leaders, thus affecting state behaviour and, consequently, cooperation (Nye, 1987).

### *Epistemic Communities, Learning and European Integration*

Learning and epistemic community are not completely new to European integration studies. Some scholars have already “adopted” them, in particular in the field of EU governance. According to Zito, the “governance turn” that occurred around 2000, implying a shift from macro theories towards analysing the micro processes in EU decision-making, has led to a change in preferences in favour of networks and learning-driven instruments, making learning a key theme in the EU research agenda (Zito, 2009). Verdun, Zito and Cross have used epistemic communities explanations to study, respectively, the creation of the European Monetary Union (Verdun, 1999), the EU acid rain policy (Zito, 2001) and integration in the field of Justice and Home Affairs (Cross, 2007). Studying the EU steel policy, Dudley and Richardson (1999) have found patterns of change driven by the interaction of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1998). The linkage between EU governance and learning has also attracted scholars’ attention. The concept of networked governance (Kohler-Koch, 2002; Jordan and Schout, 2006) emphasizes processes of networks-driven learning (Schout and Jordan, 2005) and knowledge transfer (Bomberg, 2007, Radaelli, 2009) as the basis of the EU multi-level policy-making. A special issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy* (2009, 16:8) has investigated the insights in learning conditions and the peculiarities of learning in the EU (Zito, 2009; Marier, 2009; Radaelli, 2009).

### **3. Epistemic learning: the framework of analysis**

As the previous two chapters have shown, the literature offers differing conceptualizations of epistemic communities and learning. How do these fit – or not fit – for the purpose of explaining further integration and institutionalization in the field of European security? This chapter sets out the analytical framework within which to explore the emergence and evolution of Security Sector Reform in the European Union. Following a cognitive approach, I argue that consensual knowledge can and do influence policies and institutional change. Epistemic learning provides a

knowledge-based explanation of how experts influence decisions-makers, and how this influence results in change affecting policies and institutions<sup>14</sup>.

On that account, I argue that the expansion of activities and, more in general, the institutional evolution of CSDP is to be explained as a process of institutional learning involving two components: an “epistemic” process of integration of knowledge into the decision-making and a “learning” process resulting in observable institutional change. Accordingly, new knowledge or information provided by epistemic communities (i.e. new strategic prescriptions about security) is first developed and diffused, and then institutionalized. The institutionalization of new knowledge results in changes in an institution’s structures, norms (formal and informal ones), and procedures. Institutional change is measured according to three criteria: *goals*, *means* and *instruments*. *Goals* refer to the ultimate purpose of the institution, its ends, values or strategic prescriptions underlying the institution’s means of action. *Means* refer to the organizational structures, programmes and policies that are set out to achieve the institution’s goals. Finally, *instruments* are material and non-material resources (capabilities) available to achieve the institution’s *goals* through its *means*.

To sum up, epistemic learning can be defined as a two-stage process by which epistemic communities develop and diffuse new principled or causal beliefs into the decision-making, resulting in goals, means or instruments-related institutional change. Epistemic learning has four main characteristics: it is *informal*, *collective*, *consensual/networked* and *constrained*. *Informal* means that epistemic communities stimulate institutional change by means of an informal method of institutional reform, and hence it does not originate in formal negotiations or bargaining processes (Smith, 2004). *Collective* signifies that learning is not individual (Levy, 1994), but it is assumed that bureaucratic entities and organizations can learn through socialization processes (Haas, 1990; Adler and Haas, 1992; Cross, 2007). Moreover, learning is also *consensual/networked*, in the sense that the creation of transnational networks of experts, professionals and policy-makers sharing the same principled and causal beliefs, and the interaction within these networks is vital to carry through the learning process (Risse-Kappen, 1994; Schout and Jordan, 2005). Networking takes place at

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<sup>14</sup> With reference to the institutional evolution of EU security and defence policy, I identify three types of institutional learning: (1) *epistemic learning*, or learning from innovation; (2) *experiential learning*, or learning-by-doing; (3) *mimetic learning*, or learning by imitation. The three typologies are currently being researched in the framework of my PhD dissertation at LSE (expected date of completion: December 2012).



two levels. First, within the epistemic community itself, allowing experts to exchange their ideas during transnational conferences or workshops. As a result of this process, knowledge becomes shared. Second, networking occurs between the epistemic community and the decision-making arena, through channels (or policy networks) that enable new ideas to be diffused. As a result, knowledge becomes consensual. Finally, epistemic learning is *constrained*: its effectiveness highly depends on a set of external/internal factors (Risse-Kappen, 1994) facilitating the diffusion and institutionalizations of knowledge.

