Citation for published version:
Durodie, B 2023, *The Hollow Flag: The gulf between EU security rhetoric and real security*. MCC Brussels briefings, no. 3, Brussels, Belgium.
<https://brussels.mcc.hu/uploads/default/0001/01/6dbb9e5305c635f4d5336d1e2e7c31e853b2bae5.pdf>

Publication date:
2023

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication

Publisher Rights
Unspecified
Publicly available at: brussels.mcc.hu

University of Bath

Alternative formats
If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact:
openaccess@bath.ac.uk

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 03. Mar. 2023

The Hollow Flag

The gulf between EU security rhetoric and real security

A briefing from MCC Brussels

Professor Bill Durodié

Executive Summary

> *"Against the blue sky of the Western world, the stars symbolise the peoples of Europe in a form of a circle, a sign of union. Their number is invariably twelve, the figure twelve being the symbol of perfection and entirety."*
>
> Council of Europe, 9 December 1955

This paper argues that EU security policy suffers from an intrinsic, gnawing weakness. This weakness, the hollowness in the flag, is the absence of the public.

In contrast to endless bureaucracies, meetings between elites, nice-sounding strategies or fine aspirations, real security comes from engaging the public in a serious, national conversation about the past, present and future of the nation, of Europe, and of the World.

Implicitly, the EU recognises this. The EU flag, after all, symbolises a region, points to a shared history and set of values, and makes plain the central role of the *peoples* of Europe. Sadly, in practice, the people are missing. The flag is hollow.

This paper seeks to illustrate the way in which the theory and practise of security in the EU leaves the people out of the conversation. Without a secure anchor in the hopes, fears and aspirations of real people – democratically constituted into the nation-states that make up the Union – security can only ever be an abstract concept.

Whilst the dreams and plans of elites – for peace in Europe, for the protection of rights and democracy, for the expansion of the framework of the EU to new nations – may be praiseworthy, until and unless they are grounded in the demos, they remain only that: dreams.

What's more, failure to engage the people in a genuine discussion about security makes the world a more dangerous place. Despite the fears of EU elites and despite the founding myths of post-1945 Europe, militarism, the nation-state, and the masses are not intrinsically connected. It is in fact the opposite. Without the people, there is no real security.

***

Since the end of the Cold War, the remit of security has expanded to encompass a great number of areas – such as the environment, energy, health, etc. The core of this briefing paper explores EU security policy in the sense of the word as it relates primarily to defence (or, so-called 'hard' security). This shift from state to human security will be examined at a later date.

In examining the rhetoric and policies of EU security, we find a number of worrying trends. Today, almost all commentators are united in bemoaning the fact that the EU lacks a real security strategy – at the same time as breathing a sigh of relief that the war in Ukraine may provide a strategy where there has thus far been none. But to rely on external events to give you your bearings is the polar opposite of a strategy. In fact, we find that throughout its history the EU has relied on external events to drive its security policy, from the War on Terror to events in Africa. Security policy displays the confusions of such an approach.

What the war in Ukraine has shown is that real security comes from the people – from being able to call on, motivate and involve society in matters of collective interest. The EU, by contrast, is incapable of securing this kind of loyalty. This is because the EU both lacks a foundation in a *demos,* and at the same time treats ordinary people with suspicion. When the people, democracy and nationhood are in fact invoked or praised, they are only considered rhetorically. The lack of the people is the void at the heart of EU security rhetoric.

The only remedy for this void is to challenge the cultural outlook of EU elites who see 'the people' as a threat to be managed, a group to be looked down on, a rump to be 're-educated'. In place of this patrician attitude, we must forge a new relationship where the interests of ordinary people, the outlooks of distinct nations, and values of a diverse continent, are respected. Until we do, the flag will remain a hollow one.

Accordingly, this paper offers five tentative proposals:

- First, **politicians must recover the art of meaningfully engaging the *demos***. This is easier said than done. Active involvement in the affairs of state is the only true foundation for security.
- Second, **we should restore a form of national service**. By helping all classes to mix as equals and engage in productive activity for the nation, we can restore a connection between the people and security.
- Third, **we should recover the idea of a patriotic education**. Patriotism is not blind, nationalistic devotion, but an attitude of pride and confidence in the community.
- Fourth, the **EU should allow NATO to lead matters of security**. This is not about surrendering to the interests of the USA, but a recognition that NATO, not the EU, has a legitimate grounding in nation-states.
- Fifth, **we must recover an ambition to provide serious economic growth as the key driver of security**. Economic dynamism enables peace.

These are no silver bullets, nor prescriptions. But a serious campaign to re-engage the people in the question of security would do worse than to begin with these five recommendations. Ultimately it is only through democratic debate that security itself can be secured.

CONTENTS

I The Hollow Flag (p.4)

- Foundations of EU security policy (p.5)
- Challenges for EU security (p.6)
- Proliferation of acronyms (p.7)
- Limitations of shared sovereignty (p.8)
- Culture eats strategy for breakfast (p.10)

II Conclusions and recommendations (p.13)

- Conclusions (p.14)
- Recommendations (p.15)

About (p.16)

Notes (p.17)

THE HOLLOW FLAG

Foundations of EU Security Policy

Foundations of EU security policy

Inevitably, in exploring the trajectory and impact of a supranational political and economic union of (currently) 27 member states there will be many evident contradictions. What matters most is to map out the broad contours and the forces that shape these correctly.

EU security policy has emerged, falteringly, over a protracted period, encompassing wildly different external pressures and stimuli, as well as a whole host of internal needs and agendas which, in their turn, were driven by quite disparate historical experiences, cultures and interpretations.

