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The European Union after 9/11

Federico CASTIGLIONI*

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1. Introductory note

Scholarly studies of George W. Bush's foreign policy and the "war on terror"[1] following September 11, 2001 usually overlook the participation of the European Union and the majority of EU member states during those challenging times. This reluctance to recognize the EU as an actor and even the existence of a "European dimension" in the war on terror is entirely understandable; during these years, the European Union rarely made the front page of newspapers, and most European governments could only watch history unfold while futilely attempting to influence US action through peace marches and informal diplomatic efforts. Therefore, when presented with Europe in the context of the "war on terror," scholarly discourse has analyzed primarily bilateral responses, such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair's strong support, while disregarding the broader context of intra-European domestic discussion. In current historiography, deepening the diplomatic stance of Italy, Spain, Germany, or Poland is deemed marginal, and the diplomatic posture of the European Union vis-à-vis the United States is even further behind. However, examining the contrasting phases of the "war on terror" – namely, the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent Iraq intervention two years later – can potentially unveil valuable insights into the EU's enduring role as a foreign policy actor. Such insights assume particular significance in contemporary times, marked by the Union's indirect involvement in conflicts such as the recent war in Ukraine. While acknowledging the evolved institutional framework of the Union compared to two decades ago, certain intricacies of the EU's foreign policy mechanisms during that period continue to resonate with the challenges faced today. This article – whose findings were drawn from a PhD thesis of a few years ago – intends to deepen the history of the invasion of Afghanistan from a European political perspective. Besides its historical value, the hope is to hereby offer a different understanding of the relationship between Member States and Brussels, the transatlantic relations, and the difficult balance between the main EU institutional organizations responsible for foreign policy.

* Contract professor, Link Campus University, Rome

[1] Namely, the two military campaigns undertaken by the United States between 2001 and 2003 which resulted in an overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and the Saddam Hussein dictatorship in Iraq.

2. EU foreign policy: a real actor or a façade?

Since its inception, the EU's *Common Foreign and Security Policy* (CFSP) sparked a vibrant debate within the scientific community. Academics were baffled by the uniqueness of an organization like the EU, which combined elements of supranational and international governance. Some schools of thought, such as the functionalists, appeared more receptive to future developments, in contrast to the realists, who viewed the pursuit of a common EU foreign policy as a pipe dream from the start[2]. Indeed, in its early years, the CFSP was certainly not a model of initiative. In the course of the 1990s, this area of political integration, painstakingly constructed to create what the Treaty of Maastricht designated as the 'second pillar' of the European integration process, lacked the financial instruments and ambition-driven leadership that the new European Union's external projection demanded. Governance was the first limitation of the fledgling CSFP. Before Maastricht, it was envisioned that the CSFP would have a strong intergovernmental character to extend the reach of the Member States' foreign policies without undermining them, and the European Council was the most natural organization to ensure such intergovernmental control. However, the European Council was not institutionalized as a body of the European Community (with all the related limitations) and the only external representation of the EC was administered by the Commission via the EU Commissioner for External Relations. The second limitation was budget related. In this instance, the debate was revolving around the ambition of the new instrument and would comprehend the options of establishing a true EU foreign service or relying on a looser network of European diplomats who would have assisted the national ones. Supporters of the model of intergovernmental representation, who advocated for a privileged position for European governments, were among the most apprehensive of a real expansion of the EU's diplomatic powers, arguing that a political description of the emerging new institutional reality was premature[3]. In contrast, proponents of the federal model proposed not only expanding the powers of the Commissioner for External Relations, but also entrusting him/her with a portion of the traditional responsibilities designated to national foreign policies.

The decision entailed a compromise between these two extremes, as has typically been the case throughout the history of European integration. At the beginning, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was purely intergovernmental and as such falling under the competence of the President of the European Council[4]. A few years later, in 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam established a tripartite delegation for external representation, which will be entrusted to the President of the Council, the European Commissioner for External Relations, and a new figure, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, who will act as their liaison and ultimately responsible for the collective decisions[5]. In anticipation of future developments, the second pillar should have been linked to contemporary efforts to create a European defense policy. During the period of the Cold War, the *Western European Union* (WEU - referred to as a "sleeper" organization due to its little practical utility apart from serving as a source of ideas and inspiration), emerged as the sole accomplished endeavor aimed at fostering military integration among Western European nations. However, even in this field the conclusion of the Cold War resulted in notable advancements. On the 17th of October, 1991, in a significant joint statement, the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the French president Francois Mitterand suggested the establishment of an independent European military force autonomous from NATO, urging all member nations of the European Community at that time to participate in this initiative. During the bilateral summit of "La Rochelle" in May of the same year, the French President and the German Chancellor officially

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[2] M.H.A. Larivé, *Debating European Security and Defense Policy: Understanding the Complexity*, cap.1 "Explaining European Security trough international relations theory", New York, 2016.

[3] B. Tonra and T. Christiansen, *Rethinking European Union Foreign Policy*, New York, 2004.

[4] Treaty on European Union, Title V, "Provisions on the Common foreign and security policy", Articles J.1-J.10, Maastricht, 1992.

[5] Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts, Article J.8, Amsterdam, 1997.

acknowledged the successful culmination of their prior talks by declaring the establishment of a collaborative military entity known as the *Eurocorps*.

This name, chosen for its ambitious and expressive connotations, symbolized the united efforts and aspirations of both nations[6]. The creation of the *Eurocorps* sparked an important debate just before Maastricht. The suggestion of a possible European army, a term that proved to be inappropriate right from the start, was accepted by the British government, provided that this future military coordination capability was considered as an internal appendage to NATO and under the control of the Western European Union. British and continental designs at this point seemed to diverge: the London government conditioned future military coordination to its role as a "pillar" of the transatlantic alliance, thus suggesting that the reformed and operational WEU should not become an instrument of the European Community but remain independent; France and Germany, on the contrary, believed that only a coherence between the future European strategic-military and economic-political development could ensure strategic autonomy in the changed global scenario. In this confrontation, Italy, initially close to Franco-German thought, starting in 1991 committed itself to a compromise solution which ultimately prevailed in Maastricht in defining the common foreign and security policy[7]. The change of the Western European Union (WEU) during the early 1990s can be seen as a reflection of divergent perspectives, which entailed assigning the organization a dual function in shaping security policy and establishing a framework for "European" coordination inside NATO.

