International Organizations, the European Union and Peace:

Bringing Organization Structure In

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Abstract

Well-functioning states are often seen as great pacifiers in the sense that serious societal disputes within their respective territories are usually solved without violence. On the other hand, deep conflicts between states may more easily result in violent situations due to the partly anarchical character of the international system. One could therefore expect that studies of war and peace focused extensively on various ways of organizing interstate relations and the potential for replacing anarchy with political order. However, although several peace studies deal with the role of international organizations (IOs), this research is surprisingly absent in review literature. One reason for this absence may be that findings on the peace-making role of IOs among member states seem to be ambiguous. The purpose of this research note is to increase our understanding of under what conditions international institutions could matter in this respect. The fierce debate between realists and institutionalists only marginally touches upon the effect that the various ways of organizing IOs might have on interstate peace. Arguably, the only international organization so far that in its structure and work clearly transcends a basically intergovernmental arrangement is the European Union (EU). This could make the EU, and EU-like structures, more able to avoid polarization along the territorial dimension since its organization structure activates cross-cutting cleavages and a system-wide perspective among policymakers, arguably tying together rather than splitting the system. Interestingly, the peculiar organizational structure of the EU is mostly ignored in the IO literature in general, and in peace research on IOs in particular.

Keywords

International organizations – European Union – Peace – Organization structure – Cleavages

Introduction

Well-functioning states are often seen as great pacifiers in the sense that serious societal disputes within their respective territories are usually solved without violence. On the other hand, deep conflicts between states may more easily result in violent situations due to the partly anarchical character of the international system. One could therefore expect that studies of peace and war focused extensively on various ways of organizing interstate relations and the potential for replacing anarchy with political order. As we will see, however, although several peace studies deal with the role of international organizations (IOs), this research is surprisingly absent in review literature on peace and war. One reason for the absence may be that findings on the peace-making role of IOs among member states seem to be ambiguous and disparate (Boehmer et al., 2004; Pevehouse and Russett, 2006).

The purpose of this research note is to increase our understanding of under what conditions international institutions could matter for peace and war among member states. The fierce debate between realists and institutionalists only marginally touches upon the effect that the various ways of organizing IOs might have in this respect. As we will see, the only IO so far that in its structure and work clearly transcends a basically intergovernmental arrangement is the European Union (EU). This could make the EU, and EU-like structures, more able to avoid polarization along the territorial dimension since its organization structure activates cross-cutting cleavages and a system-wide perspective among policymakers, arguably tying together rather than splitting the system. Interestingly, the peculiar organizational structure of the EU is mostly ignored in the IO literature in general, and in peace research on IOs in particular.

This research note starts by discussing literature on the role of international governmental organizations (IGOs) and the EU in peace and war among member states. It then turns to how IGOs are typically organized, and the implications for peace and war. Finally, the organization structure of the EU is presented as a qualitatively different type of structure that might have a greater potential for ensuring peace among member states. Thus, realists may be more realistic than institutionalists about the peace-promoting potential of IGOs.

International institutions and peace

In their much-cited book on the causes of war, Levy and Thompson (2010) apply a 'levels-of-analysis' framework, meaning that they locate various explanations at different systemic levels. At the individual level of analysis characteristics of state leaders are seen as decisive for the outbreak of war. This implies that if another individual had been in power the outcome might have been different. The nation-state level of analysis includes both factors associated with the government and factors associated with society. Concerning the former, the focus is on regime type, such as democratic or non-democratic and other aspects of the decision-making apparatus. The latter includes a society's economic system, political culture and ideology. System-

level theories emphasize for example the power balance and alliances between major powers, but also the role of international norms and institutions. However, in their chapter reviewing the literature on system-level explanations, no attention is devoted to international institutions. The book has only one reference to the EU which relates to the pacifying effects of trade (Levy and Thompson, 2010: 75).