In that sense, it emulates in microcosm the emergence of, and tensions within, the European Union itself. The latter is the current stage of a project that started as a Coal and Steel Community of just six West European countries to encourage cooperation over much-needed post-war industrial rationalisation. This later merged into an enhanced Economic Community (Common Market) that subsequently, and in a very different period, took on a wider, political and security dimension that was ratified through the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht.

EU security policy encompassed wildly different internal and external pressures

The commonly stated and somewhat idealistically presumed rationale of these various entities – to prevent war and ensure peace in Europe – was actually achieved through economic growth rather than conscious planning. In fact, from its inception, the motivations of its constituent states varied. Prime among these, though not explicitly voiced, was the need to re-legitimise European states quickly in the face of new Cold War challenges – especially pressing for leaders and peoples whose nations largely stood discredited through their pre-war outlooks and wartime actions, as well as the post-war settlement (1).

For France this meant attaching itself to German economic dynamism, despite a history of recurring conflict. For West Germany, it offered moral exculpation and a seat at a negotiating table subsequent to having been cut-out of the key post-war institutions that more recently became known as the 'liberal world order'. Macron's 2017 Speech at the Sorbonne, in Paris, refers to these distinct agendas while noting the other rationales for those who looked to be "leaving dictatorship behind" (whether fascist or communist), and who joined the Community (Union) later (2).

Another of the key parties, the United Kingdom, also exemplifies these disparate origins. It did not join at the time when it considered its 'special', transatlantic relationship and fledgling Commonwealth to offer greater opportunities for trade and influence. Membership was pursued later, when the government of the day sought a vehicle through which to mitigate failures of economic planning (3). It also offered Foreign Office mandarins a new remit and the US indirect, insider influence, if needed. Strategic vision played little part.

EU security policy was developed by officials rather than heads of state

In relation to the security agenda in particular, the US and events beyond Europe have often taken on a determining influence. The former Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger's apocryphal quip; "Who do I call if I want to call Europe?", was born of a period when the exigencies of the Cold War, including relations with the then Soviet Union and conflicts in Vietnam and the Middle East appeared to confirm a realist conceptualisation of anarchic state relations.

Initiatives such as the 1973 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) – a precursor to EU activity in security and foreign policy that brought most European states together with the US and Canada, and led to the Helsinki Accords of 1975 – had limited impact. In fact, the relative disinterest shown in the conference by the US and EC member states doomed it to become a bureaucratic rather than political project (4).

From its inception then, EU security policy was developed by officials rather than heads of state. This offered the benefit of avoiding the media spotlight (5), as well as preventing ministerial disputes. Those involved forged a close commonality

through their shared professional expertise and compromise-seeking ethos. But, in consequence, debate was turned into negotiation over increasingly narrow, technical detail. And the sheer volume of this "made it difficult for political directors to keep up" (6). It was a form of managerial anti-politics that came to be mirrored within member states themselves.

As Christopher Bickerton, professor of Modern European politics at Cambridge, notes, the transformation of nation states into member states of a supranational club marks the evisceration of politics as it was once understood (7). It reflects a shift from contestation through parliaments to management by committees and commissions.

Notably, Bickerton makes a key assertion – that the EU is neither a group of sovereign nations with independent aspirations, nor a federalist entity that pools their sovereignty for the benefit of all. Rather, it is the outcome of a transformation of states and their people: power moved away from democratic decision-making that engaged the public, and towards new legitimating processes and entities centred around various 'experts' (technical, scientific, legal, and other). The latter are more comfortable deliberating among themselves, from a shared, cultural perspective, than they are engaging and debating with their own citizens – from whom they nevertheless still draw their authority and legitimacy.

Debate about security was turned into negotiation over increasingly narrow, technical detail.

The thesis presented here is that without its people – the EU in general, and its security policies in particular, become emptied of their true meaning, purpose, cultural and strategic content. Without contestation to achieve a shared outlook there can only be a 'Hollow Flag'.

Challenges for EU security

While discussion of a shared foreign and security policy framework for Europe long predates the EU, it is important to avoid "the common error of reading the recent experience back into earlier pan-European entities such as the European Coal and Steel Community or the European Economic Community" (8). That is because the key element of change is the marginalisation of the people since the 1990s.

There have been many initiatives and many set-backs, for a multitude of reasons – from the 1948 Western Union and 1952 European Defence Community, which failed to be ratified, through to the founding of a modified Western European Union in 1954 and its revival through the Rome Declaration of 1984. In most instances the drivers and failures were either narrowly national (such as Gaullist intransigence) or mostly external (including allegiances to a fledgling NATO).

The single key shift in security policy was the emergence of a post-political age: politics without the people.

Even the Saint-Malo declaration between Britain and France of December 1998, which some see as a precursor to the establishment of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP, now CSDP) the following year, was a response to the conflict in Kosovo combined with growing concern by the Blair government to avoid becoming marginal in the EU.

Since then, there have been countless other influencing factors. These have included a continuing decline of American interest, the return of war in Europe and the gradual emergence of a multipolar world (9, 10), as well as the role of powerful personalities, evolving relations with NATO, and a need to share costs and rationalise the defence industry.

But, in keeping with the framework proposed by Bickerton, we propose that the single key shift (in outlook, processes and action) was the emergence of a post-political age. This can be measured by declining electoral interest and engagement in the immediate post-Cold War period, a more recent populist upsurge, and growing bureaucratisation. These then impacted and refashioned national and supranational entities.

While the absence of a singular European demos (11) points to a lack of foundational norms, and a system of supposedly shared sovereignty would fail to provide clear

institutional hierarchy, it is the disaggregated, depoliticised, and increasingly dismissed or by-passed public, that serves as the real point of departure for EU security – or rather, the lack of it.

