

IS THERE A EUROPEAN ALTERNATIVE IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC SECURITY COMMUNITY? AN APPROACH TO CULTURAL CHANGE

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The European Union (EU) claims it has a unique approach to the international security environment both in conceptual terms and in practice. The former would be exemplified through the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), the latter through the both military and non-military activities of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). With both conceptual and practical tools in place, a specific European way of dealing with international security issues, and more specifically crisis management through CSDP, is supposed to have emerged in the last decade. Implied is the idea of an EU approach distinct from the United States' (US) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO), even if this distinctiveness does not exclude strongly convergent outlooks. Such claims do raise two questions:

1. How can the changes brought about by steps such as the ESS and the development of CSDP be conceptualised?
2. What is their impact on the North Atlantic security framework, to which the European actors are tied, even beyond membership in NATO?

There have been several attempts yet to respond to these interrogations. Throughout the development of CSDP, statements from scholars, pundits and policy-makers about its impact on the North Atlantic security relationship accordingly have ranged from warnings that an autonomous EU framework for the use of member states' military capabilities would unnecessarily compete with NATO to the idea that the European operational experience will lead to a division of labour between these two structures, useful to both and enduring. Studies of CSDP-NATO relations have hence been very much concerned with this dichotomy between competition and complementarity, all the more since these conceptions are strongly present in policy-makers' statements on this issue. Yet claiming that the EU "balances" the US does not correspond to the actual configuration and dynamics of its external and security action (Menon and Howorth, 2009). But there also needs to be a strong qualification as concerns complementarity: the wide-ranging overlap of membership, ambitions and means of CSDP and NATO even tend to make their relationship subject to "hostage-taking" by some states and interorganisational "turf wars", while cooperation is characterised frequently by "muddling through" (Hofmann, 2009).

Clear-cut characterisations thus appear to be questionable. But as a conceptual starting point given the absence of an all-out competitive pattern, the European and North American states and regional multilateral organisations such as the EU and NATO can be held to participate in

a “security community”, which means that they share taken-for-granted expectations that no matter what importance conflicts between them will have, none of them will resort to the use of force, or the threat thereof, or make short-term or long-term preparations for it (see Adler and Barnett, 1998; Wæver, 1998). The North Atlantic security community is even the foremost example of such a community.

This view of the EU’s activities in security and defence matters as taking place in the context of a community then raises the issue of identifying the way they have an impact. In security communities, collective identity, common threat identification, compatibility of major values, institutions facilitating mutual recognition or religious, social or cultural proximity may each be important elements (see Pouliot, 2007: 376), but they are not the core. For example, neither being a member of a multilateral organisation nor enhanced bilateral security cooperation is equivalent with participation (Pouliot and Lachmann, 2004: 131). Security communities rather are “imagined” (Adler, 1997) and their existence relies on participants acting “*as if* there is a community” (Wæver, 1998: 77; original emphasis). Security communities are thus at heart “communities of practice”, “marked by a domain of knowledge, a community of people, shared practices, and a sense of joint enterprise” (Adler, 2005: 17). Practices can be defined as “socially recognised forms of activity, done on the basis of what members learn from others, and capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly” (Barnes, 2001: 19). In security communities, having and anticipating peaceful relations is a self-evident practice among participants and the “logic of practicality” leads them to have their actions reproduce the ties of community (Pouliot, 2008).

If the concern is the impact of a specific “European approach” to international security issues on the North Atlantic security community, what is at stake is not whether it would challenge the “dependable expectations of peaceful change” that relations between participants in such a community rely upon (Adler and Barnett, 1998: 30). Even the clashes over Iraq in 2002-2003, while they were about an issue presented by some actors as an existential threat to the whole community, did not put into question such expectations. Rather, there were questions about the North Atlantic security community’s ties that are going beyond the dependable expectations of peaceful change, notably multilateralism and the convergence of threat identifications. In this context, the development of what is now CSDP gave way to fears that North Atlantic multilateralism would be challenged by the autonomous EU framework for the development and use of member states’ military capabilities being built and by military operations being launched sometimes without consultation of NATO (Menon, 2003). Scholars also stressed the strong divergences in the EU and US approaches to counterterrorism (Rees

and Aldrich, 2005) or the “mind gap” revealed by the comparison of the ESS with the Bush Administration’s National Security Strategy of 2002 (Berenskoetter, 2005).