In another comprehensive oversight, *Why We Fight. The Roots of War and the Paths to Peace,* Blattman (2022) operates with five causes of war: unchecked interests, intangible incentives, uncertainty, commitment problems and misperceptions. The difference that international institutions could have made is not considered. However, Blattman reminds us that 'war is the exception, not the rule' (p. 31). The reason is that antagonists usually find it in their mutual interest not to fight and instead find peaceful deals and compromises (p. 30). Institutions do not seem to have a role to play in this respect. In the second part of the book, 'The paths to peace', Blattman highlights interdependence, checks and balances, rules and enforcement, and interventions. Within the section concerning rules and enforcement he briefly discusses the role of international institutions such as the League of Nations and the United Nations (pp. 216-218). However, institutions' organization structure is not an issue and no reference is made to the EU.

The minor role devoted to IOs in the review literature cited above may be explained by the ambiguous and disparate findings concerning their ability to avoid warfare (Boehmer et al., 2004; Pevehouse and Russett, 2006). There exists a certain agreement that such organizations may provide important arenas for information exchange and negotiations (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). Moreover, IO-generated networks often transcend international conflict borders (Skjelsbæk, 1972). Serious doubt has nevertheless been raised about whether IOs are able to cope with wicked problems like threats of war. Mearsheimer (1994), a prominent realist, argued that international institutions are reflecting rather than affecting international politics and that we cannot really say that the institution itself did something more than the sum of its parts. He did not consider whether various ways of organizing institutions matter. Two institutionalists, Keohane and Martin (1995), expressed their strong disagreement with Mearsheimer, but did not come up with cases in which international institutions had hindered violent conflicts between member states, nor included the organization structure of institutions in their discussion.

Russett et al. (1998) found that shared memberships in IGOs make a statistically significant, independent contribution to peaceful interstate relations. However, eight years later Pevehouse and Russett (2006) find this association between shared IGO-memberships and inter-state peace to be contingent upon whether the IGOs are democratic, here meaning that the member states qualify as democracies. In the meantime, Boehmer et al. (2004) had shown that only IGOs with 'greater structures' promote peace. 'Greater structures' mean that they have *inter alia* considerable administrative and intelligence-gathering capabilities as well as organs for mediation and arbitration. Thus, this study explicitly takes the organization structure of IOs into consideration.

Consequently, one must conclude that studies on IOs and peace usually ignore the difference organization structures of IOs could make. This is surprising not least since, as we will see, the EU represents an alternative structure that clearly transcends an intergovernmental arrangement and thus might have a greater peace-promoting potential. This being said, the peculiar structure of the EU seems very much neglected, not only in peace research but also in the general IO literature (Börzel and Zürn, 2021; Lake et al., 2021; Martin and Simmons, 1998). For example, Hooghe et al. (2019) treat the EU as one of 76 IOs that clearly vary as regards the extent to which member states have delegated and pooled authority, but without pointing out how the EU's structure deviates radically from the basically intergovernmental set-up of the others.

The organization structure of the IGO and cleavages

'Organization structure' is here defined as a codified system of positions and their respective *role expectations* concerning who is entitled to do what and how. According to Simon (1965), a person's organizational position largely determines what kind of information this person will look for, and the streams of communication he or she will be exposed to and shielded from. It follows that the informational basis for this person's thinking and acting primarily reflects his or her organizational position (Egeberg and Trondal, 2018: 5-12). Since decisionmakers operate under the condition of 'bounded rationality' due to limited cognitive capacities, they will have little capacity left to search for or digest information from other sources (Simon, 1965). In addition, rewards and punishments, as well as norms about appropriate behavior, may serve to bring decisionmakers' actual behavior in line with the stated role expectations (March and Olsen, 1989).

In organizational terms the IGO's basic set-up is characterized by *territorial* specialization and a political leadership embedded in *secondary* structures (Egeberg, 2012; Egeberg and Trondal, 2018). 'Territorial specialization' means that geographical units, here the member states, constitute the key components of the structure: representatives of the member states sit around the table when decisions are made, and at the political level these representatives are ministers or heads of state or government. 'Secondary structures' mean that for these representatives, IGO bodies such as councils of ministers, make up only secondary affiliations; their primary structures are their respective governments back home. Decision-makers are expected to devote most of their time, energy and loyalty to their primary structures. Participants in secondary structures, such as councils, committees and networks, fulfil their role expectations if they act as part-timers and show *some* allegiance to the secondary bodies. Given the organizational characteristics of IGOs it makes sense that research shows that the actual power distribution and conflict pattern within IGOs mainly seem to reflect the power distribution and *territorial* pattern of conflict found in the wider system (Cox and Jacobsen, 1973).

