

Introduction

The latest decade has been characterised by immensely dynamic changes inside the European Union and its neighbourhood. The fundamental principle of the European Union (EU) is its reliance on permanent interactions between institutions, member states, third states and other international organisations involved in decision making processes. The key European institution is the European Council (EC), which has transformed into a centre of political decision making in the European Union. The range of the EC's formal and informal powers continues to expand. The post-Lisbon EC has come to be headed by the President, an office that replaced the rotating presidency of successive states. The significant empowerment of presidential status is reflected in how it exercises its powers in practice. This particularly concerns EU external activities, where the President sets the directions of development and political priorities. Decisions of the EC are subsequently reflected in the work of the Council of the EU, European Parliament, European Commission and member states. The mechanisms of political decision making transformed when the EC was established. The Lisbon Treaty marks a significant stage in this process as it defines and recognises the role and functions of the EC within the EU. Lisbon Treaty's coming into effect marked a new stage of political reconstruction of the EU, making the EC an important element of the EU within the powers the former was granted.

This publication is the outcome of a research project entitled "The European Council in the process of forming formal and informal competences in the realm of the European Union's external activities." The project was sponsored by the National Science Centre, Poland (Narodowe Centrum Nauki, NCN no. 2015/19/B/HS5/00131). It was carried out by the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, from 2016 until 2020. The framework of the project encompasses both internal determinants (such as intergovernmental disputes and inter-institutional limitations) as well as external conditions that shape the European Council's powers. The primary objective of the authors was to carry out a comprehensive analysis and assessment of factors that have an influence on the development of the EC in terms of complementarity and dysfunctionality. In the course of the research, complementarity was interpreted as the state created as a result of mutually complementary activities aiming to achieve a common goal or the same goal. In this area of institutional and functional transformations it was also essential to refer to synergy, which can provisionally be defined as mutual strengthening and potentiating of the outcomes of interventions, the co-operation of numerous factors and maximisation of the outcomes produced as a result of the implementation of complementary activities and projects. Institutional dysfunctionality as a concept

required a more in-depth analysis and interpretation. The starting point was provided by observing the outcomes of political events which result in a reduced degree of systemic adaptation thereby necessitating an ongoing modification. The authors assumed that both functional and dysfunctional outcomes/results emerge in this field.

Another significant element involved the analysis of interactions between EU member states and other European institutions as well as external entities shaping political decisions of the EC as concerns selected international issues. Against the background of selected international situations the potential to implement EU policies was presented, in particular the application of concrete instruments in the area of external activities. The project was not limited to a mere assessment of the present directions, activities, forms and instruments of EU activities. A detailed analysis involved proposed directions of the development of the EU in the face of the intensifying dysfunctionality of its institutional system, the examples of activities of the EC, the determinants of EU involvement in selected third countries – in particular the conditions of crisis management in the EU and decision making mechanism in relation to the principle of complementarity of mutual intergovernmental and inter-institutional relations.

The EC deserves special attention among numerous European institutions due to its immensely dynamic transformations. The EC exemplifies the development of an intergovernmental centre of political decision making, which has been becoming an institutionalised political centre. It still displays interactions between the political intentions of member states against the background of the agenda of the remaining EU institutions. The intergovernmental system based on the network of national interests interferes with different institutional powers. Times of crisis are conducive to intergovernmental centres maintaining their decision making role. The role of the EC has been growing, which has had an influence on development of the EU and the formula of EU leadership.

The presented analyses indicate the potential directions of the influence exerted by the EC and define the guidelines to help indicate further prospects of the development of the EC. Secondly, they take a comprehensive approach to the issues concerned as the analyses and assessments focus on the political influence of the EC alongside the determinants and direct outcomes of European involvement in the context of the EC making political decisions. Additionally, this is related to presenting the activities of the EC against a broader international background taking into account the activities of third countries and other international organisations. The authors show both the conflicts of intergovernmental interests and the areas of common interests thereby allowing us to define efficient ways to implement external policies of the EU.

The authors believe that a series of studies presented in this publication address an extensive audience, in particular experts dealing with issues related to European integration, academic environment as well as policy makers.

*Beata Przybylska-Maszner
Jarosław Jańczak*

Jarosław JAŃCZAK

The European Council and the external actions of the European Union. A theoretical reflection, explanatory schemes and empirical research in the research on integration

Introduction

The internal and external dynamics of integration processes translate into the European Union undergoing the continuous process of political and institutional reforms. Some of these reforms are formal changes reflected, *inter alia*, in treaties, while other emerge as an outcome of applying specific formal solutions and procedures in practice, reflecting the evolution of the internal and external environment of integration. These trends are particularly noticeable in the structure and operation of the European Council, among other institutions. This pertains both to the advancing institutionalization and formalization of its structure and powers, as well as to the clarification of its informal position and informal procedures determining its operations in practice. Being one of the key EU institutions, the European Council is an interesting object of studies and analyses, in particular with regard to individual integration themes. A theme which has recently become increasingly important and continued to develop dynamically is that of the external actions of the EU. This is where the dynamics of the European Council is demonstrated in all its strength.

