Still Governing in the Shadows? Member States and the Political and Security Committee in the Post-Lisbon EU Foreign Policy Architecture*

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Abstract

The Lisbon Treaty introduced far-reaching reforms for EU foreign policy co-operation. In the decade since, most scholarship has focused on the High Representative and EEAS. Far less consideration has been given to its consequences for member states' ownership of foreign policy. This article therefore examines how these institutional reforms have affected the Political and Security Committee (PSC), established to enable member states to better manage EU foreign policy cooperation. Drawing on new empirical data, it shows that the PSC has found its capacity to act as strategic agenda-setter increasingly constrained because of greater opportunities for activism by the HRVP and EEAS; and by the emergence of the European Council as the key arbiter in foreign policy decision-making. While this indicates the PSC today finds it harder to perform the role originally assigned to it, it is gaining alternative relevance through an emerging oversight role, which has implications for member states' EU foreign policy engagement.

Keywords: common foreign and security policy; European foreign policy; political and security committee; European External Action Service; institutional politics

Introduction

European foreign policy remains a complex and hybrid construct (Smith, 2018). Formal processes of decision-making and the central role of member states have changed little since the Treaty of Maastricht established the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). However, the institutional framework facilitating member states' foreign policy cooperation has evolved considerably. The Lisbon Treaty is the most recent upgrade to the EU's foreign policy architecture, creating the strengthened and expanded role of High Representative/Vice President of the Commission (HRVP); establishing an EU diplomatic service, the European External Action Service (EEAS); and instituting a system of permanent chairs of key committees including the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and Political and Security Committee (PSC). Lisbon therefore represents the most far-reaching changes in EU foreign policy cooperation in decades, particularly in terms

of the increased importance assigned to the supranational level and consequently to a potential dilution of the intergovernmental character of the CFSP.

Supranational institutions matter in EU foreign policy-making in crucial ways. First, there are those that act as agents of the member states in supporting the formulation and implementation of CFSP decisions: the HRVP, EEAS and Commission (Delreux, 2015). During the early post-Lisbon, there were many turf battles about what form delegation and control should take, most obviously in the establishment of the EEAS (Maurer and Morgenstern-Pomorski, 2018). These highlighted the increasing difficulty of separating and differentiating between the different modes of governance at work due to the interconnectedness of EU external relations and traditional foreign policy (Riddervold, 2016). Second, supranational institutions also provide the platform for member states to exchange, deliberate and argue (Puetter, 2014). In this regard the FAC and European Council (EUCO) have contributed greatly to what Allen (1998) calls the Brusselization of EU foreign policy-making. The bodies and complex structures supporting them, including the PSC, form a system that today goes 'beyond intergovernmentalism' (Sjursen, 2011) and is better characterized as 'transgovernmental' (Wallace and Reh, 2014).

EU policy-makers are aware of this central role of member states in EU foreign policy-making. During Mogherini's, 2014 EP confirmation the HRVP-designate emphasized 'ownership' by member states as one of her three guiding principles (Mogherini, 2014). Josep Borrell (2019) similarly emphasized 'unity' and the united 'power of EU member states' in his mission statement. This reflects the reality that the EU's international actorness requires foreign policy cooperation, which in turn depends on member states. To understand this foreign policy *cooperation system* today, therefore, we must consider how Lisbon has affected the balance within and between the institutions it encompasses, and particularly how member states interact with and within them.

To date, much of the literature on post-Lisbon EU foreign policy has focused on the HRVP, EEAS and Commission – understandable given this is where Lisbon's most significant changes occurred. However, how these changes have affected EU member states' place in the system has been little considered, and this is where we concentrate our attention. We focus specifically on the PSC, the permanent, Brussels-based ambassadorial-level body established in 2001, and the key actor through which member states engage in everyday foreign policy cooperation. The question we pose is this article is: how have the institutional adaptations of the Lisbon Treaty affected the PSC?

The PSC has been central to the institutionalization of EU foreign and security policy making. It has facilitated and expanded the regular exchanges between member states and played a leading role in EU crisis management. It has become a crucial interface between capitals and the supranational level on the one hand; and between the main Brussels-based institutions on the other. In their 2007 assessment, Juncos and Reynolds concluded that the PSC had become so influential it was in effect 'governing in the shadows' with PSC ambassadors 'routinely impact[ing] upon the definition of national interests and foreign policies' (2007, p. 127). Despite this, it is barely referenced in Lisbon even though the treaty's reforms dramatically reshaped the policy environment in which it sits. With the Lisbon reforms now in place for more than ten years and ongoing debates about future reforms it seems pertinent and timely to consider whether the PSC still governs – in the shadows or otherwise. An examination of the PSC,

moreover, provides an ideal starting point to explore how policy interactions and power balances between supranational actors and member states have evolved in the post-Lisbon environment and crucially to assess how and to what extent member state engagement in EU foreign policy making may have changed.

The article proceeds with neoinstitutionalist expectations of how the Lisbon treaty reforms have impacted the PSC before the latter are empirically assessed. We show that although there was no direct intention to adjust the role of the PSC or, through it, the involvement of members states in transnational coordination of EU foreign policy in Brussels, the PSC's role has nevertheless changed significantly since Lisbon due to the strengthened role of the HRVP, the creation of the EEAS, and the emergence of the EUCO as key strategic actor in EU foreign policy. We then discuss the implications of our findings.

