

Public Opinion and ESDP: Does Strategic Culture Matter?

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Introduction

Focused on ESDP, this paper is part of a larger attempt at understanding the role of public opinion in shaping defense policy. Here we seek to identify the determinants of public support for ESDP. In contrast to public opinion vis-à-vis the EU in general, the literature on attitudes towards ESDP suggests that the explanatory power of socio-demographic and economic variables is weak, and focuses instead on national identity as the main determinant of one's support (Schoen 2008, Foucault and Irondelle 2009). In this paper, we explore the possible impact of strategic culture. We argue that preferences vis-à-vis ESDP are formed in part through pre-existing social representations of security. Rather than limiting ourselves to "national" strategic cultures, we propose four strategic (sub-) cultures, four ideational systems that contribute to explaining support for ESDP.

Support for the European security and defense policy is very high. In 2007, more than three-quarters of Europeans (77 %) responded positively to the question: "For each proposition, please tell me if you are for or against: a common security and defense policy for the member States of the European Union", while 8 % did not give their opinion. This strong support, however, conceals the fact that the definition of ESDP remains very much in flux. For some, ESDP is associated to European unification and identity. For others, ESDP is primarily a civilian crisis management tool for

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peacekeeping purposes. For others still, ESDP is a means to balance US power with military capabilities. According to some scholars, the high degree of support displayed by public opinion in Eurobarometer surveys does not imply genuine agreement with the ESDP, but a sort of permissive consensus (Wagner 2005, Tournier 2004).

1. Public opinion theories on European defense policy

Different theories are advanced to explain the dynamics of support for the EU and its policies in general. But research has rarely addressed citizens' attitudes toward European defense policy *per se*. The literature shows that public attitudes towards ESDP are influenced by evaluations concerning common goods such as national security (Carrubba and Singh 2004). Except the work of Gabel and Anderson (2002), however, the preferences of European people with regards to defense are rarely studied in connection within the European integration framework at large.

More recent studies suggest that social-economic and political variables (gender, education, ideology) play a minor role in directly shaping attitudes towards ESDP. Foucault and Irondelle (2009) have thus analyzed the role of threats in explaining support for ESDP. They confirm the hypothesis that the stronger the fear of threats, the higher the support for ESDP is. But they add that some threats, the so-called "new transnational threats" (pandemics, terrorism) are more influential in shaping support for ESDP than traditional military threats (conventional war). Ray and Johnston (2007) also concluded that only the fear of terrorism (other fears tested are the fear of WW 3 and the fear of WMD) has a significant effect in making citizens more inclined to endorse multilateral defense policy.

In the most exhaustive analysis so far, Schoen (2008) addresses the sources of Europeans' attitudes toward a common foreign and security policy by testing three models of support. The utilitarian model predicts that support for ESDP will increase with threats to national security and decrease with the existence of military capabilities at the national level. The performance model builds on the assumptions that citizens consider the performance of EU institutions and rely on these evaluations when forming

attitudes towards EU policies. Finally, the identity model deals with territorial identities as factors influencing attitudes towards ESDP. His main findings suggest that utilitarian evaluations play a role in shaping attitudes toward CFSP since national military power decreases support whereas external threats make EU citizens more prone to integration in the defense domain. But the most important predictor of support for ESDP remains national identity.

As Schoen (2008: 5) concedes: “though prior research has produced interesting results, we still do not know much about the sources of public opinion on common European policies in foreign affairs and defense.” Few of the variables that have been shown to explain support for the EU in general (Gabel 1998) seem to work in the case of ESDP. The only exception is national identity, because we observe large variations in support for ESDP between traditional Euroskeptic countries such as the UK and Europhiles like Belgium. Interestingly, despite the growing popularity of constructivist approaches to ESDP, cultural and ideational variables have not been systematically tested on large opinion data. In this paper, we try to develop a more nuanced analysis that goes beyond “national identity” and focuses on social representations of security among individuals. Our general hypothesis is that extant explanatory models provide a poor fit with the data because the independent variable, “support for ESDP”, means very different things to different people.