The period of extensive reorganization persisted without interruption with the issuance of the Petersberg declaration in 1992. This declaration solidified the role of the WEU as the primary entity responsible for conducting European peacekeeping operations and engaging in humanitarian interventions, sometimes referred to as the *Petersberg tasks*[8]. Despite the numerous references, the second pillar of the Treaty of Maastricht lacks a section describing EU Defense. This is likely due to opposing views on the role of NATO and the perplexing position of the German government, which for the time being agreed only to revitalize the WEU[9]. Indeed, after Maastricht, German government's contribution to the development of a European foreign and security strategy fell short of French aspirations. In contrast, the sustained focus on global affairs by London throughout the 1990s prompted France to raise doubts on the efficacy of the franco-german engine in Defence matters. The low level of commitment from other Member States prompted French President Francois Mitterand and later Jacques Chirac to assess the most suitable partners for establishing a European military instrument. This assessment considered not only the political aspect of achieving autonomy from NATO, as had been previously emphasized, but also the effectiveness of such an instrument. Against this background, Franco-British collaboration during the first Gulf War and their close cooperation in addressing the Balkan issue might be seen as significant manifestations of mutual trustworthiness[10]. The result was the Saint Malo agreement of December 1998, signed by Chirac and Blair to hope for the creation of the European Union's own military means, even if not strictly within the "European" pillar of NATO (and therefore of the WEU). The idea, which appeared to neither align with the French desire for an autonomous European military nucleus outside of NATO, nor with the British aspiration for a European force capable action only with diplomatic backing from the Atlantic Alliance, may have stemmed from a misinterpretation of the fact that both parties (the so called “Atlanticists” led by the UK and the “Europeanists” led by France) were not open to compromise over the respective tenets[11].

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[6] P.H. Gordon, *France, Germany and the western alliance*, New York, 2018, pp.17-22.

[7] M.Luoma-aho, *Arm' Versus "Pillar': The Politics of Metaphors of the Western European Union at the 1990–91 Intergovernmental Conference on Political Union*, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11/1, 2004,. p. 106ff.

[8] P.H. Gordon, *France, Germany and the western alliance*, ivi, pp.40-46.

[9] M.J. Baun, *The Maastricht Treaty as High Politics: Germany, France, and European Integration*, in *Political Science Quarterly*, 110(4)/1995-1996, p. 605ff.

[10] M. Sutton*, France and the Construction of Europe, 1944-2007: The Geopolitical Imperative*, New York, 2011, pp. 302-304.

[11] I. Peters, *ESDP as a Transatlantic Issue: Problems of Mutual Ambiguity*, in *International Studies Review*, 6(3), 2004, p. 393.

Notwithstanding, the declaration of Saint Malò played a significant role in Amsterdam, when the EU shaped its own foreign and defense policy within the second pillar. The establishment of the position of *High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy* settled through the Treaty of Amsterdam coincided with the decision to transfer the tasks of Petersberg from the Western European Union (WEU) to the European Union (EU), as part of a gradual reduction of the WEU's functions before to its dissolution[12]. The Cologne Council in June 1999 born substantial advancements in this path to a more consistent CSDP. The European Council, in order to implementing and harmonizing the advancements made at Amsterdam and Saint Malò, for the first time associated to the *Common Security Policy* a *Common Defense Policy* (hereby creating a *Common Security and Defence Policy* - CSDP). The CSDP was consistently subjected to oversight by the High Representative, in cooperation and under the political guidance of the European Council. Drawing from Saint-Malo, one of the primary objectives of this newly implemented policy will be the establishment of a European fast reaction force aimed at addressing international crises. During the European Council of Helsinki in December 1999, the Member States agreed on the inception of a *European Rapid Reaction Force* operating under the authority of the European Union. The ambition of the new instrument was connected to Petersberg's tasks and the force's effective strength comprehended in a range of 50,000-60,000 personnel, in accordance with the guidelines set forth in the Saint Malo declaration[13]. The ambitious objectives of the Helsinki European Council will play a crucial role in delineating the key milestones in the realm of *Common Security and Defense Policy* for the upcoming years.

3. The European Union before 9/11

The formulation of the second pillar of the Maastricht Treaty was regarded as a highly sensitive due to its potential to establish a definitive trajectory for the future of European political identity. The proponents of the intergovernmental representation model, advocating for an enhanced role for the European Council, expressed caution regarding the actual expansion of the Commission's diplomatic powers. In contrast, proponents of a quasi-federal model advocated for an expansion of the authority of the Commissioner for External Relations, along with the allocation of certain functions normally assigned to national foreign policies, as part of their proposal. As is frequently observed in the histori-cal context of European integration since Maastricht, the decision-making process tends to compro-mise and somehow summarize the divergent political wills of the Member States[14]. In this case, the compromise was enshrined in the establishment of a tripartite delegation for external representation in the Treaty of Amsterdam. The newborn duties of the EU in foreign policy were entrusted to the incumbent President of the Council, the aforementioned European Commissioner for External Relations, and the High Representative, who served as the intermediary between the two entities.

