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## **How the EU aggregates foreign policy: Is the EEAS expanding to meet the needs of the expanding EEAS?**

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# How the EU aggregates foreign policy: Is the EEAS expanding to meet the needs of the expanding EEAS?



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## Abstract

The European Union (EU) has a substantially more united foreign policy than any other international organisation. Said expansive joint foreign policy has developed in an inhospitable setting where its members hold widely different interests and perspectives on joint foreign policy. Given states' tendency to jealously guard sovereignty over their foreign policy, how the EU's foreign policy structures and instruments have been aggregated remains unclear. This paper addresses this via the question "Through what mechanism did the EU aggregate its foreign policy between 2014 and 2021?" and applies a modified 'Failing Forward' framework where foreign policy is aggregated via a process of problem-solving by problem-making resulting in an iterative institutionalisation causal mechanism. To analyse whether this mechanism is present, this study adopts a theory-testing process-tracing research method on the development of EU foreign policy structures and instruments from 2014 to 2021. It argues that the aggregation of the EU's foreign policy relies on iterative intergovernmental and neofunctional processes establishing an integrative causal feedback loop. Examining how the EU aggregates foreign policy is valuable to both EU policymakers and actors within other international organisations seeking greater unison in their foreign policy and contributes to research on international integration in intergovernmental settings.

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Key words: EEAS, EU Foreign policy, Integration, CFSP, Failing Forward

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## List of Abbreviations

EU: European Union.

EEAS: European External Action Service.

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

IO: International Organisation.

HR/VP: High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice president of the European Commission.

CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy.

CSDP: Common Security and Defence Policy.

FF: Failing Forward.

FAC: Foreign Affairs Council.

OJEU: Official Journal of the European Union.

MS: Member States.

SR: Special Representative.

## Introduction

Just over a decade ago, the European Union (EU) established a peculiar institutional innovation ordained by the Lisbon Treaty: The European External Action Service (EEAS). The service is an exceedingly rare occurrence of states ceding international representation and notable aspects of their foreign policy to a quasi-supranational institution with a separate legal identity that in some regards marks an international organisation (IO) taking the role of a supranational ministry of foreign affairs (MFA) (Conrad, 2021; Tomat, 2021). The EEAS was established as a quasi-supranational body intended to unify and oversee disparate foreign policy instruments and institutions, as well as address the shortcomings of the status quo ex ante, which was plagued by a lack of continuity, incoherence, inconsistency, and coordination (Csernaton, 2021; Cuyckens, 2012; Duke, 2009; Tomat, 2021). While unmistakably at the centre of substantial debates on its efficacy and influence, the EEAS has been given wide authority and competences while being attributed as being successful or even instrumental to consensus-building efforts and in aggregating the Union's foreign policy, evolving into a locus of EU foreign policy (Delphin, 2021; Tomat, 2021; Blockmans & Wessel, 2021).

What is less clear, however, is how an organisation nestled between competing institutions and member states (MS), with little individual power, large responsibilities, and unclear decision-making processes has become a centrepiece of MS and institutions with substantially differing interests' foreign policy (Kostanyan, 2015; Koops & Tercovich, 2020; Smith, 2013). Following the turbulent first HR/VP<sup>1</sup> term after the EEAS' activation and the initial flurry of institutionalisation (Smith, 2013), its mission, competences, and its place in relation to EU institutions were revised, better delineated, and clarified (Koops & Tercovich, 2020; Calcara, 2020; Csernaton, 2021; Pomorska & Vanhoonacker, 2016). With the initial

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<sup>1</sup> High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice president of the European Commission, the head of the EEAS.

confusion residing, the EU has moved forward in foreign policy integration, aggregating an increasing amount of foreign policy instruments into the service. In this vein, the EEAS has in the name of coherence and convergence development, been ceded far-reaching control and authority over instruments and policies relevant to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and has been widely attributed as successful (Delphin, 2021; Ekengren & Hollis, 2020; Blockmans & Wessel, 2021). That the service and the joining up of foreign policy instruments has improved the Union's capacity to employ whole-of-union approaches is clear, but what process has enabled the instrument and policy aggregation under it is not. Outside of loose arguments regarding the efficacy of intelligence sharing and cooperation (Conrad, 2021), enhanced inter-institutional coordination (Csernaton, 2021), and representative and organisational continuity (Blockmans & Wessel, 2021; Giusti, 2020) reducing costs and raising effectivity, the processes through which the EU's foreign policy has been aggregated remain largely unaddressed. Put succinctly, this paper intends to address this gap by answering the following question: Through what mechanism did the EU aggregate its foreign policy between 2014 and 2021?

This paper pursues a theory-testing process-tracing research design to establish how EU foreign policy is aggregated. The specific causal mechanism which is being tested follows a modification of a 'Failing Forward' (FF) framework, which is an aggregation of intergovernmental and neofunctional theory (Jones, Kelemen, & Meunier, 2016). Within the FF framework, intergovernmentalist decision-making results in suboptimal outcomes which then corrects itself via neofunctional processes. Importantly, there is a slight deviation from the FF concept, as it assumes that the drive for a neofunctionalist development is policy failure during crisis (Jones et al., 2016; Bergmann & Müller, 2021). As the failure of a foreign policy structure is reliant on clarity of the intent of the structure, failure is discarded in favour of a capability-expectations gap (CEG) framework (Hill, 1993), where a policy failure is considered

to occur when the structure cannot perform tasks delegated to it by MS. This leads to something near an intergovernmentalist logic of an ‘iterative institutionalisation’ of consensus (Moravcsik, 1993), with the notable difference that it results in a neofunctional process. This also ties into a broader logic of complex intergovernmental decision-making and institution-building leading to explosions of supranational integration (Ekengren & Hollis, 2020). In short, the theory posits that intergovernmental processes of decision-making are caused by and tie back into neofunctional integrationist processes due to imperfect bargaining leading to a constant process of resolving perceived issues, all the while delegating further competences to a supranational body.

