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## **Changes to European Security in a Communicative Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Based on a communicative perspective this article works out the theoretical possibility of a twofold change in European security (in the referent object of security; and in the understanding and practice of the best means to achieve security). The approach suggested should be considered *supplementary* to rational choice perspectives, and at the same time as a contribution to a strengthening of the “widening” literature on security. It is argued that the concepts of communicative rationality and deliberation can contribute to this in particular in two ways: First, by contributing to establish alternative and more precise micro-foundations to those provided in the rational choice perspective. Second, by providing a critical standard that enables us to avoid the normative ambiguity in security studies.

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## **Introduction**

It is increasingly argued that there is something particular to European security policy. However, the seeming agreement about its novelty might mask different understandings both about exactly what this means, about what has changed in European security, as well as mask implicit normative claims about the advantages of such changes. What, if anything, is new in European security and, most importantly for this article, how can we theoretically account for these (potential) changes?

There is a general consensus that traditional state-centric approaches to the study of security and defence are inadequate if we want to understand the changes to European security. Alternative understandings of security in international relations have gained ground and argue that security is linked to something else than, or something in addition to, military force. Building on this idea that the security concept should be 'enlarged', concepts such as 'comprehensive security', 'human security', 'desecuritization', 'soft power' and 'soft security' flourish in the study of both European and international security. However, are these concepts satisfactory in order to capture and understand central features of the changes to European security? And do they always entail the same understanding of what has actually changed?

In order to contribute to this debate this article works out the theoretical possibility of a twofold change in European security. Based on a communicative perspective I argue: firstly, that we may observe a change in the referent object of security, away from an exclusive focus on state sovereignty and towards a focus on the rights of the individual citizen. Secondly, that there may be a change in the understanding and practice of the best means to achieve security. Here, the change is away from military balances of power and towards collective institutions and legally binding agreements applicable to all states in an equal manner. These trends are not particular to Europe, neither are they entirely new to the post-Cold War era. However, the assumption is that they have a stronger foothold in Europe and that the emphasis on these trends is also stronger in the post-Cold War period than what they were during the Cold War (Jackson 2000: 215).

The viability of this hypothesis is not merely empirical. It may well be that the specific dimensions that are highlighted in the end turn out not to be the most important in empirical terms. However, the theoretical possibility that they are significant must at least be worked out in order for us to investigate this. This is the main thrust of this paper. To do so is particularly important at a time when numerous arguments point to a novelty to European security policy. We need then to be clear about what this novelty is and to have the necessary theoretical foundations for examining such claims.

There are two ways in particular in which the additional approach suggested here should be helpful in this endeavour: First, by contributing to establish alternative and more precise micro-foundations to those provided in the rational choice perspective. Such micro foundations seem to be lacking in much of the ‘widening’ literature on security. A growing body of literature argues that state-centric rationalist approaches do not tell the whole story of European security and that ‘norms’ and ‘ideational forces’ embodied in concepts such as human security, soft security or comprehensive security are important for understanding the European security context (Farrell, 2002; Adler and Barnett, 1998; Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998; Gärtner and Hyde Price, 2000). However, this literature rarely specifies the underlying mechanisms that might help us understand why and how norms or “ideational forces” actually are important. They do not necessarily help us understand how a potential change from a focus on the interests of states towards the rights of the individual has come about. Furthermore, they do not pay much attention to the fact that there are different types of norms. Hence, several of these studies focus on the importance of collective identity and by implication downplay a potential increase in the emphasis on “rights” that are of a more universal character.

Second, this approach should be helpful by providing a critical standard that enables us to avoid the normative ambiguity in security studies. As Steve Smith has argued, traditional realist approaches to security studies are highly problematic from a normative perspective. This is because an exclusive focus on military security contributes to a legitimization of such policies even if this is not the intention (Smith, 2000:73). The problem, however, is that the ‘new’ approaches to security do not necessarily fare much better. In particular, the empirical and normative dimensions to

several of the new conceptions are not disentangled. Although to some, the enlarged security concept is useful simply because it does a better job in capturing the empirical reality, to others it also implies that an enlarged security concept is better from a normative standpoint. However the critical standard that allows analysts to make such claims is rarely clarified – we are somehow expected to trust that the analyst actually knows what is right. An explicit critical standard is important in order to assess the validity of such normative claims. Concepts like ‘soft power’, ‘human security’ or ‘comprehensive security’ are no doubt seductive – but how do we know if they unequivocally entail the right security policy from a normative perspective? The purpose is not to provide a substantive concept of security policy, but rather a conceptual frame that enables us to theoretically account for changes to security policy without at the outset determining its normative content.

The first part of the article discusses ways in which the concept of communicative action might complement and strengthen more recent approaches that emphasize the enlarged security concept. Particular attention is paid here to the so-called Copenhagen school because it represents one of the most comprehensive and systematic attempts at providing an alternative analytical framework to state-centric realism. The second part of the article highlights some features of security relations in Europe and in Europe’s relations with third states that indicate a need for such a theoretical endeavour. It is not the aim of this article to ‘test’ the utility of the concept of communicative action to European security in any systematic way. Rather, the aim of this part of the article is to point to some trends that might substantiate the hypothesis outlined above and that are difficult to understand without these theoretical tools. The approach suggested here should be considered supplementary to the rational choice perspective, and at the same time as a contribution to a strengthening of the existing “widening” literature on security that is most often claimed to be closer to a “constructivist” perspective on international relations.