Proliferation of acronyms

Back in 2006, Robert Cooper, the then Director General for External and Politico-Military Affairs in the European Council, remarked that whilst only 200 officials "effectively do Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)", many thousands were engaged in its study (12). The numbers on both sides have grown enormously since and, inevitably, there are almost as many views on each aspect as there are commentators.

EU security – or the lack of it - always begins with the depoliticised, bypassed, and dismissed public.

This is testament too, to the proliferation of committees and agencies that input into its planning, discourse, and activity. In December 1999 the EU first established a Political and Security Committee (better known by its French acronym, COPS), as well as a Military Committee, to support the ESDP. It also launched its Helsinki Headline goal to develop a future European Rapid Reaction Force that would be able to manage two simultaneous conflicts – one 'hard', separating belligerent forces, and one 'light', to manage a humanitarian operation.

By 2001 numerous shortfalls had been identified leading to the launch of a European Capabilities Action Plan and later a Capabilities Development Mechanism to address deficiencies. The 9/11 attacks later that year also served to accelerate the preparation of a European Security Strategy that emerged in 2003. This called for joint threat assessments and promoted objectives that fed into the adoption in 2004 of a new, Headline Goal 2010. The European Defence Agency (EDA) was established at the same time to support development and promote collaboration.

One significant setback was the failure to ratify the proposed Constitution for Europe in 2005. This pointed to possible problems whenever the public were afforded an opportunity to voice their concerns. A proposal to pursue Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) on defence matters for those parties willing and able to do so was first put forward there. The option was re-written into the Treaty of Lisbon regardless, and described by the then Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, as a "sleeping beauty", to be activated at a later date (13).

It was revived in 2017, within the context of conflicts across North Africa and the Middle East, and the 2014 Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, as well as the outcome of the Brexit referendum in the UK and the election of Donald Trump as US President in 2016. It emerged together with the European Defence Fund, a Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, and the Military Planning and Conduct Capability HQ.

The overall CSDP structure is now a component of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), headed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security (currently Josep Borrell). This includes the Commission's Defence Industry Directorate-General, the military as well as civilian crisis planning and operations elements of the European External Action Service, some Foreign Affairs Council preparatory bodies, and other agencies, including the EDA. It can call on some 1.5 million active personnel and 2.5 million reservists, while commanding 1.5% of EU GDP (approaching €250 billion today).

European security policy has meetings, funding and attention. What it lacks is a strategy.

What it lacks – as noted by the then President of the European Council – is a strategy (14). Indeed, one of the consequences of this absence has been the scaling-down of much of its rhetorical ambitions. At the time of its launch as the ESDP in 1999 it was envisaged as an army corps of 50,000–60,000 troops, 100 ships and 400 aircraft deployable at 60 days' notice and sustainable for a year. Within a few years this had been downgraded to a Battlegroup initiative, consisting of a small number of more autonomous and agile 1,500 personnel sized units, two of which should be available at any time to be the first to enter theatre within 15 days' notice.

Proliferation of acronyms

As of January 2023, none had seen operational service, though this has not been for the lack of possible conflicts to intervene in. The talk now is of a 5,000 strong rapid reaction force with specialised capabilities, the core of which may be provided by Germany (15). This was adopted at the March 2022 meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council, within the context of war in Ukraine. It forms part of a new security concept emanating from the two-year development of the 'Strategic Compass for Security and Defence' document, which also looks "to tackle cyber threats, disinformation and foreign interference" (16).

Of course, EU forces have been engaged (including within Europe) before now; in Macedonia from 2003, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2004, where they replaced NATO missions there under the 'Berlin Plus' arrangements (18).

Security arrangements were beset by 'unusual and vague guidance'.

But when Major General David Leakey, took command of the latter, the only advice he claims to have received from the then High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, was that the operation should "make a difference" and be "new and distinctive". Finding most niches, such as police and defence reform, occupied by other agencies, and unable to squeeze the economy or rule-of-law into a military frame, Leakey identified organised crime as something that might possibly foster security and stability within the sense of the "somewhat unusual and vague guidance" he had received (18).

Outside of the former Yugoslavia there have been just four other military operations to date, all in sub-Saharan Africa. The first of these, sanctioned by the UN and led by France, was to the Democratic Republic of the Congo for just 3 months in 2003. It acted as the template for smaller, rapid response capabilities and was the first EU military operation outside Europe under the ESDP. The largest was to Chad and the Central African Republic from February 2008 to March 2009. This faced considerable logistical challenges and accusations of partiality by the (primarily French) troops involved.

Beyond these limited engagements, and three, small naval equivalents, to counter piracy around the Horn of Africa and deter smugglers (of people and weapons) across the Mediterranean, other security-related activities included counterterrorism and combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Most activity though has been in the form of advisory, training, monitoring, capacity building and rule-of-law missions (including to Ukraine from 2014), as well as the provision of humanitarian aid.

The proliferation of purposes, roles and responsibilities has been hailed as a new way of doing security. But it is making a virtue of a vice.

Accordingly, the CSDP shifted from a purely European to a more global focus and evolved from covering just military operations to encompass longer-term, civilian stabilisation missions. This proliferation of purposes, roles, and responsibilities, emanating from a growing set of processes, agencies, and instruments, is hailed by some as a novel, 'postmodern' way of dealing with problems. It is held to reflect a sophisticated form of power maximisation for handling nonconventional security threats by a post-Westphalian actor that eschews the conventions of power politics (19).

Javier Solana lauded this expansion of the EU remit from securing "peace in Europe" to encompassing "the rest of the world" (20), having previously described it as well-suited for dealing with "a borderless and chaotic world" (21), sentiments echoed more recently in Josep Borrell's now notorious 'garden vs jungle' speech (22).