I. Operationalizing the Roles of the PSC Post-Lisbon

EU member states' intention with the Lisbon reforms was not to change their centrality in foreign policy decision-making but rather to strengthen the institutional support structures and upgrade the EU's broader diplomatic toolkit. This was reflected in an enhanced institutional role for the HRVP, particularly in CFSP agenda-setting and implementation; the creation of the EEAS as a dedicated diplomatic service; and the establishment of a 'permanent presidency' through permanent chairs of the EUCO, FAC and its supporting substructure, including the PSC (Maurer and Morgenstern-Pomorski, 2018; Morillas, 2020). Bickerton (2011) characterized the PSC as 'central to contemporary EU foreign and security policy-making processes' (2011, p. 178). While Lisbon made no legal changes to its functioning, these wider systemic changes, especially to the role and resources of supranational agents, have had inevitable – if unintended – consequences.

In this section we conceptualize and operationalize the assumed main impacts of those reforms on the PSC. In legal terms, the PSC's role is largely unchanged since 2001. It monitors the international situation; contributes to CFSP policy formulation; and monitors implementation of agreed CFSP policies (Art. 38 TEU). Furthermore, since the creation of CSDP it has particular responsibility for the political control and strategic direction of crisis management operations. However, its role and importance go beyond treaty texts. As noted, it has been a driver of 'Brusselization' (Allen, 1998), whereby Brussels has become an increasingly significant locus of foreign policy decision-making. This process has been underpinned by a number of informal but dominant norms, particularly that of consultation – the 'coordination reflex' (for example Aggestam and Bicchi, 2019; Nuttall, 1992). Thus, the PSC is an important venue for socialization (Juncos and Pomorska 2006; Michalski and Danielson, 2019). This reflects Aggestam and Johansson's argument that the legal framing of particular institutional tasks does not reflect an institution's social role (2017); and Smith's characterization of European foreign policy as being 'situated in a "policy space" where many of the boundaries are unclear, and in which the political opportunity structure carries both strong incentives to collective action and significant obstacles to it' (2003, p. 558).

Institutionalist theories can offer important insights in terms of understanding this 'policy space' and particularly the interplay between formal, legal and organisational structures on the one hand and the role of norms, values and ideas on the other. There

is already a broad body of scholarship that applies variants of new institutionalism to the CFSP and CSDP (for example Delreux, 2015; Menon, 2011; Smith, 2004; White 2001). Guided by Campbell's argument that 'what actors believe may be just as important as what they want' (2004, p. 90), we employ here two distinct institutionalist perspectives in our analysis of the PSC: Rational Choice Institutionalism (RCI) and Sociological Institutionalism (SI). Together, they allow us to distinguish between the different and distinct roles the PSC plays within the EU foreign policy system. The first is vis-à-vis other EU actors. For this, RCI provides a focus on what we characterize as the 'external role' of the PSC in terms of strategic input and control, particularly through the lens of the principal-agent relationship. For the second, we consider the PSC as a site of dynamic interaction between member states. For this 'internal role', SI enables us to analyse the PSC as a socialization and deliberation venue. This approach echoes, for example, Breuer's (2012) CSDP analysis that rationalist approaches can only tell part of the story and that SI, with its focus on norms and values, offers an important counterbalance of addressing the complex dynamics at play. We briefly discuss each in turn as a basis for presenting the assumptions that guide our empirical analysis.

Rational Choice Institutionalism

RCI focuses our attention on how the post-Lisbon institutional re-configuration has impacted on the PSC's capacity to exercise leadership and control vis-à-vis the other EU actors – that is, exploring the ability of the member states as 'principals' to 'maintain control or gain compliance from "agents"' (Schmidt, 2006, p. 102). The PSC was established to 'ensure national political control of EU foreign policy-making' (Bickerton, 2011, p. 81). This was especially important in the early 2000s with the development of military crisis management capacities post St Malo. The PSC became 'to a significant degree' the 'script-writer for [the CSDP]' (Howorth, 2010: 3), emerging as the key institutional interlocutor for the HR after the Amsterdam Treaty. Solana, the first HR, emphasized the importance, first, of having the PSC and second, of its capacity to exercise control: 'it is essential that a single body should have access to all the information, proposals and initiatives relating to the crisis in order to make a global assessment. [...] this role would fall to the [PSC]' (Secretary-General/High Representative, 2000 quoted in Duke, 2005, p. 16). Thus, what has become arguably the central relationship in EU foreign policy making developed almost from the start: between the PSC, representing the member states; and the HR, providing the supranational institutional support to facilitate cooperation. Neither this relationship nor the particular role of the PSC was a focus of the Lisbon reforms so we can assume any subsequent role adaptations are unintended consequences of the emergence of the EUCO as a new centre for strategic foreign policy-making; the expanded role of the HRVP or the EEAS establishment.