During the period under examination, spanning from the implementation of the second pillar of the Maastricht Treaty to the Lisbon revolution, the *Troika* will assume the duty of coordinating and representing the foreign policies of both the European Union and its individual Member States. The *Troika* shown a deficiency in terms of transparent democratic accountability. Despite the Parliament being duly apprised of his acts, it is important to note that the primary entity within the European Union entrusted with the authority and obligations pertaining to foreign affairs was the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, for also known as *General Affairs and Foreign Relations Council* (GAERC). The nature of the relationship between the GAERC, which served as the representative body for the

[12] G. Bonvicini (cur.), *L'Unione Europea attore di sicurezza regionale e globale*, Quaderni del Centro Spinelli, Milano, 2010.
[13] K. McInnis, *The European Union as Crisis Manager: Patterns and Prospects*, in *International Political Review* n.2, 2014, pp. 80-81.
[14] G. Garrett, *From the Luxembourg compromise to codecision: Decision making in the European Union*, in *Electoral Studies*, 14/3, 1995, p. 289ff.

foreign ministers of the fifteen member states, and the three EU leaders, particularly the High Representative, remained ambiguous. The High Representative was indeed tasked with implementing the directives of the GAERC, however, the GAERC did not have the means to scrutinize the High Representative's actions[15]. In order to ensure more consistency, the High Representative was entrusted with its (first) 'double hat' as Secretary General of the European Council. Based on the institutional framework formulated in Cologne and subsequently ratified in Nice, the designated roles of the High Representative - Secretary General of the Council and the Commissioner for External Relations were distinct. The former would assume the responsibility of overseeing diplomatic affairs, including foreign representation, while the latter would be entrusted with political instruments and development matters. At the European Council held in Cologne in June 1999, the delegates representing the member states made the decision to choose Javier Solana, a former Secretary General of NATO, as the inaugural High Representative of the European Union[16].

Solana would have shared the competence (in their respective roles) with the British Commissioner Chris Patten, a seasoned conservative politician. This revolution bestowed additional competences upon the European Union during a critical period in the international order, particularly in relation to its dialogue with the United States. Throughout the 1990s, the primary subjects of discussion in the transatlantic discourse encompassed two distinct realms: the economic and commercial domain, and a wider redefinition on the EU-US relations after the end of the cold war. Regarding the European Union specifically, the discussions held with Washington encompassed a wide range of topics. These included the potential destabilization of the currency market due to the introduction of the euro, as well as the establishment of new trade relations between the newly formed European Union and the American market. Notably, specific subjects of interest included the import/export conditions pertaining to steel and exotic fruit. The sources of friction, which can be characterized as political in nature, revolve around certain misunderstandings that emerged following the conclusion of the Cold War. These misunderstandings stem from a partial divergence in priorities between the two sides of the Atlantic, primarily centered on the Kyoto protocol and the implications of the eastward expansion on relations with Russia.

For the first time in all these dossiers, the European Union, and the Commission in particular, was tasked with articulating a common European stance to represent the Member States' interests and (sometimes) different views. According to some political observers at the time, such as John Feffer, in this climate the election of George W. Bush to the Presidency of the United States would have considerably worsened transatlantic relations, further widening the gap on some differences that were naturally arising for internal political reasons. Bush's presidency and the coming to power of some conservative fringes of the Republican party, in fact, would have immediately exacerbated frictions inherited from Bill Clinton, deteriorating relations not only with Brussels, but with Europe as a whole[17]. The signs of at least a certain Franco-German skepticism towards the new republican president are also widely found in the press of the time, allowing us to glimpse already from the summer of 2001 the trend that would characterize the following period[18]. The phenomenon, moreover, would not be exclusive to Europe, but to be framed in an international milieu already predisposed to the transition from the New World Order dreamed of in the 1990s to the realist unilateralism of the following decade[19]. On the other hand, as some authoritative scholars pointed out, the many open questions between the US and Europe should not be magnified as to overshadow the general good environment of the diplomatic relations between the two actors[20]. Curiously, this pivotal

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[15] P.M. Kaczyński and A.Byrne, *The General Affairs Council : The Key to Political Influence of Rotating Presidencies*, in *CEPS policy briefs*, 246/2011.
[16] G. Müller-Brandeck-Bocquet and C. Rüger (cur.), *The High Representative for the EU Foreign and Security Policy: Review and Prospects*, Baden-Baden, 2011.
[17] J. Feffer, *Power trip: US unilateralism and global strategy after September 11*, Seven Stories Press, New York, 2003.
[18] The Daily Telegraph, *President stands firm against his European critics*, EU Archives, July 18, 2001.
[19] J. Peterson, M.A. Pollack, *Europe, America, Bush and Transatlantic Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, London, 2004.
[20] F. Bozo, *A history of the Iraq crisis – France, The United States and Iraq (1991-2003)*, New York, 2016, pp. 115-116.

time of EU history found the European Commission, led by the Luxembourgian Jacques Santer, greatly weakened. Immediately after the Treaty of Amsterdam, in fact, the European Parliament with a social-list majority had begun to detect a non-transparent financial management by President Santer and his Commissioners, identifying responsibilities in the then Commissioner for Research Edith Cresson[21].

The financial scandal, which was verified by a committee of impartial specialists created, under the request of the Commission itself, in early January 1999, resulted in the resignation of Santer and the whole governing body under his leadership. In mid-September, subsequent to a brief interval, a newly established commission led by Romano Prodi, a former Prime Minister of Italy, assumed its duties. Prodi was a university professor, economist, and President of the *Institute for Industrial Reconstruction*, and for these reasons was deemed to be a good candidate to finalize the ambitious Agenda 2000. This agenda, originally conceived by the previous Commission, aimed to consolidate and harmonize all the proposals for institutional reform within a comprehensive and cohesive framework. The Prodi Commission was thus tasked with delving into the social aspects related to integration, such as implementing a politically inclusive pact that would soon lead to the Lisbon Social Agenda. The commitment of the new Commission will be crucial in promptly concluding the preparatory work for the ongoing thematic conferences. The first of these, convened during the European Council in Nice in December 2000, was designed with two fundamental objectives, both aimed at simplification: to reform the voting system in the European Council prior to enlargement, in order to reassure smaller member states about their representation, and to reduce the number of Commissioners by setting a limit of one Commissioner per nation. The second one, scheduled for 2001 in Laeken, Belgium, was intended to commence preparatory work for the ratification of the first European Constitution, the adoption of which had been extensively debated in preceding years. On the eve of September 11th, the Union will thus be engaged in a process of profound renovation of its internal decision-making mechanisms and its external image. As highlighted in the literature, the implementation period of the Maastricht Treaties was perceived as transitional and necessary for a "break-in" phase prior to a constituent process that was intended to reshape the newly formed Union[22].

