FOREIGN POLICY: AIMS, INSTRUMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was established in 1993 and has since been strengthened by subsequent treaties. Today, Parliament regularly contributes to the development of the CFSP, in particular by scrutinising the activities of its institutional actors and bodies: the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) and the EU delegations. Parliament’s budgetary powers shape the scale and scope of the CFSP, as well as the EU financial instruments that sustain the EU’s foreign activities.

CFSP: DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TREATIES

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union was established by the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in 1993 with the aim of preserving peace, strengthening international security, promoting international cooperation and developing and consolidating democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The TEU introduced the ‘three-pillar system’, with the CFSP as the second pillar. The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam established a more efficient decision-making process, including constructive abstention and qualified majority voting (QMV). In December 1999, the European Council established the role of the High Representative for the CFSP. The 2003 Treaty of Nice introduced further changes to streamline the decision-making process and mandated the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which had been established under a Council decision in January 2001, to exercise political control and strategic direction of crisis management operations.

The Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force on 1 December 2009, provided the Union with legal personality and an institutional structure for its external service. In addition, it eliminated the pillar structure introduced by the TEU in 1993. The Treaty created a range of new CFSP actors, including the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who also serves as Vice-President of the Commission (VP/HR), and the new permanent President of the European Council. Moreover, it created the European External Action Service (EEAS) and upgraded the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which forms an integral part of the CFSP. (For details 5.1.2)

The legal basis for the CFSP was set out in the TEU and revised in the Lisbon Treaty. Articles 21-46, Title V, of the TEU establish the ‘General Provisions on the Union’s External Action and Specific Provisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy
(CFSP). Articles 205-222, Part 5, of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) cover the Union’s external action. Articles 346 and 347, Part 7, also apply.

Looking to the future, the final report of the EU’s Conference on the Future of Europe, presented to the Presidents of the three EU institutions on 9 May 2022, proposed ‘that the EU improve its capacity to take speedy and effective decisions, notably in CFSP, speaking with one voice and acting as a truly global player, projecting a positive role in the world and making a difference in response to any crisis’.

PARLIAMENT’S FOREIGN POLICY POWERS AND INSTRUMENTS

Despite its limited formal role in foreign policy decision-making, Parliament has supported the concept of the CFSP from its inception and sought to extend its scope. In view of the international challenges arising in the last decade, Parliament repeatedly pushed for the creation of an EU ‘foreign minister’ post and a ‘European diplomatic service’. In practice, Parliament has achieved a degree of informal cooperation with the EEAS, the EU Presidency, the Council Secretariat and the Commission in the realm of foreign affairs, as well as with the national parliaments of the Member States.

Article 36 of the TEU requires the High Representative to consult Parliament regularly on the principal aspects of and choices made under the CFSP and to inform Parliament of the policy’s evolution. Parliament holds twice-yearly debates on CFSP progress reports and puts questions and recommendations to the Council and the High Representative.

Parliament's right to be informed and consulted about the CFSP/CSDP was further strengthened by the High Representative's declaration of political accountability in 2010, attached to Parliament’s resolution on creation of the EEAS. The declaration provided, inter alia, for:

— Enhancing the status of the ‘Joint Consultation Meetings’ (JCMs), which allow a designated group of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to meet counterparts from the Council’s Political and Security Committee (PSC), the EEAS and the Commission to discuss planned and ongoing civilian CSDP missions;

— Affirming the right of Parliament’s ‘special committee' to have access to confidential information relating to the CFSP and the CSDP. This right is based on an interinstitutional agreement of 2002;

— Holding exchanges of views with heads of mission, heads of delegation and other senior EU officials during committee meetings and hearings of committees of Parliament;

— Mandating the High Representative to appear before Parliament at least twice a year to report on the current state of affairs regarding the CFSP/CSDP and to answer questions.

