

Faculty of Social Sciences
Det Samfundsvidenskabelige Fakultet

Return of the Jedi: Realism and the Study of the European Union

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Political Science Publications
9/2005



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23 June 2005

Abstract:

Many observers of European Union affairs discard the theory of Realism in the belief that this “crude” theory of sovereignty and conflict cannot grasp the “sophisticated” politics of dialogue and compromise in the EU. However, this rejection is based more on a false stereotypical view of Realism than on the insights generated by real Realism. In consequence, the purpose of this article is two-fold: to debunk the stereotype, and to outline strengths and weaknesses in the Realist research agenda.

Return of the Jedi: Realism and the Study of the European Union

Many observers of European Union affairs discard the theory of Realism.¹ Surely, the argument goes, a theory premised on states as jealous guardians of national sovereignty and relative gains cannot account for the trajectory of European cooperation, which has come to encompass high as well as low politics issues. Indeed, high politics is no longer purely a national preserve: the EU entered this domain in 1992 with the Treaty on European Union and, though threatened by the political shock of the Iraq war in 2003, staged a comeback that led to the development of a Security Strategy – the first ever – and a Constitutional Treaty whose fate is uncertain but whose provisions reflect of collective view of the type of institutional mechanisms needed to carry out foreign policy.

These observers have yet to come to terms with the “power of the empire,” however, by which we should understand notably foreign policy analysts and the Realist stereotype they have construed to extend their intellectual domain. Observers, in other words, tend to be deluded by critics of Realism. To advance the unraveling of this empire and prepare the return of the Jedi – real Realism – this article sets out to demonstrate the ways in which Realism enhance our understanding of EU affairs.

The first section of the paper outlines how and why the stereotypical view of Realism developed, beginning in the 1960s, and it explores its impact on studies of EU foreign policy making, which is significant still today. The second section enters into one branch of the Realist family, Structural Realism. This branch developed not least as a reaction to the stereotype and criticism and seeks to place regional phenomena such as the EU within a greater global context. The third and final section enters into another branch, Classical Realism, which seeks to step back from the strong focus on structure and place it on par with local politics – a primary source

¹ Throughout this article I capitalize the theory (i.e., Realism) and its branches (i.e., Offensive Realism).

of foreign policy ambition, according to Classical Realists. The purpose of the exercise is two-fold: to debunk the stereotypical image of Realism; and to demonstrate that Classical Realism is the Realist branch with the greatest analytical potential.

Stereotypical Realism

Critics of Realism, writing in the 1960s after the heyday of Classical Realism, were quick to connect the Realist view of balance-of-power rationality to the presumption of rationality in the making of foreign policy. Their argument was that if Realism is right, then foreign policy-making processes must reveal themselves to be instances of rational calculation where decision-makers carefully weigh the pros and cons of international moves, making their final decision in light of their view of probabilities and likely outcomes. When the critics then went on to demonstrate that foreign policy making is a messy affair more often characterized by happenstance than rational calculation, they naturally concluded that Realism was wrong. Apparently, the future lay with a new framework for understanding – foreign policy analysis – that gave due respect to the many internal determinants of policy.

Several key figures took part in this stereotyping of and onslaught on Realism. The move began with the general desire to link two distinct levels of analysis – the international and the national – and to connect domestic sources of policy with systemic ones, often packaged together in a type of systems analysis typical of the behavioral age. Beginning in the 1950s, Richard Snyder and colleagues (see Snyder et. al. 1962) were among the first to suggest that the international system must be connected to assessments of “decision-making processes.” Richard Neustadt (1961) concurred when he argued that the power of the American president depends not so much on formal power as on his ability to persuade – thus invoking a complex process of persuasion and bargaining. James Rosenau (1966) was perhaps the most explicitly ambitious theorist in this regard, aiming to create a theory of foreign policy that tells us how external and

internal factors interact and shape foreign policy. Thus was born the idea that foreign policy analysis is a distinct field of inquiry. Foreign policy, these people contended, is not merely an appendix to Realism; it is the unique product created at the domestic-international boundary.

This set the stage for Graham Allison's contrasted assessment of a "Rational Policy Paradigm" (model I of Allison's three models) related to Realism and the models of Organizational Processes and Bureaucratic Politics (models II and III). Model I was defined as "rational choice" and involved four distinct steps (1969, 694):

- Decision-makers define national interests (policy goals);
- They define a spectrum of policy options;
- They evaluate the likely consequences of each option (cost-benefit);
- They make a decision.

Unsurprisingly, the model failed to convince Allison who concluded that his other two models "can permit significant improvements in explanation and prediction" (1969, 716). The conclusion was foregone in the sense that Allison, as a proselyte of the new field of foreign policy analysis, was bound to justify the new field by rejecting the model that was derived from the field of international relations, but still his conclusions had wide impact.