We use Eurobarometer 54.1, which remains the most complete dataset on attitudes towards ESDP available. Because the survey was conducted in 2000, it allows us to analyze deeply-seated social representations about security before the institutionalization process of ESDP kicked in, thus avoiding the possible short-term influence of events such as the Iraq war.

2. Four strategic subcultures

2.1 *Social representations and preference formation*

A strong literature suggests that attitudes towards security policy are in large part determined by culture. Beginning with Jack Snyder's work (1977) on Soviet strategic planners and continuing with Alistair Johnson's (2003) study of Chinese foreign policy, research on strategic culture has been applied to ESDP and produced interesting results. Christoph Meyer (2006), for example, observes some degree of normative and ideational convergence since 1989 with regards to the goals for the use of force, the nature of coercive means, the preferred mode of cooperation, and international/domestic authorization requirements. Striking a more skeptical note, Bastian Giegerich (2006) finds that there remain important ideational cleavages between Atlanticists and Europeanists, and between those who favor traditional defence versus those who support force projection. Both Meyer and Giegerich have developed a typology of attitudes towards ESDP that rely on the aforementioned elements. To our knowledge, they have only applied it to elite groups, and not to public opinion in general.

This paper builds on this research in two ways. First, we propose a modified typology of attitudes towards security policy that explicitly excludes any indicator that would itself be linked to ESDP. Too often, the literature on strategic culture suffers from tautology (Desch 1998). To show the explanatory of pre-existing social representations, we clearly separate attitudes towards security in general (independent variables) from preferences on ESDP in particular (dependent variables). Our goal is to examine the extent to which preferences on ESDP are consistent with more generic social representations that were shaped before the coming of ESDP into existence. If the analysis is conclusive, this would suggest that individuals frame their understanding of ESDP and form their preferences on the basis of already existing strategic (sub-)cultures.

Second, we use this typology to develop an explanatory model of support for ESDP among the public. The literature on strategic culture has so far focused on decision-makers, and not on public opinion in general. The literature on public opinion, conversely, has paid little attention to ideational and normative variables (see Schön 2008). Again, our general hypothesis is that, when they say that they support or oppose ESDP, respondents mean very different things. Because ESDP is not fixed or defined

very clearly in political discourse (Howorth 2004), it is likely that individuals attribute different meanings to the project. Put differently, support for ESDP and for the different possible roles of ESDP should vary according to one's adhesion to a given strategic culture. This may go some way towards explaining why extant explanatory models have proven weak predictors of public support for ESDP.

2.2 Nature of the typology

The typology we propose draws from Giegerich's and Meyer's own conceptualization efforts, to which we have added a criterion and a constraint. The criterion is that the ideal-types we construct should be a priori independent from preferences expressed about ESDP. The constraint is the one imposed by the questions contained in Eurobarometer 54.1, which are few and were not phrased to fit our research objectives. Although Howorth prefers, with good reasons, to use the notion of "security culture," we adopt Meyer's (2006: 20) definition of strategic culture as "comprising the socially-transmitted, identity-derived norms, ideas and patterns of behavior that are shared among the most influential actors and social groups within a political community, which help to shape a ranked set of options for a community's pursuit of security and defense goals."

The premise of this typology is that individuals adhere to coherent ideational systems, also known as social representations (Mérand 2006). We expect that one's adhesion to a strategic sub-culture "model" will explain: 1) one's support for ESDP; 2) one's prescription of the role of ESDP. These are two distinct research objectives. The first objective is to test, given the relative weakness of socio-demographic and economic models, whether social representations display explanatory power in understanding public support for ESDP. The second objective is to show that among people who support ESDP, we find very different understandings of what ESDP is and should be.

To construct our typology, we define two axes. The first axis relates to representations of the concept of security. A growing literature in International Relations theory has argued over the past 20 years that the concept of security should be enlarged to include environmental, economic, and societal considerations (Buzan et al. 1991). We postulate

that this theoretical enlargement of the notion of security can also be found among ordinary citizens, who may adhere to a more or less traditional conception of “hard” (military) security or, conversely, to an expanded conception of security that includes “soft” elements. The Eurobarometer question we use to measure this dichotomy is whether an individual believes that an army’s primary role is to prepare for wars and fighting. We associate a positive response to “hard” security views.

