1 Explaining EU Foreign Policy Action
Turning to Practice

Why Does the EU Act Outside Its Borders?

Why did the European Union (EU or Union) act in postconflict Kosovo in 1999 but not in Bosnia four years earlier? What explains the EU's extensive civilian and military crisis management actions after the Haiti earthquake of 2010 compared to its modest activities in response to the Southeast Asian tsunami in 2004 and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013? Why did the Union act militarily in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2003 but not in Syria, Libya, or Ukraine in recent years?

The EU was created for the purpose of encouraging peace on the European continent.[1] Today, however, the EU is increasingly active internationally in such areas as diplomacy, development, humanitarian aid, and defense (civilian and military crisis management).[2] Yet after more than forty years of these external actions, we know relatively little about the forces that drive the EU to interact, influence, and intervene outside its borders. In the academic literature on the Union's foreign policy, there are essentially two theoretical schools for explaining the EU's actions.

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[1] Technically speaking, the European Union has existed only since 1992. I also take into account the history of the European Economic Community, which began in the late 1950s.

[2] The Union has close relationships with all the countries in its neighborhood (it has a Neighborhood Policy), including Belarus, Ukraine, Western Balkans, Turkey, and the Mediterranean. Until recently, it has had a "strategic partnership" with Russia and is involved in the peace process in the Middle East. The EU takes actions within its foreign policy cooperation vis-à-vis the USA, Canada, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, China, and East Asia (Bindi and Angelescu 2012). It is actively cooperating within and with other international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Gheciu 2008; Bourantonis and Blavoukos 2011). The EU is engaged in peacebuilding – in the Balkans, the Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo), and Afghanistan (Blockmans et al. 2010), for example. The Union is developing policies for the support of state building that includes its assistance to security-sector reform (Ekengren and Simons 2011). Through the 130 EU delegations around the globe, the Union upholds its diplomatic relations, implements its common trade and development policies, and assists and protects EU citizens through consular cooperation. EU foreign policy action in the area of crisis management includes international missions within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the management of humanitarian and natural disasters (Boin et al. 2013).

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1. **The realism–intergovernmental school**: Based on the assumption of a structure of national interests and a positivistic–empiricist tradition, the realism–intergovernmental school holds that Union action is driven by the largest EU member states.[3] The interests of these states are the biggest driver. The proponents of this school claim that the Union – like other international organizations – is merely a marionette in the hands of its member states.

2. **The normative–structural power school (constructivism)**: According to this school, the driving forces are localized in the EU's norm, value, and identity structures as they are expressed in official statements and documents.[4] Proponents of the normative–structural power school claim that the declared norms and principles of EU foreign policy representatives to promote good in the world are what drive their actions.

The gap between these theories and the empirical reality of EU foreign policy actions has been widening over the years. It has become increasingly difficult to find evidence that national interests are serving as key driving forces behind the Union's actions[5] or that the EU's behavior in specific situations is consistent with its officially stated values and objectives. As many observers have noted, there is a gap between the words and deeds of EU foreign policy.[6] Indeed, some observers have noted that interests and norms have no explanatory power in and of themselves, but are merely constructed representations aimed at creating an image that has little to do with reality.[7]

In contrast, the practitioners who carry out the actions of the EU's foreign policy – and who embody reality – often have a clear sense of what drives them. The influential head of EU diplomacy between 1999 and 2009, Dr. Javier Solana, was first to hold the position as the EU's High Representative of Foreign and Security Affairs that, together with a small unit of ten officials, was established in 1999 within the Secretariat of the EU Council of Ministers. He described his actions in the following terms:

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[3] Hyde-Price 2012; Dyson and Konstadinides 2013.

[4] Manners 2002; Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Keukeleire and Delreux 2014.

[5] Mérand (2008), for example, has noted just this point. In his many interviews with national policymakers, he reports that no one ever referred to national interests as a reason for creating the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Howorth, who has interviewed 350 defense actors in fifteen EU member states, has found little to support realist explanations of the CSDP (Howorth 2014: 190–199).

[6] Jørgensen 2006: 56–57; Menon 2011a: 209–214; Risse 2012.

[7] See, for example, Diez 2005 and Pouliot 2010: 14–22.

