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Europe under occupation: the European diplomatic community of practice in the Jerusalem area

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**Europe under Occupation: The European Diplomatic
Community of Practice in the Jerusalem Area**

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Introduction

This article shows how Europe (as in the EU plus its member states) practices on the ground its stated position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, by highlighting the existence of a community of European practitioners in the Jerusalem area. As no peace agreement is looming on the horizon, the often-stated EU support for a two-state solution could appear meaningless. However, a closer look at the local level in the East Jerusalem-Ramallah area shows a commitment of European diplomats (i.e. diplomats of EU member states and EU officials) to specific practices of political resistance to Israeli occupation and recognition of Palestinian institutions. My claim here is that these practices have led not only to a specific political geography of diplomacy in the Jerusalem area, but also to the formation of a community of practice, composed of European diplomats and based on their daily experience of resisting occupation and bestowing recognition. It is this group of officials who represent and actively 'do' Europe's position on the ground and under occupation.

The main contribution of this article to the special issue is to show the relevance of a practice mechanism to our understanding of politics, namely the role of communities of practice (CoPs) (Wenger 1998, p.5, Adler 2009, Bicchi 2011) (see also Graeger and Bremberg in this collection). In a nutshell, a CoP is a community that is based on a practice. By practicing the practice, the group develops a specific identity and a set of resources specific to the group. Therefore, CoPs bring a focus on the group and on the activity the group is involved in. The activity (or more specifically the practice) constitutes the group (the community) and a number of key characteristics of the group. In the case analysed here, by practising political resistance and political recognition in a context of conflict and occupation, European diplomats in the Jerusalem area develop a European identity and a set of common European policy tools that they consider appropriate. A focus on CoPs, therefore, brings the story to life, by highlighting who is actually doing what when and where, beyond for instance the institutional rules of what should happen.

This article also adds to the literature on CoPs, in two ways. First, it highlights the importance of 'landscapes' of practices, defined as a complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them (Wenger-Trayner, Fenton-O'Creevy et al. 2015). Given that CoPs are constituted by practices, the practices' context within which a CoP is situated is important in the analysis of how the CoP develops. As we are going to see, the diplomatic landscape of the Jerusalem area has its own specificities, which affect how Europe is represented on the ground. Second, this article takes sides in the discussion about CoPs, by stressing their intrinsic local nature and the communality of interpretation on the ground, as opposed to the concept being used as a metaphor for broader 'imagined' communities. Whereas for instance it is possible to think of diplomacy as an imagined community to which all diplomats belong, a more specific sense of European belonging occurs in the CoP scrutinised here.

A second related aim of this article stresses the relevance of local, daily doings. The article shifts the emphasis in the analysis of EU foreign policy and European diplomacy from the broader picture, which at times can seem generic, to the smaller story, which can deliver a more conclusive set of evidence. This shift of focus is not intended to contradict the broader analysis, which has characterised much of literature on EU foreign policy and diplomacy. Rather, it aims to add depth and detail to it, by capturing the universal as embedded in the local practice and by emphasising the link between the universal and the local. This is not a

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3 methodological point, it is an ontological one. The assumption here is that the universal, the
4 broad categorisation and the more abstract pattern must be embodied in the local practice, if
5 they are to have meaning in a given context. A focus on the local is consistent with the
6 analysis of “sites” in diplomacy (Neumann 2012), as well as with the trend across European
7 studies to highlight “the everyday” of European integration and to privilege “the point of
8 view of the people actually producing” Europe (Adler-Nissen 2016, p.88). Similarly, “daily
9 life” is what makes Europe’s imagined community (McNamara 2015). Put differently, the
10 local is where the universal is to be found.
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13 The practice of European diplomats in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a particularly
14 good case study for a micro-story. The EU has often been accused of not doing enough
15 (Aoun 2003), of allowing a gap between rhetoric and reality (Tocci 2005), of being a failure
16 (Livingston 2014). In public debates, the discussion about Europe’s alleged boycott of Israel
17 has pitched Israel’s supporters against promoters of the Boycott Divest Sanction (BDS)
18 campaign. There is clearly an issue here, which goes beyond a possible capability-
19 expectations gap (Hill 1993) in European diplomatic practices. Therefore, it is legitimate to
20 ask what precisely the EU is doing in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
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23 The angle taken here in relation to European diplomatic practices centres on practices of
24 political resistance and recognition, in a context of occupation. The Arab-Israeli conflict is a
25 conflict about the land, but not just about physical control of the land (which Israel de facto
26 has since 1967). Rather, the conflict is also and especially a conflict about the *legitimate*
27 control of the land, which Israel craves and Palestinians aim to prevent. While there is a legal
28 and a social side to the story, resistance and recognition are political practices, enacted by a
29 variety of international actors. Western countries have managed to retain a central role in the
30 recognition of new states and thus act as gate-keepers in terms of providing the ultimate
31 legitimisation of other states’ existence and territorial scope. The practice of (political)
32 recognition is relevant in the case of Palestine, which has launched in 2012 a campaign to be
33 legally recognised by the minority group of states that still does not recognise it, among
34 which Western European countries. The practice of (political) resistance to occupation is
35 relevant in terms of relations with Israel. The mere presence of European diplomatic
36 representations in the area is contested, and the location and denomination of European
37 diplomatic representation in the Jerusalem area respond to a precise political logic. As a
38 result, European diplomats have turned into a CoP, with a specific identity and set of tools, as
39 shown in the case of report drafting. The opinions expressed therein have tended to be more
40 assertive than the attitudes prevailing in Brussels, and even more so than those expressed in
41 capitals. Doing Europe under occupation in this case has taken more assertive shades.
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45 The evidence on European diplomats in the Jerusalem area was gathered predominantly from
46 desk work in 2009 and during three trips to Jerusalem and Ramallah between 2010 and 2014,
47 which generated 17 in-depth interviews with diplomats of EU member states and EU
48 officials. These were also accompanied by approx.. 20 non-structured contacts with press
49 officials, assistants and secretaries working in European representations, as well as with
50 employees of European NGOs, lasting from a few minutes (e.g. the time to explain the
51 system for car registration numbers imposed by Israel) to a couple of hours (e.g. a lunch
52 discussing German foundations’ work in Palestine). The three trips were also an opportunity
53 to explore *prima facie* the reality of occupation in the Jerusalem area, while gathering
54 material in various forms from locals (e.g. nobody seem to know where the EU Delegation¹ is
55 or even the street name). To all formal interviewees I guaranteed anonymity and I will stretch
56 that rule to include the other informants too for excess of prudence. Generalisations in this
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3 article are thus limited to the period ending in 2014 and the overall goal is to illustrate rather
4 than demonstrate.
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6 The article will start with a short clarification of the concept of CoPs. It will then analyse the
7 'landscape' of practices (Wenger-Trayner, Fenton-O'Creevy et al. 2015) in the East
8 Jerusalem-Ramallah area and European diplomats' practices of resistance and recognition, by
9 exploring the diplomatic geography of Jerusalem and Ramallah. Third, it will focus on the
10 identity and the tools that this European diplomatic group has developed. It will conclude by
11 pointing how this story contributes to broader debates in European foreign policy analysis
12 and in IR more generally.
13