The expectation is that an ‘iterative institutionalisation’ mechanism is present, in which the MS’ joint foreign policy structure is delegated tasks and objectives in a domain outside its remit without being granted the means to achieve them. This would then stretch its actual capabilities into new fields, leading to MS delegating capabilities to address the structure or instrument’s inability to perform the expected tasks. The structure or instrument then receives further updated objectives and tasks in domains adjacent to its newfound capabilities, repeating the mechanism. This would be perceivable by viewing delegations of objectives and tasks to a supranational body or instrument by MS. These would then be fully institutionalised under the foreign policy structure following its failure to achieve tasks it is not geared for, leading to further delegations of tasks and objectives in newly adjacent foreign policy instruments, which in turn leads to further institutionalisation when the new expectations placed on it are not met. By analysing all Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and European Council meeting conclusions and outcomes as well as all CFSP publications in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) between 2014 and 2021, this study intends to uncover whether the iterative institutionalisation mechanism is present. In doing this, the paper analyses the process of



foreign policy aggregation under the EEAS and its sub-structures and instruments over the 2014-2021 time-period.

The relevance of this research lies in establishing what processes constitute the building blocks of functional semi-supranational foreign policy. This is valuable in three ways. First, it fills a gap in theory on just how quasi-supranational structures may aid in aggregating IO foreign policy. Second, it is valuable for European policymakers by ascertaining what processes are more worthy of attention when forging the oft sought Union-wide approach to foreign policy, especially in the context of the Union's trial and error-based learning (Blockmans & Wessel, 2021; Csernaton, 2021; Cottey, 2020). Lastly, establishing how foreign policy aggregation within an IO occurs is of worth to other international or regional organisations seeking to pursue a more united foreign policy as it establishes a precedent of how foreign policy aggregation functions. This thesis will proceed as follows: In the next section the existing literature and this paper's role within it will be discussed, followed by a section that presents the central theoretical argument. This is in turn followed by a section outlining the thesis' methodology, followed by an analysis of decisions and conclusions by the FAC and the European Council as well as CFSP-marked publications in the OJEU. The paper concludes by summarising its findings and discussing the limitations and implications of the research.

## Literature Review

Literature on the EU's foreign policy as it pertains to this research can be divided into four categories. These can be broadly defined as the international relations literature focused on foreign policy as such, the lengthy debate on role categorisations and conceptualisations of the EU's foreign policy actorship, analyses of the EEAS as well as specific EU foreign policy instruments and policies, and finally an EU studies-based debate on Europeanisation and general EU functioning. Important to note is that most of the literature runs into a few common issues, specifically in relation to a mixture of concept stretching, vague conceptualisations, and being ungrounded either theoretically or empirically.

To begin with, one part of the literature on EU foreign policy has a traditional international relations perspective and largely considers the EU as a traditional foreign policy actor (See Baun & Marek, 2019; Riddervold & Rosén, 2018; Tardy, 2018; Tardy, 2021; Toje, 2008). While this is akin to the actorship lecture, it specifically denotes the EU as a power similar to states, that occupies a space in the international arena and that acts and reacts in manners similar to national foreign policy actors. This applies to both MS actions under an EU umbrella, with examples such as Baun & Marek's (2019) account of European foreign and security integration under a realist perspective, as well as the EU's aggregate policy, such as Riddervold & Rosén's (2018) and Sverdrup-Thygeson's (2017) analyses of EU-US balancing and competition against China and Russia. While this field is undoubtedly valuable in that it grounds the debate on EU foreign policy in the wider international relations scholarship, it instead runs the issue of questionable understandings of the role of EU institutions and the modes of the CFSP or the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). An evocative example of this is Tardy's (2018; 2021) analyses of European defence capabilities and its relationship to NATO as an aggregate actor. The issue with this is that the analysis is about a domain that neither the MS nor EU institutions claim is functionally present at an EU level.

This is not to say that the field lacks in meaningful contributions, a good example being Toje's (2008) argument of the EU's stature in international relations being set up for disappointment via an inability to reach consensus on foreign policy. The main issue with this field remains, counterexamples notwithstanding, that EU practice and modes of decision-making are not meaningfully considered, and that the Union is instead treated as either an IO like any other or as something akin to a state.

Closely related to the larger foreign policy literature, the debate on the EU's actorship is substantial and has important implications for understanding the EU's foreign policy as it stands in the international arena. This is because it simply put lays a foundation and gives an idea of why the foreign policy structures are built. Within this field there are a few contending perspectives, most important are the different archetypes of Normative Power Europe, Civilian Power Europe, Transformative Power Europe, Market Power Europe, and Great Power Europe (Biscop, 2019; Ekengren & Hollis, 2020; Giusti, 2020; Kugiel, 2017; Larsen, 2020; Leonard et al., 2019; Tardy, 2021). Without digging too deep into these archetypes and their specificities, there are disagreements on the extent to which EU foreign policy is able to exert power and whether the Union is predominantly a normative or market force on the world stage (Larsen, 2020; Delphin, 2021). While it constitutes a large chunk of the literature, the actorship literature has substantial issues. The attempts to establish a coherent stature of the EU on the world stage may be useful for analysing its foreign policy, but often involves a level of reductionism and simplification that is detrimental to analysis. Worth noting here is however that there are instances of holistic analysis, such as Biscop's (2019) work, but that these often are subject to other problems. There is a recurring theme of infusing normative ideas of what the Union should strive to become (Larsen, 2020; for examples see Biscop, 2016; Biscop, 2019; Leonard et al., 2019). This leads to what others correctly identify as policy areas being judged against an end goal that it is far from clear the EU and its MS agree on (Cottey, 2020; Jayet,

2020; Larsen, 2020). In short, this strain of literature has a recurring theme of a seemingly Sisyphean attempt to conceptualise the state and end point of what other authors assert is a constantly shifting integration project (Anghel & Jones, 2021). The issue here is that such an argument, unless directly and meaningfully applied, ends up in a semantic quagmire, albeit a highly sophisticated one.