It mattered little that Realists like Hans Morgenthau (1993, 7) had argued that "It stands to reason that not all foreign policies have always followed so rational, objective, and unemotional a course." What mattered to the critics was that Realists willingly abstracted from "these irrational elements" in a quest to uncover the "rational essence" of political experience (Morgenthau, *ibid.*). Critics argued that Realists were guilty of two sins; they knew that rational choice was not an accurate depiction of reality, yet they ignored reality in favor of theory; and they promoted abstract notions of power and national interests that were unrelated to the world of politics, which is to say that Realism was normative rather than analytical.

Realists struck back and defied their critics, naturally, which we shall see below, but it is important to note the impact of this foreign policy debate on the study of Europe and the EU in particular. Still today we find a host of analyses premised on the assumption that Realism's "crude" rational choice image cannot explain European developments and that a more "sophisticated" framework must be utilized. In this sense Allison is still with us. The purpose here is to underscore that the "crude" image of Realism is one painted by Realist critics for the purpose of debunking this theory, and that the many insights these critics generate by virtue of new approaches contribute to the stereotype's vitality. We see this in three distinct respects.

First, the foreign policy turn produced a concern with the decision-makers themselves. Some analysts argued that these decision-makers made up a distinct elite, a type of political class united in outlook and commitment to a certain idea of the state and its interests. Such an elite might be convinced that Realism is a proper outlook, but the point is that the outlook is just that, an outlook rather than a true theory of world politics, upheld by a group of people with privileged access to power.

At a European level, this point can have both positive and negative connotations for the EU. A positive view is provided by Jolyon Howorth (2000 and 2004) who finds that "supranational intergovernmentalism" is emerging in Brussels, a type of common understanding encompassing national as well as EU policy-makers who meet almost on a daily basis in the EU capital. At issue is not so much the formalities of EU organization but the sociology of interaction, a source of integration that can be traced back to the precursor of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP – beginning in 1992), namely European Political Cooperation (EPC) and the "concertation reflex" generated by it (Ifestos 1987; see also Smith 2000). The true test of this "supranational intergovernmental" outlook is whether it can be broadened to include a wider public of opinion makers and public analysts (see for instance Wallace 2003), and also whether it can be applied fairly smoothly to the many new EU member states (see Lippert, Umbach, and Wessels, 2001).

A negative spin is provided by neo-Marxist analysts and critics of liberalism. As can be expected, neo-Marxists predominantly focus on economic integration and derive observations on foreign policy making from here. Neo-Marxists such as Carchedi (2001) and Stephen Gill (2001) argue that the EU may be a market place of ideas and bargaining but that most policies ultimately must satisfy the oligarchs of capitalism. This is also how we should view the common currency and the European Central Bank – institutions created to embed a capitalist-monetarist policy and de-politicize financial decisions. Bastiaan van Apeldoorn (2002) finds the roots of regional developments beyond Europe, in the movements of global capitalism, an argument that dovetails with Johan Galtung's (2004) assessment that EU security policy is a mirror reflection of American policy. Viewed through these lenses, EU foreign policy, like other EU policies, conforms to the exigencies of economic interests and policy-making elites are the transmission belt between these interests and policy. This type of argument has found ample support predominantly among the left-wing opponents of the Constitutional Treaty (rejected in May-June 2005 by French and Dutch voters), who contend that the new Treaty would usher in an era of radical liberalism.

Second, the foreign policy turn also led analysts to investigate organizations as distinct sources of policy. Allegedly, standard-operating-procedures (SOPs) and organizational interests turn governments into “a conglomerate of semi-feudal, loosely allied organizations” (Allison 1969, 698). Organizations' programmed responses, the desire to control and preserve rather than analyze, and the way in which human minds process information make up Steinbruner's “cybernetic paradigm,” which is an extension of Allison's model II (Steinbruner 2002). The effect of this approach to foreign policy making can be traced today in assessments of notably the European Commission – the supranational organization par excellence – but also the Council staff.

News reporters regularly excel in emphasizing the struggles for power and influence within the EU bureaucracy that involve the Commission's general quest to gain influence where it has

almost none – in CFSP and ESDP matters – and the sometimes contentious relationship between the Commissioner for External Relations and the Council’s High Representative for the CFSP (Chris Patten and Javier Solana). Since the creation of the post of High Representative – following from the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty and actually created in 1999 – the two-headed organization of EU external relations, a typical example of “the complexity of the EU,” has made the rivalry between Patten and Solana “Brussels’ worst-kept secret” (The Guardian, April 19, 2001). When first the Convention and then the Intergovernmental Conference addressed this problem, the Commission’s president, Romano Prodi, sought to exploit the scope for change and enhance the role of the Commission at the expense of the Council: Prodi wanted the High Representative integrated within the Commission, and he sought to grant the Commission the sole right of initiative in foreign policy matters. Unsurprisingly, the press uncovered that the proposal generated “anger” with member states and “unease” within the Commission itself (The Guardian, May 23, 2002; Financial Times, November 30, 2002). The Constitutional Treaty ended up with a compromise: the Council is supposed to gain a new presidency, permanent for up to five years, while a new Union Minister of Foreign Affairs will combine the posts of Patten and Solana. Of course, this compromise may wither along with the treaty itself but the idea of a new and powerful foreign ministry establishment in Brussels has opened new fault lines that give food for thought: one observer thus noted that henceforth a “ruthless bureaucratic turf war” will be fought between the European and national foreign ministries (Merritt, 2004). These and other comments are informed by the view that organizations determine the positions of policy-making actors.