The roles of the HRVP and EEAS in the new system imply a greater likelihood of tension with the PSC representing the member states, or 'principals'. Our first assumption therefore is that *the greater the involvement of HRVP and EEAS in EU foreign policy agenda-setting, the more this challenges the PSC primacy as strategic agenda setter.*

Having empowered the supranational agents through Lisbon, however, member states as principals still have a clear interest in ensuring this changed transgovernmental space functions effectively. Consequently, part of the post-Lisbon function of PSC ambassadors

is to ensure its success. Thus, rather than assuming a zero-sum relationship between the HRVP and EEAS on the one hand and the PSC on the other (as per standard principal-agent models), our second assumption is that *the increased activism of the HRVP and EEAS does not decrease the strategic importance of the PSC in EU foreign policy making*.

The question then is how the PSC has reacted to the more active policy entrepreneurship of the HRVP and EEAS. It is plausible that the PSC's core roles have adapted as a consequence of these broader institutional changes. In particular, the balance between (i) strategic input and (ii) control and oversight may have shifted towards the latter. Consequently, our third assumption is that *the more activist role of the HRVP and EEAS in agenda setting and implementation has caused the PSC to adjust its role from strategic input to control and oversight*.

Lisbon also established permanent chairmanships of the EUCO, FAC, PSC and related Council Working Groups, replacing the rotating presidency to bring more consistency, coherence and efficiency. We should not, though, assume a change to the role of the PSC in terms of strategic input and control. Therefore, our fourth assumption is that *the introduction of permanent chairs (FAC, PSC, EUCO) has not impacted on the role of the PSC in terms of strategic leadership and control*.

Sociological Institutionalism

With its focus on the 'forms and procedures of organisational life' (Schmidt, 2006, p. 107), SI emphasizes the role of the PSC as a key venue of deliberation between member states and driver of socialization in EU foreign policy – in other words it is primary source for a logic of appropriateness within CFSP. The PSC prepares the monthly FAC-meetings, although Coreper-II retains formal responsibility for preparing FAC-agendas. PSC ambassadors meet at least twice per week, are permanently based in Brussels, and generally develop strong, informal relationships with each another, as well as a deep understanding of their respective national positions on the wide variety of issues they consider. Bickerton (2011, p. 173, in referring to Mérand *et al.*) thus considers the PSC as central to the 'intensification of co-operation between national actors' but without 'new supranational structures'. Unsurprisingly, therefore, PSC ambassadors can be considered prime candidates for socialization (Juncos and Pomorska, 2011; Michalski and Danielson, 2019), working in an atmosphere of 'problem-solving rather than bargaining' (Juncos and Reynolds, 2007: 141). Indeed, Bickerton suggests that the 'most distinctive feature of the [PSC] is [...] the orientation towards consensus and compromise' (2011, p. 178).

The socialization scholarship emphasizes two features of PSC conduct: its strong aptitude for deliberation; and pragmatism. PSC ambassadors understand that they are only as powerful as their compromises and if they cannot agree then there may well not be an EU position. Second, for PSC ambassadors, 'making the room work' is an important goal in and of itself. As Bickerton argues, 'what the [PSC] does is keep the show on the road and the show itself is important' (2011: 182). There is no reason to expect it would abandon its deliberative and pragmatic working mode post-Lisbon. We can therefore formulate our fifth assumption that *the PSC's capacity to be a site of deliberation and pragmatic decision-making has not been affected by the institutional changes introduced by Lisbon*.

While the introduction of permanent chairs was designed to increase coherence and leadership in EU foreign policy, the negotiation literature (for example Tallberg, 2006)

reminds us of the great value states attach to the rotating presidency, particularly in providing shared experiences. Each PSC member was fully aware of the challenges (and potential difficulties) of chairing, knowing it was a role that they would themselves at some point have to fulfil. This in turn instilled a greater willingness towards compromise, reflected in the fact that PSC Ambassadors 'consider it a failure if we cannot get an agreement' (Juncos and Reynolds, 2007, p. 145). Our sixth and final assumption is that *the permanent chair does raise the likelihood for greater internal dissent in the PSC leading to a deterioration of a collective feeling in the PSC*. The possible decline of the 'we-feeling' instilled in the past by the rotating presidency therefore risks reducing rather than increasing the sense of ownership of European foreign policy felt by the PSC and member states more broadly, thereby actually undermining a key ambition of Lisbon.

To test these assumptions, we have drawn data from 23 semi-structured interviews conducted almost entirely face-to-face between February 2018 and April 2019. We spoke with current and past PSC ambassadors; CFSP diplomats in Permanent Representations; and officials in the EEAS, European Commission and European Council, all on condition of non-attribution. Within the text we reference the institutional background and the interview number assigned to each interviewee. The selection of our interviewees was guided by the network analysis of Mérand *et al*. (2011), which maps the central actors among EU member states in EU foreign policy making. We therefore identified the key stakeholders involved in the PSC to gain a comprehensive dataset.

II. The PSC after Lisbon: More Complex, more Contested, but Still Indispensable

> 'You'll find very few PSC Ambassadors who will say Lisbon made things better. Most will say it made things more complicated. It blurred the lines and it sucked a lot of the drive out of the system.' (I-9, MS)

To test our assumptions we investigate first the PSC's relationship with the HRVP and EEAS, followed by the internal perspective of the relationship with other EU venues for member states representation, the EUCO, FAC, and COREPER-II.

