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European Union representation at the United Nations towards more coherence after the Treaty of Lisbon

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Summary

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.

The chapters of this dissertation are organized as follows:

Following an overview of the status of the EU's presence at the UN, Chapter 1 considers the conceptual and methodological issues of this research. It firstly defines EU representation coherence and distinguishes the fundamental concept of coherence from other prominent themes in the studies in respect to the EU's role or performance in external relations. Then it continues to introduce how EU representation coherence is going to be measured within the two contexts of the UN and the corresponding analytical methods that will be adopted. The third section lays out the structure for the rest of chapters in this dissertation.

Chapter 2 reviews the existing bodies of literature with reference to the EU's representation in the international system, notably at the UNGA and the UNSC, and explains how this dissertation contributes to the relevant fields of studies.

Chapter 3 first lays out the fundamental assumptions of the principal-agent theory and argues that this theoretical mode bears promising power in explaining the complexity and variety in the EU's external representation. Within this framework, the situations of EU representation in multilateral organizations are theorized into different types of delegation relationships, in which the EU and its member states are considered collective principals, while the actors that play the role of agents and the delegation structures are conditioned by the division of EU competences and the status of EU in particular international institutions. This section develops the typologies of EU competences and EU status models, and then specifies the agents and delegation structures under different (combinations of) circumstances within selected IOs. The final section of Chapter 3 places the principal-agent theory in a broader theoretical framework of new institutionalism. It compares the principal-agent theory with historical and sociological institutionalisms, and indicates that an extended and adapted model of the principal-agent theory that absorbs the strengths of the other two approaches of new institutionalism will serve as the theoretical foundation for this dissertation.

Chapter 4 is divided into two sections, which respectively draw a panorama for the evolution of EU representation at the UNGA and the UNSC from an adapted principal-agent point of view. Following a brief introduction of the institutional structures the UNGA, the first section takes a look back at the "problematic" delegation relationship of the EU's external representation at this forum in the pre-Lisbon era. Then it describes the reformed representation structure of the Union established by the ToL and points out the remaining agency problems. Based on the post-Lisbon developments in EU representation, and drawing on the insights of the extended principal-agent theory outlined in Chapter 3, six hypotheses regarding the coherence of EU representation – measured by the voting cohesion of EU member states at the UNGA – are proposed to be tested using a quantitative method in Chapter 5. The second section briefly describes the *sui generis* institutional structure of the UNSC and examines the horizontal coherence of EU representation within this context in the pre- and post-Lisbon eras. It also examines the vertical representation coherence by looking at the implications of the ToL on the Union's coordination and concertation mechanisms on UN matters. It is proposed that the innovations of the ToL – although limited – would contribute to an increase in the Union's representation coherence at the UNSC. The final section touches upon the inevitable question about the reform of the UNSC and explores the EU dimension in the ongoing debate.

Chapter 5 tests the hypotheses formulated in Chapter 4 on EU representation coherence at the UNGA, with systematic statistical analyses of the voting behaviour of EU member states. This chapter also presents the descriptive statistics of voting in the UNSC, which not only demonstrate the unique decision-making methods within this body but also identify both general and unusual patterns of EU voting behaviour.

Guided by the descriptive statistics in the previous chapter, Chapter 6 assesses EU representation coherence in two case studies, i.e., the 2002-2003 Iraq war and the 2011 Libya crisis, which are divided by the entry into force of the ToL. In each case, EU representation coherence is examined at both horizontal and vertical levels. In order to uncover the variation in coherence after the implementation of the ToL, a follow-up cross-case comparison is conducted.

The conclusionary chapter, Chapter 7, is split into three sections: the first section summarizes and revisits the central empirical findings of this dissertation; the second section makes some recommendations concerning EU representation coherence based on the lessons that are learned; the final section points out the main contributions and remaining limitations of the present study, and prospects the directions for future research.