### **Analysing Security**

According to Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde’s (1998) new framework for security studies, two views of security are available in the literature, the ‘old’ military and

state-centred view and the 'new' view that questions the primacy of the military and the state in conceptualizations of security. A central point for them, in line with the 'new' view is to indicate how we should conceptualize threats and vulnerabilities as they arise in numerous areas, both military and non-military. They suggest that security must be studied as a discourse in which certain issues are 'securitized' (in other words, become security issues) or 'desecuritized'. They define security as "...the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization. In theory, any public issue can be located on the spectrum ranging from nonpoliticized (...) through politicized (...) to securitized (meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the bounds of political procedure)" (Buzan et al., 1998: 23-24).

They suggest a multisectoral approach to the study of security. Five sectors are identified: the military sector, the environmental sector, the economic sector, the societal sector and the political sector. Each of these may be 'securitized' yet they are likely to display distinctive patterns of interaction in this process. In each sector, the referent object of security is also different. Whereas in the military and political sectors, existential threats are usually defined in terms of the state, or its constituting principle (sovereignty), in the societal sector for example, the referent object is identity, or 'more specifically, it is about the sustainability, within acceptable conditions for evolution, of traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom' (Wæver et al. 1993: 23). In this case clearly, it is no longer only the security of states that is in focus but the security of *particular* societies with *particular* life forms. Societal insecurity is thus considered to exist when 'communities of whatever kind define a development or potentiality as a threat to their survival as a community' (Buzan et al., 1998: 119).

In terms of re-conceptualizing security this approach is useful. This is so in particular because it not only sets out to 'widen' the security agenda but also highlights that the distinction between what is inside the (domestic) state territory and what is outside it (in the international sphere) is not always vitally important if we want to understand security policy. The study of security is relieved of the ties that by definition bind it to

the state as a referent object of security as well as to state sovereignty as the value to be protected. It is possible with this framework to show that the referent object is re-articulated to focus on other actors and other values. The relevance of such an approach is underlined in particular with respect to European security in the post-Cold War period and has led to several interesting studies of security and the relationship between security and identity in the European integration process (Wæver, 1996; 1998). As Buzan and Wæver (1997: 249) argue, European security ‘...is difficult to grasp if seen simply as a constellation of nation states. Much more of the dynamics can be brought out by a constellation made up of at least three kinds of (non-like) units: states, nations and the EU. Here, societal identity can become a referent object for security action.’

This concept of ‘societal security’ has provoked debate (McSweeney 1996 and 1998; Buzan and Wæver 1997). More important here, however: the potential existence of and respect for rules and norms that define the purpose and legitimacy of security policy, is left unexplored and unexplained in the overall framework proposed by the Copenhagen school (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, 1998). The concepts of securitization and desecuritization and the emphasis on studying security as a discourse allow us to escape state-centric realism, but this framework is at the same time unable to account for a possible change in normative standards for conflict resolution and the strengthening of legally binding agreements. In other words the possibility that security policy is, or can be, transformed into an instrument to uphold a global legal order that strengthens the rights of the individual, rather than being an instrument with which the interest of the most powerful is protected, is not investigated. In order to bring such a possibility into the analysis we need a theory that can capture the existence and binding character of rules, norms and principles. We need a theory that can identify the mechanisms that lead to an accumulation of norms as well as help us understand why these norms are accepted and upheld. Hence, we need a theory that allows us to capture actors’ potential normative competence. In the ‘Copenhagen approach’ there seems to be few alternatives between actors that are instrumentally rational or that are emotional in the sense that they react instinctively on the basis of a particular identity. Hence, security policy will either be governed by the most powerful, or it will be taken into the hands of particular groups in response to perceived threats to their survival.

Part of the reason might be that although the Copenhagen school challenges much of the conventional wisdom in ‘security studies’, it does at the same time maintain core realist assumptions and starts from a ‘conflict’ model of politics (Wæver, 2000). Although they emphasize the importance of the so-called ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy and social theory and explicitly start from the insight that intersubjective meaning is constituted by language, their description of the role of language seems too restricted. Discourses seem (implicitly) to be considered only as instruments of power: A particular representation of reality is produced through discourse, which allows for securitization. The ‘linguistic turn’ needs to be taken a step further. We need a theory that shows that there is an alternative to the conception of discourse as power. Even though the social world is intrinsically linked to language (Kratochwil, 1989: 6) and language therefore provides us with a point of departure for inquiry into security policy, the power of arguments can be understood quite differently from the way it is understood by the Copenhagen school. In fact, arguments can be challenged; hence they are highly unreliable as instruments of power in democratic societies. If we accept this point, we must consider that attempts at securitizing an issue will not succeed, in the sense that they will not be considered legitimate, unless the arguments in favour of such initiatives can be backed by convincing arguments as well as following the proper legal procedures. Although agents can be manipulated through the strategic use of arguments, this is not the only possible scenario in democratic societies. There are mechanisms that permit ‘illegitimate’ attempts at securitization to be exposed.