The second axis relates to representations of power projection, or the importance given to international security challenges. Both Meyer and Giegerich give a great deal of importance to power projection as a defining cleavage in European security debates. This axis opposes “outward-looking” individuals who believe that Europe should project itself into the world from “inward-looking” individuals who believe Europeans should not concern themselves with power projection. Although we are not entirely satisfied with it, we use a question that asks respondents whether they believe that asserting the political and diplomatic importance of Europe in the world should be a priority (presumably as opposed to domestic concerns).

From the combination of these two axes we produce four ideal-types, or “models” of strategic culture. These models are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. The first model we call “Peace”: we hypothesize that it includes individuals who believe that hard security and global influence must both be transcended. This pacifist set of social representations is akin to Meyer’s “Helvetian model.” The second model includes individuals who also adhere to a soft conception of security but believe that Europe may have a role to play in the world. Following Meyer again, we call it “Humanitarian.” The third model, called “Defence,” includes individuals who adopt a traditional definition of security and believe that Europeans should prioritize their continent; presumably, they have a more territorial conception of security. Finally, the “Global Power” model includes individuals who believe that Europe should assert its political and diplomatic importance in world characterized by traditional, hard security challenges.

We are conscious that the questions we selected to build our typology are far from perfect. But our most important concern was to make sure that the typology measures something other than support for ESDP, with a view to testing which ideational and normative elements may predict support for ESDP. A priori, none of these models are conceptually linked to ESDP. For example, someone in the Defence model may trust the nation state or NATO or the EU to defend his/her territory from conventional threats. Similarly, someone who believes in the Humanitarian culture may support ESDP as a civilian crisis management capability or oppose ESDP if he/she thinks ESDP will bring about a militarization of Europe's security policy.

Table 1a: Typology

	Soft security	Hard security
Inward looking	Peace	Defence
Outward looking/projection	Humanitarian Power	Global Power

As Table 1b shows, the distribution of these four models among the 12,877 respondents is heterogeneous. The biggest group is the Global Power type at 44%. Defence comes second, at 31%. Because only 24% of respondents reject hard security as the primary task of armed forces, the two other groups, Humanitarian and Peace, are somewhat smaller (slightly over 10%). Attitudes towards the power projection of Europe, on the other hand, are more balanced, with 50% prioritizing political and diplomatic importance of Europe against 50% who do not.

< Insert table 1b around here >

3. Support for ESDP: a preliminary analysis

Data used in this analysis comes from the Eurobarometer survey 54.1 (defense special), which was conducted in November and December 2000. The methodology rests on multistage national probability samples and respondents were interviewed through a face-

to-face technique. After having presented the interesting potential of this Eurobarometer survey 54.1 for analyzing the relationships between public opinion and ESDP, we will advance step by step. The first step consists in testing the four types of strategic sub-cultures as determinants of ESDP support. The second step is to discuss the results and the insufficiencies of such an approach. The third step develops the first step further by refining the testable hypotheses on the dependent variables.

3.1. *The Eurobarometer survey 54.1*⁴

The knowledge of factors that explain the support or lack thereof by Europeans for the defense and security policy remains, at the very least, embryonic for the moment. Kernic et al. (2002) is one of the very few analyses of Eurobarometer 54.1. Despite the size of the work produced, the statistical exploitation by the authors is limited to a descriptive analysis of aggregated data. In other words, the authors primarily stressed the analysis of descriptive results drawn from the survey without arriving at the identification of heavy trends and thus understanding how European public opinion is structured. From a methodological point of view, this approach is disappointing since the authors had at their disposal new material (the 8 defense items from the survey Eurobarometer 54.1) liable to finely assess the explanatory factors of the emergence of a demand for a European security and defense policy. Moreover, the descriptive analysis contributes very few new elements with respect to the usual Eurobarometer surveys and the reports that accompany their publication in which public opinion is questioned on its support or not for the ESDP.

