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Autonomy in intergovernmentalism: the role of *de novo* bodies in external action during the making of the EU Global Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Is the new intergovernmentalism well positioned to explain the inter-institutional dynamics of EU external action, as reflected by the policy-making process of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS)? This article argues that, despite the divisive and crisis-ridden dynamics in European integration and external action, *de novo* bodies such as the HR/VP and the EEAS have increased their autonomy in the traditionally intergovernmental EU foreign and security policies. By tracing the making of the EUGS through 39 interviews with officials from EU institutions and member states, this article argues that the increased autonomy of the HR/VP and the EEAS in external action has also facilitated the parallel convergence of initiatives in security and defence. The value of the EUGS should thus be found in the *ad intra* integration dynamics it has generated; particularly when, *ad extra*, it embodies a more troubled environment for EU external action.

KEYWORDS

New Intergovernmentalism; External Action; EU Global Strategy; EEAS; HR/VP

Introduction

EU strategies are a product of their time. Both the European Security Strategy (ESS) and the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) speak as much about the state of European integration (*ad intra*) as the EU's projection *ad extra*. Externally, EU strategies serve the purpose of defining a joint 'strategic culture' (Krotz and Maher 2011, 565) and provide a distinctive narrative for the EU on world affairs, even if they seldom succeed in overcoming national strategic cultures (Meyer 2005; Rynning 2003). Internally, strategies act as 'autobiographies' (Mälksoo 2016, 4) and depict the relation with broader dynamics of European integration, ultimately unveiling the 'finality of the European integration project' (Venesson 2010, 74).

The ESS (European Council 2003) was conceived as a tool to heal the wounds of the Iraq war, which became the most divisive foreign policy issue since the launch of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This division, however, did not permeate into the core of the European integration project, characterised by the optimism derived from the preparation of the European Constitution, the enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe and the recent circulation of the euro.

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Ad extra, the ESS read as the culmination of Europe's 'normative power' (Manners 2002). *Ad intra*, it served the purpose to reunite member states. The High Representative, Javier Solana, was given a large room of manoeuvre by EU member states to lead the strategy-making, in a process resembling Christiansen's (2001) 'institutionalised inter-governmentalism' due to the prominent role played by the Policy Unit supporting the work of Solana in the Council's General Secretariat (Morillas 2019).

The EUGS, on the contrary, was produced in 'times of existential crisis, within and beyond' the EU (EEAS 2016, 7). While externally the EU was suffering from the crisis of the liberal international order, increasing power rivalries at the global stage and instability in its borders, internally the EU was confronted to the effects of the euro, refugee and Brexit crises (Barbé and Morillas 2019). This disabling environment was coupled with the mistrust regarding a divisive and 'counterproductive' new strategy-making exercise (Menon 2013) and the more useful resource of bilateralism to engage in world politics (Howorth 2016).

This article assumes that examining the *ad intra* processes of strategies is as important as focusing on the *ad extra* dynamics influencing them. In times of crisis, policy initiatives can be hampered by internal divisions or, on the contrary, advance European integration (Börzel and Risse 2018). Strategies, understood as tools for 'policy inspiration' (Morillas 2019), are not an exception to these dynamics because they act as a 'benchmark and reference framework' for day-to-day policy developments (Biscop 2007, 9) and enable consensus among the different actors involved in external action. The policy-making processes of strategies can be considered 'as important as (their) outcome' (Mogherini 2015a) or, as Duke (2017, 6) put it 'in strategic terms the journey is almost as important as the destination'. Therefore, as case studies, strategies not only depict the vision of the EU of world affairs but the internal institutional and European integration dynamics as well.

By bringing together the main assumptions of the new intergovernmentalism (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter 2015a, 2015b) as a theoretical proposition on the shape of European integration – particularly in times of crisis- and the policy-making process of the EUGS, this article argues that, despite the divisive dynamics affecting the drafting of the EUGS, this strategy has reinforced the role of Brussels-based bodies in external action and become the enabling factor of subsequent initiatives in security and defence. This argument nuances some of the new intergovernmentalism's core assumptions, such as the role of the European Council and the Council as the main 'catalysts of integration' (Puetter and Fabbrini 2016, 634).