This book is dedicated to the analysis of the European Council in the process of forming its formal and informal powers as regards the external actions of the EU. This issue involves legal, institutional and political science analysis. However, in order to understand the nature of the investigated processes it is imperative for these considerations to be discussed in the theoretical context. This is the objective of this article. As the processes under study are a subject of integration studies, key theoretical schools of this particular academic discipline were selected to provide the context of this analysis. The objective of these considerations is to examine how the European Council is forming its formal and informal powers in the field of the European Union's external actions, within the framework of the theoretical output of research on European integration. The basic question concerns the methods of interpretation and explanation of the issue concerned, through reference to the main theoretical schools of European integration studies. This should allow the ways of exploring and operationalizing the issue for the needs of empirical research to be demonstrated.

The discussion begins with a review of different types of theorization of European integration, where the emergence of European Studies as an independent academic discipline has given rise to theoretical schools that are currently considered ‘classical’ and, later, to a number of theories and models attempting to explain EU governance. This is followed by a contextualization of the considerations, by discussing the institutional organization of the EU following the changes introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, including the role the treaty assigns to the European Council and external actions. This allows the specific nature of the EU’s external actions to be determined in view of the position of the European Council and the mechanisms attributed to and implemented by it. These considerations take us back to the topic of how the activity of the European Council with regard to the EU’s external actions is theorized.

Theoretical reflection in European integration studies

Decades of studies on European integration have resulted in the development of its own theoretical background, which allows the integration processes to be explained. This chapter demonstrates that European integration studies is a distinct discipline, with specific ways of theorizing integration, making it possible to apply European integration studies to the European Council’s involvement in the EU’s external actions.

In pursuit of a distinct disciplinary identity

The intensive development of European integration processes was accompanied by expanding academic reflection aiming to explain, clarify and forecast them. This resulted in the establishment and widespread recognition of a new discipline of research, European Studies, or, more precisely, European Integration Studies. In order to establish itself as a distinct academic discipline, it was imperative for this branch of knowledge to identify its object of research and develop its own theoretical apparatus.

Ben Rosamond identifies four academic areas that can accommodate theorizing on European integration. The first one involves international organization studies which approach the European Union as an extremely advanced international organization. The second area deals with studies on global economic policy, where the EU is an economic region participating in global economic processes. The third one concerns policy making studies, in particular concerning relations between national political systems and the EU as an international organization. Finally, there is the EU as a *sui generis* structure (Rosamond, 2000, pp. 14–16). Similar to a considerable number of social sciences theories, the theories of Euro-

pean integration analyze three elements: (1) polity understood as a political community; (2) policy understood as a catalog of instruments, tools and procedures pertaining to a specific topic; and (3) politics, or a collection of actors and ways to practice integration. Wherever European Studies are located, the schemes applied to explain integration processes analyze at least one of these elements, if not all three of them.

The core of interest of European integration studies are integration processes on the Old Continent. Consequently, regardless of the time of research or the scholars' orientation, it seems that the main questions they have been trying to answer for several decades concern two issues. One is why European states join integration groups and pursue successive forms, areas and fields of integration. The other one addresses the dynamics of integration processes, or, to put it differently, what mechanisms, regularities and schemes are applied in the political, economic and social practice of integration. The vast majority of other research questions posed in European integration studies seem to be more detailed or more advanced versions of the two above issues, both in theoretical reflection and empirical studies. The research problem analyzed in this book, namely the European Council in the process of forming its formal and informal powers in the field of the European Union's external actions, can be examined with respect to the same two key research questions: why do EU member states integrate their external activities? What is this process in the European Council?

When analyzing individual theories of European integration studies one observes that their answers to these questions are different. In spite of an extensive range of theories, approaches, theoretical models, explanatory schemes and so on, the currently dominating theoretical approaches can all be classified as belonging to three main theoretical schools (sometimes named 'grand theories'), namely neo-functionalism, intergovernmentalism and constructivism. Before they are analyzed, however, the context of theorizing on European integration presented in research works in recent decades will be discussed.

'Grand theories' as the core of theoretical reflection

Timm Beichelt identifies three stages in the development of the theories of European integration (Beichelt, 2006, pp. 163–167). It started with the 'early theories' which date back to the times before the Second World War and its aftermath. These theories were typically academic expressions of the political visions of the continent becoming united, which were wishful thinking more than anything else. The main approaches entail *inter alia* functionalism (Mitrany, 1944), communications theory (Deutsch, 1964) and federalism.

The second stage of theory development explains both the reasons for and mechanisms of integration. These considerations are to some extent applica-