But more related to practices, there appeared to be a weakening of the “representational force” that makes security communities a resilient framework in crisis situations by having participants consider that they have no bearable alternative to uphold the community (see Bially Mattern, 2005). Important participants in the North Atlantic security community at the moment of the Iraq crisis seemingly turned to prioritise other frameworks in their dealings with international security issues: coalitions of the willing in the case of the Bush Administration, a Europe autonomous of the US for France, which could count on support or even only “just in case” interest – as an option in case the US would drive even further apart from European standards – from other EU members.

Yet, as mentioned in the context of the competition-complementarity dichotomy, more recent developments have not vindicated this idea of CSDP and accompanying claims for the uniqueness of the EU’s approach to the international security environment disrupting the ties of community. But neither can they be held to have remained unchallenged by the European dynamics, if only because of the shifts in participants’ outlooks it brought with it.

As suggested by the frequent and sometimes interchangeable reference to a European “strategic culture” or “security culture” in studies of CSDP, grasping how the dynamics of the EU’s external action have an impact on the practices of the North Atlantic security community is linked to the issue of cultural change. This paper approaches the multiplicity of meanings attached to these notions by focussing on the difficulties to provide a dynamic understanding of culture in international security studies. Taking the example of the influence of anthropologist Clifford Geertz such as is done here is a relevant way to do so, since constructivist – thus supposedly most dynamic – readings of both strategic culture and security culture have been inspired by his work. The ambiguity in the reception of Geertz’ ideas suggests however that the attention needs to be shifted more thoroughly towards an actor-centred and practice-related focus in order to lessen the risk of reifying culture. The way chosen here is to focus on actor’s repertoire of meanings that shapes action and to consider the case of the EU’s claimed singularity in dealing with international security issues as a new cultural reference in an unstable setting.

Strategic culture and security culture

Scholars studying the EU’s strategic culture or security culture have had difficulties to differentiate one from the other, thus providing an example for the lack of conceptual clarity

of these notions. Concerning strategic culture, four elements are commonly highlighted when it comes to strategic culture: it is ideational, shared collectively, specific to a group and rather stable (Roussel and Morin, 2007: 18). Yet, beyond that, there have been strong divergences in terms of epistemology, level of analysis, expectations of change and impact on external action and eventually definitions (see Sondhaus, 2006: 1-13 and 123-130). Research on strategic culture can be held to have started with implicit references in the cultural explanations for specific national ways of war put forward in the 1930s and 1940s (Desch, 1998: 144-145; Haglund, 2004: 491). During the Cold War, the next wave brought with it the first conceptualisation of the term “strategic culture” as a complementary element for a realist explanation of why major powers with similar military capacities did not share the same outlook on the use of them because of geographic and historic specificities. This view of strategic culture as context for action then became criticised in turn since it would ignore that these cultural references were liable to manipulation by elites. In the 1990s, strategic culture became tied to a constructivist approach as an independent explanatory variable for the behaviour of actors (Johnston, 1995). The ensuing debate with “contextualists” revealed however both sides’ important shortcomings (see Poore, 2003). The emphasis has thus shifted towards case studies¹ rather than general definitions of strategic culture (Toje, 2008: 18) and the idea that the notion should be handled as a “research programme” (Haglund, 2004: 502).

In this paper, strategic culture is considered to be “a coherent and lasting set of ideas, specific to a given sociohistorical context, that a community has concerning the use of armed force and the role of the military institutions” (Roussel and Morin, 2007: 18). This synthetic definition applies well to the case of the “European strategic culture” because of the broad range of issues it can concern. One notion challenged by the European case is that the relevant actors in studies of strategic culture are policy-makers, military top brass, members of think tanks and so on, rather than the whole of the community (Sondhaus, 2006: 127). Public opinion is seldom considered of importance; this might however be different in the case of an emerging strategic culture such as in the EU (see Foucault, Irondelle and Mérand, 2010).