A second weakness with this approach is the ambiguity about whether or not it also makes a normative claim. Some examples seem to indicate that the authors rely on some implicit ideas of what security policy ought to be about, thus suggesting a normative claim. The Copenhagen school argues for example, with reference to the treatment of Kurds in Turkey, that: ‘If one wants to take this minority seriously and say societal security is about *their* security one has to open up to a more complex landscape of multiple referent points for security” (Buzan and Wæver, 1997: 248). In a different context, Wæver poses the question: ‘Should developments be securitised (and if so, in what terms)? Often our reply will be to aim for de-securitisation and then politics meet meta-politics; but occasionally the underlying pessimism regarding the prospects for orderliness and compatibility among human aspirations will point to

scenarios sufficiently worrisome that responsibility will entail securitisation in order to block the worst.” (Wæver, 2000: 285, for a similar argument for desecuritization, see Neumann and Ulriksen, 1995). However, in order to make such claims about the need to securitise or desecuritise it would be useful to have categories for distinguishing ‘real’ threats and risks that legitimately call for action, from those that are simply ‘constructed’ for other purposes. The above citations would suggest that some processes of ‘securitization’ are more legitimate than others. However, the normative standards used for such considerations are not made explicit. On what basis, with reference to what kind of norm do we decide when securitisation is a good thing, and with regard to what kind of referent object is securitisation acceptable?

### **Communicative rationality**

In order to imagine the possibility that the core rationale of security policy can change from a focus on national security interests and balances of power to a focus on the need for legally binding agreements, equally applicable to all, a conception of actors as communicatively competent is helpful. It provides a conception of political processes as aimed at something else than, or more than, merely manipulating actors at the will of the most powerful. This conception of actors as communicatively rational suggests that actors are considered rational when they are able to justify and explain their actions in relation to intersubjectively valid norms, that is norms that cannot be reasonably rejected in a rational debate, and not only when they seek to maximise their own interests (Eriksen and Weigård 1999).<sup>2</sup> The concept of actors as communicatively rational builds on Jürgen Habermas’ theory of “speech acts” and communicative action. Habermas considers that our communication through linguistic expressions – “speech acts” – “play a central role in regulating and reproducing forms of social life and the identities of actors.” (Cronin and de Greiff 1998: X) So, there is an explicit emphasis on language in this perspective that we find also in the Copenhagen school. However, the definition of actors as communicatively rational suggests that they are also capable of providing reasons for particular choices and that others are in turn capable of assessing the validity of those reasons. The emphasis in this perspective is in other words on the theoretical possibility of an open exchange of ideas where it is the power of the *better* argument, as opposed to the

Copenhagen school's emphasis on the power of the argument, that ultimately will convince actors. This opens up for the *theoretical* possibility of an agreement between actors that is based on an understanding supported by mutually acceptable or identical reasons, rather than individual utility calculations or simply force or manipulation. It becomes possible to theoretically conceive of a change in the standard for conflict resolution, for example away from an exclusive focus on the interest of states towards a focus on the rights of the individual. Hence, it becomes possible to provide an alternative theoretical account of the fact that not all attempts at securitisation succeed - as well as an alternative theoretical account of processes where such attempts do succeed - from that provided not only by a rational choice perspective but also and most importantly for the argument here, the perspective of the Copenhagen school.

The perspective might be considered similar to rational choice analysis in the sense that they are both action theoretical approaches. Social phenomena are considered to be products of interaction between individuals. However, rather than focusing on monological actors with fixed preferences the theory of communicative action focuses on dialogical actors "...who co-ordinate their plans through argumentation, aimed at reaching mutual agreement." (Eriksen and Weigård 1997: 221). The process of argumentation is considered to be the crucial mechanism of social coordination. In addition to the concept of actors as strategic and oriented towards realising self-interest, we have then a conception of actors as understanding oriented and seeking to reach agreement with other actors through argumentation. Here it is posited that "...the process of reason-giving generates a capacity for change of viewpoints." (Eriksen and Fossum 2000: 257).

### ***The validity of norms***

The reasons actors present could be material gain, but they could also be formulated with reference to an actor's sense of identity or understanding of the common good. This might be similar to the form of justification that one would see if one rely on the concept of "societal security". From this perspective communicative processes are considered context-bound; they are only possible in collectivities that have a "thick" sense of identity. The relevant form of justification according to such a logic would be

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<sup>2</sup> See also Habermas' discourse principle, discussed in Eriksen and Weigård (2003: 147) and based on

to refer to what the appropriate conduct is, given a particular cultural identity. Security policy would be justified with reference to the need to defend and protect a particular life-form from potential threats and intrusions. One would expect attempts to legitimise processes of securitisation to rely on clear ideas of “us” and “them”, and there would be an expectation of a reflex of solidarity and unity of purpose with fellow members of the community, in particular on matters of security. However, actors could also explain their actions with reference to principles that, all things considered, can be recognised as 'just' by all parties, irrespective of their particular interests or cultural identity. This might be a particularly relevant category in the European context given the variety of national identities involved and where it might be difficult to draw on an automatic or instinctive sense of solidarity with a collective “us”. This would also be the mode of justification most relevant for a change from a security policy focusing exclusively on states towards one focusing increasingly on the rights of the individual.

Whereas the concern for material gains could be accounted for through a rational choice perspective, answers to questions regarding “who we are” (identity-questions) or what is the right conduct from a moral perspective are more difficult to reconstruct from such premises. Consequently, the conception of actors as communicatively rational is helpful in particular by bringing the potential communal and/or normative dimension in European security out more clearly. Furthermore, it helps to distinguish between different types of norms. Whereas the Copenhagen school seems to contribute mostly to highlighting the potential role of identity shaping norms, the conception of actors as communicatively rational can help us to capture also those processes in which actors rely on arguments that have a certain universal validity, as well as the possibility that arguments can function as a mobilising force for change.

