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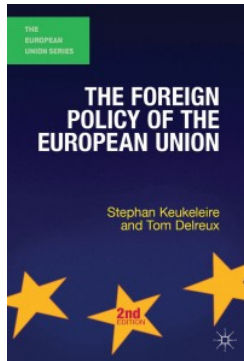
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Interview with Stephan Keukeleire and Tom Delreux

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In this interview – part of European Geostrategy's now long-running interview series

(<http://www.europeangeostrategy.org/interviews/>) – Alexander Mattelaer talks with Stephan Keukeleire, Professor at the University of Leuven and the College of Europe, and Tom Delreux, Associate Professor at the Catholic University of Louvain, about their new book *The Foreign Policy of the European Union* (<http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?pid=592058>) (EU) – especially the role of the Member States, the interplay between European external and internal policy goals and European structural power.

AM: Contrary to what the title might suggest, your new book is not just about the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, but about the foreign policy of the EU broadly defined. How can we make the best sense of the contemporary foreign policy system of the EU and its Member States?

SK-TD: We indeed consider EU foreign policy as a policy area that is broader than merely CFSP and CSDP. It also encompasses external action domains, such as trade, enlargement, development cooperation or sanctions, as well as the external dimension of policy fields that in fields that were primarily developed with an internal focus, such as environment, energy and migration and asylum policy. All these aspects are an inherent part of the EU's foreign policy. Trade and development cooperation provisions enable the EU to substantiate its foreign policy and they are important instruments of foreign policy. They can also offer the EU leverage, as the conditionality principle applied in enlargement policy nicely illustrates. Finally, various types of international agreements, such as association agreements, entail contractual, political and institutional frameworks within which the EU can conduct its foreign policy. But this broad scope of foreign policy areas can also have an undermining effect on foreign policy

activities, as trade interests may be competing with the interest of the EU to promote human rights promotion. This broad foreign policy toolbox thus not only provides the EU with opportunities, but also with challenges and potential weaknesses.

AM: Your book also gives a central place to the Member States in the EU's foreign policy. How do you see their role?

SK-TD: Although Member States indeed remain the key actors in the intergovernmentally organised CFSP and CSDP, we argue that this does not necessarily undermine EU foreign policy. When a number of interested Member States – in the sense of Member States with a particular interest in an issue or Member States that are interested in that issue – are able to find an agreement among them, this can already be sufficient to take steps in EU foreign policy. Likewise, the EU can make progress in its foreign policy when it pragmatically deviates from formal Treaty provisions and when various EU actors (Member States, the High Representative, the EEAS, yet also the Commission) informally cooperate and divide the work among them. This can occur in a more or less institutionalised way, as we currently witness in the EU3+3 talks with Iran, but also in a less visible way such various Member States representing the EU in international climate change negotiations from behind the EU flag. Such a specialisation and informal division of labour often allow the EU to make progress in its foreign policy and to overcome the formal hurdles of the unanimity requirement, of the formal institutional architecture's complexity and the rigidity, and of the different ways external competences are divided between the EU and the Member States.

AM: You emphasise that the EU's effectiveness should not only be assessed in terms of external policy goals, but also in terms of internal policy goals. What does this exactly mean?

SK-TD: We think that evaluating the effectiveness of EU foreign policy goes beyond assessing the EU's influence on crises, conflicts and structures outside the EU. Foreign policy decisions are not serving only such external objectives, but also internal ones. Developments and concrete actions in EU foreign policy are also means for Member States to manage their mutual relationships, to limit or broaden the role of the Commission in foreign policy, or to create a particular image or identity that differentiates the EU approach from other players in international politics. In our book we also label these internal objectives as 'inter-relational', 'integration' and 'identity' objectives. Such internal objectives are not explicit, but paying attention to them can help us to understand that a foreign policy action can be far from effective in terms of influencing the EU's external environment because it might well be the case that it serves internal objectives of Member States and the EU at large.

AM: You introduce an important distinction between ‘relational foreign policy’ vis-à-vis other actors, and ‘structural foreign policy’, i.e. the ability to define the rules of the game. How does this relate to the strengths and weaknesses of the EU?

SK-TD: We indeed understand ‘foreign policy’ not only as shaping relations with other countries and regions and as responding to crises and conflicts in other regions (i.e. ‘relational foreign policy’). Foreign policy can also influence long-term processes and shape political, legal, socio-economic and other *structures* in third countries, in other regions in the world, and on the global level (i.e. ‘structural foreign policy’). With regard to the EU’s relational foreign policy, we argue that, besides some clear failures (often on issues where the whole international community failed, such as Syria), European diplomacy has also resulted in a number of successes which are too easily taken for granted but which are actually quite spectacular. Examples are the EU’s successful mediation between Kosovo and Serbia (leading to the agreements of last year) and its major role in de-escalating the conflict with Iran and acting as go-between between the US and Iran. The EU equally played an active role in in even more problematic security contexts, such as in the gradual and partial stabilisation of Somalia. In Somalia, the EU – outside the spotlights – provided military training to Somali soldiers who afterwards were effective in partially regaining control over the Somali territory. This was quite spectacular, but it did not receive attention in prime-time in CNN or BBC World.

AM: And how do you evaluate the EU’s performance in terms of structural foreign policy?

SK-TD: When looking at the EU’s structural foreign policy, we argue that, despite remaining problems, such as in Ukraine, the EU’s enlargement policy and its current policy towards the Southern Balkans can by and large be considered as major successes. No other major power in the world – the US, Russia, China – has been as successful as the EU in stabilising, restructuring, and increasing the welfare of a dozen of its neighbouring countries. However, beyond the circle of potential Member States, the EU failed to convince particularly the population in the Southern Mediterranean as well as in parts of the post-Soviet space that the political, economic, legal, societal and other structures that the EU promotes can also be advantageous for them. This reflects the EU’s tendency to focus its attention on the states, regions and international regimes, but to neglect the impact (or lack of impact) of its policies on individuals and societies in third countries, for instance with regard to unemployment or the demand of respect for different value systems.

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