Yet, taking into account these dynamics of emergence raises the question about the requirements of coherence and durability, since the basic “European” cultural references cannot be held to exist already, but are still emerging (Sondhaus, 2006: 12, quoting Stine Heiselberg). Tracking the dynamics of an emerging strategic culture goes against the tendency to consider these frameworks to be resistant to change (Ramel, 2003: 103).

¹ See for example Longhurst, 2004.

Important shifts would be triggered almost exclusively by traumatic events (Roussel and Morin, 2007: 20-21). Otherwise, changes would be mere “adjustments” to international or internal influences (Longhurst, 2004: 18). But even adjustment is not frequent: even in such a favourable setting as Canada, the growing relevance attached to “human security” after the end of the Cold War did not have a significant impact on conceptions of the use of force and thus on strategic culture (see Ramel, 2003). Studies of national strategic cultures with their focus on long-standing attitudes also tend not to be interested in the process of emergence, if only for methodological reasons (see Johnston, 1995: 50).

Since the European strategic culture is emerging, it is inappropriate to see it as a unified set of ideas that would be completely opposed to the US strategic culture (Kagan, 2002). Significantly, studies of the emerging European strategic culture have rather been interested in the degree of convergence between EU member states’ outlooks (Giegerich, 2006; Meyer, 2006). Such an approach inevitably points to persisting divergences among them, even though there arguably is an agreement among these actors on some core elements:

1. As a global security actor, the EU has to be able to count on military capabilities that it can use autonomously from NATO.
2. However, this autonomy can only be developed in cooperation with NATO and the US, given the North Atlantic’s relationship uniqueness as a security community.
3. The EU’s main contribution in international politics is its comprehensive range of tools and especially its ability to tie the use of armed force to non-military missions.
4. The EU’s action is not about collective defence but about providing collective security through international crisis management, mainly outside of Europe.
5. CSDP is not a means for narrow-defined European interests, but about enhancing international crisis management, notably by multilateralism.

As regards the differentiation between strategic culture and security culture, one tendency in the use of these notions is to consider that strategic culture would be clearly military, even to the point where it is almost exclusively means-related, while security culture is more comprehensive both in terms of tools and in terms of outlook (see Gariup, 2009). But with the CSDP’s interlocked framework of military and non-military tools and perspectives for international crisis management, the case of the EU suggests that also an apparently downgraded importance of the use of armed force in external action can be linked to a strategic culture. After all, it now “possesses the perquisites to form a strategic culture in terms of having extensive interests and obligations, and capabilities” (Toje, 2008: 18).

It appears thus fair to consider that there is a European strategic culture which in turn triggers cultural change both in the EU and at the North Atlantic level. This is supported by observations of a “silent decoupling” between CSDP and NATO, with notably a growing EU-US bilateral security cooperation (Scheeck, 2008). Similarly, at the EU, differentiation has become a major dynamics of its relationship with the alliance (see Varwick and Koops, 2009). The question then is how the European strategic culture affects the framework of the North Atlantic security community, especially if it is taken into account that a shared “security culture” appears as a “permissive” element for security communities (Pouliot, 2003: 51). Such a security culture is “a system of socially constructed sense concerning international threats” implying their common identification and description and a shared mindset about the way to respond to them (Pouliot and Lachmann, 2004: 136). This matches the idea of a security culture not limited to some ways of dealing with security challenges (Krause, 1998: 220-221). At first sight, with a European strategic culture such as sketched here and the North Atlantic security culture having important similarities, the idea of a challenge of the latter through the former is suggestive. After all, both are less stable but also more inclusive than usually descriptions of national strategic cultures would have it, concern collective actors, do not aim at comprehensively covering all security concerns by members or participants but rather at providing a general consensual view on the international environment, and go beyond considering the military domain as the essential way of dealing with the security issues they are concerned with. But the challenge that European cultural references regarding international security pose to North Atlantic evolutions should not be overrated. For example, after 9/11, the EU’s outlook on terrorism was held to be both more comprehensive and less bellicose than the “war on terror” proclaimed by the Bush Administration. This would have led at least to some tension in integrating such a specific European approach to a North Atlantic framework where it appeared to be at odds with the US. But actually, the ESS’ reference to the potential necessity of preventive action in dealing with threats points to a EU framework of preemption quite similar to the US’ (see de Goede, 2008).