4. “9/11” and the *Quartet for Middle East*

The events of September 11 appear to be watershed moments in both the Union's and the member states' histories. Indeed, for the first time, the new procedures adopted after Amsterdam were forced to demonstrate their effectiveness in the face of what appeared to be a major global challenge, initiated by an actor who was progressively entering the international stage. By chance, the leaders of the so-called European diplomatic *Troika* that day were already together in Ukraine, as guests of then-Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma. The mission's goal was to develop Ukrainian-European relations in anticipation of the President's intention to negotiate an association treaty with the Union, which would pave the way for a future free trade deal and, possibly, the consideration of a subsequent bid for membership. The European delegation included Romano Prodi, President of the Commission, Guy Verhostadt, President of the European Council, and Javier Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy. When news of the events reached the three leaders while they were visiting Stalin's former dacha, they were forced to return to Brussels to conduct the first emergency sessions. Solana was tasked with writing the first official declaration, in which he stated that the Union was "firmly behind the United States". Soon after, the Commission and the ECB issued statements of solidarity[23].

[21] J. Gillingham, *European integration (1950-2003): Superstate or new market economy*?, Cambridge, 2003, p. 317ff.
[22] W.I. Hitchcock, *The struggle for Europe: the turbulent history of a divided continent (1945-present),* New York, 2003.
[23] C. Hill, *Renationalizing or Regrouping? EU Foreign Policy Since 11 September 2001*, in *Journal of Common Market Studies* (*JCMS*) 42/1, 2004, p.43ff.

The European Council agreed with the Commission a comprehensive approach to the crisis that included both an EU domestic and external dimensions. Internally, it called for the establishment of a credible European anti-terrorism system and urged the Commission to create a unique security and safety mechanism, at least within the Schengen area. Externally, it committed for a new diplomatic initiative in the Middle East[24]. The Commission was the first to move, proposing the abolition of previously existing distinctions in Europe on the term 'terrorism', the interpretation of which divided six of the five member states and was not found in the rest's jurisprudence. The counter-terrorism strategy was based on three fundamental pillars: the establishment of a European arrest warrant, strengthened judicial cooperation, and a shared mandate for Europol to track down potential terrorist financing. Despite Italy's failures in the face of a common arrest warrant, the Commission said that the agreement was to be discussed at the European Council in December, with approval expected in early 2002. The timing, while not as brief, was considered extraordinary given the complexity of the material. On September 19, the Portoghese Commissioner, Antonio Manuèl Vittorino, proposed a "framework" of legislative initiatives to the member states, with the goal of standardizing responses to terrorism-related incidents and reinforcing the principle of non-intervention. The masterplan was completed on the 21st of September[25]. The new push from Vittorino accelerated the pace of a judicial cooperation process that had already been initiated by the European Council in Tampere but had not yet been implemented. A good example of this is the first concrete activity of *Eurojust*, a European judicial cooperation agency, in the field of terrorism or related issues. Many scholars agree that this was the start of a European "securitization" process, centered not on the verticality of a central judicial institution as it is on a mesh network of procedure and information exchange between individual judges and prosecutors[26].

In terms of external dimension, the first significant message to the United States was issued on September 14th, with a Joint Statement signed by all of Europe's heads of state and governments, as well as the major institutions' representatives[27]. Because of its lacking Defence policy, the European Union was unable to follow the United States in any military offensive but should have focused on a "diplomatic offensive", exploiting the representation of the *Troika* that allegedly had filled many of the gaps arisen during the Balkan Wars. Yet, some of the most crucial conversations after 9/11, such as those with Moscow and Bejing, were already underway and led by American and British diplomats. Therefore, the area in which Brussels decided to focus on was the Middle East, where in the days following the attack on the Twin Towers worrying jubilations had been witnessed[28]. In Europe, the misalignment between Arab countries and the rest of the world had not gone unnoticed and had fuelled fears of a "civilizational clash" between Islam and the West; a clash seemingly foreshadowed shortly before the terrorist attacks[29]. In the Middle East, France and Great Britain were by far the key European players, with special interests in Lebanon, Siria, Georgia, and Israel, as well as personal friendships that have passed from Chirac and Blair to other leaders.

The Anglo-French perspective on Middle Eastern issues was eclipsed at the time by the United States, which failed to take European opinions into consideration at the August 2000 Camp David meeting. The outbreak of the Second Intifada in October of the same year created an even larger rift, demonstrating Europe's reluctance to label Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations, as

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[24] F. Castiglioni, *Interview with Romano Prodi*, Ventotene, 2/9 2019.

[25] C. Kaunert, *The collective securitisation of terrorism in the European Union*, in *West European Politics*, 42/2, 2018.

[26] J. Argomaniz, *Post-9/11 institutionalisation of European Union counter-terrorism: emergence, acceleration and inertia*, in *European Security Journal*, 18/2, 2009.

[27] European Union press office, *Joint declaration by the heads of state and government of the European Union, the President of the European Parliament, the President of the European Commission and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy*, EU Archives, 14/09 2001 (ref. 01/12).

[28] "Fox News", *Arafat Horrified by Attacks but Thousands of Palestinians Celebrate; Rest of World Outraged*, 12/9, 2001 (Arafat Horrified by Attacks, but Thousands of Palestinians Celebrate; Rest of World Outraged | Fox News).

[29] E. Engin, *The'Clash of Civilizations': Revisited after September 11, Alternative*, in *Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 1(1)/ 2002, p. 81ff.