The leading role of the EU High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) during the inception, drafting, output and implementation phases of this document is assessed through the findings of 39 semi-structured interviews with officials from member states and EU institutions involved in the policy-making process of the EUGS and the triangulation of the data obtained with official documents and secondary literature.¹ Its findings add on the studies of the system and practices of EU policies, which analyse policy-making dynamics as a way to calibrate the relationship between EU institutions and member states (Bickerton 2015).

New intergovernmentalism, autonomy and EU external action

The literature on European integration has recently witnessed a revival of a long-standing debate between intergovernmentalism and supranationalism, including in

the field of EU external action. In the eyes of intergovernmentalists, the role of member states has been reinforced by the dynamics of a crisis-ridden EU (Youngs 2014; Fabbrini 2015, 2016). National capitals have taken the reins of crisis management, in particular since the euro crisis, and established dynamics based on 'hard intergovernmental bargaining and brinkmanship', where positive-sum outcomes have often disappeared (Schimmelfennig 2015b).

Institutionally, policy-making centred on the European Council and the Council has turned the European Commission into 'little more than a secretariat' (Schmidt 2013, 2) and sidelined the European Parliament (Dinan 2011). In external action, EU crises have led member states to prioritize their national interests and reduced their willingness to coordinate at the Union level (Youngs 2014, 40). Also, in a system ruled by unanimity, big member states have benefited from their leading position in the intergovernmental institutions of the EU, in particular the European Council and the Council, where CFSP and CSDP are designed, debated and decided (Lehne 2015).

These developments have revived the interest in 'ontological questions about the nature of the EU' (Bickerton 2012). The 'new intergovernmentalism', as part of this trend, has provided a novel theoretical framework to test the policy-making developments in several EU policies (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter 2015a, 2015b). It assumes that, since the Maastricht Treaty, the EU has been characterized by an 'integration paradox' – or a 'tendency towards European integration without supranationalism' (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter 2015b).

Traditional supranational institutions have not been given additional powers and any effort to advance in European integration has followed the lead of member states. As a consequence, the institutions representing them have gained influence in the day-to-day decision-making and coordination. The European Council has become the 'catalyst of integration' (Puetter and Fabbrini 2016, 634), with a 'correlation' existing between 'the evolution of the new areas of activity and the increased role of the European Council' (Puetter 2014). And the Council is today the 'central political decision-making institution' in charge of coordinating policies (Puetter 2014)².

The new intergovernmentalism also understands that *de novo* bodies such as the EEAS act as the vehicle for coordinating the activities and resources of member states, but are not policy initiators or possess strong leadership and policy definition capacities (Puetter 2014). According to Puetter (2003), the dynamics of the new intergovernmentalism, particularly the practice of 'deliberative intergovernmentalism' among member states, are present in all phases of the policy cycle, from inception to implementation.

The assumptions of the new intergovernmentalism contrast with a growing body of literature that argues that Brussels-based institutions increase their powers when treaties confer them with additional competences. Since the Lisbon Treaty (2009), external action (Title 5 TEU) has become a hybrid policy area bringing together the intergovernmental CFSP and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) with the European Commission's external relations, so the intergovernmental and supranational policies formerly divided into two different pillars.

The creation of the position of the HR/VP as a double-hatted figure and the establishment of the EEAS as a supporting body are considered to have increased the autonomy of these agents vis-à-vis their principals – the member states in CFSP and the European Commission in external relations (Furness 2013). Autonomy, often studied through the

EEAS and understood as being ‘independent enough to take decisions in the policy areas under its mandate so that other actors will adhere to them’ (Furness 2013, 103), derives both from the nature of the EEAS as a ‘hybrid’ service (Carta 2012) and its capacity, together with that of the HR/VP, to act as an agenda-setter.

On the autonomy of the EEAS as a ‘hybrid’ service, some have underlined its ability to carry out functions in external action beyond traditional forms of diplomacy and to act as a ‘catalyst of diplomatic innovation’ (Spence and Bátorá 2015). For some, the EEAS enjoys autonomy thanks to its role in areas other than traditional diplomacy and foreign policy (Balfour, Carta, and Raik 2015), including the neighbourhood policy, trade or development cooperation, and to its joint work with the Commission in areas where the latter has competences (Furness 2013).