This said, two organizational factors in particular tend to modify the pure intergovernmental structure: First, the establishment of secretariats with a permanent loca-

tion from the middle of the nineteenth century, which meant that the bureaucrats of IGOs had their respective IGOs as their primary structure. Thus, differently from their political leadership (councils of ministers), secretariat officials are expected to devote most of their time, energy and loyalty to the IGO. Research confirms that this actually happens and that they tend to act relatively independently from the governments back home (Trondal et al., 2010). Therefore, secretariat staff may come to develop a more supranational perspective than their political masters, enabling them to see beyond particular national interests. This may in turn have policy consequences since IGO-secretariats, like other bureaucracies, often have a role to play in agenda-setting, policy development and implementation (Knill and Steinebach, 2022). Second, many IGOs have complemented their basically territorial specialization with sectoral and functional specialization. Thus, actors within the same policy sector, such as transport or energy, may develop common belief systems, identities, perspectives and preferences that may cut across territorial borders. In some cases, then, policymakers will have more in common with colleagues from other countries within the same policy sector than with their compatriots within another sector (Keohane and Nye, 1974). However, notwithstanding these modifications, the territorial cleavage seems dominant (Cox and Jacobsen, 1973), probably because the territorial principle of specialization remains the basic one, and the political leadership is still embedded within secondary structures.

The organization structure of the EU and cleavages

The EU has from the very start been composed of three political institutions, each with its own structural characteristics. It follows that the three may activate different lines of conflict. The Union Council (Council), one of the two legislative chambers, is arranged according to *territory,* and the political leadership, i.e., national ministers, have the Council as their *secondary* structure. Thus, the Council shares its basic organizational set-up with an IGO. Like many IGOs, additional features, such as sectoral specialization and a permanent secretariat, modify the basically intergovernmental structure of the Council. However, studies reveal that despite such modifications, Council politics mainly deals with interest articulation on behalf of member-state governments, as well as conflict and cooperation along national lines (Bailer et al., 2015). Research on the behavior of national officials taking part in Council preparatory committees shows similar patterns as the ministerial level. However, it also documents that national officials complement their national allegiance with a somewhat more European perspective (Beyers, 2005). Haas (1958) imagined that national delegates frequently taking part in European bodies would gradually come to transfer their loyalty to these bodies. However, Beyers (2005) found that this does not seem to happen, although some kind of secondary loyalty appears. The organizational explanation is that only decisionmakers embedded within primary structures at the international level, such as secretariat officials in this case, will have their allegiance mainly directed toward the international body (Egeberg, 2012; Egeberg and Trondal, 2018).

The European Council, a newer body, can also be seen as part of the Council system. Composed of the member states' heads of state and government, it is supposed to give political direction to the EU and to solve problems that are not solved in the Council. Due to successive crises, it meets more often than before. However. It has no legislative power, nor its own administrative staff. Instead, it draws on the Council secretariat, and for more demanding policy development for example related to the many crisis packages, must rely on the European Commission. Given the territorial specialization and state leaders embedded within secondary structures it is highly understandable that the pursuance of national interests and conflicts along national lines prevail in the European Council (Tallberg and Johansson, 2008). The fact that two EU-level politicians; the president (chair) of the European Council and the Commission president, also take part does not change this pattern. In conclusion, cooperation and conflict along territorial lines seem to dominate in the council structure.