Washington has done. The preference of Paris, London, and Berlin for a firm adherence to the Oslo Accords, and thus to a solution of "two cities and two countries" over the intransigence of some sectors of the American administration, raised concerns about a growing transatlantic divide in the region. 9/11 significantly complicated the situation. The majority of European countries were concerned, according to Brussels, that Al Qaeda would succeed in its political goal of representing the world's most intransigent fringe, escalating the second intifada and putting at risk the distinction between Islam and terrorism, on which the first reactions in Europe were focused. The priority for European diplomacy, which had influence and interests in the Middle East, was thus to avoid a schism between legitimate Palestinian claims embodied by Yasser Arafat and the radical world that Osama Bin Laden sought to represent[30].

This possibility was averted, probably also due to Solana's mediation, which pushed the Palestinian leader to distance himself and strongly condemn the attacks. This initial approach was followed by a more significant one with Israel, conducted by the European Union in cooperation with the United States, which led to a ceasefire between the two parties on September 26, 2001. To calm the escalating violence, as evidenced by the assassination of Israeli Tourism Minister Rehavam Ze'evi on October 17, the European Union mobilized its special envoy on the field, Miguel Moratinos, to study an inclusive formula to prevent a Middle Eastern escalation centered around Palestine. The idea that began to materialize at the diplomatic level was that of a *Quartet for the Middle East* composed of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations. This atypical quartet, consisting of two states, a unique international organization (the EU), and the United Nations, reflected both the political realism with which Europe wanted to find a solution to the conflict and the ideal aspiration it aimed to achieve[31]. The collective effort to establish a *Quartet* for the Middle East engaged not only Brussels but also, and especially, London, Berlin, and Paris between late 2001 and the early months of the following year. American involvement from the outset was not straightforward. In fact, while some officials within the US administration seemed somewhat receptive to the suggestion, others dismissed the joint European initiative as useless and naive, potentially slowing its progress[32]. The diplomatic effort that began in September 2001 only materialized on April 10, 2002, during a meeting of EU foreign ministers held in Madrid and organized by Javier Solana and Spanish Foreign Minister Ana Palacio. Following the meeting, which naturally included US Secretary of State Colin Powell, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the *Quartet* issued its first joint declaration.

The subsequent history of what was supposed to be the European Union's major peace effort following September 11, however, would be inglorious. Commissioner for External Relations Patten did not hesitate to define it as the greatest failure of these years, precisely due to the expectations it had generated[33]. The reasons why the peace plan failed are not due to a lack of political will from European institutions or member states. On the contrary, the activism of Solana and Patten managed to quickly produce a credible and shared Roadmap with the other three actors, especially the United States. This Roadmap for peace, developed by the four in the course of 2002, was first publicized in June by George W. Bush, before the official release of a shared document. The US President's speech came at a time of high tension following the end of the Israeli Defense Forces' *Operation Defensive Shield* against Ramallah. After several anticipations, the complete Roadmap was published in April 2003. The reasons why the Roadmap plan was never implemented, effectively marking the Quartet's stagnation for years, are manifold, but one of the main ones were allegedly the reluctance that both Middle Eastern states and the United States had in accepting the European Union as a genuine

[30] European Union press office, *Romano Prodi President of the European Commission Address on his visit to the Brussels Islamic Centre. Visit to the Brussels Islamic Centre Brussels*, EU Archives, Bruxelles, 27 Sept. 2001.
[31] N. Tocci, *The EU, the Middle East Quartet and (In)effective Multilateralism*, in *Mercury*, E-Paper 9/2011 (http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/mercury-epaper_09.pdf).
[32] C. Patten, *Not Quite the diplomat*, Penguin Books, p.112.
[33] *Ibid.*, p.111.

interlocutor in the thorny Israeli-Palestinian issue[34]. As emphasized by some authors, the European Union had been seen for years as a humanitarian actor in the region rather than a political one (a payer, not a player). This had undermined its international credibility, despite support mainly from London and Paris. The result was that Patten and Solana soon found themselves isolated within the *Quartet*, making them ambassadors of a less credible organization. This failure also reflects the growing international skepticism towards multilateralism, especially in the period immediately preceding the Iraq invasion when the understanding between Europe, Russia, and the United States that had marked the beginning of the war on terror was progressively eroding[35].

5. The Afghan trail

Parallel to the Middle East peace process, the European *Troika* also had to deal with the urgency of the Afghan issue, which erupted in just a few days following the attacks in New York and Washington. On September 20, Solana, Michel, and Patten were in Washington to discuss possible European assistance to the United States with Colin Powell. This visit had been planned well in advance, specifically since the first inter-ministerial meeting between US and EU officials held in Washington on March 2[36]. The following day, President Prodi also met with President Bush, along with the current President of the Council, Verhostadt. In the new context that had emerged, European representatives had little concrete assistance to offer to their American counterparts, excluding the initial steps taken by the EU in judicial cooperation and the sharing of good intentions regarding the Middle East. This was quite insufficient considering the evolving events. As early as September 18, the US Congress had authorized the White House to intervene militarily against any state responsible for the attacks, and Bush was welcoming Tony Blair to the American capital. The name of Osama Bin Laden was the most widely circulated, despite denials from the head of the terrorist organization himself, and consequently, a potential invasion of Afghanistan was already in the sights of the *United States Central Command* (CENTCOM)[37].

The NATO-led operations Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean and Eagle Assist mainly served to free up some American air-naval resources to be moved to the Indian Ocean, but they did not significantly impact the development of Operation Enduring Freedom. With the marginality of NATO established, at least in this initial phase, it remained to be seen whether the US would seek bilateral assistance, including military, from their European allies. In a time of great expectations for the institutional evolution of the Union, any potential relevance of Brussels could only be linked to its ability to provide, if nothing else, political coordination to its member states in their out-of-area engagement. The even merely symbolic role of European institutions was not guaranteed, and President Prodi himself had generated expectations by speaking of the need to "defend freedom" and drawing a parallel between American aid during World War II and European aid after the attacks[38]. These expectations were not met. Some authors have even described a Europe that was not only fragmented but also a "bandwagon" of American decisions during these weeks, at least until the invasion of Afghanistan[39]. In reality, the request for greater involvement from Brussels and a connection between the war on terror and further reform of the CFSP can be discerned in various high-level statements of these days, including those from the European Commission and the German government. However, there were still some unresolved issues not only regarding the form that any