14 **What CoPs are**

15 The expression "community of practice" has spread widely in IR (Adler 2008, Adler 2009,
16 Bicchi 2011, Bremberg 2014, Davies 2015, Goff 2015, Zwolski 2016) as well as in studies of
17 European diplomacies (see for instance Graeger, Bremberg, and Merand/Rayroux in this
18 issue). But it is still crucial to summarise the concept's definition and highlight the elements
19 that identify a CoP, in order to have a 'blueprint' for recognising one and understanding how
20 it works. To this, I will add two points, about the relationship between a CoP and its context,
21 as well as about the level at which to situate the CoP.
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25 It was Etienne Wenger's book that sparked the first wave of CoPs studies (1998) by
26 providing a definition of CoP that has become the standard across disciplines.ⁱⁱ He identified
27 three elements: an ongoing mutual engagement (the practice); a sense of joint enterprise (the
28 identity, the community); and a shared repertoire (the tools). These represent the point of
29 reference for the concept in IR literature.
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32 The first element is the practice. Members build their community through a practice, when
33 they do something on a regular basis (which also gives the CoP a history). "The concept of
34 practice connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and
35 social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do" (Wenger 1998, p. 47). A
36 practice is thus always a social practice, which produces meaning, provides coherence in a
37 community and delivers learning for new comers. Moreover – and this is particularly
38 important for the claim I am making in this article – practice is locally situated. An example
39 here would be a post in a different diplomatic representation. While the job description may
40 remain the same, the way it is actually done, in the local site, will be different and will need
41 a learning process. The first indicator of a CoP, therefore, is the existence of specific
42 practices, i.e. specific patterns of social actions that are recognised as meaningful by the
43 individuals involved.
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46 Second, according to Wenger, members are bound together by a common identity forged in
47 their practicing a practice together. This is important because, despite the longstanding
48 tradition of analysing communities and the much shorter history of practice approaches, it is
49 the practice that aggregates the community, not the community that invents the practice (cf.
50 Nicolini 2013, pp.86-92). To put it differently, the community is constituted in the act of
51 practising (Gherardi 2006, p.221, p.108) and the two are not mutually co-constitutive. This
52 aspect refers to the transformative effects that a routine of socially meaningful doing brings
53 to a group and to the sense of joint enterprise involved in accomplishing a task. This does
54 not drive out the possibility of in-group contestation, as for instance masters might be
55 challenged by advanced novices. Moreover, not everybody has to agree on what the end
56 goal is and how to reach it. But there must be a local, contextualised, indigenous response to
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3 external challenges. There needs to be a feeling of ‘appropriated’ enterprise (Cox 2005:
4 532), in which for instance members re-interpret (and most likely distort) the will of the
5 overarching institutional authority. A community of practice is therefore a “community of
6 interpretation,” within which “the shared means for interpreting complex activity get
7 formed, transformed, and transmitted” (Brown and Duguid 1991, 47). The key point is that
8 dissent becomes more likely outside the group than inside. This explains also the thickness
9 of social relations surrounding the practice: members sustain “dense” relations of mutual
10 engagement organised around what they are to do (Wenger 1998, 74). The second indicator
11 of a Cop is a set of pointers suggesting the existence of a community, including a common
12 identity (which differentiates between insiders and outsiders), a common interpretation of
13 what needs to be done and density of mutual relations.
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16 Third, CoPs create a specific set of tools and resources, which help CoPs address
17 uncertainty. ‘Over time, the joint pursuit of an enterprise creates resources for negotiating
18 meaning’ (Wenger 1998: 82). The repertoire of resources that is continuously created and
19 re-enacted in a community of practice helps turn the unexpected into normality. While they
20 are partly reified, these repertoires remain partly ambiguous and thus open-ended, relying on
21 ongoing participation and continuous negotiation of meaning (Wenger 1998, pp.52-57). The
22 process is akin to that of ‘structuring the unknown’ described by Robert H. Waterman
23 (1990: 41) and that of ‘sensemaking’ explored by Karl E. Weick (1995). Resources can be
24 very different and include routines, tools, ways of doing things, words, stories and concepts.
25 Examples of stories are ‘war stories’ about error codes not included in repair manual,
26 described by Orr (1996), the commands and swearing on the deck of a USS navy ship
27 (Hutchins 1995) or the weather analyses and examinations of changing farming practices
28 collected by the Senate Agriculture Committee (Boynton 1990, p.200-201). Other instances
29 could be the metaphor of the ‘policy cycle’ that many project-oriented activities embrace,
30 the ‘non-papers’ that many governmental agencies produce or – more to the case here –
31 political reports sent by embassies to capitals with the latest about a foreign country.
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35 A CoP is thus a group of people who routinely share a practice of doing something they see
36 as socially meaningful, with tools that they consider appropriate for the task. While
37 institutional approaches would often seem to suggest that rules are all there is to see, a CoPs
38 perspective underscores instead that what matters is beyond the formal rules and does not
39 necessarily coincide with them, as CoPs can exist within and across institutional boundaries.
40 An institutional boundary “may therefore correspond to one community of practice, to a
41 number of them, or to none at all” (Wenger 1998, p.119).
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44 Two further points need exploration. To start with, CoPs are best analysed at the local level.
45 They are an analytical mechanism that helps identify what precisely to zoom in on, in the
46 local landscape of practices and in the local “site” (Neumann 2012). A CoP brings in an
47 element that marks a half way in between the individual, which is the unit of analysis of
48 rational choice, and the overarching structure, on which much constructivism is predicated.
49 It highlights the group role and the group dynamics. This is akin to ‘groupthink’ as
50 developed in Foreign Policy Analysis, according to which maintaining group consensus and
51 personal acceptance by the group become main motivations for action (e.g. Janis 1972). But
52 it is interpreted in a light that differs substantially from the aseptic analyses of the 1970s and
53 instead shows the relevance of locally situated practices in bringing together the group in the
54 first place. CoPs are ‘situated’ and local, emerging from ‘situated’ local practices, an aspect
55 that is still unexplored in the literature on CoPs (e.g. Hughes, Jewson et al. 2007, Gherardi
56 2009, Nicolini 2013). While much of the literature in IR has focused on ‘macro’ CoPs, akin
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3 to the imagined communities of Anderson (Anderson 1983) and involving a large number of
4 people (Adler 2008, Adler 2009), the point here is that local CoPs, in which people have
5 names, have a different specificity.
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8 Moreover, while CoPs are local, they also take place in a social and political context, which
9 affects their making. A CoP is “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over
10 time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (Lave
11 and Wenger 1991, p.98). The broader social landscape is constituted by a plurality of
12 practices, which support a plurality of CoPs, bridged by individuals holding multiple
13 memberships but also created in contrast to some of the existing practices. Different
14 practices and CoPs can also be bridged by “brokering boundary encounters” (Kubiak,
15 Fenton-O’Creevy et al. 2015), especially if individuals with multiple memberships act as
16 boundary spanners. However, if this is not the case and the situation is conflictual, then a
17 CoP can help members rally behind a given practice. In fact, a conflict between practices
18 can contribute to create a CoP around a practice, as it sharpens the contrast and clears the
19 middle ground of possible alternatives.
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22 Each professional occupation (such as diplomacy) can thus be conceived as a landscape of
23 practice, in which different CoPs interact and bring “their own histories, domains, and
24 regimes of competence” (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.15). A landscape of
25 practice thus constitutes a complex social body of knowledge, which is articulated in
26 different sub-sets of specific interpretation, some of which overlapping, some of which
27 clashing. It is within such a context and on that basis that a CoP exists.
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30 To sum up, the elements of a CoP are a practice (a patterned social activity), a community
31 (with a common identity, a common interpretation of what needs doing and density of
32 relations) and a set of tools (from keywords to routines). Moreover, I suggest that the most
33 interesting examples of CoPs are at the local level, thus involving a limited number of
34 people. Finally, CoPs are in interaction with the context they are part of and a conflictual
35 context can spur CoPs as much (if not more) than a cooperative one.
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38 Therefore, in the rest of this article I will examine the three components of the European
39 diplomatic CoP in the area of East Jerusalem-Ramallah, as well as their local and contextual
40 elements. I will start from the analysis of existing practices of resistance and recognition,
41 within the conflictual context, before turning to identity, interpretation and tools in the
42 following section.
43