As time goes by, I do whatever I want. I know what people think. I pursue my own agenda. I don't have to check everything with everyone. I would rather have forgiveness than permission. If you ask permission, you would never do anything.[8]

This short quote is significant for the long-existing need to understand the deeper and complex social forces that generate EU foreign policy actions beneath the superficial representations of interests and norms. Over time, Dr. Solana, through actions conducted on a regular basis, established and expanded a practice that was based less and less on conscious reflection. He felt that he knew "what people think" and that EU member state diplomats, with whom he increasingly shared a diplomatic practice, would forgive his actions. Dr. Solana was learning routines that resulted in his acceptance as a like-minded colleague in the diplomatic community. At the same time this recognition gave him room to maneuver in specific situations.

The quote also shows that it is difficult to explain Dr. Solana's actions without a close view "from within" his meetings with national diplomats of what specific actions were actually forgiven by EU member states. What can be assumed, however, is that he would probably not have been allowed to continue with his habit of not asking permission unless his actions were recognized not only as competent diplomatic practice in general but also as the right thing to do in the particular local context. What actions and practices are in reality driving collective EU foreign policy action? Who judges whether they are competent? Where are they conducted?

This book offers a new theoretical perspective that helps to explain EU foreign policy action and understand the preconditions for future reform of the Union's foreign policy. I argue that new insights into the forces that drive the EU to take collective action are best gained by focusing on what the Union's foreign policy[9] representatives[10] do in practice around the globe. This perspective explains how Union action beyond the confines of the EU is driven by global *transnational practices*[11] – the "correct" ways of doing things that EU representatives learn and share with like-minded transnational groups in the area of foreign policy. These transnational *communities of practice*,[12] which are driven by a sense of joint enterprise

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[8] Solana 2003, quoted in Barros-Garcia 2007: 10.
[9] I define EU foreign policy in terms of all the fields of the EU's external relations, ranging from areas such as trade and development aid to the Common Security and Defence Policy. Cf. footnote 2.
[10] See page 23 for the definition of EU representatives.
[11] These practices are defined in detail in Chapter 2.
[12] See, for example, Wenger (1998) on communities of practice.

and collective accomplishments,[13] include transnational groups of diplomats, trade officials, development civil servants, first responders of humanitarian[14] and consular aid, and defense (crisis management) officers. This new perspective shows how the representatives of these communities through their actions adjust their foreign policy practices to particular time–space contexts across the globe and how this results in localized transnational practices[15] – the recognized right things to do on the ground.[16] It explains how individual EU representatives, via their experiences of local applications of transnational practices, and by using the institutional and material resources at hand (organs, offices, staff, etc.), perform and are driven by localized practice in the specific situation.[17]

I define a foreign policy practice in terms of a certain category of foreign policy actions repeated over time and recognized as competent performance by a transnational community of practice.[18] I look upon transnational practices as the driving forces behind both the reproduction of entire categories of actions, such as diplomatic practice, and specific action, for instance an EU diplomatic act limited in time and space. I conceive of the relation between practices and action as a two-way relationship. The repetitive development aid actions (transnational development practice) of EU representatives dispose them toward future development action by "inscribing" potentialities for this action into their bodies.[19] The actions of EU and other transnational actors normally reproduce practice, which only exists through these actions,[20] but individual EU representatives always have the possibility to do something different than what would normally be done and contribute to a change of transnational practice.[21]

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[13] Adler and Pouliot 2011b. Cf. Haas' definition of epistemic community in terms of "a common policy enterprise – that is, a set of common practices associated with a set of problems to which their professional competence is directed" (Haas 1992: 3).

[14] Cf. Stein (2011) on the transnational humanitarian community of practice.

[15] See, for example, Brickell and Datta (2011) on how transnational experiences are adapted to local conditions to form localized transnational practice.

[16] See, for example, Neumann (2013) on the importance of studying sites of diplomacy for an understanding of diplomatic practices.

[17] Cf. Saurugger, who shows how the establishment of norms is due to actors' performance of these norms rather than socialization and internalization (2010).

[18] Adler and Pouliot 2011b.   [19] Bourdieu 1998: vii.