Setting the Policy Tone: The PSC and the HRVP

The establishment of the High Representative in the Amsterdam Treaty was a significant catalyst for the 'Brusselization' of foreign and security policy-making. For the first time, the EU had an individual promoting its collective foreign policy-making efforts. The first post-holder, Javier Solana, was highly experienced in foreign policy and did much to develop the position, as well as signal its potential. His gradual assumption of the lead role in the 'E3 + 3' negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme in the early 2000s demonstrated how the post-holder could become an institutional focal point for EU foreign policy-making. Lisbon reflected and formalized this.

For the PSC Lisbon's key procedural innovation was the HRVP's appointment as permanent FAC chair. This gives the HRVP crucial agenda-setting power, particularly alongside the institutional support and resources provided by the EEAS (I-3, EEAS; I-2, MS). Mogherini as HRVP is considered to have used her agenda-setting power quite effectively, for example in steering EU policy on China (I-11, MS) or crisis management (I-4, MS; I-8, MS). Her most visible agenda-setting effort was the 2016 EU Global

Strategy (Morillas, 2020). The first comprehensive document on EU foreign and security policy in a decade, it presents a 'clear ambition' for the EU and its role in the world (I-5, EEAS). Since then policy developments particularly in the field of defence cooperation – for example PESCO, the European Defence Fund – have demonstrated the traction the Global Strategy has achieved with member states, 'help[ing] beef-up an area in (sic) the back-drop of Brexit' (I-10, MS).

At the same time, the HRVP has sought to constrain and limit the room for manoeuvre available to member states on certain decisions, thereby creating tension with the PSC. For example, one PSC discussion on conclusions on Syria resulted in agreement that the EU should call for Iran to show restraint. However, due the HRVP's engagement in the E3 + 3 negotiations, her cabinet made clear to the PSC chair, an EEAS official, that there should be 'no reference to Iran' in the conclusions, placing the chair in 'a very awkward position' given they were supposedly representing the consensus (I-9, MS).

Finally, there is the capacity of the HRVP to circumvent PSC ambassadors by engaging directly with capitals – known as 'trampolining'. In these situations, PSC ambassadors may find themselves over-ruled or contradicted by the FAC after an agreement has been reached in the PSC. Whilst quite rare, it underlines the institutional challenge the HRVP poses to PSC ambassadors as the crucial channels between capitals and CFSP actors in Brussels, particularly if the former are not strongly connected to their ministers or known to have 'very little say in their capital' (I-3, EEAS). Mogherini was regarded as 'very involved and very activist', wanting 'to be involved in all the major policy decisions' (I-11, MS) and emphasizing the importance of 'external projection' (I-22, MS). PSC ambassadors, however, expressed concern over her lack of attention to Council structures below the FAC and criticized her occasional efforts to overcome their opposition on issues she prioritized by recalibrating how they were considered by foreign ministers in the FAC. It is clear that the HRVP's institutional position can now challenge the PSC's decision-shaping capacity. Indeed, analysis of interactions between the PSC and EEAS indicates a subtle but important shift in the role and purpose of the PSC in the CFSP as a result.

Obvious Dancing Partners: The PSC and the EEAS

The EEAS was intended as 'the show-piece of a new, more joined-up approach to EU external relations' post-Lisbon (Wright, 2019, p. 226). Hemra *et al*. describe it as the 'institutional embodiment' of the member states' 'somewhat ambivalent ambition that the EU should be a diplomatic heavyweight' (2011, p. 3). While that ambivalence remains, there is no doubt the interactions between the PSC and EEAS now represent the most significant component of day-to-day CFSP negotiations. Prior to Lisbon the PSC 'didn't have […] an obvious dancing partner' and operated in a much more disparate institutional environment involving the Commission and the Council's General Secretariat (I-10, MS). Today, according to one diplomat, the EEAS has become 'bread and butter' for the PSC, 'the main relationship' and 'the institution we cooperate with on almost an hourly basis' (I-11, MS). Equally, and reflecting the symbiotic nature of their relationship, for the EEAS the PSC 'is the natural interlocutor' (I-3, EEAS). Both 'need the other for their legitimacy' (I-10, MS).

The EEAS enjoys institutional advantages in its relationship with the PSC. As chair of the PSC and various CFSP working groups the EEAS has an agenda-setting advantage. The continuity it offers is valuable for member states, though: chairing a PSC meeting 'is more than just chairing. You need to know your colleagues, what they want, their stance' (I-1, MS). On the other hand, the loss of the rotating presidency may have impacted on the urgency the chair might feel to reach agreement, with rotating presidencies always keen to show they can deliver. The EEAS can also use the Global Strategy, which all member states endorsed, as a powerful platform for agenda-setting. It provides both clear guidelines for the EEAS in 'setting out the lines of where we should go and we have this clear ambition from [that]' (I-5, EEAS), and legitimation for EEAS and HRVP policy activism.