The conception of actors as understanding oriented and thus able to shift from a purely self-regarding to an other-regarding mode of interaction is not the same thing as a conception of actors as altruistic. Rather the actor is conceived of as having “...the ability to critically reflect on her own understandings of reality, interests, preferences, and maxims of behaviour; to estimate the consequences for other actors

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Habermas (1996: 107).

should she decide to pursue her own interests; and to participate in a discourse with others regarding the interpretation of interest and norms for the coordination of behaviour and interaction.” (Lose 2001: 185) This opens up not only for the possibility of a change of preferences as a result of interaction and communication, but also for the possibility that actors agree to certain decisions even if they go against their own material interest. It also makes it possible to theoretically account for the existence and binding character of norms. In this way, it might be possible to theorize about a change away from the Westphalian logic of state sovereignty and balances of power as the principal logic of security policy and towards a focus on individual rights and legally binding agreements in European security. Pushing security policy in such a direction can be supported by references to universal norms, however, it also entails a potential cost in terms of restraints on the defence of particular interests. Thus, it is a change that would be difficult to account for in a rational choice or realist perspective.

Norms are not in this perspective only practical arrangements, held together through ‘...mutual agreement about their advantageousness or through the use of coercive power’ (Eriksen and Weigård, 1997: 224-5). In contrast to a realist or a functionalist perspective norms are held to be autonomous sources of motivation owing their validity to their impartial justification i.e. that they can be defended in an open, free and rational debate (among all affected). This provides analysts with a clear alternative starting point for hypothesising about security policy. Hence it is a valuable additional tool of analysis that is not found in the realist or rational choice literature. Neither is it found in the neo-liberal institutionalist literature in international relations, which share with its neo-realist counterparts the essential assumption of actors as rational utility-maximisers (Risse-Kappen 1995).

Furthemore, norms are not only common understandings of the ‘good life’. It is not necessarily the thickness of the social environment – a common cultural identity - that would explain the emergence of dependable expectations of peace and commitment to common norms. Rather, social norms and institutions are *also* upheld because actors consider them valid. The value added of the communicative approach is to specify the micro-mechanism that is often lacking in the widening literature on security. It is through a communicative process in which norms are rationally assessed that the

relevance and binding character of norms is established. Hence, due to its emphasis on norms and ideas, this approach follows the principal arguments of the so-called “constructivist” perspective on security, but strengthens it by providing a theory of the validity of norms.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Challenges to the concept of communicative action***

However, a number of criticisms are presented to the use of this concept in the study of international relations. Most of these criticisms seem to focus on the difficulties involved in using this approach as a “practical research tool”. Sceptics point to the difficulty in showing that actors were convinced of the power of the better argument rather than simply manipulated or forced (Checkel 2003). Hence, alternative research strategies or concepts have been launched, that are considered better suited to face such challenges. The starting point, that it might be possible to observe changes in state behaviour in the absence of material rewards and punishments, and without observable changes in the domestic distribution of power, is accepted as a reasonable one by such authors. However, concepts such as social influence, rhetorical action and persuasion are considered more suitable research tools (Schimmelfenning 2001, Johnston 2001, Checkel 2003). The core idea in the concept of “social influence” is that “pro-norm behaviour” is elicited through “...the distribution of social rewards and punishments.” (Johnston 2001: 499) This is similar to the concept of rhetorical action, where the principle mechanism allowing for adherence to collective norms is a process of shaming (Schimmelfenning 2001).

According to these perspectives it is because they are concerned about public criticism (from public opinion or from other states or institutional actors) that states adhere to collective norms rather than because they are convinced of the legitimacy of the arguments in favour of a particular course of action. However, such processes of shaming or social pressure depend on the actors’ conviction that the principles and norms at stake exist and are valid. The presupposition for rhetorical action or social influence is that actors know and respect the established norms. Yet, the existence of these norms are neither explained nor assessed in these approaches. To explain the

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<sup>3</sup> Following Risse (1995) this form of constructivism may also be seen as part of the liberal “family”, although as he also stresses “There are many versions of liberalism in world politics, making it hard to sort out core assumptions” (Risse-Kappen 1995: 25).

binding character of norms we need a conception of actors as communicative and not only strategic: 'Strategic rationality presupposes communicative rationality' (Eriksen 2000: 48).

Is the concept of persuasion then more promising as an alternative avenue of research to the rational choice approaches or to the perspective presented by the Copenhagen school than the concepts of social influence or rhetorical action? According to Johnston (2001: 499) the difference between situations where actors are persuaded and those where they give in to social influences is that only in the former case is it possible to talk of consistence between public conformity and "private acceptance". Hence, this would be similar to the hypothesis that would be developed with the concept communicative rationality, where actors would be convinced about a particular course of action being the best one or the right one. As Checkel argues, the emphasis in the "persuasion literature" is on actors that "...present arguments and try to persuade and convince each other; their interest and preferences are open for possible redefinition" (Checkel 2003: 11). However, when the conditions under which this literature expects such processes of persuasion to take place are outlined, the core characteristic of communicative rationality seems to have disappeared. Hence Johnston points to three ways in which an actor is persuaded: First, through a high intensity process of cognition, reflection, and arguments about the content of new information; Second because of the affect relationship to the persuader; and third, the persuasiveness of a message may be function of characteristic of the persuadee (i.e. her cognitive processing abilities, the strength of existing attitudes or discomfort at being viewed as hypocritical and inconsistent." (Johnston 2001: 496-8; Checkel 2003).