The evaluative literature on the EU's foreign policy and on the EEAS is predominantly focused on evaluating specific policies and instruments utilised by the CFSP and CSDP policy domains, as well as on the institutional developments that enable such usage of instruments. Within this field there are two streams of research, the first emphasising the institutional setting of the Union's foreign policy (see Blockmans & Wessel, 2021; Calcara, 2020; Conrad, 2021; Csernaton, 2021; Delphin, 2021; Koops & Tercovich, 2020; Kostanyan 2015; Novák, 2018; Smith, 2013) and the latter focusing on specific missions or policies of the EU (See Biscop, 2018; Boşilca, Stenberg & Riddervold, 2021; De Zwart & Pomorska, 2019; Zaborowski, 2020). While both strands overall provide apt analysis, there is an issue in that the two are devoid of a meaningfully holistic approach. In essence, the research often falls back to surface-level critique of CFSP decision-making structures (Smith, 2013), assertions of lacking organisational or general capability (Blockmans & Wessel, 2021; Kugiel, 2017), or a lack of integration (Csernaton, 2021; Koops & Tercovich, 2020). The problem with this is not that these assertions are not well-argued or necessarily inaccurate, but that this field of literature rests on unclear theoretical bases and tends to be evaluative and exploratory in nature. Why this is an issue is made clear by De Zwart & Pomorska's (2019) assertion that the intention of a policy is often difficult to ascertain, which in conjunction with an evaluative focus leads to arbitrary benchmarking. This harks back to a flaw of the actorship literature, as an analysis of an instrument or institution's functioning becomes beholden to a surmised assumption of intent. Using this assumption to establish whether an instrument or body is functioning as intended is

wholly reliant on a correct assumption of intent. As the intended outcome becomes unclear and problematised, the value of the research becomes questionable.

As for the European studies-based perspectives, some attention should be given to work on the study of Europeanisation of foreign policy (Moumoutzis, 2011; Moumoutzis & Zartaloudis, 2016; Bressan & Bergmaier, 2021). In their work, Moumoutzis (2011) and Moumoutzis & Zartaloudis (2016) demonstrate the validity of employing a Europeanisation framework to the study of the EU's effects on its MS, particularly when employing a process-tracing method and when the EU stimuli are non-binding. Similarly, Bressan and Bergmaier (2021) discuss the extent to which the EU has converged MS policy on early warning systems and resilience by viewing the evolution of a subset of MS' policies. This is highly relevant to this project in that it specifically pertains to the EU's foreign policy, which is both non-binding and unanimous in nature. While arguments are made about the effects of diffusion and institutionalisation of European norms at the MS level, Moumoutzis (2011) states that as Europeanisation is likely the result of a mutually constitutive interaction between institutions and MS, they cannot be dealt with in tandem until both have been treated in isolation. This is evocative of a notable flaw in that the field tends to treat institutionalisation and aggregation of foreign policy at a European level as a product of a process rather than a process in and of itself. In short, what is being viewed is not the institutionalisation of foreign policy, but the processes that enable it.

This is where the main shortcomings of this field lie, namely in two tacit assumptions which are due further scrutiny. First, the idea that the MS-Institution process is separable in the first place is far from clear, especially when scholars subscribing to the FF model of EU integration maintain the interaction between the two is a type of iterative feedback loop (Anghel & Jones, 2021). The second can be found in that due to what Moumoutzis identifies as a sort of conceptual confusion within the wider tradition (2011). This is visible in Bressan

& Bergmaier's (2021) finding that more specific diffusion items have stronger converging effects, which instead of establishing that specificity breeds convergence. This fails to consider that more specific decisions and formulations in a unanimous decision-making structure instead may simply indicate a greater level of agreement among the actors involved. In short, the causal direction appears misplaced. Further, attention is universally given to the goals and enabling factors of Europeanisation or EU-level foreign policy institutionalisation, whereas the process itself is not given meaningful scrutiny.

Taken together, the main issues within the literature on EU foreign policy is that the logics underlying the process of European foreign policy aggregation remain questionably understood. The literature has occupied itself with ascertaining the implementation of specific foreign policy instruments and their objectives, as well as the effect of foreign policy structures, such as the EEAS, in the Union's foreign policy. While the field has done much in defining ways in which these institutions may aid in having the EU occupy certain roles in foreign policy and how it is inhibited or enabled in its joint foreign policy, little has been done on how these structures emerge and progress. This is the gap that this paper intends to address; namely how aggregative foreign policy develops in the EU. Essentially, given the widespread notion of an aggregating Union in foreign policy and the growing domain of joint EU foreign policy, there is a need for further understanding of how and why these structures evolve. This is the specific gap that this thesis intends to address, as the process of foreign policy institutionalisation has not been given sufficient attention, but remains highly relevant to the field of EU foreign policy as all fields outlined above are contingent on it to some extent.

## Theoretical Framework

To address the research question, some discussion of relevant theories on international integration is warranted. From the offset, the theory this paper tests is primarily whether neofunctionalism's spillover effects hold for joint foreign policy structures. In broad terms, neofunctionalism posits that once a supranational institution has been established for a specific task, mechanisms are activated which push toward increased subsequent integration via the concept of spillover, where integration in one area leads to integration in adjacent domains (Bergmann & Niemann, 2018). Neofunctionalism is worth dealing with in depth, as the concept of spillover offers a possible explanatory pathway for increased IO foreign policy aggregation. Additionally, the neofunctionalist externalisation hypothesis maintains that international integration causes the formation of some sort of joint foreign policy if there is sufficient initial commitment, and that aggregation would be a consequence of incentives to strengthen the organisation members' bargaining power relative to outsiders (Schmitter, 1969). Neofunctionalism is therefore useful for understanding how a supranational MFA may aggregate foreign policy, as the conclusion derived would be that integration is preordained in some areas of foreign policy, with spillover effects then leading to the institutionalisation of other foreign policy instruments and structures.