44 **East Jerusalem – Ramallah as a site of conflict, diplomatic resistance and recognition**

45

46 While this is not the place to summarise the millennia-long history of Jerusalem (e.g. Dumper
47 1997, Philipp and Rieniets 2006, Dumper 2011, Montefiore 2011, Dumper 2014, Shlay and
48 Rosen 2015) or the details of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Lesch 2008, Peters and Newman
49 2013) or even the Europeans’ position towards it (Musu 2010, Muller 2012, Bouris 2014), it
50 is crucial to understand the context and the prevailing governing practices in this area, as well
51 as the politics of resisting and recognising practices of European diplomats. The aim of this
52 section is to paint the “landscape of practices” existing on the ground (Wenger-Trayner,
53 Fenton-O’Creevy et al. 2015) and show how it has impacted on the geography and the
54 political context. Prevailing practices of conflict and occupation have been met by the
55 European diplomatic community in the Jerusalem area with a set of actions that challenge the
56 status quo. Therefore, after mentioning key legal issues, I will focus on existing practices of
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3 conflict, resistance and recognition in their sites of diplomatic representations (the buildings,
4 diplomatic privileges and official ceremonies).
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7 The background element to keep in mind is that the status of Jerusalem is very contradictory,
8 thus giving plenty of opportunities to develop conflicting practices. In 1947, when the United
9 Nations General Assembly approved the partition plan with Res.181, it was agreed that
10 Jerusalem would be under a special international regime and governed by the United Nations.
11 This special arrangement set it as a *corpus separatum*, the boundaries of which were broad
12 and included “surrounding villages and town”, such as Bethlehem in the south and Shu’fat in
13 the north (UNGA Res. 181, Part III, par.B). Ramallah, which lies more to the north and at the
14 time was a relatively unknown village, was not included. The armistice agreements that
15 brought to an end the 1948-49 war between Israel and its Arab neighbours was based on the
16 so-called Green Line, which divided Jerusalem in a Western and Eastern sector,ⁱⁱⁱ the latter in
17 the hands of then Transjordan, which annexed it. In 1967, Israel occupied the Eastern part of
18 Jerusalem and it was Israel’s turn to de facto annex the city. This situation has thus created a
19 very complex legal situation, in which the original idea of Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum*
20 under UN jurisdiction co-exists with the partition of the city in two by the Green Line and the
21 de facto (and in 1980 de jure) annexation of the whole city by Israel.^{iv} The legal context has
22 been further complicated by Israel’s construction of the Wall, which goes beyond the Green
23 Line and created “enforced reorientation of the daily life of the inhabitants” (Dumper 2014,
24 p.5).
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28 This has created a diplomatic controversy about where embassies are to be located, which
29 dates to the time Israel declared Jerusalem its capital, in 1950. The international community
30 did not recognise this move and while Israeli institutions started to shift their seat to
31 Jerusalem, embassies stayed in Tel Aviv. When in 1980 Israel passed a new law on Jerusalem
32 and moved some of its offices to East Jerusalem, the response was a UN Security Council
33 resolution (Res.478) urging those remaining countries that still had diplomatic representation
34 in Jerusalem to move them to Tel Aviv, which they did. Since then, the position of the state
35 of Israel has been that if states wanted to open a new diplomatic office in Jerusalem, it would
36 have to be an embassy to the state of Israel, de facto ‘freezing’ the diplomatic contingent in
37 the city, but allowing ‘humanitarian offices’ to be opened in Ramallah.
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41 Therefore it has been an act of political resistance that European diplomatic representations
42 still exist in Jerusalem, targeting representation not in Israel but instead in those territories
43 (Jerusalem but also Gaza,^v Golan Heights and West Bank) over which the Europeans have
44 not unanimously recognised a clear source of sovereignty. In Jerusalem, there is a traditional
45 ‘hard core’ of consular representations, which predated 1967. This is referred to as the
46 “Consular Corps of the Corpus Separatum” (see Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable
47 Rights of the Palestinian People 1997) and it is composed of nine states, which are
48 predominantly European: Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK (as well as
49 Turkey, US and the Vatican). The European representations are all located in the same block,
50 literally side by side (in Baybars Street, in the area of Sheikh Jarra: Belgium, France, Italy
51 and Sweden) or in its immediate vicinity (Spain and UK). They also share the same
52 denomination as ‘Consulates-General.’ In addition, Italy and France have also got offices in
53 West Jerusalem, which they tend to use as their main residence. The French residence is
54 particularly grand, dating back to the XVII century and to the privileges / responsibilities that
55 France had (and continues to claim) on the Holy Sites.
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3 In all the other cases, European countries have not been allowed to open an office in East
4 Jerusalem and 15 member states opened one in Ramallah instead.^{vi} These represent practices
5 that are partially of resistance and partially of recognition. Several but not all are located in
6 the same building / venue: in the so-called VIP centre (Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta), in
7 the al-Watania towers (Hungary, Ireland) or in Othman Ben Affan Street (Denmark, Finland).
8 Most notably for our focus, there is a variety of names used to indicate these offices,^{vii} which
9 is particularly striking in the case of countries that have recognised Palestine as a state at
10 some point (all Central and Eastern European countries,^{viii} plus Cyprus, Malta and Sweden).
11 Technically, these should be all diplomatic Embassies, but they do not portray themselves as
12 such on their official websites, where a clear, formal and official reference to the state of
13 Palestine exists only in the case of Cyprus, Malta and Romania.
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16 Moreover, several European officials have private residencies in East Jerusalem or in
17 Ramallah and share with Palestinians the daily grind of occupation. East Jerusalem is the
18 'politically correct' part of the city in which internationals live (pushing prices to very high
19 levels, a challenge for small diplomatic budgets). It also entails living in the worst off parts of
20 Jerusalem, where infrastructure is poor and violence much more likely. Ramallah is also a
21 disadvantaged location, despite the façade of middle-class that has pervaded parts of the city,
22 and reaching Jerusalem from Ramallah entails crossing at least one check-point and facing
23 not only the related security issues, but also the traffic jams that check-points (and Qalandiya
24 in particular) can create.
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27 A special case is the EU representation, which officially was not to exist where it is and
28 probably is the only EU building without the EU flag and without an indication of the EU
29 presence.^{ix} It was opened in 1994 in East Jerusalem, with the name of "EU Technical
30 Assistance Office to the Palestinians."^x As the EU has refused (or tried to refuse) to
31 coordinate development aid with Israeli forces, Israel denied to lease the building. A
32 compromise was eventually found (and then found again, when the lease had to be re-
33 negotiated), but part of it is that no EU signs are to be visible from the outside (see Fig.1). It
34 is here, however, that all EU-related meetings, including regular meetings of European
35 officials, are held.
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Fig.1 – The office of the EU Technical Assistance Office in Jerusalem, Sept.2014, notable for its lack of EU insignia. I was forbidden to take a closer picture.