Other analyses of the same phenomenon, typically found in greater-length articles published in journals or as policy papers, reflect a similar concern about the impact of organizations but they simultaneously suggest ways of rationalizing the process. Fraser Cameron (2002) finds that the “CFSP machinery ... has always been overly bureaucratic” – and he then outlines a menu for change. Brian Crowe (2003 and 2005) – a former Council official – is more focused in his

argument that what needs fixing is not so much the Solana-Patten relationship but the Solana-member states relationship because, formally speaking, Solana is merely to “assist” foreign ministers, but these repeatedly fail to provide leadership and support for Solana. Philippe de Schoutheete (2004) strikes an optimistic note as he believes that the EU can find a third way – an organization that balances the communitarian and the intergovernmental. Typical for these analyses is that they combine Realism and Allison: Allison’s world of powerful and sometimes dysfunctional organizations is how the world works; Realism’s world of rational calculation is how it ought to work. We may be sympathetic toward the goal of these observers but we should also note the way in which they reinforce the Allison view that Realism’s rational model is removed from reality.

Third and finally, the foreign policy turn led to the conceptualization of policy making as a complex process of political bargaining, not among organizations but among “players” who take their clue from “where they sit” (positions) as well as their personal “baggage” and who play policy games in pre-ordered “action-channels” that favor some players and penalize others (see Allison 1969, 708 ff.). This is a broad research agenda, and its complexity accounts for the fact that Allison has yet to produce the foreign policy theory he initially hoped to develop. In EU matters, this bureaucratic politics model often overlaps with the organizational model: depictions of Brussels bouts refer to both players and organizations.

Still, the bureaucratic politics view of a host of players and action channels has affinities with a distinct perspective on CFSP policy-making. At issue is the literature on multi-level governance and the idea that EU policies are made in ways that directly contrast with a so-called “state centric” view that is traced back to a motley crew of Realists and Intergovernmentalists (see Marks, Hooghe, and Blank, 1996). Multi-level governance is “actor-centered” – focusing on particular actors in the policy process (i.e., players) – and concerned with a “multi-level polity” inhabited by national leaders as well as “numerous subnational and supranational actors” (1996, 348 and 371). The link to the CFSP is made by Michael Smith (2004) who contends that CFSP

policy is one policy “space.” By implication, state centered perspectives are “problematic” and “inappropriate” (2004, 741). As for Allison, the world of complex political bargaining impresses these analysts, so much so that they find Realism – state-centered theory – all too simplistic. The fact that they generally fail to tell us what typically happens, which was also Allison’s problem, does not disturb them.

Realists, like also organizational and elite theorists (see above), at least seek to move beyond the complex description of a complex reality and identify the essence of politics. The virtue of this challenging ambition is insight, and we therefore now turn to Realist theory as developed by Realists and not its critics.

Structural Realism

The initial Realist response to critics was one of retreating into the international domain and cultivating the balance-of-power perspective. This happened notably with Kenneth Waltz’s *Theory of International Politics*, published in 1979. The date of publication is not coincidental: it follows from the height of foreign policy analysis and also the emergence of the school of interdependence. Waltz argued that we lose sight of durable patterns of events if we delve into domestic politics; we should instead focus on the structural conditions that explain these patterns. As is well-known, Waltz explains war and peace with reference to anarchy and the desire of states to survive.

If we follow Waltz, Structural Realism should find no place in this discussion of (European) foreign policy because the theory deals with typical and thus *general patterns* of international behavior and not policies, foreign or otherwise. Waltz’s retreat from the domestic-international debate that so inspired foreign policy analysts is thus complete, but it has not stuck. Various Structural Realists have claimed that the theory does have implications for foreign policy analysis,

although Waltz has made clear his criticism of this point of view (see Elman 1996a, 1996b; Waltz 1996). Below we shall consider the foreign policy implications for Europe of Structural Realism.

Structural Realism has fragmented into two competing schools of thought: Defensive and Offensive Realism. The former is predicated on the assumption that states in general seek to survive, and thus that states are fairly benevolent; the latter that states will grab for power if possible, and thus that states are expansionist. Waltz did not make a strong claim in one or the other direction: states “are unitary actors who, at a minimum, seek their own preservation and, at a maximum, drive for universal domination” (1986, 117). The children of Waltz’s thinking have parted company, however, emphasizing either the minimum or the maximum scenario.

Defensive Realists (e.g., Van Evera 2001) bolster their “defensive” outlook with reference to the state of military affairs, which is an amalgam of military technology, geography, and strategic beliefs, and which is referred to as the “offense-defense balance” (Jervis 1978). In general, they argue, this balance favors defensive strategies.

