



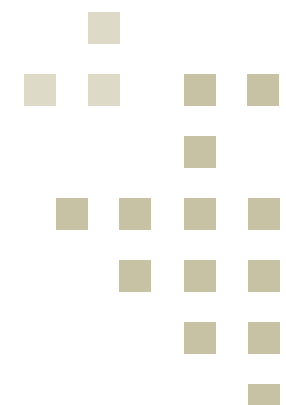
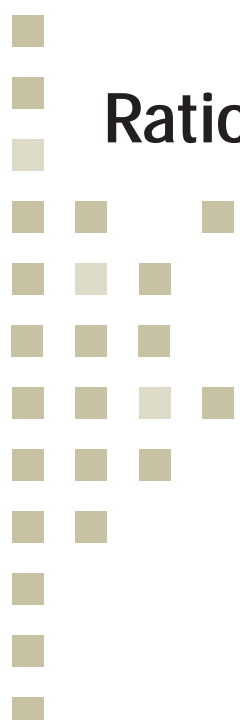
# [659] Paper

## EU Security Policy: Contrasting Rationalism and Social Constructivism

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# EU Security Policy: Contrasting Rationalism and Social Constructivism

Pernille Rieker

**[Summary]** There are two very different stories that can be told about EU security policy during 2003. On the one hand, some argue that the deep division among important EU countries in relation to the Iraq war is a final confirmation of the absence of an EU security policy. On the other hand, some argue that the last year has been a year of considerable intensity in relation to EU security policy – despite the fact that EU cannot yet be characterised as a unitary actor. One of the reasons for these very different stories is that they are based on fundamentally different ideas and theories about the basic mechanisms in international relations. In this paper Pernille Rieker will contrast how two different approaches, namely *Rationalism* and *Social constructivism* would analyse EU security policy. The paper starts with a short presentation of the meta-theoretical foundation of these approaches. The second part discusses how each of them views the conditions for multilateral cooperation and security. In the third part these perspectives on EU security policy will be discussed and some empirical data that support each of them will be presented. Finally, the paper ends on a discussion concerning whether these approaches must be seen as being alternative or complementary approaches.



## Introduction

EU security policy is a topical issue. There are two very different stories that can be told about EU security policy during the last year.

On the one hand, some argue that the deep division among important EU countries in relation to the Iraq war is a final confirmation of the absence of an EU security policy – or at least that it was simply declaratory. It is argued that when the really important issues rise on the agenda, the large states in the EU will stick to their national interests. The argument is therefore that also the prospects for a EU security policy in the future are weak.

On the other hand, some argue that the last year has been a year of considerable intensity in relation to EU security policy – despite the fact that EU cannot yet be characterised as a unitary actor. The EU security and defence policy has moved beyond declaration and become operational. For instance, in 2003 the EU took over UN's *police mission* in Bosnia; it took over NATO's *peace keeping mission* in Macedonia; and it undertook its first *peace enforcement operation outside of Europe*, in Congo. In addition the member states agreed on several issues that will further strengthen the EU's security policy, the most important being the adoption of an EU security strategy that defines threats, objectives and policy implications for the EU.

One of the reasons for these very different stories is that they are based on fundamentally different ideas and theories about the basic mechanisms in international relations. In this paper I will contrast how three approaches, namely *Neo-realism*, *Intergovernmentalism* and *Social constructivism* would analyse EU security policy.<sup>1</sup>

The paper is organised as follows. It starts with a short presentation of the meta-theoretical foundation of these three approaches. The second part discusses how each of them views the conditions for multilateral cooperation and security. In the third part these perspectives on EU security policy will be discussed and some empirical data that support each of them will be presented. Finally, the paper ends on a discussion concerning whether these approaches must be seen as being alternative or complementary approaches.

## The meta-theoretical foundation

In fact, these three approaches have rather different views on what in the philosophy of science is called ontology, meaning what reality is; on epistemology, meaning how knowledge about this reality is reached; and finally they have different views on the basic mechanisms of action and change. It is important to note, however, that I will contrast simplified and ideal types of these approaches in this paper.