While the existence of these representations shows a practice of resistance to Israeli occupation and of partial recognition of the state of Palestine, it is important to specify that de facto diplomatic privileges are granted by Israel, as the occupying power. Whereas two interviewees recalled that in the past it was customary (if symbolic) to present Consuls General's credentials also to the UN, reflecting the original idea of Jerusalem as a *corpus separatum* under UN authority, this practice was fallen in disregard by 2014. The practice of diplomatic privileges has thus put the Europeans in the position to at least partially recognise the de facto authority of Israel over the occupied territories.

Interviewees confirm (contra Mochon 1996) that most (if not all) diplomats belonging to European representations (be they in Jerusalem or in Ramallah) are listed as consular personnel on the EU member states' embassies in Tel Aviv. It is inclusion into this list that grants them some (but not all) diplomatic privileges, such as for instance a 'CC' (consular corps) car plaque. The issue came forcefully to public attention after the Swedish recognition of the state of Palestine in October 2014, as Israel was able to force a downgrading of the Swedish Consulate General by refusing diplomatic immunity to the person who would have replaced a departing Swedish official. Moreover, the Swedish minister of Foreign Affairs and her deputy have been denied security cover by Israel, de facto barring them from visiting Israel, Jerusalem and Palestinian territories in January 2015. Other Swedish officials have also faced difficulties.^{xi} Less in the public domain, but equally interesting is the case of the

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3 French School in Jerusalem, which is located in West Jerusalem and has constantly aimed to
4 establish itself as an extra-territorial entity, a move regularly contested by Israel.
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7 Palestinian authorities are more than willing to grant diplomatic privileges, but it is of no
8 consequences. On the contrary, they address all European officials as ‘ambassadors’ and use
9 all the formalities that go with the title. However, the everyday of occupation means that only
10 Israel has the ultimate monopoly of force, which makes the daily resistance of European
11 officials interesting, if only partially successful.
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14 As well as ‘being on site’ as a practice of (partial) resistance and recognition, European
15 officials avoid ‘being on site with Israeli symbols.’ Therefore, they avoid visiting public sites
16 in Jerusalem accompanied by Israeli forces or participating in Israeli ceremonies held beyond
17 the Green Line. European diplomats have long since established that they should “avoid
18 having Israeli security and/or protocol accompanying high ranking officials from Member
19 States when visiting the Old City/East Jerusalem” (quoted in Dumper 2014, p. 176), in order
20 to avoid the inevitable picture of them smiling amid Israeli soldiers or policemen next to a
21 well-recognisable monument, e.g. in the Old City. Moreover, that part of diplomatic life
22 which is participation to public ceremonies is also a potential minefield. The UK established
23 that “the Consul-General and staff do not attend Israeli national functions although they do
24 attend municipal functions within pre-1967 borders unless connected with anniversaries such
25 as the unification of Jerusalem” (quoted in Dumper 1997, p.246).
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28 Therefore, the landscape in which European diplomats are embedded in the East Jerusalem-
29 Ramallah area is one in which conflict and occupation are the prevailing practices, resistance
30 and recognition are intertwined, compromises are found but principles also upheld. It is a
31 landscape of practices in which there is a strong hostility to the European presence and this
32 has contributed to fuel European diplomatic practices of resistance to Israeli occupation and
33 recognition of Palestinian forms of political authority.
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35 **European diplomats in the East Jerusalem – Ramallah area as a community of practice**