Offensive Realists (e.g., Mearsheimer 2001) believe too that states want to survive – and in principle, the world could be one of defensive realism. However, in practice, the world is dangerous because expansion more often than not pays off: Offensive Realists find in “the historical record” a 60% success rate for offensive strategies (Mearsheimer 2001, 38). This is to say that the “offense-defense balance” so heralded by Defensive Realists in fact undermines the goal of survival. Attack is not a question of whether but when: states hoping merely to survive will sooner or later fall prey to an attack. The ruthless environment thus forces even defensive states to ponder an uncomfortable choice: be offensive, or be attacked.

These positions yielded contrasting arguments about Europe in the immediate post-Cold War era. Jack Snyder (1990) and Stephen Van Evera (1990/91) sought comfort in factors that could help bolster defensive advantages in the offense-defense balance, notably European institutions and moderate strategic beliefs; Barry Posen (1993) saw threats to Europe’s stability emerging

from its peripheries where new states, preoccupied by survival, lived in an environment where defensive strategies were not always favored by the “offense-defense balance” – specifically in the Balkans. In contrast, John Mearsheimer (1990) argued that a new “multipolar” Europe would be prone to “major crises” – a likelihood that could best be reduced by a “well-managed” process of “nuclear weapons proliferation” (1990, 8). This provoked the reply that Mearsheimer “ought to learn more about the European Community” (Hoffmann in Hoffmann, Keohane, and Mearsheimer, 1990, 192).

The nature of the debate has not changed significantly to this day. Mearsheimer is a fitting illustration: his 2001 assessment of Europe’s future deals with multipolarity, Germany’s power, nuclear proliferation, and a dangerous competition among Europe’s big states (2001, 393-396). Theoretical innovations have occurred, it should be noted. Joseph Grieco (1999) seeks to wed Realist theory to asymmetries in interdependence, hoping thus to account for the fact that Germany, hand-in-hand with the US, opted for a regional strategy of institution-building. Grieco thus hinges the continuity of Europe’s institutional order on the strategy of the US: if the US changes track, Europe might change. One would expect this type of argument from a structurally inspired Realist, but Grieco’s analysis is sophisticated and convincing. Based on a grand review of Realist theory, Jeffrey Taliaferro (2000) likewise places Europe in a greater context, arguing that since Europe (and others) would be negatively effected by a US push to develop defensive capabilities (such as missile defense): the US interest is to engage its friends in leadership rather than to challenge them. Anders Wivel (2004) has challenged fellow Realists to think more clearly about the link between globalization, often associated with unipolarity in the Realist vocabulary, and Europe’s integration, and he suggests that Realist concepts such as socialization and interaction capacity are helpful starting points.

Offensive and Defensive Realist typically belong to the field of international relations theory and they therefore tend to view the EU through the lens of global politics. The above references are cases in point. In the sociology of the discipline it is also of importance that this field tends to

be dominated by American scholars who more often than not are general political analysts as opposed to European “area studies” experts. Such experts exist, of course, and they write prolifically, often in the capacity as analysts at the many foreign policy think-tanks in Washington. However, their policy analyses generally eschew questions of theory, and the “Realist argument” is therefore hidden although often present as an underlying view of things. One such expert, Philip Gordon, interestingly made his assessment of CFSP affairs explicitly theoretical in a standard journal for Realist theory (though not exclusively Realist): *International Security* (Gordon 1997-98). The argument was familiar: European states are able to cooperate in various matters of external relations (such as trade and development aid) but strong impediments exist to the forging of a strong CFSP: national traditions and outlooks as well as US interests in Europe. It would take US disengagement as well as an “external shock” to produce CFSP unity. This is unlikely to happen, Gordon concludes, and “EU foreign policy cooperation will probably remain limited, fragmented, and intergovernmental” (1997-98, 100). It would not be difficult for Gordon to argue that the Iraq conflict of 2003 testifies to his conclusion’s validity.

Under the impact of the Bush presidency and the neoconservative turn in US foreign policy, some analysts have attracted considerable attention to their self-styled “realist” arguments. These arguments have in common a desire to portray the US as a lucid and pragmatic player in a world of power politics and political tragedy (i.e., requiring sacrifice) and Europe as a hotbed of illusion and weakness. David Frum and Richard Perle (2003) portray the Bush administration as particularly insightful in the war on terrorism and debunk all critics of it for being weak or misguided; Robert Kagan (2003) specifically criticizes European “born-again idealists” who cultivate “strategies of weakness” in their Kantian world, failing to realize that the world at large is Hobbesian; and Jeffrey Cimbalò (2004) believes the Constitutional Treaty is a veiled attempt to aggrandize EU power at the expense of NATO.² The problem with these self-styled “realist”

² Moderate US Realists responded to Cimbalò with a “nothing to fear” argument (Asmus, Blinken, and Gordon 2005).

arguments is that they are not really Realist. They are rather political statements dressed up in analytical garments, although Robert Kagan's book commends itself for adopting a fairly rigorous framework of analysis. Like Allison before them, these analysts create and reinforce a stereotypical view of Realism. In Allison's lens, Realism is all about rational calculation; in the neoconservative lens, Realism is about US power and even Republican (the political party) insight and prowess.