Neo-realism and Intergovernmentalism are actually two theories about international relations, sharing a common meta-theoretical foundation. Social Constructivism, on the other hand, is in reality nothing but a meta-theory in itself. There are a number of scholars writing within a constructivist approach, but there is no such thing as a single “social constructivist

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1. This paper is based on the lecture given for the doctoral degree 5 March 2004 at the University of Oslo. The topic was decided by the doctoral committee represented by Professor Adrian Hyde-Price, Professor Clive Archer and Professor Janne Haaland Matlary.

theory” about international relations in general or European integration in particular.

The lack of a specific theory of Social Constructivism makes a direct comparison between these approaches difficult. In fact, it makes more sense to contrast Social Constructivism to the meta-theoretical foundation of Neo-realism and Intergovernmentalism.

It is common to distinguish between three meta-theoretical approaches in the study of International Relations: *Rationalism*, *Social Constructivism* and *Reflectivism* (Christiansen et al. 2001: 5). I will start by saying a few words about the first two. I will leave out Reflectivism here since this goes beyond the topic of this paper. However, it is important to note that some also refer to Reflectivism as Constructivism. What I will present here is a somewhat softer version of the constructivist approaches.

Rationalism has been the dominant approach in IR for many years. Neo-realism and Intergovernmentalism belong to this group. Although these two have somewhat different views on the likelihood of multilateral cooperation, they share the same meta-theoretical foundation. With regard to *ontology*, Rationalists have a tendency to favour materialism or so-called hard facts. Norms, social structures and identities are given less or no attention. With regard to *epistemology*, they favour causal explanations and the method of theory testing. Finally, their theory of action focus primarily on the role of agencies or actors, and often this has meant that the nation state has been considered as the most important, or sometimes even the only relevant unit to study.

Social Constructivism, on the other hand, has an ontology that is open for both hard and softer evidence, material and social facts. Its epistemology does not reject the possibility of testing theories against evidence, but also puts emphasis on the more qualitative and interpretative methods of inquiry. Social Constructivism is less interested in causal explanations and more interested in interpreting and examining how structures and agents interact and are mutually constitutive.

This indicates that these approaches have different meta-theoretical foundations. However, we should be careful about over-emphasising this point. Sometimes the differences are more a result of different research interests or different research strategies.

## **Multilateral cooperation and political integration**

How do Rationalists and Social Constructivists view multilateral cooperation and political integration?

I will start with the Rationalist approaches. Neo-realists and Intergovernmentalists share the assumption of states as unitary rational actors, and that multilateral cooperation is a result of inter state or intergovernmental bargaining (Hoffmann 2000; Hoffmann 2003) or of an alliance made against a common threat (Waltz 1979).

However, there are some differences between these two approaches. Neo-realism is based on classical realism, which view the ‘natural condition’ of the international system in terms of anarchy. This means that there is no overarching authority to identify common rules. The ability to promote and

protect national interests depends on the economic and military power of the state. Order is a result of the balance of power. Multilateral cooperation is likely to emerge only when it is in the interests of the great powers. International institutions are seen as operating within a mandate delegated from the nation states, thus having limited, if any, autonomy. When national interests cease to coincide, the multilateral cooperation disintegrates.

During the Cold War, this classical power politics perspective was further elaborated into what is often referred to as Neo-realism. Neo-realists assumed that states primarily are interested in survival and protection from threats. State behaviour will vary according to the structure of the international system (Waltz 1979). In their view multilateral institutions may emerge if such institutions can work as an alliance towards a common threat. Consequently, Neo-realists found it easy to account for the multilateral co-operation between Western countries during the Cold War period.

However, they have had greater problems in explaining the continued multilateral cooperation and political integration in the West after the end of the Cold War, when the threats were fundamentally altered. For instance, one Neo-realist, John Mearsheimer, argued in 1990 that the prospects for crisis and wars among the major European states were likely to increase with the end of the Cold War (Mearsheimer 1990). In a book from 2001 called *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, he explains the fact that these predictions have not yet been fulfilled by referring to the continued US engagement in Europe. Furthermore he now predicts that the US will probably disengage from Europe before 2020 and that security competition and the risk of war among European great powers then will increase (Mearsheimer 2001: 379). Rather surprisingly, he argues “that Germany probably will become a potential hegemon and thus the main source of trouble in the new Europe” (p. 394). While Mearsheimer’s argument that the peaceful integration between the European countries has come about due to American engagement is shared by many (see, for instance, Kagan 2003: 72), there are not that many who share his predictions for the years to come.

