Organizational Learning in European Foreign Policy: The Role of the EU Special Representatives

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Abstract

Organisational learning is key in understanding the inner dynamics of European foreign policy. Some concepts have been developed in sociology and microeconomics, yet the subject is still understudied in international relations or European integration theories. This is puzzling as these theories explore the nexus between structure and agency on the sub-systemic level. They conceptualise (individual or collective) learning processes based on external events, how they become internalised in foreign policies, and how they in turn impact on the international environment. This paper applies theories of organisational learning in the context of European foreign policy. After presenting an analytical model based on organisational learning theories, a short case study examines the role of the EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) in Africa, the Balkans, and Central Asia. This is based on 22 semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2006 and March 2007 in Brussels, Paris, and Berlin. Interview partners were staff of the EUSRs, the Council Secretariat, the cabinet of the High Representative and his Policy Unit, the European Commission, the EU Institute for Security Studies, the German Foreign Office, and the German Federal Chancellery. The rising number and changing scope of responsibility of the Special Representatives clearly show the importance of this foreign policy instrument. Furthermore, they are associated with the way the Union sees itself and so mirror exemplarily the worldview of this actor.
Organizational Learning in European Foreign Policy: The Role of the EU Special Representatives

Cornelius Adebahr

1. Introduction

International organisations have become more and more important as political actors in their own right rather than as mere tools of nation states. When they thus decide about their course of action, can they learn from their own or others’ experience? If so, what are the mechanisms of such organisational learning? To answer these questions, the article focuses on the evolving role of the Special Representatives that the European Union (EU) and on the ways in which they contribute to changes in European foreign policy.1

In the past fifteen years, European foreign policy has undergone rapid and substantial change. From having only a loose body coordinating national foreign policies, the European Union has turned into an international actor that is engaged along the whole spectrum of foreign policy activities: from engaging in diplomatic negotiations with Iran about its nuclear programme over conducting military operations in Congo to providing development assistance to more than 160 countries. While there are still many insufficiencies in terms of effectiveness and outcomes of its policies (and thus the EU’s overall relevance on the global scene), its actual actoriness is hardly questioned, as the many scholarly works that have appeared in the past years show.2

1 According to White 2001, 29, European Foreign Policy encompasses both the intergovernmental CFSP, the External Relations of the Community (Relex) and the European elements of national foreign policy of the Member states. This study will limit itself for reasons of capacity to the first two areas.

The EU’s newly gained international importance is most visible in the rising number of operations under its European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), which is an integral part of the Union’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). From the EU’s first ever ESDP operation in Macedonia in early 2003, the number of civilian, policy, and military missions has risen to a total of 19 (ongoing or completed).

A lesser-known area of activities is the work of the EU Special Representatives (EUSR). EUSRs are appointed by the Council of Ministers (or Council, in short) to represent the Union and its foreign policies in certain crisis regions around the world. Their mission is targeted to ensure a coherent political EU presence and an effective policy implementation. The number of EUSRs has risen from two in 1996 and four in 2001 to presently ten, covering extensively the major regions of concern of the EU: the Balkans, Africa and the Middle East, as well as the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The EUSRs are a relatively young foreign policy instrument of the EU. Born from a provision of the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, they nevertheless predate main CFSP institutions like the High Representative. Their institutional age and their focus on security policy and crisis management as well as their geographical scope make the EUSRs an exemplary research subject for the EU’s foreign policy. Surprisingly though, hardly any scholarly work on them or their role in European foreign policy can be found.

The academic literature attributes most of the EU’s dramatic development in foreign policy to significant events or crises that changed the international or regional order and thus required not only the European Union but also other actors, like the United States, to adapt accordingly. While these factors

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3 During the 1990s, the “F” in the EU’s overarching CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) developed well whereas the “S” took hard hits in the attempts to stop the wars in former Yugoslavia. This trend has been somewhat reversed in the current decade, with progress being made in security rather than in foreign policy; cf. Ginsberg 2003.

4 As of January 14, 2008, and including preparation teams for missions in Kosovo and Chad. For an overview of all ESDP operations, see: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=268&lang=en&mode=g.

5 The most recent Chaillot paper (N° 106 “Pioneering foreign policy: the EU Special Representatives” by Giovanni Grevi – Grevi 2007) is the first to counter this trend. Previously, a study on the role of the EUSR for the Middle East Peace Process had appeared in Germany; cf. Dietl 2005.

are certainly plausible triggers, they fail to indicate how the EU reacted to such developments and why it did so in the way it did and not in any other way.

The same is true for the standard explanation EU politicians, whether from the national or European level, like to give. When asked to explain the EU’s rise as an international actor, many of them refer to what the Union has “learned” from its failure in, for example, the Balkan wars in the 1990s, or which “lessons” it has drawn.7 While reference to world events takes into account only external factors, “learning” alludes to the internal processes of how an actor reacts to such outside changes. The question is whether talk of learning is not simply just rhetoric.8 In fact, it could be only two things: Either it is a post-hoc euphemism for weak performance. Or there may be some truth to the word and the EU has learned some serious lessons.

Most theoretical approaches to institutional change in the EU seem to believe the former, whether they take a functionalist (Haas 1958, Schmitter 2004), realist (Hoffmann 2000), intergovernmentalist (Moravcsik 1993), or constructivist (Checkel 2005a, Tonra 2001) orientation. There has been rather scant attention given to the question of how an institution or organisation can learn from its environment.9 This is particularly puzzling because the analysis of organisational learning offers not only a fruitful integration of external events and internal responses, but also a link between individual performance and institutional development. It therefore appears justified to investigate the second alternative, i.e. that learning did take place.

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7 These lessons primarily refer to the EU’s military capabilities but include also its relations to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) with regard to a so-called “burden sharing,” or instruments of conflict prevention. Exemplary is a speech by Javier Solana, the EU’s High Representative for CFSP, given in 2005 in which he says: “Finally, there is a lesson for European foreign policy. There is no point denying that the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was a dismal low for Europe. But look where we are today. We are united around a single, comprehensive strategy for the region. The Western Balkans are now one of the success stories in EU foreign policy. […] Indeed, this points to one of Europe’s key strengths. After every setback, we re-group, learn the lessons and emerge stronger.” (Solana 2005a, 4-5).

8 For a comparison of the difference between the everyday and the professional use of the word “learning”, cf. Breslauer/Tetlock 1991, 6-7.

9 One exception is Checkel 2001 who applies, in an effort to build a bridge between rationalist and constructivist reasoning, a concept of “social learning” to the question of state compliance. This approach, however, does not intend to explain institutional but identiy change.
This present work represents an attempt to fill this theoretical gap. The study’s epistemological interest (Erkenntnisinteresse) is the basic question whether the EU as an organisation did learn, and if so, what, how, and why?\textsuperscript{10} From this follow three research questions, two theoretical and one policy-oriented. First, are there processes of organisational learning in the second pillar of the EU and, if so, have they contributed to policy or institutional change? Second, what are the causal mechanisms of organisational learning at the EU level?