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38 Out of the daily poignancy of the practices described, European diplomats have developed a
39 clear identity and a set of tools with which they address uncertainties related to their job and
40 to the European foreign policy towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The community spirit
41 and the type of resources they have developed is best exemplified in the yearly issuing of a
42 report on East Jerusalem (see also Bicchi 2014). This report is the most widely known
43 example of reports issued by European Heads of Mission (HoMs), given its relevance in
44 terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It provides an annual assessment of developments on the
45 ground in East Jerusalem and as such it is particularly important, though generally considered
46 stronger than what Brussels and most European capitals tend to find palatable. It is used here
47 as a key indicator of the existence of a CoP, as community of interpretation.
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50 The European representation started to produce a yearly report on East Jerusalem in 2004,
51 although in the previous years a ‘Jerusalem Watch’ report was occasionally circulated.^{xii} At
52 first the report was public, but it became confidential in 2005. It is, however, regularly leaked
53 to the press,^{xiii} and it used to reach the public domain, until the 2015 assessment of 2014,
54 which is the last publicly available one.^{xiv}
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57 The reports tend to be divided in three parts (regardless of the specific number of sections),
58 the last one being the most relevant for our purpose. First, the report includes reliable data, be
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3 it from a UN publication or a map or similar. Second, there is a political assessment of the
4 situation in East Jerusalem, which generally tackles settlements in and around East Jerusalem,
5 restrictions on Palestinian housing, access to the city, etc. Third and most importantly, there
6 is a set of recommendations. These are numerous, specific and far-reaching. They usually
7 include a few contentious points, on which there is no agreement among EU member states,
8 if we listen to what emerges from Brussels or from national capitals. The 2009 report, for
9 instance, mentioned the option to prevent financial transactions from EU member states'
10 actors that support settlers in East Jerusalem "by adopting appropriate EU legislation", and
11 information sharing on violent settlers to assess "whether to grant entry into the EU". While
12 the word 'sanctions' is banned from EU-speak, there has been a similar flavour in the
13 recommendations across the years. In the most recent edition of the report, the tone of
14 recommendations has been slightly less outspoken. For instance, in relation to violent settlers,
15 the 2015 report suggests to "consider possible consequences" "as regards immigration
16 regulations in the EU member states." The meaning is however univocal.
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20 The identity of views on this set of contentious issues underscores the existence of a
21 "community of interpretation," in which members see eye to eye in terms of not only which
22 data is relevant and reliable, but also how to interpret it and what kind of policy conclusions
23 to draw from it. The fact that recommendations go beyond the consensus reached in Brussels
24 and in national capitals also speaks to the "appropriateness" of the endeavour on the part of
25 the community of practitioners. The report is a tool this CoP has developed in order to make
26 sense of the conflict in which they are embedded, as well as to communicate their
27 interpretation to both Brussels and their national capitals.
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30 Equally interesting in the case of this report is the process leading up to it, and how it has
31 evolved. In 2009, when I was able to follow the process quite closely, the report was
32 requested by the (then Swedish) Presidency of the Council Working Group on the Middle
33 East Peace Process (COMEP) to contribute to the drafting of the Council Conclusions for
34 December 2009. Sweden kicked off the process in Jerusalem, convening the first meeting in
35 summer 2009. Most importantly, however, Sweden did not prepare a draft of the report. On
36 the contrary, at the first meeting the Swedish political officer in Jerusalem raised a number of
37 points for discussion with her colleagues such as the exact definition of the term 'Jerusalem,'
38 the structure of the report, and the need to update and prioritise facts as well as to discuss the
39 EU interest.^{xv} After 3-4 meetings addressing these general aspects, national representatives
40 agreed to share the load in drafting the report.^{xvi} One country focused on social services,
41 another on ID cards, a third on religious affairs, etc.,^{xvii} in an ad hoc manner and without
42 'domaines réservés.'^{xviii} On the contrary, political officers discussed openly the sources they
43 were thinking of consulting and received suggestions about further sources that might be able
44 to deliver useful information.^{xix} They then pieced it together, refined it as much as possible,
45 and passed it on to the HoMs. The HoMs went over every single word, consulted bilaterally
46 with their capitals and finalized the text. The process was, therefore, a "collective
47 endeavour," as a diplomat put it, with "red lines" being decided "en route," rather than a