There are however a few issues in the application of neofunctionalism to foreign policy. The first is that there is an argument to be made that the development of a supranational foreign policy's structure may be better understood via a Failing Forward (FF) framework. In an FF framework the relationship is more contingent on a logic of decisive, yet incomplete, intergovernmental reforms that often lead to a policy failure, which then leads to further reform to address said failure along neofunctionalist mechanisms (Jones et al., 2016). Intergovernmentalism here pertains to a state-based theory of international integration where states within an IO are the fundamental loci of power and integration is wholly based on

bargaining between MS (Moravcsik, 1993). Spoken plainly, an FF framework posits that intergovernmental tendencies lead to incomplete solutions which beget neofunctionalist tendencies leading to further and deepened integration (Jones et al., 2016; Bergmann & Müller, 2021). Policy failure here refers to how intergovernmental bargaining results in an incomplete reform which eventually sparks a crisis that puts the incompleteness of the reform on display, launching a new round of intergovernmental bargaining to address the policy failure (Anghel & Jones, 2021). To put it in simpler terms, the FF framework in essence suggests the presence of a bargaining process that iteratively makes integrative reforms more complete by addressing problems as they come, incrementally problem-solving and creating new problems, all increasing a reform's supranational character.

In the field of foreign policy, this logic may indeed be stronger than in other policy domains as foreign policy is dominated by intergovernmental decision-making structures (Alecú de Flers, Chappell, & Müller, 2011; Moumoutzis, 2011), which increases the odds of policy failure due to suboptimal bargaining outcomes which would then not be fit for their task (Jones et al., 2016). Further, and in tandem with the previous point made, a strictly neofunctional lens fails to capture the highly intergovernmental processes allowing for supranational institutionalisation (Jones et al., 2016; Bergmann & Müller, 2021). Minimising the focus on supranational actors may indeed be more important within foreign policy due to its uniquely intergovernmental decision-making praxis (Moumoutzis, 2011). Adapting along these lines can also cover some distance in reconciling the issues inherent in a strictly neofunctional or intergovernmental approach, as either approach is patently unable to comprehensively account for processes of foreign policy integration (Bergmann & Müller, 2021).

Adopting such an integrationist theoretical approach, while it addresses concerns held by Intergovernmentalists toward Neofunctionalists and vice versa (Jones et al., 2016), retains



one fundamental issue for this research project. In essence, the issue with the FF approach is that it is contingent on incomplete solutions being exposed by crisis, which is a strange concept when the subject matter is foreign policy instruments and structures, and not foreign policy itself. Indeed, ascertaining failure or intention in an actor's foreign policy is elusive and problematic in and of itself (De Zwart & Pomorska, 2019). Therefore, instead of focusing on reform borne by crisis or failure, another condition which both better mirrors the nature of foreign policy conduction and ties in more neatly with intergovernmentalist logics is warranted. Intergovernmentalist processes face critique for resulting in lowest common denominator compromises (Jones et al., 2016; Biscop, 2019), but that is not necessarily a problem for the incremental integrationist processes suggested by neofunctionalism nor are these compromises solely confined to crisis management.

As stated, any notable development in foreign or security policy structures is reliant on unanimity (Alecú de Flers et al., 2011). Therefore, whenever there is unanimity on a supranational delegation of foreign policy competences, it should be expected that it is adopted by an intergovernmental process, though the precondition for this taking place is the result of a neofunctionalist process (Anghel & Jones, 2021). However, granting this competence to a joint structure is also likely to be done in an incomplete manner due to the nature of intergovernmental bargaining (Rabinovych, 2021). When the competence ceded to the supranational foreign policy structure then runs into some form of policy failure a new round of intergovernmental bargaining takes place which addresses the issues that lead to the failure. To address how this relates to foreign policy specifically, the conceptual background of joint foreign policy structures, as well as the problematic nature of foreign policy failure is vital. Beginning with the conceptual background of joint foreign policy instruments, the point of establishing a supranational foreign policy structure is to aggregate the MS' foreign policy. Aggregation here refers to the joining up of MS' foreign policy practices, structures, and

instruments under an IO. The reliance on unanimity wrought by the intergovernmentalist character of common foreign policy translates into a direct need for consensus for the foreign policy structure to accomplish anything (Alecú de Flers et al., 2011).

There is still a need to address the issue in judging policy failure without a reasonably clear idea of what the policy's goal was, which may be difficult to ascertain in general, but especially for foreign policy (Rabinovych, 2021; De Zwart & Pomorska, 2019). In lieu of complete knowledge of the actors' intentions, it can therefore be worthwhile to instead adapt the concept of a CEG. A CEG is the perceived distance between what is expected of an actor and "its ability to agree, its resources, and the instruments at its disposal" (Hill, 1993, p. 315). Instead of judging whether a structure is successful in achieving specific goals, then, what is expected of it can be found in what it has been tasked with doing. Adopting the CEG's logic also addresses a fundamental issue for the FF framework, namely the issues in conceptualising what 'forward' is (Anghel & Jones, 2021; Rabinovych, 2021). Making 'forward' contingent on the fulfilment of expectations allows it to be conceptualised without assuming the end point of a policy, instrument, or structure. Assuming an assigned task is expected to be successful, any delegation of tasks or objectives outside of institutionalised means and authority are likely to cause a perception of the structure failing its newly delegated objective, which would then trigger a new round of intergovernmental bargaining as per the FF framework. This leads us to the expected causal mechanism, displayed in Table 1. Due to the significant departure from the crisis emphasis in FF theory, the expected mechanism will instead be referred to as the 'Iterative Institutionalisation' mechanism.