The EEAS can also rely on the global network of EU delegations for regular reporting from third countries (Bicchi and Maurer, 2018). Its coverage of issues on a global scale gives it a clear informational and diplomatic advantage over the majority of member states – only the largest enjoy similar global reach. In contrast to the old system of rotating presidencies which might have lacked the capability, today 'the EEAS is able to look at everything. Some states don't have the knowledge or interest in everything. The EEAS is this permanent service' (I-4, MS). A big member state official went so far as to describe them 'like a twenty-ninth member state sitting at the table' (I-2, MS). We, thus, observe a subtle but important change in the institutional power balance within CFSP as a consequence of the 'fixed presidency' system that has seen the EEAS emerge as the 'driving force' in PSC meetings (I-4, MS).

Although suspicious of this new EEAS PSC-chairmanship role, member states also acknowledge its added value. Indeed, an 'interesting tension' has emerged between the PSC and EEAS, with the former seeking to maintain and exert its own influence as the embodiment of member state preferences and prerogatives in CFSP (I-10, MS). One official felt the EEAS now 'puts quite a lot of effort into keeping decisions away from the PSC' with its 'permanent presidency' meaning it will only seek PSC approval when necessary (I-9, MS). Another suggested that at times 'the chair can be a bloody nuisance', for example in EEAS efforts to expand its influence over CSDP missions 'to get more control' (I-6, MS). The PSC chair can therefore be placed in a highly ambiguous position if a consensus decision adopted in the PSC goes against the preferences of the HRVP and EEAS. One diplomat observed that getting the PSC to deliver is of course the main objective of the chair, but now 'the chair has two masters, the closer one is the EEAS hierarchy' (I-13, MS). This has occasionally resulted in EEAS officials 'calling capitals and trying to reverse positions that member state ambassadors had taken in the room' (I-9, MS).

This does not mean the PSC lacks agency, and ambassadors do push to maintain their influence and voice. The permanent chair cannot ignore their proposals or requests for agenda items. A group of states may collaborate and co-sponsor a demand for a common position, as during the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar or the military mobility plans (I-11, MS; I-5, EEAS). Regarding PESCO member states have remained very much in the driving seat with the EEAS often 'playing the honest broker', particularly when several smaller states were 'not happy' at the dominance of some of their larger partners (I-5, EEAS). Meanwhile, when urgent crises require an EU statement, especially at short notice, the PSC 'will meet as long as necessary'; if needed a draft statement may even be sent to capitals for approval, reflecting the 'responsibility of the chairman and the EEAS'

to keep member states informed (I-8, MS). Thus, while the events-driven nature of foreign policy clearly empowers the institutionally-advantaged HRVP and EEAS in 'shap [ing] a unified EU position' (I-6, MS), the PSC remains the crucial decision-making venue.

The EEAS's establishment has also significantly affected the PSC-Commission relationship. This has always been complex, given member states´ desire to prevent the *communautarization* of foreign and security policy. The double-hatted HRVP and the EEAS as a separate service from the Commission were intended to manage the frequently difficult and not always logical distinction between 'classic' foreign policy and external relations. The Commission has maintained its presence at the PSC post-Lisbon, and 'intervenes a lot and explains what they are doing' to member states, with their views and advice generally considered (I-5, EEAS). It also participates in in-house preparatory meetings with the EEAS. However, it is subordinate to the EEAS in its dealings with the PSC which generally 'talks for them' in meetings (I-9, MS). This can cause tension between the Commission and EEAS, with the former feeling 'the need to get involved' and 'remind [the EEAS] […] that they're part of one big family' (I-10, MS). The result can be a 'very complicated dance […] about who's actually going to say what' in the PSC (I-9, MS), or even Commission officials 'waving at the EEAS chair to give [them] the floor' in meetings (I-10, MS). It can also result in member states 'want[ing] to hear more from the Commission directly than the EEAS wants them to' – for example when PSC ambassadors had to push the EEAS chair to put a Commission paper on hybrid threats on the agenda in the face of opposition from the HRVP cabinet (I-8, MS; I-9, MS).

Although there is a 'decent complementarity', tensions as a consequence of 'the old intergovernmental idea' still come into play at times (I-10, MS). These are normally around questions of competence (I-11, MS), especially given the growing interlinkage of external relations and foreign policy and the increasing number of treaty 'grey zones' where security meets other policies like migration (I-6, MS), and where the HRVP may have been working towards a more joined-up approach. This also shows in the management and accountability of missions, with the Commission's attitude to the PSC being 'a mixed bag' (I-6, MS). In the context of missions to the Sahel or Horn of Africa, for example, the interactions between dedicated task forces, geographical desks and Commission services can be complex (I-6, MS). With the increased concentration of the HRVP on security and defence initiatives like PESCO, CARD and the MPCC, and the creation of a new Commission DG for defence, such complexities are likely to increase.

The EEAS's establishment has seen the PSC's role in CFSP governance change in unanticipated ways. PSC ambassadors increasingly find themselves scrutinising EEAS policy-making rather than acting as a focal point for decision-making themselves (I-3, EEAS). This leads to the PSC 'trying to manage their agenda and member states – with varying degrees of success - trying to hold the EEAS to account or to impose their own ideas' (I-9, MS). This development has not been entirely unwelcome. For one official, 'it is about member states coming together to support implementation of the common policy' (I-8, MS). Another saw it is an inevitable outcome of Lisbon: while larger member states in particular might complain about the EEAS developing its own agenda, 'if you create an institution, don't be surprised if it does something' (I-10, MS).