From this Eurobarometer survey, for which we had access to the individual responses for each of the 15 countries questioned (approximately 16,000 observations)⁵, we carried out a first examination of those variables liable to determine support for the European defense policy.

3.2. *Puzzling support for ESDP*

⁴ Cf. annex to the report to the Eurobarometer 54.1 survey that can be consulted on the site : http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_146_fr.pdf

⁵ The individual data was obtained through the *Interuniversity Consortium for Political and Social Research* (ICPSR), of the University of Michigan.

The classic analysis for analyzing the determinants of support for ESDP begins by measuring the factors that influence the ‘YES’ response to the following question: “The European Union member states should have a common defence and security policy.” As mentioned earlier, such analysis often provides disappointing results since no strong set of explanatory variables stands out.

A different approach could argue that supporting ESDP implies that Europeans perceive ESDP differently according to the strategic sub-culture they adhere to. In such a perspective, we propose to test the impact of the 4 models derived from the above typology on support for ESDP as a whole. The dependent variable is tested from a logistic regression (section 4 presents a more detailed part of such a method).

< Insert Table 2 around here >

Table 2 provides some interesting results and does not necessarily confirm a hierarchical logic for supporting ESDP. Each of the four models must be read according to the (missing) reference independent variable. For instance, in the case of the model 1, adhering to the Humanitarian culture reduces the odds of support for a common security and defense policy compared with Peace and Global Power. Conversely, being in the Global Power group increases the odds of support for ESDP compared to the Defense, Peace and Humanitarian types.

It could be expected that people belonging to the Peace group do not support ESDP since they reject hard security and diplomatic assertiveness. Model 2 does not support this expectation because the coefficients associated to the Defense type and the Humanitarian type display a negative sign. This means that these two cultures are less likely to support ESDP compared to the Peace group.

In sum, only two models (model 3 and 4) confirm the polarization of ESDP models as a well-suited explanatory model, even in a reduced form. Model 3 indicates that three types of strategic culture reduce support for ESDP compared with Global Power. This result is

not surprising because Global Power corresponds well to the EU's ambition for strong diplomatic and military capabilities. Model 4 indicates the opposite, i.e. Defense, Global Power and Peace are three conceptions that favor support for ESDP compared with the Humanitarian type. We do not have sufficient controls to conclude that the Humanitarian type is the least supportive of ESDP. The Peace type, finally, seems to be more supportive than the Defence group.

In sum, the two strategic subcultures that feel more at ease with ESDP are the Global Power group, which emphasizes hard security and power projection, and the Peace group, which emphasizes exactly the opposite (soft security and territory). This is interesting because the Defence and Peace groups do not prioritize asserting the political and diplomatic importance of Europe in the world, while the Humanitarian group does. This suggests that support for ESDP is not only related to support for a European foreign policy or for armed forces in general, even though the Global Power group is clearly the most supportive of ESDP.

Despite the quality of the estimation, these results offer an interesting puzzle because we do not know exactly what European public opinion means by ESDP. Indeed, we can hypothesize that Global Power individuals and Europe of Defence individuals do not buy into the same conception of ESDP at all. That is why we have to improve this support pattern by defining different roles for ESDP in order to understand better what people mean by ESDP.

4. Support for ESDP: a functional approach

The preceding section has briefly demonstrated to what extent the dependent variable such as defined by the Eurobarometer survey leads to puzzling results. We propose to tackle this methodological issue by testing four different dependent variables, which correspond to four functional roles for the European security and defense policy.

4.1. *Dependent variables*

Four dependent variables are used in our estimation strategy. Each variable is a dichotomous variable and implies a binary response choice. Each corresponds to a distinctive set of Petersberg tasks that were put forward for ESDP.

The first variable, called *Defending Europe*, corresponds to one of the main roles suggested for a common security and defense policy. By considering such a role, respondents say that ESDP should defend the territory of the European Union including their own country. It corresponds vaguely to the European Defense Community model, or more precisely to the collective defense clause in the failed Constitutional Treaty, in which the EU builds its own defense capability against territorial threats.