Finding an answer to these questions would shed light on why organisational learning should be considered in the explanation of European foreign policy at all. From this also follows the policy-oriented question: Why is it that the EU, in cases where learning can be recorded, seemingly has learned only “in one direction”? Policy failures like in Bosnia-Herzegovina or Kosovo in the 1990s could have ‘taught’ the EU just as well that it is not fit for military intervention. This notwithstanding, the lessons drawn by the EU have so far always implied an institutional or strategic build-up.

The present paper limits itself to answering, in a preliminary way, the first two questions, i.e. to establish the presence and mechanisms of learning processes in the field of the EU Special Representatives. The policy question will only briefly be touched in the concluding section. Given that the learning approach is still new in international relations (IR) theory,\textsuperscript{11} the following theoretical deduction and the development of an analytical model is given considerable space.

\textsuperscript{10} As Levy put it, “it is one thing to say that historical learning often occurs but quite another to specify when certain actors learn what types of lessons from what events, and under what conditions this leads to policy change” (Levy 1994, 280).

\textsuperscript{11} Learning as an element of broader social processes in international institutions finds an expression in the “socialisation literature.” For a good overview, see the Fall 2005 issue of International Organization on “International Institutions and Socialization in Europe” (e.g. Checkel 2005a; Gheciu 2005; Lewis 2005).
2. Theoretical Framework

Theories of organisational (or institutional) learning\(^{12}\) have a long history in the fields of sociology (Argyris 1992, Dierkes et al. 2001, March/Olsen 1976) and management (Cyert/March 1963, Senge 1990).\(^{13}\) However, “[the] concept of learning is difficult to define, isolate, measure, and apply empirically,” Levy admits (Levy 1994, 280). What makes engagement in learning theories difficult to start with, is that there is no common or in any way prevailing concept in the theory of organisational learning (OL).\(^{14}\) A wide range of definitions exist, many emphasising different aspects of the learning process (see Argyris/Schön 1978, Dierkes et al. 2001, Haas 1993).

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\(^{12}\) Sociologists prefer “organisational learning” as a broader term encompassing all sorts of organisations (including firms, groups etc.). Political scientists, on the other hand, may give preference to the term “institutional learning”; this is because in this discipline, the “institution” is the broader expression covering organisations, regimes, rules, and norms (cf. the two standard definitions of institutions/ regimes in political science: They are “persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations” (Keohane 1989, 3); or they “can be defined as sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area of international relations (Krasner 1983, 2)). However, authors seldom give an explanation for their use of either term, an exception being Haas/Haas 1995, 259: “Organizational learning is the process by which the learning becomes ingrained in [International Organisations]. Institutional learning is the broader international process by which state entities and other actors learn and assimilate some of these lessons” (emphasis added). Precisely because this analysis looks at learning in a concrete organisation made up of individuals rather than an abstract institution like a regime, the term “organisational learning” is adopted here.

\(^{13}\) “Within social science there are two broad strands of theorizing about organizations. One is economistic and rooted in assumptions of instrumental rationality and efficiency concerns; the other is sociological and focused on issues of legitimacy and power” Barnett/Finnemore 1999, 702, with more references.

\(^{14}\) Both Breslauer 1991, 825, LaPalombara 2001b, 557 and Levy 1994, 280-81 regret this fact in a similar way. Worse still, in his overview of the literature, Huber criticises that scholars do not even try to build on each other: “The researchers who have studied organizational learning apparently have, to a surprising degree, not used the results from pervious research to design or interpret their own research” (Huber 1991, 107).
2.1. Differences and commonalities in organisational learning approaches

What most of these definitions have in common is that they see organisational learning as a cognitive process, in which a group of people reach a collective understanding about new (or newly assessed) information, and which can take place at different levels.

- Learning can be considered a cognitive process when the environment does not directly impact on a person’s behaviour. Instead, external stimuli are mediated “by images or plans, maps or schemes, or generally spoken, by cognitive structures and processes” within the individual (Klimecki/Lassleben 1998, 15). Learning is also rational, although limited by the fact that actors do not possess all information necessary or possibly available (bounded rationality). While learning is a psychological process at the individual level, it becomes a socio-communicative process at the collective level.

- The main element of learning consists of information processing. This is generally seen to take place in four steps: At first, an actor acquires information from the environment, which it, secondly, distributes internally and, then, interprets with its cognitive structures (or vice versa). Fourthly, the interpreted information is stored in the actor’s organisational routines. These routines can be of a structural (organisation of staff, institutional memory etc.), operational (decision-making, consultation mechanisms etc.), or ideational nature (doctrines, strategies etc.) (cf. Böhling 2002, 10). The information processing thus

15 See Haas 1990, 32, Smith 2004, 29; for an introduction to the concept of bounded rationality, see Jones 1999. The effect of cognitive structures (or filters) is further elaborated later.
16 Huber 1991, 90; see also 2.2.1 on the processes of learning. Other authors distinguish three steps: “The cognitive process incorporates perception, analysis and choice” (Starbuck/Hedberg 2001, 333).
17 For a similar distinction of three levels of effects, cf. Balthasar/Rieder 2000, 250-251. Levitt/March propose a relatively broad definition: „The generic term ‘routines’ includes the forms, rules, procedures, conventions, strategies, and technologies around which organizations are constructed and through which they operate. It also includes the structure of beliefs, frameworks, paradigms, codes, cultures, and knowledge that buttress, elaborate, and contradict the formal routines“ (Levitt/March 1988, 320).
takes place at a collective level, i.e. when individual learning experiences become engrained in organisational practices.\(^{18}\)

- A differentiation between two levels of learning is generally made, although different authors have labelled them differently. Argyris and Schön (1978) famously distinguished between single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop (or adaptive, evolutionary, exploitative, incremental, operational, reactive, or simple) learning can be characterized as an adaptation within the structure and processes of the present system, i.e. changing the means but not the ends of an organisation (Argyris 1992, 8). Double-loop (or complex, explorative, generative, strategic, or transformational) learning, on the other hand, includes a change of the governing variables because the existing organisational norms and procedures have proven to be inefficient (Argyris 1992, 8-9).

The approaches differ primarily in whether they put emphasis on the individual or the organisation as a whole, in how they value social interaction in the learning process, and in whether they see (successful) change as inherent to learning or not.

- The emphasis placed on the role of the individual in organisational learning processes makes a useful distinction of the different approaches, as it is central to their understanding (Friedman 2001, 398). One group of scholars sees ‘learning’ as an exclusively individual process and the attribute ‘organisational’ as a metaphor (Simon 1991, 125). Proponents of this approach contend that organisations learn not by themselves (which would mean to anthropomorphise them) but only through individuals.\(^ {19}\) Other authors stress that organisational learning is more than the sum of learning by each member of the organisation (cf. Fiol/Lyles 1985, 804). They take “organizations as

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\(^{19}\) “Organizations do not literally learn in the same sense that individuals do. They learn only through individuals who serve in those organizations, by encoding individually learned inferences from experience into organisational routines” (Levy 1994, 287; cf. also Argyris 1992, 8; Hedberg/Wolff 2001, 537).
entities which are able to think and act” and, thus, learn by themselves (Malek/Koch/Lindenthal 2002, 7).