How do the two processes (diffusion of knowledge and learning) work? I first assume that international organizations are created to solve complex problems for which cooperation is considered necessary. These problems, as Ernst Haas maintained, are “nested”, that is interconnected with institutions, policies and processes (Haas, 1990). This logic also applies to the European Union’s security and defence Policy. By introducing new knowledge, or innovative ideas into the decision-making, this learning process leads to a redefinition of the problem and of the means or instruments to address it and, consequently, to institutional change. On that account, drawing from previous conceptualizations of epistemic communities and their application to other policy areas, I describe the process of knowledge development and diffusion as follows. First, a pool of academics and/or experts generates new ideas, or strategic prescriptions. This innovative content constitutes a creative act that derives from a different observation of facts, which may or may not follow circumstances of policy failure. Second, the knowledge produced is socialized among the members of the nascent epistemic communities to achieve its conceptualization and the clarification of its normative content. At this stage, initial network building takes place, leading to transnational value shaping (Cross, 2007), sharing and diffusion. Third, shared knowledge, and hence new norms or beliefs, undergoes a process of deliberation and communication. This process is not too different from the management of the “brand image” of a company, where symbolic constructs are created to associate information and expectations with a given product or service. Deliberation and communication result in a set of principles outlining the values the epistemic community is advocating, and their promotion within specific institutional settings. Fourth, once it has become mainstream, knowledge is integrated within the institution and routinized (or institutionalized) (Crossan, 1999; Rogers, 1962; Zito, 2009). Institutionalization springs from learning. Learning occurs when the

knowledge diffused by epistemic communities become strongly embedded in the institutional setting and produce observable institutional change according to the criteria defined above. Routinization and persistence then follow, and may lead to reassessment by experiential learning to further improve institutional performance. To achieve institutional learning, transnational experts need channels into the institutional system and institutional partners (decision-makers) to build up winning coalitions (Risse-Kappen, 1994; Hecló, 1974). Policy networks are all-important to ensure that ideas are injected into a society and its policy-making processes.

Finally, the constrained nature of epistemic learning processes requires that the ability of epistemic communities to influence decision-makers and produce institutional change depend upon a set of external and internal factors. Internal factors may include the institution's geographical scope (whether it is a global or regional institution), its governance structure (intergovernmental, supranational or multi-level governance), the characteristics of leadership, cultural affinity between states members of the organization, and, last but not least, the degree of consensus developed among experts and the presence of one or more rival coalitions. External conditions refer mostly to the structure of the international system – and the shocks producing systemic changes (i.e. crises), and the “timing” factor.

On that account, my hypothesis is that, under certain conditions, communities of experts foster security cooperation and institutional change in CSDP, and hence that non-material and ideational factors (as opposed to interests and structural changes) play a role in accounting for the evolution of the EU security system. Four “constraining factors” delineate the conditions under which epistemic learning is facilitated or hampered: the structure of EU governance, the compatibility and affinity of national strategic cultures, the degree of expert consensus within the epistemic community and the presence of constituencies interested in supporting the diffusion of new ideas. Accordingly, I formulate my hypotheses as follows.

- The multi-level configuration of EU security governance (supranational and intergovernmental) particularly as far as civil-military coordination is concerned, increases the possibilities of epistemic learning, since it provides experts with multiple points of access to influence decision-making.
- A high consensus among members of the epistemic community increases the chances of epistemic learning.

- Similarity or affinity among national strategic cultures enhances the likelihood of producing consensual knowledge, therefore paving the way for the adoption of the new strategic prescriptions by national experts and their participation into the transnational networking process.
- The presence of constituencies (national, i.e. member states, or transnational, i.e. pressure groups) interested in supporting the diffusion of new knowledge increases the likelihood of effective network building and epistemic learning to take place.

#### 4. From *epistemes* to policies: Security Sector Reform and European security cooperation

This chapter is incomplete and it represents only a rough draft. Its purpose is to test in an epistemological framework the hypothesis that the emergence of SSR in European security institutions is a case of epistemic learning. Hypothesis testing requires the collection of empirical evidence from interviews and documents produced by experts on this sector, a work I plan to undertake over the next few months. The final version of the paper will therefore be released once I get hold of all the data, presumably by early June 2011.