Yet, it has to be reminded here that even in national strategic cultures, “if there is ‘something’ that can be assimilated to be a *dominant* strategic culture, it is nevertheless not *unique*” and that domination is due to a “capacity to suffocate the other discourses” carrying “strategic counter-cultures” but does not lead to their vanishing (Roussel, 2007: 217; original emphasis). This is even more relevant for the European strategic culture: public opinion polls on EU external action suggest that the apparently strong support overall needs to be qualified since there are at least four “strategic sub-cultures” to be found beneath it, of which some actually

are not really favourable to the direction CSDP has taken (Foucault, Irondelle and Mérand, 2010). Thus, it is to be expected too that both challenging and conforming elements appear in the European strategic culture's articulation with North Atlantic references.

The cultural obstacle to grasping change

In order to grasp the range and the impact of the changes accompanying the emergence of a European strategic culture, the difficult relationship between culture and international security has to be taken into account (see amongst other Weldes et al., 1999). It is highly suggestive in this context that constructivist takes both on strategic culture and security culture have been informed by anthropologist Clifford Geertz' semiotic approach to culture. Geertz argued following Max Weber, "that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" which would be his culture (Geertz, 1973a: 5). One follow-up on this conception has been to define culture as "a system of symbols creating meaning within a social group" (Snyder, 2002: 14). Geertz' approach has inspired the conceptualisation of security culture as a variable of security communities (Pouliot, 2003). Similarly, his definition of religion as a "cultural system" (see Geertz, 1973b: 90) became paraphrased in a constructivist reading of strategic culture as "an integrated 'system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious'" (Johnston, 1995: 46)². In both cases, culture would have to be understood "as concrete and bounded body of beliefs and practices" which "is commonly assumed to belong to or to be isomorphic with a 'society' or with some clearly identifiable subsocietal group" (Sewell, 1999: 39).

Before the 1990's wave of interest for the link between international security and culture, Geertz' work had not been much more than an "obligatory" reference for international security studies (Weldes et al., 1999: 4). But then constructivists, notably, highlighted its attractiveness, especially since its semiotic approach did not appear to reify culture³. After this wave, Geertz' influence has become less apparent in studies of international relations in a cultural perspective. Part of this can be linked to the conceptual ambiguity of an essentially

² Johnston also has drawn on Geertz' notion that cultural assumptions constitute a "system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (Geertz, 1973b: 89) but claims that political scientists, unlike anthropologists, differentiate culture "from behaviour as the dependent variable" (Johnston, 1995: 44/note 25).

³ Alexander Wendt's work has been considered by several scholars to be close to Geertz' semiotic conception, even though there are no explicit references to this approach in it (Snyder, 2002: 14-15; Pouliot, 2003: 28-29).

contingency-based approach such as his (see Kuper, 1999: 75-83). But there has also been a general dichotomy in the reception of his approach, with a highly questioned ontology of what cultural references are and a strongly exploited epistemological framework for their interpretation (Ortner, 1997: 6-7). The former is held to be liable to reification, the latter was considered in the 1990s as an inspiration to non-positivist scholars of international relations (see Yee, 1996: 95-96). More recently, Geertz' epistemological and methodological framework has been key to a constructivist, practice-oriented methodology (Pouliot, 2007).