- The consideration of individuals leads to the second differentiation of approaches, i.e. the question of social interaction in the learning process. One group of authors stresses the importance of information about the environment. Thus, the acquisition stage of the information processing activity receives more consideration than, say, distribution or interpretation. Other approaches place more emphasis on the latter two processes and how knowledge is constructed collectively from ambiguous environmental information. For these approaches, information is not ‘‘raw’ data [but] the product of human interpretations of social and physical phenomena’’ (Haas 1992, 4).

- Finally, approaches vary substantially in their assessment of change and/or success.20 For some, behavioural change as a result of learning is needed in order to speak of a complete learning process (Nye 1987, 378). Others go even further and give ‘learning’ a normative notion by claiming that, for learning to have taken place, processes (or policy) must have improved.21 With the assumption that learning is a cognitive process, this behaviourist position has lost ground, however. The inclusion of change or even successful change into the definition of learning would mean to overlook cases where learning (at the

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20 For an early consideration of the difficulty of declaring a policy successful or not, cf. Jervis 1976: “This determination [of success or failure] is usually made by applying a simple standard, such as whether the actor was better off at the end of the encounter than it was before. With a successful outcome, relatively little attention is paid to the costs of the policy, the possibility that others might have worked even better, or the possibility that success was largely attributable to luck and that the policy might just as easily have failed” (Jervis 1976, 232). Still today, international organisations “often lack clearly defined standards for success or failure and have no unambiguous instrument for measurement, which might lead to quick and unequivocal feedback. This usually leaves the organization without any measures for efficiency or effectiveness that go beyond the political judgments of the involved actors” (Breul 2005, 25).

21 Cf. Fiol/Lyles 1985, 803: “In all instances [of learning definitions developed by theorists] the assumption that learning will improve future performance exists. [...] Organisational learning means the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding.” See also Argyris/Schön 1978, 323; and Tetlock 1991, 27-38.
cognitive level) takes place but cannot be translated into the desired outcome (i.e. policy or institutional change).\textsuperscript{22}

In sum, based on the commonality of approaches I regard organizational learning as a \textit{cognitive practice of collective information processing leading to a change of organisational routines}. It is cognitive in that it involves filters both at the individual and group level. Being a collective process, OL builds on individual learning as an important but not as a necessary element.\textsuperscript{23} What is essential is a change of organisational routines, i.e. that new information is added and/or old one is altered or discarded. The adding or altering of information is not necessarily a mechanistic process (like changing written rules) but builds on the establishing of a collective understanding (rather like unwritten rules).

Whether this change of organisational routines is single-loop or double-loop is of subordinate relevance.\textsuperscript{24} Moreover, with regard to the notion of change and success, I follow Levy’s two-stage process in which, first, organisational learning has to be detected and, second, this learning is translated into organisational change.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} “If we study only learning that is followed by policy change, we cannot understand when individual learning gets translated into policy and when learning gets blocked by institutional or political constraints. This is important for normative or policy purposes as well as for the scientific study of foreign policy” (Levy 1994, 290). For his assessment of ‘successful learning’ (the “accuracy criterion” as he calls it), see pp. 291-94; other authors explicitly distance themselves from such a value-neutral stance (e.g. Knopf 2003, 206).

\textsuperscript{23} I therefore disagree with Levy who states, “evidence of individual learning is necessary […] to confirm a learning model of foreign policy change” (Levy 1994, 311). Rather, I take sides with authors like Friedman who regard the behaviour, but not the actual cognitive learning of individuals as essential: “Individuals do play the critical role of setting learning processes in motion” (Friedman 2001, 399).

\textsuperscript{24} The usefulness of the distinction between single-loop and double-loop learning is rightly questioned by some. Huber agrees that “this conceptual distinction […] seems critically important,” but doubts the practical difference between the two learning types (Huber 1991, 93). He is right insofar that, given the lack of empirical evidence of organizational learning and the fact that neither of the two types can be regarded as better than the other, proving the existence of actual learning would already be an achievement.

\textsuperscript{25} The actual research process may, of course, work as well the other way round: When policy change is detected, this may then be traced back to an initial learning process.
2.2. The analytical framework of organisational learning

Based on the considerations of the previous section, I will develop an analytical framework for this study based on the OL approaches from sociology but taking into account the political nature of international institutions. In particular, the framework will take into consideration the processes of learning, their subject as well as the environment in which they take place. Once this is established, I will develop the analytical model for this study.

2.2.1. The processes of learning

As mentioned before, this study assumes a two-phase process in which organisational learning (phase 1) is distinguished from potentially ensuing organisational change (phase 2). It was also defined earlier that organisational learning consists of information processing at the collective level with a resulting change of the organisational routine. One of the most comprehensive attempts to model the process of OL is Huber’s description of a four-stage learning process (Huber 1991). He differentiates information acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and organisational memory.26 While Huber’s approach is criticised for some shortcomings,27 his model highlights some important aspects of the overall learning process, which are useful for the original model developed in this section.

26 Huber calls the first stage ‘knowledge acquisition,’ as he does not distinguish between information and knowledge (Huber 1991, 89). Böhling, however, points out an important distinction of the two: Information is unprocessed data received from the outer environment, while knowledge is what is created by internal sense-making procedures (Böhling 2007, 33-34). Knowledge as the product of information processing can then be stored in the organisational routines.

27 Unfortunately, Huber’s model creates the impression of linearity with one stage building upon the other. Yet, learning in reality is much messier with overlapping processes and feedback loops, producing delays or even interruptions of the process. Another critique is that Huber’s underlying conceptualisation of the organisation as an information-processing system takes information as something objective and transferable. It does not consider the symbolic nature of it, or the way an organisation’s culture may influence its distribution or interpretation (cf. Böhling 2007, 33).
The information processing consists of the first three of Huber’s “learning-related constructs.”\textsuperscript{28} The environmental information can be operationalised according to the type of information received: Political, operational, contextual, relational or normative.\textsuperscript{29} Information is political when it informs about the opportunities and constraints in policy-making; it is operational when it informs about the effective and efficient implementation of policies; it is contextual when it informs about a certain (real) event and potential similarities and differences between this event and others; it is relational when it informs about the relationship of one organisation to another; and it is normative when it informs about the prevalent collective values and principles.

Learning can be impeded by constraints and biases of the individual. There are three main filters that impact the processing of information: Cognitive maps that select and discard information, the organisational culture that may distort it, and the absorption capacity that simply limits the amount of information received. The collective effect of these filters, given the complexity of the outer environment, is that “organization select the stimuli to which they respond” (Hedberg 1981, 8). This selection, however, is not arbitrary but deliberate: Research on political psychology has shown that human perception tends to disregard unfavourable lessons (cf. Jervis 1976, Haas 1992, 28).

Once information has passed these filters, it turns into new or altered knowledge – and is available for future action if it is stored in the organisational routines. As mentioned before, these routines can be structural, operational, or strategic. When this process is completed, one can say that an organisation has learned.