Limitations of shared sovereignty

Critics, on the other hand, point to the limited scale of these operations. They appear cosmetic – to find a role for the CSDP rather than solve problems on the ground – and driven by national interests – as in the DRC and Chad. In the meantime, the EU has been a bystander to other major crises, from the Middle East, through the Caucasus, to East Asia, while its limited actions "come to serve as an alibi to avoid

Limitations of shared sovereignty

broader international security responsibilities" (23).

Focusing on crisis management has allowed the EU to project itself as a mediator and to appear ethically neutral. This appeals to the managerial mindset of bureaucrats who prioritise deliverables over what they see as abstract principles. But while consensus is prioritised, actions pursued on a case-by-case basis lack coherence. Indeed, civilian-military cooperation emerged more to assuage the different actors concerned than as the reasoned product of an overarching strategy with a focus on ends rather than means. The absence of clear ends admits ambiguity and an inability to assess performance or outputs.

Excuses for the delays, confusions, and partialities endemic to EU security policies either rest on the labyrinthian decision-making processes within the EU or the problem of political will. States are understandably sensitive when it comes to defence-related decisions and this leads to complex, consensus-seeking bargaining to achieve any position, let-alone unanimity. Even decisions over mundane capabilities improvements are hamstrung by non-binding mechanisms to satisfy those involved.

The focus on 'crisis management' over clear ends appeals to the mindset of bureaucrats.

In terms of process, initiatives can be proposed by national governments, the Council Secretariat (through its High Representative), the European Commission, members of the Political and Security Committee and others. These are then dissected and analysed in 27 national capitals and 'filtered through' specialist working groups, the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) and COPS, before being forwarded to the Foreign Affairs Council for approval by the European Council.

Any system of shared sovereignty necessarily features a disconnect between principles and reality, as well as having key actors presenting contrasting logics. But the main problem for EU security policy is less about practicalities and disagreements than the inability to reflect and express any popular view at the national level to frame a common outlook.

Economic unification was not a source of inspiration for European citizens (24, 25). And ceaseless expansion has also led to an alleged 'enlargement fatigue'. In response, officials either focused down, pursuing the so-called 'Social Europe' initiatives promoted by Jacques Delors (26), or pushed out, to take on foreign affairs, security, and defence policies, previously seen as marginal to integration (27).

The problem in EU security policy is less about practical issues or forthright disagreement than a total absence of public involvement.

That these latter roles became central is either questioned or viewed as projecting 'fantasies of unity' (28, 29). Realist scholars of International Relations are torn between those who expect defence cooperation to be unlikely due to the presumed pursuit of national self-interest, and others who predict that the divisive forces of international 'anarchy' will, nevertheless, still push Europeans closer together (30, 31).

This confusion of actions and interpretations was implicitly anticipated by Zaki Laïdi, a director of research at Sciences-Po in Paris who, notably, from 2020 became senior advisor to Josep Borrell. In his key works, Laïdi explored the twin crises of meaning and purpose that afflicted the Western world in general and the EU in particular, subsequent to the demise of the old, Cold War, world order (32).

A loss of direction is not incidental. It is a direct consequence of the disconnection of the people from the political system. It has led to institutional power avoidance (as norms go untested) (33), as well as risk aversion (34). It also brought to a head the three dependencies the EU now finds itself challenged by – with Russia for energy supplies, China over trade, and the US (as famously called-out by President Trump over financial contributions to NATO and other commitments), in relation to defence (35).

For now (with the US still on-board), NATO – the military alliance formed in the aftermath of the Second World War to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in and the Germans down" – continues to

dominate the defence scene. It is better equipped and better suited to this role, lacking any pretence to democratic decision-making. But its own post-Cold War expansion from 12 founding states to 30 today (including 21 of the 27 EU members), along with military interventions beyond the North Atlantic area – including the Gulf War of 1991, Libya in 2011 and the Afghan War through to 2022 – were evidently driven by its own search for a new purpose after the demise of its founding objective.

NATO dominates the security scene, but also suffered from its own crisis of meaning.

Now that the Russian invasion of Ukraine appears to have restored some of its original rationale, 5 more countries are in line to join the alliance – including Finland and Sweden (which speaks volumes as to their views about the EU's security arrangements), as well as possibly Ukraine (36). But to have your agenda set by external exigencies is the very opposite of having a strategic vision.

Culture eats strategy for breakfast

> "*Culture eats strategy for breakfast.*"
>
> (Phrase attributed to Peter Drucker)

This paper is certainly not the first to note how profoundly undemocratic EU decision-making processes are. The outlook of all its key actors, as well as of their related institutional processes are geared towards negotiation and compromise rather than majoritarian decision-making (37). Political disagreement is elided through a complex, iterative process of private deliberation.

This both reflects and drives a concomitant transformation at the national level whereby a supposedly pragmatic managerialism has displaced conflict between competing interests. The outcome has been described as "policy without politics" (38). It has also allowed unelected bodies to act as a new branch of government (39). EU security policy is an acute version of these developments as, inevitably, much of it remains confidential among those charged with its planning, preparation, and implementation.

But what has been less discussed is the effect that this bureaucratisation has on domestic cultures, as well as the extent to which disengagement and marginalisation come to undermine the very policies and actions the EU seeks to pursue. This is particularly so when matters come to a head, as they have now with war in Ukraine, the very existence of which the EU was held to avert.

The EU can put on a good show when the stakes are low. But in serious moments, the first instinct is always the nation state.

It is often in times of crisis that you find out who your friends really are. Such moments can teach you more about yourself and the strength of your relationships with others than about the specific problems you confront. People who are genuinely connected come together in an emergency. Those who are not may fall apart. One of the founders of the European project, Jean Monnet, suggested in his memoirs that "Europe will be forged in crisis" (4). But each time it has encountered one, it would seem, it has been found wanting.