Cause	Iterative institutionalisation causal mechanism				Outcome
	→				
Existence of joint IO foreign policy structure.	Foreign policy spillover effects cause Intergovernmental delegation of more or expanded tasks and objectives the structure is not geared for.	Intergovernmental delegation of further means, authority, and competences to the foreign policy structure to address perceived failure of the execution of new tasks and objectives.	Spillover effects now raise expectations and cause further expansion of tasks and objectives outside of newly delegated means, authority, and competences.	Intergovernmental Delegation of further means, authority, and competences to the foreign policy structure to make it able to live up to new tasks, objectives, and expectations.	Joint foreign policy structure more with more tasks, objectives, means, competences, and authority.

**Table 1:** The Iterative Institutionalisation causal mechanism.

Put as succinctly as possible, the existence of a joint foreign policy institution with specific competences leads to a spillover effect where it is delegated objectives and tasks adjacent to those it is properly geared for due to an expectation that it is able to achieve these objectives or perform these tasks. When these expectations are not met, this leads to an intergovernmental bargaining process solving its perceived inadequacy for the new tasks and granting the structure something closer to its required means. This increased institutionalisation of the joint foreign policy structure leads to a new spillover effect via raised expectations, which leads to the delegation of new objectives and tasks outside its newly acquired remit. This then leads to a new delegation of authority and competences to resolve the new perceived CEG. This results in a more heavily institutionalised joint foreign policy structure and a deeper aggregation of the IO MS' foreign policy. Important to note is that this causal mechanism is a feedback loop, without any claim of a fixed end point. However, this causal mechanism is not claimed to hold ad infinitum, and a limitation is that it is unclear what constitutes the end point of integration, as it is nigh impossible to know when capabilities and expectations would converge and remain stable. Nevertheless, should expectations and capability of the structure or its instruments be equal, the process should come to a halt, though there is no preconception of what state the structure is in at this point nor is there anything to suggest it could not restart.

## Method

### Case Selection

To analyse how IO's aggregate foreign policy under joint structures via the research question "Through what mechanism did the EU aggregate its foreign policy between 2014 and 2021?", this paper conducts a single extreme case study on the EU and its aggregation of foreign policy under its quasi-MFA the EEAS. There are several reasons for this being the most appropriate case and why a single-case study is particularly viable. First, the EU's foreign policy regime is a bricolage of a considerable amount of meaningful and separate actors, institutions, and processes (Csernaton, 2021), undue simplification of which would be detrimental to analysis. Second, there is no other case with similar general characteristics or foreign policy regimes. There are no other IOs with a meaningful joint foreign policy structure to be viewed, nor are there any with a similar level of integration that lack one, excluding the possibility of both most similar and most different system designs as it violates the prerequisites for both (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Third, the EU is an extreme case of both foreign policy and general integration, and as such comparison would greatly reduce the efficacy of the research. Lastly and in an EU perspective, the fundamentally intergovernmental nature of the CFSP makes it an extreme case study of intergovernmentalism compared to other fields of European integration (Moumoutzis, 2011). This makes the EU both the only case for analysing the results of an IO joint foreign policy institution on the functioning of bloc foreign policy and its foreign policy an extreme case of intergovernmentalism in European integration.

To specify, the specific case being viewed is the totality of the EU's foreign policy structures and instruments in the given time-period. This ranges planning centres for joint action being established to the individual mandates of its' representatives and CSDP missions. These will be viewed both individually as well as more holistically where appropriate. Further

and worth noting clearly, the spillover effects noted in the theoretical framework refer to different tasks, objectives, competences, authorities and mandates within individual instruments as well as holistically for the entire Union, rather than between policy fields.

As for the specific time-period of 2014-2021, there is some justification needed though the argument is quite clear. The choice to begin in 2014 is that while there is an argument for the formulation and initialisation phase of the EEAS still being an ongoing process in 2014, the service was prior to this in its markedly confused and rapidly shifting inaugural term (Koops & Tercovich, 2020). As such, viewing delegations of competence and increased institutionalisation during this time could potentially violate the prerequisite of having a minimally established joint foreign policy structure. Beginning in 2014, there is mounting institutionalisation of foreign policy conduction under the EEAS, and the service enjoyed a reasonably stable institutional landscape. In other words, by 2014 the service can be seen as established and the iterative institutionalisation mechanism should therefore be in effect. As for why data post 2021 is excluded, the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine is sure to generate a tremendous amount of noise, adding to the fact that analysis of ongoing data complicates research without much benefit.

#### Data Collection

The data collected are Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and European Council conclusions and decisions as well as publications in the Official Journal of the EU (OJEU) relevant to the CFSP, HR/VP, and EEAS from January 2014 until December 2021. The mechanistic evidence sought in the documents are twofold and in a temporal sequence. The first is whether there is a furthering of tasks and objectives of an instrument of structure without increased means, competences, or authority. The second mechanistic evidence sought is the increase of said means, competences, and authority. Should both be present, temporally lagged,

and especially the two steps are later repeated, this would constitute evidence of the iterative institutionalisation mechanism. Worth noting is that this also would account for the launch of entirely new foreign policy structures, as long as the pattern is followed. In simpler terms, inferences relevant to the causal mechanism are drawn from actions taken by the Union as evidenced by legal and political EU documents. As such the research deals exclusively with primary sources, which are all publicly available via the institutions' websites. Specific examples of sub-cases would be the evolution of the foreign policy instruments like the European Peace Facility or European Defence Fund, the establishment of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability, the evolution of the services' Special Representatives' (SR) or CSDP missions' mandates, policy objectives and structure.