The second dependent variable, called *Intervening in Conflict*, corresponds to the number of people who believe that a common security and defense policy has to help the EU intervene in conflicts around the world (EU excluded). This corresponds well to the Petersberg “tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking.”

The third dependent variable, called *Guaranteeing Peace*, is linked to the experience of the Balkans, in which the EU was asked to keep the peace in its own backyard, to separate belligerents, transcend nationalism, and help reconstruction on the European continent. It corresponds to the Petersberg task of “peacekeeping.” This variable is also suggestive, we think, of the EU’s role in the peace of the continent.

The fourth and last dependent variable, called *Carrying out humanitarian missions*, corresponds to the civilian conception of ESDP, or the Petersberg task of “humanitarian and rescue missions.”

The distribution of the four dependent variables is summarized in Table 2, which shows that defending Europe and guaranteeing peace in the EU are the most frequently cited tasks for a European Army/ESDP.

< Insert Table 3 around here >

4.2. Independent variables

The literature on determinants of ESDP support usually mentions two main sets of explanatory variables: (1) military and defense issues and (2) socio-demographic-political controls. We propose to change this perspective by refining the definition of the ESDP role and matching the four strategic sub-cultures of ESDP and role prescriptions for a common security and defense policy.

4.3. Testable hypotheses

Our hypotheses are based on the conceptual affinities between the orientation of strategic sub-cultures (defined in section 2.2) and the content of the Petersberg tasks. Following Meyer (2006), we expect that individuals who believe in hard security and power projection will be more supportive of an ESDP that can be used to intervene in conflicts around the world; that is why we termed this culture “Global Power” above. Similarly, we expect that individuals who believe in soft security and power projection will emphasize humanitarian operations; that is why we called this group “Humanitarian.” Etc.

H1: Individuals belonging to the Defense group will display a higher level of support for “*Defending Europe*” than other subcultures.

H2: Individuals belonging to the Global Power group will display a higher level of support for “*Intervening in conflicts*” than other subcultures.

H3: Individuals belonging to the Peace group will display a higher level of support for “*Guaranteeing Peace*” than other subcultures.

H4: Individuals belonging to the Humanitarian group will display a higher level of support for “*Carrying out humanitarian operations*” than other subcultures.

5. Results

5.1. *Logit estimation*

Before we go further in the statistical analysis, it seems useful to briefly define the method used and to specify its contribution. It hinges on the estimate of a functional relationship of a dichotomous nature. In effect, we seek to explain why public opinion mentioned a given European army role within the ESDP framework. We test four different dependent variables for which European public opinion mentioned (1 for YES response) or not (0 for NO response) a normative role for a European army. From this dichotomous choice (YES or NO) we test the four dependent variables. Essentially, this means determining the influence of a number of independent variables (X_i , Z_i) on the probability that public opinion responds « YES » (dependent variable Y_i). We thus explain the probability of positive responses to this question that only called for a discrete response (for/against). A logit estimation is performed under the following specification: $\Pr(Y_i=1) = \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 Z_i + \dots + \epsilon_i$ (for each respondent i)

To avoid multicollinearity, it is necessary to check that the explanatory variables are independent. Consequently, we sought first to identify the group of variables that we have considered as independent and explicative of ESDP support. The presence of multinomial variables leads us to conduct multinomial logistical estimations in order to take into account multiple choice answers.

< Insert Tables 4a and 4b around here >

Table 4 largely confirms our hypotheses. Model 2 (on intervening in conflicts) has the most explanatory power. It shows that the Global Power group is the most supportive of the EU intervening in conflicts around the globe. The difference with the three other groups is substantial and significant. By comparing these results with Table 2 (model 3), we observe that the structure of attitudes towards “intervening in conflicts” overlaps with the structure of attitudes towards ESDP in general, with Global Power being the most supportive, followed by Peace, Defence, and Humanitarian.