Most processes taking place under these conditions could probably also be explained by through a sophisticated rational choice model. What is missing is the emphasis on the distinctiveness of a process where the better argument has functioned as a mobilising force for change. In such cases the quality of the argument would not, as it is suggested in the literature on persuasion, be dependent on the attitudes or strategic abilities of the "persuader" or "persuadee". Rather, it is the quality of the argument itself that counts. This can only be tested through a process of social interaction between what is assumed to be equal actors. It also follows from this that the

hierarchical relationship implied in the use of terms such as “persuader” and “persuadee” does not sit well with the conception of actors as communicatively rational.

### ***Deliberation rather than bargaining***

Even though the avenues pointed to in some of the constructivist literature do not appear satisfactory in terms of producing a clearly different and starting point for hypothesising about security, one might however still argue that the concept of communicative rationality is an unsuitable starting point for empirical research. It is clear that communicative rationality is based on idealised conceptions such as that of equal conditions for communication and free symmetrical relations. However, such idealisations do not distinguish it from most theories. As rational choice theorists argue, it is impossible for us to reach into the “hearts and souls” of policy-makers and thus uncover their “real” or “sincere” beliefs or convictions for doing what they do. Or as Wheelers admits “There can be no conclusive response to the sceptic who argues that public legitimating reasons are always post hoc rationalisations.” (Wheeler 2000: 9)

In order to make use of a less idealised conception, however, the concept of deliberation can be introduced. It “designates the process of reaching collective decisions through reason-giving. Such a process may end in agreement or in conflict and may be succeeded by bargaining” (Eriksen 2003) It is to be understood as a mechanism for action coordination that could help us understand a potential change in focus in security policy. What then, might be empirical indicators of a process of deliberation? A distinction between verbal and non-verbal behaviour is not a suitable indicator for distinguishing interest-based bargaining process from a deliberative process (Eriksen 2000). In bargaining processes parties employ speech acts strategically in order to achieve results, or even to misrepresent their preferences and deceive others. Thus in order to distinguish strategic bargaining from what takes place in a deliberative process we need other indicators. We need to show not only that standpoints have been moved, but that this has happened not because actors are persuaded (through threats) but because they are convinced that an alternative course of action or objective is in the equal interest of all. Hence, in addition to the first indicator of showing a change in standpoints, a second indicator would be that the

actors make use of the force of a norm, a principle or a common authoritative value in justifying the chosen course of action. Furthermore, a third indicator would be that actors would have similar reasons for complying with an agreement or a particular course of action. In a bargaining situation on the other hand, parties will have different reasons for complying (Eriksen 2003: 153; Habermas 1996). The research methodology required in order to investigate whether or not there is any empirical relevance of such theoretical propositions as the ones outlined above does not then have to differ from the methodology traditionally used. It would require analysis of documents, interviews with participants, as well as, if possible, participant observation.

It is possible that an accurate empirical description of European security is dependent upon a certain idea of security being imposed by the most powerful either through bargaining, or through manipulation. It is also possible that the changed conceptions of security entail abuses of power that are unacceptable. The perspective outlined above may very well not fit with the empirical landscape. However, the possibility of providing a different account has at least to be worked out theoretically. And to discard the utility of an alternative account by simply arguing that “To assume that general ‘opening’ and democratisation lead to people resisting the bad and choosing the good would be a surprising Enlightenment optimistic audacity” (Wæver, 2000: 284) would only reveal or reflect a particular world view. It is true that we need something more than the good will of actors to ensure fairness and stability. One important part of this ‘more’ is the strengthening of rights through legal procedures, which ensures that justice does not depend on altruism. The theory of communicative rationality provides the micro foundations that allow us to understand how such a different version or interpretation of European security might be possible.

Studies of the integration process in the European Union (EU) increasingly suggest that analyses might benefit from the insights provided by the theory of communicative action. Such proposals have been presented most systematically in the literature on comitology in the EU, where it is argued that the so-called comitology committees transform governance from intergovernmental bargaining to supranational

deliberation (Joerges and Neyer, 1997 a and b).<sup>4</sup> However, this perspective is increasingly applied also to broader issues in the European integration process (Risse-Kappen, 1996; Eriksen and Fossum, 2000; Sjørnsen, 2002; Eriksen, 2003; Neyer, 2003; Jacobsson and Vifell, 2003; Gehring, 2003) and in some cases also to other international issues (Lynch, 1999 and 2002; Loose, 2001; Müller, 2001; and Risse, 2000). In the study of European security, however, the role of communicative processes and the possibility that actors coordinate their action through arguments and deliberation is rarely considered. Given the increasing focus on an enlarged security concept it makes sense to talk about deliberation and actors seeking agreement through arguments also in this issue area. This is not to undermine or reject the importance of processes of bargaining or of material power in European security, but to try to improve the theoretical underpinnings of an alternative account such as that hinted at in the “widening” literature, and thereby also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of European security. An important task for studies of European security must be to investigate to what extent such alternative accounts are relevant and in order to do so, they need to be worked out theoretically.