48 priori.^{xx}
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52 The report went then on to play a significant role in the controversial Declaration issued by
53 the Council on 8th of December, 2009. The controversy focused on member states' intention
54 (later partially downsized) to declare East Jerusalem the capital of the future Palestinian state.
55 As the draft of the Declaration prepared by the PSC was leaked to the press, Israel started a
56 diplomatic battle to tone it down, with some success.^{xxi} Still, the Declaration was unusual for
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3 the emphasis on the issue of Jerusalem, which directly relied on the content of the HoMs
4 report.
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6 Since then, the process has changed, but only to an extent. The 2013 report, which analysed
7 events in 2012, was prepared with a similar division of labour. As an interviewee explained,
8 it came to include a proviso in order to be approved, specifying that recommendations were
9 to be implemented “as appropriate.” In 2014, when the 2015 report was in preparation and I
10 was able to interview European diplomats^{xxii} as well as within the EU Delegation,^{xxiii} EU
11 officials were by then in charge of coordinating the preparatory work, the Lisbon Treaty
12 having abolished the rotating national Presidency in favour of the EEAS. The process
13 remained however very similar, stemming from an informal discussion among political
14 officers before being polished by HoMs with the contribution of capitals. It remains to be
15 seen whether the further consolidation of the EEAS brought subsequently a more centralised
16 approach to the drafting.
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19 While the above shows a common interpretation of events by local European diplomats and
20 EU officials and thus the existence of a community of interpretation/practice, where should
21 its boundaries be located? The evidence shows that there is a difference between the
22 interpretation prevailing in the Jerusalem area, on the one hand, and those embraced in
23 Brussels and in member states’ national capitals, on the other. The view from
24 Jerusalem/Ramallah is considered more assertive than elsewhere and several of the
25 recommendations put forward in the reports on East Jerusalem are not embraced in Brussels,
26 when they come under scrutiny in the Maghreb-Machrek (MAMA) Working Group of the
27 Council, as testified by the Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process that the Council
28 regularly approves. Moreover, in Brussels it is customary to divide participants of the
29 MAMA Working Group in two “like-minded” formations, a more pro-Israeli one and a more
30 pro-Palestinian one, as referred to by interviewees. Capitals’ views can be even further apart
31 than the Conclusions or declarations issued in Brussels, as shown by the occasional
32 statements issued by individual member states after Council Conclusions or (more often)
33 declarations. There are, therefore, clear boundaries between ‘the view from Jerusalem,’ ‘the
34 view(s) from Brussels’ and ‘the views from the capitals.’
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38 How do we explain the existence of such a boundary? Is this a case in which diplomats ‘go
39 native’ (Berridge 2010, pp.107-08) or ‘rogue’ and lose touch with the ‘real’ policy line set at
40 home? Three points are of relevance here. First, the gap is not too broad to be bridged at
41 times. During the period 2009-2014, a remarkable convergence occurred about the broad
42 guidelines set in Jerusalem/Ramallah and several of the recommendations proposed were
43 adopted. Second, capitals that were reluctant to follow this trend have since become more
44 assertive. Earlier on, in 2010, an interviewee suggested it was “easier to reach unanimity” in
45 Jerusalem than in Brussels or in capitals. Moreover, another interviewee mentioned that the
46 report was useful “to keep the capitals informed,” thus indicating a clear sense of direction to
47 the flow of knowledge, from the local CoP to capitals. This has however changed. In 2013,
48 capitals reportedly became more involved in the drafting of the report and more than one
49 interviewee mentioned double-checking the final draft with his/her capital. While double-
50 checking was the exception in 2013, the following year an influential interviewee lamented
51 that “now capitals interfere in the process” and the report, which should be “provocative” and
52 stir a debate in Brussels and in capitals, had instead become plain. This was confirmed for
53 instance by the relief shown by a more pro-Israel diplomat in the Jerusalem area in 2014.
54 2014 seems thus to mark the reverse in the trend. While in 2010 the interpretation of the
55 Jerusalem CoP was influential in Brussels and in capitals, the capitals reacted by reigning in
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3 on the freedom that their diplomats in Jerusalem had. This points to a trajectory in the
4 existence of a CoP in the Jerusalem area, which was able to coalesce around a locally
5 established interpretation in 2010-13, but was threatened in its existence by the encroachment
6 of capitals (and related national CoPs) by 2014. This finding also highlights interesting
7 research avenues, centred on how local CoPs of European diplomats interact or overlap with
8 existing CoPs in Brussels and in national capitals, which also contribute to the making of
9 European foreign policy.
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11 **Conclusions**