#### Method of Analysis & Operationalisation

To establish whether the expected causal mechanism is present, a theory-testing process-tracing research method is used. Theory-testing process-tracing is a research method geared to examine whether a theoretically expected mechanism is present and if it functions as expected (Beach & Pedersen, 2019). Utilising a process-tracing research method is suggested by the wider literature, as effects in the EU context are considered particularly vulnerable to equifinality, something that process-tracing research strategies are well-suited for circumventing (Moumoutzis, 2011; Moumoutzis & Zartaloudis, 2016). Given that the EU's foreign policy aggregation and the EEAS' effects on it are already reasonably established phenomena (Blockmans & Wessel, 2021), the method is a perfect fit for examining whether the expected iterative institutionalisation causal mechanism is present.

As for the operationalisation of the mechanism, some explanation is warranted. The expectation is that the MS, once the EEAS and the instruments and structures under it are

minimally operational, should initiate the iterative institutionalisation mechanism and begin extending tasks, responsibility, and objectives for the structures and instruments, causing its remit to spill over to new tasks, without meaningfully raising its capacity. This should be evidenced by viewing mandates and control documents by the FAC, European Council, and relevant changes in the OJEU delegating these tasks, responsibilities, and capabilities. This should in turn be followed by a later extension of an instrument or structures' means so as to fulfil their newfound mission. At this stage, any preceding statements or notations of an instrument failing its new tasks would further substantiate the mechanism's presence. This would again be perceivable by the delegation of increased budgets, competences, authorities, staffing, and legal frameworks to enable the completion of the instrument or structure's new tasks. This would then lead to a later delegation of new tasks and objectives outside of the instrument or structure's remit due to raised expectations, making the instrument or structure spill over into new tasks and responsibilities. The execution of these new tasks and objectives would then again fall below expectations, leading to a new delegation of enhanced competences, capabilities, and authority, to address the shortcomings of executing the new tasks and objectives. Evidence for this step would again be found in the same manner as outlined above. While the mechanism can then conclude or be repeated, the outcome would be an increased aggregation of foreign policy under a joint structure or instrument nonetheless. (See Table 2).

Cause	Iterative institutionalisation causal mechanism				Outcome
	→				
Existence of joint IO foreign policy structure.	Foreign policy spillover effects cause Intergovernmental delegation of more or expanded tasks and objectives the structure is not geared for.	Intergovernmental delegation of further means, authority, and competences to the foreign policy structure to address perceived failure of the execution of new tasks and objectives.	Spillover effects now raise expectations and cause further expansion of tasks and objectives outside of newly delegated means, authority, and competences.	Intergovernmental delegation of further means, authority, and competences to the foreign policy structure to make it able to live up to new tasks, objectives, and expectations.	Joint foreign policy structure more with more tasks, objectives, means, competences, and authority.
Observable manifestations					
A foreign policy structure or instrument is established.	FAC or European Council conclusion, or OJEU publication delegates new tasks and objectives to the structure or instrument without increasing its capabilities.	FAC or European Council conclusion, or OJEU publication delegates new capabilities to a structure or instrument with previously extended tasks and objectives to achieve expectations.	FAC or European Council conclusion, or OJEU publication delegates further extension of tasks and objectives outside new remit without enhanced means to achieve the new objective.	FAC or European Council conclusion, or OJEU publication delegating further capabilities to a structure or instrument to enable it to execute given tasks.	More foreign policy instruments, structures, and policies aggregated into joint structures.
Actors					
The EEAS.	FAC, European Council, Council of the European Union.	FAC, European Council, Council of the European Union.	FAC, European Council, Council of the European Union.	FAC, European Council, Council of the European Union.	The EEAS.

**Table 2:** The Iterative institutionalisation causal mechanism, observable manifestations, and actors when applied to the case of the EU's joint foreign policy.



## Analysis

This analysis will view the iterative institutionalisation mechanism step by step and, for reasons of scope, view both structural and instrument-specific developments in tandem. This is mainly due to the importance of temporality for the causal mechanism and that an in-depth analysis of all, or even a subset of each type of foreign policy instrument, would be too extensive for a single paper. Important to note here is also that for the same reason, substantial decisions and developments are not treated by this analysis. The rationale behind this will be expanded upon in the discussion.

Beginning with structural developments, the institutionalisation of general foreign policies and instruments as well as permanent structures under the EEAS is particularly important. Firstly, it is useful in contextualising EU's foreign policy institutions and establishing more thematic developments. Secondly, strategic-level developments within the foreign policy structure carry considerable implications for the functioning of more specific instruments. To avoid overcomplication, the beginning of the process can be counted bluntly as with the beginning of the data set, in January 2014. For reasons of brevity, the important aspects of its existence at this stage mainly pertains to its management of existing foreign policy instruments – as well as all future ones bar a small and specific subset of instruments which predate it – as per the decision establishing it (European Union, 2010). Of note to the causal mechanism is that the Council of the European Union (CTEU) in March of 2014 claims success in achieving its goals in the integration of all EU means and instruments in service of the goal of achieving more effective policy (2014a). As such, there is an inference to be drawn that the Council at that point considered its foreign policy integration to be at a suitable level, setting the stage for the first spillover stage of the mechanism.

Moving on to the first step of the causal mechanism, a few processes may be readily identified. The first here is the CTEU's (2014b) outlining of the 'EU comprehensive approach', which maintains the benefits of unified EU action and calls for the EEAS and HR/VP to emphasize the development of the CSDP's linkage to political and development-focused instruments as well as its link to the Freedom, Security and Justice (FSJ) policy domain. Following this is the CTEU's (2015a) call for the mainstreaming of migration and counterterrorism (CT) into all facets of EU external action. This includes specific calls for the EEAS to deploy new CT and security positions in key EU delegations, as well as for the EEAS and HR/VP to increase their central CT capability, and ordering INTCEN – an EEAS body dealing with strategic level intelligence – to both increase its role within its original task but now also to focus on CT intelligence (2015a). The same conclusions also reiterated the call for the mainstreaming of CT into all aspects of the EU's foreign policy (2015a), followed by further calls to action in enacting the comprehensive approach and the coherent incorporation of FSJ to the Union's foreign policy (2015b). Later council meetings would go on to call for the EEAS and the European Commission to incorporate migration policy into all instruments (2015c), mainstream human rights, and redouble migration efforts (2015d).