The real contribution of Structural Realism lies with the Defensive and Offensive Realists examined earlier. They all seek to place the EU and its policies in international context, with this context being defined as the global chessboard of power. Structural Realists thus consider US unipolarity as a prime source of European political developments, just as the emergence of new threats in the Middle East and new competitors in the Far East ought to impact on Europe. Few of these Realists hold high hope for Europe's CFSP ambitions. Offensive Realists are particularly pessimistic – and fairly crude in their assessment of European dynamics. Defensive Realists offer a wider palate of analytical tools, such as the offensive-defensive balance, but their optimism can be extended to Europe's stability only, which is to say that Europe will remain peaceful but the EU is not about to gain the cohesion that will make the CFSP a powerful tool of pro-active policy.

It follows from the structural perspective that many details are deliberately ignored or left out. This does not mean that Structural Realists do not acknowledge the many processes involving political elites, organizational interests, and bureaucratic politics emphasized by foreign policy analysts. Structural Realists instead argue that they focus on the big picture – the opportunities (and dangers) for European cooperation: the fact that an opportunity can be squandered on the grounds of, say, bureaucratic politics, is interesting but also ultimately of secondary importance. Domestic or internal factors cannot in any case change structural opportunities, and of these the EU has only few.

Classical Realism

A more complete and ultimately satisfying picture of European politics emerges from the writings of Classical Realists who believe that politics is as much about units as structure: in other words, we must understand the conditions of balance-of-power (structure) but we will gain few if any insights if we do not understand the history, values, and ambitions of European states and societies. Classical Realists thus combine “international relations theory” and “area studies” expertise, and the combination is a fruitful one.

The roots of the combination go back to Thucydides’ Peloponnesian War, the founding text of Realism. Thucydides of course did many things and is more than simply a Realist in the modern-day understanding of the word, but he created the study of international affairs by looking at relations between Greek city states, and he brought to the study a sense of tragedy because, allegedly, wars happen and history does not progress. Thucydides also balanced between the study of inter-state relations and human agency: the international system will push and shove decision-makers, but it is these decision-makers, acting on behalf of their state and society, who make choices and, ultimately, history.

Two points should be made in relation to the international system and human agency before we assess its general impact of Classical Realism on the study of Europe. First, Classical Realism believes the international system is made up of precarious balances between the satisfied and dissatisfied: powers of the status quo and, in contrast, revisionists. This clash of interests is enduring. Doctrines of universal social morality exist – they always have and will – but they do not reflect political reality: these doctrines “are always the product of a dominant group” (Carr 1991, 79). The objective of Classical Realism is therefore to identify the status quo – what is it and how many support it – and then understand revisionist challenges to it – how many oppose the status quo, and do they have a coherent ideology to mobilize a counter-project? This is not so much a question of analyzing balances-of-power – in so far as “balance” implies a degree of equilibrium and satisfaction – as analyzing conflict: its depth and potential.

The second point refers to human agency and more particularly the “units” – i.e., states. Classical Realists do not operate on the basis of an “essentialist” view of these units, which was otherwise found in Structural Realism (i.e., the primary goal of states is to survive). Classical Realists believe that state goals vary, and this variation makes it imperative to understand history and politics, just as it makes it futile to generate big theories of international relations – the vocation of behavioral social scientists. Raymond Aron exemplifies this point in his discussion of “the goals of foreign policy.” Aron distinguishes between levels of conceptualization – between “eternal” and “historical goals” (1984, 82 ff.) – and finds not one but several “eternal” goals (survival, power, and glory).³ Naturally, the goals multiply infinitely when we reach “historical goals,” leading Aron to conclude that a general theory of foreign policy cannot be constructed (1984, 102). Aron’s work was first published in 1962 and thus preceded the theoretical optimism that imbued the field of foreign policy analysis – from Rosenau to Allison. The transatlantic divide in academic outlook largely accounts for the fact that Aron’s warning went unheeded.

The transatlantic divide does not exist today, at least not when it comes to Classical Realism. Analysts in North America as well as in Europe are united in an effort to resurrect this conceptual framework. There may be a geographical divide in so far as the EU is concerned: the EU figures less often in the writings of Classical Realists in the US who generally develop theory or analyze greater global events. But one should emphasize this transatlantic difference with great caution: some of the best Classical Realist analyses of Europe come from the pens of American observers. It is therefore worrying that American academia tends to give less and less emphasis to European studies within their curricula. It is also worrying that European Classical Realists do not make themselves more heard in the European debate. The European research agenda has effectively been captured by constructivists, sociologists, and governance theorists who stand united in their opposition to Realism. A quick glance at the major European research journals reveal that these analysts still live with the Allison view of Realism as a crude, rationalist, and simplistic view of

³ These emerge from Thomas Hobbes who spoke of “competition, diffidence, and glory.”

politics. The view is mistaken, and Classical Realism has much to offer, as the following comments illustrate.⁴ They are organized around three dimensions relating to the balance of interests rather than power; the impact of national culture; and the ethics of restraint and prudence.