Let us now turn to the Intergovernmentalists. In the following I will interpret Intergovernmentalism as meaning Liberal Intergovernmentalism, primarily as we know it from the works of Andrew Moravcsik. The intergovernmentalists reject the Neo-realist assumption that state preferences must be treated as naturally conflictual. They also reject the assumption that state preferences should be treated as convergent, comprising a collective action problem. Intergovernmentalism builds on the tradition of Neo-liberalism aiming at capturing the complex interdependence of states in the international system and thus departing from those who treat states as billiard balls or black boxes with fixed preferences for wealth, security or power” (Keohane and Nye 1977; Moravcsik 1993: 481).

The central argument of Liberal Intergovernmentalism is that governments are assumed to act purposively in the international arena, but on the basis of goals that are defined domestically. The central claim is that the broad lines of European integration since 1955 reflect three factors, which made governments willing to coordinate or pool their national sovereignty: First, their economic interests; second, their relative (bargaining) power; and finally their credible commitments for transferring sovereignty.

Social constructivists, on the other hand, have a different view on multi-lateral cooperation and political integration. They view cooperation as a result of social interaction and collective identity formation, not inter-state or intergovernmental bargaining. They do not accept the idea that the interests of states are fixed and independent of social structures. It is this basic assumption that makes room for the introduction of other mechanisms for understanding international cooperation (Wendt 1999).

Cooperation and integration were understood as being a result of other processes than bargaining. And there are some similarities with another Rationalist approach, the so-called Neo-functionalism, represented, for instance by Ernst Haas, who focused on how international interaction and shared problem solving may trigger processes of learning and spillover, promoting further political integration and thereby also undermining the notion of national sovereignty and autonomy. However, Social Constructivists do not view political integration merely as problem solving or as a process with a clear end-goal, like the functionalists do.

In a book by Christiansen et al. called *The Social Construction of Europe*, it is argued that a constructivist study of the European integration process can be done in three different ways. First, a study of institutionalisation of politics through rules and norms (Jørgensen 1999); second, a study of the formation of identities and the construction of political communities; (Adler and Barnett eds. 1998; Rieker 2003); third, a study of the role of language, discourse and communicative action (Sjursen 2003). These strategies, however, share the assumption that integration can be understood as a result of a common world-view, the establishment of common institutions and the development of capacities, rules, norms and standards that are likely to influence the member states.

## Security

Let me move on to what these three different approaches have to say about *security* and *security policy*. For the Neo-realists, military threats are the prime issue of security. The central instrument for maintaining *security* is the military capacity of the specific state alone or together with its allies. *Security policy* is then a policy of the build-up and use of military force. The very essence of Neo-realism is to focus on military threats, on military instruments to limit such threats, and the role of military capacity in shaping the world order (Waltz 1979; Walt 1991; Mearsheimer 2001).

Liberal Intergovernmentalists, on the other hand, are not that focused on military threats and military capacities as instruments. In fact, they are not much concerned about security, and give primacy to economic interests instead of security concerns. However, Moravcsik acknowledges that also geopolitical threats and security concerns were involved in the establishment of the EU.<sup>2</sup>

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2. He argues that if only economic interests were involved, one should have expected a pan-European free trade area to emerge at a much earlier time. In order to explain the specific West European co-operation requires, in his view, attention to geopolitical ideology. Still, he maintains that member states are not willing to transfer sovereignty in the area of security policy, due to differences in national interests (Moravcsik 1998).



Since the 1980s many scholars have been concerned with the concept of security. Among the Rationalists some (who felt affiliation to the Liberal school rather than the Realist school) introduced a broader definition of security. Security was not only referring to military threats, but also environmental and social threats. For instance, in 1989 a special issue of the journal *Survival* was devoted to discussing the broadening of the concept of security (see *Survival* 1989, 31:6). This was widely criticised by many Realists. Their argument was that such a widening made it impossible to determine the limits of security (Walt 1991).

