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European Union Representation at the United Nations

*Towards More Coherence after the
Treaty of Lisbon*

Xi JIN



This dissertation explores the effects of the Treaty of Lisbon (ToL) on the coherence of the external representation of the European Union (EU) in the field of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) at two main UN bodies, i.e., the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and the Security Council (UNSC). It theorizes EU representation into a principal-agent relationship and assesses the developments of the EU delegation relationship since the adoption of the ToL. In both contexts the EU and its entire membership are considered a collective principal while the actors that play the role of the agent(s) have been different through different historical periods.

A mixed approach is adopted to combine both quantitative and qualitative methods to detect the pre- and post-Lisbon coherence variation in EU representation. At the UNGA, EU representation coherence is measured in terms of EU voting cohesion. At the UNSC, some descriptive statistics are first presented to describe and summarize the voting behaviour of the EU member states sitting on the UNSC, based on which the cases of Iraq and Libya are selected for further investigation. Subsequently, the coherence of the EU's representation during these two conflicts – both horizontal and vertical – is examined and compared by looking at the coordination mechanisms and articulation consistency of the EU and its member states.

The empirical evidence suggests that EU representation coherence, in general, has increased in parallel with the developments of the CFSP over time. The reformed delegation structure introduced by the ToL, however, has not yet contributed to greater EU representation coherence at the UN. Whereas the ToL offers an opportunity to strengthen agent capabilities and control mechanisms, coherent EU representation appears to be unlikely in the near future, if the remaining agency problems are left unaddressed. Especially it depends on the genuine willingness of EU member states to overcome diverging preferences and support common EU positions. Only until their declaratory commitments lead to real cooperation can the Union truly stand united and speak coherently on foreign affairs. Of equal importance is the demand for closer coordination among different EU institutions for the sake of consistent and complementary representation. Time is still needed for EU representatives, namely the President of the European Council, the Commission President and the refashioned High Representative – the External Action Service under her authority as well – to develop into fully-fledged agents with more autonomy and clearer delimitation of representation competences.