The second phase consists of action based on the newly acquired knowledge. This can take two forms: A policy change aims to alter the impact

\textsuperscript{28} Huber 1991, 90. Huber’s fourth construct, organizational memory, is only one aspect of the notion of organisational routine employed here.

\textsuperscript{29} Wright distinguishes five different types of learning, each labelled with one of these adjectives (cf. Wright 2003). However, to differentiate learning according to what was learned does not appear useful in the context of this study, which is interested in the existence and conditions of learning processes. Nevertheless, I will follow her categories with regard to the content of information.
of the organisation on the outer environment (i.e. what the organisation does); this could be the alteration of existing or development of new policies (e.g., in the case of the EU, Joint Actions or Common Positions) with regard to a given country or region. Institutional change, in contrast, aims to alter the organisational structure in order to use resources more effectively or efficiently (i.e. how the organisation does it); this includes modification of the internal configuration of the EU, from inter-institutional agreements to a change of the treaties. Finally, change translates into new information (via its impact on the environment), thus starting the process anew.

Similar to the filters that influence information processing and, thus, organisational learning, there are barriers that impact on the second phase in which a change of organisational routine is transformed into actual organisational change. A learning process may be completed but the experiences gathered could not be put into practice due to domestic, economic, or bureaucratic constraints (Levy 1994, 290). Moreover, even if an objective outsider may judge learning accurate, applying its lesson straight away may not be good policy (Tetlock 1991, 38). I will therefore distinguish three such barriers: Situational pressure, in which it may be either unwise or impossible to implement change; institutional hurdles that may inhibit desired change; and change resistance on the level of individuals or groups thereof.

In sum, I regard the process of organisational learning as contingent on three filters (cognitive maps, organisational culture, and absorption capacity). Organisational change can take place either on an institutional or policy level, and it may be limited by three barriers (situational pressure, institutional hurdles, and change resistance). Because of the procedural nature of the concept, there are no specific threshold values for organisational learning. Instead the concept has to be understood as one of degree.

The processes of learning, the main object of this study, are modelled in a two-phase progression and illustrated in the following simplified pattern. The model does not intend to say that learning occurs in a linear or even circular fashion. To highlight the potential shortcuts or interruptions of the learning process, it therefore includes feedback loops in both the information processing and action stage.
2.2.2. The subject of learning

“Who learns?” is an important question to answer when sketching the analytical framework of organisational learning, especially given the lack of definitional clarity described above. Organisational learning, in principle, refers to the learning of any organisation, i.e. any group of persons organized for a particular purpose. The basic assumption of this work is that the subject of learning is a goal-oriented actor displaying strategic behaviour within the limits of rationality described above. Political scientists would furthermore narrow the range to those formal groups of people that pursue a political goal, for example governments, parties, unions, or civil society organisations. Their distinctive feature is that they primarily follow normative considerations and power calculations rather than the rationale of utility and efficiency, as private sector organisations do (LaPalombara 2001a, 557-8).³⁰

³⁰ Researchers may define the unit of analysis in a more narrow way by looking at a particular component of a certain institution (e.g. one department within a ministry). Or they may choose a higher level of analysis by studying a group of similar organisations (e.g. all political parties in a given country). Either way, the subject of learning is the unit where, according to the definition,
What is more, while being a defining element of an organisation, its boundaries should not be regarded as impenetrable because “increasing the permeability of external boundaries makes organizations more responsive to changing demands and conditions in their environment.” (Böhling 2007, 24). Therefore, while it is necessary to clearly define the subject of learning and, thus, differentiate it from its environment, it is similarly important to look at the organisation-environment nexus in order to detect the activities by so-called boundary-spanners that trigger learning processes within an organisation (ibid., 24-25).

In this analysis, the subject of learning is a group of people organised around a political goal, following primarily normative considerations and power calculations. An important element of the subject is the permeability of its (formal) boundaries with the environment, as this can enhance its learning capacity.

2.2.3. The learning environment

Parts of the OL literature agree on defining the environment of an organization as “everything outside the organization” (cf. Malek/Koch/Lindenthal 2002, 6). Indeed, it is recognised that organisations need to demarcate themselves from their environment as a constitutive act, thus justifying their existence (Böhling 2007, 21). At the same time, organizations are not isolated from their environments: They are open to and even dependent on the flow of information and resources from outside.

In IR theory, the environment is usually referred to as the ‘structure’ (or society), in which ‘agents’ (or actors) operate. Sociological institutionalists consider the two as mutually constitutive;31 in this vein, recent approaches to learning see the organization and its environment as equally interdependent (Benner/Binder/Rotmann 2007, 17). However, IR scholars do not systematically define the environment in delineation from the subject but only

the cognitive processes of dealing with information and reaching a collective understanding through communication and interaction take place.

31 For an early analysis of the “agent-structure problem,” as it has been called since, then, see Wendt 1987: “Taken together these truisms [about human beings and society] suggest that human agents and social structures are, in one way or another, theoretically interdependent or mutually implicating entities” (ibid.,338).
ascibe a specific nature to it. Yet, it is important to analytically separate the two prior to investigating into learning processes.

There is no direct link from the environment to the inside of an organisation. Outside information first has to be translated by the agents of the organisation. Some authors therefore distinguish an inner environment from an outer environment (cf. Breul 2005, 12, building on Hedberg 1981, 13-16). The outer environment is the ‘real world’ as it impacts on the organisation. The inner environment is constituted by the organisational mechanisms that deal with this impact (Breul 2005, 13-14), i.e. the internal structures, procedures as well as organisational culture that may help or hinder the reception and processing of information from the outer environment.

Hedberg’s point about the ‘environment within’ is worth pondering, not only because it mirrors the cognitivist argument of a mediated impact of external information on the behaviour of a person. It is also important with regard to the difference between the object of much of the classical OL literature, the firm, and a political entity like the European Union or an international organisation. Of course, the outside world, in principle, is the same to all organisations. Yet, both its impact and the perception from the inside are different. It is the strongly normative nature of the public/political sphere, combined with the “ambiguity, messiness, and continuous struggle and conflict” of the political and governmental environment (LaPalombara 2001a, 562), that begs for a differentiation from normal theories of corporate behaviour.

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32 Most famously, neo-realists consider the international environment to be anarchic, powersensitive, and unforgiving (cf. Grieco 1988, 388), while constructivist or institutionalist approaches stress the importance of norms and rules. For two IR works that provide a basic definition of the environment under scrutiny, see Schimmelfennig 2000 and Barnett/Finnemore 1999.

33 This point is also highlighted by Benner et al. with regard to international organisations: “The literature on organizational learning almost exclusively focuses on business organizations, often relying on quasi-Darwinian market forces as explanatory factors while critically under-emphasizing the political factors in organizational processes. The analogy does not hold; international organizations rarely operate in a market-like environment where they are likely to go out of business based on the forces of supply and demand.” (Benner/Binder/Rotmann 2007, 17).
The two-tiered approach to the environment is taken up here because it is deemed useful on three accounts. First, it directs the focus on the processes of learning within an organisation and not on the organisation as a whole. Second, it bridges the otherwise strict separation between the organisation and its environment not only in nominal, but also in analytical terms. This allows, third, for the observation of learning not only from the outer but also from the inner environment.