The EEAS’s delegations in third countries have also increased its autonomy (Henökl 2014) and, as a consequence, expanded the distance between the EEAS and the masters of EU foreign policy -the member states (Henökl and Trondal 2015). However, being ‘torn apart’ between the influence of several actors (Henökl 2014), the EEAS has also found it hard to escape the diplomatic habits of national capitals (Spence 2012; Pomorska and Vanhoonacker 2015) or to avoid that its officials remain caught in the dynamics of the institutions they come from (Juncos and Pomorska 2014).

Most critically, autonomy in external action also derives from the capacity of *de novo* bodies -particularly the HR/VP and the EEAS - to set policy priorities and exert leadership. Article 30.1 TEU enables the HR/VP to put forward proposals on the CFSP together with the member states, while Article 22.2 TEU confers the right of initiative to the HR/VP in other areas of external action together with the European Commission. These agenda-setting prerogatives turn the HR/VP -and by extension the EEAS- into policy entrepreneurs in domains where the member states and the Commission have enjoyed long-standing prerogatives (Riddervold and Trondal 2016). For some, the HR/VP is today an ‘autonomous player’ and enjoys ‘a central place in all phases of the policy cycle’ (Vanhoonacker and Pomorska 2013, 1322), as will be assessed here through the policy-making process of the EUGS.

The autonomy of *de novo* bodies during the making of the EUGS -the first all-encompassing strategic document of EU external action- will be read here against the premises of the new intergovernmentalism. Following a combination of the frameworks to analyse foreign policy and European policy processes provided by White (2004) and Young (2010), the following sections will analyse the policy-making of the EUGS, divided into four different phases: agenda-setting, where the inception of a policy takes place; policy formulation, where the drafting of the document happens; policy output, characterized by discussions on the adoption of the document; and implementation, where the follow-up proposals are devised. All of them unveil specific inter-institutional dynamics and relationships between member states and Brussels-based institutions that will nuance some core assumptions of the new intergovernmentalism and reinforce the autonomy of *de novo* bodies in external action, despite the internal and external crises shaking the Union during the EUGS policy-making process.

Agenda setting: putting the HR/VP’s right of initiative into force

The need to update the ESS came as a consequence of several external and internal factors. On the one hand, the global transformations from 2003 to 2016 witnessed the

effects of growing multipolarity, the erosion of the EU's normative power and the effects of instability in its neighbourhood (Smith 2016). On the other, the EU has been severely affected by internal crises, from the euro to the refugee and Brexit crises, and the questioning of the European integration project with the rise of populism and Euroscepticism (Barbé and Morillas 2019). From the outset, the motivation for new strategic thinking was more defensive, based on security threats, the diminishment of internal cohesion and a wobbly internal and external environment (interview MS-33).

In addition, the changing dynamics of external action brought about by the Lisbon Treaty gave the necessary impulse to think anew in strategic terms (Andersson et al. 2011). The new institutions, particularly the HR/VP and the EEAS, demanded a new sense of direction (Biscop 2015, 24), which should be based on a joined-up and 'whole of EU' approach to external action (interviews EU-4, MS-21, MS-24, EU-31)³. The added value of an all-encompassing strategy would be to avoid silo mentalities (interview EU-31) and to apply the principle of coherence to policies, institutions and member states (interview EU-2).

Contrary to the lack of interest in strategic discussions of her predecessor, Catherine Ashton, (interviews EU-37, EU-38), Federica Mogherini was fully in line with the objective of building a 'stronger global actor' of the Juncker Commission (European Commission 2014). So whereas Solana was not able to have a strategy for the whole of external action (the ESS was circumscribed to the pre-Lisbon CFSP pillar) and Ashton was not willing to use the resources at her disposal, Mogherini was 'able and willing' (interview EU-2).

Making use of her right of initiative, the push of the HR/VP became the most determinant factor during the inception phase of the EUGS. She understood that launching a strategy-making process meant leaving a personal footprint into external action (interviews MS-9, MS-17, EU-34; Mogherini 2014). Some staff of the EEAS was also pleased to perceive a renewed impetus in strategic discussions, following Ashton's lack of interest (interview EU-7).