Despite this critique, the Social Constructivists have maintained that it is important to have a wider concept of security.<sup>3</sup> One of the most well-known attempts was presented in a book from 1998 called *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde (Buzan, Wæver et al. 1998). What is interesting in this approach is that it accepts the Realist argument that security has to be about *survival*. But it does not accept that the only way, or the best way, to secure survival is the retreat into a military core (ibid: 7). Their point is that security and threats are not fixed objectives, but instead are a result of social constructs. In fact, an issue becomes a threat or a security issue when it is *presented as* such by an actor – through what they call a process of securitisation.

The concept of security among the Social Constructivists is therefore in some sense more flexible, and therefore more able to capture the changes in threat perception and security instruments. While most Constructivists favour a broader approach to security, some scholars have also been interested in providing a constructivist approach to a study of the military aspects of security. Some have done that by introducing the study of cultural factors into security studies (Katzenstein 1996).

## **EU security policy from a Rationalist perspective**

Neo-realists and Intergovernmentalists will argue that the EU does not have any security policy. There are several components in this argument. First, the EU does not have much autonomy and is governed by the member states. Second, attempts at building military capacities and to strengthen security cooperation in the EU have failed. And third, it is difficult to perceive a common threat that will promote the EU cooperation in the future. I will examine these components a bit more in detail.

### **Member states govern the EU**

Rationalists will argue that it is the member states that govern the EU. In this view, the member states have only delegated limited powers to the EU institutions, but they have not provided autonomy for the EU. Moreover, Rationalists argue that the interests of single members will block integration within the realm of high politics, such as foreign, security and defence policy (Glarbo 2001) because they will object to any reduction of national sovereignty in this area.

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3. There have been several attempts to reach a deeper understanding of the concept (Lipschutz 1995, Huysmans 1998).

Now, some of the Liberal Intergovernmentalists would perhaps argue that states could be willing to pool their sovereignty also in the field of security policy. They would argue that this will happen if the most powerful states in the EU then use their influence to shape the EU policy in manners that fit their interests. This EU security policy, however, will collapse as soon as the interests of the powerful states diverge.

The Rationalists have convincing evidence to back this argument. As they point out, the character of cooperation in the field of security has been intergovernmental throughout the history of the EU: first, the failure to establish a European Defence Community in the 1950s. second, the interstate negotiations and the rule of unanimity in decision making, which remains the norm within present-day Common Foreign and Security and Policy in the EU (Pijpers 1991). And, finally, the deep divisions over the Iraq war, are seen by the Rationalists as an illustration confirming this view.

### **The EU lacks military capacity**

According to the Rationalists, the EU cannot be considered as a security actor. The lack of a military capability to intervene in conflicts makes the EU a weak or even non-existent security actor. The EU may perhaps be perceived as a soft security actor, but in a Rationalist perspective this will not be sufficient. It is the military power and capacities that count.

In support of this argument they would, for instance, refer to the fact that the US spends approximately four times as much as the EU member states on military research and development and that it spends approximately double the amount of the EU member states on military equipment. The difference in the level of spending between the US and the EU is to the Rationalists an indication of the EU having a weak military capability.

Moreover, they would argue that any attempts at developing and strengthening the military capacities of the EU, as of yet, have failed. They argue that the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty, and later the Amsterdam Treaty, which paved the way for more supranationality, have been far from successful (Regelsberger and Wessels 1996; Hoffmann 2000). In these treaties the member states agreed to establish a High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, and the development of a peace keeping and crisis management policy. Later, the EU agreed to establish a rapid reaction force consisting of approximately 60.000 soldiers, able to intervene within a 30 days period. This capacity was announced partly operational in 2001. However, the EU has had difficulties in actually establishing this force. This has led some to argue that the effort to build a European force has so far been an embarrassment to Europeans. As Kagan argues, today the European Union is no closer to fielding an independent force, even a small one, than it was three years ago, when the EU declared itself operational (Kagan 2003: 5).

### **An EU security policy is unlikely to emerge**

Finally, the Rationalists would argue that it is unlikely that a EU security policy will emerge in the future. The Rationalists do not totally reject the possibility for the EU to develop into a security actor, but in their view this

will happen only when the EU has managed to develop into a military power of some importance, and when it has adopted a decision-making system that is efficient.

The only way they can see this happening is if the member states get a clear incentive to do precisely that. Following a Neo-realist logic, for instance, the member states might wish to use the EU as their instrument to balance the American power. This means that in a Rationalist view an EU security policy is likely to emerge only as long as it is in the member states interest to do so. However, with references to the divisions over the Iraq war, they would tend to argue that the prospects for this to happen are weak.