For the purpose of this study, the environment is therefore understood as multiple, complex, and uncertain. It is political in nature and comprises an inner and outer sphere, both of which can provide information to be fed into the learning process.

Both the subject of learning (2.2.2) and the learning environment (2.2.3) are briefly sketched in the following figure.

![Diagram](image.png)

Figure 2: The subject of learning and the learning environment

2.2.4. Empirical data

Process tracing is used as the main research method as it allows following the cognitive processes in CFSP decision-making bodies. More than merely
looking at a given policy outcome, this method aims to trace, based on a hypothesised process, the causal mechanism that lead to a particular decision.34

Empirical data for the present study is based mainly on 22 semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2006 and March 2007 in Brussels, Paris, and Berlin. Interview partners were staff of the EUSRs, the Council Secretariat, the cabinet of the High Representative and his Policy Unit, the European Commission, the EU Institute for Security Studies, the German Foreign Office, and the German Chancellery.

As mentioned at the outset, secondary literature on the EUSRs is extremely sparse. Sporadically, official documents of the Council and the Council Secretariat were drawn upon.

3. The EU Special Representatives: A Case Study

The first EUSR was nominated for the Great Lakes region in March 1996, followed shortly by the one for the Middle East Peace Process. These appointments reflect the EU’s long-standing engagement in conflict management in Central Africa, and conflict resolution in the Middle East. It is noteworthy that these EUSRs preceded the creation of the High Representative for the CFSP and the Political and Security Committee (PSC). To date, none of the mandates has been terminated, while new mandates have been added (for Macedonia and Afghanistan in 2001, Bosnia-Herzegovina and South Caucasus in 2003, Central Asia, Sudan, and Moldova in 2005, and for the African Union in December 2007). This signals the growing importance of the contribution of the EUSRs to CFSP, and EU foreign policy at large.

34 “In process-tracing, the researcher examines histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variable in that case” (George/Bennett 2004, 6). With regard to learning processes, the authors specify: “process-tracing can be particularly effective at examining the kinds of detailed sequences in learning and diffusion processes that can create relationships between cases” (ibid., 33). For a recent critique of the process-tracing method, see Checkel 2005b.
3.1. Institutional background and political function

3.1.1. Legal conditions

EUSRs are appointed by the Council of Ministers to represent the Union and its foreign policies in certain crisis regions around the world. The legal foundation is a Joint Action based on Article 18 (5) TEU: The Council may, whenever it deems it necessary, appoint a special representative with a mandate in relation to particular policy issues. The focus of their work is on security policy and crisis management. They are therefore an instrument of the Union’s CFSP. From a legal standpoint, however, it is the European Commission that contracts them as CFSP advisors.

While being nominated by the Council, the EUSRs work under the strategic guidance of the PSC, as every other ESDP mission too. The High Representative provides operational guidance. The actual working level contacts, however, are mainly with the Council Secretariat and Solana’s Policy Unit. EUSRs report regularly to the Council working groups, thus reaching also the staff in Member States’ permanent missions and the relevant Commission units.

Consequently, the EUSRs are closely linked to all three major players in EU foreign policy – the Council, the Commission, and the Member States – in all phases of their work. Their nomination by the Council follows a selection procedure that involves the Council Secretariat, the High Representative’s Policy Unit, and the Presidency on behalf of the Member State. Due to their status as Commission Advisors for CFSP, they are responsible to the Commission for the budget allocated under the financial statement for their missions.

The following graph shows the location of EUSRs in the CFSP decision-making system:

35 For a thorough description of the legal and budgetary framework of the EUSRs, see Grevi 2007, 17-28.
36 This underscores their function as a boundary-spanner already within the EU system.
37 The graph does not pretend to fully reflect existing hierarchies within CFSP.
Using the analytical categories introduced earlier, I can now identify the subject and environment of learning for this study. First, the subject of learning is the second pillar of the EU (CFSP). While the focus is on the EUSRs and their teams (level of explanation), the study includes their direct counterparts in the institution (unit of analysis): the Political and Security Committee, the High Representative (including his Policy Unit), and the Council Secretariat. The Commission is part of this to the extent that it is “fully associated with CFSP.”

The outer environment can be divided into two parts: A Brussels environment, comprising the European Commission (Relex), the Permanent Representations of Member States, the European Parliament, and the delegations of third states and international organisations; a mission

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38 Cf. Article 18 IV TEU; the Commissions is, for example, represented in the PSC. In return, when the Commission is acting under its first pillar competence (Relex), it is regarded as part of the outer environment.

39 The Permanent Representations are part of the outer environment inasmuch as they pursue non-CFSP policies; otherwise they are part of the subject of learning via the PSC.
environment, including the respective national and regional authorities, the representations both of Member States and of the Commission, as well as the representatives of third countries and international organisations. The EUSRs are understood as boundary spanners in this system.

3.1.2. Geographical distribution

The current number of EUSRs is ten; their mandates cover the EU’s major regions of concern:

- The Western Balkans and Southeastern Europe, with mandates for Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Moldova;
- Central Africa and the Middle East, with mandates for the African Great Lakes Region (covering Burundi, DR Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda), the Middle East Peace Process (covering Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Syria), Sudan, and the African Union; as well as
- The Caucasus and Central Asia, with mandates for the South Caucasus (covering Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), Central Asia (covering Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), and Afghanistan.

Both the rise in numbers and in geographical scope of the EUSRs led the High Representative for CFSP, Javier Solana, to remark, on the occasion of the first joint EUSR seminar:

“You as EUSRs are the visible expression of the EU’s growing engagement in some of the world’s most troubled countries and regions. The list of where we have EUSRs is, in part, also list of where our foreign and security policy priorities lie [...]. I am pleased that we have this network of EUSRs, present on the ground, in most of the conflict regions that matter most directly to the EU” (Solana 2005b, 2).

The following map shows the geographical reach of EUSR mandates in the wider European neighbourhood, stretching to Central Asia and Central Africa:40

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40 27 EU Member States (blue) and EUSR mandate areas (red). With the issuing in December 2007 of the mandate of an EUSR for the African Union (AU), the whole African continent (with the
3.1.3. Different roles of the EUSRs

Looking at what EU Special Representatives do in practice, and how this relates to learning processes, it is useful to distinguish between an external and an internal role.

Externally, the EUSRs are ‘a face and a voice’ of the European Union. They (passively) represent and (actively) inform about EU policies. As opposed to the 123 delegations of the European Community (EC), the EU does not have any ‘embassies.’ The EUSRs thus increase the EU’s visibility and profile, especially compared to the rotating Presidency.

Moreover, they offer advice and support to the conflicting parties with the aim to effectively implement EU policies and to terminate the crisis or conflict. To do this, they have a range of primarily diplomatic means at their disposal.

exception of Morocco) would need to be coloured red. This, however, would distort the picture as the EUSRs mandate focuses on joint crisis management in particular. Therefore, only Ethiopia, the country of the AU’s seat, Addis Ababa, is thus signified.