Mogherini built on the mandate given by the European Council (2013) to the 'High Representative' (HR) to launch a process of strategic reflection. Member states who favoured an intergovernmental understanding of external action emphasized that the launch of the strategy-making process derived from a mandate of member states to the HR – not the HR/VP – in the European Council (interviews MS-17, EU-23), so in line with the intergovernmental methods of the CFSP. They circumscribed the exercise to the fields of security and defence only (interviews EU-23, MS-29), also because that session of the European Council (2013) was a 'thematic debate on defence'. A member state-driven process enabled reluctant capitals – either fearing internal divisions or the irrelevance of an 'academic exercise' (interviews MS-26, MS-29, Exp-32) – not to lose their grip on subsequent developments in strategy-making.

Mogherini's vision was based, however, on broadening the scope of the strategic assessment beyond security and defence and prioritising a 'whole of EU' approach (Tocci 2016a). She established a working group including representatives from the EEAS, the European Commission, the EU Council Secretariat and the European Council to work on a joint document from November 2014 to June 2015 (Tocci 2015, 119). The involvement of the European Commission signalled the willingness of the HR/VP to use her 'two hats fully' in the benefit of a joined-up assessment of external action (interviews EU-1, MS-36).

A series of meetings were organized with the members of the strategic planning departments of the ministries of foreign affairs. In them, member states adopted a listening mode, arguing that the HR/VP was producing a 'strategic assessment' and not a new strategy, for which there was still insufficient agreement among member states (interviews MS-29, EU-34). Nonetheless, the HR/VP used the mandate of the European Council (2013) to stretch her prerogatives as much as possible, going beyond the elaboration of a report on the international environment and considering the strategic assessment (EEAS 2015) the first step towards the EUGS.

Reading the agenda-setting phase of the EUGS against the premises of the new intergovernmentalism (Fabbrini and Puetter 2016), the leading role of the European Council and the needed consensus among member states was less important than the entrepreneurship of the HR/VP. Mogherini provided the overall political direction and became the catalyst of the initiative despite the initial reluctance of some member states to discuss a new strategy. Mogherini built on the mandate of the European Council to undertake a strategic assessment and interpreted it generously, considering it the preliminary phase of the EUGS and putting forward a 'whole of EU' vision, instead of just a security and defence one.

Policy formulation: the reinforcement of autonomy in intergovernmentalism

The European Council (2015) mandated 'the High Representative' to prepare the EUGS by June 2016. For member states, this wording again reflected an intergovernmental process: the HR had to prepare a new strategy 'on foreign and security policy' in close cooperation with them. The European Commission was not mentioned in the wording of the European Council (2015) conclusions, so the new strategy should be considered along the lines of the ESS -i.e. a security strategy falling within the realm of the CFSP.

In the mind of the HR/VP, however, the reading of the conclusions was more nuanced. Having been put in the driving seat of the new strategy, Mogherini was entitled to pursue a 'comprehensive (...) and a genuinely common EU global strategy. And the key is precisely the word common' (Mogherini 2015a, 5–6). 'Global' was to be understood in the geographic and thematic sense of the word (Mogherini 2015b; Tocci 2016a), including security, defence and the external relations of the European Commission. The EUGS provided the perfect opportunity to showcase the evolving nature of EU external action and to bridge a long-standing gap between the European Commission and member states (interview EU-1).

The policy-formulation process had to be as inclusive as possible to reflect the joined-up vision of the EUGS. Mogherini and her special advisor, Nathalie Tocci, lead a 'highly centralized' process (interview MS-16). For them, this was the only way to obtain a truly strategic document and not a 'lowest common denominator' one, so the traditional methods of drafting by committee in the CFSP had to be discarded (interviews MS-9, MS-12, EU-27).

Some member states warned against Brussels-based bodies going 'too far' in their prerogatives (interview MS-21). The policy formulation, however, was devised as an inclusive process from the outset, bringing together the intergovernmental and supra-national features of the EU under the coordination of the EEAS and the leadership of the

HR/VP. The consultations with member states and the European Commission followed separate tracks, with their representatives never meeting together to discuss the contents of the strategy (interviews EU-15, EU-34).⁴ Consultations also included epistemic communities and policy networks (Tocci 2017b, 41).