The European Parliament (EP) shares the legislative power with the Council. The directly elected parliamentarians are organized in various transnational party groups reflecting very much their ideological counterparts at the national level. The representatives are also physically seated together with their fellow group members. Thus, arguably, the basic principle of specialization in the EP is *ideology,* not territory. In addition, the EP constitutes the *primary* structure of the parliamentarians. This is different from the period before 1979 when elections to the EP were indirect, meaning that a group of *national* parliamentarians met in the EP on a part-time basis. Research documents a high level of (transnational) party group cohesion and that the representatives vote more along transnational party lines than along national lines (Hix and Høyland, 2022: 65-71). This happens even if the ideological specialization is supplemented by a certain territorial specialization in the form of national party delegations within the groups, and despite the growing national and political heterogeneity of the EP after successive enlargements. To understand this transfer of loyalty to transnational parties we have to consider not only the deliberate organizing of transnational groups, but also the crucial role that *primary* structures at the EU-level might play. A study of indirectly elected EP representatives before 1979 revealed that they became more interested and better informed about European integration but not more in favor of it (Kerr, 1973). This observation illustrates that secondary structures may have less impact on actual behavior and attitudes. Finally, EU parliamentarians are supported by staff within the EP and political groups who assign more weight to European than to national concerns (Egeberg et al., 2013). In conclusion, cooperation and conflict along ideological lines seem dominant in the EP.

The European Commission (Commission) makes up the main executive body of the EU. Like national political executives it plays a key role in agenda-setting, policy development and (monitoring) implementation. Each of the 27 member states nominate one of the 27 commissioners of the College, the political leadership of the Commission. The nominated are 'examined' by the respective EP committees and appointed by the European Council. The president of the Commission is also elected by the EP. Although commissioners are nominated by member-state governments,

they are expected not to take instructions from the same governments and to be loyal to the Commission in the first place.

The Commission's basic principles of specialization are *sector* and *function*, both at the administrative and political level. Thus, the bureaucracy consists of departments ('directorates general') organized around different policy sectors and horizontal services like budget and human resources. All departments have a responsible commissioner at the top. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that not only the bureaucrats but also the political leadership, i.e., the commissioners, have the Commission as their *primary* structure. Given such an organization structure, it makes sense that politics at the Commission tends to take the form of politics among (sectoral) departments (Cini, 2000; Coombes, 1970; Daviter, 2011). Similarly, commissioners also tend to evoke their (sectoral) portfolio role most frequently in College meetings. However, they also assign weight to the interests of the Commission as such, to concerns within their home countries and to the programs of their respective political parties (Egeberg, 2006). Wonka (2008) also observed that national attention complements their sectoral (portfolio) orientation. In line with this, Thomson and Dumont (2022) found that the Commission tends to support policies which agree with the policies favored by the home member states of the responsible commissioners. However, they conclude that this effect is not as marked as the effects from an integrationist perspective, i.e., the Commission's pro-integration and pan-European preferences. A considerable bureaucracy (employing about 30.000 officials) serves to underpin these pan-European preferences and sectoral orientations. Commission officials are overwhelmingly loyal to the Commission as such, and in particular to the (sectoral) department in which they work. Only a very small proportion expresses some allegiance to the government of their home country (Trondal et al., 2010). Thus, we may conclude that although many current commissioners have previously served as national ministers, they behave significantly different as commissioners. Most probably, the organization structure in which they are embedded, explains this difference.

During the last couple of decades, the EU executive, the Commission, has been supplemented by an increasing number of EU-level agencies. Their main tasks are to contribute to more uniform and efficient implementation of EU policies across member states and to provide more specialized and technical expertise than the Commission has available for its policy development. To fulfil their tasks, EU-agencies facilitate information exchange, training of national officials and common practices through organizing networks of national agencies within their respective policy fields. Thus, national agencies become directly coupled with their respective counterparts in other member states, as well as to EU-level bodies within the same policy area. EU agencies and their networks of national agencies are arranged according to *sector*, like the Commission, and the officials have the agency as their *primary* structure. However, EU agencies have management boards numerically dominated by national delegates. Although Commission officials also take part, such boards, arguably, represent a territorially based (intergovernmental) component in EU agencies' structure. Studies indicate, however, that the boards meet relatively seldom and have too many members to be able to play a key decision-making role. In addition, heads of national agencies, who work at arm's length from political executives, often

represent national governments at board meetings (Busuioc et al., 2012). EU-agency managers consider the Commission to be the most influential actor within their field; thus, ranking above national agencies and ministries (Egeberg and Trondal, 2011). In conclusion, cooperation and conflict along sectoral and functional lines seem to dominate within the EU executive branch.