[20] Cf. Giddens' concept of duality of structure which points out that "social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time the very medium of this constitution" (Giddens 1976: 121). The relationship between EU action and transnational practices – agency and structure – is explained in detail in Chapter 2.

[21] Bourdieu 1990: 53 and 99.

Why Kosovo and Haiti?

For a close view of the driving forces, I delve into two "signature cases" of EU foreign policy action: the Union's actions in postconflict Kosovo in 1999 and in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake of 2010. There are many good reasons for my choice of cases.

The Kosovo and Haiti crises were extremely formative experiences for the EU's foreign policy institutions and capacities. The two cases provided first-class opportunities for my study of how EU representatives drew on new institutional and material resources to instantiate transnational practices through local action and how members of transnational communities judged whether this action could be recognized as localized practice. The new EU position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy ("EU foreign minister") and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), with its military and civil crisis management capacities, were established in connection to the Kosovo conflict. The Haiti earthquake hit the country only one month after the new Lisbon Treaty had come into force in December 2009 and turned ESDP into the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The crisis became a first test for the strengthened role of the High Representative who was now permanent chairperson in the Foreign Affairs Council of the foreign ministers of the EU member states, Vice-President of the European Commission, and head of the new European External Action Service (EEAS) ("EU foreign ministry") of 3,400 diplomats and officials.[22]

Both case studies are excellent examples of the most central categories of transnational foreign policy practices that generate action in major international conflicts and crises. Both situations engaged members of the diplomatic, humanitarian, development, and defense communities.

The Kosovo and Haiti cases offer a particularly fruitful comparison in terms of the ways in which transnational practices are learned, experienced, and "grounded" in the form of localized practices. In Kosovo many of the EU's foreign policy actions were new and not recognized as transnational practices in the first phase of the postconflict situation after the NATO bombings of Serbia which ended on June 10, 1999. By innovating, beginning on a small scale, and doing the right thing in the province's "capital" Pristina, the EU's representatives successfully learned practices, expanded their actions in a "bottom-up" way, and gradually made these actions recognized as localized diplomatic,

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[22] Spence and Bátora 2015.

humanitarian, and development practice. Eventually the EU's representatives were included in transnational groups of like-minded practitioners and driven by their routines and joint enterprise to reconstruct Kosovo after the war.

By contrast, the EU's new diplomatic and defense (military crisis management) actions in Haiti's natural disaster a decade later were conducted in a "top-down" fashion by the High Representative and the EEAS in an attempt to make these actions recognized as localized transnational diplomatic and defense practices. The unfortunate result was that these "superimposed" actions challenged the transnational practices that were being carried out by the Union's humanitarian, development, and civilian crisis management officials, which led to a struggle among the EU representatives over the correct way of delivering assistance on the ground in Haiti. The consequence of the EU's internal struggle was that many Union actions were not recognized as competent performance, as practice, by the transnational foreign policy communities engaged in the disaster. This limited the EU representatives' access to transnational communal resources and a sense of being part of collective accomplishments, and, as a result, weakened the forces that drove Union action.

Finally, I chose the Kosovo case because it was one of the empirical cases that I knew best from my practical life as a diplomat at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In line with Pierre Bourdieu's ethnomethodological approach, which has greatly influenced my own perspective, the task was to turn my insights "from within" everyday practices into robust scientific knowledge. I worked at the ministry between 1990 and 2001, including the period of the Kosovo conflict in 1999 and the most decisive postconflict years, and have kept an insider's understanding through my close contacts with former colleagues within both the ministry and the EU's foreign policy institutions long after these years in service (my brother Andreas, many of my friends, and former students currently work within the ministry and the EU's institutions). I returned to academic research in 2001, and between the years 2005 and 2013 I focused on the EU's international humanitarian aid and civilian and military crisis management activities around the world. Because I was also familiar with the EU's crisis management from working as a diplomat, it was natural to choose the Haiti disaster of 2010 – perhaps the crisis where the EU has been most broadly engaged – as my second case. A more detailed description of my methods and empirical material is included in Appendix I.