On the side of the member states, an unorthodox system of national points of contact (POCs) was set in motion.⁵ The meetings discussed different aspects of external action and were based on questionnaires that the EEAS sent to the member states beforehand. The Strategic Planning Division of the EEAS coordinated the formalities of the consultation process, while Tocci focused on the contents of the strategy (interview EU-15). The EEAS was in charge of the drafting process, although it also encouraged POCs to provide comments to reinforce the national ownership of the exercise, eventually keeping in the text parts of the wording provided by member states (interviews EU-2, EU-15).

During the consultations with the POCs, participants complained that they were not given access to the full draft of the text, so they felt too much in the hands of the EEAS when it came to reflecting their inputs into the strategy (interviews MS-6, MS-20, MS-21, MS-22, MS-26, MS-33). Officials also recall that member states were 'shocked' when they learned that the HR/VP wanted to set up the consultation process via the POCs and not the Political and Security Committee (PSC) or the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) (interviews EU-7, MS-9, MS-13), a step taken by the HR/VP and her team to avoid weekly discussions in Brussels-based intergovernmental institutions, which would have also required reports to be sent back to capitals. This procedure gave to the EEAS additional leverage and control over the agenda and the pace of the drafting process (interviews MS-20, MS-22).

As a result, capital-based diplomats acting as POCs expressed the need to limit the exercise to security discussions, thus not buying into the understanding of a global external action strategy (interviews MS-35, MS-36). They feared that entering broader external action dimensions involved moving from a purely intergovernmental policy (the CFSP) to a hybrid one, whereby EU institutions enjoyed larger prerogatives. PSC representatives also voiced concerns about the 'take it or leave it' approach to strategy-making (interviews MS-16, MS-17).

Awareness regarding an insufficiently intergovernmental process exacerbated during the last phase of the consultations (interviews EU-2, MS-26). In the so-called 'confessionals'⁶, a first draft of the strategy was presented in order to identify the 'red lines' of member states, which had been limited thanks to the previous consultations with the POCs (interview MS-9). Participants read fragments of the EUGS but their opinions were not automatically reflected in the final text (López-Aranda 2017, 75). Instead, the EEAS staff took note of their comments and worked on a revised version, keeping control over the drafting process.

Member states adapted to the proceedings established by the EEAS rather than confronting them (interview MS-9, MS-24). The general understanding was that producing a good text and securing the buy-in required a certain degree of flexibility. The HR/VP had been put in the driving seat since the beginning of the exercise, so she also had the legitimacy to define the policy formulation process as desired (interviews MS-6, MS-12, MS-24). Overall, the text was considered as 'negotiated' by member states (interview EU-15), even if it had followed an unorthodox and innovative policy formulation method (Tocci 2017a).

The assessment of the policy formulation of the EUGS against the premises of the new intergovernmentalism shows a lesser degree of leadership of the European Council and other intergovernmental bodies than expected (Fabbrini and Puetter 2016). The day-to-day discussion and coordination of policy initiatives in these institutions was replaced with a policy-making process lead by the office of the HR/VP. The drafters avoided the drafting by committee and set up a consultation process where member states were not in the driving seat.

The POCs system also contrasts with core assumptions of 'deliberative intergovernmentalism' (Puetter 2014), which gives a prominent role to the member states and intergovernmental bodies in policy deliberations. Instead of confronting this novel policy-making method, member states adapted to it, thus increasing the autonomy of the EEAS in the traditionally intergovernmental CFSP. The policy formulation method of the EUGS also nuances the new intergovernmentalism's understanding of *de novo* bodies as a tool for the coordination of member states' initiatives. Instead, the HR/VP and the EEAS acted as policy entrepreneurs in the making of the EUGS.

Policy output: acceptance without adoption

The full text of the EUGS was circulated for the first time to member states three days before the European Council of 28–29 June, where it was presented by the HR/VP (Tocci 2017a). The discussion of the text among heads of state and government was overshadowed by the divisive dynamics of the Brexit referendum of 23 June 2016. Some voices advocated for the postponement of the presentation of the EUGS due to the lack of attention that it would gather (interviews MS-6, MS-21, Exp-25).