In addition to this political dialogue, Parliament exercises its authority through the budgetary procedure. As one arm of the EU’s budgetary authority, Parliament must approve the annual CFSP budget. An interinstitutional agreement of December 2020 on budgetary discipline sets the framework for the annual approval and the basic structure of the CFSP budget, as well as reporting mechanisms. Parliament also helps to shape
the relevant external financial instruments through a process of trilateral negotiations with the Council and the Commission.

Parliament regularly scrutinises the operations of the EEAS and provides it with suggestions on structural issues, ranging from its geographical and gender balance to its interaction with other EU institutions and the diplomatic services of the Member States. Parliament also holds regular discussions with the High Representative and the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) appointed for certain regions or issues. Parliamentary committees, which helped to set up the EEAS, also exchange views with the EEAS’s newly appointed heads of delegation.

Parliament also has a role to play in monitoring the negotiation and implementation of international agreements. Parliament’s consent is required before the Council can conclude such agreements. (For more details 5.2.1, 5.2.3)

INTERNAL PARLIAMENT STRUCTURES INVOLVED IN THE CFSP

Much of Parliament’s work on the CFSP is done in specialised committees, in particular the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and its two subcommittees (on Security and Defence (SEDE) and on Human Rights (DROI)). Their work is complemented by the Committee on International Trade (INTA), the Committee on Development (DEVE), and the temporary Special Committee on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation, and the strengthening of integrity, transparency and accountability in the European Parliament (ING2). These committees shape the CFSP through the reports and opinions they issue. They also serve as Parliament’s principal points of contact with global governance structures (including the United Nations), other EU institutions, the Council presidencies and Member States’ national parliaments.

CFSP-related work is also undertaken by parliamentary delegations, whose role is to maintain and develop Parliament’s international contacts (especially through interparliamentary cooperation), promoting the Union’s founding values, including liberty, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. There are currently 44 standing interparliamentary delegations, including joint parliamentary committees (JPCs), parliamentary cooperation committees (PCCs), other parliamentary delegations and joint parliamentary assemblies. These include inter-parliamentary delegations to the following multilateral assemblies:

— The ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, created to bring together MEPs and the elected representatives of those African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries that have signed the Cotonou Agreement;

— EuroLat, a joint multilateral assembly originating in the Bi-Regional Strategic Association established in June 1999 between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean;

— The EuroNest parliamentary assembly (PA), the parliamentary forum of the EU’s Eastern Partnership, which brings together MEPs and members of national parliaments in Eastern Partnership countries;
— The Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM), representing the parliamentary dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which replaced the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (the Barcelona Process).
— The NATO Parliamentary Assembly, where the European Parliament delegation has a role as observer with enhanced rights and aims to convey its positions on the EU-NATO relationship.

PARLIAMENT’S IMPACT ON THE CFSP

Parliament’s involvement in the CFSP helps to enhance the policy’s democratic accountability. Parliament has strongly supported the post-Lisbon institutional landscape, advocating an enhanced role for the VP/HR, the EEAS, the EU delegations and the EUSRs, as well as a more coherent policy and a more effective CFSP, including sanctions. It has pushed for greater coherence among the EU’s political and financial instruments for external policies, in order to avoid duplication and inefficiency.

Parliament is consulted on CFSP, exercises scrutiny over it and provides strategic policy input. Its involvement is centred on regular debates on key foreign policy topics with the VP/HR in the plenary session or in the AFET committee, in particular on the annual report on the implementation of the CFSP. Parliament has provided a platform for exchanges among institutional and governmental policymakers, as well as civil society, think tanks and academics, helping to raise public awareness of the CFSP and facilitating the participation of a wide range of partners within and beyond the EU, both governmental and non-governmental. Through its activities, Parliament has strengthened the visibility of the EU’s foreign policies, and served as a bridge between the EU institutions and citizens.