Accordingly, I will now introduce the way I intend to organize the chapter and I do welcome critical feedback on various aspects, methodological, analytical, and conceptual.

##### *Origins and Definition of Security Sector Reform (SSR)*

Security Sector Reform has gained the attention of practitioners and policy-makers since the mid-1990s. Its origins are to be located within the broader context of evolution of the concept of “security” post-1989 and the growing recognition of the connections between security, development, justice and democracy. With the progressive blurring of the boundaries between external and internal security, a “new thinking” regarding security emerged during the 1990s (Barbé, 1995). This new thinking suggested a new paradigm in the development discourse, stressing that security and stability, and hence the transformation of ineffective, inefficient and

corrupt security forces, would become a necessary pre-requisite for development and aid delivery (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2006). The international community soon adopted the concept of a comprehensive approach merging civilian and military means in the conduct of crisis management and peacekeeping operations. European donor states headed by the United Kingdom and under the institutional umbrella of the European Union, were the first to embrace the concept<sup>15</sup>, with significant implications on their development *and* security policies (Sabiote, 2010). The international juncture at the end of the Cold War, as well as declining military expenditures and downsizing state armies (SIPRI, 2006) undoubtedly played a role in opening a window of opportunity. The endorsement of the UNDP's notion of "human security", encompassing the broader and "non-military" nature of security concerns (UNDP, 1994), spurred the affirmation of the "security-development nexus" (Williams, 2002; Chandler, 2007) as the absolute protagonist of the peace-building discourse. The increasing role of the development community in security matters would hence result in the rise of comprehensive security programmes aimed at tackling a wide range of activities within the broader security sector. As a result, the focus on the reform or reconstruction of security actors as a precondition for peace and development, effectively branded as SSR, would become the main approach.

In Europe, the enlargement of Euro-Atlantic institutions dramatically accelerated the development and diffusion of SSR. EU and NATO's support to the transition from authoritarian rule in Eastern Europe realized that, to be successful, focus on effective security sector reform was all-important. As a result, in 1994, OSCE developed a *Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Relations* that mainstreamed the idea in Europe that all security services, not just the military, had to be under democratic control.

Against this backdrop, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) defines security sector governance and reform as two related concepts:

*Security Sector Governance (SSG) refers to the structures, processes, values and attitudes that shape decisions about security and their implementation.*

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<sup>15</sup> As Ekengren noted, the EU has in itself essentially been a project of security sector reform, built on broad transformation of national government including security and defence structures (Ekengren and Simons, 2011).

*Security Sector Reform (SSR) aims to enhance SSG through the effective and efficient delivery of security under conditions of democratic oversight and control. SSR offers a framework for conceptualising which actors and factors are relevant to security in a given environment as well as a methodology for optimising the use of available security resources. By emphasising the need to take a comprehensive approach to the security sector, SSR can also help integrate a broad variety of actors and processes.*

(DCAF, 2009)

SSR approach is by definition holistic, in that it assumes that security has to take into account all the institutions and actors that play a role in a country's security. SSR instruments impact on a wide range of sectors: police reform, judicial assistance, border training, and can entail post-conflict situations measures such as Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) or Combating Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW).

For this reason, while it is acknowledged that some generic and general features are common to any type of involvement in SSR, many different sub-approaches have arisen and were developed by the several external actors engaged in SSR. These include state and non-state actors, NGOs and civil society organizations, but in the last ten years intergovernmental organizations have tended to play a leading role in conceptualizing and implementing the SSR agenda (DCAF, 2009).

Therefore, the concept of SSR has been shaped by a variety of policy experiences. Organizations tend to approach SSR from either a development (i.e. World Bank), security (i.e. OSCE, NATO, EU), or democratic perspective (i.e. Council of Europe); have a global (i.e. UN, EU, OSCE), regional (i.e. African Union, Council of Europe) or sub-regional focus (i.e. ECOWAS); maybe active in field activities, such as capacity building and technical assistance (i.e. Council of Europe), norm development (i.e. OECD) or both (i.e. EU, OSCE); can operate in different country contexts, such as post-conflict (i.e. EU, NATO, OSCE), transition countries (i.e. Council of Europe), developing countries (i.e. OECD, ECOWAS, World Bank). Although the overarching principle and framework of SSR remains the same, each organization has experienced SSR programmes in different ways, depending on their specific concerns (problem-solving), capabilities or geographical scope.