However, as it was the case in previous phases, the decision to present the EUGS regardless of Brexit was a personal choice of the HR/VP (interviews EU-2, MS-33). Mogherini understood that the long consultation process had resulted in a text agreed 'line by line by all 28 member states and the Commission, [so it was] not a wish list of the HR/VP' (Tocci 2016b, 8). Reluctant member states eventually acknowledged that Mogherini took the right decision to move ahead with the presentation of the EUGS regardless of Brexit (interviews MS-21, MS-33).

According to several national diplomats, the insufficient involvement of member states in the drafting process led to the non-adoption of the strategy at the European Council (2016) (interviews MS-16, MS-26). The conclusions only 'welcomed' the presentation of the EUGS, but did not endorse it. Looking back, however, the discussions on adopting, welcoming or endorsing the EUGS were seen as 'ritualistic' (interview MS-22), since the weak endorsement had little impact on the ownership of the EUGS (interviews MS-14, EU-15, MS-17). This contrasts with the policy-making dynamics depicted by the new intergovernmentalism, which considers the European Council as the catalyst of integration and the central institution where political agreements are made (Fabbrini and Puetter 2016).

Implementation: the parallel convergence of policy initiatives

To overcome the criticism on the lack of implementation that EU strategies often receive (Menon 2013; Müller 2016), the EUGS was conceived as an actionable and policy-

oriented document from the beginning (Tocci 2017a; Barbé 2016), as its title ‘shared vision, common action’ reveals. Soon after its publication, the EUGS was followed by a specific implementation plan, thus becoming a ‘symbol and a tool’ (interview MS-21). The mandate for implementation followed a ‘whole of EU’ approach to external action on the basis of the European Council (2016) conclusions, which instructed ‘the High Representative, the Commission and the Council to take the work forward’.

Soon after the presentation of the EUGS, the HR/VP set in motion a multi-staged process of implementation which started with the discussion at the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) in July 2016. In this Council, foreign ministers ‘welcomed’ the EUGS document and the intention of the HR/VP to present a ‘framework with processes and timelines’, which would ‘operationalize the vision set out in the strategy’ (EU Council 2016a). Before the FAC meeting in October, the HR/VP had proposed a ‘roadmap’ for implementation in which she detailed priority areas for the first year.⁷

In October, foreign affairs ministers adopted conclusions on the EUGS, in which they acknowledged that the strategy ‘will guide the EU’s external action for the years to come’ and committed to its implementation ‘jointly with the High Representative and the Commission’, underlining the ‘Member States’ ownership and involvement throughout the process’ (EU Council 2016b). The text of the conclusions also endorsed the priority areas of the roadmap as ‘five priorities for the EU’s external action’.

As it was the case during the policy formulation process, the HR/VP and the EEAS took the lead in the definition of the areas and priorities of implementation, which were subsequently adopted by member states. Even the actors who disliked an excessively autonomous policy formulation process understood that the EUGS was a ‘point of reference’ and a platform to move initiatives forward (interviews MS-14, MS-21, MS-22, MS-28, MS-33). The process that had prevented the full adoption of the EUGS did not have a strong impact on its implementation, so the new strategy became a *fait accompli* (interviews MS-17, MS-24 and EU-27), in line with the aspirations of member states (interviews MS-12, MS-16, MS-33).

Of all areas of implementation, security and defence has been the one where most progress has been made, even if these are areas particularly prone to the impact of broader and divisive developments such as power transition and shifting power relations at the global stage (Howorth 2013; Howorth and Schmidt 2016).⁸ External necessity – the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States – and internal crises – Brexit and recent terrorist attacks – were often mentioned as enabling factors (interview Exp-32). Others saw the pushing of big member states as the reason behind the renewed impetus in security and defence matters (interviews MS-8, EU-30). The HR/VP, in turn, argued that, thanks to the EUGS, the EU had ‘moved more in the last ten months than in the last ten years’ (EEAS 2017b).