As for more specific instruments, EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia<sup>2</sup> included the policy objective to disrupt human smuggling and trafficking off the coast of Libya from the operations' 2015 launch (European Union, 2015c). Similarly, and more directly tied to the EEAS and HR/VP, the appointment of a new Special Representative (SR) to the Horn of Africa would also include the policy objective to improve the management of migration flows (European Union, 2017a). As for already established instruments, the SR to the Sahel already had the policy objective to handle migration and implement the EU's region-specific CT strategy (European Union, 2014). On the other hand, the SR to the South Caucasus and the

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<sup>2</sup> Was not called operation Sophia at launch, and was later relaunched as Operation IRINI

Crisis in Georgia saw its policy objectives updated to include supporting the return of refugees (European Union, 2015a).

Important to mention, and core to the argument that these observations constitute a form of spillover, is that over the same period, the European Council turned from an original stance of CT and migration being intergovernmental affairs (2014) to calls for increased HR/VP action in both fields (2015a; 2015b; 2015c). Throughout this period, the EEAS was tasked to incorporate migration, CT, and development policies without any meaningful increase in capabilities or change in mandates to properly execute the newfound tasks. Another delegated task at this stage is the tying of migration to climate policy and call for the reinforcement of EU-level climate diplomacy and the prioritisation of climate change in all external policies (2016a).

In fact, for the totality of 2014 and 2015, the only meaningful addition to the Service's capabilities was the HR/VP, Commission, and EEAS gaining the approval to increase engagement and leverage third parties in the field of migration (2015e). Decisions made in 2016, however, show significant signs of addressing the newfound shortcomings. Several decisions established means that would significantly strengthen the EEAS and the HR/VP's ability to perform the previously delegated tasks. There are concrete actions that indicate this. These are the CTEU's assignments of leadership on development financing in the specific context of development policies being tied to migration and migration to foreign policy (2016d), the delegation of authority to the HR/VP and EEAS to mobilise all EU instruments and funding to handle migration in third parties (2016f), and the commitment by the CTEU to update strategies and implementation policies to reflect their new priorities (2016g). Worth noting is that though the CTEU also issues a later reiteration of the call for integration in these fields, this conclusion also includes energy policy in the fields to be more integrated (2016i), but that there after this point is neither call for further integration of the migration-

development-CT nexus. Concluding this step is that conclusions following these instead turn to lauding the success of this integration of foreign policy instruments or calling for the continuation of current policies (Council of the European Union, 2016i; 2017b; 2018b; European Council, 2016g). Given that the CTEU and European Council's conclusions prior to this turn tended to repeat calls for more effective, improved, or enhanced action, this is indicative of the MS – via the CTEU and European Council – considering the structures to be successfully executing their tasks.

As for specific instruments, the mechanistic evidence is also present. Operation Sophia saw its mandate expanded to also include the territorial waters of Libya's neighbours and had the concurrent addition of a capacity building objective (European union, 2016). Here, the mandate expansion clearly constitutes an increase in capability in service of its objectives, and the capacity-building objective is not introduced with any relevant changes in either capability or authority. As for the non-CSDP instruments the evidence is weaker. The Horn of Africa SR and the South Caucasus SRs, for one, saw no development in either migration or CT in any decisions on it for the remainder of the period under the purview of this analysis. The Sahel SR, on the other hand, was given the authority to engage with actors outside the Sahel, arguably constituting an increase in capabilities (European Union, 2015b). Importantly, the SR was also later instructed to address migration in the region (European Union, 2015d), and subsequently given the authority to coordinate all EU instruments in the region (European Union, 2017b), all of which appears to be confirmatory evidence.

The question at hand is however not only whether these two steps are present, but whether they are followed by step 3 and 4 of the iterative institutionalisation mechanism, and thus repeat. Additionally, given the focus on EU-level foreign policy as such rather than specific instruments, care must be taken to ensure that the next iteration of task aggrandisement is a spillover from the new capabilities in migration, CT, and development policy. This is due

to the need to ensure that the causal chain viewed is the same, and that there is no jump between one process to a separate other. In this view, the developments in the structure of CSDP are reasonably clear-cut to be a part of the same process due to the furthering of tasks and capabilities above were explicitly to ensure a functioning linkage between FSJ, CSDP, foreign, and development policies (Council of the European Union, 2014b; European Council, 2014). In essence, now that the other domains have been developed to match MS' expectations, focus shifts to adapt the instruments they are integrated with. The argument here is simple; the means granted above still need to be operationalised, and to effectively do this, the EU has via the expansion of capability outlined above created a perception of a need for enhanced CSDP activity.

The matter at hand is then to establish what tasks were delegated to CSDP structures following the integration of migration and CT into foreign policy and foreign policy with CSDP domains. In this regard, the CTEU's calls for and iterations of the necessity for proper resource management and enhanced coordination are relevant to the analysis (2016b; 2017a; 2017c). Further along this line is the change in security sector reform tasks, which expanded notably to include institutional support, equipment, common security, and was now to be coordinated with non-CSDP aspects of EU foreign policy (Council of the European Union, 2016h). The last point here, the coordination with other foreign policy activities, is indicative of the spillover element of the process. The beginning of the third step of iterative institutionalisation is found in the establishment of a civilian CSDP mission support platform and the Military and Civilian Planning and Conduct Capabilities (MPCC and CPCC, respectively) under the EEAS (Council of the European Union, 2016c; 2017a). The tasks delegated to these new central bodies were to establish a civilian-military joint support cell and to alter the functioning of capacity-building in support of security and development (Council of the European Union, 2017a). Importantly for this constituting the third step of the mechanism and that this is a spillover from the second,

however, is the CTEU's assertion that CSDP missions now constitute a pillar of the comprehensive approach (2017a, p. 8).