Losing Political Clout: The PSC, EUCO and Coreper-II

The formalization of the EUCO as the strategic policy-setter and 'new center of political gravity' (Puetter, 2014, p. 68) was a major institutional consequence of Lisbon. Since 2009, the EUCO has emerged as the key EU forum for strategic foreign, security and defence discussions, with foreign affairs the second most important EUCO topic after economic governance reform (Puetter, 2014, p. 92). This in turn has had implications for other Council structures dealing with foreign and security policy, notably the FAC and Coreper-II.

The most important has been the gradual eclipsing of the FAC as the primary venue for foreign affairs decision-making. While the CFSP decision-making rhythm continues to focus on the monthly FAC meetings prepared by the PSC, the EUCO has become 'a more active top player in [the] hierarchy' especially 'when there's difficulty to agree or find consensus'; indeed leaders are now 'engaged in the policy-making process like never before' (I-6, MS; see also I-10, MS and I-11, MS). The EUCO permanent presidency has added an additional interlocutor who 'quite jealously guards the whole process' of preparing conclusions (I-10, MS). Meanwhile, foreign ministers no longer attend EUCO meetings, impairing the ability of heads of government to consult and coordinate with their ministerial colleagues *in situ* (I-2, MS). One official suggested that 'a lot of foreign ministers are actively disengaged from what their prime ministers are going to do' at the EUCO, often for reasons of domestic politics (I-9, MS). At the same time, he argued that the HRVP's style of chairing the FAC has also had an impact, with Mogherini seeking to avoid 'any real kind of argument' or serious decision-making, meaning 'quite a lot of foreign ministers have lost interest in it' (I-9, MS). This, he believed, also effects the quality of the FAC:

> 'The FAC seven or eight years ago had David Miliband, Radek Sikorksi. It had Joschka Fischer. It had Carl Bildt. There were some serious people in there and you look at the FAC now and it's very hard to see the equivalents, really' (I-9, MS).

In general, foreign ministers seem increasingly side-lined and left to negotiate the detail of what their political chiefs have agreed: 'FACs and foreign ministers [have been] shunted to one side and lost influence' (I-10, MS) while 'sensitive, controversial issues' generally go 'directly to the EUCO' (I-3, EEAS). This is not a particularly new phenomenon, though: heads of state and government have always been key to foreign policy-making. The interesting question is how far the institutionalization of EUCO has permanently reduced the FAC's significance and authority and if it also suggests a degree of 're-nationalization' of foreign policy-making, as one diplomat suggested (I-10, MS).

The increased role of the EUCO has impacted on the PSC particularly in its relationship with Coreper-II, which is formally responsible for preparing EUCO meeting agenda. Inevitably this creates tensions between the two bodies: indeed, Coreper-II's relationship with the PSC has been characterized as one of 'historic competition' (I-10, MS), reflecting the 'robust level of administrative rivalry' that exists within the Council more generally (Lewis, 2000: 262). However, in practice a clear *modus operandi* has developed over the years (I-10, MS) and the 'number of PSC-Coreper skirmishes has gone down' (I-6, MS). This is partly due to the broad range of issues Coreper-II must address leaving little

time for CFSP – as they do 'not have time to do it properly' (I-4, MS). Indeed, one PSC ambassador declared: 'I hardly get to see [my Permanent Representative]. We meet when it gets critical before a [FAC] then I hand over if we couldn't solve any issues in the PSC'. Thus, Coreper-II remains the venue for discussion of particularly sensitive and politicised issues. Moreover, if the PSC does not respond swiftly and efficiently, issues 'sometimes end up by default in Coreper-II' (I-11, MS).

The increasing focus on foreign policy in the EUCO agenda does mean the balance between Coreper-II and the PSC is undergoing deeper structural change. As the PSC does not prepare EUCO or General Affairs Council meetings, it finds itself at one remove from their formal discussions. For example, following a briefing on maritime security, the PSC asked to see the action plan before the Council meeting but were refused because it was a matter for the GAC rather than FAC (I-6, MS). In such situations, individual PSC ambassadors have to rely on their own Permanent Representations and national coordination systems to ensure they can feed into crucial debates. One official believes that 'we've all become a little impoverished in our engagement with EUCO Conclusions', with processes differing across Permanent Representations as regards information sharing, coordination and maintaining consistency in the presentation of national positions (I-10, MS; I-2, MS). Meanwhile, the broad and often cross-cutting nature of policy questions – for example the migration crisis – means Coreper-II is paying increasing attention to issues that may previously have been more easily demarcated as within the remit of CFSP and therefore the PSC. Indeed, it has become 'much more interested in external policy than it normally is' meaning the overlap between Coreper-II and PSC 'has grown bigger and therefore the tensions between them have grown bigger' (I-9, MS). Recent examples include PESCO and plans to improve military mobility (I-5, EEAS). Ultimately, Coreper-II's status as the most senior ambassadorial formation in the EU means there is little PSC ambassadors can do if it decides to take charge of a particular issue, even if they 'are not always happy with that' (I-3, EEAS). Whilst some PSC ambassadors now jokingly point to the increasingly paper-pushing nature of their work, they also emphasize the importance of their deliberations in making EU foreign policy cooperation work. As one ambassador put it, in the PSC 'we're not the centre of it all but we're a central part'.