Like fair-weather friends, the EU can put on a good show when the stakes are low, such as when regulating the chemicals in bath time 'rubber' ducks and baby teethers (41). But whenever there has been a serious problem – from the 2008 financial crisis to the COVID pandemic in 2020, and now Ukraine – the first instinct of its constituent members has always been to go their own way.

Despite assertions of unity over Ukraine, there are self-evident tensions. Some have declined to challenge Russia (42), and others have exempted their businesses from any sanctions-regime (43). Some clearly want to see faster responses (44), while others have either been slow or compromised (45). This is not so much due to expressions of an underlying conflict of differing national interests as reflecting a deeper confusion and disconnection over common aims and values.

Real values emerge over time. They represent informal, organic relations that can take generations to build. Formal rules and regulations, strategies and agreements

Culture eats strategy for breakfast

can never compensate for these.

A nation, as famously expressed by Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address, represents "government of the people, by the people, for the people" (46). This reflects the active role of countless citizens both in its creation – often through conflict – as well as in its continued trajectory, thereby engendering their loyalty through a lived relation and shared cultural memory. Above-all, this imbues states with authority and legitimacy, rather than mere power.

Real values emerge over time. Formal rules and regulations, strategies and agreements can never compensate for these.

Today, states have become distant from their people, who they are inclined to view as problems needing to be managed and controlled. It has allowed open debate over the long-term goals for our collective security to be replaced by a narrow, technocratic focus on options, procedures, risk calculus and performance management. This creates conflicting aims and confusion through piecemeal intervention.

The concomitant erosion of what are now sometimes presented as rather old-fashioned values, such as a sense of duty and loyalty to a nation, also have significant consequences (47). Soldiers may be held to fight for a set of ideals, but they need to believe in these, as well as having a sense that they belong to and are supported by a wider community at home who share those values and outlooks.

People need to believe in, and belong to, something that the EU cannot provide.

As we know, from Vietnam to Afghanistan, a living ethos cannot be compensated for by equipment and technology, let-alone processes, and documents. The nineteenth century military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, understood that "physical forces" could never suffice without "moral powers" in war, chief among which was "national spirit" (48).

But, after the wars of the last century, nationalism stood discredited and, by association, the nation state too. This led to a pursuit of supra-national projects, such as the EU. Its officials have denounced all expressions of national interest as suspect ever since. However, this implicit critique of sovereignty (made more explicit over the period of the Brexit referendum and its aftermath), also undermined the basis for social solidarity – the sovereign individual and the communities that provide them with a sense of meaning and purpose.

The people of Ukraine have demonstrated what ordinary people can still do, given half the chance.

Fortunately for us all, the people of Ukraine have demonstrated what ordinary people can still do, given half the chance. Professors, ballerinas and countless others have left the safety and comfort of their employment to serve on the frontline (49, 50). How many would do that elsewhere? Because to do that, people need to believe in, and belong to, something that the EU cannot provide.

War is unpredictable and transformative. It is not an arena for committees or even risk management. When those in positions of power, fear risk and change, while their people are disconnected and written-off or dismissed, then we cannot hope to challenge, still less resolve any conflict. Armies fight because they believe there is something more important to life worth fighting for. But when did we last debate this, as a society?

As the First World War was drawing to a close, the US President, Woodrow Wilson, aligned with those who sought an end to secret diplomacy and confidential agreements in international affairs. In the period before the advent of the masses into politics it was just such private deals that had created the conditions and fuelled the conflict that led to the slaughter of millions.

For Wilson, it was evident that "a new international order based on rights of self-determination national sovereignty and the striving for democracy had to conduct itself in public" (51). Accordingly, he called for: "Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at" and for deliberations to "proceed always frankly and in the public view" (52).

Culture eats strategy for breakfast

That vision did not last long. Surrounded by crumbling empires: "The European elite was under intense pressure to make reforms – including widening the franchise and granting a greater role for parliaments – while at the same time looking for ways to constrain the popular will" (53). So, while elected assemblies superficially allowed the public to influence political affairs, genuine democracy was kept in check through the power of new, constitutional courts, presidents, and central banks.

Today, European affairs have become almost entirely detached from democratic debate and public scrutiny. Rather than attenuating this, the populist upturn of the last decade encouraged existing powers and actors – such as Italy's Five Star Movement and France's La Républiqe En Marche – to simply invoke 'the people' (as well as 'the science'), in their pronouncements (54).

European affairs have become almost entirely detached from democratic debate and public scrutiny.

And while the technocratic obsessions of the EU elites may by-pass the mediating role of traditional political parties, such as through a growing reliance on referenda (56, 57), their avoidance of conflicting views also comes at an enormous cost. As the Brussels correspondent for The Times (London), noted; "the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has given rise to destabilising trends. This is because it has pursued interventions divorced from differing national interests based in different histories, economies, geography and territorial relationships" (58).

By this he means that something as profound as Ukraine joining the EU or NATO is not simply a matter of ticking boxes and announcing common values, which he describes as "gesture politics" in the face of deep-rooted geopolitical realities and relations. Such values cannot arise through fanciful allusions to a new 'European sovereignty' either (59), especially as the latter are merely rhetorical ripostes to more conservative elements who have sought to reclaim the language of sovereignty through appeals to national pride and community.

As the Hungarian sociologist and executive director for MCC Brussels, Frank Furedi, noted: "Unable to supply the people of Europe with a positive European identity, the EU has opted instead for discrediting national feelings of belonging. In doing so, it has strengthened cultural insecurity rather than legitimated the ideal of European unity", before concluding; "the challenge facing genuine liberal-minded people is to cultivate a sense of European unity on the foundation of respecting the sovereignty of its different nations" (60).

Without the people, there can be no security. Only a hollow flag.

It is time for the EU elites to understand what the great, liberal philosopher John Stuart Mill meant by: "A state that dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands, even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can be achieved" (61).