But reversely, it has proven much more difficult to build on his inspiration so as to conceptualise culture in relation to international security or more generally to political developments in a dynamic way (Wedeen, 2002: 716). This ambiguity can be related to the observation that in following the lead of his works, scholars have tended "to represent culture as essentially static" while "accounts of how the effects of culture evolve over time are relatively rare" (Jackson, 2008: 160). Such problems can be linked to Geertz' approach to grasp in one observation elements with different temporalities, which leads to difficulties to account for cultural change (Sewell, 1997: 39-42). In the case of the European strategic culture, synchronicity would not allow to grasp the difference in dynamics between the process of convergence of member states' longer-held and still importantly divergent cultural references and the emergence of an EU reference concerning the military domain triggered notably by the practice of CSDP.

Because of Geertz' insistence that communities can remain attached to inherited exclusive systems of meaning to the point of contending more inclusive ideologies, he also has appeared as a "primordialist", liable to essentialisation, in the domain of nationalism and ethnicity. The ambiguities of his take on culture thus favoured that in parts of the scholarship inspired by him, "[c]ulture became not only what a group has – beliefs, values, or a symbolic system – but what a group is" (Wedeen, 2002: 716). Yet, if the aim is to avoid reification, such as proclaimed among others by constructivists, the coherence between shared cultural references and groups attached to a territory rather should be considered "diffuse" (Sewell, 1999: 49-50). This is suggested by the case of the European strategic culture, which escapes partially from national references by having core elements aloof of the convergence of member states' views on the use of force and the place the military institution should take.

The notion of "cultural systems" similarly rather has led to considerations that appear problematic if the aim is to develop a dynamic understanding of culture. One example is the argument that Geertz' approach "limits culture to meaningful symbols" while it separates social institutions from it (Snyder, 2002: 15). More generally, the focus on "cultural systems"

has favoured non-dynamic questionings such as about the boundaries of communities, homogeneity, the territorialised dimension of symbols, and so on (see Ortner, 1997: 6-11). That the application of Geertz' notion of cultural system for strategic culture has not impeded the essentialist tendencies that constructivists have precisely tended to avoid (Poore, 2003: 282-283) is thus not surprising. In this specific case, one further salient issue is that the relationship between culture and behaviour is held to be causal (Johnston, 1995), while it is not in Geertz' approach. Even beyond this example, establishing links of causality between ideational elements and actions has more generally proven one of the most challenging issues in relation with the study of ideas or discourses (see Yee, 1996: 94-101), and thus with culture. One constructivist response has been that a causal relation exists when several elements demonstrably have an impact on an outcome (Giegerich, 2006: 35). This “quasi-causal” approach would suggest that actions reflect the influence of cultural elements but does not establish a clear-cut causal relationship between variables (Yee, 1996: 101).

One question at issue here is that references to culture have been frequently linked to discourse, as differentiated from practice. According to this view, they “can be thought of as encompassing the multiplicity of discourses (...) through which meaning is produced”, which “in turn implies (...) that meanings can be contended” (Weldes et al., 1999: 1-2). A discourse-centred approach to culture appears for example when culture is separated from behaviour in order to establish causal relations (Johnston, 1995). It also can be an outcome of the “quasi-causal” approach of tracking the influence of a European strategic culture through the convergence of discourses in EU member states (Giegerich, 2006). Arguing for the existence of a European strategic culture at the discursive level while qualifying the relevance of the discourse by matching it against the actions taken by the EU is a further example of this approach (Gariup, 2009).

An apparent way out of this discourse-centred causal approach is provided by Geertz' argument that cultural patterns would be both “models *for*” and “models *of*” reality: “they give meaning, that is, objective conceptual form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves” (Geertz, 1973b: 93). This fits nicely with a framework of mutual constitution, which has been applied in a non-positivist reading of strategic culture in contention of the positivist approach of distinguishing culture from behaviour (Neumann and Heikka, 2005: 8-11). Systems of meaning – strategic culture – and practices – for example the EU's external action – would thus be interlinked. Culture is then no longer linked to discourse to the detriment of accounting for its links with practice.