Three Mechanisms behind EU Action

Three types of mechanism that brought transnational practices to local contexts and generated or "caused" EU actions crystallized in my inductive, empirical investigation of these two cases.[23]

I detected the first mechanism in situations where the EU's behavior[24] was from the outset not recognized as practice by the transnational communities engaged in the specific locale,[25] but where Union representatives conducted strategic acts[26] to change this behavior and make their actions socially meaningful and recognized as localized transnational practice. This mechanism shows how, for instance, the transnational diplomatic community assesses the Union's strategic diplomatic actions – such as the ones on the ground in Kosovo in 1999[27] – before recognizing them as localized diplomatic practice. Mechanism 1 reveals how representatives of transnational communities recognize EU actions as practice through their conduct of joint diplomatic activities on site with EU representatives, manifesting their inclusion in the group of like-minded colleagues and as part of the collective enterprise.[28]

The second mechanism that generated the actions of EU representatives was found in situations where Union actions had been long recognized as localized practice by transnational communities. In these cases EU actions were already, from the beginning of the specific situation, driven by embodied transnational practices that were routinely embedded in an unreflected practical sense by EU representatives that informed what a "correct" local action meant. Mechanism 2 refers to situations where these representatives act out and adjust transnational foreign policy practices to the local setting in line with normal routines and proceedings. The Union's application of transnational standardized

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[23] Causality in this book is seen not in the "hard" sense of general scientific laws that explain why structure A automatically leads to action B but as a dynamic relationship where human agency is driven by structure (e.g., a practice) but always has room for maneuver in relation to this structure. This agency–structure relationship is explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

[24] Adler and Pouliot (2011b: 6) distinguish among aimless behavior, meaningful action, and socially developed and recognized practices. EU behavior can of course mean no Union action at all.

[25] Giddens defines "locale" as the spatial, temporal, and physical setting for action that is routinized (1987: 157–160; 1984: 118–119). The concept is thoroughly discussed in Chapter 2.

[26] In Bourdieu's terminology a strategic act is an attempt to change aimless behavior or practice that does not involve conscious reflection of the agent (Bourdieu 1990: 53 and 99). See a more detailed explanation of strategic acts in Chapter 2. I will, for stylistic reasons, use strategic acts and strategic actions synonymously.

[27] See Chapter 3.

[28] Cf. March and Olsen on the logic of appropriateness (1989, 1998).

procedures for humanitarian financial aid to implementing organizations on site in Haiti in 2010 is a case in point.[29] Here the transnational recognition of the EU's actions as localized transnational practice does not "happen" before or after these actions are conducted but is instantiated in the form of immediate joint action together with EU representatives and a tacitly shared sense of collective responsibility.

The third mechanism was distinguishable in situations where the EU's representatives share a transnational practice, as in Mechanism 2, but attempt to change the local application of this practice through strategic actions when they sense that it is not possible to go on in the normal way in the specific crisis or conflict.[30] I found examples of Mechanism 3 in situations where the EU's representatives innovated in the field by drawing on the experiences of both humanitarian and development practices to establish a new type of localized practice that helped them cope with the situation – as the Union did in Kosovo when its local actions eventually led to a "reconstruction practice." In these situations the transnational communities in question, for instance the humanitarian and development community, either recognize the EU's strategic action as part of a needed transformation of localized practice or reject it as an unacceptable deviation from the normal way of doing things.

These three mechanisms reflect how individual EU representatives through their local actions bring their embodied, unconscious "memory" of transnational practices from earlier situations into the specific local context. Each of the mechanisms expresses a specific type of bodily experience of transnational practices that dispose EU representatives to relate to and act out these routines in different ways.

In situations referred to as Mechanism 1, Union representatives do not embody any lived-through experience of conducting the transnational practice that drives foreign policy actors in the specific situation, and the way they should act is not taken for granted. Instead, the EU's representatives are disposed to experiment and innovate on site through strategic acts that relate to the transnational practice in question and the potentialities of changing EU behavior into meaningful action recognizable as localized practice.[31]

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[29] See Chapter 4.
[30] In contrast to Hopf, who sees actions without conscious reflection as able to produce only incremental changes at the margins (Hopf 2017), I conceive of the unreflected strategic acts in Mechanism 3 as generators of minor, stepwise transformation as well as fundamental change of practice.
[31] Bourdieu 1990: 53.