In line with their focus on foreign policy goals, Classical Realists argue that balances in international affairs arise on the basis of interests (most prominently, status quo or revisionism) rather than power. For instance, common interests explain why Western European states in 1948-49 aligned with the US rather than balancing it. Randall Schweller (1994) has developed a conceptual toolbox for balance-of-interest analysis focusing on cases of balancing and bandwagoning. The latter, bandwagoning (aligning with the bigger side, or the winning side), is in many ways an accurate description of the EU's process of enlargement: the former Warsaw Pact members seek to join the winning organization, the EU (and NATO, one might add). Let us briefly consider the distinct types of bandwagoning:

- Appeasement: this happens when a weak status quo power joins a revisionist in order to gain security. Clearly, appeasement has nothing to do with the European situation since 1989.
- Jackal bandwagoning: this happens when a minor revisionist joins a bigger one to gain profits. Again, this has little relation to current European affairs, although one possible application of the concept suggests itself. It could be that the EU was a counter-project to the American international order, in which case the EU becomes the major revisionist joined by smaller ones from Eastern Europe. The vision of Europe as a counter-project is notoriously associated with the French debate on multipolarity and the need to balance world politics in an era of American dominance. The French policy in the UN Security Council in 2002-2003 comes to mind. However, it would take a stretch of imagination to

⁴ For the argument that Classical Realism has much to offer in the study of world politics more generally, see Rynning and Ringsmose (2005).

label the EU revisionist. The EU is deeply split on the issue of political integration as well as transatlantic relations, and the new members are almost all pro-Atlantic. Moreover, one should note that French decision-makers seek to take the edge out of their multipolar vision by referring to a new world of live-and-let-live rather than projects and counter-projects.

- Piling-on bandwagoning: this happens when states join a winner at the closing of a war in order to gain profit. The EU has not participated in any war, and the concept is therefore inappropriate.
- Wave-of-the-future bandwagoning: this happens when states are seduced by the profits held out by a dynamic ideology. This is the concept that appears to be of greatest relevance to the recent history of EU enlargement because the new members quite clearly are of the conviction that they join a more prosperous and successful project. It is obviously difficult to determine whether the “dynamic ideology” on which the future is built is European or Western: in the former case, the EU offers itself as a progressive, social-liberal model that better than the American free-market model offer benefits to its members; in the latter case, the EU is merely one of several organizations representing a larger “liberal” idea of politics that has permeated the Western world since 1945. If the new members were hoping to gain a new social-liberal model, typical of continental welfare states, then the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty and the ensuing disputes over the EU’s finances are serious because they indicate that the new model may be no model at all: that the European “alternative” is collapsing. If the new members were aiming to join the West through the EU, then the rejection and disputes are less serious because the EU can continue to offer liberal path-ways to growth: the question is then merely whether the EU path-way should be more or less “social” – not whether it should be liberal/Western. Empirical investigations must ultimately demonstrate which scenario is the more likely one. From a Classical Realist perspective, the important point is that

dissent from Europe in the Western world has weakened – the “dynamic ideology” of the EU is in a crisis – and that the foreign policies of EU members ought to take this condition into account. How they do so cannot be predicted but it will determine the position of the EU within the West, essentially vis-à-vis the US, and its appeal to prospective new members.

The ambitions and strategies of the established EU member states – France, Germany, and Britain in particular – is therefore of essence, and it brings us to the second dimension, the impact of national culture. Culture and history are primordial analytical components to Classical Realists because they account for ways in which different people view the world. True, global and international norms exist and help shape policy, foreign policies included, but these norms are typically more superficial than local or regional norms and values. These local norms, an intellectual infrastructure, generate distinct world views and sustain the condition of anarchy. This insight in the 1950s led Adda Bozeman (1994) to inquire into the “non-Western orbit” in the wake of the Second World War when many newly independent countries joined the domain of world politics. These new countries would not so much be guided by global (liberal) norms – which were “loose agreements on the use of forms, techniques, and words” – as by local “cultural infrastructures” and their “history” (1994, xv and xli). A similar concern is found in Stanley Hoffmann’s (1974) analysis of France, the political project of Charles de Gaulle, and its effects on European integration where, Hoffmann contends, the impact of national “baggage” had been overlooked by students of integration.

Prominent American observers of European affairs use this approach today as they assess not only the potential of the EU but also of transatlantic relations. Henry Kissinger combines international structural change and philosophical developments in his assessment. Structural change concerns the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the unification of Germany;

philosophical developments concern regional identities and notably the “burgeoning of a European identity” (2001, chapter 2). Kissinger worries notably about two philosophical developments: first, “the loss of human contact,” which is the paradoxical combination of unprecedented travel and lack of knowledge of local history and values; second, whether Europe will choose an Atlantic partnership or rather become an impotent mini-United Nations or, alternatively, a power rival. Kissinger does not predict any particular scenario; his purpose is to raise awareness of the issues at stake and ultimately call for humility based on “the study of history and philosophy” (“the disciplines most relevant to perfecting the art of statesmanship”) (2001, 286).

