

Common Foreign & Security Policy

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) controls the efforts of EU member states to act in a unified way on foreign policy and security affairs. The CFSP has received extensive attention in recent years as the EU has attempted to carve out an independent role for itself in foreign policy. Some member states, such as France, see this as a way of setting the EU up as a superpower to balance the strength of the USA. Other states view it as a way to improve the manner in which the EU can cooperate with and support the USA. Because of these differing agendas, progress in setting a clear direction for CFSP has been slow, although important changes have occurred.

History

Until the Maastricht Treaty came into effect in November 1993, the EU had no official role in foreign affairs and could not speak on behalf of member states. Maastricht committed the EU member states to develop a foreign policy and for the first time allowed the EU to speak with a single voice in this area. Under changes made by the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) this process was solidified into the CFSP. The Treaty created a post of EU High Representative for the CFSP, able to represent the European Council abroad. The 1999 Cologne European Council committed the EU to develop the ability to take independent military action, a policy which has been pursued by the High Representative under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). As a result, since 2003 the EU has deployed teams of international observers and peacekeeping forces, such as the team deployed to Chad in 2008. The Lisbon Treaty (2007) brought about huge changes to the CFSP. First, it combined the roles of 'High Representative for the CFSP' and the 'External Affairs Commissioner' to create a single EU Foreign Policy post of **High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**. The position is currently held by the UK's Catherine Ashton. Secondly, it created a new **European External Action Service (EEAS)** which brings the EU's diplomatic missions together under the authority of the new High Representative. Thirdly, the Lisbon Treaty changed the way ESDP decisions are made. Previously, decisions were ultimately made by member states in the Council of the European Union (each state had a veto), but the Lisbon Treaty increased the use of Qualified Majority Voting, which reduced the number of areas in which the veto can be used. Crucially, decisions on military or defence issues must still be unanimous.

How does the CFSP work?

The High Representative for Foreign Affairs is responsible for co-ordinating the EU's foreign policy and building consensus between member states. The specific powers of the Foreign Affairs post are largely undefined and likely to be shaped by Catherine Ashton in the coming years. However, actual decisions on CFSP are still made by member states in the European Council. It was agreement here that involved the EU in peacekeeping in Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Congo in 2003, as well as observer missions in Gaza (2004) and Indonesia (2005). In 2007, EU foreign ministers agreed to implement sanctions against Iran following its refusal to halt uranium enrichment. In 2008 sanctions were imposed against Zimbabwe following a

violent and undemocratic Presidential election, and the EU launched its first maritime operation against piracy off the Somali coast. The European Council also issues 'common strategies' on issues about which members states agree, many as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). These include strategies on promoting democracy and peace in Russia, the eastern Mediterranean and the Ukraine.

The use of **Qualified Majority Voting** in CFSP increased under the Lisbon Treaty (2007), but member states retain the right to **veto** all EU foreign policy decisions and strategies. For example Poland blocked a new Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) with Russia in 2005-07 in protest at an ongoing Russian ban on Polish meat imports. Also Spain, Greece and Slovakia opposed UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari's plan for Kosovan independence before an EU mission policed Kosovo's transition to independence when it declared independence from Serbia in 2008. Member states still have the freedom to pursue their own foreign policy goals as Britain and some other members did in 2003 when they decided to join the US-led invasion of Iraq, despite the opposition of other members.

Arguments about CFSP

For

- The CFSP is an effective way of enhancing security around the EU by emphasising shared goals and values.
- Co-operating on foreign policy gives countries a louder voice on the world stage.
- Pooling diplomatic and defence resources allows members to save money because they can share know-how and hardware.

Against

- The EU should not 'go it alone' but maintain traditional links with the USA through NATO and the UN.
- Setting foreign policy is one of the most important jobs of a national government. Un-elected European officials should not be given this power.
- Member states find it very difficult to agree on foreign and security policy, so the CFSP can only ever have limited effectiveness.
- CFSP allows some countries to do less about their security because they can ride on the back of more powerful countries, like the UK or France.

Quotations

'For decades we had been confronted by various forms of crises on our doorsteps – but without the means to address them. Now we have...' Javier Solana, High Representative for CFSP, 2006
'[CFSP] would have profound and troubling implications for the transatlantic alliance and for future U.S. influence in Europe.' Jeffrey Ciambalo, Journal of Foreign Affairs, '04

Technical Terms

Veto: The right of one country to block a decision.

Qualified Majority Voting: 74.8% of votes cast have to be in favour of a proposal for it to pass. Votes are spread in relation to the size of a country.

Links

- http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/cfsp/index_en.htm
- <http://www.euractiv.com/en/security>