The next question then is to investigate to what extent this interpretation fits with political realities in Europe. While it is not possible here to test this systematically, the aim of the next section of the article is to highlight some trends in European security that substantiate the hypothesis outlined in the introduction and thus indicate a need for this kind of theoretical framework.

## **Changes in European Security**

Three main trends may be identified.<sup>5</sup> First, we have witnessed a significant change in the understanding of what constitute central threats to European security. After the end of the Cold War there has been a move away from the almost exclusive focus on military threats from territorial states and towards a focus on a number of highly diverse issues. These range from social and economic inequalities to terrorism, the

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to deny that there is a debate about these findings. The point here is simply that the concept of communicative action is, for good or for bad, increasingly employed in the literature on the EU. For a critical perspective on the communication literature see for example Pollack (2003).

<sup>5</sup> This section builds on Helene Sjørnsen “Security and Defence” in Carlsnaes, W. Sjørnsen, H. and White, B. (eds) *Contemporary European Foreign Policy*. London, Sage, forthcoming 2004.

spread of weapons of mass destruction, ethnic conflict, international crime or even migration. Such issues are now often defined as security issues of equal importance to military issues.

The changes to the understanding of what constitute central threats to security are not 'exclusive' to Europe. They represent a general trend in the international system, although the emphasis on the different types of threat varies. With regard to Europe this changed understanding of what constitute central threats is well illustrated by the following quote from a speech by Danish foreign minister Niels Helveg Pedersen: '...preoccupation with the so-called soft security issues are increasingly the centre of attention: political and economic instability, ethnic conflict, minority problems, border conflicts, refugees, transitional environmental issues and organised crime' (Helveg Pedersen 1996). The Petersberg declaration (1992) of the West European Union (WEU), later incorporated in the European Union's (EU) definition of its responsibilities in security and defence, is a further example of how the 'new' security agenda is reflected in the formulation of security policy in Europe. The declaration points to 'soft security as an important security task in addition to military matters. 'Soft security' is defined in terms of social and economic inequality, environmental risks and crime. These are identified as the 'new' security issues that the European Union and its member states face in the post-cold war world (WEU 1992).

Assertions of change in the European security agenda are echoed in the academic literature by authors coming from very different theoretical perspectives. Whalen (1999: 257) argues that: 'While Europe today faces less of a direct threat to its military security than at any time in its history, a diffuse multitude of risks has taken its place.' According to Gärtner & Hyde- Price (2001: 4) 'Human rights, environmental degradation, political stability and democracy, social issues, cultural and religious identity, and immigration are issues that are becoming ever more important for security and conflict prevention'. And Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998: 4) argue that 'Our solution comes down on the side of the wideners in terms of keeping the security agenda open to many different types of threats. We argue against the view that the core of security studies is war and force...'

The second trend that indicates a need for an additional theoretical approach is related to the conception of how to handle security threats and challenges. Here there has been a move away from military alliances and the search for balances of military force and towards institutionalization and legally binding agreements. European security is now increasingly sought through multilateral institutions. We can observe an increasing institutionalization of relations between European states and a European order is no longer guaranteed (if it ever was) by a balance of power between military forces. Increasingly, European states are bound together by legal agreements that constrain and condition policy choices. This is also the case across the old East-West dividing line in Europe. We see this for example in the neutrals' – Sweden, Austria and Finland - membership in the EU (including the second pillar) since 1995 and later the eastward enlargements of both Nato and the EU. The establishment of NATO's Partnership For Peace which includes almost all of the Central and East European states as well as the former republics of the Soviet Union, and the NATO partnership with Russia, can also be mentioned in this context.

Inside the EU this trend is even stronger as member states have long since moved from a balance of power to 'co-operative security' with regard to problems arising. The EU has successfully domesticated security within the Union in the sense that it is extremely unlikely that member states would use military force to resolve disputes with fellow members. What characterizes the European situation is the high degree of institutionalization at the supranational level. Here states have moved further than most states elsewhere in terms of establishing international institutions that are based on a commitment to common rules and norms. What is more, within its field of competence, community law is supreme.

Arguably, the EU is exporting this approach to the rest of Europe through enlargement. This at least is the image that the EU itself seeks to project. Hence Javier Solana, High Representative for the EU's CFSP argues that: 'European integration has worked as a strong catalyst for political stability and economic prosperity in Western Europe. We are now extending the benign effect of integration to the rest of the continent. ... An enlarged Union means strengthening the stability of the continent.' (Solana 2001) I will return to this in the next section of the article.

As an implication of the first two trends, a third trend would be a change in the standards for conflict resolution. By this is meant that the position of the individual as a right holder within international law has been strengthened, and there is no longer an exclusive focus on the sovereign state. Traditionally, international law was not seen as an instrument that should protect individuals from abuses of power but as an instrument that would guarantee the sovereign control of the state over a specific territory. As a result, *inter alia*, of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, there are now agents outside the nation state that can sanction illegitimate abuses of power and to whom citizens can appeal if national decisions seem unacceptable (Menéndez, 2002). Hence human rights are not merely moral categories, but are also becoming positive legal rights with the capacity to be reinforced in Europe. European states today are expected to respect human rights and basic civil and political rights (Zürn, 2000). In other words, when we ask 'security for whom' the answer is no longer self-evidently the state. What is developing in Europe is something 'more' or qualitatively different from a situation of interdependence as described in much of the literature on international relations. Increasingly, it is also argued that this implies that the EU will be, and is, faithful to these norms in its external action (Manners, 2002; Rosencrance, 1998).