Discussions on the EU’s ‘strategic autonomy’ have been considered by some as a distraction from more pressing issues such as the reinforcement of EU-NATO cooperation (Howorth 2018). However, relevant voices involved in the EUGS policy-making process also acknowledge that the new strategy soon became the ‘vehicle’ for subsequent developments in EU security and defence (interview MS-28). Despite the shocks of the election of Donald Trump or the effects of Brexit, security and defence discussions were kept on the table thanks to the EUGS and its clear timelines and deliverables (interviews MS-28, EU-34). As a result, a path towards the parallel convergence of

initiatives – for which the EUGS provided a structuring narrative – was facilitated thanks to the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence (IPSD), the cooperation initiatives between the EU and NATO, the European Commission's European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) and, later, the European Defence Fund (EDF).

As soon as the roadmap for the implementation of the EUGS was presented, member states emphasized the need to resume 'word-by-word' negotiations on security and defence matters (interviews MS-17, MS-20). The FAC of November 2016 examined a proposal by the HR/VP on the IPSD (EU Council 2016c), in which 'a new level of ambition' was presented as part of a 'wider package' including EDAP and EU-NATO cooperation. The proposal of the IPSD included references to three major initiatives: the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) (Fiott, Missiroli, and Tardy 2017).

Member states criticized the attempt by the EEAS to adopt the initial proposal of the HR/VP on the IPSD as Council conclusions without proper intergovernmental negotiations (interviews MS-17, Exp-18, EU-23). They requested to resume intergovernmental procedures, instead of pursuing the innovative policy formulation process of the EUGS, and reminded the HR/VP that security and defence matters had to be discussed 'within the order' (interview MS-16).

Despite the return to 'deliberative intergovernmentalism' (Puetter 2014), participants in the process note that the EEAS text for the IPSD (EU Council 2016c) and the final Council conclusions (EU Council 2016d) did not dramatically differ, with the latter only nuancing the level of ambition of member states (interviews MS-17, EU-23). The inputs provided by the EEAS acted as a 'political trigger' and 'strategic impetus' for the discussions on security and defence (interviews MS-24, EU-34). So while intergovernmentalism still dominated security and defence discussions during the implementation of the EUGS, it also benefited from the inputs and 'partial transmission and outsourcing' of the initiative to the HR/VP and the EEAS (interviews MS-22, EU-27, MS-29).

Together with the initiatives on the IPSD and EU-NATO cooperation, the European Commission presented its EDAP in November 2016, including the EDF to support more efficient spending by member states on joint defence capabilities and to foster a competitive and innovative industrial base (European Commission 2016). The European Commission's involvement in defence matters and the use of the European budget to fund defence-related activities were considered a 'big shift', 'previously unthinkable' (interviews EU-23, EU-27, EU-30). The Commission's involvement also facilitated the parallel convergence of security and defence initiatives and was positively perceived by member states (interviews MS-8, MS-20). Some voices even argued that institutional inertia in security and defence were overcome and that traditional taboos were broken (interview Exp-18).

The implementation of the EUGS again nuances the centrality of the European Council and the Council and the need for intergovernmental consensus to move initiatives forward. Instead of the EEAS implementing the initiatives set forth by member states and assisting in generating policy outputs, the European Council and the Council followed the path provided by the EUGS and embraced a 'whole of EU' approach to external action. The European Council included the European Commission in its mandate for implementing the EUGS and put the HR/VP in the driving seat of subsequent developments.

As the new intergovernmentalism rightly acknowledges (Puetter 2014), the operationalization of the EUGS came in the form of Council conclusions. Member states tried at

first to regain the ownership of the developments in security and defence, although the EEAS and the HR/VP had already set the tone of developments in their proposal on the IPSD. The EEAS acted as the trigger of new initiatives, including in traditionally inter-governmental and divisive areas. And although member states still played a prominent role, the EUGS facilitated the parallel convergence of intergovernmental and supranational initiatives in defence such as the EDAP and EDF.

Conclusion

The EUGS has enabled the HR/VP to take advantage of her right of initiative in external action, both regarding the range of policies covered by the new strategy and its policy formulation process. New dynamics based on autonomy in intergovernmentalism have been present during the making of the EUGS, from agenda-setting to implementation. Throughout the process, the intergovernmental foundations of EU security and defence have emulated supranational dynamics, as shown by the wide range of new initiatives emanating from Brussels (Riddervold and Trondal 2016).