David P. Calleo (2001) blends national and regional histories in his account of European integration and cooperation, beginning with the First World War and ending with the turn of the century. Europe’s history contains, naturally, national bonds, which give way to a “Europe of states.” But this Europe co-exists with “Atlantic Europe” and “Federal Europe” – and Europe today is a “hybrid confederacy” that builds on states but is not strictly speaking a confederation. Calleo’s analysis is uniquely attuned to ideas and the way in which they gain political support and become inherent features of politics. Calleo is a Realist because he does not foresee any possibility of transcending the “unit” (the state) as a building bloc; and he is a Classical Realist because he does not believe that conflict within Europe is inevitable. European states can be likeminded, and European integration can continue in the 21st century. However, and this is Calleo’s warning to current policy-makers, integration finds its anchor in Western Europe, the strength of which is of direct consequence for Pan-Europe, and, worryingly, Western Europe is adrift. This leads Calleo to criticize American policy-makers because they have focused too narrowly on America’s power and primacy – not the conditions for stability and cooperation. Calleo (2004) also offers advice to Europe policy-makers: “A Europe locked in opposition to America is unlike to succeed in uniting itself.”

One might also finally note that Stanley Hoffmann is still going strong. In recent years Hoffmann has notably focused on the transatlantic relationship and its fate in an era of international terrorism. Hoffmann leaves no doubt about his sympathies in the clash of Euro-American interests that erupted in the context of the Iraq war in 2003: US policy reflects “dogmatism” where European policy builds on “empiricism” (2003, 1035). True, Europe was split on the issue of Iraq and it may be difficult therefore to speak of “Europe.” However, in another essay entitled “America goes backward,” Hoffmann writes that the Bush administration deliberately – and aided by Tony Blair – sought to divide the European Union by soliciting the support of Atlantic-minded political leaders (2004, 12). Hoffmann’s assessments are thus marked by their political engagement – Hoffmann can be seen as the opponent of Robert Kagan – and in this sense they are predominantly liberal. Still, one can detect the thinking of a Classical Realist who for most of his career has sought to identify the points at which the particular (the state) and the general (international rules) were compatible.

European Classical Realists are few and far between, although many reports of foreign policy institutes bear the mark of Classical Realism, albeit implicitly so. This author writes in the vein of Classical Realism and in the context of European integration and cooperation argues that the history of politics and culture in Europe speaks against the making of a strong EU security and defence policy (Rynning 2003). The national “baggage,” to borrow Hoffmann’s term, is too strong and too strongly embedded in national institutions. There are several ways of dealing with this situation but the best consists of a “flexible” approach to security cooperation where coalitions of willing and able states – big and small – come together based on their sense of interest and duty. Another way is suggested by Lindley-French (2002) and consists of gathering the big EU members in a type of concert capable of providing EU leadership. The problem with this approach, I argue (2003 and also 2005), is that it will fail to gain legitimacy within the EU construction as a whole: the EU is better off remaining a successful European peace project, capable of instilling trust and also of inciting bandwagoning in its immediate environment.

A prominent European Classical Realist is Colin Gray who, however, writes on general strategic issues rather than European affairs in particular. Gray does address Europe and America on the issue of ballistic missile defence, and does so from a typically Classical Realist concern with the intellectual infrastructure that supports policy (2003). Gray finds that Europeans – their many political differences in spite – share a background, indeed, a world view, that sets them apart from their American allies. In particular, Europeans are more used to conflicts in their neighbourhood and enduring vulnerabilities. If the Atlantic allies do not begin to understand each other’s background and outlook, they will never reach a missile defence agreement, Gray warns. “Because opinions on BMD express attitudes shaped by history, culture, and geopolitics, they are not likely to be shifted by multicolor PowerPoint briefings, or even by immediate events in the world” (2003, 280). A similar focus on missile defence and the importance of understanding regional politics is found in Heurlin and Rynning (2005). Finally, an understanding of how different countries view the world is deemed essential in the US strategy to re-build the international order – and European and American Classical Realists unite in this point of view (see Howard 2002 and Calleo 2003).

This brings us to the third and final dimension, the ethics of restraint and prudence. Classical Realism espouses a tragic view of politics (i.e., conflict is endemic) and the reason is essentially that “group relations can never be as ethical as those which characterize individual relations” (Niebuhr 1960, 83). Niebuhr did not advocate brutal anarchy; to the contrary, he sought ways to ameliorate anarchy. The solution is not to move beyond anarchy, demanding of groups that they live by the ethics of individuals. This solution is idealistic and a likely cause of greater tragedy. The better solution is to recognize the legitimate role coercion plays in society and seek to place it at the service of “equal justice” – a condition that can exist primarily within groups (nations) but also among like-minded nations (1960, 234). By implication, we cannot escape the contradictory calls of distinct ethical demands – loyalty to nation and duty to humanity – and “we will at best

strike a precarious balance,” as Hans Morgenthau wrote (1945, 11-12). “It is here that the inevitability of evil becomes paramount.”⁵

This is no call for cynicism: in fact, it is a call to arms. Ethical thinking is of essence because it is only an awareness of the contradictory issues at stake that can help policy-makers steer a course between the extremes of national loyalty and humanitarian duty. Extremes seduce ignorant policy-makers; insights into history, culture, and philosophy enable policy-makers to ignore these siren calls and steer for a precarious balance.