Arguably, the EU executive's relationship to international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) further underpins its sectoral character and connects it to sectoral patterns of cooperation and conflict in civil society. Here INGOs include both business interest groups, trade unions, professional associations, and public-interest groups. The main point is that these organizations are voluntary and organized *transnationally*. Thus, although INGOs often consist of national member associations, they nevertheless aim at hammering out common positions across national borders, for example on behalf of agricultural producers from different countries. While IGOs are then, as we have seen, organized along territorial lines, INGOs are most typically structured along sectoral or functional lines.

While many national interest groups still operate at the EU level, EU policymaking within most policy fields has triggered the establishment of INGOs within the EU. The Commission, wanting counterparts at the EU level, has also encouraged such establishments, particularly regarding public interest groups, which have been lagging behind compared to businesses organizing (Eising and Sollik, 2022). EU-agency managers report more contact with EU-level interest groups than with national groups, and also see the former as more influential (Egeberg and Trondal, 2011).

EU – a model for peacekeeping among constituent states?

Coser (1956) argued that a system is in fact held together by its inner conflicts, provided that these conflicts crosscut each other. On the other hand, a society which is only split along one cleavage line or has cumulative, coinciding lines reinforcing each other, may be in danger of being torn by violence or falling to pieces. As shown above, the EU has in fact developed a multidimensional conflict structure that reflects the EU's composite organization structure. The territorial, ideological and sectoral dimension are all cross-cutting each other. In addition, two of its key institutions, the Commission and the EP, consist of organizational components that endow policymakers with more system-wide decision horizons. Together these features mean that the EU shares many of its characteristics with federal states. And the more state-like the political order is, the more robust it is supposed to be. States are usually seen as the great pacifiers *within* their respective territories (Blattman, 2022: 209).

For about 500 years before the Second World War a disproportionate number of interstate wars were fought in Europe (Levy and Thompson, 2010: 12). During the lifetime of the EU and its predecessors, however, peace has prevailed within its borders. Needless to say, coincidence in time does not imply causation. Other factors, such as the fact that member states have been democracies, may also explain the absence of war, i.e., 'democratic peace' (Gleditsch and Hegre, 1997). This being said, one cannot preclude that the existence of the EU has contributed to interstate peace within its

borders. As suggested, the EU embodies an organization structure that may have a greater potential as a path to peace among the constituent states than traditional IOs. Some regional IOs have started to build institutions that share some of the characteristics of EU institutions. The African Union (AU) is particularly noteworthy in this respect. Like the EU, it has a separate executive body (Commission) composed of fulltime politicians at the top in charge of particular sectoral portfolios rather than national delegations. And in order to complement today's intergovernmental legislature (Assembly) a consultative indirectly elected parliament has been erected. However, the declared future aim of this body is to organize it as a directly elected parliament with legislative power (cf. the AU parliament website). Two other regional IOs, the Central American Integration System and the Andean Community, already run directly elected parliamentary assemblies. However, unlike the EP these are so far only consultative bodies. Arguably, more advanced regional IOs along the lines indicated above may represent possible paths to peace within regions and 'democratic peace' between regions. Such IOs may also represent an alternative to regional peace caused by hegemonic states (Lake, 2007).

Conclusion

Since political organization has replaced anarchy and promoted peace within most states one could expect that ways of organizing interstate relations would top the research agenda on interstate peace and war. However, this does not seem to be the case. Concerning system-level theories, research on IOs competes with numerous realist approaches, the balance-of-power-theory and hegemonic theories. In addition, theories on the dyadic interactions of states, as well as a huge number of national and individual-level explanations, attract much attention (Levy and Thompson, 2010). Somewhat ambiguous results regarding the peacekeeping role of IOs have not placed them center stage when possible paths to peace are being discussed.

This research note has argued that existing literature on IOs' relation to peace and war omits to take into consideration the organization structure of IOs. IOs are basically specialized according to territory while their political leaders have their primary organizational affiliation within their respective national governments. This may explain, as realists argue, that IOs more often reflect rather than affect international politics. Although several IOs experiment with more multidimensional structures, the EU represents the only clear alternative so far: Here we find cross-cutting cleavages and system-wide decision horizons among policymakers that reflect the EU's composite organization structure. It is reason to believe that such a structure is more integrative, robust and state-like. Regional IOs structured along such lines could contribute to peace within regions as well as 'democratic peace' between regions.

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