### **EU security policy from a Social Constructivist perspective**

The Social Constructivists disagree with the Rationalist view on EU security policy. Their argument rests upon three very different components. First, that the EU already has gained some degree of autonomy. Second, that the EU is an important comprehensive security actor. Third, that the EU already has a significant military capacity, and that this is likely to be strengthened.

#### **The EU has some autonomy**

Social Constructivists would argue that the EU has some autonomy despite the fact that the EU cannot be considered as a unitary actor. In the EU there has been a process of gradual establishment of common rules, norms and institutions. Resources and capabilities are linked to these institutions.

Over time, the EU is able to constrain and influence the agendas and understandings of security policy in the member states. The literature on Europeanisation of the member states deals particularly with this process where the fundamental building bricks of the EU are gradually being changed. States adapt to their environments, either by changing the security discourse and policies at the national level, or by trying to change and influence the security discourse and policies at the European level.

In some sense, the very idea of sovereignty has been transformed in the EU. The state monopoly of law making no longer exists and the state monopoly of force is also constrained. For instance, sovereignty has been modified by EU agreements on policing, permitting the police to operate in limited ways in each others' territories. State monopoly of force is constrained by the establishment of common institutions in the field of Foreign and Security Policy, such as the establishment of a High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy. While this position currently does not exercise full power over the member states, it still sets the agenda and therefore also influences and affects the policy of the member states in this area.

In a Constructivist perspective the EU is often understood as a post-national actor, meaning that states have lost their sovereignty, or at least that the content of sovereignty has been modified and reinterpreted. This view is also supported by more policy-oriented scholars like the British scholar-diplomat Robert Cooper. In his recent book *The Breaking of Nations*, he argues that the EU must be considered as a post-modern actor where the dividing line between foreign and domestic policy is being erased, states are

giving up their traditional monopoly on violence, and [internal] borders are increasingly irrelevant (Cooper 2003). The fact that the EU has developed institutional features beyond the original design and certainly beyond the purpose of managing economic interdependence, should also indicate that it is more than simply a successful intergovernmental regime (Christiansen, Jørgensen et al. 2001: 13).

### **The EU has a security policy that stretches beyond military means**

The constructivists argue that the EU has a security policy that stretches beyond military instruments. According to a Social Constructivist, it is important to have an open approach to security in order to capture the whole range of the EU's security policy instruments. This may be done by studying how threats are presented in EU documents, and what kind of policies is developed to counter these threats.

Empirical studies have shown that the EU securitise both internal and external threats and has developed countermeasures of various kinds. With regard to internal preventive measures, they refer to the area of Justice and Home Affairs, particularly after 9/11, for instance the strengthening of domestic police cooperation in order to counter international crime and terrorism. In addition, the coordination of the member states' capacities for civil protection in case of a terrorist attack has been strengthened. With regard to external preventive measures, one may refer to the enlargement process, and the broader programme for more specific conflict prevention that the Commission implements around the world. Finally, the continued improvement of the Union's capacities for civilian and military crisis management operations should be mentioned (Rieker 2003).

But according to Constructivists, it is not necessary to use a broader definition of security to argue that the EU is a security actor. Some Social Constructivists argue that the EU also has a significant military capacity. Instead of comparing member states' capacities to those of the US, they will look at the EU as a different military power. They would, for instance, argue that comparisons with the US are of little value, and that what is interesting is rather to evaluate what the EU aims at and what it is capable of doing (Ulriksen 2004). As Cooper argues "it is not true that Europeans have no military capability – after the United States and Russia there is no country that is on pair with the European Union's collective force. Nor is it true that the Europeans are unwilling to use force" (Cooper 2003: 156). He argues further that it was in fact "the Anglo-French artillery rather than American bombing that made the difference in Bosnia; and it was the British-French artillery that were willing to send in troops when the air campaign in Kosovo seemed to go nowhere. And Germany – in spite of its long-standing reservations about the use of military force – has been active in Kosovo and Afghanistan" (ibid: 156).

Constructivists will also put emphasis on the many years of experience Europeans have in crisis management and nation building, and on the fact that the first EU-led military operations in Macedonia and Congo have been undertaken, and that the EU now is discussing to take over NATO's military operation in Bosnia.