[34] T. Greene, *Blair, Labour, and Palestine: Conflicting Views on Middle East Peace After 9/11*, Bloomsbury Academic, London/New York, 2014.
[35] W. Zank, *Clash Or Cooperation of Civilizations? Overlapping Integration and Identities,* London, 2016.
[36] European Union press office, *First ministerial meeting between the EU and the new US Administration*, EU Archives, 2/3 2001 (classif.IP/01/301).
[37] R. E. Rupp, *Nato after 9/11: an alliance in continuing decline*, New York, 2006, p.93ff.
[38] D. Mahncke and W.Rees, *Redefining Transatlantic Security Relations: The Challenge of Change*, Manchester, 2009.
[39] W. Wallace, *American Hegemony: European Dilemmas*, in *The political Quarterly*, 73/1, p.113.

European military initiative should have taken but also the international legitimacy of such involvement[40].

While some member states, like the United Kingdom, seemed to have no hesitations about providing unequivocal support to the ally on the ground, an important member of the *Troika* like Charles Michel (at the time Belgian Foreign Minister, who held the rotating presidency of the Council and today President of the European Council) cautioned against a possible excessive U.S. reaction and effectively dissociated himself from any support for a military initiative[41]. The reactions of individual member states, excluding the UK, were equally contradictory. In Italy there was some difficulty in deploying adequate resources to support U.S. forces and from President Chirac and the French government led by Lionel Jospin came contrasting messages. This lack of determination and coordination was reflected in the slow European response. On October 7, the United States began the invasion of Afghanistan, notifying the United Nations of the intervention together with Great Britain. This happened just three weeks after the attacks and the GAERC (General Affairs and External Relations Council) had not yet been convened in Brussels to address the pressing issue of military aid. The EU unpreparedness and lack of coordination left a decision-making void that was soon filled by the Franco-British initiative. In the fall of 2001, Jacques Chirac and Tony Blair attempted to influence the decisions of European heads of state and government by forming a "mini-directorate" together with German Chancellor Schroder. The first meeting of the three took place in Ghent, eloquently organized before the European Council meeting on October 19. The agenda was prepared by Downing Street and focused on the Middle East, already identified as a "hot spot" of potential diplomatic offensive, and on the invasion of Afghanistan, in which the UK was participating[42]. However, despite the initial intentions, the meeting of the three did not produce any real results, except for arousing a reaction of indignation from all non-involved governments, particularly the Italian one. Even the President of the European Commission, Prodi, criticized the idea of creating a Directorate that could potentially guide, if not replace, the Brussels *Troika* reiterating that only a collective effort revolving around the Commission could manage the crisis[43]. Indeed, the conclusions of the European Council meeting in Ghent did not seem to reflect the suggestions of the mini-summit. Instead of speaking about practical support for the United States, the Council focused on the need to strengthen the CFSP and to call on Washington to embrace international responsibility in the difficult political conjuncture; a position that seemed incredibly closer to the Belgian cautious approach than to the participatory English one.

The second meeting of the "big three" was scheduled in London for early December but it never took place. Both Aznàr and Berlusconi were beginning to perceive the "big three talks" as deeply disrespectful to their standing within the European community. Additionally, Chirac himself was displaying hesitancy in depending so heavily on the mediation of Tony Blair with Washington[44]. Ultimately, Blair succumbed to the prevailing pressure and, without any specific sequence, decided to meet with the European heads of state and government in order to deliberate on the feasibility of a common action. Silvio Berlusconi was the first Prime minister to receive an invitation to London on November 4. Prior to the meeting, Berlusconi had recently met with Blair to discuss Afghanistan, leveraging on their strong bilateral relationship. Following Berlusconi, Aznàr received an invitation, expressing evident displeasure that Spain had not been invited bofore. Afterwards, Belgium and Holland were also invited, with Javier Solana being involved in the process. The discussions held in

[40] T. Helm, *We must pay front-line role, says Schroder*, in "The daily Telegraph", 1/10 2001; A. Evans Pritchard, *Terror attacks will bing EU closer together*, in "The Daily Telegraph", 3/10 2001.

[41] A.E. Pritchard, *EU calls for intelligent and targeted response*, in "The Daily Telegraph", 15/9 2001.

[42] A. Seldon, *The Blair effect (2001-2005)*, London, 2005, p.394.

[43] L. Fasanaro and L. Nuti, *Romano Prodi (1999-2004): so much to do at such a critical time*, in J. van der Harst and G. Voerman (eds.), *An Impossible Job? - The Presidents of the European Commission 1958-2014*, cap.10, London, 2015.

[44] French President Chirac was keen in highlighting the French involvement in the ongoing events and he became the first European head of State to visit New York after to the terrorist attacks. While this state visit garnered significant attention for him that year, it also drew criticism from other leaders, including Berlusconi, who accused the Elysee of employing deceptive tactics to enhance its image in the eyes of Americans at the expense of its European partners.

London, sometimes referred to as the "London meetings" were unable to produce any tangible outcomes due to their coinciding with the hurried actions of the United States and their haphazard nature. Therefore, as correctly argued by Christopher Hill in a reflection nearly contemporaneous to the events, the meeting of Ghent was the only true attempt in Europe to coordinate the war on terror and the European response in Afghanistan[45]. With coordinated European intervention eliminated as a possibility, in the following weeks, individual governments associated themselves with American operations, attempting, at the very least, to bring them within the framework of international coordination. On December 5, 2001, an international conference was hosted in Bonn to decide the structure of the country once liberated from the Taliban.