12 This article has showed how better to understand an empirical case study (European foreign
13 policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict) by using the suggestion of practice approaches to
14 focus on practices, landscapes and, in this case, communities of practices, with a special
15 emphasis on the local and the micro-dimension. It will have served its purpose if readers will
16 take home not only a clearer understanding of what Europe is and does (and how Europe is
17 done and by whom) in this case, but also a better sense of how practices can be employed to
18 analyse empirical evidence and gather theoretical insights.
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22 The first goal of this article has been to engage with the analytical concept ‘community of
23 practice’ to highlight interesting parts of empirical evidence, while providing theoretical
24 leverage. During the period 2010-14, European diplomats in the Jerusalem area represented a
25 CoP based on their common practices of political resistance and recognition, on their
26 common interpretation of what needs doing (as expressed in their reports to Brussels) and on
27 the set of tools they developed. Moreover, in the case under scrutiny, the context (or, more
28 specifically, the landscape) of occupation practices, together with the contradictory status of
29 Jerusalem, has helped practitioners practice the same forms of (partial) resistance and
30 recognition, as visible in their diplomatic seats, in their diplomatic status and in their
31 participation in the official life in Jerusalem.
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34 The evidence gathered here also points to areas for further exploration, beyond the obvious
35 one of the post-2014 period. The first area is the relationship between the macro, meso and
36 micro level in the analysis of CoPs. CoPs can be found at any of these levels and they can
37 also mediate between these levels (cf. Conclusions, in Hughes, Jewson et al. 2007). While
38 much of the IR literature has used CoPs for macro phenomena (Adler 2008, Adler 2009, Goff
39 2015), this does not exhaust the range of possibilities, which instead should include analyses
40 of micro phenomena, such as here. Macro CoPs are a very suggestive metaphor, but local
41 CoPs are a more punctual analytical instrument, which allows for a closer examination of e.g.
42 relations between insiders and outsiders. The beauty of local CoPs is that participants know
43 each other’s name, instead of just ‘imagining’ a collective group and projecting their own
44 identity onto a group. A second avenue for further research consists of relations between
45 CoPs. This includes the relationship between local CoPs, such as in the East Jerusalem-
46 Ramallah area, and other existing CoPs, such as in Brussels and in national capitals, which
47 also contribute to the same macro-practices (e.g. the Middle East Peace Process, EU foreign
48 policy, diplomacy).
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52 The second goal of this article has been to stress the relevance of the local and the everyday
53 as a site in which the universal is to be captured. The issue here is not to identify ‘nice
54 stories’ or ‘single-outcome case studies’ (Gerring 2006), but rather to capture the general
55 pattern through its embodiment in the local and in the everyday, without which it would not
56 exist. Therefore, the description of the way in which European diplomats act and represent
57 Europe in the area in and around Jerusalem is a description of how Europe tries (among other
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practices) to resist Israeli occupation and contribute to the recognition of Palestinian institutions as a different source of political authority. While writing, I have in mind European diplomats spending considerable time to navigate the difficult Jerusalemite landscape, with their 'CC' car plaque, on their way to a meeting in the EU Delegation's anonymous building. This is not spectacular resistance, it is not complete resistance (which would entail leaving the area), but it is a form of resistance that instantiates the European position on Jerusalem. Similarly, it is not a full recognition of the state of Palestine, as Sweden most notably experienced. But it is a way to keep the possibility of recognition open.