Model 1 is also instructive. On “defending Europe,” the Global Power remains supportive but is closely followed by Defence. Although this does not quite confirm our hypothesis,

the estimates of the two other groups are strongly negative and significant. Although the estimates are less significant, Model 3 confirms our hypothesis that the Peace group is the most supportive of the task of guaranteeing peace. While Model 4 does not fit our hypothesis, it nonetheless suggests that the Defense group is the least supportive of carrying out humanitarian missions, which dovetails nicely with our description of the strategic sub-culture.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that strategic culture can help explain support for ESDP in two ways. First, it explains some variation in support for ESDP. Our analysis has shown that social representations about security that are not a priori linked to ESDP help explain support for ESDP. In that regard, the next step in our analysis will be to integrate socio-demographic controls and national identity in a general equation of support for ESDP. Second, the paper provides a way to conceptualize the different meanings that people ascribe to ESDP. Here, it will be necessary to contextualize the typology we have proposed, especially by differentiating national contexts. But it is interesting to note that, although respondents do not necessarily have a clear understanding of what ESDP is, their preferences are not random since they match certain pre-existing social representations of security. Our attempt at refining the definition of ESDP through its various putative roles results in a better specification of the logic of support for ESDP.

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Table 1b: Distribution of strategic sub-cultures

EU diplomacy	Army - preparing war		
	No	Yes	
No	1,601 (12.43%)	4,036 (31.34%)	5,637 (43.78%)
Yes	1,534 (11.91%)	5,706 (44.31%)	7240 (56.22%)
	3,135 (24.35%)	9,745 (75.65%)	12,877 (100.00%)

Table 2: Logit estimation of support for ESDP

Dep. Variable	ESDP support	ESDP support	ESDP support	ESDP support
	(model 1)	(model 2)	(model 3)	(model 4)
Defense	-	-.696*** (.079)	-.985*** (.055)	.195*** (.066)
Peace	.696*** (.079)	-	-.289*** (.081)	.891*** (.089)
Global Power	.985*** (.055)	.289*** (.081)	-	1.18*** (.069)
Humanitarian	-.195*** (.066)	-.891*** (.089)	-1.18*** (.069)	-
Cst	.943*** (.036)	1.63*** (.071)	1.928*** (.041)	.747*** (.055)
N	11986	11986	11986	11986

*** p <0.001; ** p<0.05 ; p<0.1

Table3: Summary of ESDP role

Dependent variable	Freq.	St. Dev.	N
Defending Europe	0.691	0.46	16,607
Intervening in conflict	0.178	0.38	16,607
Guaranteeing peace in the EU	0.630	0.48	16,607
Carrying out humanitarian missions	0.455	0.49	16,607

Source: Eurobarometer 54.1

Table 4a: Estimation results

Dep. Variable	Defending Europe (1)			Intervening in conflict(2)		
	Coef.	St. Dev.	Odds Ratio	Coef.	St. Dev.	Odds Ratio
Defense	-	-	-	-.285***	.052	0.75
Peace	-.164***	.065	0.84	-.262***	.074	0.77
Global Power	.017***	.046	1.18	-	-	-
Humanitarian	-.293***	.063	0.74	-.694***	.082	0.49
Const.	0.96***	.035		-1.28***	.032	
Log likelihood	-7527.2			-6151.1		
N	12877			12877		

*** p <0.001; ** p<0.05 ; p<0.1

Table 4b: Estimation results (continued)

Dep. Variable	Guaranteeing peace (3)			Carrying out humanitarian missions (4)		
	Coef.	St. Dev.	Odds Ratio	Coef.	St. Dev.	Odds Ratio
Defense	-.144*	.063	0.97	-.163**	.059	0.84
Peace				.010	.071	1.10
Global Power	.018	.061	1.29	-.058	.056	0.94
Humanitarian	-.184*	.075	0.65			
Const.	.744**	.054		-.001	.049	
Log likelihood	-8205.6			-8907.5		
N	11986			12877		

*** p <0.001; ** p<0.05 ; p<0.1