We must expose the gulf between EU security rhetoric and real security, for without the people, their pursuit of sovereign independence, and that of the territories and communities they care about, there can be no real security – just a 'Hollow Flag'.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS

Conclusions

1. The EU – by its own admission – lacks a security strategy. Documents, processes, initiatives, and capabilities are not the same. Strategic vision plays little part in these.

2. The Russian invasion of Ukraine may appear to provide a new rationale. But to have your agenda set by external exigencies is the very opposite of having a strategic purpose.

3. Official EU security policy has often been driven by such exogenous factors, from events across Africa and the Middle East to the support, or not, of the US, and new technologies.

4. Accordingly, its actions – in addition to its ambitions – are confused. They are often conducted on a case-by-case basis, and thereby lack any cohering purpose or clear direction.

5. Real security comes from the people. As Ukraine shows, the support and actions of your own citizens is what allows for the continued existence of distinct communities and nations.

6. The EU is incapable of securing the loyalty of people. It lacks appeal to them and views them as problems to be managed, rather than as the source of its own authority and power.

7. The EU – and leaders of its member states – invoke the people as a rhetorical device, or look to establish patrician relationships with them, to bypass their engagement altogether.

8. The biggest security challenge going forwards is to bridge the divide between the cultural outlook of establishment elites as opposed to the beliefs and actions of ordinary citizens.

9. We need to replace the rhetoric of EU security policy with the reality of a living relationship with ordinary people, who live in distinct nations with independent outlooks and interests.

10. Without this, the EU lacks cohering values and above-all, is dismissive of, the very agency upon which its future depends. It is hollow, like its flag of stars surrounding a blue void.

RECCOMENDATIONS

1. **Meaningfully engage the demos:** The security of any entity comes, first-and-foremost, from the people who have a sense of loyalty to it. This emerges, often through conflict and challenge, over protracted periods. Accordingly, the primary component of any security strategy must be to ensure the loyalty of the people through their active engagement with affairs of state.

2. **Restore a form of national service:** The largest entity that is both accountable to the people and authorised by them to act on their behalf thereby ensuring legitimacy and loyalty, for good or ill, is currently the nation state. Restoring some form of national service, both military and civilian, can strengthen this bond to help ensure people of all classes meet and mix as equals.

3. **Reclaim patriotic education:** While equipment, training, tactics and planning matter, the Ukrainian conflict reminds us that a sense of duty towards a community, its values, culture, and traditions are key to achieving security. Promoting a positive narrative about the nation through a patriotic education that celebrates its people and achievements is not nationalistic.

4. **NATO should lead, the EU should follow:** A strategic culture that places people at its core is open to dissenting views to win the loyalty of its citizens. Solidarity among sovereign nations is stronger than bureaucratically mandated edicts. At an operational level, NATO can deliver more than the EU. The latter should look to support these key elements rather than supplant them.

5. **Focus on economic growth as key driver of national and international security:** At the same time, and in the context of US strategic confusion and decline, European nations must now look to achieving their security for their own purposes. As in the post-war period, a focus on growth will be the single, most important factor in achieving this. It was economic dynamism that enabled peace, not the other way round.

About

About the author

Professor Bill Durodié, Visiting Professor, MCC Brussels

Bill is Visiting Professor to MCC Brussels and Chair of Risk and Security in International Relations at the University of Bath. He previously held posts in British Columbia, Canada and at NTU in Singapore, as well as at the Defence Academy of the United Kingdom and in the War Studies Group of King's College, London. Since 2014 Bill has also been a Visiting Professor to the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong, one of China's top-level Party schools. In 2017, following in the steps of former US Secretary for Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and the UK Minister of State for Universities and Science David Willetts, he became the 8th person and first alumnus to give the Vincent Briscoe Annual Security Lecture at Imperial College London. French by origin, he has lived in the UK for much of his life and currently resides in Oxford with his wife and three young sons, two of whom sing for the Choir of Magdalen College there. He views the establishment of MCC in Brussels as essential for shaking-up institutional complacency, both there and further afield.

About MCC Brussels

At a time of unprecedented political polarisation, MCC Brussels is committed to providing a home for genuine policy deliberation and an in-depth exploration of the issues of our time. It will provide an opportunity for intellectuals and experts to debate and assess the conceptual and normative status of European policy making. Drawing on MCC's outstanding pool of expertise it will attempt to acquaint and influence European policy makers with its distinct approach towards the political, socio-economic and cultural issues of our time. The centre will offer a challenging and stimulating environment for visiting young students to acquaint themselves with the policy and decision-making process in Brussels. It will provide short educational courses and seminars on matters pertaining to European thought and EU policy making.