III. Discussion: The PSC and EU Foreign Policy Cooperation in the Post-Lisbon Setting

Member states did not set out to change the role of the PSC with their 2009 institutional reforms. However, by empowering the HRVP, creating the EEAS, and expanding the strategic role of the EUCO, the PSC's position and influence with the EU foreign policy system has clearly altered vis-à-vis the HRVP, the EEAS and Coreper-II. In this final section we consider how accurate the six assumptions presented above are and what our empirical findings reveal about the post-Lisbon involvement of member states in EU foreign policy.

The empirics confirm our first assumption that the PSC's strategic agenda setter role has been challenged and indeed limited by the greater activism of the HRVP and EEAS. However, relationships are complex, depending very much on institutional politics and individual leadership. The PSC's strategic role is also increasingly challenged by EUCO (supported by Coreper-II) when it comes to wider foreign policy and external relations.

While the HRVP and EEAS enjoy privileged institutional positions backed by resources (particularly of information), their capacities to translate these into agenda-setting influence depend on the coherence of member states' positions; its urgency; and the ability of the HRVP as FAC chair to circumvent PSC ambassadors (or threaten to) if necessary. There is also evidence to support our third assumption that the greater activism of HRVP and EEAS in agenda-setting and policy implementation has resulted in the PSC shifting from strategic input to a greater focus on control and oversight, a direct consequence, therefore, of Lisbon's institutional changes. However, our second assumption – that as a consequence of the increased activism of the HRVP and EEAS the PSC is becoming less relevant – is much less clear. Indeed, our analysis suggests that, on the contrary, the added value of the PSC within the system has increased. In the post-Lisbon setting the PSC does not matter less - rather, it matters differently: it does not necessarily govern in the shadows, but does provide governance - controlling, supervising, and enforcing the necessary boundaries for agents´ activism.

Our fourth, fifth and sixth assumptions all focused on the possible consequences of introducing permanent chairs of the FAC, PSC and EUCO. First, this innovation would not impact on the PSC's capacity for strategic leadership and control (4); second, that it would not affect the PSC's capacity to be a site of deliberation and pragmatism (5); and finally, that it would result in a reduced socialization, and particularly a deterioration in the collective 'we-feeling' in the PSC (6). The evidence suggests the impact is not straightforward and depends on a variety of factors. Certainly, permanent chairs can and do bring continuity and greater efficiency, an objective of the reforms. However, the HRVP's increased activism on certain issues with foreign ministers was seen as an attempt to bypass dissent in the PSC and reduce its capacity for strategic leadership. The HRVP's capacity for leadership at FAC level is enhanced by the advantages (particularly informational and resource) s/he enjoys over many ministers. If the HRVP and their EEAS representatives are seen to go against a PSC consensus too often, though, this risks a deterioration in the crucial institutional relationship in the system.

Replacing the rotating presidency with a permanent EEAS chair has also changed the dynamics between PSC ambassadors. The rotating chairmanship created a particular form of interaction between them leading to an increased willingness to find a consensus and show support for the chair (Juncos and Pomorska 2006). The permanent EEAS chair removes this important source of socialization, and the evidence here suggests a weakening in the collective 'we feeling', although our research design does not enable a definitive answer on this point. Meanwhile although deliberation and pragmatism remain core features of the PSC, they are increasingly challenged by more frequent incidents of dissent between member states; and between member states and the chair. The capacity of the permanent EEAS chair to broker compromise is also hampered if they are seen to represent the HRVP/EEAS position rather than acting as an honest broker. Interestingly, the dynamics of working groups have also been affected by permanent chairs. Whereas before the six-month presidencies imposed a time imperative meaning the holders tended to be much more proactive in seeking agreement, the permanent chairs are unable to maintain the same degree of urgency across all discussions.

Overall, the strengthened HRVP role and the EEAS's establishment have altered the context of agenda-setting and decision-making in CFSP. In addition, the emergence of the EUCO as the new focal point in strategic policy-making has resulted in a renewed

tension between the PSC and Coreper-II. Lisbon altered the institutional support structure for foreign policy cooperation to the extent that the role of member states in the system – and particularly how they engage with it through the PSC – has profoundly changed. More than a decade on, the PSC is increasingly struggling to maintain its relevance as a strategic agenda-setter. Instead, it is more focused on broader oversight of CFSP, the HRVP, the EEAS, and the specifics of operational crisis management.