41 “EUSRs provide the EU with a visible and practical presence in critical countries and regions. To a considerable degree they are a ‘voice’ and a ‘face’ of the EU and its policies on the ground” (European Union 2005, 1).
e.g. proffering good offices, mediation, facilitation, and the like. If an ESDP mission falls within the area of responsibility, the EUSR have an even more direct way of intervening in the conflict through their inclusion into the political chain of command.42

Finally, EUSRs cooperate closely with third parties, be they states (like Russia or the United States) or International Organisations (like the United Nations, the African Union, or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)). If a Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General is also deployed to the region or country, the EUSR supports him or her directly.

Internally, the mere existence of an EUSR, established through an EU Joint Action, obliges the member states to act together at least at a minimal level. Functionally, the Special Representatives can be considered, in analogy to the bodily metaphor, the “eyes and ears” of the EU. They provide information about and analysis of the current situation in their area of responsibility. This contribution is especially valued by those Member States, the vast majority, who do not dispose of extensive diplomatic networks abroad and lack information form the field.

In addition, EUSRs can make concrete proposals for action. Based on their findings, they develop policy proposals in order to enhance CFSP effectiveness. However, they do not have decision-making authority beyond their mandate, thus they can only feed their proposals into the policy-making process, i.e. primarily into the PSC.

Another important role is that of internal coordination. EUSRs strive to coordinate national policies of member states as well as the activities of the Commission, aiming to achieve the greatest coherence possible. This need to cooperate is felt both in Brussels and in the field.

The roles described above can be structured around their internal and external dimension, and around the their degree of activity. The former relates to the EUSRs as a group and how they act within the learning subject (internal) or in the outer environment (external). The latter is here described

42 Military and/or civilian ESDP operations have been deployed in all the geographic areas of responsibility of EUSRs, except Central Asia. Or, the other way around, almost all ESDP operations ever have taken place within the area of responsibility of an EUSR (the missions in Indonesia and Iraq being the exceptions to this rule).
with two forms, presence and actorness.43 ‘Presence’ refers to the actual non-absence of the EU, which in itself raises expectations of third parties and, thus, can exert influence. I include in this form the distribution of information insofar it is not intended to have direct effect.44 ‘Actorness’ builds on concrete policy initiatives or interaction with third parties – or in one sentence: “Presence is latent actorness” (Bretherton/Vogler 1999, 257).

The following matrix summarises the main functions EUSRs have under these two headings:45

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presence</th>
<th>Actorness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factual presence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Informational presence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Individual Actorness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Eyes &amp; ears”</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligation</td>
<td>Information for policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information on policy</td>
<td>Policy proposals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External</strong></td>
<td><strong>Intersubjective actorness</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Face &amp; voice”</td>
<td>Visibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visibility</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Summary of the main functions of EUSRs

3.2. Three within-cases: Africa, the Balkans, and Central Asia

The EU Special Representatives are examined here as a single-case study of European foreign policy. Within the group of ten EUSRs, three mandates are singled out for an in-depth within-case study: the African Great Lakes, Macedonia, and Central Asia. They were chosen on the basis of being most

43 The concept of ‘presence’ was introduced by Allen and Smith to describe the status of the EC/EU without referring to it being an international actor equal to states or international organisations (Allen/Smith 1990). Cf. Ginsberg 1999, 432: “Scholars concur that the EU has an international ‘presence’ (it is visible in international and regional fora) and that it exhibits some elements of ‘actorness’ (it is an international actor in some areas but not in others).”

44 Cf. Bretherton/Vogler 1999, 5: “Presence does not connote purposive external action, rather it is a consequence of internal policies and processes.”

45 Grevi similarly defines six roles of the EUSRs (Grevi 2007, 141-145); however, he does not include the role-shaping effect of the EUSRs factual presence.
different cases, thus painting the full picture of EUSR involvement in European foreign policy. Most obviously, one case was chosen from each broader region, i.e. Africa, the Balkans, and Central Asia. Moreover, two of the selected EUSRs cover a group of countries while one is limited to a single country. Time is another differentiator: The three cases have mandate durations of approximately twelve, six, and two years respectively. Interestingly, this dimension extends to the ‘time in office’ as well: While one post was filled by the same person for over a decade, another has seen six occupants in as many years.

Moreover, physical presence plays a role: Whereas a number of Special Representatives are residents in their area of responsibility, most are headquartered in Brussels. Then, their respective mandates differ: Some EUSRs are directly involved in crisis management as an ESDP mission is placed under their supervision, while others work more on a political level. Lastly, the requirements for coherence may vary, depending on the number of member states’ or Commission representatives in the region or country and their, potentially, diverging interests.

In the following, I will briefly describe the mandate and main achievements of the three EUSRs in question.46

3.2.1. The African Great Lakes region

The European ‘Special Envoy’ (as he was called in the original mandate) to the African Great Lakes region was the first EUSR ever to be deployed. Moreover, his is not only the longest lasting mandate (since 1996), but until the beginning of 2007, he was also the longest serving EUSR: Aldo Ajello, the former UN Special Representative for Mozambique, had occupied this post for nearly eleven years. The current EUSR is the Dutch diplomat Roeland van de Geer; he is based in Brussels.

The mandate stipulates, inter alia, close cooperation with the UN and the African Union and with the prominent African figures in strengthening the peace processes of Lusaka and Arusha and the peace agreements concluded in Pretoria and Luanda. Moreover, the EUSR is to observe the peace and

46 Again, a more detailed description of the EUSRs’ mandates (except the one for the AU) can be found in Grevi 2007.
transition processes between the parties and offer the European Union’s advice and good offices as appropriate. He shall contribute, where requested, to the implementation of peace and cease fire agreements reached between the parties and engage with them diplomatically in the event of non-compliance with the terms of these agreements (crisis management).

Consequently, the EUSR has been involved, on behalf of the EU, in all peace activities in the region. In particular, he provided advice and assistance for the security sector reform in Congo, working closely with the respective Heads of the EU Police Mission (EUPOL Kinshasa training a Congolese police) and of military mission EUSEC DR Congo (advising and assisting the Congolese authorities in the security sector reform, i.e. training a Congolese army). The supervision, through the international community, of the vote in 2006, the first democratic election in the country for more than 40 years, was the EUSRs most significant contribution so far.

The inclusion of the EUSR in the chain of command of ESDP missions has helped to improve civil-military co-operation. This is of great relevance for an actor like the EU, whose foreign policy identity builds on a wide range of instruments among which the military is only one and ought to be used only in tune with others. These changes of the organisational routine aim at increasing the coherence of the Union’s foreign policy, which is one of the main goals of the EU Security Strategy.

3.2.2. Republic of Macedonia

The post of EUSR for Macedonia was created in 2001, following the successful EU crisis management intervention in the domestic crisis between Slavic and Albanian Macedonians, settled by the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The main task of the EUSR has been to supervise the

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47 Interview in Brussels, 15.09.06.
48 Cf. the relevant passages from the European Security Strategy: “In contrast to the massive visible threat in the Cold War, none of the new threats is purely military; nor can any be tackled by purely military means. Each requires a mixture of instruments” and “We could add particular value by developing operations involving both military and civilian capabilities” (Council 2003, 7 and 11).
49 Council 2003, 14.
implementation of this agreement. The post, however, has seen a high degree of turnover, with some EUSRs serving only a few months and ending their terms early. Thus, six envoys have resided in Macedonia in the past six years; the current EUSR (since October 2005) is the Irish Commission official Erwan Fouéré.