T: @MCC_Brussels

E: info@brussels.mcc.hu

Press enquiries

Mr John O'Brien, head of communications, MCC Brussels

john.obrien@brussels.mcc.hu

Notes

1. Heartfield, J. (2013) 'The European Union and the End of Politics', Zero Books (available at: https://www.johnhuntpublishing.com/zer0-books/our-books/european-union-end-politics)
2. Macron, E. (2017) 'Sorbonne Speech', 26 September 2017 (available at: http://international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html)
3. Young, H. (1998) 'This Blessed Plot: Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair', Macmillan (available at: https://www.amazon.co.uk/This-Blessed-Plot-Britain-Churchill/dp/0333754115)
4. Möckli, D. (2009) 'European Foreign Policy during the Cold War: Heath, Brandt, Pompidou and the Dream of Political Unity', I.B. Tauris (available at: https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/european-foreign-policy-during-the-cold-war-9781845118068/)
5. Ludlow, N.P. (2005) 'Mieux que six ambassadeurs. L'emergence du COREPER durant les premières années de la CEE', in Badel, L., Jeannesson, S. et Ludlow, N.P. (eds.) 'Les Administrations nationales et la construction européenne. Une approche historique (1919-1975)', Peter Lang, (available at: https://www.peterlang.com/document/1098964)
6. Bickerton, C. (2011) 'Towards a Social Theory of EU Foreign and Security Policy', Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol.49, No.1, pp.171-190 (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02134.x)
7. Bickerton, C. (2012) 'European Integration: From Nation States to Member States', Oxford University Press (available at: https://global.oup.com/academic/product/european-integration-9780199606252)
8. Ben-Ami, D. (2013) 'The EU: a club for anti-democrats', Spiked-Online (available at: https://www.spiked-online.com/2013/08/30/the-eu-a-club-for-anti-democrats/)
9. Jones, S. (2007) 'The Rise of European Security Co-operation', Cambridge University Press (available at: https://www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/politics-international-relations/international-relations-and-international-organisations/rise-european-security-cooperation)
10. Krotz, U. (2009) 'Momentum and Impediments: Why Europe Won't Emerge as a Full Political Actor on the World Stage Soon', Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 555-578 (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2009.01815.x)
11. Grimm, D. (1995) 'Does Europe Need a Constitution?', European Law Journal, Vol.1, No.3, pp.282–302 (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1468-0386.1995.tb00033.x)
12. Howorth, J. (2007) 'Security and Defence Policy in the European Union', Palgrave (available at: https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/security-and-defence-policy-in-the-european-union-9780230362345/)
13. Benavente, E.M. (2017) 'Time for the Sleeping Beauty to wake', European Council on Foreign Relations, 15 November 2017 (available at: https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_time_for_the_sleeping_beauty_to_wake/)
14. Van Rompuy, H. (2010) 'We have strategic partners. Now we need a strategy', video message in the run-up to the European Council meeting, 14 September 2010 (available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/27538/116494.pdf)
15. Dewitz, C. (2022) 'EU-Battlegroup 2025: Planungskonferenz in Ulm', Bundeswehr Journal, 3 October 2022 (available at: https://www.bundeswehr-journal.de/2022/eu-battlegroup-2025-planungskonferenz-in-ulm/)
16. EU (2022) 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence', European Union (available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf)

Notes

17. NATO (2004) 'The NATO-EU Strategic Partnership', Istanbul Summit Press Kit (available at: https://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2004/06-istanbul/press-kit/006.pdf)
18. Leakey, D. (2006) 'ESDP and Civil/Military Cooperation: Bosnia and Herzegovina', Chapter 4 in Deighton, A. and Mauer, V. (eds.) 'Securing Europe? Implementing the European Security Strategy', Centre for Security Studies, ETH Zurich (available at: https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/ZB-77.pdf)
19. Jones, S. (2007) 'The Rise of European Security Co-operation', Cambridge University Press (available at: https://www.cambridge.org/gb/academic/subjects/politics-international-relations/international-relations-and-international-organisations/rise-european-security-cooperation)
20. Solana, J. (2007) 'The Lisbon Treaty: Giving the EU More Coherence and Weight on the International Stage', Fakt, 10 December 2007, cited in Bickerton, C., Irondelle, B. and Menon, A. (2011) 'Security Co-operation beyond the Nation-State: The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy', Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol.49, No.1, pp.1-21 (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-5965.2010.02126.x)
21. Solana, J. (2006) 'The Three Reasons for Europe', EU Security and Defence: Core Documents 2005, Vol. 6, Paris: EUISS (available at: https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/cp087e.pdf)
22. Borrell, J. (2022) 'Opening remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the inauguration of the pilot programme', European Diplomatic Academy, 13 October 2022 (available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-diplomatic-academy-opening-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-inauguration_en)
23. Menon, A. (2009) 'Empowering Paradise? The ESDP at Ten', International Affairs, Vol. 85, No. 2, pp.227-246 (available at: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2009.00791.x)
24. Garton Ash, T. (1999) 'History of the Present: Essays, Sketches and Despatches from Europe in the 1990s', Allen Lane, London (available at: https://www.amazon.co.uk/History-Present-Timothy-Garton-Ash/dp/0375503536)
25. EC (2004) 'The Spiritual and Cultural Dimension of Europe', Reflection Group initiated by the President of the European Commission and coordinated by the Institute for Human Sciences, Brussels (available at: https://www.files.iwm.at/uploads/michalski_091104_report_annexes_en.pdf)
26. Lehmann, W. and Salm, C. (2020) 'Jacques Delors: Architect of the modern European Union', European Union History Series, European Parliament (available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/652009/EPRS_BRI(2020)652009_EN.pdf)
27. Øhrgaard, J.C. (1997) 'Less than Supranational, More than Intergovernmental: European Political Co-operation and the Dynamics of Intergovernmental Integration', Millennium: Journal of International Studies, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp.1-29 (available at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/03058298970260010401)
28. Sjursen, H. (2006) 'What Kind of Power?', Journal of European Public Policy, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp.235-251 (available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13501760500451584)
29. Merchet, J.D. (2009) 'Défense européenne, la grande illusion', Larousse, Paris (available at: http://crd.ensosp.fr/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=1854)
30. Mearsheimer, J. (1994/95) 'The False Promise of International Institutions', International Security, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 5-49 (available at: https://www.mearsheimer.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/A0021.pdf)