Contemporary Classical Realists build on this insight in their analyses of Europe. Michael Loriaux (1999) finds true Realism to lay not so much with the many “isms” of contemporary scholarship (producing Offensive, Defensive and other schools of thought) but rather with scepticism and conservatism. Realists are sceptics on the idea of human progress; they are conservatives because they are preoccupied by “order” – such as the state or the balance of power. Loriaux thus finds that “The commitment to European Union is an affair of realist prudence born of skepticism” (1999, 378). French and German leaders, in particular, support the EU because it builds on prudential norms, and they likely would be worse off without them. It is thus restrained behaviour on the part of important states that explains institutions rather than vice versa.

This is a far cry from the nihilist stereotype that critics like to present and according to which Realists are concerned only with the In-group and views the Out-group as an object of strategic combat rather than cooperation. Richard Lebow (2003) sophisticated review of Thucydides, Clausewitz, and Morgenthau should silence these critics for good. Lebow distils how ethics, interests, and order can be made compatible, and he repeatedly highlights how “hubris” has upset the precarious balance and produced tragedy. Whether we are dealing with Xerxes’ Persia,

⁵ It should be noted that Morgenthau rejects value relativism where many Realists uphold it because he finds in human nature the source of “one moral code.” However, this does not detract from the point that they are in agreement as to the “autonomy of the political sphere,” as Morgenthau put it, and thus the fact that politics are driven by interests rather than morality (see Donnelly 1992, 94).

Periclean Athens, or Clinton's or Bush's America, we are dealing with cases of hubris and great powers who turn out to be their own worst enemies (2003, 310-11).

Lebow thus reminds us of how the three dimensions of Classical Realism emphasized here tie together: foreign policy must be prudent and humble if it is to avoid hubris and tragedy; foreign policy steers its course by building on local culture and history, and this is how European foreign policies gain their particular flavours; the EU can become a pole inciting bandwagoning but this potential depends on its inner ability to build a "dynamic ideology."

Conclusion

This review of Realism and the European Union has had two purposes: one, to inform readers of the richness of Realist thought; two, to argue that the tradition of Classical Realism is particularly rich and appropriate for the study of European affairs.

The Realist crisis of the 1960s and 1970s was partly self-inflicted because Realists tended to delve into details of strategic deterrence rather than political fundamentals. This allowed critics to seize the middle ground where domestic and international politics meet. The field of foreign policy analysis resulted, as did a stereotypical image of Realism. Section I traced this image and its consequences for the EU literature, much of which follows in the footsteps of distinct foreign policy concerns with decision-makers' bias, organizational processes, and bureaucratic politics.

Real Realism is not like the Allison stereotype, however, and section II and III illustrated how Structural and Classical Realists conceive of the world and analyze European affairs. These are distinct branches of Realism and thus have different strengths and weaknesses. Structural Realism's strength lies with its global awareness and thus its ability to place the EU in context, a distinctively geopolitical context, naturally. The weakness of this approach is its tendency to derive rational roadmaps from the global structure and then use the concerns of foreign policy

analysts – decision-makers’ bias, organizational processes, and bureaucratic politics – to explain why European states may not be rational.

Classical Realism is reluctant to derive such roadmaps. Roadmaps are historically contingent, being the product of regional, cultural, and philosophical contexts, and we unsurprisingly find that the scientific ambitions of Classical Realists are more modest, although they naturally strive for analytical rigor, as should all analysts. Classical Realists, as section three demonstrated, offer insights related to European enlargement (qua the concept of bandwagoning), national ambitions in Europe and also transatlantic relations (qua insights into history and philosophy), the dangers of unipolarity (qua prudence) and also the virtue of restraint – also in Europe where the temptation to enhance Europe’s profile at the expense of the US is strong.

Classical Realism offers few easy answers. It is predicated on the understanding that the domestic domain is fundamentally different from the international but also that the two interact in complex ways. The tradition thus does not lend itself to the strong claims of Structural Realism, or to the scientific ambitions of the original foreign policy analysts. Indeed, the search for strong explanatory schemes characterizes both Structural Realism and foreign policy analysis and explains why the former has been willing to incorporate many findings of the latter. Classical Realists carry potent tools in their bag: powers of the status quo and revisionism; interest-driven balancing and bandwagoning; national baggage as a policy constraint. These tools have give birth to paradigmatic claims about how the world works in general, but in practice the tools are applied with modesty because Classical Realists are impressed by the ability of history and culture to produce cases that are not entirely comparable.

There is both good and bad news in all of this. The bad news is that too many analysts continue to adhere to the Realist stereotype rather than to engage with real Realism, the consequence of which is a relative impoverishment of Realism in European studies, particularly in Europe. The bad news is also that beleaguered European policy-makers cannot hope for easy

roadmaps should Classical Realism gain ground in European studies. The good news is that there is considerable potential for the enrichment of the analytical debate on European affairs and that Classical Realism is a particularly attractive and powerful analytical framework.

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ISSN 1399-7319