Since early 2000s, the European Union has constantly increased its focus on SSR as part of its foreign-security policy interface. This process is to be understood as part of the evolving goals and means for EU security resulting from its growing fields of competences and the changes occurring in its security environment. The EU has progressively internalized the SSR discourse and practice as part of the security-good governance-development paradigm. These concepts have become the key elements justifying EU interventions and ESDP operations (Sabiote, 2010).

The European Security Strategy (2003) underlines the importance of SSR in improving the EU's capabilities for peace support activities and in achieving its strategic objectives in third countries. However, it was not until the "*EU Concept for ESDP Support to Security Sector Reform*" had been released (Council of the European Union 2005) that the operationalization and effective integration of the concept came into being. The document underlines the importance of SSR in "...putting fragile states back on their feet...enhancing good governance, fostering democracy and promoting local and regional stability". The Council's concept was followed by the Commission's *Concept for European Community Support for Security Sector Reform* of the European Community (May 2006), stating that "SSR is an important part of conflict prevention, peace-building and democratisation...SSR concerns reform of both the bodies which provide security to citizens and the state institutions responsible for management and oversight of those bodies". A month later, in a Council of Ministers decision of 12 June 2006, the EU adopted a "Policy framework for Security Sector Reform"<sup>16</sup> aiming to pull together the Commission's related activities and doctrines with the military route available to execute and support SSR through the common security and defence policy (Bailes, in Ekengren and Simons, 2011). Therefore, both the Commission and the Council have rapidly become major players in SSR<sup>17</sup>, in a period that coincides with the rapid expansion of the EU's crisis management structures and activities (Grevi, Helly and Keohane, 2009). The Council concept, in particular, stresses the need to adopt a co-ordinated, holistic and tailored approach to SSR due to the different European institutions involved in

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<sup>16</sup> 2736<sup>th</sup> General Affairs Council meeting conclusions, Luxembourg, 12 June 2006. See also Spence and Fluri (2008).

<sup>17</sup> The Commission, through its Conflict Prevention programmes for developing countries, its mandate for justice and home affairs, and its responsibilities for EU's enlargement and neighbourhood programmes; the Council through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) instruments.

the domain. It also emphasizes, in accordance with the OECD-DAC report, the importance of local ownership the creation of the conditions for political control as the main aim for SSR missions.

The consequences of the introduction of SSR within the EU, in terms of policies, have been quite significant. As of Autumn 2010, 16 out of 28 missions (total including completed and ongoing missions) are situated in the SSR field (activities ranging from police reform to law enforcement), with 3 of them mentioning explicitly SSR in their mandate (these being EUSEC RD Congo, EU SSR Guinea-Bissau and EUTM Somalia)<sup>18</sup>. Several SSR-related concepts, approaches and practices have integrated the EU strategic lexicon and greatly shape the EU security posture in both strategic and operational terms.

#### *The role of experts in SSR: epistemic learning?*

Interviews and in-depth analysis of the documents produced by experts are expected to reveal the existence of groups of experts fulfilling the criteria defining epistemic learning (see chapter 4).

At the global level, the promotion of SSR was transmitted, for the most part, across three international *fora*: the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), as part of the Millennium Development Goals, the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD's Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD). The latter, in particular, has assumed a key role in the process of conceptualization and consolidation of the SSR approach, resulted in the publication of two handbooks: the *OECD DAC Guidelines on Security Sector Reform* (2004) and the *OECD-DAC Handbook on Security Sector Reform* (2007), a platform aimed at providing guidelines for greater coordination and effective implementation of SSR, both highly influential on European security organizations' approach to SSR (Bagayoko-Penone, 2009). The OECD DAC Guidelines have been crucial in forging a common, transnational understanding of the

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<sup>18</sup> Notable examples of SSR-related missions are: EUPOL Afghanistan, EUJUST LEX Iraq, and EUPOL COPPS and EUBAM Rafah in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, as well as ESDP interventions in the Western Balkans and in the Caucasus. Some examples of activities: Justice Reform, Law Enforcement, Civilian Oversight Mechanisms, Public Financial Management Reforms, Police Reform, Military Aspects of SSR (EUFOR, RD Congo), SSR Missions (DRC), DDR, Borders and Migration Management. For a literature on the analysis of these missions, see: Gross (2009), Hanggi and Scherrer (2008), and Grevi, Helly and Keohane (2009), Part II.

SSR approach. It can therefore be considered as the reference point for adoption of SSR programmes by international organizations, including the EU.