Notes

31. Posen, B. (2006) 'European Union Security and Defence Policy: Response to Unipolarity?', Security Studies, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 149-186 (available at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09636410600829356)
32. Laïdi, Z. (1994) 'Un monde privé de sens', Fayard, Paris (available at: https://www.fayard.fr/documents-temoignages/un-monde-prive-de-sens-9782213592992)
33. Laïdi, Z. (2005) 'La Norme sans la Force: l'enigme de la puissance europeenne', Presse de Sciences-Po, Paris (available at: https://www.pressesdesciencespo.fr/en/book/?gcoi=27246100629320)
34. Laïdi, Z. (2010) 'Is Europe a Risk-Averse Actor?', European Foreign Affairs Review, 15, pp.411-426 (available at: https://kluwerlawonline.com/journalarticle/European+Foreign+Affairs+Review/15.4/EERR2010032)
35. NATO, (2018) 'Remarks by President Trump at press conference NATO Summit Brussels' 12 July 2018 (available at: https://nato.usmission.gov/july-12-2018-remarks-by-president-trump-at-press-conference-after-2018-nato-summit-in-brussels/)
36. Tidey, A. (2022) 'Like NATO, the EU has a mutual defence clause but trust appears low', Euronews, 8 June 2022 (available at: https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/06/07/like-nato-the-eu-has-a-mutual-defence-clause-but-trust-appears-low)
37. Haas, E. (2004) 'The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces 1950-1957', University of Notre Dame Press (available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/100books/file/EN-H-BW-0038-The-uniting-of-Europe.pdf)
38. Schmidt, V. A. (2006) 'Democracy in Europe: The EU and National Polities', Oxford University Press (available at: https://academic.oup.com/book/7030)
39. Vibert, F. (2007) 'The Rise of the Unelected: Democracy and the New Separation of Powers', Cambridge University Press (available at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/rise-of-the-unelected/A0616500EFF36C03A2A8B384958B4452)
40. Monnet, J. (1976) 'Memoires', Édition Fayard (available at: https://www.fayard.fr/histoire/memoires-9782213022789)
41. Durodié, B. (1999) 'Poisonous Dummies: European Risk Regulation after BSE', European Science and Environment Forum (available at: http://www.durodie.net/pdf/PoisonousDummies.pdf)
42. Cafiero, G. (2022) 'Austria commits to neutrality, even as Russia destroys Ukraine', Al Jazeera, 15 August 2022 (available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/15/austrian-neutrality-in-light-of-the-ukraine-war)
43. Lambie, F. (2022) 'Tientallen ontheffingen voor sancties tegen Rusland', RTL Nieuws, 24 October 2022 (available at: https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/artikel/5341835/sancties-eu-rusland-ontheffingen-ontheffing-tientallen)
44. Tilles, D. (2022) 'Ukraine should have "immediate express path" to EU membership, says Polish president', Notes from Poland (available at: https://notesfrompoland.com/2022/02/26/ukraine-should-have-immediate-express-path-to-eu-membership-says-polish-president/)
45. Steerpike (2022) 'Stop calling Putin! Macron appears to be scolded by the Estonian PM', The Spectator, 14 May 2022 (available at: https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/stop-calling-putin-macron-appears-to-be-scolded-by-the-estonian-pm/)
46. Lincoln, A. (1863) 'Gettysburg Address', 19 November 1863 (available at: https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good_cause/transcript.htm)
47. Furedi, F. (2022) 'Ukraine and The Moral Disarmament of the West', Roots and Wings Substack, 23 September 2022 (available at: https://frankfuredi.substack.com/p/ukraine-and-the-moral-disarmament)

Notes

48. Clausewitz, C. von (1832) Book 3, Chapters 3 and 4, 'Moral Forces' and 'The Chief Moral Powers', in 'On War', Princeton University Press (available at: https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/OnWar1873/BK3ch03.html)
49. Smith, P. (2022) 'Ukrainian professor gives lecture from front lines of fight against Russia', NBC News, 6 May 2022 (available at: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/ukrainian-professor-gives-lecture-front-lines-fight-russia-rcna27636)
50. Freeman, C. (2022) 'The Ukrainian ballerina who dances by night and fights Russians by day', The Telegraph, 25 June 2022 (available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/06/25/ukrainian-ballerina-who-dances-night-fights-russians-day/)
51. Waterfield, B. (2008) 'E-Who? Politics behind closed doors', in Appleton, J. (ed.) 'No means No!', Manifesto Club (available at: http://manifestoclub.info/wp-content/uploads/EU%20Essays.pdf)
52. Wilson, W. (1918) 'Address of the President of the United States delivered at a joint session of the two houses of Congress', National Archive (available at: https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-woodrow-wilsons-14-points)
53. Ben-Ami, D. (2019) 'The strangling of European democracy', 23 August 2019 (available at: https://www.spiked-online.com/2019/08/23/the-strangling-of-european-democracy/)
54. Bickerton, C. and Accetti, C. (2021) 'Technopopulism: The New Logic of Democratic Politics', Oxford University Press (available at: https://academic.oup.com/book/39582)
55. EU (2022) 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence', European Union (available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf)
56. Lord, C. (2021) 'Referendums and democratic theory', in Smith, J. (ed.) 'The Palgrave Handbook of European Referendums', Palgrave (available at: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/bfm:978-3-030-55803-1/1.pdf)
57. Glencross, A. (2021) 'History', in Smith, J. (ed.) 'The Palgrave Handbook of European Referendums', Palgrave (available at: https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/bfm:978-3-030-55803-1/1.pdf)
58. Waterfield, B. (2014) 'Ukraine: another fine mess EU've gotten us into', Spiked-Online (available at: https://www.spiked-online.com/2014/03/26/ukraine-another-fine-mess-euve-gotten-us-into/)
59. Macron, E. (2021) 'Presentation of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union at the Élysée Palace', 9 December 2021 (available at: https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/french-president-emmanuel-macron-press-conference-speech/)
60. Furedi, F. (2016) 'A project with no name', Spiked-Online (available at: https://www.spiked-online.com/2016/07/28/a-project-with-no-name/)
61. Mill, J.S. (1859) 'On Liberty', Parker and Son (available at: https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/mill/liberty.pdf)