### **EU security policy is likely to be further developed**

In addition to the first EU crisis management operations, a Constructivist will argue that several important developments during 2003 indicate the likelihood of a further development of the EU's security policy:

*First*, a compromise between the major opponents over the Iraq war was reached in November concerning the establishment of EU operational headquarters.

*Second*, it was decided to set up a European armament agency that will oversee the improvement of the defence capabilities in the member states and thus be responsible for the development of European defence capabilities and for the promotion of European armaments cooperation.

*Third*, an EU security strategy was adopted identifying the main threats,<sup>4</sup> the main strategic objectives and also the policy implications for Europe. It recognises that the EU has made progress towards a coherent foreign policy and effective crisis management, but it also stresses the need to make a contribution that matches the EU's potential. It argues that the EU needs to be more active, more capable, more coherent and be better at working with partners. It focuses on the need for bringing together the various instruments and capabilities in order to meet the identified threats. The approach presented in the strategy is one that fits the Constructivist interest in comprehensive security.

*Finally*, the draft Constitutional treaty proposes the establishment of an EU foreign minister, the possibility for some member states to establish closer or structured cooperation in security and defence, a solidarity clause stating that member states should come to each other's assistance if a member state suffers from a terrorist attack.<sup>5</sup>

This means that a Constructivist analysis of EU security policy will argue that the EU already has developed a security policy. And they would argue that this has happened despite the fact that major member states continue to have different positions in relation to some hot topics in international politics.

### **Alternative or complementary approaches?**

I started out this paper by referring to two different stories about EU security policy. As we have seen, it follows from the assumptions of the different theoretical approaches that they tend to support different stories.

I have contrasted different theoretical approaches to IR. I have shown that these approaches have different meta-theoretical foundations, or at least that they have different views on multilateral cooperation and on security. An implication of this is that they have different perspectives on EU security policy – Rationalists arguing that the EU does not have a security policy and Constructivists arguing that it does have a different kind of security policy.

However, my argument is that, as long as one takes out the most extreme forms, Rationalism and Social Constructivism may be seen as complemen-

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4. Terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure and organised crime.

5. While the Constitution has not yet been adopted, the solidarity clause and some degree of structured cooperation between France, Great Britain and Germany concerning defence policy have been agreed upon.

tary approaches. In my view research should be problem-driven and not theory-driven. Each approach may explain important elements of the integration process. And when combining them we will more fully capture the range of dynamics at work in contemporary Europe.

For instance, if we rely only on a Rationalist approach, where political processes within the EU are defined as processes of bargaining between self-interested actors, we risk underestimating the longer-term changes. The most important contribution of using a Social Constructivist approach is that it makes it possible to study processes and dimensions that are largely ignored by Rationalist approaches.

In fact, whereas Rationalist approaches do not have problems in explaining why the EU is an ineffective and incoherent actor in world politics, they have more difficulties in explaining the transformative character of the EU on national policies. The continued commitment of member states to building common institutions despite the lack of immediate material gains from such efforts is also difficult to understand on the basis of Rationalist assumptions.

But this is not to say that member states never act according to Rationalist assumptions. One important area for further research should therefore be to find a way to determine under what circumstances the different mechanisms are valid – rather than engage in a trench war between the approaches.

Therefore, I would like end this paper by highlighting three questions that need some further investigation:

*First*, is it so that Rationalist and Social Constructivist mechanisms are valid in *different historical periods*? For instance, is it possible to argue that Rationalist approaches may account for the processes before the end of the Cold War, but have more difficulties accounting for most processes since 1990? *Second*, is it so that Rationalist and Social Constructivist mechanisms are valid in *different policy-areas*? For instance, is it possible to argue that Rationalist approaches are better at accounting for issues related to defence than to security? And *finally*, is it so that Rational and Social Constructivist mechanisms are valid at *different stages in the same process*? For instance, is it possible that one always have to include both mechanisms in order to understand or explain a phenomenon in international relations?

It is exciting times to study EU security policy. Still, it is difficult to predict what will happen in the future. In fact, one is often surprised by the policy developments. This means that it is important to avoid having too narrow a theoretical framework, which may prevent us from seeing developments that in the longer run might transform European security.

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