At the regional – European level, three intellectual sub-communities can be identified as part of a broader epistemic community sharing SSR policy concepts. First, the OECD DAC, which is both an intergovernmental organization engaging in SSR in the framework of its development policies and an important subgroup of the SSR-epistemic community that namely set the standards for implementation of SSR programmes.

The second sub-community is the *Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces* (DCAF), which is composed of policy analysts, scholars and policymakers. DCAF played a key role in situating EU Security Sector Reform within the larger context of European and Transatlantic SSR, by ensuring development and diffusion of SSR concepts through transnational exchanges with other research institutes Europe wide. This community has been actively engaged in the organization of a great number of conferences over the last ten years to promote networking and knowledge-sharing among European policymakers, practitioners, military experts and academics<sup>19</sup> (Sugden, 2006; Ebnother, Fluri and Jurekovic, 2007). Besides facilitating the creation of shared understanding about SSR, DCAF also initiated the process of learning by opening channels between experts and Brussels-based policy networks, in particular through its offices in Brussels (permanent) and Ljubljana (in the course of the Slovenian Presidency of the European Union, January – June 2008).

Finally, a third important component of the European SSR epistemic community is the UK-based *Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform* (GFN-SSR), initially hosted by Cranfield University and now managed by the University of Birmingham. The “epistemic” mission of the GFN is stated in the network’s principal aims: to “promote a better understanding of security and justice sector reform through the provision of information, advice and expertise to practitioners, academics and policymakers through the world”<sup>20</sup>. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) also defined the objective of the network as “to provide knowledge management and network facilitation services to an international network of SSR practitioners”<sup>21</sup>. The

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<sup>19</sup> An example is the Seminar organized by DCAF and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in December 2006, bringing together NATO and EU representatives, government officials and experts to address the future challenges for SSR.

<sup>20</sup> Source: GFN-SSR website, <http://www.ssrnetwork.net/>.

<sup>21</sup> FCO (2006), Foreign And Commonwealth Global Conflict Prevention Pools, 15 August 2006.



network is funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and led by the University of Birmingham's International Development Department (IDD) and the Centre for the Studies of Security and Diplomacy (CSSD).

As part of the broader question of the "constraining" conditions facilitating or hampering the emergence of epistemic communities, the case of the GFN – and, to a similar extent, of the OECD DAC – provide evidence of the role of constituencies in promoting the work of epistemic communities and the formation of consensual knowledge. As suggested by Jennifer Sugden (2006), there is an overwhelming agreement that the UK is a leader in the field of SSR, and in this regard the DFID is described as the "Godfather of SSR", exerting a significant influence on OECD DAC and UNDP in the promotion of SSR (Sugden, 2006). Another interesting case is Slovakia, which during its presidency of the United Nations Security Council, in 2007, organized a wide thematic debate on security sector reform, co-hosted by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and the DCAF.

Evidence from the development of SSR seems also to suggest another consideration. The normative elasticity of the European security environment, where norms are changing and possibly converging towards the maturation of a European strategic culture, although on a lower common denominator, has facilitated the process of epistemic learning.

In sum, informal and non-material factors have pushed European integration forward in the field of security and defence, a field that is considered a breeding-ground for IR realism. Although the paper still lacks the empirical evidence to validate its theoretical arguments, it seems undeniable that the role of knowledge and ideas as important factors affecting institutional change – and, as a consequence, states' interests and their cooperative behaviors – is crucial for future applications of institutionalist approaches to the study of security cooperation.

## **Conclusion**

By investigating and reframing the link between epistemic communities and institutional learning, this paper has sought to explain the emergence of SSR in European security cooperation as a case of epistemic learning, that is a learning process triggered by the introduction of new knowledge, or new interpretation of facts, by networks of experts into the EU security and defence policymaking. I have identified four factors affecting the effectiveness of epistemic communities in diffusing new knowledge: the (EU) governance structure, the compatibility and affinity of European national strategic cultures, the degree of expert consensus within the epistemic community and the presence of constituencies interested in supporting the diffusion of new ideas. These factors define the boundaries within which epistemic communities are able to influence the EU policymaking. By applying a non-restrictive definition of learning (Nye, 1987), I have defined three criteria - goals, means and instruments - to measure learning-driven institutional change.

At this stage of my research, it is of course not possible to draw a proper “conclusion”. I hope, however, that the insights and the ideas this contribution fed into the academic debate on European security will generate genuine food for thought, as well as possibly critical feedback for further refinement of this piece.

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