However, this approach might entail a rather circular view in which symbols located on the structural level and practices attached to agency constitute each other, while actually, “actors’ practices and their systems of significations do more than merely influence each other”, since they “are defined and generated in reference to each other, yet can come into conflict” (Wedeen, 2002: 719-720). Cultural systems themselves include the permanent and latent possibility of disjunction between actions and representations leading to a transformation of the latter by the former or triggered by attempts to stick to the latter through a change of the former (Sewell, 1997: 47). In light of this, a conceptualisation of non-circular co-constitution is provided by “permissive theorising” in which “a combination of variables allows the existence of another variable”, such as in the link between security culture and security communities (Pouliot, 2003: 50-51). Rather than to insert cultural references in the framework of a causal explanation, such an approach would also be in line with Geertz’ interpretive approach and his focus on contingency (Pouliot, 2007: 367).

The unsettling effects of the European strategic culture

Drawing on Geertz’ notions regarding culture needs not contradict his statement that “formulations of other peoples’ symbol systems must be actor-oriented” (Geertz, 1973a: 14). An actor-centred approach is also in line with the interest he showed for the influence exerted by particular actors in the elaboration and dissemination of ideologies such as nationalism (Ortner, 1997: 7). In this context, the development of CSDP provides a good example, since differentiation from NATO has been promoted and implemented both through EU-specific practices and through the highlighting of a particular European approach to international crisis management and to issues of international security more generally.

A focus on the production of meaning “as a process through which conventions become intelligible to participants through observable usages and effects suggests that meaning are open to various and changing interpretations, while also sometimes appearing to be overtly coherent, fixed, or inevitable” (Wedeen, 2002: 722). While this apparent coherence, fixedness or inevitability would be in line with considerations about national strategic cultures generally, such an approach is also relevant for the case of the European strategic culture, since the CSDP formal framework is consensus-based and intergovernmentalist, so rather an unfavourable context for having a non-state-centred dynamic taking place (see Gariup, 2009). Methodologically, an actor-oriented approach “centres on the ways in which people attempt to make apparent, observable sense of their worlds – to themselves and to each other – in emotional and cognitive terms” (Wedeen, 2002: 721). One example of such meaning-making

can be found in the continuous references to the 2003 ESS as a key to Europe's relevance in dealing with international security challenges. Reversely, NATO's current elaboration of a new strategic concept has featured so many contradictions as to suggest that in this North Atlantic setting has become more elusive than in the European.

The focus thus shifts to actor's practices, including the discursive elements of them, rather than to see them as bounded by cultural references. This is especially important if the link between territory and culture is blurred as in the case of the North Atlantic security culture or the European strategic culture.

Focussing both on actors and on practices, Pierre Bourdieu's conception of "symbolic power" linking together culture-related elements and how actors struggle for domination appears as a relevant way to study the relation between culture and security (see Williams, 2007). More generally, a Bourdieusian framework seems a check against the overstatement of individual or collective predispositions related to culture in works inspired, amongst others, by Geertz (Jackson, 2008). With regards to culture, the turn to practice inspired by Bourdieu has pointed "the contradictory, politically charged, changeable, and fragmented character of meanings" (Sewell, 1999: 45)⁴. Unlike Geertz' reception in the 1990s in the field of international relations that seems now to have been rather a wave of more often than not fashionable instead of substantiated references, the Bourdieusian input is handled in a more consistent and aware way by most scholars drawing on him (see for example Mérand and Pouliot, 2008).

One way that the Bourdieu-inspired turn to practice in the study of culture has taken in the field of sociology is the idea of cultural references not providing "ultimate ends or values towards action is directed" but rather a "tool kit", "which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems" and "components that are used to construct strategies of action" (Swidler, 1986: 273). This suggests a focus on the practical dynamics of repertoires of meanings. One example is that the emergence of a European strategic culture has enlarged the range of tools for national security actors to act, while at the same time pushing them to confront their cultural references within the EU framework (Giegerich, 2006: 36)⁵. National actors drawing on the emergence of a European strategic culture would correspond to the idea of sustaining already existing frameworks, which is furthermore enhanced by the institutional framework of CSDP being intergovernmentalist. In this case, co-constitution as suggested by Geertz' idea of culture as a "model of" and "model

⁴ This approach, by giving attention to power struggles, is all the more appropriate if it is taken into consideration that practices are power-laden (see Barnes, 2001: 27-29).