Therefore, in my view practice approaches are an interesting ontological and epistemological development, which does not necessarily entail jettisoning well-established theoretical traditions in International Relations, but suggests instead an attention to specific issues and mechanisms – a shift of emphasis. While other authors in this special issue have brought forward the agenda of practice theory *stricto sensu*, I would like to conclude by encouraging a plurality of practice turns within existing theoretical perspectives, as practice approaches can contribute to all debates aiming to navigate between methodological individualism and structuralism.

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ⁱ The EU Delegation is not formally called so, as explained below.

ⁱⁱ For an early overview of different definitions, see Cox (2005).

ⁱⁱⁱ As well as a portion of land defined as 'no-man's land.'

^{iv} For an overview of the different but overlapping regimes that regulates the city, see Del Sarto (2014) and Dumper (2014).

^v Gaza is another interesting case. As it is nearly completely cut off from Jerusalem and from the West Bank, EU member states have started in recent years to open nominal offices in the Gaza Strip, which European officials visit occasionally – raising the issue of the extent to which they lend recognition of the de facto government in Gaza, which is run by Hamas.

^{vi} Countries not represented either in Jerusalem or in Ramallah are: Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Slovakia.

^{vii} Correct at the time of going to press, 24 August 2016. It is interesting to note that discrepancies remain despite the attempt by the EU Delegation to present a uniform set of denominations: see http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/westbank/travel_eu/consulates/index_en.htm for the list, last visited 24 August 2016.

^{viii} Baltic countries excluded.

^{ix} Correct as of September 2014.

^x But it is currently listed together with other EU Delegations. See: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/westbank/index_en.htm accessed 12.2.2016

^{xi} See a summary here: <http://www.timesofisrael.com/swedish-officials-unwelcome-in-israel-deputy-fm-says/> accessed 12.2.2016

^{xii} See HoMs report "Jerusalem watch (9/97-12/97)", 28 January 1998 and "Jérusalem Watch", 8 July 1999.

^{xiii} Most recently, the report is referenced here: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/12/israeli-settlements-eu-fails-to-act-on-its-diplomats-report>, last accessed 24 August 2016.

^{xiv} Available for instance here: <http://www.kaapeli.fi/akys/pdf/EAST%20JERUSALEM%20REPORT%20-%20HOM%20.pdf>, last accessed 24 August 2016.

^{xv} Interview with European diplomat, Jerusalem, 18.V.2010.

^{xvi} Interview with two European diplomats, Jerusalem, 20.V.2010, 9am and 1.30pm.

^{xvii} Interview with two European diplomats, Jerusalem, 20.V.2010, 9am and 10.30am.

^{xviii} Interview with European diplomat, Jerusalem, 20.V.2010, 1.30pm.

^{xix} Idem.

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4 ^{xx} Interview with European diplomat, Jerusalem, 20.V.2010, 10.30am.

5 ^{xxi} See Tony Barber, "Protests force EU to drop Jerusalem plan", *FT*, 8.XII.2009; Natasha Mozgovaya, Barak
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8 ^{xxii} Interview with six European diplomats, Jerusalem/Ramallah, 23-25.IX.2014.

9 ^{xxiii} Interview with two EU official, Jerusalem, 24-25.IX.2014.
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