In its most recent expression of political guidance with regard to the EU’s institutional framework for external action, Parliament recommended, in its resolution of 15 March 2023 on the functioning of the EEAS and a stronger EU in the world, that the Council, the Commission and the VP/HR ‘improve the coordination and integration of EU foreign policy and the external dimension of EU internal policies, in particular migration, trade and energy’ and ‘ensure that development cooperation, trade policy and security and defence policy are coherent and consistent with the overall goals of the EU's CFSP’. It also asked for the reinforcement of ‘the strategic coordination structure composed of all relevant commissioners, the VP/HR and the Commission and EEAS services to ensure coherence, synergy, transparency and accountability of the EU’s external action’, with ‘the VP/HR’s leading role as a bridge-builder between the CFSP and EU external relations’, and with ‘the leading institutional role’ assumed by the EEAS. Parliament also advocated meaningful revisions of both the 2010 Council Decision establishing the EEAS and the VP/HR’s 2010 Declaration on Political Accountability. Parliament repeatedly recommended the full use of qualified majority voting for certain foreign policy areas, such as human rights and the protection of international law, and for the imposition of sanctions. In addition, it asked for effective delivery of foreign assistance under the brand of ‘Team Europe’, established as a
response to the global consequences of COVID-19, composed of EU institutions and Member States’ and European external funding agencies and banks.

EU’S FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The High Representative presented the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy to the European Council on 28 June 2016. With its emphasis on security, its ambition for strategic autonomy and its principled yet pragmatic approach to Europe’s environment, the EU Global Strategy signifies an important change of philosophy from the 2003 European Security Strategy. Together with Member States, national parliaments, experts and the wider public, the European Parliament was involved in the Global Strategy consultation process. Parliament organised AFET committee meetings and expert hearings dedicated to the Global Strategy, and passed a resolution on ‘The EU in a changing global environment — a more connected, contested and complex world’, which expressed Parliament’s wishes for the future direction of EU external policy.

The EU Global Strategy’s security and defence aspects were substantially complemented by the EU Strategic Compass endorsed by European Council on 24-25 March 2022. As a consequence of the strategic challenge to European security and global stability posed by Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU has recently undergone a paradigm shift and launched several new initiatives on CSDP and the defence industry (For details 5.1.2).

Furthermore, in order to provide for a sustainable option for global infrastructure investment and to rise to the geopolitical challenge posed by China’s investment and governance model, the EU came up with a Global Gateway strategy in 2021. This initiative aims to raise up to EUR 300 billion in public and private investment into various sectors of connectivity around the world, promoting EU values and a global rulebook at the same time. Parliament also highlighted the ‘geopolitical centrality’ of the Global Gateway’s connectivity approach in its recent resolution on the implementation of the CFSP in 2022, noted below. This initiative relies partly on money from the EU budget’s Global Europe instrument (also known as the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument — NDICI), worth approximately EUR 80 billion in 2021-2027.

PARLIAMENT’S ANNUAL RESOLUTIONS

In its annual resolution on the implementation of the CFSP in 2022 adopted on 18 January 2023, Parliament underscored ‘the tectonic shift in the geopolitical landscape caused by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine’. This geopolitical paradigm shift was complemented by other international challenges, such as the continued rise of global authoritarianism, increasing Sino-Russian cooperation, China’s assertive foreign policy, the climate emergency and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges led to a ‘call for a swifter implementation of the concept of strategic autonomy, solidarity and for a geopolitical awakening of the EU’. The text further urges concrete action and implementation of the concept of strategic autonomy.
of the EU and of the Strategic Compass. It makes further recommendations aimed at strengthening the EU’s institutional and decision-making arrangements in foreign and security policy. Parliament also reiterates the role of a reinforced multilateralism, with the EU-UN relationship at its core, aimed at ‘advancing human security, sustainable development and the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts’. Crucially, it noted that the Russian war in Ukraine ‘has reaffirmed the role of NATO as the bedrock of European security and the indispensability of a strong transatlantic bond’, and welcomed the third joint declaration on EU-NATO cooperation, adopted on 10 January 2023.

Importantly, Parliament’s latest 2023 annual resolution on the implementation of the CSDP (For details 5.1.2) and annual resolution on human rights and democracy in the world (For details 5.4.1) provide for further positions within their respective areas.

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