1. Research Interest and Puzzle

With the Treaty of Maastricht (TEU), the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was incorporated into the institutional framework of the European Union (EU). But as many member states did not want to integrate the field of external relations fully into Community competence, three pillars with different degrees of integration were created. The CFSP made up the second pillar, where decisions still remained intergovernmental.

Nevertheless, not all external actions towards third states emerge from this second CFSP pillar. Actions primarily related to trade and development are realized in the first pillar, the European Community. To accomplish good cooperation between these two pillars and their actors and to ensure an effective appearance of the Union in international affairs, Art. 3 of the TEU asks for coherence in the external actions of the European Union. (Gauttier 2004; Nuttall 2001).

Incoherence in external relations is not a new issue. Within national foreign policies incoherence is accepted and mostly not even perceived as a problem. Nevertheless, on European level more coherent action in external relations is already desired since 40 years, and there have been several attempts to improve the cooperation of the various actors.

But despite of these already taken adaptations, the international performance of the EU is still criticised for its insufficiency and incoherence. In the literature there are two different lines of arguments why incoherence still occurs. On the one hand, it is argued that the EU, i.e. its member states as well as its supranational organisations are not willing to act in a coherent way, as this process of coordinating would reduce their own room for strategic action. On the other hand, the complex institutional structure is perceived as the main obstacle for coherence in European Foreign Policy (EFP), as decision-making procedures, actors and their competences, means and instruments are different in EC and CFSP.

My research interest directly refers to this discussion, and the key research question is:

How has the cooperation of first (EC) and second pillar (CFSP) in European Foreign Policy changed from 1995 to 2005, and what factors supported or hindered the process of cooperation?

First, I look at the process of how the interplay of the different actors has changed over time, and secondly and more importantly, I focus on the causal influence of different factors. Further, I want to analyse which formal and informal procedures were designed to foster coherence, how important better cooperation is for the involved actors and how much of a problem uncoordinated action is for them. The focus of my research is on institutional coherence, i.e. the cooperation between the pillars and within the pillars, and how this cooperation has changed over time. I analyse how the process of improving cooperation has developed the last ten years, and what factors have supported or hindered improvement on this level.

2. Theoretical Framework

My theoretical framework is based on Carlsnaes’ tripartial model of explaining a foreign policy action (Carlsnaes 1992: 254-254; 1994: 282-283) where he differentiates between the intentional, the dispositional and the structural dimension.
On the intentional level the different choices and preferences (rational perspective) of the actors are analysed and I will use the bureaucratic politics approach to explain why different actors or bureaucracies choose rationally the specific course of action among others. By applying the constructivist concept of social learning I will switch to the “dispositional dimension” of Carlsnaes’ model where the intentions of the actors are linked with the respective output. At this dimension rational assumptions about used bargaining advantages will also be added. Finally, the structural dimension will be incorporated in the theoretical framework by perceiving the institutional set-up as a constraining factor on the first two dimensions.

Based on these theoretical approaches I have identified six factors that influence the degree of coherence and cooperation of European foreign policy making: the power-factor, the policy interest-factor, the competence-factor, the time-factor, the bargaining advantage and the communication-factor.

3. Case Selection and Method

My case selection is motivated by the consideration that I want to look at a most-likely case, i.e. that I select a region or a country where good coordination of EFP is most probable. Since the end of the Cold War the EU has emphasised two priorities in its external relations: the Central and East European Countries and the Mediterranean Region. In 2003 the creation of the “European Neighbourhood Policy” (ENP) further emphasised the importance of these countries to create a secure and stable environment. The Mediterranean countries seem a good choice to analyse a most likely case, as I assume that especially towards priority countries the probability of coherence should be given. In concrete terms I decided to focus on Algeria and Morocco, and it will be interesting to examine if the degree of coherence differs in relation to these two countries.

To get detailed information about the interactions, I analyse the relevant documents and in a second step look at recent attempts of EU-actors (primarily Commission and Secretariat of the Council) to improve cooperation and coordination among them. An analysis of secondary literature as well as of media reports will support the empirical work. Nevertheless, as my analysis focus on the interaction of different European actors and their view on coherent foreign policy making, it is indispensable for my research to conduct expert-interviews with the relevant actors themselves in Brussels, but also with “experts” on the selected regions. Based on my theoretical framework and the collected empirical material I will apply process tracing to highlight how the process of coordination between the different actors has changed over time and what factors have influenced these changes.

4. Selected References