⁵ A more practice-oriented case study of strategic culture is provided by Neumann and Heikka, 2005.

for” experience would lead it and “structural circumstance” to “reinforce each other” (Swidler, 1986: 278). Thus, if European strategic culture there is, it would have to point to CSDP’s development which in turn would reinforce the reference of a specific EU approach to international security issues, distinct from other ways in the North Atlantic framework, while reflecting a process of convergence between member states (see Meyer, 2006).

However, this example stresses only one of two settings in which how culture works. In a “settled” situation, it “accounts for continuities”, but there are also “unsettled” situations in which “ideologies – explicit, articulated, highly organised meaning systems (both political and religious) – *establish* new styles or strategies of action”, the main distinction being “between culture’s role in sustaining existing strategies of action and its role in constructing new ones” (Swidler, 1986: 278; original emphasis).

Arguably, the European strategic culture has also a much more “unsettled” side to it. At least, this is suggested by the questioning about whether the EU taking action in international crisis management including with military elements would not trigger potentially disruptive changes in the North Atlantic framework. CSDP and European strategic culture are not mere prolongations of national actor’s references but have a momentum of their own beyond the reach of states. This is all the more the case since CSDP, as practitioners are wont to stress, is a framework which is still developing, having been launched about a decade ago and operating even only since 2003. Unlike NATO drawing on a long-lasting experience, the European references and actions are still set in a dynamics of emergence. This distinction between a limited but apparently more dynamic framework and a settled organisation such as the alliance is also a key to understand why the development of CSDP has been considered potentially disruptive of the North Atlantic framework: it is not what the EU is actually doing that matters in this view but the prospect of further unsettling of continuities.

Furthermore, the insistence that there is a European way to deal with international security issues meets the definition of an ideology as an explicit, articulated, highly organised meaning system establishing new styles or strategies of action in an unsettled situation. Nowhere is this aspect as present as in the claim that the EU’s civil-military approach in CSDP initially has been something unique to it to which other multilateral organisations intervening in international crisis management have progressively come around, notably NATO through its references to a “comprehensive approach”. In this context, pointing out the alliance drawing on the European framework is an outstanding example of the contested and politically charged characteristics of such a reference. It pitches the EU’s assertiveness in terms of strategic guidance provided notably by the ESS against the difficulties NATO experiences to

follow up in its practices on its mentions of a comprehensive approach as a priority. Reversely, by putting the focus on orientations rather than means, it challenges the idea that the alliance actually would be a senior partner in relation to CSDP as the European intervenant in international crisis management because of its overwhelmingly bigger military capabilities and its experience of high-level intensity use of armed forces.

Turning back to the perspective of the North Atlantic security community, it has to be taken into account that such communities of practice are “sustained by a repertoire of ideational and material communal resources” (Adler, 2005: 17). This is very much the issue with the claim for European uniqueness through CSDP and conceptual guidance such as the ESS. Materially speaking, these elements are not detached from the North Atlantic framework: after all, the overlap in membership between NATO and EU makes the concerned participants draw on one set of capabilities, and military speaking they rely on the alliance’s experience and higher risk-taking for specific operations of international crisis management. Yet, European ideational resources appear less communal, as suggested by the uneasy relationship between CSDP’s civil-military outlook and the comprehensive approach. At the same time, the convergence between US and EU approaches to counterterrorism as regards non-military preventive tools is actually rather unsettling the continuity of the North Atlantic security relationship in that it increases a trend toward bilateralisation and challenges the centrality of NATO at the political-diplomatic level (Scheeck, 2008: 100-101).