The conference was attended by several Afghan exiles in Europe, representatives of the Northern Alliance, and historical opponents of the Taliban regime, including future President of the Transitional Administration Hamid Karzai. The conclusions of the Bonn meeting were accepted by the United Nations in Resolution 1386 of December 20, 2001. Thus, the American Operation "Enduring Freedom" became an internationally led mission under U.S. leadership and supported by the UN, structured as the *International Security Assistance Force* (ISAF). Between November and December 2001, when the operations were nearly concluded, the armed forces of three European countries (France, Italy, and the Netherlands) reached the Indian Ocean to participate in the final phase of the military campaign. Other nations followed between January and February 2002. Among the forces deployed in this second phase were also German and Greek naval vessels, as well as F-16 fighters belonging to the European Participating Air Force, composed of Belgium, Denmark, and Norway. Alongside this second wave came a contingent of 1,600 German soldiers, who would soon become the core of ISAF in Kabul, eventually taking command of the entire mission at the end of the year[46]. The European Union, for its part, attempted to influence the events by clarifying its detachment from military operations but emphasizing its role in reconstruction. In January 2002, Chris Patten participated in the Tokyo summit that was to decide financial aid to the Asian country, committing to a sum of 500 million from the Union as a whole, including 180 million from the Commission's budget[47]. Along with aid came the appointment of a Special Envoy in the person of Klaus-Peter Klaiber, a former collaborator of Solana's at NATO. The beginning of 2002 marked a turning point for the Union. President Bush's intention to continue the war on terror beyond Afghanistan led to an immediate hardening across the Atlantic, marking a shift from a narrative that sought a united Europe to be useful to the United States to a search for strategic independence from the American ally. The setting up of a protectionist industrial policy in the Defense sector, the creation of the *European Defence Agency*, the first CFSP Artemis mission, the *Berlin Plus* agreements with NATO and the debate that arose on the need to have a single foreign policy in view of the Convention, are all topics closely related to the war in Iraq and the growing transatlantic divide.

6. Conclusion

With the notable exception of some authors, such as Sarwar A. Kashmeri[48], scholarly literature has largely omitted an in-depth exploration of the transformation that occurred in Brussels' perception of

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[45] C.Hill, *EU Foreign Policy since 11 September 2001: Renationalising or Regrouping?*, Europe in the World Centre, Lectio Magistralis, University of Liverpool, 24 October 2002 (see also www.liv.ac.uk/ewc)

[46]T.oon Dirkx, *State-building in the Shadow of War: EU Capabilities in the Fields of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan*, project fund by the EU in the framework "Enhancing EU peacebuilding capabilities", Centre for Conflict Studies, Utrecht, 2017, p.7

[47] This figure was taken from E. V. Linden (eds), *Focus on Terrorism,* in *Nova Science Pub Inc*, 9, 2007. Nonetheless, there are divergent data on the actual allocation of these resources. The European Council declared in 2008 that the EU collectively spent about 3.7 billion in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2006, and this total amount has been taken up by much of the literature (https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/esdp/91660.pdf)

[48] S.A. Kashmeri, *America and Europe after the 9/11 and Iraq: the great divide?,* Potomac Books, Lincoln, 2008

Euro-Atlantic relations between 2001 and 2003. This article aimed to synthesize key findings pertaining to the initial phase of the "war on terror," specifically the invasion of Afghanistan. It is worth noting that prominent European figures of the time, including former EC President Romano Prodi, have retrospectively pointed out the hasty assignment of blame to Afghanistan for the attacks on the Twin Towers, as well as the determined commitment of the United States to overthrow the Taliban regime, which limited substantial European involvement[49]. In light of these circumstances, European leadership tried to establish a preliminary coordination endeavor in Ghent, after a facilitation attempt tried by a French-British initiative. In this case, the traditional cooperation between France and Germany, which is known for driving European integration efforts, was temporarily replaced by a more informal alignment that included London, Paris, and Berlin. The Ghent meeting highlights the growing importance of London in the European defense and security context, particularly as it established itself as Paris' primary partner in Europe during the Chirac-Blair era. The strive to pre-coordinate the at the time three most influential member states ahead of the summit, perhaps to establish a precedent for others and influence the Council outcomes, encountered several limitations. The first was the evident skepticism from European institutions. In an era marked by a nascent drive to Europeanize aspects of Member states' foreign policy, the multi-lateral coordination attempted by some governments was viewed in Brussels as an attempt to circumvent the established institutions designed to address such matters. These institutions primarily encompassed the European Council, an entity formalized through the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, with its functions, including foreign policy, still being delineated. The *Troika* played a secondary but significant role in this context.

The coordination attempt among the trio ostensibly disregarded this established system, opting instead for an informal, ostensibly more effective collaboration among major governments which could give, following the words of the British government, “a substantial contribution to the operations”[50]. However, like analogous endeavours driven by the Franco-German alliance in earlier and subsequent periods, this effort faltered. The reasons of this failure probably lay not only in the exclusionary stance of European institutions but even more in the firm resistance from other member states, compounded by the divergent stances among the three governments convened in Ghent. In fact, behind the common solidarity during this crisis-laden period, the three governments exhibited contrasting positions regarding the feasibility of coordinating a military intervention. While Blair's Britain had already committed troops and intended to participate in the forthcoming American operation, Chirac's France, while possibly amenable, experienced a sense of disappointment due to the perceived lack of American receptivity to French assistance[51]. On the other hand, the centre left government of the German Chancellor Schröder was unprepared (or unwilling) to act swiftly as the American administration would have requested and allegedly concerned by the role of CENTCOM[52]. Given these underlying dynamics and considering the relatively nascent state of advancement of the *Common Security and Defense Policy* (CSDP), contemplating a European-led operation would have appeared implausible. Thus, the only viable course of action would have entailed deploying a European multinational force and labelling it as European, as supposed in some journalistic sources (and later done for the EU operation “Artemis” in Congo)[53]. However, the lack of a cohesive structure and, as previously mentioned, the divergent viewpoints among the three governments, ultimately rendered this endeavor ineffectual.