This has important implications for several key debates. First, the transgovernmental nature of EU foreign policy-making reminds us of the fundamental centrality of member states and the impossibility of replacing them at the supranational level, however sophisticated the institutional support structures. As we show, Lisbon has not necessarily made the system more efficient – especially in crisis situations. The PSC's inability to overcome blockages between member states on key policy questions is both contributor to and indicative of its loss of influence as a strategic decision-maker and consensus builder. But this role cannot be played by the HRVP or EEAS in the system as currently constructed (and arguably nor should it be). For EU foreign policy to work requires the buy-in and support of member states, regardless of HRVP and EEAS influence. Whether consciously or not, it is telling that member states strengthened the EUCO, making this body more effective and influential at the *strategic* level, even as their choices weakened the PSC and therefore their ability to exercise *day-to-day* control over EU foreign policy-making. Aggestam and Bicchi (2019, p. 515) argue that 'the implementation of [Lisbon] in the context of a fragmenting consensus has led to an increase in Member States' reliance on informal practices; namely, cross-loading and small groupings of likeminded countries'. This suggests that member states will inevitably look for alternative forums if the usual opportunities for meaningful input are diminished.

Second, our investigation recapitulates Smith's argument that the EU foreign policy system is still 'a political opportunity structure' with 'both strong incentives to collective action and significant obstacles to it' (2003, p. 558). Institutional politics and political leadership thus impact considerably on how the machinery works. Lisbon decisively upgraded this machinery. Its dramatic and far-reaching reforms were intended to create a clear institutional focal point for 'a new, more joined-up approach to EU external relations' (Wright, 2019, p. 226). One diplomat put it more prosaically: the aim of these far-reaching reforms was to ensure greater coherence, continuity and coordination in EU foreign policy, thereby ending the 'disconnect between money and politics', i.e. between the Commission and the Council (Wright, 2019, p. 236). The data here indicates the need to ensure there are sufficient – and sufficiently influential – venues for the 'politics' rather than focusing too much on 'money' alone.

Finally, we offer here further evidence that EU foreign policy cooperation today goes 'beyond intergovernmentalism' (Sjursen, 2011) – indeed, often way beyond. What has become the Lisbon system is a complicated admixture of legal and political institutions and processes captured adequately neither by intergovernmentalism nor supranationalism. Indeed, as Riddervold argues in the context of European Commission involvement in security questions, 'it is important to go beyond formal characteristics' to assess governance relations in EU foreign and security policy (2016, p. 366). Similarly, Bickerton, Hodson and Puetter (2014), in their articulation of 'new intergovernmentalism', highlight the inherent paradox that seems to be emerging between increased deliberation and consensus-seeking between member states on the one hand; and on the other the

intensification of policy coordination and delegation 'to de novo bodies' like the EEAS (2015: 705). Seen from this perspective, the changing nature of the PSC is revealing as to how and where member states seek to present and pursue their interests in this new system.

Conclusion

This article has examined the impact of institutional reforms of the Lisbon Treaty on the PSC as main actor and venue for member states' representation vis-à-vis the EEAS, HRVP and EUCO. Empirically, we show that the increased activism of the HRVP and the EEAS as well as the strengthened role of the EUCO have had significant implications for the PSC and its role as the key preparatory forum for foreign and security policy-making. The PSC now finds itself competing with both the HRVP and EEAS, which have increased their agency and agenda-setting power. It has also been cut out of important strategic decision-making as a consequence of the EUCO's increasing centrality to foreign policy making, supported by Coreper-II. The PSC thus finds itself squeezed between powerful and empowered new institutional actors, and its influence in key decision-making discussions diminished.

Analytically, therefore, this paper provides a starting point to examine how policy interactions and power balances between supranational actors and member states have evolved in the post-Lisbon foreign policy environment and to assess how and to what extent member state engagement in EU foreign policy-making may have changed. Our findings demonstrate why both rational choice and sociological institutionalism offer important perspectives for a comprehensive understanding of the changes in the EU foreign policy cooperation system. They remind us that institutions are living systems, which change (in)formally or (un)intentionally, and we cannot treat the institutional structures of EU foreign policy cooperation as a black-box. Due to the systemic nature of EU foreign policy cooperation, a single approach limits us to one particular role, not allowing us to explore how institutional change between and within institutions is connected. The rational-choice account seems fitting to assess *inter-institutional* dynamics, while sociological approaches are much better suited to explain changes *within* institutions like the PSC. In both cases, our understanding would not have been possible without a careful assessment of inside-out perspectives from diplomats and officials working in the system.

Our findings also encourage further research on the implications of these institutional shifts for the EU foreign policy co-operation system. For example, will the HRVP and the EEAS be able – and be allowed – to exercise greater strategic leadership in the post-Covid-19 world? Is the increased disagreement between member states throughout 2019 and 2020 a direct consequence of the unintended institutional shifts since Lisbon, and are these leading to a de-socialization, disengagement from and even a re-nationalization of foreign policy by member states? The increasingly unstable and uncertain environment in the EU's immediate neighbourhood and globally means current demands for a greater focus on foreign, security and defence policy by heads of state and government is only likely to continue, competing with other demands for their attention. That said, the role of the PSC in negotiating and agreeing the detail of EU cooperation and how to enact it will remain important, particularly as this expands further into defence policy. It will therefore remain an

important part of the overall machinery and it is not yet clear whether its ability to exercise power and influence vis-à-vis the HRVP and EEAS will change under the new HRVP, Josep Borrell. Certainly, the PSC will continue to be the 'linchpin' of CFSP. However, rather than 'governing in the shadows' it seems likely to become increasingly preoccupied with governance in the shadows.

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We thank the diplomats and civil servants who informed our research and took the time to talk to us.

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