### ***Manipulating the security agenda?***

It might be argued that some of these trends, particularly the first, are not really new. Social and economic inequalities were obviously a problem also during the Cold War. Several states experienced acts of terrorism before 1989 and ethnic conflict is not a creation of the post-cold war world. Thus, in one sense, the change with regard to the so-called 'new' security issues is only a change in emphasis as these issues have emerged on top of the agenda of security politics. However, as Jackson (2000: 215) argues they have a stronger foothold in Europe and that the emphasis on these trends is also stronger in the post-Cold War period than what they were during the Cold War. More importantly, the ideas about a new security context could simply be the result of efforts to "redefine the policy agendas of nation states" (Baldwin, 1997: 5) and the outcome of a struggle between different actors where the most powerful have successfully defined the policy agenda in accordance with their own interests. The increased focus of the United States on the threat of terrorism, for example, can be interpreted in this way. Such an interpretation would be supported by Amnesty

International's annual report of 2002 that concludes that with respect to the security of the individual citizen, states still pose more important threats than terrorists. However, the resistance to the exclusive focus on terrorism as a security threat, as well as to the United States' view on how to handle such a threat, suggest that there are also other forces and processes at play in the international system (Brunkhorst 2003: 22-23). This is also the case with regard to the strengthening of the rights of the citizens within international and particular European law. Such moves constrain the ability of states to act in accordance with their own interest and thus do not seem to fit with a realist hypothesis. Following from this, it is worth noting that although the relationship between securing the state and securing the rights of the citizens does not have to be a zero-sum game, securing the state does not on its own guarantee the rights of the citizens. As the above report from Amnesty International documents, arguments about state security may also be used to infringe citizens rights, which is why it is interesting to examine the potential for legally binding commitments above the state.

Thus, as already noted, the argument here is that if we do not work out an alternative theoretical approach we have few ways of distinguishing between different kinds of political processes. This means that we risk losing important dimensions of the current transformations in European security. We must at least consider the possibility that some of these trends, consciously or unconsciously, reflect broader challenges to traditional perspectives on security and international relations. In fact, many scholars argue that if we look closer at Europe's security relations with the rest of the world, this can be further substantiated.

### **Civilian power Europe?**

A growing literature makes a strong case that the EU not only has an impact on the international system, but that it has a *particular* impact due to the nature of the EU as an organization (Rosencrance, 1998; Manners, 2002; Aggestam, 2000). An explicit example of this argument is found in Ian Manners (2002) study of the EU's international pursuit of the abolition of the death penalty. Manners argues that the EU represents a normative power in world politics. He suggests that the EU's work for the abolition of the death penalty cannot be understood on the basis of material

incentives and instrumental bargaining because there are few rewards for promoting this issue in terms of domestic political support and because this policy creates difficulties for the EU in its relations with close allies such as the United States. He thus concludes that the EU can be conceptualized as a changer of norms in the international system. Rosencrance (1998: 22) also defines the EU attainment in international politics as 'normative rather than empirical'. Furthermore he observes that it is paradoxical that with their history as imperial powers that ruled the world with the help of physical force, the European states now set normative standards for the world.

This literature follows the tradition of defining Europe as a 'civilian power'.<sup>6</sup> First launched by Francois Duchêne in 1972, the idea of civilian power Europe consists of arguing that the EU (then EC) is a special international actor whose strength lies in its ability to promote and encourage stability through economic and political means. Hence, this is an image of the EU that would go contrary both to the realist understanding and to the account that might be provided by the Copenhagen school. However, this literature has been less preoccupied with working out theoretically how this is possible. The importance of such an endeavour becomes particularly evident if one considers the argument that it is only because the EU does not have the means to be anything else that it chooses to be a civilian power (Kagan, 2003). From a realist perspective this is the only possible interpretation. However, with the concept of communicative action as a starting point it is possible to work out theoretically and investigate empirically whether an alternative understanding of the EU's role as normative power is plausible. It is possible that the EU acts this way because it thinks it ought to do so. Furthermore, this perspective might help us to discover how it is possible that instruments other than military power, such as arguments and public deliberation, can also make a difference to international security. Abstaining from the use of military power, in other words, does not necessarily have to be a sign of weakness, as Kagan (2003) seems to assume.

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<sup>6</sup> For the original arguments see Duchêne (1972) and Bull (1982).

## **Limitations to civilian power Europe**

At the same time, there are serious limitations to the ability of the EU to act as a 'normative power'. These limitations do not only have to do with the lack of coherence in the EU's security policy or with the lack of 'hard' instruments to back up policy declarations. The limitations are also linked to the far more limited role of international law in the international system outside the EU. This perspective emphasizes the need for rights to be legally binding in order to ensure that justice does not depend on altruism. Unless the principles of human rights become positive legal rights that can be enforced it is difficult to avoid the argument that the most powerful only use a "moral" foreign policy for their own interest and that when they don't, they are still suspected of doing so (Eriksen, 2001; Sjursen, 2003). In turn this leads to arbitrariness, as human rights are not universal principles applied equally to all. Moreover, as Karen Smith shows, the EU's commitment to 'civilian' principles, and in particular to human rights, is inconsistent (Smith, K. 2001).