The new intergovernmentalism understands that intergovernmental bodies such as the European Council and the Council are always at the roots of new policy initiatives. During the policy formulation phase of the EUGS, however, most debates took place under the auspices of the EEAS, who designed an innovative platform of POCs to avoid the traditional intergovernmental methods of 'drafting by committee'. Deliberative intergovernmentalism was secondary when compared to the path set by the EUGS process, so consensus generation at the intergovernmental level was not constant in 'all stages of the policy-making' (Puetter 2014), as assumed by the new intergovernmentalism.

The result of the policy formulation process was a strategy that 'everybody owns but no one negotiated', in the words of HR/VP Mogherini.⁹ Despite disagreements on the way the process was handled, member states accepted the EUGS as the vehicle through which subsequent initiatives would navigate. Regardless of discussions on security and defence taking place in intergovernmental bodies such as the FAC, the centre of political gravity of the EUGS was established at the EEAS under the leadership of the HR/VP. The fact that, *ad intra*, these *de novo* bodies exercised their right of initiative also helped to overcome the divisive and crisis-ridden dynamics that the contents of the EUGS actually reflect.

In line with previous findings when analysing the dynamics of the euro crisis and the growing autonomy of the European Commission or the European Central Bank (Bauer and Becker 2014; Schimmelfennig 2015a; Dehousse 2016), this article has found that the EEAS and the HR/VP -two *de novo* bodies of the post-Lisbon era- have gained autonomy in intergovernmentalism through their initiative in external action. The policy-making of the EUGS, characterised by innovative *ad intra* dynamics, has also fostered the commitment of member states towards new initiatives in the traditionally intergovernmental CFSP and CSDP.

Notes

1. Non-attributable interviews on the policy-making of the ESS and the EUGS were conducted by the author throughout the autumn of 2016 and the spring of 2017, mostly in Brussels. They have been coded as follows: 'EU' refers to interviews conducted with officials from the EEAS, the European Commission, the European Council and the Secretariat General of the Council; 'MS'

refers to interviews with member states' representatives; 'Exp' refers to experts of EU foreign policy. The selection of interviewees was made on the basis of their knowledge and involvement in strategy-making, securing a balanced sample of officials from EU institutions, member states and experts.

2. So far, new intergovernmentalism has been used to study developments in the economic and monetary union (Howarth and Quaglia 2015), foreign, security and defence policies (Smith 2015; Amadio Viceré 2016), energy policy (Thaler 2016) and justice and home affairs (Wolff 2015). But being a novel theoretical undertaking, scholars still need to overcome the lack of reflection of its 'theoretical propositions at the policy level' (Schimmelfennig 2015a, 728), particularly in 'new areas of activity' such as external action (Bickerton, Hodson, and Puetter 2015a).
3. The EUGS indeed broadens the CFSP focus of the ESS and covers external relations areas such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, trade and development, so the change of strategy can be considered a 'natural result of the Lisbon Treaty' (We Perfectly Know 2016, 1204).
4. Despite the necessary buy-in of the European Commission for an inclusive external action document, the EUGS was not a supranational endeavour either. The community method was replaced with meetings with European Commission officials at the EEAS (interviews EU-2, MS-13, EU31). Not entering a formal inter-service consultation enabled the HR/VP to avoid the Commission's cumbersome, hierarchical and rigid working procedures (interviews MS-9, EU-39).
5. POCs were appointed high-level officials from member states who met regularly in Brussels during the policy formulation phase.
6. Confessionals were meetings held in the EEAS between April and June 2016 and consisted in discussions on a bilateral basis with groups of member states, not at EU28 format (López-Aranda 2017, 74).
7. The roadmap, not a public document, was released on the blog Bruxelles2.eu. <https://club.bruxelles2.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/feuilleteroute-strategieglobale@ue160922.pdf> [accessed 20 November 2017].
8. The empirical analysis of this article ends with the publication of the first implementation report of the EUGS (EEAS 2017a).
9. The expression, as noted by the author, was pronounced on the occasion of the closing speech of the EUISS Annual Conference, Brussels, 8–9 October 2015.

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