[49] F. Castiglioni, *Interview with Romano Prodi*, cit.
[50] S. Von Hlatki, *American Allies in times of war – The great asymmetry*, Oxford University Press, 2013, p.126
[51] M.Guedj et Y.Sultan-R'bibo, *11 Septembre, Paris, 14,46*, 2011, kindle ed., position 1890.
[52] Quoting Alaster Campbell, then spoke person for Prime Minister Tony Blair, in Id., *Diaries Volume Three: Power and Responsibility (1999-2001)*, Theale (UK), kindle ed., rep. 2011: “they don’t want to be under CENTCOM command, the French because they are French, the Germans because their parliament would only support peacekeeping forces” (Ref. October 21, 2001).
[53] G. Prunier, *Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a continental catastrophe*, Oxford, 2009, pp. 29-37.

The lack of progress in the Ghent negotiations was not accompanied by any contemporaneous achievements in European Union foreign policy, commencing with the Quarter for the Middle East. In this scenario, the European Union's institutional leadership, represented by the *Troika*, was officially assigned the responsibility of conducting negotiations. Brussels, along with Russia, the United States, and the United Nations, set the agenda and met political leaders from the region. The inability of the *Quartet* to become a relevant actor in the Middle East (especially after the war in Iraq) might be interpreted as a reflection of the European Union's struggle to establish itself as an independent diplomatic entity, one that is actively engaged in the region rather than solely providing financial support. In this case, it is important to note that the lack of support or coherence from the EU member states was not the primary factor behind the Quarter failure. Instead, the main issue stemmed from the European Union's (and UN) diminished credibility in the negotiations. The reasons for this lack of credibility can be subject to speculation, but allegedly the novelty of a supranational actor conducting negotiations played a significant role[54]. This was particularly notable during a period when the idealistic vision of a regionally integrated and more peaceful world order was overshadowed by the challenges posed by the 9/11 attacks and subsequent American military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Currently, the security environment is being further exacerbated by the escalating Russian aggression against Ukraine. Afghanistan has once again fallen under the leadership of the Taliban, while the instability originating from Palestine has extended to Iraq subsequent to American engagement, and Syria subsequent to the Arab Spring. In the current challenging security landscape, the realist school of international relations presents compelling explanations for the events transpiring[55]. In the face of the contemporary events, the European Union (EU) is putting a considerable effort in presenting itself as an international (or geopolitical) actor and thereby bolster the perception of Brussels as an influential player in the global stage. However, the same crucial questions of 2001 remain unanswered, namely how much Brussels can claim responsibility on foreign policy given the current institutional framework, which role the national governments should have in the building of an autonomous European foreign policy stance, and how the contemporary request for "hard security" can be reconciled with the absence of any EU military means besides the Member States' capabilities.

Abstract

The article examines the various and complex attempts undertaken by the European Union (EU) and its Member States to exert influence on the US-led "war on terror" and the global crisis that followed 9/11. It places special focus on the Quartet initiative in the Middle East, which involved a coordinated effort between the EU, the United States, the United Nations, and Russia, with the objective of facilitating mediation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The diplomatic mediation process faced numerous obstacles, which were purportedly exacerbated by the European Union's poor credibility with other global stakeholders. Furthermore, the study examines the concurrent efforts of the Anglo-French alliance to coordinate a unified military reaction within the European Union at the beginning of the Afghanistan conflict. The research aims to contribute to the understanding of the EU's dynamic evolution in international diplomacy by analyzing the EU's failure from a historical perspective. It also aims to highlight the complex web of internal rivalries and interpersonal competition among leaders that hindered the accomplishment of effective intergovernmental collaboration, despite the member states' shared desire to achieve the objective. Beyond enhancing our knowledge of the past, the analysis could help the present by assessing the shortcomings of EU foreign policy in relation to the current threats to European unity and security, like the crisis in Ukraine.

[54] C. Hill, *Renationalizing or Regrouping? EU Foreign Policy Since 11 September 2001*, in *JCMS*, 2004, pp.154-155.
[55] D. Singh, *The Tripartite Realist War: Analysing Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*, Middlesbrough (UK), 2023.

Keywords*:* European Union; war on terror; Afghanistan war; Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

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Lo scopo di questo articolo è ricostruire la risposta dell'Unione Europea (UE) alla guerra in Afghanistan del 2001, concentrandosi sui contemporanei sforzi delle istituzioni europee per emergere come attore rilevante nel quadro delle relazioni internazionali dell'epoca. L'obiettivo dell'indagine è gettare luce su alcuni passaggi poco conosciuti delle relazioni tra Stati Membri e istituzioni europee, nonché sui primi tentativi di applicare lo schema della neonata Politica Estera di Sicurezza e Difesa Comune (PESC) alla crisi generata dall'undici settembre. Nel quadro delle iniziative maggiormente approfondite c'è il così detto "Quartetto per il Medio Oriente", uno sforzo collaborativo orchestrato insieme agli Stati Uniti, alle Nazioni Unite e alla Russia e mirato a mediare il conflitto israelo-palestinese. Questo tentativo di coordinare le diplomazie degli Stati membri, dei partner internazionali e quelli dell'allora "Troika" incaricata di rappresentare la PESC fallì e non fu più ripetuto, probabilmente per una mancanza di credibilità di Bruxelles come attore internazionale. La seconda parte della ricerca approfondisce invece il contemporaneo sforzo anglo-francese di organizzare una risposta militare coerente a livello di UE per rapportarsi agli Stati Uniti e contribuire alle operazioni in Afghanistan. Anche in questo contesto, dove le aspirazioni degli Stati membri dell'UE erano allineate, la complessa rete di rivalità interne e di competizione interpersonale impedì la realizzazione di una collaborazione efficace. Oltre alla ricostruzione storica di questi fallimenti, l'auspicio della presente trattazione è che, gettando luce sugli insuccessi dell'epoca, si possa contribuire a una comprensione più ampia dell'evoluzione dell'UE nell'ambito della diplomazia internazionale, anche in vista delle sfide geopolitiche in corso, come il conflitto in Ucraina, che mettono alla prova la coesione e la sicurezza collettiva del continente.

Parole chiave: Unione Europea, Guerra al terrore, Guerra in Afghanistan, Politica estera e di sicurezza comune (PESC)