In this sense, the current situation is far away from the scenarios that had participants in the North Atlantic security community turning to alternatives to this framework, such as evoked in the wake of the Iraq crisis. Rather, even in this situation, actors were drawn by “representational force” to consider that the breakdown of the community would through “an unexpected and unpleasant destabilising domino effect” lead to a challenge to their international positioning overall (Bially Mattern, 2005: 20). It is relevant to point out that while NATO before the war in Iraq became a forum of diplomatic and political confrontation so entrenched it questioned the support requested by Turkey as an ally exposed to the fallout of a conflict at its borders, later on military cooperation was almost self-evident, as exemplified by the permission for US air force to pass through the German space. Similarly, for all their problems, current relations between the alliance and CSDP also are essentially cooperative. The shift in the North Atlantic security community through the EU’s growing assertiveness in dealing with international security matters according to a European approach is not brought about by an all-out opposition. Rather, it is reflecting that practices in this domain have disrupted several representations that represented a settled situation.

One such representation is the idea of a clear-cut division of labour between NATO and the institutions emerging through the process of European integration. This notion first grew upon the effect the demise of the European Defence Community had on policy-makers involved in this process: they even expressed their willingness not to get involved in these matters again since it would be unbearable to make another attempt to have a European military force that would provide an effective deterrence (see Toje, 2008: 24-29). After the end of the Cold War, the failure of the EU and the Western European Union to manage crises at the borders of their member states and the eventual reliance on NATO to deal militarily with these also bore witness that there was a division of labour better to be taken into account by these European actors. With the CSDP launching operations with military component, the split now is no longer related to the use of armed forces generally, but rather to the scope. Thus, policy-makers – especially from NATO – and also scholars have evoked a division of labour as if it would be inherent. This would concern the tools to be prioritised respectively by the alliance and CSDP – military or civilian – or the appropriate missions – combat or peacekeeping and stabilisation – or geographic zones, with the EU being supposed to focus on its neighbourhood and Africa, and so on. While all of these differentiations match with important features of the current situation, considering them to be stable in time is challenged by references to the ongoing dynamics of emergence of the European framework and approach to international security issues, and the practices attached to this development more generally. At the same time, the initially strong institutional isomorphism with NATO has lost importance. Unlike relations with other multilateral organisation, the EU's ties to the alliance do not really conform to its claim to act in light of an "effective multilateralism" that would enhance both partners but rather feature a tendency to merely draw on the other organisation's assets without a similar range of reciprocity (Varwick and Koops, 2009: 122-123). While cultural references of the military component of CSDP are still very much NATO-related as far as it concerns efficiency, in the conceptual terms of strategic culture, there is a growing European autonomy. Reversely, the increased bilateralisation of North Atlantic security cooperation also indirectly challenges the alliance's senior partner status. Already during the second term of the Bush Administration but even more now, the US has shown less concern about the EU's development of CSDP while ensuring NATO's centrality has lost importance in its relations with the European participants in the North Atlantic security community.

Conclusion

This paper set out by asking two questions. The first concerned the conceptualisation of the changes brought about by the EU's growing activity in international crisis management and its practice of highlighting the relevance of a specifically European contribution. The second was about the impact this has on the framework of the North Atlantic security community. As concerns the question of how to conceptualise the context of CSDP or the ESS, the answer suggested here is to consider it as a process of cultural change. There would be a European strategic culture driven by a dynamic of its own with considerable relevance in relation to the convergence between member states' references. If the conceptualisation draws on actor-centred and practice-oriented approaches to culture, which is one way that Geertz' ambiguous influence has taken, it is then suggestive to consider this development as an unsettling of elements that had been crucial to certain continuities. This in turn leads to the question about how this cultural change exemplified by CSDP affects the North Atlantic security community, especially since one important element of security communities being a common security culture, a European strategic culture could turn out to be an alternative framework. But its emergence rather has triggered shifts in the practice of the North Atlantic security community by unsettling the division of labour or the centrality of NATO for political-diplomatic interaction between the EU and its member states and the North American participants. Hence, the shift in European practice accompanying the development of CSDP, while not challenging the community itself, has led to important changes in it.

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