His mandate is, inter alia, to maintain close contact with the Macedonian Government and with the parties involved in the political process, and to offer the EU’s advice and facilitation. At times when there were ESDP missions in Macedonia,50 the EUSR was responsible for overall coordination of EU activities. Furthermore, he contributes to the consolidation of the political process and the full implementation of the Ohrid peace agreement, thereby facilitating further progress towards European integration through the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP).

While all crisis management activities in Macedonia took place under CFSP, the SAP, a stepping-stone on the way to EU membership, falls under the purview of the Commission. As a consequence, with the nomination of Erwan Fouéré, the post of EUSR was merged with the one of Head of the Commission delegation. Two basic motivations can be detected behind this policy innovation. Internally, the aim was to achieve greater coherence between the first and second pillar, thus also providing less opportunity to third parties to play out one EU actor against the other. Externally, the idea was to pay tribute to the transition phase in which the country found itself in 2005. Naturally, a candidate country should not be subject to an ESDP mission; therefore an EUSR “light” could limit the impact by playing second fiddle to the head of EC delegation.

This institutional interlocking, called “double-hat,” resulted not only in operational and procedural, but also conceptual change. In the case of Macedonia, it meant the transition from a policy of conflict prevention and crisis management to one aiming at the potential accession of the country.51

50 The EU’s first ever military operation, Concordia (2003), was followed by EU Police Mission Proxima (2003-05), which again was succeeded by the EU Police Advisory Team EUPAT (until June 2006).
51 A similar perspective would be given for Bosnia-Herzegovina or Kosovo in case of such a “double hat;” interviews in Brussels, 22.11.06 and 27.02.07.
3.2.3. Central Asia

The EUSR for Central Asia is one of the most recent nominations, appointed in July 2005, following the May 2005 unrest in Andijan, Uzbekistan. His mandate poses a particular challenge to coherence, as it covers no less than five countries (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). After his predecessor had become the foreign minister of his home country, Pierre Morel, a French diplomat, assumed the post in October 2006; he is based in Brussels.

The mandate instructs the EUSR, inter alia, to promote good and close relations between the countries of Central Asia and the EU, to contribute to the strengthening of democracy, rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Central Asia, as well as to enhance the EU’s effectiveness in the region, including closer coordination with other relevant partners and international organizations, such as the OSCE. Explicitly mentioned is the input desired from the EUSR to the formulation of energy security aspects of the CFSP with respect to Central Asia and to the implementation of the European Union human rights policy and European Union Guidelines on Human Rights.

Despite the short time frame of his mandate, the EUSR was instrumental in contributing substantially to the development of a new EU Strategy for Central Asia, adopted at the EU summit in June 2007. To this end, the first EU Foreign Ministers’ Troika Meeting with the five Central Asian countries took place in Astana on 28 March 2007. Finally, the EUSR works in close cooperation with his two colleagues responsible for Afghanistan and the South Caucasus, trying to provide a more comprehensive regional approach.52

The short overview of these three mandates shows already how the range of tasks of the EUSRs has been continuously broadened. The first two mandates in 1996 were limited to getting in contact with the conflicting parties and the international actors involved as well as offering advice and good offices. The following mandates, for Macedonia and Afghanistan (2001) foresaw already a more active role, e.g. the surveillance of peace agreements stipulating the conduct of elections, protection of minority rights and the like. From 2003 onwards, EUSRs have become involved in the growing number of

52 Interview in Brussels, 12.10.06.
civilians (rule of law or border protection missions) and military ESDP operations.\textsuperscript{53}

3.3. Internal reorganisation

The first two EUSRs had to perform their functions in a relative political and institutional void until CFSP institutions like the High Representative and the PSC were introduced in 2000 and 2001, respectively.\textsuperscript{54} Especially the fact that they preceded the creation of the High Representative placed that latter in the awkward position to simply “Do something” with them – despite an early reluctance on Solana’s part.\textsuperscript{55}

Over the last few years, regional task forces including staff from the Council Secretariat DGE, the Policy Unit, and the EUSR teams have been set up to provide regular policy input. The motivation behind this innovation was harmonise political analysis in the second pillar. Some of these task forces include the direct participation of the Commission, which, as a consequence, also enhanced joint policy making across pillar divides.\textsuperscript{56}

At the level of organisational memory, changes took place too. In 2003, the broader framework of all mandates (start date and duration, regular reports) was standardised.\textsuperscript{57} This extended also to the language used, creating substantial benefits for the translation into all official languages.\textsuperscript{58} Finally, in 2005, a lessons-learned unit was created and a first meeting of all EUSRs held. The aim was to exchange experiences and improve cooperation both among EUSRs and between these and their Brussels counterparts.\textsuperscript{59}

Closely related to the organisation of personnel is the selection of the EUSRs themselves. Before the 1998 Treaty reform, the Special Envoys were

\textsuperscript{53} All past and current EUSR mandates are available from the Council’s website: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=263&lang=DE&mode=g.
\textsuperscript{54} Staff at the Council speak of the “time before Solana” as the “dark Middle Ages”; interview in Brussels, 10.10.06.
\textsuperscript{55} Interview in Brussels, 22.11.06.
\textsuperscript{56} Interview in Brussels, 27.02.07.
\textsuperscript{57} Interview in Brussels, 23.10.06; cf. also European Union 2006, 1.
\textsuperscript{58} Interview in Brussels, 23.10.06.
\textsuperscript{59} Interviews in Brussels, 23.11.06 and 26.02.07. Lessons learned meetings are to be held regularly every six months, starting in 2007 (interview in Brussels, 27.02.07.).
nominated directly by the Council.\textsuperscript{60} After that, the High Representative started to make proposals for nomination. In order to increase the transparency of the process, but also to secure the influence of the member states, the 2004 guidelines introduced a multi-stage selection procedure, involving a call for applications, a selection body, and a formal proposal to the PSC.\textsuperscript{61} Observers say that this procedure has helped to increase the quality of personnel selection.\textsuperscript{62}

In addition, cooperation with the Commission has been improved. In institutional terms, for example, the Director-General A represents the Commission at the meetings of the PSC.\textsuperscript{63} Moreover, the EUSRs themselves have an interest in effective cooperation with the Commission, as the latter disposes of those economic instruments, which the EUSRs could introduce as incentives into their political negotiations.\textsuperscript{64} The closest interconnection between Council and Commission is the “double-hat” that has existed in Macedonia since 2005.

4. Assessing the EUSRs’ Influence on European Foreign Policy

In this last part, I want to assess the influence that the EUSRs, through learning mechanisms, had on the overall development and direction of European foreign policy. Looking at the effects of the different roles they can assume, I will consider how these have contributed to a change of the (structural, operational, or ideational) organisational routine, which potentially can lead to institutional or policy change. One caveat is apt, however: The results presented here must remain tentative, as they are not yet based on the full analysis of the EUSRs work using the presented analytical model in its entirety. They remain therefore preliminary research findings.