In order to overcome this problem, all international relations would have to be subordinated to a common judicial order that would transform the parameters of power politics: As Habermas (1999: 270) puts it: 'Things look different when human rights not only come into play as a moral orientation for one's own political activity, but as rights which have to be implemented in a legal sense. Human rights possess the structural attributes of subjective rights which, irrespective of their purely moral content, by nature are dependent on attaining positive validity within a system of compulsory law.' With the strengthening of the United Nations, the principles of human rights have gained more force in international politics. Thus one might see a gradual change in the content of norms at the international level away from an exclusive emphasis on state sovereignty and a strengthening of the principles of human rights. However, the international system is still one in which legal procedures for protecting human rights are weak and where their enforcement is therefore dependent on the will power of the great powers.

This is where the contrast between European security and international security becomes evident. In Europe, there are now several legal sources that create a link between the EU and the promotion of human rights and democracy. Some sources

date back a long way, such as the affirmation by the European Assembly in 1961 that respect for fundamental rights and democratic principles was a condition for membership in the EC, although the founding treaties of the EU made little reference to human rights. And, as Menendez (2002) argues, the legal competence of the Union to promote human rights has been strengthened as a result of the proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Furthermore, the charter is likely to become a central benchmark in assessing compliance with fundamental rights by third countries. Such developments in the Treaties have led EU foreign affairs commissioner Chris Patten, to state that ‘we have a legal framework for human rights in our external policy’ (Patten, 2000). Nevertheless, as long as such rights are not legally binding in the international system at large, there is an obvious risk of arbitrariness.

Hence, the concept of communicative rationality is helpful in providing analytical building blocs that allow us to capture a larger part of the empirical landscape and at the same time highlighting the limitations to a security policy that relies on moral principles in a context where these are not enshrined in legal procedures that are equally binding for all.

## **Conclusion**

Based on a communicative perspective I have worked out the theoretical possibility of a twofold change in European security: firstly, a change in the referent object of security, away from an exclusive focus on state sovereignty and towards a focus on the rights of the individual citizen. Secondly, a change in the understanding and practice of the best means to achieve security.

Studies of the integration process in the European Union increasingly suggest that analyses might benefit from the insights provided by the theory of communicative action. Hence, the argument here corresponds to a broader trend in European studies, but takes the analysis a step further by suggesting that it would make sense to talk about deliberation and actors seeking agreement through arguments also in the issue area of European security. The EU today is at an advanced stage of its unification process. Relations between member states are no longer organized solely in

accordance with the set of norms and rules embodied in the Westphalian system of states (Held, 1993). Increasingly, they are linked together in a network of 'domesticated' relations. A growing number of policy fields are coordinated at the central level in Brussels. Even though there is no clear centre of authority above the member states, it is evident that the EU represents a radical (peaceful) challenge to our traditional understanding of international relations. Consequently, one should expect that European integration also has affected the conditions under which security policy is made, as well as the *meaning* of security in Europe.

The value added of this approach to the study of European security is twofold: firstly, it allows for a better theoretical account for the (potential) existence and binding force of norms in European security; secondly it helps us understand how a (potential) change in norms comes about in a rational way.

Whereas the "widening" literature on security often highlights the importance of norms, the validity of norms is undertheorised in this literature and this is where the communicative perspective is important. According to the communicative approach norms are held to be autonomous sources of motivation owing their validity to their impartial justification. It is through a communicative process in which norms are rationally assessed that their relevance and binding character is established. Furthermore, the emphasis on a communicative process also allows for a change in norms, as these are rationally assessed rather than considered "given" for example as part of a particular cultural identity. The understanding of what is considered to be the relevant and appropriate norm may change through a communicative process. Hence it becomes possible to theoretically account for the above hypothesis in a better way than if one relies only on concepts such as "comprehensive security", "human security" or "soft security".

The aim here has not been to systematically to investigate the empirical relevance of this approach. Rather, what has been done is to point to some trends that substantiate its relevance. It is possible however that when this is done, a realist account will appear the most convincing. Yet it is difficult to check if this is so without possessing alternative analytical categories that allow us to hypothesize and 'test' a different scenario. If we do not even consider any alternative to instrumental or strategic

rationality the risk that findings are simply self-fulfilling prophecies is even higher. This also means that, although it may be argued that it is difficult to actually know if actors were convinced by the better argument, assuming a priori that they were not, risk leading to research results that only reflect one particular world view. Furthermore, as noted in the article, although much further research is needed in this field, in particular in operationalisation, much is also achieved in terms of working out indicators that can help in empirical research.

This endeavour is even more important in a context where arguments about national security and the threat of terrorism dominate the agenda of world politics and thus risk undermining concerns about human rights and respect for international law. In such situations it becomes particularly important to possess analytical tools that both provide us with critical standards for assessing policies and to investigate the validity of claims that policies are conducted “in the name of humanity”. However, the solution to this cannot be to consider only the hypothesis of the sceptic. We need to be able to theoretically account also for the alternative.

These analytical tools, in turn, might also allow us to look at the history of European security through different lenses. The idea that security and defence issues should be dealt with through common institutions was certainly present before the end of the cold war and found expression in concepts such as ‘common security’ and processes such as the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (now OSCE). Likewise, the strengthening of human rights has been part of the activities of the Council of Europe since the early 1960s. Hence, the analytical tools highlighted in this article might also allow us to investigate more systematically such historical developments in European international relations.

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