Subsequently, a plethora of new tasks were assigned to structures involved in both grander foreign policy and the CSDP. The MPCC and CPCC were tasked with the reinforcement and further development of their respective capabilities (Council of the European Union, 2018b; European Council, 2018c), implying that neither instrument functioned at the level expected by the MS. Further and more specifically, the MPCC was tasked with developing the readiness to support an active EU Battlegroup by 2020 without any new delegation of authority or resources. The MS also raised calls for the furthering of integration when dealing with external crises and more specifically for enhanced operational capacity, joint planning, flexibility, information sharing, and analysis (Council of the European Union, 2016e; 2018a; 2020; 2021; European Council, 2016; 2018).

The concluding step of the process is present in the ebb of references to CSDP. When the calls cease is however varied, as MS perceptions of CSDP instruments and the rate at which they develop appear to be differentiated. Importantly however, references to inadequacy or need to strengthen or improve the coordination and balancing of financing halt after the establishment of the European Peace Facility, an HR/VP-headed instrument for financing military CSDP operations and missions (European Union, 2021). Similarly, calls for improved information sharing and ability to react to crises diminished after the implementation of the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response, a reform establishing dedicated situational awareness integrated into the EEAS to enable "timely coordination and response at Union political level for crises" (European Union, 2018b, p. 29). Lastly, MS stop issuing calls to enhance crisis response coordination with the establishment of the civilian CSDP compact, which raises the CSDPs deployment capacity and codifies strategic guidelines (Council of the European Union, 2018c). Worth noting is that the final step here may be considered ongoing, as the final FAC

meeting in the data viewed calls for improved implementation and follow-up of the EU's integrated approach (Council of the European union, 2021). Nevertheless, the conclusion of the final step is reasonably the commitment to give the EEAS and European Commission the authority to – in conjunction with MS – develop new competences relevant to the conduct of CSDP missions “as appropriate” (Council of the European Union, 2020, p. 4).

While this subset of instances where integration is not fully complete as per the model due to some processes seeming to be very much ongoing, the core process remains. The pattern of tasks being delegated prior to resources for the tasks and statements urging more functional action in the meantime culminating in supranationalisation remains present. Further, this supranationalisation appears to mirror the delegated tasks and, importantly, are updated and developed in an iterative fashion mirroring what is expected by the iterative institutionalisation mechanism.

## Discussion & Conclusion

As per the analysis, there is substantial confirmatory evidence that the EU aggregates its foreign policy via the iterative institutionalisation mechanism. The mechanistic evidence is solid in that there is no clear alternative explanation for the counterintuitive behaviour of expanding a structure or instruments tasks beyond its remit without providing it with further resources or mandates to achieve the delegated task – especially so when it is later granted the same resources and mandates. As such, concerns of heterocausality should be reasonably addressed. This study establishes a possible explanation for observations of trial-and-error based learning in EU foreign policy, as the mechanism lends explanatory power to self-righting processes (Cottey, 2020). The study also provides some reinforcement of the FF framework not only accounting for general EU integration and individual foreign policies as established by Jones et al. (2016) and Anghel & Jones (2021), respectively, but for the framework's value in explaining the process of integration itself. In this regard it also, by incorporating the CEG, addresses Rabinovych's (2021) assertion of the FF framework being limited by an inability to establish policy incompleteness and forwardness in foreign policy. Further, it displays the value of incorporating the CEG into the framework, addressing how the gap influences processes of integration outside of the concept's current value as a theoretical anchor for the wider literature (Larsen, 2020).

There are however a few notable caveats to this analysis. First, large parts of foreign policy integration and aggregation observed may be attributed to being a part of crisis response, which the literature has established tends to lead to bursts of MS interest convergence and integration (Boşilca, Stenberg & Riddervold, 2021; Delphin, 2021; Riddervold & Rosén, 2018; Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017). While the mechanism itself is not sensitive to this as it pertains to how rather than why foreign policy aggregation occurs, the analysis cannot conclude whether crises are a necessity for the mechanism to take place. This leaves the possibility that



the cause of the mechanism is in some way reliant on crisis. Second, specific instruments are not treated in depth by this study. This is partly for reasons of scope and the goal being to establish the presence rather than specificities of the mechanism, but also due to constraints in data. For instance, CSDP missions are under the political-strategic control of the PSC, which makes neither its deliberations nor its decisions publicly accessible. Third, while application of the CEG does increase the generalisability of the mechanism by de-emphasising crises, it does raise the issue of evaluating whether expectations are indeed placed on an instrument. In lieu of further data on the decision-making process underlying the mechanism is exceedingly difficult to ascertain, and the link between calls, encouragements, tasks, and expectations may well be due further problematisation.

The implications of this research are mainly the further support for the utilisation of the FF framework and CEG in studies on EU integration. Specifically in this regard, the findings illuminate the processes of foreign policy aggregation, but may well be applicable to non-foreign policy domains. The policy implications of these findings are twofold. If an actor in an intergovernmental setting is wary of further integration, the process' existence suggests that it is equally important to guard against the raising of expectations as it is to guard against the delegation of resources and power. Conversely, should an actor in the same setting seek more integration than other parties, the findings indicate that raising expectations via the delegation of further tasks, especially those a structure is patently unable to perform, may enhance the structure in the long-term. Further research should however focus on a few specific avenues. The first of these is to conduct more in-depth and instrument specific analyses of individual instruments, as this study emphasises the structural and views iterative institutionalisation in broad terms. The second is that the preconditions for the mechanism may well be due further scrutiny, as the study does not provide a framework for identifying why the initial delegation of tasks and objectives occur. Lastly, it would be helpful to view changes in expectations more

in-depth, which could be done by repeating the study and including interviews with individuals involved in the process.

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