\textsuperscript{60} Interview in Brussels, 27.02.07.
\textsuperscript{61} Interview in Brussels, 27.02.07.; cf. European Union 2006, 3. The selection body comprises the Presidency’s PSC ambassador, the Director-General E of the Council Secretariat, and the Head of the Policy Unit (interview in Berlin, 23.10.06.).
\textsuperscript{62} Interview in Brussels, 27.02.07.
\textsuperscript{63} Interview in Brussels, 23.03.07.
\textsuperscript{64} Interviews in Brussels, 26.02.07. and 23.03.07.
4.1. Changes of organisational routine

With regard to the EUSRs’ internal roles, the following contributions can be discerned. First, by their mere presence, they create the need to integrate them into the Brussels foreign policy machinery.65 Second, the EUSRs have become providers of “‘EU-made’ analysis and information” (Grevi 2007, 46), given that a majority of member states do not have their own diplomatic representations in the countries under scrutiny. Moreover, they provide information of a different quality: EUSRs usually have better access to the local counterparts due to their perceived higher level;66 in case their mandate covers more than country, EUSRs can offer a regional perspective on a conflict, which national ambassadors cannot.

Third, in the field, EUSRs often chair, as in the case of Macedonia, a coordination group composed of all EU actors present in the field, including the commanders of ESDP missions, with a view to coordinating the implementation aspects of the EU’s action. Moreover, EUSRs enhance the coherence of all EU instruments in the field. Through their work, they provide a bridge not only to ESDP, but also to policy areas such as Enlargement Policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy67, development policy, and, as of recent, energy policy. The latter is most relevant in Central Asia, where the EUSR was a key player in drafting the first EU strategy for the region. Development policy is the major theme for all EU-Africa relations. Enlargement policy, finally, takes prominence both in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Macedonia.

Bridging institutions and policies in the name of external coherence, thus, has been the most relevant contribution of EUSRs rather than making policy proposals. The latter, indeed, is generally not seen as their main task but a field fiercely guarded by (larger) member states. The EUSRs are therefore

65 Furthermore, it highlights the conventional IR wisdom that it is easier to create institutions than to get rid of them.
66 On their tours to the region, EUSRs usually meet the president or prime minister of a country, rather than ‘only’ the foreign minister; interviews in Brussels, 10.10.06, 22.11.06, and 23.11.06.
67 The European Neighbourhood Policy is part of the external relations of the Community, covering those countries of Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, an the Southern Mediterranean that do not have a membership perspective; for an overview of this policy framework, see European Commission 2004. The inclusion of the South Caucasian countries into this policy framework was reportedly based on direct lobbying by the EUSR; cf. Coppieters 2003, 159 and 168.
confined to contributing to the work of the regional task forces rather than providing innovative ideas themselves.68

Looking at the EUSRs’ external role, it is primarily the enhanced visibility of the Union that they provide – in addition to whatever information about the EU’s policies they disseminate. Whether present on the ground or coming as envoy from Brussels, the Special Representative embodies the EU’s engagement in a conflict. Their high standing vis-à-vis the host country grants them particular leverage when advising on and supporting in conflict resolution.

Besides, through their interaction with third parties, EUSRs enhance the EU’s actorness. This is most visible in the so-called Middle East Quartet, founded in 2002 and comprising representatives of the EU, the United States, Russia, and the UN. At the level of ‘principals,’ it is the Troika (Presidency, Relex commissioner, and High Representative) that represents the EU; at the ‘envoy’ level, however, the EUSR is the only EU agent at the table.69

In sum, through their different roles, the EUSRs have contributed to a change of organisational routines, be they structural (e.g. the internal reorganisation around task forces or the establishment of a lessons learned unit), operational (e.g. coordination in the field and inclusion in chain of command), or ideational (e.g. the respective policy contributions).

68 Interview in Brussels, 15.09.06.
4.2. Conclusions

In this study, it could thus be shown that the EU Special Representatives provide useful learning experiences for the EU, and the theories of organisational learning offer a methodological framework for their evaluation. Both the findings of this study and the need for further research are summarised in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Operationalisation</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Further research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive practice</td>
<td>Filters at individual and group level</td>
<td>Contingent on three filters: cognitive maps, organisational culture, absorption capacity</td>
<td>How do the three filters work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective information processing</td>
<td>Different types of information: Political, operational, contextual, relational or normative Notion of boundary spanners</td>
<td>Interaction with various players in both inner and outer environment Different roles of EUSRs</td>
<td>Distinguishing between five different types of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of organisational routines</td>
<td>Differentiation between structural, operational, and ideational routines</td>
<td>Structural: e.g. Internal reorganisation, lessons learned Operational: e.g. coordination in the field, chain of command Ideational: policy contributions</td>
<td>Is there a causal link from phase 1 (organisational learning) to phase 2 (organisational change)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy change or institutional change</td>
<td>Alteration of existing or development of new policies (Joint Actions or Common Positions) Modification of the internal structure (e.g. inter-institutional agreements, treaties)</td>
<td>To be found in further research</td>
<td>Did some of the three barriers prevent change from occurring?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of main findings

These theoretical conclusions can be complemented by a few considerations of potential policy implications. By simply providing a focal
point for a given crisis or region, and by thus creating the need to give common instructions to them, the EUSRs can help advance the so-called “habit of coordination.” This was first noticed with regard to the close circles of foreign ministers and their political directors in the early days of European Political Cooperation (de Schoutheete 1980, Nuttall 1992). Later, it was detected in the group of ambassadors assembling as the Committee of Permanent Representatives in Brussels (Checkel 2005a, Lewis 2003); and most recently, researchers have applied this ‘socialisation concept’ also to the Political and Security Committee itself (Juncos/Reynolds 2007). These aspects point to further interesting cross-references of organisational learning to the more mainstream fields of European foreign policy analysis.

The most fundamental aspect of the development of the EUSRs as an instrument of EU foreign policy is that they were not developed after any given model. While it is true that the first Special Representative, Aldo Ajello, held the same position for the United Nations before, neither the UN’s Special Representatives of the Secretary-General nor state representatives (like those of any member state or, for example, the United States) served as a template for the EUSRs. Much of their development is therefore owed to the learning-by-doing approach that is symptomatic for the overall advancement of EU foreign policy, or even of the EU as a whole. It is this aspect in particular that makes the EUSR experience worthwhile looking at when starting to build, under the 2007 Reform Treaty, the new EU foreign service.70

The same is true for their contribution to the EU’s holistic approach to crisis management. Solana himself, in a speech in 2005, called the EUSRs (together with the three representatives on non-proliferation, terrorism and human rights) emblematic of what EU foreign policy is all about: conflict resolution, crisis management, tackling the new security threats and standing up for the EU’s values and interests, seeking comprehensive solutions to complex and multi-dimensional problems (Solana 2005b, 2). It is in this sense – i.e. in what they do, how they do it, and what they learn from it – that the EUSRs embody the EU’s identity as an international actor.

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