In contrast, when experiences of carrying out transnational practices locally are inscribed in the body of EU representatives – in line with Mechanism 2 – their practical sense of the situation disposes them to go on "automatically" with these routines.

Finally, and in accordance with Mechanism 3, in situations where EU representatives embody the transnational practice but sense a need for a change in its local application, they proceed with recurrent strategic acts to increase the probability of having this new type of action socially recognized as transformed localized practice.

All mechanisms build on how EU actions relate to or instantiate transnational practices in specific local situations – therefore I call these actions translocal EU foreign policy actions[32] and see them as examples of translocal foreign policy.

With the help of the concept of translocal EU action, I will examine both the connectedness and situatedness of the transnational practices that fuel EU foreign policy actions. I will show how the EU representatives through their physical presence on site and translocal actions "ground" their embodied deterritorialized transnational practices in the local setting.[33] The specific localized practice of representatives of transnational communities and the EU is the product of their earlier conduct of localized practices at other sites around the globe and constitutes the transnational connection between sites.[34]

The presented perspective specifies the local conditions for EU translocal action in terms of locales of interaction, defined in time and space, and by the transnational practice carried out by the majority of the foreign policy collectives engaged in the locale and the Union institutions that provide the means for this action (personnel, material assets).[35]

I conceive of the conditions for EU collective action as a cluster of many specific locales of interaction, or simply locales.[36] The presented perspective explains how the aggregated translocal actions of EU representatives, for example within the many locales that made up the Kosovo "situation" in 1999, constitute the driving forces of the collective actions of EU

[32] The term translocal action was introduced by Resnik et al. (2008).

[33] In their investigation of the experiences of transnational migration networks, Brickell and Datta use the term "grounded transnationalism," which they define as "a space where deterritorialized networks of transnational social relations take shape through migrant agencies" (2011: 3).

[34] Cf. Burawoy, who sees localized experiences "as the product of flows of people, things, ideas, that is, the global connections between sites" (2000: 29).

[35] See footnote 25 for Giddens' definition of locale and Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion of the concept.

[36] Cf. Giddens, who conceives of the social organization of the nation-state as a cluster of many specific routinized locales of national citizens (Giddens 1984: 110–144; Cohen 1987: 295–297).

institutions such as the European Commission and the Council of Ministers.[37]

In short, the theoretical outline introduced in this book is based on the conviction that what human beings do, and are recognized to do well on a regular basis is a strong driving force behind what they will do next – stronger than their interests, identities, or conscious reflections and narratives about why they act.[38] In contrast to the view that interests, identities, and recognition of competence precede EU foreign policy actions and are therefore central to the study of the causes of this action, my perspective is that EU representatives first act and then make sense of their actions and practice in terms of reason, ideas, interests, identities, and norms.[39]

A more precise outline of my theory is presented in the last part of this chapter – and Chapter 2 – in the light of the urgent need for a new theory.

Why Do We Need a New Theory?

There are five reasons why we need a practice theory of translocal EU foreign policy action. First, there is a need for a theory that produces agency–structure analyses that avoid the explanatory limitations of the realist–intergovernmental and normative–structural power schools referred to earlier in this chapter. Second, there is a need to develop the most promising "alternative" to these theories – practice-based approaches – with a framework for analysis of how transnational identities and communities matter in relation to EU foreign policy action. Third, a new theory needs to remedy EU studies' lack of analysis of how Union institutions condition EU action. Fourth, there is a need for frameworks that are able to compare and connect contextualized practices behind EU action in investigations of possible general mechanisms behind this action. Fifth, there is a need to develop existing approaches to translocal relations with a theory of translocal action.

The Underdeveloped Relationship between Agency and Structure

The explanatory weaknesses of both realist–intergovernmental and normative– structural power schools are rooted in the limitations of their

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[37] Cf. Giddens: "Study of the 'everyday' or the 'day-to-day' forms a basic part of the analysis here, many seemingly trivial or mundane features of what people do being the actual 'groundwork' of larger-scale institutions" (Giddens 1989: 298).

[38] Cf. Pouliot who, in his investigation of the security community and we-ness, sees collective identity as the result of practice rather than the other way around (Pouliot 2010: 237).

[39] Cf. Weick's (1995) writings on sense-making in organizations.